And Yet It Moves!

(Climate) Migration as Symptom in the Anthropocene

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Abstract

While the climate-migration nexus raises crucial questions of mobility and climate justice, it is commonly understood through simplistic narratives that reify a complex set of relations. The spectre of environmentally-induced exodus is recurrent in media, policy and activist circles, in spite of numerous studies that reveal the empirical flaws and noxious normative implications of such narratives. This article explores this insistence, and the desire(s) for there to be a reified relation between climate and migration it reveals. The article proceeds in three movements. First, it situates discourses on climate migration in relation to the crisis of humanism the Anthropocene signifies. Second, it operates a symptomatic reading of climate migration discourses, drawing on two understandings of symptom elaborated by Lacan – as 'return of the repressed' and as 'Sinthome'. Read as a symptom, the figure of the climate migrant/refugee appears as the return of fundamental contradictions that carve contemporary regimes of socioecological (re)production. Through the concept of 'Sinthome', discourses on climate migration can be read as (illusory) attempts to shore up for the waning consistence of modern forms of 'being human'. Finally, the article proposes a symptomatic reading of the Anthropocene itself, and elaborates on what the dissolution of this symptom/ Sinthome would entail.

Keywords: mobility justice, climate justice, Anthropocene, climate refugees, climate migration, Lacan, posthuman

And yet *they* move *us* - the emblematic force of climate migration

Often invoked as the 'human face' of climate change (e.g. Hamilton, Gemenne and Bonneuil 2015), the *climate refugee* has proven to be a moving figure in current debates on climate change and the Anthropocene. Present and future environmental change are increasingly

suggested as the cause of large-scale displacements, with the spectre of environmentally-induced exodus animating an imaginative geography of unsettled futures that await us as climate change kicks in and we move into the Anthropocene (on this, see Gemenne 2011, Farbotko and Lazrus 2012, Methmann 2014, Ransan-Cooper et al. 2015, Baldwin and Bettini 2017).

The climate-migration nexus raises crucial questions, not least for the political left, as it ultimately has to do with alternative futures and the forms that being human will take (Baldwin 2014). The mobilities paradigm stands to make an important contribution to this growing debate. Its sophisticated approach to the politics of movement could provide a vital resource for conceptualising – and critiquing – the ways in which the mobilities of people, species, matter, ideas might come to be reshaped amid profound planetary transformations. The mobilities paradigm has, however, devoted surprisingly little attention to the links between environmental change and human migration (for some exceptions, see Cook and Butz 2016, Clark and Bettini 2017, Ingham, Rabiul Islam and Hicks 2018, Sheller 2018a). For example, in her ground-breaking volume *Mobility Justice* (Sheller 2018b), Mimi Sheller develops an analytic that links mobilities to justice, and that approaches movement as fundamentally positive rather than pathological. Sheller touches only briefly, however, upon the links between environmental change and mobility, and never fully escapes the trap of a reified and deterministic understanding of the nexus with which the present argument takes issue. One of the aims of this intervention is therefore to invite those working in the mobilities paradigm and with mobility justice, more specifically, to engage more closely with the climate-migration nexus, and with the question of how mobilities are being reshaped in the Anthropocene.

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The climate-migration nexus has been understood and discussed in rather problematic ways after coming under the spotlight in the early 2000s. While the figure of the climate migrant/refugee has proven to be visually powerful and emblematic, its empirical vacuity and analytic flaws are notable. To begin with, a well-established body of research warns against simplistic approaches that isolate climate change as the sole cause of (im)mobility. Such simplistic and mono-causal understanding of migration has very shaky empirical grounds and in the last instance stems from environmental determinism (e.g. Black 2001, Carr 2005, Morrissey 2009, Massey, Axinn and Ghimire 2010, Jakobeit and Methmann 2012). Critical studies emphasise the complexity of the interactions between environmental change and mobility, which intersect with social difference (gender, class, race, etc.) and play out on multiple temporal and spatial scales (White 2011, Methmann 2014, Boas 2015, Baldwin 2016, Fröhlich 2016, Hardy, Milligan and Heynen 2017, Rothe 2017, Gioli and Milan 2018, Telford 2018). Case studies furthermore reveal how simplistic narratives about climate refugee/migrants not only blanket over such differences, but also erode the agency of those involved and overlook the ways in which mobilities are part of coping and adaptation strategies (McNamara and Gibson 2009, Barnett and Campbell 2010, Gray 2011, Farbotko and Lazrus 2012, Smith and McNamara 2014, Adams 2016, Ahmed et al. 2019, Kelman et al. 2019).

