

## A Collision of Disparate Historical Timescales in Ignácio de Loyola Brandão's *And Still the Earth*

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This essay offers an eco-critical reading of Ignacio de Loyola Brandão's 1981 novel *Não verás país nenhum*. (Trans. *And Still the Earth*, 1985). I examine in detail the novel's unconventional and multi-layered conceptualizations of history while also focusing on aesthetic aspects of Brandão's depiction of social, political, and environmental degradation. My analysis expands on the contextual timeframe of the Military Dictatorship years (1964-1985) with which the novel is conventionally associated. I propose instead to approach Brandão's text through wider historical and spatial perspectives. I show how the novel articulates unconventional conceptualizations of history that challenge long-standing humanistic approaches. Though closely related to specific historical and political contexts in Brazil, this decades-old narrative anticipated many of the anxieties that became part of current global debates on the Anthropocene and its impact on humanistic precepts in the Humanities and in the Social Sciences.

**KEYWORDS:** Anthropocene; Anthropocentric versus Anthropogenic approaches to history; Brazilian Military Dictatorship; Eco-Criticism; Eco-Dystopias; Environmental degradation in fiction, "Great Acceleration;" Ignácio de Loyola Brandão, *Não verás país nenhum/And Still the Earth*, Unconventional conceptualizations of history.

A new geological epoch is upon us. At least this is the argument that the majority of the academic community in and outside of the sciences defends. The basic premise behind such a statement is that, due to the unprecedented scale of the human impact on the environment, it is no longer possible to measure, predict, and historicize geological transformations solely in terms of natural occurrences. Human action has become a major player affecting these transformations. Nobel-Prize winning climatologist Paul Crutzen was the first to propose the term Anthropocene to account for this irreversible and irreversible development in 2000.<sup>1</sup> Even though the term has spread throughout many academic areas and even outside academia, its transformative potential is far from being fully realized. The Anthropocene is still a relatively new concept that has nonetheless spurred heated discussions among those who accept its general principles but do not agree on the terminology. There are disputes regarding certain assumptions embedded in Crutzen's narrative and the Anthropocene has yet to be officially recognized. A decision on whether or not the Holocene era is over will be announced by the International Commission on Stratigraphy in 2016 or 2017 (Hamilton, Bonneuil and Gemenne, "Thinking the Anthropocene" 1).

As artistic expressions of the current anxiety over climate change, there has been a significant increase in speculative fictional and non-fictional representations of ecological disaster directly related but not exclusively tied to climate change.<sup>2</sup> In *Anthropocene Fictions* (2015), Adam Trexler catalogues over 150 eco-dystopian contemporary and classic novels that address issues related to climate change. However, the author affirms that environmental

issues related to atmospheric changes were "of grave concern to authors before greenhouse gas emissions attracted wide scientific interest" (8). Trexler proposes a brief chronology in which he observes a marked spike in publications in this vein around the year of 2008. According to the author, some of the earliest fictional representations of climate change related scenarios date back to the mid-1970s. Trexler identifies Arthur Herzog's novel, *Heat* (1977) as the earliest case (25).<sup>3</sup>

One of the novels that Trexler could have included in his study as an example of an "Anthropocene fiction" *avant la lettre*, a similar case to and a contemporary of Herzog's *Heat*, is Ignácio de Loyola Brandão's *Não verás país nenhum* (1981) (Trans. *And Still the Earth*). The fact that this novel was not identified by Trexler is not surprising, and I do not suggest that the author knowingly neglected to include this novel in his study. *And Still the Earth* has achieved the status of a perennial classic in Brazil, but it does not enjoy notoriety among the Anglo-American public, even though a translation was published in 1985. I believe the novel articulated in complex ways many of the issues that come into focus in current debates over the Anthropocene. In spite of being associated with a single and peripheral nation and with a specific historical and political context, the 1964-1985 Military Dictatorship, the novel presciently expressed the anxieties and dilemmas of current debates on environmental issues on a global scale.

My analysis of *And Still the Earth* will stray away from the specific historical time frame of Brazil of the 1960s and 70s, which informs most of this novel's criticism.<sup>4</sup> I intend to explore this novel's

references to broader historical contexts and, above all, its unconventional historical timeframes and conceptualizations that make up the structure of this narrative. In expanding an analysis of this particular aspect, my essay contributes to new possibilities in the critical reception of the novel.

