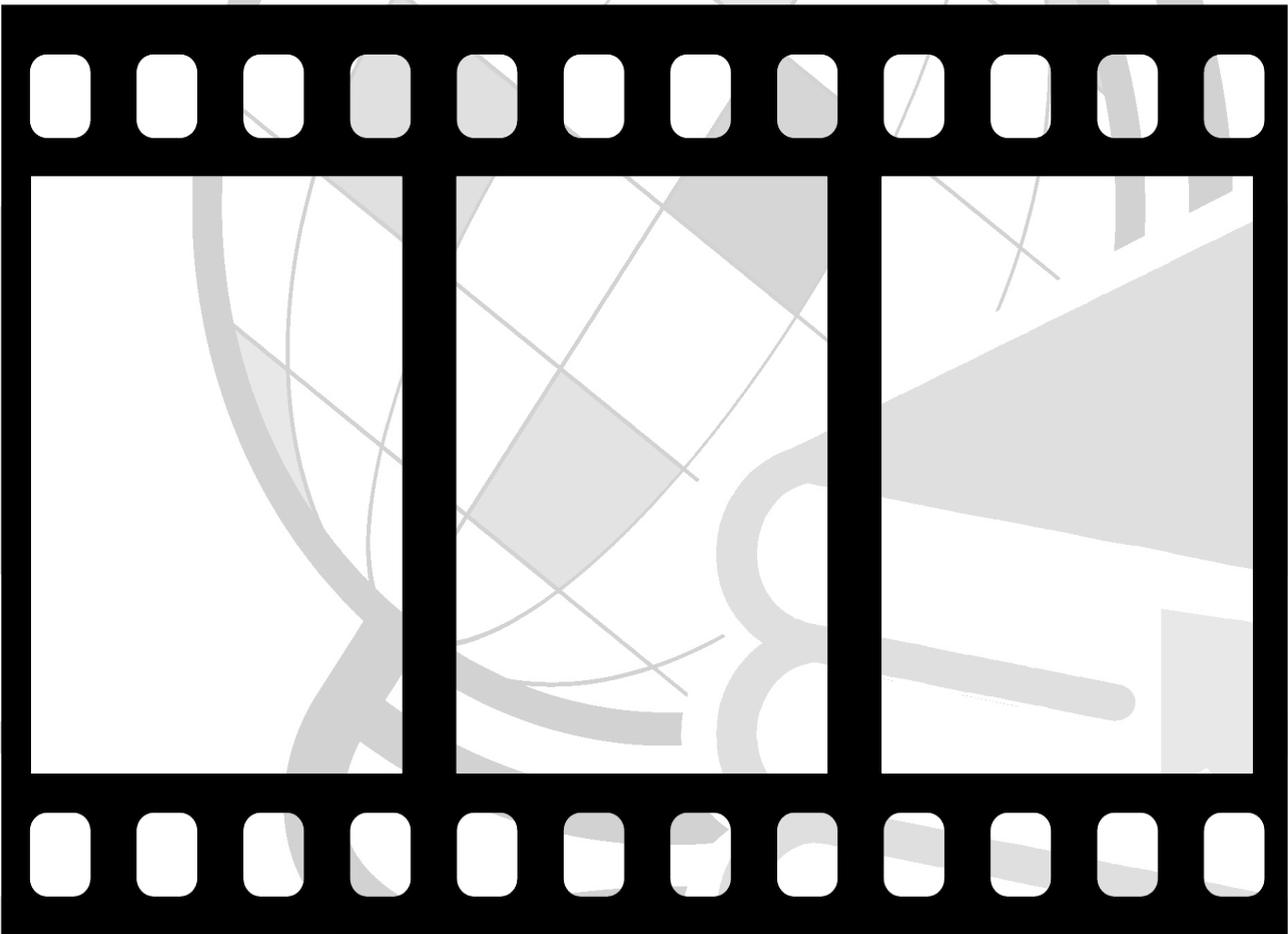


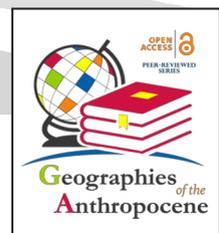
CINEMA, DISASTERS AND THE ANTHROPOCENE

Enrico Nicosia, Lucrezia Lopez (Editors)



Foreword by David McEntire

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Enrico Nicosia, Lucrezia Lopez (Eds.)

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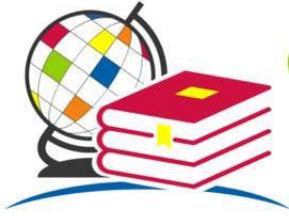


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4. From Denis Villeneuve's *Arrival* to Adam McKay's *Don't Look Up*, cultivating a meeting ground for communicating the Anthropocene: will we speak Eggplant?