However, in a 'self-perpetuating circle'(Nash 2018) of calls for more empirical research and policy tools addressing the issue, climate migration is often *reified* into a problem to be solved. That is controversial, also from a normative angle, as treating migration as a problem to be solved entails its pathologization, and the depoliticization of big questions about future mobility (on this, see Baldwin and Bettini 2017). This pathologization of human mobility in the last instance has its roots in the Western modern (and colonial) biopolitical nexus of mobility-territory-sovereignty, which presupposes the organic bond between nation-as-population and state territory (Agamben 1998, Foucault 2003, especially 239-64). Migrants

exceeding such an assumed bond between population and territory are viewed as unbounded, and are thus construed as pathological. And yet, in spite of these empirical and normative pitfalls, the figure of the climate migrant/refugee continues to resurface in reports, campaign materials, and policy recommendations (SkyNews 2015, Environmental Justice Foundation 2018, Rigaud et al. 2018, European Parliament 2019). What is even more remarkable is that progressive voices and activists continue mobilizing – with various motives – these 'toxic' narratives.

This insistence leads us to a key question: To what does the figure of the climate refugee / migrant owe its 'success'? How can we explain its popularity in current debates? I will argue that such popularity is not due to the existence of an empirically circumscribed phenomenon. Quite to the contrary. The echo obtained by the figures of climate refugee /migrant cannot be justified by their empirical referents, which – emphatically put – do not exist. To understand the emblematic and evocative power, we have to look elsewhere or outside, at some excess or surplus that transcends the vacuity of their referents.

In order to explain why the figures of the climate migrant and refugee appear so 'moving', and to illustrate what these discourses do (not) work for, this article makes three movements. First, it situates the climate-migration nexus in relation to the tensions the Anthropocene signifies (and of which mobility is symptomatic). Building on Baldwin's argument that nothing less is at stake in the debate on climate migration than a crisis of humanism (2017), this article draws an analogy between the current predicament and the crisis that the Copernican turn entailed for the then dominant understanding of the 'Anthropos' and its position on the planet.

Second, the article reads climate migration discourses as a 'symptom'. This aspect of the argument draws on and contrasts the two main understandings of symptom elaborated by French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan, as 'return of the repressed' and as 'Sinthome'. The

former will allow us to identify the repressed contradictions that emerge in disguised form through the figure of the climate refugee. Through the concept of Sinthome, we will shift the focus onto the performative character of these discourses, on the subjectivities and forms of being human they (fail to) sustain. As we will see, these two approaches offer complementary insights into the 'function' that discourses on climate migration absolve, and different vistas on how their symptomatic character might be 'treated'.

Third, and finally, I'll propose a reading of the Anthropocene itself as a symptomatic formation and elaborate on what it would or could mean to let this symptom dissolve.

And yet it moves!

The great mathematician, philosopher and physicist Galileo Galilei must have cried out these infamous words in a fit of frustration, possibly even rage, frightened by the possibility of encountering the Inquisition's sacred fire – quite literally. Galileo's theory that the Earth orbits around the Sun was inflammatory, as it openly challenged the Church's cosmological edifice that placed the Earth at the centre of God's creation, with humanity as its pinnacle. In 1633, the Catholic Inquisition had forced Galileo to recant his claims, placing him under house arrest. But Galileo was unable fully to give ground on a truth that reason and years of dedicated observations, calculations, and pondering had put in front of him.

Four centuries later, we find ourselves in the midst of another 'planetary' decentring of the Anthropos. Striking similarities exist between the revolutions, calamities and contradictions that Galileo went through in his life and the tensions evident today within what is often referred to as the Anthropocene.[1] Most immediately, the field of the Anthropocene hints to another

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[1] The analogy proposed in this section does not suggest that the Copernican turn decentred the same 'Anthropos' at stake in debates on the Anthropocene. The Copernican turn opened cracks in the Christian cosmological edifice that placed the Earth at the centre of the Universe, with humans in turn at the very centre of God's creation as inhabitants of the planet. The Anthropos that the Anthropocene at the same time exalts and questions had not yet been 'invented' in the Renaissance, as it is a figure that emerged much later, during the Enlightenment (Foucault

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questioning – again, based on the power of reason – of the very figure of the Anthropos, interrogating the end(s) of certain modes of subjectivity and responsibility. Ultimately, of ways of being human. For sure, the idea that entering the Anthropocene means passing a discrete threshold separating one history that *was before* from one that *is now*, is highly problematic. It risks legitimizing the simplistic (and deeply depoliticizing) obliteration of the multiple and frayed histories that co-exist and collide now as much as they did in the past (for this line of critique, see Malm and Hornborg 2014, Bonneuil and Fressoz 2016, Swyngedouw and Ernstson 2018). And surely, there is a promethean and gendered dimension to the elevation of humanity into a geological actor epitomized in the description of the Anthropocene as 'the age of mankind' [sic] (Crutzen and Stoermer 2000, Zalasiewicz et al. 2008). But the Anthropocene – seen as a problem field rather than as discrete event/threshold – has also given momentum to a renewed questioning of the fantasy of that modern, Western, white, capitalist Anthropos. Separated from and imagined to be in charge of an objectified 'Nature', this is a 'man' whose hubris and violence have been denounced for quite some time (e.g. Merchant 1989, Haraway 1991). The condition of the Anthropocene is said – most influentially through the post-human suggestion – to mark the evaporation of the grounds for that fantasy (Clark 2011, 2014, Braidotti 2017, Colebrook 2017, Povinelli 2017a). While Galileo inverted the position of Sun and Earth, and thereby questioned human centrality in God's creation, a post-human Anthropocene hints to another decentring of the human: not only in relation to the planet, but also in relation to the phantasmatic essence of the 'human' itself (Esposito 2008), calling for a recognition of the agency of the non-human.[2]

2001, Todorov 2002). Here I am proposing a (metonymic) analogy between two distinct crises, in order to 'look awry' at the tensions of which discourses on climate migration are symptomatic. I am thankful to an anonymous reviewer for the suggestion to clarify this important point.

