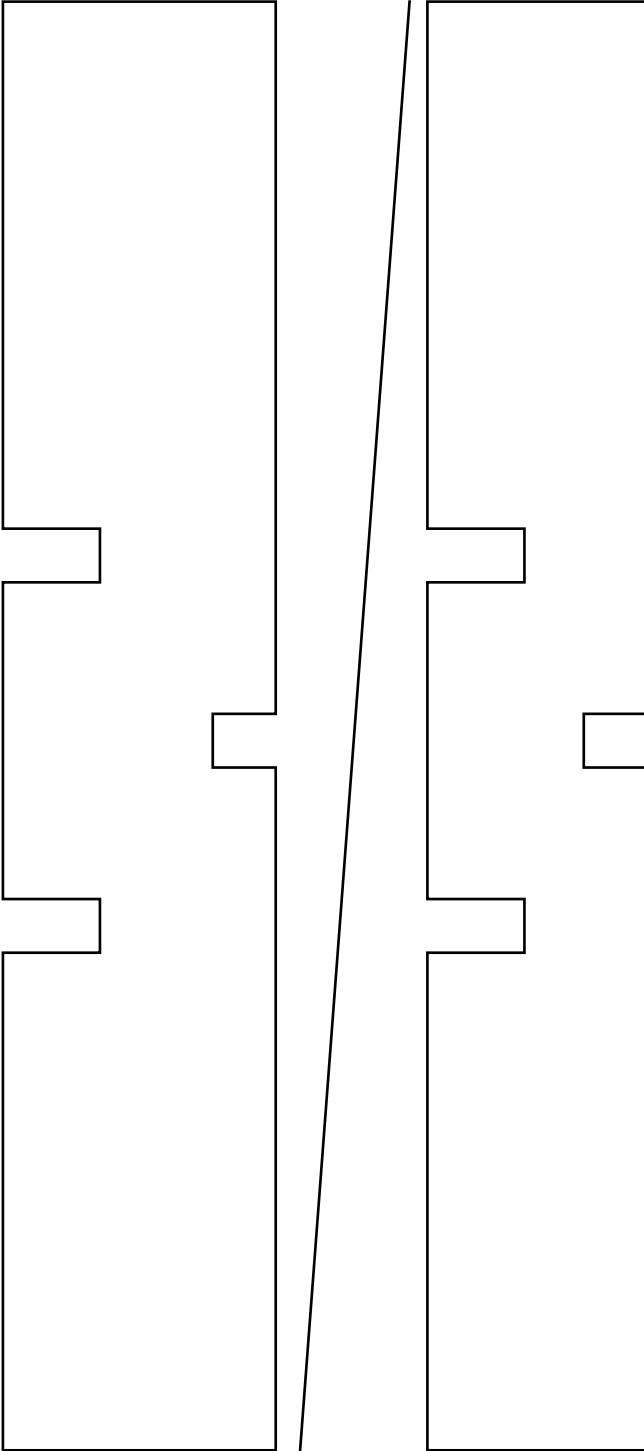


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Hétérotopies de la récréation

Experimental Science-Fiction Films as Filmic Heterotopia: New Imaginaries/New Worlds

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Abstract

This paper questions the concept of the possible heterotopia of cinema by making a creative reading of a corpus of contemporary experimental science-fiction films. We think heterotopia in direct relation to utopia. If utopia can be linked to a form of thought, then heterotopia would be a form of realised or achievable utopia. Heterotopian action would then allow us to experiment subversive, if not new social configurations, where utopian thought allows us to dream of better (or at least other) societies. We propose to look at these issues starting from experimental science-fiction films. The aesthetic and narrative resorts as well as the modes of production of works like *Slow Action* and *Urth* by Ben Rivers, *Meteor* by Mathias Müller and Christoph Girardet, Momoko Seto's *Planet Series* or Jérôme Cognet's *Guerilla Hubble*, indeed offer us with an audiovisual experience that invites us to re-evaluate our human relation to the world by appealing to our capacity for imagination and by stimulating our free will, notably through their staging of historicity and multiplicity.