### An Early Anthropocene Novel from the Periphery of Capitalism

Literature that deals with future prognostics, whether one calls it speculative fiction<sup>5</sup> or science fiction, has, more often than not, taken into account environmental problems. If, as Carl Freedman argues, SF performs the role once reserved for critical theory (1-23), I see eco-dystopian fiction as the sub-genre of SF that most incisively and critically engages scientific discourse on the environment. It explores aspects once considered exogenous to scientific thinking and, by and large, to fiction in general. Freedom from the rigors of scientific rationality and from the exclusively humanistic disciplines allows fiction to capture complex interrelations of issues in the current environmental debate.

In this vein, *And Still the Earth*, can be read as an early Anthropocene eco-dystopian novel that remains as relevant as any other so-called cli-fi<sup>6</sup> novel of recent times. Regardless of how specifically the novel relates to the SF genre, or the cli-fi subgenre, what is essential is that it contains many of the elements of SF and performs similar social, political, and historical critique as the most important works of that genre. The narrative comprises a multi-layered critique of the mainstream capitalist narrative of progress, human and technological advancement, predatory use of natural resources, and the "endless accumulation" of capital and economic growth (Arrighi 69-96).<sup>7</sup> It does so by questioning the developmental model implemented in Brazil, especially in the 1960s and 70s, the historical period of the Military Dictatorship and what became known as Brazil's "Economic Miracle." The economic policies of that era consisted of market-driven economic orthodoxy, artificially stimulated through massive borrowings from the IMF, World Bank, and major capitalist nations. Such policies were imposed through political authoritarianism. Government propaganda boasted the success of the military regime's economic policies by heavily investing in megalomaniacal infrastructural projects, which carried strong symbolic value as unequivocal concrete evidence of exceptional technological and economic development. More than a narrative that confronts the Military Dictatorship, *And Still the Earth* clearly establishes, more broadly, overt and the subtle connections between the triumphant capitalist ideology in Brazil and international capitalism as a whole.

One of the main principles that guided such an economic expansion was the idea that the most remote regions of the Brazilian territory needed to be colonized. There were incentives for the occupation of inland areas such as the Central and Amazonian regions. This principle had already justified the construction of Brasília at the very center of the South American continent, and it also

guided projects such as the Transamazônica highway; several dams, including the biggest in the world, Itaipú; the Rio-Niterói bridge, and many others. These came at a great environmental cost.<sup>8</sup>

Brandão foresees the suicidal impetus of such economic, political and developmental model and amplifies to the level of caricature, the devastation that he personally witnessed. In a video interview, part of a roundtable discussion of this novel, the author reveals that the earlier insights he had about an imminent disaster came from a disturbing image used in an advertising campaign by Ford. The ad consisted of a picture of large truck filled to its capacity with logs taken from a forest also featured in the background. The slogan displayed in the truck's front bumper read: "Pense Forte, Pense Ford." ("Think Strong, Think Ford") ("Redes da criação").

Instead of writing a novel set in the Brazilian Amazon, Brandão chose São Paulo as the stage. The story takes place in an indeterminate year in the twenty-first century. This Brazilian megalopolis suffers the consequences of environmental catastrophe spurred by the prevailing ideology of development of the post-war years. Excessive heat, pollution, disease, synthetic food, violence, segregation, distrust and paranoia are all elements in the novel that represent and reflect on the extreme dehumanization of life. This novel is essentially a narrative that traces the last events in the life of a society in the context of a "tipping point,"<sup>9</sup> leading to what appears to be the end of human life on Earth. This dystopian representation of São Paulo and Brazil as environmental wastelands confronts nationalist myths expressed in still prevalent notions of "Brazil: tropical paradise" or "Brazil: nation of the future."<sup>10</sup>

The population lives in a complete state of alienation. The few characters with whom the protagonist, a "retired"<sup>11</sup> historian named Souza, interacts have no goals, except for personal gains in some cases. Little of their humanity is left. There is no real social bonding, but, instead, a pervasive lack of solidarity. The struggle for survival is mainly what moves the (mostly disenfranchised) characters. São Paulo is segmented in sectors protected by guards and surveillance apparatuses. These barriers can only be crossed by individuals with formal authorization cards. Each sector of the city clearly represents a certain class or category of people, who are allowed to cross these barriers only for the purposes of work.