[2] This paragraph highlights a key contradiction in the Anthropocene field. For some, the fact that human activities are pushing the 'Earth system' into a new operating state endows 'humanity' with a stewardship role over planetary fates, while others see the planetary crises as an accusation against that same 'humanity' – if not as a fatal blow to its possibility. While it is beyond the scope of this article to conceptualize this tension thoroughly, this is a rift that will run through this intervention as it represents not only one of the defining traits of the field,

Galileo's '*and yet it moves*' resonates with another salient trait of the Anthropocene: its strikingly and stubbornly emergent, returning character. If Galileo's stubbornness was moved by a truth that 'returned' and could not be reconciled with time's doxa, the 'symptoms' of the Anthropocene (climate change, mass species extinction, pollution, nuclear catastrophes, etc.) also obstinately erupt onto the scene, with uncanny effects that have become impossible to ignore. As theorized by Timothy Morton (2013), the Anthropocene forces itself upon us via emergent entities and processes that are 'sticky', and with their sheer figure and shadow looming over and saturating the human horizon. Climate change, whose viscous impacts will stretch into the coming centuries, is a prime example of such emergence (ibid.). Baldwin (2017) has problematized the identification of human migration as an emergent phenomenon in the unstable landscape of the Anthropocene. What more than the current 'migration crisis', with the regressive fears and inhuman brutalities that surround it, brings to the surface the cracks in the edifice – ontological, epistemological, economic, in terms of sovereignty – of the present, and in particular of Western modernity?

The word 'yet' in Galileo's outcry introduces us to other salient features of discourses on migration in relation to climate change and the Anthropocene. As we will see in the following, the figure of the climate refugee/migrant has been very 'sticky', mobilizing vivid imaginaries and continuously returning on the scene, *in spite of* the vacuous, often blatantly inaccurate and normatively noxious character of the narratives through which discourses on climate migration have come to the fore. At the same time, the word 'yet' can hint at another form of 'stubbornness' – that of migrants. In their movement through hurdles and in spite of the attempts to discipline, harness, curb their mobility, an excess of agency and subjectivity emerges, also perforating ideological veils that cover settled geographies of inequality.

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but also a fault that makes the Anthropocene a productive concept, in spite of the pitfalls critical scholarship has identified in it.

A Symptomatic Reading of Climate Migration

A vast critical scholarship now exists which has done much to map and deconstruct discourses on climate migration and climate refugees, unearthing the lineages, imaginaries, affects and signifiers on which they are built (see workes cited in the introduction, and in particular Oels 2010, Ransan-Cooper et al. 2015, Baldwin and Bettini 2017). This article will not go into detail about this expanding body of work. Instead, it develops an alternative interpretation to explain the discursive grip that the figure(s) of climate migration has on the climate change imaginary. If one of the fundamental challenges of the critical literature is to show that the figure of the climate migrant does not exist, this paper attempts to account for the shared desire for there to be a relationship between climate change and migration.[3] It is for this reason that this paper produces a symptomatic reading of discourses on climate and migration, as this will help us to understand not only the undercurrents, but also the 'function' that supports current discourses. Looking at the 'excess' that animates the debates will help to ascertain the 'work' that discourses do, the ways in which they sustain specific ways of responding to the cracks in the edifice of Western civilization and modern humanism which are opened by climate change and the Anthropocene.

The structure of the symptom indeed presents homologies with several key traits of discourses on climate migration. To begin, excess and repetition are key elements of both. Importantly, a symptom is a 'staging' of something else, of an excess – a trait we identified in narratives on climate migration. A symptom also entails the compulsive insistence on an enclosed pattern/gesture/signifier, while the function of this repetition is not to solve a tension, nor to bring about a change. Quite the opposite: the repetition of a symptom harnesses and channels enjoyment within a known pattern, with an escalation in intensity contained along familiar and

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[3] This makes it extremely difficult to identify/categorise the literature (for attempts to do so, see e.g. Bettini 2013b, Ransan-Cooper et al. 2015). That said, this paper focuses on a range of texts/discourses stemming from media outlets, the state, international institutions, and commentators and thinkers from both the left and right.

already consumed tracks, bending it back, away from any resolution (Parker 2011). This vertiginous immobility in repetition is another trait that discourses on climate migration share with the symptom. Most engagements with climate migration do not seem to channel the affective investment, the fears, the anxieties they capture toward some sort of resolution or change. Rather, they keep those immobilized in the insistence on vacuous, evanescent, non-actionable narratives on climate refugees and migrants.