Keywords: heterotopia, science-fiction, film studies, contemporary cinema, experimental film

Introduction

How can creative readings inform ways of thinking and help trace paths to track budding thought processes? Film analysis can be said to exist as a creative experience in its own right, in that exploring the possible meanings withheld by film through interpretation – the art of hermeneutics – challenges one to question the ways in which meanings are conveyed. It involves picking film apart in order to rebuild it, an activity which could be deemed a mediation. It is an intervention in the regular, direct reception of film, through which we seek to resolve meaning by

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examining what constitutes whatever meaning is conveyed. This approach is akin to criticism, which Stanley Cavell defines as the “reading of art” (81), and is far from unusual. This paper, however, proposes to look at the inner workings of a program of short films rather than just individual works, that is, it looks at what it could mean to read specific films in a specific order or at least as a specific set. This reading could thus be analogous to how we “read” a collection of short stories or a music album: the program itself is an assemblage, each fragment partaking in the works’ global movement.

The aim of this reading is to show how the chosen films contribute to defining and understanding how the cinematographic heterotopia can be rethought today, within the scope of renewing the ways in which we represent the anthropocene, this new geological era defined by such intense human activity that it affects the climate and the environment.¹ Michel Foucault, who defined the term heterotopia in a conference given in 1967, writes that heterotopia is “a kind of effectively enacted utopia in which the real sites, all the other real sites that can be found within a culture, are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted” (1994, 756).² Cinema is one of the examples of heterotopia, that is, of “other spaces” or practical utopias, given by Foucault in both versions of his article on the subject. Indeed, it conforms with the six defining principles he states. Without lingering on the first two aspects of heterotopia – that they exist in all societies and that their function and working is synchronous with the societies in which they emerge – cinema can be shown to include in one real space multiple spaces that are incompatible between themselves. The physical space of the film-theatre as well as the space-time of a film’s screening allows an absent space to exist, and the film itself allows disparate spaces to coexist on-screen, through montage. Going to the cinema and experiencing a screening allows the viewer to escape traditional time, and exemplifies the heteropian space’s system of being at once open and closed, isolated and at the same time penetrable. As to the last principle stated by Foucault, that is, heterotopia’s function of illusion or compensation, the cinema is divided, in that different film practices can be said to pertain to one or the other – some films create spaces of compensation “as perfect, as meticulous, as well arranged as

1 The term “anthropocene” was coined by chemist Paul Crutzen and ecologist Eugene Stoermer in 2000. Although the geological era has yet to be made official by the IPCC (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change), the concept has been developed across natural sciences, the humanities and the arts over the past two decades. The term itself is also subject to debate (otherwise proposed as capitalocene, anglocene (Bonneuil & Fressoz), or even chtulhucene (Haraway 2016) but continues to fuel a prolific “intellectual scene” as Dominique Raynaud put it in his recent article on the subject (Raynaud).

2 All translations are mine, unless specified.

ours is messy, ill constructed, and jumbled” (751) and others create spaces of illusion “that expose every real space, all the sites inside of which human life is partitioned, as still more illusory” (ibid.). It is this second kind of heterotopia which is concerned by this reading. Indeed, the works studied here belong to the world of experimental film, which offers another link to heterotopia as defined by Foucault when he first used the term in his introduction to *The Order of Things* (1966, 8-11). This first brief mention of heterotopia alludes to its capacity to disrupt and to displace, as does the experimental film: in rejecting traditional storytelling and dramatic realism it upsets audiovisual representation’s dominant aesthetic and narrative codes. This can be said of the films chosen for this study, that we qualify as “experimental science-fiction,” since they resort to the codes of the heterogeneous heritage of experimental and avant-garde film whilst portraying subjects and motifs commonly found in science-fiction cinema. Through these works, Ben Rivers (*Urth*, 20’, 2016), Matthias Müller and Christoph Girardet (*Meteor*, 15’, 2010), Momoko Seto (*Planet series*, 2014-2019, between 7 and 10’) and Jérôme Cognet (*Guerilla Hubble*, 7’, 2013) offer a completely different way of representing the anthropocene than what is found in most science-fiction productions that focus on dystopia and disaster – be it natural or man-made (Voigts & Boller). Indeed, if science-fiction is, as Maurizia Natali upholds, the cinematic space of the anthropocene (“Empire of Catalandia”), it must be concerned with renewing the ways of representing the world and staging our relation to it, something that is deterred through the standardisation furthered by mainstream film, and to some extent art-house film. These can be said to be mainly heterotopias of compensation that offer a well-orchestrated and time-old narrative arc focusing on one (or more) character(s)’ psychological evolution and resulting in a conclusion. Instead of relying on the genre’s regular fast cutting and constant action, the films explored here allow space for the viewer to become involved with the film as medium, whilst showing interest in non-human subjects and deflecting the gaze from a prophylactic imagining of the end of the world.