*Andrea Nocera*¹

Abstract

In the 1980s, American ecologist Eugene Stoermer and Nobel laureate and atmospheric chemist Paul Crutzen initiated discussions on the definition of a new epoch: the Anthropocene. Since then there have been debates on the most varied topics related to this new definition, which seems to be elusive and multifaceted every time we try to approach it. It is precisely this need to define and communicate the era in which we live, its characters, urgencies and needs, that requires thoughtful reflection to identify a minimum common denominator to analyze, describe and communicate the Anthropocene. It is no coincidence that in recent years the definitions, more and less popular, of the time in which we live have multiplied: Capitalocene, Eremocene, Plantationocene, Plasticene and the more recent Koinocene. The Anthropocene is too often perceived as an immeasurable and distant problem, impossible to embrace in its entirety, especially for those who are not insiders and struggle to relate to it, receiving from this comparison a nauseating sense of unease and guilt. But the Anthropocene, other than being a problem, is a condition of existence, which questions our way of being in the world, of dwelling it – according to Martin Heidegger's definition of dwelling (Heidegger, 1976), taken up by Tim Ingold (Ingold, 2016) – and which questions it by asking us to be responsible, response-able, that is, able to respond to the present (Haraway, 2019). It is in this need to identify a common language and imaginary, translatable and assimilable, that some cinematic experiences proposed here have moved. Few and firm principles, footholds of the real, imaginary and shared stories that cinema tries to promote in order to create a common ground of experience with which to face the Anthropocene and create a reference vocabulary. There is an urgent need to communicate the emergencies and disasters of the Human Epoch, projected on big screens by Jennifer Baichwal and Edward Burtynsky's trilogy, and to avoid the fragmentation and the communication barrier exalted by the recent *Don't Look Up* proposed by the American giant *Netflix*. The article attempts

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to analyze and highlight the efforts made by the movie medium in establishing a shared dialogue about the Anthropocene. An inclusive human-non-human, past-future language needs to be identified, such as the semasiographic writing of Ted Chiang's heptapods staged by Denis Villeneuve's *Arrival*. The article reflects on the collective imagery that cinema proposes today with respect to the present and possible futures: generally represented by the image of the Ecological disaster, the Techno Fix and the Ecotopian solution, as Robert Crumb perfectly illustrated in *A Short History of America*. Because, as Donna Haraway states, it matters what thoughts think thoughts, what stories we tell to tell other stories with (Haraway, 2019). And maybe indeed, if we cultivate a meeting ground not only between humans, but also between humans and non-humans, one day we will speak *Eggplant*.

Keywords: Environmental science, Anthropocene, Cinema, Human-Non human, Dystopia.

“Where must we go, we who wander this wasteland, in search of our better selves”. *The First History Man (Mad Max: Fury Road)*

1. Plotting the course

In 1979, Robert Crumb, an American cartoonist who founded *Zap Comix* magazine and became famous in Italy for the character of Fritz the Cat, published a twelve-illustration strip entitled *A Short History of America* in the ecologist magazine *Co-Evolutionary Quarterly*. The intention was to show how a single plot of land had changed due to the process of industrialization and anthropization. The strip illustrated the transition from a natural, verdant, bucolic environment, celebrating an ideal imagery of nature, to the appearance of early roads, railroads, motor vehicles, and the city. Green fields and blue skies were being replaced by signs of corporations, while quiet and birdsong surrendered to the deafening din of road traffic. Crumb was denouncing the process of urbanization, industrialization and in general anthropization that had taken place especially since the Second Post-World War II, with that historical-economic phenomenon that came to be known as the Great Acceleration.

It is not surprising that as early as the late 1970s, similar issues were being hotly debated². In 1962, *Silent Spring* by Rachel Carson (Carson, 1962) denounced – with a scientific enquiry – the damage caused to all living beings by the use of pesticides (DDT) in agriculture, promoted by companies and the US government. On April 22, 1970, the first *Earth Day* was celebrated in the United States, while in 1972 *The Limits to Growth* was published (Meadows et al., 1972). The well-known report, commissioned from MIT by the Club of Rome openly denounced and made manifest the impossibility of infinite and uncontrolled growth by humankind.

It was precisely this desire for growth, often hidden behind the controversial definition of "development," that marked an epochal transition, in the literal sense of the term: the transition from the Holocene (the geological epoch that began with the melting of the last Wurmian glaciers and the disappearance of big carnivores about 10000 years ago) to the Anthropocene, the Human Epoch³. It is precisely the Anthropocene that will be discussed below, this fluid epoch, difficult to understand and grasp, exposed to multiple and burning interpretations, because it affects us all and too closely perhaps to have a truly objective gaze. The Anthropocene is too often perceived as an immeasurable and distant problem, impossible to embrace in its entirety, especially for those who are not insiders and struggle to relate to it, receiving from this confrontation a sickening sense of unease and guilt. But the Anthropocene, other than being a problem, is a condition of existence, questioning our way of being in the world, of dwelling it – according to Martin Heidegger's definition of "dwelling" (Heidegger, 1976), taken up by Tim Ingold (Ingold, 2016) – and questioning it by asking us to be *response-able*, that is, able to respond to the present (Haraway, 2019). It is in this need to identify a common language and imaginary, translatable and assimilable, that some cinematic experiences proposed here have moved. A few firm principles, footholds of the real, shared imaginaries and stories that cinema attempts to promote in order to create a common ground of experience with which to confront the Anthropocene and create a vocabulary of reference. The proposed movies were chosen because they belong, for the

² Another illustrated text with a very similar topic to Robert Crumb's was published in 1973. *Where there was a meadow* (this is the title in the Italian edition) illustrated the stages that lead a small town in the countryside to become a large industrialised city.