To be clear, and quite obviously, the definition of symptom we are referring to stems from the psychoanalytical tradition. While in the medical usage of the term, symptoms are fixed indexes that allow identification of a pathology, psychoanalysis views the symptom as a contingent, singular manifestation, not inherently linked to a clinical structure (Parker 2011, Recalcati 2012). More specifically, in the following we will draw on the two main conceptualizations of the symptom that can be identified in Lacan's work: the symptom as 'return of the repressed' and 'the Sinthome', respectively. While isolating them as two distinct concepts entails some simplification, the evolution of the understanding of the symptom mirrors important aspects of the trajectory of Lacan's oeuvre (on this, see Žižek 2008 [1989]: 79ff, Recalcati 2012). The following sections will briefly introduce each concept and offer complementary readings of discourses on climate and migration.

Climate Migration as symptom, or the return of the repressed

In the first part of Lacan's work, the symptom refers to a ciphered message through which repressed unconscious content returns to the fore in disguised form. This symbolic connotation is enunciated in Lacan's seminal *Function and Field of Speech and Language in Psychoanalysis*, which argues that 'symptoms can be entirely resolved in an analysis of language, because a symptom is itself structured like a language: a symptom is language from which speech must be delivered' (Lacan 2006: 223). In this definition, a symptom is a signifier

that conveys a message; the 'message' is disguised because what returns is a traumatic fissure, a crack in the subject's discourse that has been repressed. Perhaps, the Freudian case of the formation of a symptom in animal phobia (the so-called case of Little Hans) can be instructive here. Freud reports about the inhibitions and fears of a five-year-old boy who was afraid to exit the house fearing the horse on the street. In deciphering the role and meaning of the horse, Freud stresses that the animal originates from the displacement of the ambivalent (sadistic-aggressive and masochistic-passive) cathexes from the boy's father to the horse. Importantly, Freud emphasises that it is this displacement itself which is a symptom in a strict sense. Were the boy to admit his fear that his father will punish him (because of the boy's love for the mother and the aggressive cathexis toward the father who he considers his rival), it would be unjustified to frame the boy's reaction as symptomatic.

In order to translate these psychoanalytical formulations in a register closer to the political domains this paper is concerned with, we can draw on Žižek's classic reading of the Lacanian symptom presented in *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (Žižek 2008 [1989]). In extreme synthesis, Žižek describes the symptom as a 'particular' that, through its emergence negates the consistency of a universal; a particular that dislocates an ideological or discursive field. In this reading, a symptom is a 'scandal' that brings to the surface a contradiction in a universal, its constitutive lack. This lack is not accidental but *constitutive*, as it lies at the very core of the field it carves. What moves the symptom, what explains its emergence, is not the consistency of a universal, but rather the lack it contains, the fundamental antagonism at its core – equivalent of the primal repression of the first signifier which constitutes the original negativity around which the discursive structure orbits (Zupančič 2016, 2017). Drawing on Žižek's account of the commodity as symptom: The contradiction between the particular (the very peculiar commodity that labour is) and the universal (the universal equivalence of value among

commodities) is for sure not an accident. Not only is such contradiction a fundamental trait of capital relations, but it is what keeps them in motion (2008 [1989]).

Let us now 'operationalize' these definitions in order to produce a symptomatic reading of discourses on climate migration. Most immediately, the 'scandalous particular' is the climate migrant or refugee, displaced by the impacts of climate change that exceed their adaptive capacity. Read as symptom, climate migrants/refugees are that 'something' that makes the ethereal, future-oriented and abstract phenomenon of climate change visible, tangible, embodied. They embody the antagonisms that carve hegemonic discourses and the assemblage of international efforts to combat climate change. This particular perturbs the belief (fantasy) that these incremental approaches will lead to effective, equitable, democratic 'solutions' to climate change.

As next step, we can identify distinctive ways in which competing discourses interpellate climate migrants/refugees as the scandal that returns to reveal a field's antagonism. Heuristically, we can differentiate three sets of discourses: the *mainstream*, which we can find in many international institutions and state governments; the *red-green*, radical positions advocating for climate justice, including eco-Marxism; and the *post-human*. As we will see, in these three sets of discourses the repressed that returns and the contradictions or antagonisms it symptomatizes are different.[4] While the variations and combinations are many, in most cases these discourses suggest the possibility of some sort of anamnesis; in other words, the possibility to 'work' on the symptom, to bring back the repressed onto the scene and to move on from there. Crucially, though, while occupying very different positions across the

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[4] To be clear, it should be emphasised that these three sets are identified heuristically; they are often overlapping and combined in the position articulated by the same author, actor, or institution (Bettini 2013b, Ransan-Cooper et al. 2015).

contemporary (Western) political spectrum, the symptomatic nature of climate refugees is prevalent in all three – hence enabling a curious consensus that preserves that discourse.