This essay then intends to work on how the reading of this program of films can inform our thought process in a sensitive manner, within the scope of offering alternative science-fiction narratives for the anthropocene. Namely, we shall try to use this methodology in order to help us define and understand how the cinematographic heterotopia can be rethought today, at a time when we desperately need a radical shift in our imaginaries (Hache 13). Our method for analysing film draws on a variety of substances, each induced by the film itself. Each film is systematically deconstructed (number and average length of shots, predominant framing and/or camera movement, soundtrack...) and considered from a semantic point of view: what is represented directly, contained in the

images, conveyed by text and sound? Furthermore, they are identified as being part of a larger cultural and historical point of view and considered within the scope of their affinities with other audiovisual forms, namely those that represent the anthropocene.

Inspiration for these thoughts originally arose from the observation of a paradox between the visionary aspect of societies depicted in speculative, science-fiction films and series and the normative aspect of this genre from an aesthetic and narrative point of view. *Slow Action* by Ben Rivers (2010, 45'), a cross between art and experimental film, allowed for a more in-depth questioning of this problem, since it is resolutely oriented towards utopia rather than the all-too-common dystopia. Indeed, the film presents a world in which different utopian societies have been implemented on various islands in a future where seas have risen on planet Earth: Eleven, Hiva, Kanzennashima and Somerset.

Eleven is a particularly speculative island on which beings have evolved to conceive themselves as holograms that enjoy close relations with the stars and with mathematics. Hiva, or the Society Islands, form an archipelago where inhabitants spend their days telling the stories of their own lives as well as others, and whose possible political organisations are manifold. From one isle to the next, Hiva welcomes a multitude of social models and encourages permanent change and adaptation. The third island, Kanzennashima, appears as a ghost-island, home to the remains of dead civilisations, their memory and the madness of human dreams. Finally, Somerset is characterised by the fervour of permanent revolution, a hub of metamorphosis where the young take charge of political tasks whilst elders sacrifice their lives for a dream.

Analysing this film led to the identification of a variety of ways of stylising a multiple world through narration and aesthetics. The film asserts this diversity through the use of colour and black-and-white hand-processed film, an anamorphic lens, music taken from various 1960s science-fiction films, a number of historical and geographical situations in the voice-over written by science-fiction author Mark von Schlegell, and significant difference between the two narrators' voices. There is also a great porousness between the film genres Rivers references (documentary and mockumentary, science-fiction and art-house), or even its different screening formats. Thus, in making vision apparent, the work appears as a kaleidoscopic apparatus that largely contributes to installing the viewer in a world governed by multiplicity and historicity. These two elements are central in the filmmaker's approach: multiplicity, meaning the explicit acknowledgement of otherness, and historicity, that is to say a reflexive position on the film-maker's part not only towards film-as-medium but also towards film's inscription in history. And it is with these two elements that this approach seems to

agree with a form of “situated” knowledge, in Donna Haraway’s sense of the term (1988, 580-581). In refusing the “conquering gaze from nowhere” (581) that can generally be said to be adopted in science-fiction cinema, the films and film-makers chosen for this study ascertain doubt and reassessment through their “webbed accounts,” allowing us to “build meanings” through the criticism implied by their work, and enabling us, it would seem, to “see faithfully from another’s point of view” (583). This, in turn, appears to be an important step in how we can acknowledge the evolution that the introduction of the notion of heterotopia allows us to effectively make in our relation to the space surrounding us, namely in that it requires a certain change of perspective.

Firstly, the two elements of multiplicity and historicity therefore appear useful for reconsidering what heterotopia, at least that of the cinema, can be fifty years after Michel Foucault coined the term. The second characteristic I would like to retain from *Slow Action*’s analysis is the one concerning the passing from utopia to heterotopia. As I have said, the film presents an ensemble of imaginary, utopian societies. However, I share Dominic Paterson’s opinion that in this film the idea of utopia shifts towards that of heterotopia. I would now like to somewhat specify the relation that seems to arise between the two.