Müller, J., Marconi, R. (text by), 1974, *Dove c'era un prato (Alle Jahre wieder saust der Presslufthammer nieder, 1973)*, Emme Edizioni, Milano.

Given the relevance of the topic, the text has now been reprinted in Italy by the publishing house Lazy Dog.

³ *Anthropocene: the Human Epoch* is a 2018 documentary directed by Jennifer Baichwal, Nicholas de Pencier and Edward Burtynsky, which will be discussed later.

vast majority, to that Western mass culture that influences the millions of moviegoers who still (briefly?) push their way into movie theaters and thus shape and produce a present and future imaginary⁴. Without forgetting the active role of the spectator, cinema is a means of representing society and influencing it on the part of those who produce it, as in its narratives and meanings we can discern indicators of the ways in which a specific culture makes sense of itself (Turner, 2006, p. 4).

The cultural industry distributes different types of communication products on the market and thus collaborates in a decisive and leading manner in the construction of what is commonly defined as the collective imaginary, understood as a reserve of models, value systems, images and symbols, as a universe of the desirable, the appealing and the wishable [and the undesirable with reference to dystopian collective imaginary], available to the great masses and often endowed with transnational characteristics precisely because of the international penetration towards which the mass media industry tends (Bettetini, 1991). This reserve ends up being accessed by the uncritical motivations and existential choices of millions of individuals, for whom the relationship with the media constitutes the only or, at least, one of the most important sources of learning and self-education. Cinema has always made the main contribution to the constitution of this imagery and continues to do so⁵. (Proper translation)

Cinema, understood here as a tool and work of art/communication, stands as an eloquent medium through which understand “what stories we tell to tell other stories with; [...] what stories make worlds, what worlds make stories” (Haraway, 2019). Stories, ideas and thoughts of change, disasters, crises and hopes for rebirth that characterize the present time. It is precisely this uncertainty of a gaze turned to a near, imminent future that characterizes the Human Epoch.

At the conclusion of the twelve illustrations of the comic strip, when the process of anthropization has completely invaded the scene, it is Robert Crumb himself who questions us with a very simple question: *What Next?*

⁴ In this regard, one of the selected films, *Don't Look Up*, never appeared in Italian cinemas, but was only released by the American *Netflix* directly into people's homes. This is one of the signs of transition from cinema conceived as a physical place, to a cinema exclusively as a tool and artistic/communicative operation.

⁵ In: https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/cinema_%28Enciclopedia-delle-scienze-sociali%29/ (last access: November 2022).

A Short History of America is a miniature re-presentation of the action that human beings have produced on a vast scale, and for that reason it calls him into question and to react with urgency. Crumb's response was not long in coming. Shortly after publishing the twelve vignettes, he added three more, presenting as many historical outcomes: Ecological disaster, Techno Fix and Ecotopian solution, which will be further debated.

Three present-future outcomes and stories with which, thanks in part to the medium of movies, we have been becoming familiar for quite some time. More than four decades later, it is necessary to update Crumb's comic strips and interrogate cinema to ask what stories tell where we are and where we are going.

2. Where we are: the Anthropocene by Edward Burtinsky and Jennifer Baichwal.

In order to create common ground for dialogue about the Anthropocene, it becomes of paramount importance to understand the conditions of the world in which *Homo sapiens* live today. Obviously, the goal immediately presents itself as too pretentious and arduous. However, thanks to an ecocritical approach aimed at some cinematic works, we can roughly identify the starting context from which human beings today look to the future.

First of all, as I have expressed in a previous paper, the very definition of the era in which we are living does not agree with everyone. There are many ways in which it has been named, varying according to the aspect one prefers to emphasize as an element of change and transition from the previous epoch. Capitalocene, Eremocene, Plantationocene, Plasticene⁶, are just some of the ways employed to define the present era. The very definition of the Anthropocene, coined by Eugene Stoermer and popularized by Paul Crutzen (Crutzen & Stoermer, 2021), has not yet been formally recognized by the *International Union of Geological Sciences* (IUGS), which establishes international naming of geological epochs. From its name, this fluid epoch appears to us to be elusive and difficult to place.

⁶ For further discussion of the distinction between the Anthropocene, Capitalocene and Eremocene I refer to: Nocera, A., 2021, *Verde Meraviglia: immaginare un nuovo modo di abitare* (*Green Wonder: Imagining a New Way of Dwelling*), Geographies of the Anthropocene, Il Sileno Edizioni, Lago.

For the designations listed here, reference is made to the work of J.W Moore, E.O. Wilson and *Ethnos magazine* for University of Arhus (Haraway, 2019, p. 237).

Canadians Edward Burtinsky and Jennifer Baichwal, respectively photographer and filmmaker, have attempted to bring some order to this confusion and capture the distinctive features of the Anthropocene with the eye of the camera. What they have given back to the audience is an overview of the Human Epoch traits, made visually impactful through the sense of wonder, beauty and daunting terror generated by the impressive and annihilating images captured by Burtinsky and projected on the movie screen. The three documentaries, *Manufactured Landscapes* (2006), *Watermark* (2013), and *Anthropocene: The Human Epoch* (2018), have been able to reach the general public and stand as a reference for establishing a common dialogue.