The Mainstream: immunising against the climate barbarians?

In most mainstream narratives, climate refugees signify an 'eruption' of the Other (non-white, non-Western, non-affluent, non-resilient) who, in spite of the combined efforts by international regimes of governance to erect fences and to infuse docility into the vulnerable, reappears at the doorstep of the affluent minorities (cf. Hartmann 2010, Oels 2010, Bettini 2013a, Chaturvedi and Doyle 2015). Here an excess returns to face those (the heavy emitting affluent minority) who have caused the problem, and re-encounter the 'victims' of climate change that have been 'expelled' economically and ecologically. In such accounts, the vulnerable are reduced to the status of 'bare life' (Oels 2010), with climate refugees and migrants represented as the destitute victims either to be saved (in humanitarian narratives) or to be feared and controlled (as in securitised articulations).[5] Such biopolitical representations can be found in an array of accounts of climate or environmental displacement, including in 'economic' approaches such as the illustrious Stern Review (2007), in security reports (Schwartz and Randall 2003, Council of the European Union 2008, WBGU 2008), as well as in rather cosmopolitan media outlets such as *The Guardian*, *Time* or *The New York Times* (Bawden 2014, Baker 2015, Dinshaw 2015, The Guardian 2015). In the most overtly Malthusian declinations, climate migration conveys fears over the swelling of a global surplus population of climate dispossessed and displaced – often in strongly racialized tones (Baldwin 2016, Giuliani 2016, Telford 2018). This is an excess formed by the vulnerable, the non-adapted, the non-resilient, expelled by and from the inner circles of globalized privilege and cosmopolitan elites. Their right to survive, even when acknowledged by the humanitarian variations of these

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[5] On the intersection of these two sides of victimhood and on their common biopolitical character, see Bettini (2013a)

discourses, is biopolitically conditioned upon their ability to adapt to the rule and vagrancies of planetary capital (cf. Felli 2013, Bettini 2014, Turhan 2016). The repressed truth re-emerging through the climate migrant is that a climate shock could crack the hegemonic order. In such discourses, the anamnesis or resolution of the symptom would consist of action ensuring the vulnerable either become adapted or are controlled/expelled. In other words, the 'scandal' should be treated according to the biopolitical logics of government (Foucault 2007), which often entail a violent immunization (Esposito 2008, 2011) against those identified as a threat.

The red-green: the return of the oppressed?

Moving on to less toxic narratives, red-greens (radical, emancipatory perspectives, including eco-Marxist voices), signify climate migration in very different way. For those concerned about the inequalities creating and created by climate change, climate refugees can represent the 'scandal' revealing how climate change tangles with and exacerbates the injustice and oppression that characterize the current exploitative 'world order'. This is the suffering of those at the fringes of globalised capital and most exposed to the vagrancies of changing climates (e.g. WPC 2010, Nixon 2011, Klein 2014, Malm 2014, Sassen 2014, Sheller 2018b). Climate migration here becomes, we could say, the return of the *oppressed*. The contradiction or negative surfacing here is the exploitative character of globalized capital, which also shapes mainstream attempts to make climate change governable. While such narratives often enshrine ambiguous forms of victimization of the vulnerable, they stress the subjectivity and potential political agency of climate migrants. What returns through climate migration, in red-green discourses, is also the recalcitrant subjectivity (and resistance) of those exposed to the combined wraths of globalised capital and environmental change. Those who are in effect made 'expendable' by the lack of substantive action to curb emissions and address the inequalities on the ground that create patterns of vulnerability. They signify here a part of a 'climate

multitude' that could coagulate to challenge the combined forms of marginalisation and exploitation that characterise the 'Capitalocene', and have their deep roots in centuries of domination and destruction (Nixon 2011, Chaturvedi and Doyle 2015). The climate migrant or refugee in this sense becomes a vehicle for climate justice claims and for mobilising more radical climate action (for a critical reading of this invocation of climate refugees to denunce climate injustices, see Bettini, Nash and Gioli 2016).

The fact that the figure of the climate migrant/refugee stages acts of mobility can help to explain the antagonist or subversive character that red-green discourses at times attach to it. Those vulnerable to climate change (and potentially displaced by its impacts) largely overlap with 'marginal' populations in the postcolonial global South (Nixon 2011, Chaturvedi and Doyle 2015, Ciplet, Roberts and Khan 2015). Curbing or triaging mobility has been a key ingredient of biopolitical and neo-colonial attempts to govern such populations, often in the name of sustainable development (Duffield 2007), and now arguably also of climate change adaptation and resilience (Bettini 2014). Therefore, in red-green discourses, the climate migrant can be seen as enacting a movement against established gradients of power. We can see here, as one of the contents 'returning', the subjective and political kernel of migration as such, the surplus of non-docile autonomy that often emerges when people move. A potentially subversive surplus of subjectivity enacted when, in spite of the attempts to stop or harness their movements, people still move, often having to break rules and cut fences, and in spite of the dire conditions they encounter. Political theorists have explored this 'excessive' character of migration in depth (e.g. Mezzadra 2006, Holland 2011). Thomas Nail has recently expanded upon such ideas through the theory of Kinopolitics (2015). In a nutshell, Kinopolitics is a 'political theory of movement' (2015:24). It identifies movement and flows (of humans as the default ontological and ontic condition characterising life and societies. On these grounds, Nail offers a theoretical genealogy of sovereignty and the related territorialisation of power as aimed