First, utopia. Without limiting ourselves to thinking utopia as a radiant city or ideal society, utopia, in the meaning Miguel Abensour grants it, is affiliated not only with a way of thinking but with a form of critical thinking about the reality of the world with which it is confronted: “as if utopia was an attitude, a disposition, a way of thinking or even a spiritual exercise that could only be undertaken on the condition of maintaining, of retaining an irreducible distance” (Abensour 18). Utopia thus forms virtually, in the way that it appears at the heart of the renewal of a world-view, whoever casts that view being caught up in a distancing from established systems. It seems to be in this sense that Paul Ricoeur opposes utopia and ideology, the two aspects that form the double character of the social imaginary (1984). The function of social integration specific to ideology relies upon the legitimisation and social recognition of norms, leading in turn to the illusion of a possible social hegemony: it is considered as a “reproductive” force. Inversely, utopia is a “productive” force that opens the field of possibilities through its projection of otherness, in accordance with its subversive function. But what then can be said of heterotopia, a no-longer imaginary notion, characterised by its concrete, tangible and practicable aspect? The idea presents itself as a manifestation within society of the utopian dynamic which remains in the order of the virtual, or at least intangible. Heterotopia, in this sense, would actualise utopia. But in what ways does it appear in the material reality of film?

Returning to the application of these thoughts, I would like to propose two levels of heterotopia in the films that will be discussed to further my point. Firstly, represented heterotopia, meaning the presence of a heterotopia found in the diegesis, contained by the film's own universe. Secondly, the heterotopian attitude adopted by the filmmaker committed to an "other" cinema, that contests the dominant cinematographic order through practice itself. Thus, I will now invite the reader on an excursion-cum-exploration through a corpus of films that, via a detour through Space, could accompany us in rethinking heterotopia today. The selected films, produced between 2008 and 2017, all share a certain affiliation with Science-Fiction and with an experimental film-making process, that, once situated, can also be thought of as a means to question representation in the time of the anthropocene. This method is therefore a stab at using a creative reading of a specific set of film works in order to use the creative experience of film analysis as a means to help shape theoretical thought.

2. Desolate Planet: *Urth*

Let us begin on planet Earth, with the second instalment in Ben River's trilogy made in collaboration with science-fiction writer Mark von Schlegell: *Urth*. In the Sonora desert, Arizona, stand the remnants of one of the most ambitious if not accomplished heterotopian experiments we know of. This building complex was originally destined to house a variety of autonomous ecosystems, reproducing the necessary conditions for human subsistence. Biosphere 2 is the result of an initial collaboration between Jon Polk Allen – a modern polymath of sorts, follower of Buckminster Fuller, navigating between art, New Age philosophy and systems ecology – and Ed Bass – inheritor of a Texan oil fortune, influenced by 1970s American counter-culture. The structure appears as the incarnation of scientific reproducibility pushed to the very conditions of our life, a utopian realisation of Man playing God.

Urth envisions the possible extinction of mankind following the planet's "venusification." Indeed, the film presents itself as a first-hand account of the woman we are led to imagine as the last survivor on Earth, as she lives her final days imprisoned inside a replica of the terrestrial ecosystem. It is through her entries in the research centre's log-book, narrated by British artist Janice Kerbel, that we learn the story of this "graduate student summer-worker" (*Urth*, Day 0). The account is illustrated by images shot in Biosphere 2, the closed, artificial ecosystem situated, not without a hint of irony, in the township of Oracle.

The log entries allow us to follow this solitary character's survival as she resists for a little over a year in this artificial environment. The film stretches from the first day (Day 0) to the 376th day and presents notes from twelve different days. Within the film, each day is signalled by a chaptering technique: the colour green fills the screen, and the film then cuts to one or more exterior shots of Biosphere 2, before a second, fully green screen, after which the day's number and the concentration of oxygen or carbon dioxide inside is announced by the voice-over.