In addition to the deterioration of the social and political realms of human life, Brandão places emphasis on non-human life conditions. Material, technological and environmental markers of history are intertwined with the fragmented elements of social and political history. The dramatic scenario in which animals have died out and the Amazon forest has become the largest desert on Earth does not serve simply as a narrative background. These are elements that directly affect the lives of the characters in the novel. The author projects a broad imaginary representation of nonhuman histories, with emphasis on the lack of nonhuman agency, the effects of material and technological development on the natural environment, and the corresponding social and political disintegration, among other aspects. In other words, in *And Still the Earth*, human and nonhu-

man histories interact in a non-hierarchical manner. It is a quality of what Timothy Morton assigns to expressionist art that "abolishes the play between background and foreground" (*Hyperobjects* 76).

An example of the tight relationship between natural and human life appears in the opening of the narrative in which extreme air pollution, the stench caused by garbage and the unclaimed dead bodies that lie on the streets, cannot be minimized despite the use of giant fans, a phony solution, among many others that the System provides.<sup>12</sup> Besides being a dark comic element present throughout the narrative, the scene is important both for the above-mentioned function of connecting human, environmental and (mostly obsolete) technological elements of life in a dystopia, but also in establishing a surrealist atmosphere of absurd that predominates in the novel. In addition, the noise pollution caused by unrelenting sirens disturbs the characters to the point where they can barely discern what is real and what is part of a nightmare from which Souza and his wife awaken. The image of children's heads exploding, for instance, appears at first to be a surrealistic representation of a given character's nightmare. Instead, the scene is actually witnessed by Adelaide, Souza's wife, who continues to have flashbacks that seem to indicate she had lost a child. Whether or not Adelaide and Souza lost a child is never confirmed in the narrative.

The interconnection between human, non-human life, material, sensory, and psychological experiences displayed in a non-hierarchical fashion also speaks of the novel's complex account of history. The narrative challenges some long-standing assumptions in the still prevailing historiography, which sees human history as distinct and superior to natural history. Humanistic approaches to history also tend to maintain distance from the realm of other sciences. The novel's explicit, as well as implied, critique of humanistic approaches to history is in line with one of the central issues of theoretical debate spurred by the Anthropocene.

Historian Dipesh Chakrabarty elaborated perhaps the earliest connections between the Anthropocene concept and its impact on the prevailing theoretical foundation of disciplines such as history and the social sciences. His seminal article "The Climate of History" exposes one of the major weaknesses of the conventional discourses of the social sciences and more broadly of the entire spectrum of disciplines in the humanities. At the core of Chakrabarty's argument is the claim that "anthropogenic explanations of climate change spell the collapse of the age-old humanist distinction between natural history and human history" (201). And from this general thesis, the author elaborates further implications of the insufficiency of anthropocentric approaches in the social sciences and humanities. Chakrabarty's controversial assessment of these disciplines has spurred heated debates, even among scholars who by and large agree with his critique of anthropocentrism. Those who attack the now predominant narrative of the Anthropocene argue that Chakrabarty's and Crutzen's claims end up restoring and reinforcing anthropocentric views of the relationship between humans and nature. Critics argue that both Chakrabarty and Crutzen

propose a linear narrative of the deterioration of the environment dating back to around 10,000 years and progressively increasing the rate of destruction. In contrast to the dominant Anthropocene narrative, scholars of what has been called Capitalocene<sup>13</sup> reject the notion of humanity as a species that is responsible, as a whole and indiscriminately, for the current environmental crisis. Instead, they see Capital as the driver. Hence, they prefer to disavow the term Anthropocene. Other positions also dispute the current dominant narrative. Along with Capitalocene scholars, the so-called Eco-pragmatists, as well as the Eco-Catastrophists claim that establishing a linear narrative of human interference in the environment and generalizing the subject of such actions not only ignores the causes and the main agents of destruction but also leads to political paralysis.<sup>14</sup>