at harnessing and controlling movement and flows. The climate-migration nexus can be read through a rather free interpretation of the theory of Kinopolitics. From this angle, climate-related migration and the politics surrounding it can be seen as symptomatic of the contradictions that dominant regimes of socioecological accumulation and government encounter in the face of rapidly changing planetary conditions. The climate migrant could be seen as the returning excess, perturbing attempts to govern through the harnessing of movement and the naturalisation of stasis. Such a figure is one that embodies the fundamental drive to movement that stubbornly returns, in spite of all efforts to control and pathologize it.

The 'Posthuman' Anthropocene: Down to Earth?

Another symptomatic formation associated with the figure of climate migration can be traced in perspectives orbiting around the post-human suggestion (Braidotti 2013, Povinelli 2017b, a). Here, the figure of the climate refugee/migrant can be read as symptom of the resurfacing of non-human and planetary forces and the impossibility to tame and control them. (Clark 2011). What is seen as returning is nothing less than 'nature' or 'the Earth'. This is an apolitical/impolitic truth striking back through the wraths of climate change, in this specific case suffered by the vulnerable forced to move. It is also a surplus that, in this view, has been repressed by critical theory (Morton 2013, Clark 2014, Stengers 2015). And it his is a crucial theme in debates on the Anthropocene: while Western capitalist civilization has contributed setting in motion planetary forces with its fossil-fuelled destructive machinery, these planetary, geological or non-human forces (and agencies) appear to exceed human attempts to control and harness them. To be clear, this entails a double movement, in that the return onto the scene of the repressed 'inhuman' first dismantles the primacy of 'soft' social relations, and then leads to an ontology populated by flat and heterogeneous constellations of human and more-than-human entities (we will return to these themes in the last section).

This is a key undercurrent running through debates on the Anthropocene and climate change: the re-emersion of finitude in connection to the sheer potency of non-human entities. The crisis that the Anthropocene signifies here is primarily a crisis of the modern/humanist faith in the possibility to master and control the complex biological, atmospheric and geological entanglements humans live in. From this angle, the figure of the climate refugee can be seen as a messenger from the future, 'the canary in the coalmine' (for an insightful analysis of this topos, see Farbotko 2010), the first to be struck by these retuning powers. In this sense, climate migration could be described as a symptom of the Anthropocene. The fantasy that the eruption of climate migration cracks is the modern Anthropos, based on the illusion of a human alterity and superiority in relation to the non-human, to 'nature'.

Before moving on, it is worth noting that seeing climate migration as symptom of the Anthropocene that opens cracks in the fantasy of modern 'Anthropos', entails recasting the relationship between human agency and subjectivity, and the 'natural' forces and agencies that erupt onto the stage – for instance, by causing large-scale human displacement. This recasting is associated with a profound critique against 'traditional' understandings of the political stemming from the lineage of continental critical theory. The inhuman and planetary, in all their facticity and force, are presented as dismantling the centrality and speciality of constructed, 'soft' social relations based on representations, discourse – in blunt words, 'human stuff'. This critique is not free of problems. Of course, social relations are not the same as the magma erupting from a volcano, the waves raised by a tsunami, the burning sands of deserts, the winds of a hurricane, or sea-level rise. Those latter do have 'agency', and differ from 'social' forces in a number of respects (for a less hasty and substantially more refined discussion of this point, see Clark 2011, Chakrabarty 2017, Clark and Yusoff 2017). However, these non-human objects and forces do not need to be as dissimilar to social relations and structures as they are at times presented, at least not if we encounter them from a situated (and

not necessarily human) position. When looked upon from a situated position/perspective, even relations such as 'gender' or 'class' are not necessarily changeable or malleable, they look less soft, so to speak. They also demarcate conditions of possibility for (human) life and actions, for politics, for resistance. Class, race, gender and other oppressive relations can and have proven harder than rock.

A Sinthome in the Anthropocene?