We come to understand this situation as the film unrolls. Outside, the atmosphere is high in carbon dioxide and she struggles to regulate oxygen inside. She operates alone, since she disconnected the artificial intelligence after a disagreement on the importance of wind for a living being's survival. She eats her comrades. What the film is staging is a possible disappearance of humans on Earth. Paradoxically, the action takes place in what presents utopian characteristics – a closed, self-sufficient space, the ideal of a system-Earth manageable by man, an artificial replica of nature. But everything turns dystopic in that the dream of substituting ourselves for God – a dream of salvation through technology and science, that ideal of modern belief still furthered by our current dominant system – is definitively flattened: the end of the film leaves us faced with the most certain death of the last human survivor. We imagine that the lack of oxygen (17%) throws her into a state of confusion since the last two entries bear the same date (Day 376, Hour 00) and she asserts that the world is still there, that planes are still flying and that she can go out to the mall. She ends by specifying that she can see us observing her, as if in a fit of paranoia (she also watches herself over the video-surveillance). This direct call to the viewer is disconcerting, as if the subject of a scientific experiment was suddenly becoming aware of its condition. Indeed, on the same day she questions the possibility that she herself could be an artificial intelligence programmed to believe it is human.

Returning to our hypothetical criteria of what contributes to a heterotopian stance on film and filmmaking, the film presents us with a variety of multiplicity. The on-screen exploration of the different biomes – savanna, ocean, desert, rainforest – but also the diversity of what is filmed – objects, writing, plants, the structure itself – contribute to an obvious fragmentation. The point of view too is multiple, or at least double, because each time the day changes we are offered an outside point of view although the story tells us that nothing lives out there. The camera-eye could therefore be thought of either as surveillance cameras or as the eyes of some other, unsuspected, life form. Additionally, the voice-over's text explicitly references wind and turbulence a number of times, notably on Day 144: "The mosaic pattern cannot be artificially established without constant turbulence."; "it was over exactly this that I decided to

disengage the IA. We had a disagreement on the importance of wind to a living system.”; “I very much want a more seasonal flux in temperature than the current stabilisation allows. Flux, where have you gone?” (*Urth*). These excerpts show how the ideas of variation and change, reflective of what defines multiplicity, are contained in the text’s semantic field.

In turn, other elements inscribe the film in a historicity, that is, a situated knowledge of our belonging in the world. The film clearly refers to a gaze informed by the anthropocene, in a world where human activity would have ended up by triggering irremediable climate change. This is furthered by reference to one of the genres to which the film can be said to belong – speculative fiction – in that it opens with a quotation taken from Mary Shelley’s *The Last Man*.

But the game is up! We must all die; nor leave survivor nor heir to the wide inheritance of earth. We must all die! The species of man must perish [...] Will the mountains remain unmoved, and streams still keep a downward course towards the vast abyss; will the tides rise and fall, and the winds fan universal nature; will beasts pasture, birds fly, and fishes swim, when man, the lord, possessor, perceiver, and recorder of all these things, has passed away, as though he had never been? (Shelley 541; *Urth*, opening sequence)

Explicitly preoccupied by the extinction of the human species and the natural world’s indifference towards it, Rivers borrows words that unnervingly echo with the present day, as do many other dystopian writings. Referencing Shelley is also significant since she is most well-known for her novel *Frankenstein or The Modern Prometheus* that calls into question Western Man’s unconditional reliance on and belief in scientific progress as the promise of a better world. Finally, the film is anchored in the reality of the experiments led in Biosphere 2 and the experience of the scientists shut inside the structure from 26th September 1991 to 26th September 1993 who reported lack of oxygen, difficulties in creating wind and insect infestation – all of which are present in the film.

Originally Biosphere 2 was intended as a first complete experience of a biodome imagined to house human life on other planets, partaking in the furthering of human expansion through the colonisation of Space. Indeed, after this desolate Earth, where to look but up, in order to perhaps take off towards other skies, as humans have shown themselves prone to these past 50-odd years, with *Meteor*, a 2010 film by Matthias Müller and Christoph Girardet.

2. Towards Other Skies: *Meteor*

Meteor appears as a film fairy tale in which a young boy is adopted by birds who teach him their language after his parents abandon him in the woods. The story is visually illustrated by found-footage, sourced by the filmmakers from 39 films: pictures of boys in European and North American films as well as pictures taken from science-fiction films, notably Soviet productions from the 1950s and 1960s. Complementing these pictures, a voice-over, narrated by experimental film-maker John Smith, brings us the story, borrowing from a set of fairy tales.

