

Michelangelo Antonioni's Images of the Planet in the Anthropocene

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Contemporary visual cultures, and the entertainment industry in particular, tend to present the end-of-the-world scenario connected to the rising awareness of the Anthropocene as a forthcoming possibility. The projection into the future of the demise of the world's sheltering function manifests the disavowal of the irreversibility constitutive of the Anthropocene's inception. This fundamental denial conceals the central paradox of the new geologic epoch, namely the fact that the subjugation of the Earth's geologic temporalities to human agency and chronologies – the apparent subjugation of “Natural History” to “Human History,” as Dipesh Chakrabarty puts it – marks at the same time the definitive demise of the anthropocentric illusion.¹ Global Warming and the current, polymorphous environmental crisis – the most overt epiphenomena of the transformation that the Anthropocene names – unveil the radical powerlessness of a humanity facing unprecedented ecological transformations. While it seemingly culminates atavistic anthropocentric delusions about ontological privilege and exceptionality, the Anthropocene simultaneously exposes their groundlessness.

The disavowal of irreversibility is symptomatic of the larger dimension of denial in which contemporary multimedia conglomerates operate. To preserve the withering delusion of the Earth as the home of the human being, an insistent equation between the extinction of humanity and the annihilation of the planet is displayed within the genre of the “cli-fi” (climate change fiction).² This equation obscures the orb's autonomy from the subsistence of the anthropomorphic life inhabiting its surface. Denial is as well operative in the erasure of the differential degrees of culpability and vulnerability connected to the advent of the Anthropocene. An erasure that disguises the salient contradictions in terms of geopolitics and social justice related to the unequal responsibilities for the anthropogenic modifications to Earth's crust and climate, along with the unfair distribution of their repercussions.³ Through the representation of a threat to the planet – and therefore to the entirety of humankind – the entertainment industry accomplishes the unification of the species into a single whole. In assembling this nonpolitical unity, disaster movies obfuscate the particularism of the specific form of life – that of the American middle class – for which they claim a universal status. Finally, the industry's ultimate act of denial is also its most perverse. The cataclysmic dread nurtured by Hollywood cinema frequently transposes the actual living conditions of the poorest regions of the planet into imaginary future scenarios involving the global North.⁴

Michelangelo Antonioni's cinema of the 1960s and 1970s articulates a reflection on the demise of anthropocentrism, which offers a perceptive counterpoint to the culture of denial fostered by the entertainment business. Embracing the desert as privileged setting and key imaginary geography, in the films he shot

between 1964 and 1975 Antonioni visualized the planet's indifference for the human being. The emphasis on the imaginary of the desert in Antonioni's cinema of the 1960s and 1970s alludes to a condition – the *worldlessness* of the Anthropocene – whose inception the filmmaker presents in terms of irreversibility. Identifying the end of the world with the collapse, in the very first place, of a conceptual and ideological construct, Antonioni prefigures what Timothy Morton considers the crucial ethical and philosophical task of the Anthropocene – or, in Morton's terms, the “Age of Asymmetry” characterized by the acknowledgement of the influence and “demonic agency” of the “hyperobjects” (global warming, Styrofoam, plutonium, etc.) (Morton 2013).⁵

Jennifer Fay opens her riveting book on cinema and the Anthropocene precisely by highlighting “the difficulty of disentangling the state of the planet from the status of the refuge” (Fay 2018, 1). In her reading, an analogous capacity to reveal the world's inhospitality equates cinema and the new geologic epoch. Making the familiar seem strange, they both unmask the illusory consistency of the planet's sheltering function, while offering an “alternative, denaturalized history of the present” (19). In light of the case studies Fay examines, Antonioni's desertic films can be understood as an attempt at visualizing, and coming to terms with, an “everyday Anthropocene” (Fay 2018).⁶ Estranging the familiar experience of the world, the imaginary of his desertic cinema maps the infiltrations of Anthropocene consciousness – the consciousness of living in a time posterior to the end of the world – on the everyday scenarios of our lives.

While catastrophic imaginaries play a primary role in the visual cultures and critical discourses of our age, today there seems to be a significant lack of alternative visions of the end of the world. The importance of reassessing Antonioni's desertic cinema at this point in time has also to do with his invitation to imagine life at the end of the world in the form of an ordinary experience, as the ineluctable, given condition on the non-anthropocentric planet that we inhabit. The catastrophism of the cli-fi genre fundamentally works towards reinstating anthropocentrism, and aims at mitigating the radical uncertainty in regards to the fate of humanity and culturally sanctioned lifestyles and modes of being. Catastrophic phantasies imply an exceptional event that would clamorously disrupt anthropocentric privilege, but which they exorcise by firmly locating such an event in a time yet to come. Antonioni's desertic films instead convey the uneventfulness of the end of the world, portraying it as the unspectacular transition to the awareness of living in non-anthropocentric, inhospitable, and potentially hostile environments.

Tackling the crisis of notions of world and worlding, Antonioni's everyday anthropocene has addressed the experience of living in a posthumous time pervaded by the “sense of being after the earth, after conceptions of humans as emerging from the earth, and after all the notions of the earth as home of ours” (Weinstein and Colebrook 2017, 6).⁷ By foregrounding the imaginary of the desert, these films question notions of nature and the world as either a home to the human being or the static background against which human actions occur. For they stress the problem of inhabitation in conjunction with the avowal of a posthumous life on the planet, Antonioni's desertic films foreshadow the problem of a viable coexistence – both among humans and between humans and nonhuman beings – in the age of the Anthropocene. In this sense, Antonioni holds a privileged position among contemporaneous art-house filmmakers. If the main concern of modernist film directors in the 1960s and 1970s is a critique of modernity focusing on the relationship between the individual and larger social structures, Antonioni's desertic films enlarge as well as displace such critique onto individual and social interactions with physical environments that are not only transformed through anthropogenic modifications, but which also, in turn, affect humanity in unforeseeable ways.

In the first part of this essay I briefly detail the inception of Antonioni's desertic cinema, highlighting its specificity in relation to his previous filmography. I thereupon engage in a close analysis of *Zabriskie Point* (1970), which I posit as the crucial juncture in the articulation of the filmmaker's imagistic forecast of the Anthropocene and in his reflection on the vital potential of the imaginary in molding our relations with the otherness of an unhomely planet. By illuminating the investment of Antonioni's desertic cinema in the transformative potential of the image and the imaginary, my aim is to provide a positive answer to the provocation launched by Pietari Kääpä and Tommy Gustafsson: “Perhaps the real and most pertinent question we should ask is not how cinema can make a contribution to global ecopolitics but whether, ultimately, it can do something beyond raise awareness” (Kääpä and Gustafsson 2013, 4).