To a certain extent, *And Still the Earth* is not only critical of humanistic view of history but it is also rigorous in its assessment of the past as well as in its projection of the future. In spite of the novel's caricaturesque depictions of social, political and environmental degradation, it retains coherence in regard to some established scientific views of the problem. The post-World War II decades represent, in most scientists' view a period widely referred to as "The Great Acceleration" (Hamilton, Bonneuil and Gemenne 1). The future represented in the novel suffers the effects of heavy industrialization of Brazil, initiated in the mid-1950s but mostly implemented throughout the dictatorship years and done in a haphazard way. Therefore, the narrative of *And Still the Earth* and that of the "Great Acceleration" are perfectly compatible. As a critique of the ideology and logic of development that supports the ill-conceived modernization project of the dictatorship, Brandão represents this process as irrational.

In this vein, natural history in the novel could be deemed post-natural history, since the only thing that is left are the effects of an unbound and extreme natural environment. The atmosphere is irremediably damaged as evidenced by the lethal heat pockets that threaten human life. Of the amenable aspects of nature, all that exists is simulacra (i.e. artificially-produced water, chemical scents that simulate natural ones and a tree that has been memorialized in a museum). These artificial recreations nonetheless remain the only elements that allow a measure of relief to human suffering. To Souza these artificial smells still evoke memories and sensations experienced during his childhood, which were never available to some characters in the novel.

Reflecting on this state of absolute devastation of natural resources and of societal values, Souza's rhetorical questions challenge the idea and the ideals of complete human mastery of the nonhuman aspects of life. These first-person digressions scattered throughout the narrative encompass concerns that extrapolate regional and national realms. Most importantly, these philosophical queries cannot be circumscribed within the specific historical context of the military dictatorship and post-dictatorship:

I guess the question is this: Could man, daring to alter the structure of the universe, have gone beyond the limit? Modifying things on a large scale even before understanding or controlling the smaller pieces which together make up our world? In other words: maybe we got in over our heads, and made a serious blunder. At some point. (87)

Souza's musings about human-induced alterations/modifications in Earth systems and on the Earth's landscape, by what is known as terraforming, examine the ethical limits of these actions. All the questions, along with the hypothetical answer, ponder the ethics of human dominance, its self-granted superiority, and the disastrous aftermath of such assumptions and actions.

In contrast with these rare moments of serious introspective contemplation, Souza's daily life experiences and relationships lack depth and meaning. He leads a mechanical and extremely monotonous life with his wife, the frail and emotionally unavailable Adelaide. Beethoven's "Pathétique Sonata," the only piece Adelaide could still play on the piano, is metaphorical of their relationship. After she leaves him without notice, and after his apartment is taken over by a nephew and his accomplices, Souza's life becomes a fast-paced adventure through the wild sectors of the city. In spite of the accumulated losses Souza finds relative freedom and excitement in roaming the city.

The most meaningful event in Souza's pilgrimage relates to environmental and political subjects. His encounter with his long-time friend Tadeu (a fellow history professor who was also forced into "retirement" during the dictatorship days) represents the only glimmer of hope for a movement of resistance and return to a more humane lifestyle. Tadeu has a clandestine project in which he grows real vegetables and raises a few animals on the outskirts of what's left of São Paulo. This moment of hope turns out to be short-lived, as Tadeu's farming project is completely consumed when a hungry mob discovers it. Tadeu becomes depressed and commits suicide. After the annihilation of the only possibility of a modest resistance to the oppressive post-natural world, the narrative loses coherence. Souza, who has not eaten for days, starts to have delirious thoughts.

Nonsense prevails until the very last moments, when the System's loudspeakers announce that a gigantic shelter, the so-called "Endless Marquee," is ready for people to protect themselves from the deadly sun. Once again, the solution provided by the state turns out to be another obvious hoax. In the end, Souza's search for explanations, for reconnection with the past, and for redemption turns out to be a long, disheartened journey toward the ultimate catastrophe. Souza's erratic quest nonetheless provides insights into aspects of history that go beyond his grasp. Some of these are aspects that have also eluded criticism of the novel thus far.