Right from the start, one perceives how for Burtinsky one of the central themes is landscape. The photographer shows the scale and majesty of the impact generated by anthropogenic action, particularly related to industrialization. It is a lament toward what human beings are perpetrating against nature⁷. The three documentaries highlight the pervasiveness and destructiveness with which humans have intervened in and on nature. Within the vastness of the movie theater, Burtinsky confronts us with even more imposing and annihilating landscapes, industrial landscapes, open-pit mines, tunnels dug deep into the earth, lakes of toxic material of high economic value. And we realize how much in the Anthropocene human beings have dug, shaped and left their mark on the Earth from which they try with increasing vigor to move away, forgetting all ties. A manufactured landscape that reminds us that 2020 was the year in which the weight of materials produced by *Homo sapiens* exceeded that of the living (Mancuso, 2021) and that there are molten plastic rocks named plastiglomerates⁸ (Corcoran *et al.*, 2013).

Burtinsky and Baichwal also attempt to define a brief but representative vocabulary of the Anthropocene through their latest documentary. The seven key words in *Anthropocene: the Human Epoch* (mining, terraforming, technofossils, anthropocene, limits, climate change and extinction) describe the processes of action and reaction that are taking place due to anthropogenic action and that are pushing Nature to no longer be a landscape in the background, but to react to the abuse that humans are inflicting on it. In fact, as Bruno Latour states, the Anthropocene could manifest itself as a state of

⁷ Ted, *Edward Burtinsky: Manufactured Landscapes*. Last access: May 2022.
Link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U2Dd4k63-zM&t=1861s>

⁸ The plastiglomerate was first discovered in 2006 by oceanographer Charles Moore in Kamilo Beach (Hawaii). It consists of conglomerates of molten plastic, beach sediments, basaltic lava fragments and organic debris.

generalised war, in which Nature breaks into a battle in which the protagonists are not only all living beings, but also CO₂, acidification and rising seas, and, above all, humans who still think they live in the Holocene and the Earthbound, the Earthlings of the Anthropocene (Latour, 2013). Latour's *geostory* warns us that future scenarios are anything but peaceful and shapes darker collective imagery to which we must pay close attention. To do so, an emotion could also be added to the short vocabulary on the Anthropocene proposed by Burtinsky, as it is often arduous even to understand one's feelings toward a situation that escapes from all sides and appears to have immeasurable dimensions. *Solastalgia* is a term coined in 2015 by Australian philosopher Glenn Albrecht, who has wondered for some time about the relationship between ecosystem distress and human discomfort.

Solastalgia has its origins in the concepts of "solace" and "desolation". Solace is derived from *solari* and *solacium*, with meanings connected to the alleviation of distress or to the provision of comfort or consolation in the face of distressing events. Desolation has its origins in *solus* and *desolare* with meanings connected to abandonment and loneliness. [...] *Algia* means pain, suffering or sickness. (Albrecht, 2007)

Solastalgia is a sense of anguish, which can even degenerate into illness, due to the loss of the current state of one's home, territory, landscape with which one identified and felt one belonged. It can be well understood how the interventions made by humans to the detriment of the environment and the catastrophic reactions due to climate change are one of the main sources that generate this feeling. Burtinsky and Baichwal perfectly show the changes that cause solastalgia when they project onto the screen artificial and industrial landscapes, skyscraper forests replacing natural ones, dried-up waterways, processes of desertification, all generated by a perpetual and increasingly accelerated action of terraforming (modification of the Earth's surface for human purposes). All the more reason why the term solastalgia needs to enter into a common discourse on the Anthropocene since, as Albrecht states, today many people identify their home not only with reference to their local context, but encompassing the whole Earth (Albrecht, 2007). The home to which globalized *Homo sapiens* belongs and with which he identifies is no longer exclusively his own neighborhood, but the Earth as a whole. Thus, deforestation processes in the Amazon, the loss of coral reefs and other ecological disasters also trigger this emotion typical of the Anthropocene.

3. What Next?

Having broadly described the conditions from which *Homo sapiens* today looks to the future, it is necessary to focus on the insidious question Robert Crumb referred to a few decades ago: *What Next?* If in order to talk about the present, three documentaries have been identified, which on the whole can provide a detailed overview, in order to understand what stories we tell to tell other stories with and to imagine the near future(s), one can only refer to fictional cinema. We will see how the suggested alternatives are not substantially dissimilar to those depicted by Crumb in the last three vignettes, even though they inevitably tend to mingle with each other, generating utopian or dystopian futures.