Climatescape Change

The advent of the visionary figurations of the Anthropocene in Antonioni's cinema is announced by the transformation – occurring within *Il deserto rosso* (*Red Desert*, 1964) – of the fundamental “climatescape” shaping his filmmaking in stylistic, narrative, and affective terms. Geoffrey Nowell-Smith has coined the notion of climatescape to account for the centrality of weather and climate in Antonioni's cinema. He differentiates an “autumnal or wintry climatescape” (characterized by fog and cold) and a “summery climatescape” (defined by an enhanced luminosity), which alternate throughout Antonioni's filmography, in a cyclical return that mirrors the rotation of the seasons (Nowell-Smith 2015).⁸ Adapting the notion of climatescape to a larger periodization within Antonioni's filmography, I instead propose distinguishing the two fundamental climatescapes that inform his cinema between 1947 and 1975 according to a chronological criterion into a fluvial (1947-1964) and a desertic climatescape (1964-1975). The decisive transformation in Antonioni's filmmaking that I am describing in terms of a climatescape change reflects a fundamental transition of his cinema from the self-enclosed dimension of place to the awareness of an ominous, but inescapable planetary interconnectedness. Thus reconceived, the notion of climatescape not only alludes to the elemental properties of profilmic spaces and their physical geographies. It also indicates, more broadly, a set of narrative, stylistic, and affective components that cohere around the Italian (1947-1964) and foreign (1966-1975) locations of Antonioni's films. I hence argue that, through the transitional moment represented by *Red Desert*, a fluvial climatescape (1947-1964) recedes in front of a climatescape structured around the imagery of the desert (1964-1975) – most recognizably in *Red Desert*, *Zabriskie Point*, and *Professione: reporter* (*The Passenger*, 1975).

Giuliana Minghelli suggests reading Antonioni's early films in close connection to the atmospheric qualities of the landscape of the filmmaker's youth – the Po River Valley, and, more specifically, the Po di Volano region – and she describes them in terms of “fluvial cinema” (Minghelli 2013).⁹ Minghelli maps the intimate correspondence between the materiality of the environment in which Antonioni grew up and the formal innovations of his cinema with reference to style and narrative organizations: “[the] fluvial understanding of reality as perpetual motion [occasions] a new cinematic vision and mode of storytelling that combines the faithfulness to the profilmic space and a formal search for an alternative ‘earth-bound’ vision of modernism” (Minghelli 2013, 134). According to her reading, Antonioni's fluvial cinema culminates with *Il grido* (*Outcry*, 1957), but I would like to extend Minghelli's definition to include the three films that Antonioni shoots in the early 1960s: *L'avventura* (1960), *La notte* (1961), and *L'eclisse* (1962).¹⁰ Whereas these films initiate a progressive deconstruction of the earth-bound vision of his earlier cinema – most notably by disrupting Antonioni's almost exclusive use of long takes and complex tracking shots that secured an uninterrupted, embodied vision – at the same time, they preserve the rigorous faithfulness to the profilmic space distinctive of his previous films.¹¹ Only with *Red Desert* would he emancipate the cinematic space from the limits of his vow of faithfulness towards the contingent, material historicity of place.

In addition to the stylistic continuities linking Antonioni's triptych from the early 1960s to his antecedent work, these films also retain the dominant affective undertone of the earlier pictures, and further develop their core themes. The triptych heightens the unbearable, and yet unsolvable anxiety affecting the characters of Antonioni's previous films. This underlying affective current, connected to the dreaded dissolution of traditional ways of life and the certainties of a familiar world, is attached to the three leading thematic threads in Antonioni's fluvial cinema: life and experience in a world on the verge of dissolution; the vanishing of the elsewhere, understood as a salvific dimension of exteriority; and the threat of disappearance looming in multiple forms over the characters. Throughout this phase of his career, Antonioni paired the documentation of the progressive deterioration of physical and social landscapes in northern Italy with the scrutiny of the crumbling existential horizon of its inhabitants.¹²

A dramatic opening of this (territorially, socially, and culturally) self-enclosed space occurs in the dazzling final sequence of *L'eclisse* (1962), the film that immediately precedes *Red Desert*. *L'eclisse* narrates the relationship between Vittoria (Monica Vitti) and Piero (Alain Delon) and concludes with their missed encounter. Or, more precisely, the film ends with a seven-minute sequence composed of views of the Roman EUR district, in which Vittoria lives. Long and extreme long shots of the urban landscape alternate

with close-ups of quotidian things and extreme-close shots emphasizing the material aspects of diverse objectual surfaces. The viewers recognize places and unremarkable objects (a barrel, a tree, a wooden fence, a storm water drain etc.) that have previously appeared on screen. Yet, these are now seen in an utterly new light; estranged through daring geometrical compositional choices, unconventional framing and camera angles, and the sense of scalar incongruity kindled by the extreme-close ups. The sequence's fragmentary and disjunctive editing style similarly prevents the creation of a coherent space, and thus dismembers the spatial integrity of locations previously known to the spectator.

The prosaic existence captured in the views of the district is also imbued with a disquieting mysteriousness by the menacing quality of the soundscape. Throughout the film, Antonioni refrains from the use of nondiegetic sound. Its inclusion within the final sequence suggests that it applies to it a figural, rather than literal (realist), interpretative framework. The minimalist score for piano, based on repetition and intensification, engenders an excruciating sense of expectancy, reinforced through the characters' blocking in the central section of the sequence. Antonioni frames a series of individuals seemingly waiting for somebody to arrive. As the filmmaker immobilizes them in self-absorbed postures that adumbrate an anxious anticipation, their look intensely points towards the invisible dimension of the offscreen space. Antonioni denies the viewers the relief of counter shots, and further frustrates our expectancy by suddenly returning to the long shots of the streets and close-ups of unexceptional objects (spectacle frames, a wooden stick, street lights, etc.), which conclude the sequence. In the banality of an ordinary evening, Antonioni thus conveys a sinister, but enigmatic threat.

Scholars have frequently emphasized the documentary features of this sequence, downplaying its thematic significance. Seymour Chatman has underlined its ostensible idiosyncrasy by noting that "the story ends but the movie continues" (Chatman 1985, 80). Chatman's account is emblematic of the impression of discontinuity between the closing sequence and the rest of the film that prevails within critical readings.¹³ To the contrary, I advocate interpreting the sequence as the thematic and affective climax not only of *L'eclisse*, but of the entirety of Antonioni's fluvial cinema. Rather than through narrative development and dramatic action, the sequence culminates and unifies the core themes of Antonioni's fluvial films exclusively by audiovisual means. A progression is embedded within the music score itself, which develops through increasingly dark scales and concludes in crescendo. Likewise, the sequence exhibits a clear chronological organization, a progressive approximation to nightfall.¹⁴ This is the twilight of a familiar world, and a twilight of the familiar itself. As the film effectuates the gradual obscuration of the diegetic world and the figural vanishing of the protagonists, a suggestive series of shots inserted within the central section of the sequence intimate a more frightening disappearance. The titles of a weekly news magazine (*L'Espresso* VII.37: September 10, 1961) carefully framed in close ups read: "Nuclear Arms Race" and "A Fragile Peace." Through the evocation of the atomic peril – and in a fascinating anticipation of the international angst spread in October 1962 by the Cuban Missile Crisis – the hospitable enclosure of the world familiar to Antonioni and his characters is abruptly exposed as an impermanent, volatile condition.



Fig. 1 Witnessing the approaching twilight of the world in the closing sequence of *L'eclisse*.