### Linear, Circular and Synchronic Conceptualizations of History

One of the pivotal elements of estrangement central to the plot of *And Still the Earth* is the fact that memory is forbidden. In order to maintain the populace alienated, the System burned and banished books of any kind. The only news source comes from the government propaganda that constantly broadcasts through loudspeakers the purported social and technological advancements achieved by the System. Time has become impossible to track: people do not know their age or even how many years have elapsed since the environmental destruction started. It is clear, however, that this was a very rapid entropic process, given the fact that Souza, a man in his fifties, has recollections of his childhood and youth that include natural elements ("real" water, trees, rivers, fruits, vegetables, non-artificial pleasant smells, etc.) that have all but disappeared within his lifetime. This specific aspect of the novel's representation of history is also analogous with the concept of the "Great Acceleration," which is also taken to an extreme.

An atmosphere of chaos allied with a prevailing aesthetics of absurdity in the novel convey, in a powerful way, one of the most baffling elements of the Anthropocene: In a matter of a few decades the physical and natural environment (in Brazil and by logical inference also all over the planet) withstood destruction on a scale only comparable to those undergone in millions of years. The incomprehensibility of this phenomenon is precisely what Bruno Latour, a leading scholar of the Anthropocene debate, singles out as the main hindrance to the possibility of agency in the Anthropocene: "...in modernism, people are not equipped with the mental and emotional repertoire to deal with such a vast scale of events...they have difficulty submitting to such a rapid acceleration for which, in addition, they are supposed to feel responsible" (Latour, "Agency" 1). Similarly, Timothy Morton's concept of *hyperobjects* refers to certain devices, phenomena, and processes such as global warming as examples of mechanisms that are too complex to be understood (*Hyperobjects* 9). The overlapping of the disproportionate timescales of natural and human histories, one of the defining elements of the Anthropocene concept, is precisely that which cannot be comprehended with the information that is at Souza's disposal. Souza and all the other characters feel paralyzed and impotent in the face of unimaginable devastation in such a short period of time.

Souza still has memories and the mental capacity to process memory. What is left of his personal memories, however, is hardly enough for him to make sense of the situation. He also makes an enormous effort to recall events of national history. Yet, both national and individual memories have suffered a severe process of deterioration. It is easier for Souza to understand why collective memory is almost non-existent, than to accept that his own sense of time and his ability as a historian are also compromised. The System has diligently worked on erasing or suppressing various forms of preservation of memory and he was not immune to the process. It is precisely the unprecedented acceleration of the process of envi-

ronmental degradation that hampers Souza's ability to make sense of both his own history and that of the nation's. He makes numerous references to government slogans that can be loosely dated but cannot help him establish any meaningful sequence of events. The "Eras" he attempts to recall also seem to overlap. These fictional eras vaguely refer to well-known expressions used by the government and the media to characterize certain moments in the unfolding of various events during the dictatorship in Brazil. For instance, in the novel, the end of the dictatorship in the mid-80s is sarcastically referred to as the "Open wide eighties," which is a clear reference to the slogan Abertura Política. "The Era of Rapid Enrichment" alludes to the Milagre Econômico, while "The Era of Casuistry" may or may not be a reference to what was called Anistia Ampla Geral e Irrestrita.<sup>35</sup> It becomes evident that the proliferation of these buzzwords serves only to baffle Souza and the reader. They are insufficient not only because they turn out to be hollow, but also because they refer to a limited period of time, which disregards the impact of a much longer history of political recklessness with regard to the environment and every other aspect of life.

*And Still the Earth* is a novel of great endurance and popularity.<sup>36</sup> Yet, it has received sparse critical attention. There are no eco-critical analyses of and hardly any recent scholarly publications about this novel. This is surprising given the fact that the novel's most pervasive theme, extreme environmental degradation, has only increased in relevance since its publication. The few publications that deal with the novel thus far have focused on the author's creative process<sup>37</sup>; the novel's relation to the SF genre,<sup>38</sup> and, as mentioned earlier, the majority of critics insert Brandão's text in the specific historical context of the Brazilian military dictatorship. While all of these interpretations are on target, there remains an elision with regard to the complexity of the interconnection between environmental, political and societal issues that are so prevalent throughout the novel. Most critics only mention environmental aspects in passing and tend to view them simply as part of the oppressive setting in a narrative that allegorizes the dictatorship years.