If the symptom in this radical dimension is unbound, it means literally 'the end of the world' (Žižek 2008 [1989]: 81)

In the last part of Lacan's teaching, a slightly different understanding of the symptom emerged, culminating with the introduction of the figure of the 'Sinthome' (Lacan 2016). Gradually, the conception of symptom as a message, as the re-emersion of repressed, unconscious (symbolic) contents (which can be dissolved through analytic anamnesis), gives way to, or is sidelined by, an understanding of the symptom as a kernel of enjoyment – in the Real, beyond the Symbolic[6]. The concept of Sinthome denotes this definition of the symptom as the kernel that supports the structuration of the subject's enjoyment, and ultimately, supplements the figure and the function of the symbolic father as that which structures the symbolic order. Rather than being an 'unconscious message' that can be symbolized through anamnesis and thereby dissolved, the Sinthome identifies a kernel of enjoyment that supports the subject's consistency, contributing to knotting together its affects, enjoyment, meanings. Rather than the index of a 'concealed' pathologic state, it becomes a key support to make life liveable – to put it in

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[6] Imaginary, Symbolic and Real are the three interrelated orders or registers through which Lacan maps and distinguishes the phenomena that psychoanalytic theory elaborates. To simplify, the Imaginary is the domain of perceptive-sensorial experience comprised of images, imagination, the appearance of phenomena, and affects. The Symbolic is the register of signifiers, norms, rules, traditions. The Symbolic order is a trans-individual differential system/structure of signifiers defined by their mutual differences; it is a system of (cultural) meanings 'external' to the individual. Together, the Imaginary and the Symbolic form 'reality', which is the field of subjective experiences, cognitive apprehensions, representations and language. The third term, the Real, can be defined in opposition to the 'reality' of (inter)subjective experience. The Real represents the points of impossibility and the contradictions of that 'reality'. The Real refers to that which resists symbolisation, language and signification, an undifferentiated and unattainable outside to the Symbolic and the Imaginary. For relatively accessible definitions which also offer references to additional reading on these fundamental concepts, see the for instance the entries by Evans (1996) or Johnston (2018).

extreme terms, nothing of the human is left, if it is removed (on this see also Žižek 2008 [1989], Recalcati 2012, Lacan 2016). To understand what this might mean for climate (and) migration, a useful starting point is offered by the analysis proposed by Andrew Baldwin in a recent piece:

> the figure of the climate change migrant or climate refugee signifies a crisis of humanism and is a construct whose purpose is to stabilize the human at a world historical moment when the hyperobjectivity of our world calls into question the very tenets of humanism (2017, p.3).

Baldwin's acute analysis complements the 'standard' critical take on discourses on climate migration as linked to the identification of an 'other' to fear, kill, dominate or furtively desire. Baldwin hints at another function, with such discourses being also an active (while deplorable) 'response' to the crisis of humanism that has profoundly carved the present (on this, see also Brown 2017). Interpreting Baldwin's point with some liberty, we could indeed read the invocation and insistence on the figure of the climate migrant/refugee as linked to a *stabilization* (rather than dissolution) of the eroding grounds of modern humanism. Along these lines, the interweaving of affects, imaginaries, meanings and compulsive repetitions of 'myths' that we see at play in the narration of climate migration might be read as an attempt to maintain the 'human' alive. Not (only) the repression of a crack in its edifice, but rather an attempt to defend its last remnants. Not only a concealment, but also productive, generative, performative. And this could explain the desire for such a (reified) relation between climate and migration to exist (see introduction). What is kept alive here is highly problematic of course: governing mobility in the face of climate change (and the Anthropocene) becomes a way to reaffirm the privilege of the Western modern Anthropos, a construct with strong racialised connotations that reaffirm white privilege (Baldwin 2016, Giuliani 2017, Telford 2018), and based on a biopolitical (and colonial) configuration of the mobility-territory-sovereignty nexus (on this, see introduction).

Conclusion: Dissolving the Human – Diving into the Real?

Before discussing the third movement, which will bring us back to the Anthropocene, let me offer a brief summary. Through an analogy with the crisis that the Copernican turn entailed and with the qualms encountered by Galileo, the article has situated the frictions the nexus climate-migration signifies in the context of the 'crisis of the human' to which the Anthropocene hints. We have then read the insistence on discourses on climate migration as a symptom, an expression of fundamental, constitutive 'unsignified' contradictions. In this reading, for mainstream discourses climate migration symptomatizes the return onto the scene of 'surplus populations' in the global South, which reveals cracks in the dominant biopolitical configuration of the territory-population-mobility nexus; for red-green positions, the climate migrant is the 'oppressed', part of a multitude that reveals and could potentially challenge the exploitative nature of planetary capitalism; in post-human articulations, climate migration is the return of 'nature', the planetary or geological, which in turn reveals the illusory (and destructive) character of the modern Anthropos and the socioecological relations it supports. Here the symptom could be dissolved by anamnesis, in other words by bringing the repressed back to centre stage and addressing the tensions it covers. We have then read the same discourses through the concept of Sinthome elaborated in the late phase of Lacan's work. Here, the insistence on climate migration (and the desire for there to be such a reified relationship) could be seen as a knot giving consistency to an evanescing 'human', an attempt to shore up the illusory fantasy of modern 'men'. To be clear: this reading is far from suggesting a (posthumous) apology of the modernist conception of the human. Critical scholarship has successfully revealed its oppressive traits, failures and phantasmatic character. Rather, this reading leads to the third and concluding movement in this article, which addresses the question of *what would be left* or *would emerge* once this 'human' fully dissolved.