Released at a two-year distance from the completion of *L'eclisse*, *Red Desert* apparently actualizes the warning evoked by the magazine's titles. Rather than a nuclear doomsday, however, the ecological agony pictured in the film represents the inescapable outcome of an uninterrupted and increasing process of environmental exploitation. A quintessentially transitional film, *Red Desert* constitutes the climax of Antonioni's chronicling of the degradation provoked by the aggressive industrial development connected to the Italian postwar economic revival.¹⁵ It also culminates the existential disquiet – determined by the collapse of traditional forms of life, sociability, and kinship – that accompanied the country's industrial expansion. As it accomplishes the dissolution of the world exposed to the threat of collapse in Antonioni's previous films, *Red Desert* preserves the adherence to the specificity of places and locations that has been characteristic of his fluvial cinema. Yet, at the same time the film also relates the actual locations of Ravenna's industrial pole, and the immense ANIC petrochemical complex built in the late 1950s, to the imagistic geography of a global toxic apocalypse. Entangling incommensurable spatial dimensions and intertwining human chronologies with geologic time, *Red Desert* inaugurates Antonioni's broadened planetary interest into the landscapes of the Anthropocene.

In *Red Desert* the solidity and shelter of a livable planet have melted, just as the ground melts under the feet of the protagonist Giuliana (Monica Vitti), in her repeated reference to the metaphor of the quicksand to describe her condition. The unbearable encounter with the unhomeliness of the planet undermines the aesthetic distance necessary to deny one's own implication in the cracking fabric of this deliquescent world. Antonioni's noticeable shift, from the almost exclusive use of wide-angle lenses and deep focus cinematography in his fluvial films, to the consistent employment of telephoto lens in order to convey Giuliana's point of view, performs the disruption of this illusory distance. Telephoto composition, which blurs the contours of objects and flattens the depth of the image by compressing its spatial coordinates onto the surface of the picture plane, has allowed Antonioni to collapse the distance – and therefore the distinction – between figure and ground, which has played up until this point a preeminent role in his filmmaking. On the one hand, this shocking erasure undermines the stability of a horizon against which human actions become intelligible. By the same token, the vanishing of the horizon also determines the elision of a possible elsewhere. On the other hand, as the firmness of the horizon evaporates, and the ground devours the figure, the corporeal and psychic boundaries sheltering the subject coalesce as well.



Fig. 2 The melting of ground and figure in *Red Desert*.

Giuliana's recurrent panic attacks signal her incapability to accept the demise of a stable horizon of meaning and the sheltering of a subjective shell. This is the case until the film's final scene, which heralds the sudden inception of a new awareness that would transform the protagonist's life and Antonioni's filmmaking. Prompted by her son, Giuliana explains that the birds survive the poisonous gasses released in the environment by the chemical plant through a process of adaptation. While the film closes with an overt invitation to overcome denial and face the end of the world as an irreversible event, the emphasis on adaptation, in relation to a toxic and potentially lethal environment, hints precisely at the need to adjust to living conditions on a planet that has lost its status as refuge. The acceptance of the catastrophe's

irreversibility crystallizes the authentically liberating side of *Red Desert's* toxic apocalypse. This awareness reorients Antonioni's cinema from the paralyzing anxiety of his fluvial films to the search for viable modes of coexistence and forms of inhabitation, which he would pursue in his desertic cinema.

With *Red Desert*, the problem of inhabitation in Antonioni's cinema is significantly reformulated through a wider planetary perspective. Global interconnectedness is asserted across a variety of levels in the film. On the one hand, the conspicuous presence of cargo ships alludes to – among other things – the transoceanic circulation of resources, goods, and epidemics, and thus evokes international trade and a market economy extending on a planetary scale. The toxic universe of *Red Desert* also reveals the entanglement of the ecosystems, that is, the integrated context of life and nonlife systems on Earth – animal (including human), vegetal, microbial, and lithic systems.¹⁶ This entanglement is openly enunciated in the remark of a man reported by Giuliana, as she recalls him complaining about the taste of petroleum of his eel. Borrowing Ursula K. Heise's phrasing, we can say that, by framing the local through a global environmental and geopolitical perspective, in *Red Desert* Antonioni's cinema transitions from a sense of place to a sense of the planet (Heise 2008). The global expansion that *Red Desert* enacts on a textual level is also coupled with a major transformation within the material conditions of Antonioni's film practice. In the second half of the 1960s he leaves behind the safe enclosure of the familiar contexts of his life and filmmaking, as the three-picture deal signed with MGM after the completion of *Red Desert* takes him to London (*Blow-up*), the US (*Zabriskie Point*), and eventually to sub-Saharan Africa and throughout Europe (*The Passenger*).

Antonioni's Desertic Cinema

The melting of the world-shelter illusion in Antonioni's cinema brings to the foreground the climatescape of the desert, the preeminent material and imaginary environment of his films between 1964 and 1975. As a figure of nature's disappearance and anthropic decentering, the desert materializes an imagistic threshold into the Anthropocene. The protagonists of Antonioni's desertic films ought to negotiate their existence and modes of being within environments that cannot be reduced to the background function of the "natural world." Dissolving the imaginary associated with the latter, the climatescape of the desert in Antonioni's films destabilizes its assumed unproblematic givenness. For Bruno Latour, the 'axiological neutrality' implied in the notion of nature as "what *is just there, nothing more*" (Latour 2017, 22; emphasis in the original) has been primarily responsible for the lack of political intervention in response to the "awareness of ecological disasters," which, Latour emphasizes, "has been "long-standing, active, supported by arguments, documentation, proofs, from the very beginning of what is called the 'industrial era'" (9). The conclusions he draws are provocatively radical: "for Westerners, and those who have imitated them, 'nature' has made the world uninhabitable" (36).

Accomplishing the iconic and conceptual disappearance of nature, Antonioni's desertic films constitute an early imaginative response to the disremembered awareness denounced by Latour. A disremembrance responsible for the "ecological amnesia" that we are presently struggling with, and which "limits us from understanding our current and past impacts on the species and ecosystems around us" (Parker 2017, M161). As Latour shows, contemporary ecological amnesia has been actively sustained by means of a laborious production of uncertainty in regard to the environmental emergency. In the past decades, economically and politically influential pressure groups have financed the generation of data and factual evidence disputing the conclusions of authoritative scientific institutions. Latour identifies the conditions for the creation and enduring success of this manufactured uncertainty with the positing of nature as a separate and autonomous domain: "When 'nature' is involved, what is a matter of fact is necessarily also a matter of law. [...] What is *just there* is fundamentally also always what is just" (Latour 2017, 34; emphasis in the original). Antonioni's deserts configure an ecological immersion that prevents his characters from disavowing their enmeshment within environments that they cannot dominate. The ecological thought encapsulated in Antonioni's desertic films thus fascinatingly prefigures Latour's call to reconsider the relation between nature and ecology: "ecology is not the irruption of nature into the public space but the end of 'nature' as a concept that would allow us to sum up our relations to the world and pacify them" (36).