One critic who briefly touched upon the unconventional representation of history in connection to environmental degradation in *And Still the Earth* was Robert DiAntonio. DiAntonio aptly noted the motif of circularity scattered throughout the plot, especially noticeable in the scene of the protagonist's encounter with the "girl who spins in circles" (266-275). DiAntonio interprets these representations of circularity as instances of "movement, action, and rebellion...to counteract and stave off the entropic process" (150). Similarly, Elizabeth Ginway incorporates DiAntonio's argument and provides additional examples of circularity in the text. Ginway finds other instances of circularity in the "perpetual motion machine invented by one of his [Souza's] relatives, the link between the opening decree against clearing forests and Souza's lumberjack grandfather...and the final quotation by Galileo about the Earth's orbit and the cyclical aspects of nature itself." Ginway sees in this motif an incitement to "a revolution of consciousness" (132). Unfortunately,

neither DiAntonio nor Ginway expand on their analysis to explore further the multiple possibilities opened by these insights.

DiAntonio and Ginway's brief examination of the circular nature of the representation of history remains circumscribed in the immediate experience of the protagonist and narrator and in the historico-political context of the dictatorship. Circularity is just one of the elements in this novel's complex, non-linear conceptualization of history, which suggests, in addition, a disconcerting synchronicity of multiple and disparate historical timescales.

Reading Brandão's novel through the Anthropocene requires an expansion of the ecological and historical scope of the narrative's immediate context of the 1960s and 70s. One way to start would be by examining the significance of the *in abyme* structure of the narrative. This structure alone significantly widens the scope of the novel's historical timeframe. To see how this novel engages and alters Macrohistorical<sup>39</sup> views of history, it is essential to examine the material included in lieu of a prologue to the novel. This material starts with a chart divided into four lines and columns, three of which contain epigraphs and fragments of poems by modern and contemporary writers and one contains a fragment of a text attributed to Christopher Columbus named "Diante do cabo Hermoso," dated 1503. All four quotes refer to non-human natural life.

In the subsequent page a second framing document is included. It is a transcription<sup>40</sup> of a document issued by the Count of Oeyras on behalf of the King of Portugal. The document, dated July 9, 1760,<sup>41</sup> is a decree that essentially prohibits the felling of the Mangrove tree. It has the force of law and states that violators will be punished if caught doing harm to these trees. The inclusion of this document as a frontispiece to novel places emphasis on both human and nonhuman species. Elizabeth Ginway sees the decree as an expression of concern for the environment and an effort at environmental conservation, in spite of revealing also the environmentally harmful character of the Portuguese colonial enterprise: "While this is the first attempt at conservation, it nonetheless recalls the predatory use of nature" (131).

Against the claim that the decree expresses concern for the environment, there is an overlooked detail of the decree that further disqualifies the apparent conservationist impetus behind this document. The decree *only* condemns the felling of trees that still have their bark. The ones whose bark had already been removed were of no concern for the Portuguese authority. The contents of the decree emphasize the economic importance of the Mangrove tree at that time and also the exploitative mentality of the colonizer. Thus, the decree is *not* intended to protect the tree from extinction or to preserve the environment, but rather to extend the life of these trees and assure that their bark could be used for commercial purposes. In other words, since the document predicts the extinction of the tree and still authorizes its commercial exploitation, the decree cannot be considered a document intended to protect this species from extinction. It is a document intended to protect only the bark of that species of trees and also the business of curing leather. Therefore,

the document is an expression of a pre-industrial capitalist mentality so-to-speak, which foretells, in the novel, the ecological disasters to come. It is significant that the date of the implementation of this law precedes the Industrial Revolution by just a few years. The inclusion of this document as a frame to the narrative establishes a historical point of reference that stretches over two hundred years back from the imprecise point at which the narrative starts and develops. According to Brandão, the approximate date he envisioned was around 2030 or a few decades thereafter (“Redes da criação”).