The first shot of the film shows a close up of a boy's face. He screams and falls to the ground and the film then cuts to an astronaut we see through the porthole of a spaceship. The rest of the film is articulated following this initial opposition created by parallel editing and alternately presents us with this world of middle-class white boys (in bed, asleep or daydreaming, staring at the ceiling, learning, drawing and looking into space) and visions of Space. These well-raised, observant boys are thus placed opposite what appears to be a dream of Space, as if these children were dreaming of becoming astronauts, explorers of the modern age. As other papers published here have remarked, the ship is, for Foucault, the ultimate heterotopia: "for our civilisation, the ship has been – since the 16th Century at least – at once the greatest economic instrument and our greatest reserve of imagination" (1994, 762). To what extent, in 2021, could we shift this sea-faring vessel to the spacefaring, interstellar one? The rocket or spaceship indeed seems to arise as its contemporary counterpart, fuelling economy as much as fantasy.

The last third of the film differs from the rest, lifting off to other skies. Here, pictures of astronauts alternate with those of a rocket flying through Space, planets, star-charts and even a planet seen through a telescope. The film mutates into a space-opera – literally – for the last five minutes of the film, during which we see other pictures of Space and planetary exploration, before closing on the picture of a boy, his eyes raised skywards. This entire sequence is backed by an opera theme, an aria taken from Giacomo Puccini's opera in one act *Suor Angelica* (1917).

The multiplicity in the film notably arises in the relationship it creates to the individual. Indeed, individuality recedes to benefit plural entities; the film, for example is not made by a solo filmmaker as can often be seen with this type of cinema, but by a creative duo. Müller notes that "[their] work is of perpetual exchange and debate" (MacDonald 30). Working with found footage withholds this idea in a more general sense: porousness for example between temporalities, openness towards the films and filmmakers they borrow from, and, in *Meteor*, porousness between the fairy tales it draws from. Müller upholds this idea in his interest for what

lies *in between*. Scott MacDonald writes that Müller “positions himself somewhere in between commercial filmmaking and “avant-garde” or “experimental” film-making; between film-maker and video artist; and, like Shirin Neshat and Sharon Lockhart, somewhere between the film world and the art world” (ibid.).

This ‘in-betweenness’ already surfaced in the study led on *Slow Action* and seems to have to do with a willingness for hybridity, like an inclination to go towards others or towards things, in short, to adopt a position in which the multiple, the plural, are projected to the foreground through difference and otherness. Additionally, the film shows us a main character embodied by a succession of avatars, tens of boys’ faces for the one protagonist, recalling the notion of metempsychosis, the soul’s capacity of transmigration towards other containers than our own body.

In respect to historicity, as we have mentioned, the film is made from found-footage, a recovering of material that emerges as a reflexive practice in which the medium observes itself. Indirectly, through the use of Soviet archives, it also introduces the memory of the Space Race and thus the idea of 20th Century conflict. The voice-over uses elements from three fairy tales: “Hansel and Gretel” and “The Star Money” by the Brothers Grimm and “The Snow Queen” by Hans Christian Anderson, elements again of memory for European civilisation, passed down orally before being recorded in writing.

Meteor thus invites the viewer on an interstellar journey, an initiation story-cum-maiden voyage that confronts us with an otherness manifested throughout the film, from the direct representation of one-as-many and the desire to escape to other skies, but also through the use of fairy tales. Pieced together, the different stories merge into a narration of the process of loss and learning: the abandoned boy (the pictures as well as the reference to *Suor Angelica* also lead us to believe mother and son have been separated) learns the birds’ language and is also subjected to a series of tests for which he is prompted to associate words and pictures. Text, a central element in the two first films in our corpus, is – save their titles – totally absent from the next works we will be looking at. Their analysis will thus be briefer, since there is less of an explicit story to relate to, although this absence of language is also constitutive of an openness to otherness since, as a viewer, we are no longer limited by linguistic skills in order to access the films. Refusing the *logos* is indeed one of the consistent aspects of experimental and avant-garde film since the 1920s, which, as such, is more inclined to cross borders and develop a universal mode of expression of sorts. We shall now land on the alien planets of Momoko Seto.