While the desert functions as a figure of disappearance, at the same time the climatescape of the

desert inaugurates in Antonioni's filmography the elevation of the cinematic space to what Gilles Deleuze calls "the power of the void." A void from which space "does not emerge [...] depotentialised, but on the contrary, all the more charged with potential" (Deleuze 1986, 119-20). Deleuze further emphasizes this apparent paradox by explaining that, "it is an extinction or a disappearing, but one which is not opposed to the genetic element" (120). Antonioni's deserts cinema develops an imagistic idea of the medium, which has first emerged in *Red Desert*, but has been fully accomplished only in his subsequent *Blow-up* (1966). Contrary to *Red Desert's* reduction of imagination to an escapist, individualistic retreat from an unbearable social and historical reality – the obvious reference is to the beach sequence – beginning with *Blow-up* the imaginary in Antonioni's films is endowed with a generative potential of its own. Antonioni abandons the aspiration to chronicle an unintelligible historical reality, as he adheres to a conception of the medium reminiscent of Sigfried Kracauer's longing for an image that does not simply validate but rather questions "our notions of the physical world." Kracauer's advocacy of an imagistic cinema is aimed at contrasting the proliferation of "corroborative images," designed to persuade the viewers to accept preexisting assumptions about the world. The "corroborative images," Kracauer warns, "are intended to make you believe, not see," and he concludes: "whenever the visuals take on this function we may be reasonably sure that they serve to advertise a belief, or uphold conformity" (Kracauer 1997, 306; emphasis added).

By mobilizing the "power of the void" – the power of the imaginary – Antonioni's deserts films offer a model to counteract the conceptual "blindness" and ecological "amnesia" that, according to Ingrid Parker, summarize the two major challenges in our relationship to a transforming ecological condition (Parker 2017, M160). Antonioni's transition to an imagistic cinema significantly occurs in conjunction with the recognition, in his deserts films, of a posthumous life on the planet. Manifesting at first in the shape of a toxic apocalypse (*Red Desert*), this acknowledgement is later transcoded into the everyday existential horizons of Antonioni's characters. The question of inhabitation was a central concern for his cinema throughout the first three decades of his career, to the point that in 1978 the filmmaker stated: "[my characters] are looking for a home – and 'looking for a home,' in a wider sense, could be said to be the subject of all my films" (Antonioni 2008, 144). Yet, up to *Red Desert* Antonioni envisions inhabitation in the terms of an impossibility. In his deserts films, he instead takes an interrogative turn and links the viability of inhabitation with the transformative potential of the imaginary. Of his deserts films, *Zabriskie Point* most overtly articulates this link, and, whereas the characters' search usually concludes with a failure (most cogently in *The Passenger*), thus reaffirming the impossibility ingrained in Antonioni's fluvial cinema, *Zabriskie Point* affirms a viable solution to the problem of inhabitation, by means of a political struggle fought over the imaginary.

The Material and Imaginary Topographies of Zabriskie Point

Set on the backdrop of the social and political unrest of the late 1960s, *Zabriskie Point* stages the clash between the emancipatory and socially progressive pursuits of youth cultures and Afro-Americans and the ruthless institutionalized repression of oppositional movements. A clear connection is drawn between the interests of powerful private corporations and the abuses of state violence. This heated atmosphere enwraps and crucially defines the film's narrative, which revolves around the romance between two young dropouts, Daria (Daria Halprin) and Mark (Mark Frechette). Driven by unlike motivations, they are simultaneously fleeing Los Angeles; Daria at the wheels of an old-time Buick and Mark on board of Lilly 7, a stolen Cessna airplane. As their routes coincidentally intersect in the Mojave Desert, Mark's plane performs a courtship dance for Daria's Buick, and they eventually journey together in her car towards the lower depths of the North-American continent: the dried-up bed of the prehistorical Furnace Creek Lake – 282 feet below sea level – which projects in front of Zabriskie Point, a location on the Amargosa Range that crosses the Death Valley.

After their journey to Zabriskie Point, Mark and Daria part ways. He flies back to LA in order to return the stolen Cessna, and is shot dead by the police as soon as he lands. The narrative refocuses on Daria, who drives towards the outskirts of Phoenix. She joins her employer (and suitor), Lee Allen (Rod Taylor), at a luxurious mansion nestled in the landscape of Arizona's desert. Stricken by the news of Mark's

death reported on the radio, Daria revolts against the instrumental rationality and the exploitative logic of corporate capital and the governmental practices favoring its ascendancy. The entrepreneurial aims over the Arizona desert nurtured by Sunny Dunes – the development company headed by Allen – provide a concrete, immediate embodiment of this logic. The institutionalized violence responsible for murdering Mark instead functions, throughout the film, as an almost caricatural index of the state repression safeguarding economic and political hegemony. In a visceral reaction triggered by the news broadcast, Daria suddenly leaves, unnoticed. Driving away, she stops at the roadside and fiercely looks back at the mansion. The film closes by visualizing the explosion of the building, in an apotheosis of cathartic violence dismembering the iconology of consumerist culture.

The film's narrative is structured around two fundamental topographies: the "urban jungle" of Los Angeles – the set of the long opening segment – and the chthonic world of *Zabriskie Point*. *Zabriskie Point* not only represents an actual location, but also an imaginary geography. An early film treatment (August 1967) speaks of Antonioni's desire to visualize this "sort of primaevial desert which still keeps the form of its origin, the bed of an ancient sea," in such a way as to induce a "violent, cosmic emotional impact" (Quoted in Pomerance 2011, 165). Yet, it is crucial to emphasize that the vision associated with the desert is not intended to evoke a menace, but rather a promise. In a note Antonioni added to the film treatment, he specified that his handling of the location was meant to materialize a place "where everything breaths peace and serenity" (quoted in Pomerance 2011, 175). The same imaginary excess, however, also guides Antonioni's approach to urban locations, which are subjected to an analogous process of transfiguration. At the most basic level, the film opposes the material and imaginary topographies of LA and *Zabriskie Point* according to the type and quality of vision that they allow to experience, and to the distribution of the visible that they organize.

Whereas the desert allows for an egalitarian distribution of the visible and elevates the space to the generative potential of the Deleuzian void, the city is identified with an unequal and hierarchized distribution of the visible and the restricted generative capacity of the imaginary. Such a diminished capacity ironically impacts to an equivalent degree the two scopic regimes corresponding to the unequal partition of the visible within the urban settings. A partition that is reflected, on the one hand, in the ground perspective of city dwellers marked by overstimulation, spatial disorientation, and the dispersal of attention. On the other hand, the transcendental perspective of aerial views denotes the disembodied gaze of corporate capital, which dominates the city from the heights of its skyscrapers, and constitutes the other pole of the urban partition of the visible.

The planimetric control and totalizing perspective linked to corporate capital are staged in the scenes set in Allen's offices in Phoenix and LA. Antonioni frames him against the backdrop of the urban space and skyline as seen from these Olympic heights. In an early scene set in his Phoenix offices, American flags of gigantic proportions flapper outside of the building and surround Allen on all sides, alluding to the institutional support provided to the advancement of private interests. In another scene – which takes place in the lobby of the building hosting Sunny Dunes' LA headquarters – the camera sneaks behind the desk of a guard surveilling CCTV monitors. The scene is copiously lit, enhancing the intensity of the sunlight passing through the enormous glass window situated behind the guard's back. The display of panoptical control, in tandem with the increased luminosity, awake a fantasy of full visibility – and therefore of integral control.¹⁷ This heightened visibility is nevertheless predicated upon the reduction of the complexity of space and life to the all too interested abstractions of the instrumental logic of corporate capital. As such, this is a constrained and limited visibility in imaginary terms, imposed over the physical and social world through direct and "invisible" (structural) forms of violence.