The unaccounted time in between the issuance of the decree and the historical context of the novel itself signifies in many ways the erasure of national memory and provokes in the reader a vertiginous sense of loss. This ellipsis also has the effect of conveying a magnified acceleration of the passing of time, which corresponds with the absurd acceleration of the entropic process that takes place within Souza’s lifetime. Not surprisingly, the loss of memory and the acceleration of time are precisely the topical elements of one of the most striking passages of the novel. In this scene, Souza is in his apartment and strikes a conversation with a character named the man-who-sat-at-the-head-of-the-table. This individual behaves like an automaton, following instructions from Souza’s nephew, who has also been conditioned to serve the System without questioning it. The apartment has been taken over and now serves as a storage place for the invaders’ merchandise (mainly water) and a place to hide corpses of those they killed in order to steal water from them. This man had previously been an agronomist. He is one of the few characters in the novel, besides Tadeu, who is capable of conversing with Souza at the same intellectual level. Typical of Souza’s explorations, this conversation is an inquiry on the interconnections between memory, history and identity:

MAN-WHO-SAT-AT-THE-HEAD-OF-THE-TABLE. “Memories. You’re the last person in this whole country to still be talking about memories. What good are they?”

SOUZA. “They give you a vision of yourself. Of what you were and what you’re becoming.”

MAN-WHO-SAT-AT-THE-HEAD-OF-THE-TABLE. “Only if the world were still following a normal cycle. You’re a history professor, you should know that. For centuries and centuries, historical and social coordinates functioned as expected. But for the last thirty years everything has been out of synch. The acceleration of history changed everything, the dynamics are totally different now, the dynamics are everything, total conception – or else transforming constantly, minute by minute.”

SOUZA. “This new order has a name. It’s called chaos.”

MAN-WHO-SAT-AT-THE-HEAD-OF-THE-TABLE. “No,

that’s too strong a word. Chaos implies complete disorganization, anarchy. This is confusion, but not total chaos. Maybe *disorder* would be the right word.” (173) (Emphasis in the original)

In keeping with the general absurd tone of the narrative, the matter-of-fact attitude of both characters in this conversation suggests a total disconnect. Neither Souza nor his interlocutor could grasp the magnitude of the phenomenon being discussed. Or maybe they also do not see any point in discussing it further, because at this point there was nothing anyone could do to remedy the environmental devastation they witness. While the man-who-sat-at-the-head-of-the-table describes with a somewhat detached authority (a stereotype of scientific discourse) the central premise of the Anthropocene concept, Souza’s reaction to such complex and thoughtful explication is also blasé. That is, the behaviors and reactions of these characters do not match the tragedy, the urgency, the ramifications, or the magnitude of the problem.

Both characters’ attitudes exemplify a type of “disorder” but not in the literal sense of confusion or chaos to which Souza’s interlocutor refers. The disorder expressed in these character’s reactions fall in Timothy Clarke’s appropriation of psychological jargon used in reference to an individual’s disproportionate reaction to an event or situation. It is a “psychic syndrome...inherent in the mismatch between familiar day-to-day perception and the sneering voice of even a minimal ecological understanding or awareness of scale effects (Clarke 140). Such a reaction can be expressed either as exaggerated or moderated. In the fragment of the conversation cited above, both characters downplay the phenomenon discussed.

In part, Souza reacts with a certain scorn as he despises the ex-agronomist-turned criminal. It becomes clear, nonetheless, that Souza does not grasp the full extent of the explanation. Souza simplifies the phenomenon the man-who-sat-at-the-head-of-the-table describes by bringing it back to something more familiar and general (chaos). Instead of questioning or elaborating further the description of the process under discussion, Souza reduces it to a single noun. The word chaos may describe the living conditions in the Anthropocene epoch (especially as depicted in the novel), but the qualifier avoids reflection on the historical process. As an old-fashioned historian, Souza is not equipped to make sense of this because the process described by the man-who-sat-at-the-head-of-the-table does not satisfy his linear, predominantly humanistic and anthropocentric notions of history. Souza’s reaction is also a common form of denial.<sup>22</sup>

In this sense, even though the man-who-sat-at-the-head-of-the-table effectively reveals to Souza part of the mystery, and a key element to make some sense of historical time in the face of the scalar disjunction of the Anthropocene. He also avoids engaging the subject any further, not only because he (and no one) can grasp the full complexity and ramifications of the phenomenon described, but also because it is too late to do anything about it. Souza and all

the other characters with whom he interacts experience the wrath of nature, when Gaia manifests itself in extreme weather events, with the collapse of ecosystems and depletion of vital resources. The magnitude of this process, even with the enlightening explanation of the man-who-sat-at-the-head-of-the-table, remains enigmatic, beyond comprehension.