In order to better understand the future scenarios proposed by the movie industry, it is necessary to dwell for a moment on these two concepts, which also play an important role in cinema. The term "utopia" was coined by Thomas More in his opus *Utopia*, and refers to a twofold meaning: οὐ - τόπος, "place that does not exist", and εὖ - τόπος, "happy place". Utopia, then, is the narrative of a perfect place, but it is also <<first and foremost a text, a narrative that frames a description to which it confers its conditions of possibility, a text that marks a gap, an active difference within historical and geographical reality>> (Marin, 1973; proper translation). Dystopia, on the other hand, is an utopia in the opposite direction (Rouvillois, 1999). It shows how the ideal and perfect narrative of utopia will never be achieved, proposing, on the contrary, undesirable, frightening and negative scenarios. Via the categories of utopia and dystopia, today's media - including the cinema, especially the SF genre - tend to anticipate information about the world to come through *premediation* (Grusin, 2010), which prepare the user for whatever will happen in the future by placating anxieties and inculcating a kind of apathy (Sontag, 1965; Demaria & Piluso, 2020). As a few examples will demonstrate in the next paragraphs, in recent years science fiction cinema has increasingly focused on ecological disaster's theme (in addition to the technological one) – after all, the close link between SF and the Anthropocene has been demonstrated by a large body of scientific literature (Canavan, 2014; Kara, 2016; Haraway, 2019; Neilson, 2020) – anticipating possible future scenarios and providing a critique of current environmental policies.

3.1. Ecological disaster

The first of Crumb's future vignettes presents an apocalyptic scenario. An orange-hued sky, a Sun that seems to bake everything it rests on rather than act as a source of life, a dry and sandy terrain, dilapidated and abandoned buildings and human infrastructure. This is the image the cartoonist provides of the first possible future scenario: the Ecological disaster.

Unfortunately, if for Crumb it was only a hypothetical future, today *Homo sapiens* is familiar with events of this magnitude on a daily basis. The frequency with which we witness ecological disasters depends on where we are fortunate enough to live, but even the more fortunate and affluent among us, who do not experience them directly on an ongoing basis, have by now become accustomed to the alarms spread by the media.

In fact, we have been getting used to this kind of apocalyptic and dystopic scenario for quite some time now. Not only because human beings experience ecological disasters, but also because it has become a topic for the movie industry to discuss, even a rather attractive one. The risk could even be that we internalise such a hypothesis to such an extent that we become addicted to it and lack a reaction. For the time being, this would seem to be unfounded; a recent study conducted by *Avaaz*⁹ (an NGO engaged in the fight against climate change, corruption, poverty and more) showed that a common sense of anxiety about climate change is widespread among young people. Here is another typical emotion of the Anthropocene.

Orange skies, sunburnt landscapes, sandy soils and crumbling structures. Almost certainly all of us, reading these scenarios, are mixing fact and fiction. *Blade Runner 2049*, the sequel to the famous 1982 movie directed by Ridley Scott, was released in cinemas in 2017. Under the direction of Denis Villeneuve, the film showed a hyper-technological world, but also one shattered by ecological disasters. The first images with which the viewer is confronted are images of imposing and disorienting landscapes, very similar to those proposed by Burtinsky and Baichwal. In a hyper-constructed world, where advertisements and the companion of life can both be holograms, and where humans and replicants coexist, it is noticeable how extremely rare it is to find any form of coexistence between humans and other living beings. The two sentences uttered by Mariette (Mackenzie Davis, as a Nexus-8 replicant working as a doxie) and the protagonist K (Ryan Gosling) are significant. The former claims never to have seen a tree, the latter instead ascertains and is

⁹ Link: https://secure.avaaz.org/campaign/it/climate_anxiety_briefing_2021/?slideshow Last access: May 2022. Here is the link to the research conducted by *Avaaz* on climate change anxiety. You can also contribute your own experience.

surprised that a dog could be real, namely living. Here we find among the scenes of the film the meaning of that term included in the vocabulary of the *Anthropocene* documentary: extinction¹⁰. Even more significant than the images of *Blade Runner 2049* are the orange skies saturated with contaminated, unbreathable air. In addition to calling to mind Crumb's vignettes, they became reality a few years later due to the fires that broke out in 2020 in California and other West Coast states. On that very occasion, several newspapers and TV news had pointed out the similarity between the dystopic scenario proposed by Villeneuve's movie and what the inhabitants of San Francisco were experiencing on their own skin.

The movie of humans and replicants is not the only one that the big cinema industry has proposed in recent years to shape the stories of the Anthropocene. There are many apocalyptic, post-apocalyptic and dystopic movies that involve humanity in a bleak future. *Mad Max: Fury Road* (2015), *The Book of Eli* (2010), *The Road* (2009), *The Day After Tomorrow* (2004) are just some of them. A blockbuster film like *Interstellar* (2014), directed by Christopher Nolan, takes precisely ecological disaster and climate change as the trigger for the whole affair. With a documentary feel, the film introduces the environmental and social context that Cooper (Matthew McConaughey) and his family are forced to face every day.

My dad was a farmer. Like everybody else back then. [...] The wheat had died. The blight came and we had to burn it. We had acres of corn [...] but mostly we had dust.

This is how some of the first lines unfold during a hypothetical interview. A world in which humans have become guardians of the few precious resources at their disposal, in which ecological disasters have turned lush soil into sand and plagues have precluded the possibility of cultivating one of the few plant species on which *Homo sapiens* feeds. *Interstellar* thus illustrates the risks and some of the possible consequences of soil loss, monocultures and the general war humans are waging against nature. Even some tricks to resist sand invasions are listed, which in several countries are already a reality, such as handkerchiefs over the mouth or tables set with plates turned inside out. And a sad consideration moves the entire film because "we are not

¹⁰ On the subject of extinction I point to two popular texts from the immense work of the father of biodiversity Edward Wilson:

Wilson, E. O., 2004, *Il futuro della vita (The future of Life, 2002)*, Codice, Torino.