Seen from the ground, Antonioni's LA is instead a city in perpetual motion, a space lacking the fixed anchoring and recognizable limits that are usually associated with place. Antonioni primarily depicts the city through a windshield that mediates the encounter with the social and material urban fabric. By means of telephoto composition, the film creates a layering of vision that superimposes street views, urban landscapes, and a plentiful array of billboards. *Zabriskie Point* thus intertwines the reality of the actual cityscape with the imaginary evocations of the advertisement industry. Through these superimpositions the film suggests a mutual interfusion of fantasy and reality, and the reciprocal action that they exert upon each other.

At the same time, Antonioni puts in motion this layered imagery through the unceasing mobility of the frame and the relentless refocusing across the back-, middle-, and fore-ground of the image. Fragmentary impressions assault the viewer and quickly alternate on screen. Narratively unmotivated, these layered and dynamic views of the city transform the lived engagement with place into mediated and incoherent forms of spatial experience. The city offers itself to its estranged occupants as a dynamic spectacular backdrop and a kaleidoscopic topography to navigate through, endlessly, pointlessly.

To describe the vision of the city organized in the film, Graham Cairns borrows the notion of “vehicular landscape” from *The View from the Road*, an essay published in 1964 by a group of scholars in architecture and urban planning. Through this notion, the authors capture the “‘live, chaotic experience’ of the car drivers” in commercial cities like Las Vegas and LA (Cairns 2013, 115). A major stress is put on the fragmentary constitution of the driver’s experience: her attention oscillates between a multiplicity of stimuli, occurring at irregular intervals and originating from varying distances. Cairns recognizes the “perceptual dynamism” described in essays such as *Learning from Las Vegas* (1972) and *The View from the Road* at the heart of the scenes depicting car rides in *Zabriskie Point*. Expanding on Cairns’ analogy, I claim that the overall experience of urban life depicted in *Zabriskie Point* is imbued by the same sense of fragmentation, restless, but purposeless mobility, and is visually characterized by a similar perceptual distortion and layering. Through the sensory assault and planimetric control associated with urban driving, Antonioni envisions the generalized condition of city dwellers in the megalopolises of the Anthropocene.

Antonioni’s LA is not a city to be contemplated, nor does it encourage strolling or enable the “walking cures” that, according to Edward Dimendberg, restore a certain spatial and psychological coherence even within the cumbrously precarious universe of postwar film noir: “Unlike the long-distance depictions of the city in a single elevated or panoramic view, these ground-level cinematic representations often secure temporal as well as spatial coherence” (Dimendberg 2004, 132). Walking is simply not an option in LA, and therefore pedestrian practices that could remold the urban space from below are ineffective. Antonioni’s city irreparably undercuts the pedestrian tactics of re-appropriation that Michel de Certeau theorizes in relation to New York. The desired effect of the tactics de Certeau appeals to is the reawakening of an “‘anthropological,’ poetic and mythic experience of space,” that is, the experience of a “lived space” (de Certeau 1988, 93 and 96). The mobility of the postmodern city visualized by Antonioni sardonically usurps the aspiration to create a pedestrian “mobile [or, metaphorical] city,” which de Certeau invokes against the abstract design of modernist city planning (110). The postmodern city of *Zabriskie Point* illuminates the transition from the disciplinary regime inherent to modernist urban planning to the instances of control devised by post-disciplinary forms of biopolitical power. In terms of social control, Antonioni’s LA bespeaks the triumph of the postmodern city over the spaces of resistance that modern urban planning preserved at its interior.

The fragmentation, mediation, and inequality defining vision in the urban topographies of the film are counterpointed by the visual harmony and sensorial respite of the sequences shot at *Zabriskie Point*. The desert opens in front of the observer an egalitarian access to the visible that contrasts with the hierarchical ordering of vision connected to the city. The harmonizing effort is tangible in the frame’s steadiness and the smoothness of camera movements, which strikingly differ from the hectic quality of the camerawork in the urban sequences. At the same time, the desert reverses the restricted imaginative capacity that limits both scopic regimes associate with LA. The use of wide-angle lenses enhances the magnitude of a landscape pictured in Panavision. It opens the spatial coordinates of the image, both in extension – magnifying Panavision’s panoramic scope – and in depth. The switch in lenses generates an intense perceptual contrast with the flatness and layering distinctive of the urban scenes photographed through telephoto composition. The noticeable reduction of the frenetic editing pace prevailing in the metropolitan settings similarly engenders a sense of placid stability and concentration that contributes to an entirely renewed experience of space. In addition to the visual markers signaling the opposition between the city and the desert, the use of sound plays a prominent role in this topographic transition. The sound mixing in the city sequences relies on the distortion of diegetic sound and the artificial character of the sound effects. The resulting soundscape emphasizes disjunction, non-synchronicity, and contrast. On the contrary, the sequences shot in the desert harmonize diegetic and nondiegetic sound, and allow, at moments, for the uncanny

experience of an inhuman silence being heard. A generative void, the vibrant sonic vacuum of the desert sets the stage for the emergence of the vision of a possible co-existence.



Fig. 3 Spaces charged with the “power of the void” in *Zabriskie Point*.

Antagonistic Visions: Love-in, or Drive-in?

Even though Antonioni envisions the desert as a place charged with a generative and transformative potential, in the film there is an unquestionable awareness of the challenging conditions posed by living in such an environment. The sequence staged in the dilapidated ghost town visited by Daria, and the not accidental, emphatic absence of water imagery throughout the narrative segments set in the desert – with the important exception of the Sunny Dunes resort – provide the clearest evidence of this consciousness. Not only the film discloses the hardships of inhabiting the desert, at the same time it also alludes to the progressive geographical expansion of such conditions, as a consequence of the interest-based developmental projects of the private sector. Marsha Kinder’s recollection of the location scouting for the film testifies to Antonioni’s alertness to the increasing process of desertification threatening the area: “[w]hen we were on location in Lone Pine looking at the dry lake bed below Mount Whitney, Antonioni observed that it had been drained because Los Angeles needed water” (Antonioni 2008, 73). As investment capital turns the world into an inhospitable desert, the filmmaker does not summon the specter of a lost natural plenitude (as was instead the case in the beach sequence of *Red Desert*). He rather accepts the challenge of transforming the desert – the figure of the unhomely Anthropocene planet – into a livable place. Yet, there is no safe place, in the “world interior of capital,” from the endless augmentation and diversification of processes of extraction, exploitation, and dispossession.¹⁸