3. Other Worlds: Momoko Seto's *Planet Series*

Made between 2008 and 2017, Momoko Seto's Planet series tetralogy depicts the lifeforms specific to four different, imaginary planets. *Planet A*, *Planet Z*, *Planet Σ* and *Planet ∞* are each film-worlds on which we discover lifeforms other than our own, incarnating heterotopia as independent celestial bodies. On *Planet A*, mineral life reigns, columns of salt lengthen and blossom over snow-white plains that stretch out over the planet's cotton-like surface. We see the crystals expand, take shape and solidify, and this desert is a reference to the man-induced catastrophe of the Aral Sea's desertification (Seto, website, *Planet A*). *Planet Z* shows the movement of life in matter's transformation, the vegetal life that inhabits it is colonised by fungi, decomposes and rots while mushrooms establish their reign. *Planet Σ* is turned towards insects: crickets and spiders are entrapped in ice before submarine explosions generate global warming, bringing them back to life. Finally, *Planet ∞* (created in virtual reality) alternates between a mushroom-forest and the depths of an alien ocean home to amphibian-like creatures, an "organic tale" in the filmmaker's words (Seto, website, *Planet ∞*). With this series, Seto offers us the idea of multiplicity in the variety of reigns she uses as main characters – concentrating on non-human life-forms – as in the "collection" or series of short films. Transformation and metamorphosis are also central elements in these films that are to be associated with the idea of multiplicity, as we have shown already with *Urth* and *Meteor*.

The historicity we are interested in here lies in the deflection of the anthropocentric gaze and the inclusion of the history of natural science and microscopy in the film's subject matter (Aït-Touati, *Le Théâtre des monstres*). Furthermore, Seto's descriptions of her own work refer to human activities' effect on the environment – desertification or climate change for example. In order to capture the different organisms we see on-screen, the film-maker developed a specific macroscopic shooting technique, and we get a strong feeling of the artificial character of the image and its manipulation, unlike with *Urth* for example, where the director's use of 16mm gives us the impression of a direct cinema with very little, if any, reworking of the pictures themselves. Here, the landscapes created play on scale and altered time (timelapse and slow motion) and show myriad worlds hidden in (infinitely) small objects, that we are led to imagine as infinitely big. In *Planet Z*, the planet is an orange for example, and yet is shown to host a cauliflower-forest. This awareness of scale – more proof of the historicity we are interested in – is pushed to its limits with the next and last film in our tour, *Guerilla Hubble*.

4. The Chaosmos of *Guerilla Hubble*

With *Guerilla Hubble*, Jérôme Cognet invites us to discover a “chaosmos,” as a work creating an obvious parallel between celestial movement and social movement. The filmmaker worked from images captured by the Hubble telescope, overlaying them and associating different details to create a composite image. We thus feel like we are witnessing the universes’ great dance: supernovas, whirling galaxies, magnetic winds and flux, meteors, the centripetal and centrifugal movements of black holes, planets... crowd onto the screen in constant variation. These black-and-white pictures are accompanied by a soundtrack that anchors them in social movement: sounds of struggle, of demonstrations or of revolution, shouts and cries, the burst of guns and shells, sirens, the hubbub of crowds, voices over radios... The infinite character of social struggle and of the becoming-world is implicitly sketched out and Leon Dax suggests that it might be in this ‘internal identity of the world and of chaos’ as Deleuze mentioned, borrowing the term from James Joyce, that the resonance and arrangement of the stars and of men in their totality reveal their common determinations, be they impelled by objective or subjective forces (2013).

Multiplicity in the film thus arises through the bringing together of these two elements – the cosmos and society – that at first glance seem distinct. The composite aspect of the image also contributes towards plurality as it results from collage, piecing together one picture from many pictures. Like *Meteor*, this is a found-footage film, albeit one whose source is not cinema itself but scientific imagery, partly direct images from Hubble and partly artists’ impressions. Here, historicity appears as the film’s central element, its very subject is about questioning the permanent remodelling of the course of history. *Chaosmos*, as stressed by Peter Pál Pelbart, resonates with the eternal return, a repetition that affirms difference (2008).