Wilson, E. O., 2006, *La Creazione (The Creation: an Appeal to Save Life on Earth, 2006)*, Adelphi, Milano.

meant to save the world, we are meant to leave it". It is in the Lazarus Missions that Professor Brand (Michael Caine) places his hope of saving humanity. In a way that recalls Crumb's second scenario: Techno Fix.

3.2. *Techno Fix*

Robert Crumb's second vignette of the future brings with it a positivist baggage dating back to the XIX century combined with the persistent technological hopes of the XXI. This time the cartoonist's illustration looks promising: blue skies, flying machines, futuristic buildings. Hints aimed at dispelling any doubts about human's supposed victory over the uncertainty of the future, Crumb specifies: *Fun Future*. Probably what all mankind, more or less explicitly, yearns for. Yuval Noah Harari, an Israeli historian, has pointed out that some of the XXI century goals of *Homo sapiens* are the pursuit of immortality and happiness (Harari, 2017). The latter is determined by chemical processes: feelings of pleasure generate happiness, and there is no doubt that enjoyment produces temporary feelings of happiness. The "problem" lies in the evolutionary functioning mechanisms that characterise human beings. *Sapiens*, in fact, are not made to be fulfilled, to stop at a certain level of happiness or enjoyment, but always desire further doses of it. As Harari states, it is not certain that humans today are happier than hunter-gatherers. The pursuit of happiness could turn out to be a dangerous and fruitless chase. What can be seen, however, is that many are trying to complete this marathon by using technology and science. One of the currents of thought opposing the idea that human beings will succumb to climate change hinges precisely on a total faith in some technological innovation that will pacify our relationship with nature or, more correctly, allow us to dominate it once and for all. Yet nowadays such technology still does not seem to have been achieved.

The movie industry has also put forward a dystopian vision of the relationship between humans and technology. The futuristic landscapes projected on big screens rarely present a harmonious merging of highly advanced technology and naturalness. More often, the images tell of an even more anthropised future, where urbanisation has now taken over: cities are hyper-constructed megalopolises, developing horizontally as well as vertically (after all, this is the trend of the XXI century), plants are a rarity, as Mariette suggests, and the greyness of infrastructures reigns supreme. The city of Trantor, capital of the Galactic Empire in Isaac Asimov's *Cycle of*

Foundations (Asimov, 2020), recently revived in the TV series format¹¹, encapsulates the image of incessant urbanisation sometimes projected by the cinema industry. Trantor is a world city, a totally humanised ecumenopolis. Thinking of another, even better-known galactic empire, that of the *Star Wars* cycle, here too technology has produced completely constructed cities devoid of naturalness. Moreover, the entire *Black Mirror* TV series was dedicated to the theme of the perverse and aberrant outcomes produced by technology in a hypothetical dystopic future. The series has been constructed through individual episodes that are not connected from a plot point of view, but linked by a common dystopian look into the future. Many of the technological innovations of the current century are analysed: social networks, augmented reality, video games, nanotechnology and so on. The series highlights some aspects of the contemporary world, generating user identification, and proposes possible future imaginaries, highlighting the two sides – collaborative and conflictual, verging on the morbid – of the human-technology relationship (Bennato, 2018).

However, technology does not necessarily have to bring a negative outcome. A recent study conducted by the architecture and urban planning firm *Skidmore, Owings & Merrill* (SOM) constructed an image of what the city of the future could look like¹². Technological innovation in this case would be adapted to the principles of ecology, with a focus on the use of water and energy, liveability, the introduction of waste in a circular process of reduction and reuse, sustainable and local food production, zero-emission infrastructure, mobility, and the promotion of culture, heritage and a digital economy. Even Edward Burtinsky, in an interview conducted for the *Manufactured Landscapes*¹³ project, pointed out that technology is not the enemy of the human-environment relationship, indeed it could actually lead to the solution depicted by Crumb through improved recycling and biomimicry practices.

What could be a threat is not so much the technology itself, which depends on how it is directed, but the difficulty of communication between those who employ it and those who study its impacts and identify solutions at a scientific level. *Don't Look Up* is a 2021 film directed by Adam McKay, which received

¹¹ *Foundation* is the US TV series based on the works of the same name by Isaac Asimov and produced by David S. Goyer for Apple TV+.

¹² “*Città del Futuro (City of the Future)*” is the article published by National Geographic Italia in April 2019 that illustrates the project of the architecture and urban planning firm *Skidmore, Owings & Merrill* (SOM). In the issue of National Geographic Italia, “*Città. Idee per un futuro migliore (Cities. Ideas for a better future)*”, April 2019.