The “peace and serenity” of *Zabriskie Point* are in fact exposed, in the site of the actual, historical negotiation between the two imaginary topographies – the deserts of Southern California and Arizona – to the predatory gaze of the ongoing imperial project of global capitalism, epitomized in the film by Sunny Dunes. This look finds an overt expression in a minor scene towards the end of the film. Allen is standing on the terrace of the mansion that the viewers would see exploding at the end of the film (the Boulder Reign house in Carefree, AZ). His gaze is directed toward the horizon; an uninhabited semidesertic plane, unspoiled by human presence, prolongs in front of his eyes. But this is probably not what Allen sees. Writing in 2017, and noting that “the desert around Phoenix today is filled with one suburb after another,” Joël Mestre-Froissard and Joaquín Aldás Ruíz have proposed to superimpose the present-day image of the area onto the landscape observed by Allen (Mestre-Froissard and Aldás Ruíz 2017, 159). They can therefore advance the inspiring interpretation of his glimpse at the landscape as a “memory of the future.” With our knowledge of the future, Allen’s vision indeed acquires the concreteness of a memory. Yet, in the late 1960s the landscape he is staring at represents a battlefield on which two irreconcilable visions of the future collide. His stare transposes upon the space of possibility of the desert the restricted imaginative capacity and the unequal access to space and vision associated with the urban topographies (and capitalist dispossession).

In order to inhabit a place, *Zabriskie Point* suggests that we first need to acquire the ability to inhabit our fantasies. The film relates the desertification of Southern California and the economic exploitation of the desert with the colonization of the imaginary, and presents the anti-imperialist endeavor of the protag-

onists primarily as the struggle for the re-appropriation of a colonized imagination. The stakes could not be higher, as the latter constitutes the site of a possible transformation of our being in a world that has lost its sheltering function. *Zabriskie Point* conceives of the imaginary in its intersubjective dimension, rather than as an individual property (as was the case for Giuliana's fantasies in *Red Desert*), and avows therefore its entanglement within the broader existing networks of social and political life. And, while Antonioni puts a major stress on the imaginative faculty, he relates the imaginary to perception, presenting the generative potential of fantasy as a capacity to see. In *Zabriskie Point*, vision is the crucial factor capable of setting into motion the generative potential of the Deleuzian void. Vision is also, however, what is the most in peril, exposed to the impersonal forces that aim at limiting and regulating its potential. The larger sets of oppositions that structure the film's narrative can be mapped out in terms of antagonistic forms of vision, competing in the endeavor of molding imaginary and material spaces.

The film unmistakably advocates the urgency of taking sides, and, in order to challenge the reifying gaze of Sunny Dunes, Antonioni invites the viewers to share the perceptual and affective experience arising from Daria and Mark's descent towards Furnace Creek's lakebed. The protagonists' journey into the depths of the prehistoric subsidence is captured in one of the most charming sequence of the whole film. The long and extreme-long shots of the desert compose the image of a ruffled sea of sand, expanding to the visible horizon. The vivid vibrancy of these images vitalizes the desert with a profusion of chromatic tonalities and degrees of luminosity. The sequence is structured around a gradual increase of intimacy: the intimacy between Mark and Daria; the intimacy of the protagonists with the environment; as well as the intimacy of the camera with the characters and the diegetic universe – most clearly reflected in the increasing amount of medium and close shots. As they begin to make love, cradled by the dunes, a growing number of couples and groups engaged in a tender intimacy suddenly appear across the landscape. There is no aggressiveness in their sexuality, but a spontaneous playfulness asserting their joyful search for an unbound interconnectedness. The participants to the love-in caress each other, while they are caressed, in turn, by the nonhuman embrace of the desert. As they progressively undress, their skin tone merges into the color palette of the landscape. The enrapturing movement of the lovers animates the dunes themselves, a single motion reverberates through and unifies all beings.¹⁹ *Zabriskie Point's* visionary treatment of the desert thus materializes a site of coexistence in which humans are guests rather than hosts, but which at the same time allows for the coming to light of a space of possibility and renewal.



Fig. 4 Performers of the *Living Theatre* enacting a viable co-existence in the imaginary vision of the love-in sequence in *Zabriskie Point*.

As soon as the vision of the love-in ends, the film cuts to a long shot of a caravan arriving to Zabriskie Point. The nuclear family onboard humorously typifies the building block of consumer society. As they abide to a standardized tour and pursue a set of conventionalized experiences, the tourists are visibly at pains in establishing a connection with the landscape. The paterfamilias points his penetrative gaze towards the horizon and remarks to the docile wife standing on his side: "They should build a drive-in up here." Lino Micciché has sarcastically noted that, in the place which has just hosted the ecstatic vision of the love-in, this couple can only see a drive-in (Micciché 1989, 65). I would like to take Micciché's pun very seriously, how-

ever, as the opposition between “drive-in” and “love-in” ultimately condenses the core conflict dramatized in the film. Although *Zabriskie Point* exalts the desert and allows protagonists and viewers to experience it as a living entity, the tourists can only see the desert coming to life at the prospect of an economic enterprise. While Antonioni, Daria, and Mark see life in matter itself, for the tourists (and Sunny Dunes), it is capital exclusively that can vivify the physical world. Fundamentally, the couple does not see matter as inert, but rather as an object not-yet-vivified by the intervention of capital. In this regard, Elizabeth Povinelli observes that “[c]apitalism sees all things as having potential to create profit; that is, nothing is inherently inert, everything is vital from the point of view of capitalization” (Povinelli 2016, 20).

The irreconcilable perspectives associated with each set of characters represent two antagonistic visions of the future. In order to explain the transforming relationship of the present with the future in the age of the hyperobjects, Morton contrasts Jacques Derrida’s notion of *avenir* with the anthropocentric misconception of the future as something that can be planned, controlled, and predicted (Morton 2013, 123). The *avenir* is not a future springing from the present, but rather a future coming towards the present – according to the etymology of the French word. The visions of the love-in and the drive-in thus activate specific images of futurity: the receptiveness towards the *avenir*, against the interest-based planning that aims at foreclosing the openness of the future. The degree of receptiveness towards the future is fundamentally a matter of vision. By looking at the desert, the tourists (and Sunny Dunes) see an empty abstract space. Their myopia is particularly staggering, if we consider that this scene immediately follows the aesthetic, sensory, and experiential richness of the love-in sequence.

The Mattering of Vision

In *Zabriskie Point* vision does literally matter, in the radical sense that the image and the imaginary engender material effects in the historical world, exemplifying the mattering function that Sean Cubitt ascribes to optical media: “mediation comes into being as matter, its mattering constitutes the knowable, experienceable world, making possible all sensing and being sensed, knowing and being known” (Cubitt 2014, 2). The attainment of a capacity to bring into existence, by means of the emergence into visibility, became Antonioni’s leading aspiration in his deserts films, and supplanted his concern with recording the contingency of the historical world.²⁰ The effectuality of the imaginary finds in *Zabriskie Point* an irresistible comedic incarnation in the tourists themselves, an obvious progeny of the *plastification* of life witnessed in a Sunny Dunes TV commercial appearing in an early scene of the film. The advertisement depicts a nuclear family enjoying the unlikely pleasures of the company’s desert retreats: playing golf on a fully-equipped course, hunting extinct wild animals, drinking fresh mountain water, living a life of adventure and independence, “like the pioneers that molded the West.” This vast horizon of possibilities, narrated through an authoritative voice-over, unsurprisingly corresponds to the visualization of a strictly gendered space. While the wife is happily relegated to the secluded realm of domesticity, cooking, and child-care, the husband teaches their son to fire a gun in monumental outdoor settings.

