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History 1, 2, 3

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Published version. *Science Fiction Studies*, Vol. 39, No. 3 (November 2012): 375-376. DOI. © 2012 De Pauw University. Used with permission.

History 1, 2, 3. In "The Climate of History: Four Theses" (*Critical Inquiry* [35.2, Winter 2009]: 197-222), Dipesh Chakrabarty offers an interpretive framework for apprehending the material and ideological conditions of a fully globalized world. History, he writes, has traditionally been imagined as a progressivist Grand Narrative called the "history of civilization"—or, even more grandiosely, "the history of the human race"—in which the everyday lives of actual humans fall away in favor of oblique social forces that reveal themselves to us as destiny (201-203). (For sf studies, of course, the natural reference here is the view-from-nowhere of Asimovian psychohistory.) Intervening against this Eurocentric faux-universalism, contemporary postcolonial theory has insisted instead on counter-histories that are characterized by multiplicity and difference; in this theoretical revision, globality collapses back into locality, and human beings consequently re-emerge as persons—especially the disenfranchised and the dispossessed, those who have continually been made to suffer in the name of "progress."

The first dialectic, then, is the familiar one between center and periphery—between a metropole that imagines itself as the pinnacle of human achievement, and the disparate localities that have been denied inclusion in this totality. But Chakrabarty complicates this picture with the addition of a third history that exists alongside the first two: geologic time, *species* time. This is the moment of the Anthropocene, when the human race discovers itself to be an even more hyperbolic universal than the partisans of the Grand Narrative could have ever dreamed: an immense worldwide "geological agent," whose collective actions are reshaping the coordinates of the natural world (208-209). In an era of cascading, ever-escalating environmental crises, "species time" reveals itself to us as a radical destabilization of the usual stakes of human history—indeed, as a kind of a sublime terror.

As Ursula Heise has noted in *Sense of Place and Sense of Planet: The Environmental Imagination of the Global* (2008), since the 1960s and 1970s questions of the global have crystallized around a particular series of science-fictional visual images that, while familiar and perhaps unremarkable today, were revelatory and even shattering in their moment: Soviet and especially NASA images of the Earth as viewed from space, chief among them the "Earthrise" photograph obtained by Apollo 8 in 1968 and the "Blue Marble" photograph taken by Apollo 17 in 1972. In these images of the global totality, we find all three of Chakrabarty's histories at work at once. "Blue Marble" and "Earthrise" signify the culmination of the progressivist narrative of human civilization (History 1)—but their shared photographic focus on the African

continent simultaneously reminds us of the radical *particularity* of that history, its costs and exclusions (History 2), while the sublime vision of the whole globe inevitably points us towards the radical fragility of our ecosystem and the destructive environmental consequences of global capitalism (History 3). From Octavia E. Butler's *PARABLES* novels (1993-1998) to Kim Stanley Robinson's MARS trilogy (1992-1995) to James Cameron's *Avatar* (2009) to Margaret Atwood's *Oryx and Crake* (2003) to Paolo Bacigalupi's *The Wind-Up Girl* (2009) to Wanuri Kahiu's *Pumzi* (2009) to Lauren Beukes's *Zoo City* (2010), and on and on, the Blue Marble photographs perform in miniature the cognitive work of sf in a time of globalization: to register, interrogate, and reconcile these three very different histories, to uncover lurking behind the false triumphalism of History 1 other sorts of histories, and other kinds of globes. (Sincere thanks to Ian Baucom for his contributions to these thoughts.)**—Gerry Canavan, Marquette University**