5. Conclusion

It is in this sense that I would like to return to the idea of heterotopia where we left it, in the distinction between the two sides of social imaginary developed by Ricoeur: the reproductive force of ideology – repetition – and the productive force of utopia – difference. Another level then seems to add on to represented heterotopia and the heterotopian attitude: if, through these films we access an aesthetic experience that allows us to be displaced, then the act of creation and the transmission of aesthetic experience arise as a heterotopian position. This has for example been

stressed by Gianni Vattimo, who in his consideration of the passing from utopia to heterotopia, states that it is in aesthetics as experience of community that utopia becomes effective in a post-modern society (Vattimo). Indeed, the heterotopian attitude translates into practice, in the most prosaic sense of the term: films must be made and opportunities created for them to be shown and seen for them to exist. It seems that it is in this necessarily communitarian experience that the disputant power of heterotopia entirely gains its importance.

We realise that it is impossible to create a complete break with what goes before us; repetition, historical situation and the lessons of the past inform the possibilities of our present-future. Maybe then, to expand what often appears as a descriptive, conceptual tool towards a tool for application or realisation, experimentation would then be a key attitude for heterotopia to acquire a practical, pragmatic, active dimension in a more accepted way. It is in this sense that the disputant nature of heterotopia seems to take on all its worth: Foucault's text appears as an invitation to seize upon space, in the experience we have of it as in the ways in which we can model it.

Returning to the first occurrence of heterotopia in Foucault's writing, in the introduction to *The Order of Things*, is perhaps useful in furthering this argument since in his ulterior writings on the matter he shows less interest for the worrying, disturbing character so central to this first definition. Identified in Borges' use of language, and notably from the reading of his "Celestial Emporium of Benevolent Knowledge" in which he creates an imaginary taxonomy of animals,

[h]eterotopias are disturbing, no doubt because they secretly undermine language, because they prevent us from naming this or that, because they break common nouns or entangle them, because they ruin syntax before it is formed and not only that which builds sentences, - that, less obvious that makes words and things hold together (next to and opposite each other). (1966, 9)

Meteor's voice-over indeed echoes this way of thinking heterotopia, when the main character, abandoned by his parents is adopted by the birds he inadvertently fed:

In return the birds taught the boy their language.

The next word is chair. Look at the picture of the chair.

Look at the word chair written under the picture.

The next word is bed. Look at the picture of the bed.

Look at the word bed written under the picture.

Some words were like a knot of snakes that stuck out their heads in all directions. Others floated like particles around him and collided with each other like meteors. Some even formed sentences and were swishing around. (*Meteor*)

Montage in these films, as perhaps more generally experimental film as a genre defined by its refusal to conform, also reflects this characteristic of heterotopia to disturb or disrupt³. The ways in which these films are arranged, in resisting the dominant narrative and resorting to heteroglossia, instead of common language, as Haraway put it (1988, 588), demand that the viewer adopt an active, interpretative, position. In distancing ourselves from a mere representation of heterotopia through the reading of these particular forms, that themselves offer a step back on our dominant, anthropocentric modes of representation, we have tried to show how heterotopia relies on otherness (multiplicity). As Felix Guattari writes: “It is in the *maquis* of art that we find the most consequential cores of resistance towards the steamroller of capitalistic subjectivity, that of one-dimensionality, of a generalised balancing-out, of segregation, of deafness to true otherness” (126).

Since we are at a time in which we are becoming aware of the disputant force offered by heterotopia it seems appropriate to seize it. In claiming the audiovisual medium for themselves in the ways I have shown, these filmmakers seem to partake in the dynamics of transformation, enhancing the possible by shedding light on the question of perception, of how our gaze upon the world is a condition of its becoming. In the specific scope of representation in the time of the anthropocene, this reading, in the step back – or zoom out in cinematographic terms – that it offers from our contemporary, Western, human condition, and Planet Earth, hopefully proposes another perspective that that of the common dystopia on how we can relate to the world we live in. By shifting the habitual gaze, I would then uphold that these films – as well as the reading we have proposed for them here – allow for empowerment in our claiming of the idea of heterotopia and it is in this that I believe today’s interest in the matter lies: not only in thinking it but in questioning the creation of these physical and narrative spaces and being aware of the extent to which we can shape them, as many islands of resistance.

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