Through the grotesque artificiality of the oversaturated color palette, an uncanny shadow projects upon the sense of homologation forcefully expressed by way of a phantasmagoric display of standardized commodities. The most disquieting feature of the advertisement probably is, however, the fact that the happy-family scenario is entirely played out by plastic dolls. The overt constructedness of Sunny Dunes’ promises reveals the irreality of the American Dream itself, which unmistakably underlies the fantasies evoked in the commercial. Moreover, its promise of prosperity is significantly linked with the aspiration to turn the desert into a garden, in accordance with the long-lasting formula of the Western genre. Recalling the colonial history of the country, Antonioni connects the two foundational myths grounding American national identity. Embedding these fantasies within the too apparent artificiality and unlikeliness of the advertisement, the film refers to the deterioration of their imaginary grasp, and therefore of their mythical power. In this regard, Angelo Restivo credits Antonioni with an almost prophetic vision: “it is doubtless only from the vantage point of the recent years that we can understand that *Zabriskie Point* is about, among other things, the moment at which the nation begins to disintegrate as the horizon against which meaning is assigned to words and images” (Restivo 2011a, 83).

The liminal moment recalled in Restivo's reading corresponds to the transition from the second (1945-1970) to the third stage (1970-2000) in the development of "bourgeois imperialisms" described by David Harvey (Harvey 2003, 26-86). The shift from the "logic of territory" to the "logic of capital" represents the distinctive trait of this transition to forms of imperial power that aimed at substituting territorially specific domination with a global hegemony based on the control of financial capital. The rearrangement of international power relations at the conclusion of WWII brought to the process of Decolonization – that is, to the dismantling of European empires – and to the raise of a new imperial paradigm, in which supranational hegemony required a novel justification: "[m]uch as European imperialism had turned to racism to bridge the tension between nationalism and imperialism, so the US sought to conceal imperial ambition in an abstract universalism" (50). *Zabriskie Point* draws attention to the production of this abstract universalism, by exposing the homologizing endeavor of the entertainment industry responsible for what I have called the *plastification* of life. Inserting an allusion to the fantasies that propelled the colonial enterprise of the European settlers within the commercial, the film discloses the continuity between two subsequent phases of a single political project, and thus alerts to the unspoken imperialist foundations of the American Dream itself. At the hearth of both, the film identifies a fantasy of limitlessness, either projected upon space and territory, or investing the resources available for exploitation. In drawing this connection, *Zabriskie Point* emphasizes the pivotal function of the imaginary for the successfulness of imperial domination.



Fig. 5 The colonization of the imaginary in *Zabriskie Point*.

Launched as a film about the counterculture, *Zabriskie Point* has been largely criticized for failing to advance a clear alternative political project to the late liberal governance it exposes. This enduring cliché is revealing of a certain critical shortsightedness – or perhaps even of a possible complicity – that would prevent the viewers, both at the time of the film's release and now, from acknowledging the core of Antonioni's ideological and political critique. In 2011, George Porcari tried to explain why Antonioni's "prescient insights" have been largely ignored by the American audiences. The answer is to be found – according to Porcari – in "the fact that those very corporate values [embedded in the Sunny Dunes commercial] would be incorporated and internalized by the culture at large in subsequent years" (Porcari 2011, 66). Instead of producing an alternative tale to the grand narrative of the colonial epopee, Antonioni foregrounds the decisive political value of the imaginary – to which also Porcari's reference at internalization hints at.

A sequence explicitly illustrates the struggle over the re-appropriation of the imaginary incited by the film. After their trip to Zabriskie Point, Mark decides to return the plane, but only after redecorating it. The polished, candy pink Lilly 7 – a symbol of imaginative homologation – is painted over by Daria and Mark, and transformed into a colorful emblem of resistance and social engagement. The seriousness of their project is significantly permeated with a ludic gaiety, reflected in the irreverent and provocative content of their drawings (most explicitly, the woman's breasts painted over the upper side of the wings and the erected penis decorating the whole right-side fuselage). This joy is the marker of a liberation, namely, the emancipation of their imaginary from the constraints of culturally pre-constituted meanings, beliefs, and values. By painting over the prefabricated appearance of the airplane, Daria and Mark operate a political and ethical re-appropriation of a colonized imaginary.

The political stakes inherent to the redecoration of the plane are also obliquely implied in an element of the plot development that has persistently troubled commentators. This critical moment is represented

by Mark's decision to return the plane, although the characterization of police violence throughout the film allows to predict his murder. I propose to identify the meaning of this scene precisely with the affirmation of the political significance that the re-appropriation of the imaginary holds within the film. The return to Los Angeles is in fact a re-turn to the polis, the foundational element of Western political thought. The film suggests that the insights gained in the desert need to be re-inscribed within the political dimension of social life. Through this return, Antonioni undercuts the viability of communal forms of life grounded in the separation from larger social and political collectivities. He instead frames the imaginary through a broad inter-subjective perspective that exceeds the private fantasies of individuals and small groups. The commitment to imagination dramatized in this sequence refers to a shared, collective – and therefore, political – dimension, and alludes to the centrality of the imaginary in shaping new modes of being and forms of life that might enable a “collaborative survival” on a “damaged planet.”²¹

Conclusions

Antonioni metacinematically redoubles the struggle over imagination dramatized in the film. Daria and Mark's striving for the re-appropriation of a colonized imaginary mirrors the endeavor implicit in the imagistic conception of cinema subtending Antonioni's desertic films. Whereas the dominant naturalist aesthetic in Western cinemas – that adheres to and develops the aesthetic premises proper to the classical Hollywood style – aims at confirming and validating preexisting ideas about the world, Antonioni on the contrary yearns to transform these ideas through his images. In materializing an everyday Anthropocene – that is, an experience of the planet as, at once, deeply familiar and utterly unrecognizable – Antonioni's desertic films transfigure ordinary life, but they avoid the spectacularization and catastrophism of the cli-fi genre. Contemporary multimedia conglomerates foster the perception of the catastrophe's exceptionality – a possible but improbable occurrence – and the belief in the radical transformation determined by its impact. In Antonioni's desertic cinema, life instead moves on unshaken, in spite of the irrecoverable destabilization of the certainties that structure our being in the world. Against the threat of total annihilation that informs cli-fi films, Antonioni plays, in a telling inversion, the very menace of survival. His desertic films share the awareness that Fay attributes to the representations of the everyday Anthropocene: “the dread is not that the status quo will be radically disrupted, but that it will go on as it has been” (Baer 2018, 83).