This is one of the key themes animating debates on the post-human (for a collection of recent

interventions, see Grusin 2017). For instance, Elisabeth Povinelli, arguing that the Anthropocene reveals the 'end of humans', offers suggestions on what this could lead to (Povinelli 2017a). To be sure, the passage envisioned by Povinelli is a quite traumatic one, as it involves the abandonment of the belief in the continuation of 'the human' into the future, as well as of the illusion of its past existence. Povinelli poignantly asks:

> But what if the problem that emerges when left critical theory encounters the Anthropocene, and anthropogenic climate change, is much richer and much stranger? What if one of the conceptual consequences of this intersection is the acceptance that the human did not exist in the past, does not in the present, and will not in the future? What if there is no human, or even any humans, but merely regionally more or less densely compacted forms and modes of existence, one component of which has been abstracted out and named "the human"? (2017a, p294)

Povinelli's powerful words denounce the phantasmatic character of the Anthropos, suggesting a disaggregation of its assumed substance, unity and centrality, as well as autonomy (on the concept of autonomy see Braun and Nelson 2017 and the special issue in which it appears). Povinelli hints to decentred forms of (post)human subjectivity, based on a flatter view of life as a complex and uneven entanglement of modes of existence: 'Now not only does the human disappear into the total organism of the earth, Gaia, but so do all other forms of entangled existence move into an extimate[7] relation to "each" other.' (2017a, p300).

Povinelli's ontological proposal has a number of potentially liberating implications, gesturing to more caring intra-human and human/non-human relations. This can be translated also in relation to the question of human mobility in the Anthropocene. Does the insistence on the

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[7] The term 'extimate' derives from the concept of extimacy (*extimité* in French), a neologism coined by Lacan that combines the words 'exterior' and 'intimacy'. It conveys the problematisation operated by psychoanalytic theory of binaries such as inside/outside, individual subject/Other (Evans 1996).

figure of the climate migrant/refugee reveal a Sinthome strenuously refusing to give up the phantasy of 'the human'? The direction traced by Povinelli could potentially have liberating implications for the way in which mobility in the Anthropocene is conceived. One implication of the overcoming of the spectre/illusion/remnants of the (white, capitalist, male) Anthropos would be the debasing of the biopolitical, modern and violent nexus of (im)mobility-territory-sovereignty. Liberated from such forms of territorialised sovereignty, the condition of movement could be normalised and mobilities could become part of the conditions of life on a moving planet, rather than an aberration.

These provocative reflections, however, leave questions unanswered and bring us onto difficult terrain. If the crisis of modern humanism is to be overcome through the immersion into a flat, nebulous universe, a question with pressing political implications is where (if anywhere at all) the terrain to challenge unequal power distributions would lie. Swyngedouw and Ernstson elaborate on such risks in a recent intervention that takes issue with post-human ontologies (2018). While we cannot engage with their full argumentation here, their emphasis on the stubbornly emerging excess, its relation to exteriority, and its role in shaping political subjectivity and action is of great relevance to the argument developed in this article.

In extreme synthesis, Swyngedouw and Ernstson criticize post-human perspectives for postulating a full, flat ontology of immanence that neither has room for exteriority and 'outsides', nor for separation. Swyngedouw and Ernstson suggest a very different route, which starts from the recognition not only of the "exteriority of the non-human, but also the exteriorities that cut through the human" (2018: 10). They view such exteriority as constitutive of all relations, and more profoundly as a reflection of the divided, elusive character of the Real (in Lacanian terms) that incessantly irrupts onto the scene. This returning excess is a symptom of the impossible character of reality, of its constitutive lack which stubbornly opens cracks in

the fantasies attempting to suture it.

For Swyngedouw and Ernstson, this excess – rather than being immunized (as dominant constellations of power aim for) or reabsorbed under the wholeness of a flat and 'dense' reality (as in the post-human suggestion) – constitutes the very possibility of political acts attempting to transform reality. This political ontology indeed suggests a very different route to follow once the displacement of the Anthropos (the necessity of which is acknowledged by all critical engagements with the field of the Anthropocene) is operated. Rather than suggesting the immersion into an heterogeneous, dense and 'organic' pluriverse with no outside, this displacement could open up space for the creation of new differences and exteriorities, sustaining the staging acts contesting and overcoming the old 'humanist', anthropocentric and capitalist subjectivities, constellations of power and ecologies (Swyngedouw and Ernstson 2018).

And on a less political and more existential level, how should the dissolution into a nebulous web of entangled forms of life be translated into bearable ways of existence and subjectivity? Wouldn't the immersion into a flat, molecularly connected and organic totality closely resemble an injunction to dive into the (Lacanian) Real? What type of existence would this dissolution into the Real – if possible at all – open up for, apart from being a recipe for melancholy or a synonym of psychosis?

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