¹³ Ted, *Edward Burtinsky: Manufactured Landscapes*. Link:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U2Dd4k63-zM&t=1861s> Last access: May 2022.

several *Oscar* nominations. The events take place in the USA, but involve the whole world, as two astronomers discover a gigantic asteroid that is destined to hit the Earth, generating a new mass extinction including mankind. Despite the in-depth studies of the two scientists, supported by the scientific community, the news fails neither to be taken seriously by the population, nor to be addressed with the right technological means by the competent authorities, who prefer to profit economically from the event. Through fake news, spectacularization, politicisation and much more, the news is only taken seriously when it is too late, generating widespread and uncontrollable panic. Here again, the “solution” to the catastrophe relies on technology: a space mission consisting of a small core of super-rich people is sent to colonise another planet (here we return to something similar to Professor Brand’s plan in *Interstellar*). *Don’t Look Up* is an alarm to what is happening with climate change. The future Techno Fix will only be possible and will only be able to help *Homo sapiens* cure some of the problems of the Anthropocene if it is guided by an ecosystemic approach, a different kind of communication and appropriate policies.

3.3. *Ecotopian solution*

The last of Robert Crumb’s hypotheses about the future is the Ecotopian solution and identifies a future in harmony between human beings and the rest of the inhabitants of the *oikos*, the common home. What is evident from the cartoonist’s vignettes is the dominant presence of vegetation, which in the first two solutions was completely absent or scarce. The Ecotopian solution belongs to the long list of imagined (and im-possible?) utopias: human and non-human beings have reached a coexistence to leave the Anthropocene and enter a new epoch where there is a place for everyone. Crumb seems to anticipate and respond to the queries of anthropologist Tim Ingold, who through his own work has often questioned what the role of anthropology should be for the future. Ingold asks <<How should we live?>> (proper translation; Ingold, 2020a) and <<What kind of world has a place for us and for everything else both now and for future generations?>>¹⁴. Questions that have much to do with the concept of “sustainability”, which is now being discussed on many fronts, and with the ability to weave relationships as in a correspondence of lines (Ingold, 2020b). It is precisely relationships and the ability to create community that prompted the coining of an alternative term

¹⁴ In: Stuart Platt, Tim Ingold: “The sustainability of everything”, 28 settembre 2016. Last access: May 2022. Link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ncLv9Gk7XrI>

to that of Stoermer and Crutzen to describe the epoch towards which we must strive: that of *Koinocene*.

The Greek noun *koinotes* (and the adjectival root *koinos*) indicates precisely “commonality”, “participation”, “absence of distinctions”, “similarity”. [...] *Koinocene* is the new utopia (grounded in an ancient reality) of a world in which humans become (or rather re-become) aware of their relationships and participation, and of the risk of placing *humanitas* as the single pivot of the world. (Proper translation; Favole, 2021)

The *Koinocene* could be achieved by overcoming once and for all the opposition between nature and culture typical of naturalism, of western cosmology, as Philippe Descola would say. Some populations inhabit the world according to other ways of thinking about the environment, which leads them to form different relationships with it, as in the cases of totemism or animism (Descola, 2021).

In the science-fiction colossal film *Avatar* (2009) by James Cameron, set in the year 2154 on the planet Pandora, the director uses the different relationships with the environment entertained by invading humans and indigenous people as a common thread. Through an approach similar to ethnography, scientist Grace Augustine and ex-marine Jake Sully come into contact with the inhabitants of Pandora and slowly learn about their customs and habits. These reveal a deep connection to all living creatures in the *oikos*: they worship Eihwa, a panicle deity made up of all living things, relate intimately to the forest, trees and other non-human beings, and understand how there is a network of energy and connections through the forest between all living creatures. These features of the culture of the Pandora people might seem like mere science fiction suggestions. Recent studies by Canadian scientist Suzanne Simard, have shown how complex networks of connections between trees and fungi exist in the oldest forests. The *Wood Wide Web* is precisely this connection between plant roots and fungal hyphae that allows trees and fungi in the forest to exchange resources for community sustenance (Simard *et al.*, 1997; Beiler *et al.*, 2010). We return here to the importance of forming relationships and making community that trees seem to have learned long ago. The Eihwa people also understood the importance of connections, particularly with the plant world. Their city is built around a giant tree in the forest with which they identify, and one of the most sacred places is the Tree of Souls, which holds the voices of the ancestors.

Although of a different genre, the film *Captain Fantastic* (2016), directed by Matt Ross, provides other suggestions in this regard. The setting of the

film is very reminiscent of Crumb's third hypothesis. Ben Cash (Viggo Mortensen) lives with his family in a forest on the northwest coast of the United States. Together with his wife, who died prematurely, he has decided to raise his children in contact with nature, giving them rigorous physical and intellectual training. As a result, the family has a perfect knowledge of their environment, other living forms, the resources they can use, and a superior cultural education that is categorically opposed to western capitalism. They seem to have achieved their own ecological utopia. The importance of an ecotopian solution in opposition to the crises generated by the capitalist model is thus shown, which led Jason Moore to coin the term *Capitalocene* (Moore, 2017). On the other hand, the advantages of such an upbringing clash with the inability of Ben's children to live within the dominant community, which leads the eldest son, Bo, to clash with his father and go to one of America's most prestigious universities to study.