The climatscape of the desert in Antonioni's cinema challenges both the figuration of the desert within the cli-fi genre, as well as the grasp on the landscapes of imagination exerted by the advertisement industry and Hollywood blockbusters. As shown by Povinelli, contemporary entertainment business has co-opted the image of the desert as the epitome of the other-than-life. Yet, by the same token, the desert becomes the stand-in for everything that can be (re)made hospitable to life. The desert in disaster movies primarily transmits the very “affect that motivates the search for other instances of life in the universe and technologies for seeding planets with life” (Povinelli 2016, 17). The threat of annihilation hence most fundamentally represents the occasion to reaffirm anthropocentrism on an even vaster scale. Today, Antonioni's desertic cinema constitutes an invaluable alternative to contemporary forms of anthropocentric proselytism. His films indicate in a broad understanding of coexistence the sole viable mode of attunement to a posthumous time. An explicit allusion to the entanglement of human and nonhuman life appears in the sequence of the airplane redecoration in *Zabriskie Point*. On the left-side fuselage Daria and Mark paint “He-She-It,” an exhortation not only to abolish gender discrimination, but also to endorse an ontological communion that rejects anthropocentric privilege. Antonioni's desertic films thus encompass the “ecologically oriented and zoomorphic” idea of cinema promoted by Anat Pick and Guinevere Narraway, as they visualize “the interconnectedness of human and other life forms, our implication in and filtering through material networks that enable and bind us” (Pick and Narraway 2013, 5).

By addressing the question of inhabitation in terms of coexistence, Antonioni's desertic films, and *Zabriskie Point* in particular, foreshadow Morton's ethical injunction to rethink life on the planet in the time of the hyperobjects: “We coexist with human lifeforms, nonhuman lifeforms, and non-lifeforms, on the inside of gigantic entities with whom we also coexist: the ecosystem, biosphere, climate, planet, Solar System” (Morton 2013, 128). Stacy Alaimo advances a complementary ethical imperative, as she urges to understand

inhabitation as in-habitation, a condition for which “what is supposed to be outside the delineation of the human is always already inside” (Alaimo 2010, 143). Alaimo invites us to welcome the “terrifying truth” – disclosed by the current ecological crisis – that “humans are made of the same genetic stuff of other creatures,” as the only possible ontological grounding of a viable ethics in the Anthropocene epoch (142). Against the populism of the entertainment industry, which advocates conservatism through the perpetual recasting of a threat to humanity, Antonioni’s desertic cinema invites to think viable forms of co-existence and co-in-habitation, while linking this viability to the precondition of gaining control over our individual and collective imaginaries. Alluding to both the power of imagination and the advent of a posthumous time, the climatescape of the desert in Antonioni’s cinema of the 1960s and 1970s bequeaths the injunction to resist ecological amnesia and blindness, and to imagine forms of connectedness open to the otherness of a non-anthropocentric planet.

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Endnotes

- 1 The reference is to Chakrabarty's "The Climate of History: Four Theses" (2009). On the complex relationship between historical chronologies and deep geologic time disclosed by the advent of the Anthropocene, see also Thomas 2014, Chakrabarty 2016, Szerzsyński 2017, and Chakrabarty 2018.
- 2 The Term refers to literary and cinematic fictions of climate change. Cli-fi films include, for instance, *Waterworld* (Reynolds, 1995), *The Day after Tomorrow* (Emmerich, 2004), *Take Shelter* (Nichols, 2011), and *Interstellar* (Nolan, 2014). On cli-fi cinema see, for ex., Svoboda 2015, Griffin 2017, and Salmose 2018.
- 3 On the unequal degrees of culpability and vulnerability connected to the inception of the Anthropocene, see, in particular, Martínez-Alier 2002 and Nixon 2011.
- 4 In this regard, Claire Colebrook has recently written: "these dystopian future scenarios are nothing worse than the conditions in which most humans live as their day-to-day reality. By 'end of the world,' we usually mean the end of our world. What we don't tend to ask is who gets included in the 'we'" (Colebrook 2017b, np).
- 5 See also, Morton 2010, 130-5, where the concept of hyperobject is first introduced. The three examples I have listed belong to the first, and more limited, formulation that appears in *The Ecological Thought*. I have chosen them because of their explanatory immediacy. On the "demonic agency" of the hyperobjects cf. Morton 2013, 28-29.
- 6 See also Baer 2018, where Fay explicitly formulates the notion of "everyday Anthropocene."
- 7 On the notions of posthumous life and posthumous time, see the introduction to, and the essays collected in, Weinstein and Colebrook 2017.
- 8 See, in particular, pp. 244-6.
- 9 See, in particular, pp. 130-5 and n. 13.
- 10 I refer to Antonioni's films by the names that are best known to English-speaking audiences. Unlike the titles of the majority of his pictures, those of his early 1960s films are usually not translated in anglophone publications.
- 11 On Antonioni's strenuous adherence to the immediate materiality of profilmic spaces throughout the early 1960s, see, in particular, Rhodes 2011a.
- 12 On the saliency of the actual historical, social, and political contexts for Antonioni's fluvial cinema, see, especially, Arrowsmith 1995, Restivo 2002, Galt 2011, and Rhodes 2011b.
- 13 For instance, see Rohdie 1990, 115-6; Brunette 1998, 87-9; and Bernardi 2002, 178-9.
- 14 The chronological ordering of the sequence has most recently been underlined by the historian Carlo Ginzburg. Cf. Ginzburg 2017.
- 15 Angelo Restivo argues that *Red Desert's* mise-en-scène is designed for the very purpose of visualizing the impact of the Italian economic miracle and, simultaneously, its incomprehensibility. Restivo 2002, 95-143. See, in particular, pp.126-43.
- 16 Furthermore, the scene shot in *Medicina* at the Croce del Nord (Cross of the North) radio observatory expands the film's planetary perspective to a cosmic scale.
- 17 For the debates on the "politics of verticality" (the notion coined in 2002 by Eyal Weizman), and the power dynamics inherent to the optical control of space through aerial views, see, for ex., Adey 2010; Adey, Whitehead, and Williams 2014; and Graham 2016.
- 18 The reference is to Sloterdijk 2013.
- 19 The participants to the love-in are performers of the *Living Theatre*, the New York based company founded in 1947 by Judith Malina and Julian Beck. The choice of the company is suggestive of Antonioni's grandiose ambition of animating the Death Valley.
- 20 I would like to position my reading of Antonioni's desertic cinema within the turn – in cinema and ecomedia studies – towards a non-indexical understanding of the moving image. For ecocritical works that endorse a notion of the cinematic reaching beyond the registering function traditionally assigned to photographic-based media, see, for instance, MacDonald 2004, Bubitt 2005, Ivakhiv 2013, and Fay 2018. For a contribution specifically addressing Antonioni's cinema, see Pinkus 2011. These essays emphasize the generative potential of the moving image, highlighting the concrete material, social, and perceptual after-effects of cinema and media within the historical world. More radically, Colebrook argues that cinema allows for the "overcoming of the notion that images mediate the real rather than being the real itself." She demonstrates that it was precisely through cinema that Deleuze could abridge the ontological gap between image and reality: "Images are not images of some underlying truer world: the world just is its imaging." Cf. Colebrook 2017a, 31 and 32.
- 21 The Reference is to Tsing, Swanson, Gan, and Bubandt 2017.