Matt Ross's film induces reasoning about a possible change, highlighting the criticality of an alternative solution, but also the many contradictions of Western civilisation¹⁵. It often uproots the beliefs and reference symbols that Western society adopts, replacing them with other models. One example is the celebration of Noam Chomsky's birthday, who is taken as a hero or figure of reference in place of Santa Claus. The well-known American intellectual and political activist throughout his life has criticised certain traits of today's society by proposing other forms of *dwelling*, hence of being in the world, as Ingold would say. It is precisely a quotation from Chomsky that marks the spirit of the movie and the road to the necessary change, Koinocene or Ecotopian solution:

If you assume that there is no hope, you guarantee that there will be no hope. If you assume that there is an instinct for freedom, that there are opportunities to change things, then there is a possibility that you can contribute to making a better world. (Noam Chomsky, from the film *Captain Fantastic*)

4. Conclusions

The Anthropocene does not call for a one-way response. *Homo sapiens* does not have the option of pointing the finger at just one of the hypotheses of the future presented, but must come to terms with all that the Human Epoch

¹⁵ Some statements bring to mind the text edited by M. Guernaccia, 1998, *Papalagi*, Stampa Alternativa, Rome.

is and will represent. This time asks the human species to become aware of an essential fact: commonality in fragmentation. Humans cannot exist without poplars, tuna, bees and bacteria. We are lines (Ingold, 2020b) and *koinotes* must be woven and strengthened in the weave. “Where must we go, we who wander this wasteland, in search of our better selves” (*The First History Man*, from the film *Mad Max: Fury Road*) – it is with this quote that the article opened – in order to heal this wasteland and find our better selves, *sapiens* must come to terms with themselves and open to bonds of correspondence with the Other.

Humans are looking for their own stories to tell, the ones that will shape the lives of future generations, human and non-human, and be lived by them. Cinema too, as an instrument of storytelling and communication, is shaping collective imaginaries and creating common grounds for reasoning and thinking about the Anthropocene. To overcome this *impasse* and veer towards futures of “multispecies resurgence” (Tsing, 2017) we must first understand where we are and create common ground for discussion.

It is not permissible to wait for resurgence which arrive in the form of an alien gift, such as that brought by Ted Chiang’s Heptapods (Chiang, 2018), shown in cinemas by Denis Villeneuve’s *Arrival*. But as in that case, hopes could be pinned on a new and acquired ability to see and think about reality. For Chiang-Villeneuve, this is made possible by a new form of language, past-present-future and circular, like the semasiographic language of Abbott and Costello (the two aliens who came to Earth to communicate with humans). In the movie, some scientific theories are taken to the extreme. According to the *Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis*, the film’s real trigger:

we dissect nature along lines laid down by our native languages. The categories and types that we isolate from the world of phenomena we do not find there because they stare every observer in the face; on the contrary, the world is presented in a kaleidoscopic flux of impressions which has to be organised by our minds-and this means largely by the linguistic systems in our minds. We cut nature up, organise it into concepts, and ascribe significances. (Whorf, 1964)

Adopting another language could change the way we think and see reality. A suggestion that brings us back to the importance of what Donna Haraway provocatively (but not too much) stated through the words of Ursula K. Le Guin, when she speaks of a human being who will be able to read Eggplant and lichen verses (Haraway, 2019, p. 87). A human who sees, thinks and inhabits through multi-species symbiosis; who has overcome nature-culture,

human and non-human oppositions by entering the common ground of the experience of living and dying well on this damaged planet (Haraway, 2019).

Creating a common vocabulary and common ground is the first tiny step towards this goal. To foster the emergence of human and non-human communities that oppose the Anthropocene and enter the Koinocene. It is important to understand which stories tell other stories and which thoughts think other thoughts (Haraway, 2019). Stories that the cinema industry helps to shape and that today have to come to terms with a Nature that is no longer harnessed but rightfully enters the current narrative. Perhaps indeed one day we will realise that we have reached a new, more inclusive, open and relational vision of reality. We will be able to speak Eggplant and once again update Robert Crumb's vignettes.

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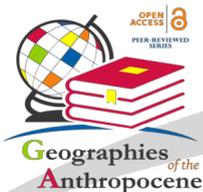
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The Anthropocene concept identifies a geological era in which human action leads to changes on a planetary scale with long-term irreversible effects. This volume collects insights into geographical research, with a specific look at the challenges of the future, and the potential of visual communication offered by cinema, documentaries and television series. In fact, fiction could represent the appropriate medium to examine the notions of the Anthropocene, being a language of global diffusion and highly evocative since it uses the engagement of narration and entertainment to convey messages of vital importance, arousing emotions in the viewer, shared awareness and, finally, responsibility. In the Anthropocene era, the challenge of climate change is not a problem of science but a failure of politics. And politics fails because the Great Acceleration has led to the good life and certainly a better life for people everywhere. Who is willing to give up the great stuff of the Great Acceleration? What would that new life look like? What kind of challenges does the future propose? Some of these questions, among others, are raised in the chapters of the present volume. The different geographical contexts and approaches, here collected, can play an important clarifying function, to reduce the complexity of (today's) social, economic, political, and technological reality, presenting a much deeper vision of reality than it appears to us, and at the same time offering us the means to navigate it. Thus, the volume deals with these issues in three sections, moving from narrative methods to the representation of ecological disasters and finally analysing a more specific topic.

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