The story ends in a horrific situation in which everyone is destined to die due to the harshness of the environment. As people start to die from the unbearable heat, Souza smells the rain, which brings good memories. This is the only event that suggests a glimmer of hope for the planet. The last line in the book is Galileo's heretic statement: "e pur si muove," ("and still it moves"). This quote also suggests continuity, as well as an affirmation of the resilience of the planet. It is, in fact, this last line that inspired the title of the English translation, which was a felicitous choice. By underscoring the reference to Galileo in the title, Mary Watson shifts the focus of the Portuguese title on the nation paradigm (*Não verás país nenhum*), to the Earth and brings this narrative to a wider and more historically relevant context. The quote from Galileo also resonates with one of the main challenges posed to conventional humanist history by the Anthropocene.

Bruno Latour coined the term Geostories to define narratives that are both about the Earth and of the Earth.<sup>23</sup> It is a term that refers to history and geology at the same time. In Latour's conception Geostories are narratives in which the Earth can be the subject or the object, the actor or the recipient of an action. As humanity produces knowledge about the planet, it also changes the planet, which is both changed by humanity and changes by itself. The role of managing the environment on an unprecedented scale is something that will always be necessary.

In *And Still the Earth*, the final scene re-enacts a prototypical Geostory that ties the entire narrative to Galileo's heretic remark: "E pur si muove." Because the sun has become lethal for humans, the System urges citizens to go under the so-called Endless Marquee, which is broadcast with boastfulness and hysterical denial by the System. As Souza struggles with the multitudes of people who attempt to remain under the marquee's precarious protection, he smells rain—something that has not happened in years. Souza is unsure whether or not this is a result of his delirious state of mind. To certify that this is not hallucination, he wakes up a friend, who feels the wind, but not the smell of rain, because he is no longer able to remember that smell. Souza, on the other hand, is convinced that the rain is coming: "It would arrive sooner or later. Even if it was a long way off... Maybe the moist smell we were smelling came from somewhere so remote it would take a long time to arrive. Hey, is it raining out there?" (373-74).

The final scene represents the culmination of the entropic process and is perhaps the moment when Souza finally realizes, in a possible delirium, the magnitude of both the human impact on the planet and the new, precarious, subjectivity of both humans and the Earth. This ending may or may not offer a glimpse of hope,

depending on the reader's interpretation. The hopeful side of it lies in the realization that some form of life will prevail amidst dreadful environmental conditions. But this future may not include human life. The suggestive and enigmatic quote from Galileo that wraps up the narrative opens up at least two immediate interpretive possibilities: On the positive side, Galileo's dictum supports the view that the Earth will continue to move, life will go on, and perhaps a new breed of humans will pick up from there. But, on the negative side, Galileo's remark can be assigned a more literal meaning, according to which the Earth will continue to move by itself, devoid of human life but still supporting some forms of nonhuman life.

Heretical at the time of the Inquisition, Galileo's dictum remains an undisputable fact. Conversely, instead of closing a chapter in science, his discoveries have in fact inspired recent philosophical discussions related to the Anthropocene and subjected to an intriguing and in many ways prescient spin. In a now classic study, *The Natural Contract*, French philosopher Michel Serres had anticipated the main argument of the Anthropocene precisely by referencing Galileo. Serres alters and supplements Galileo's remark by stating that the Earth "has been moved." That is, the planet moves on its own, but it has also been altered to such an extent as to lose part of its agency. Bruno Latour elaborates on Serres' argument to propose that, after being "moved," (i.e. being pillaged) Gaia reacts in unpredictable ways through the natural phenomena that fall largely under the umbrella of climate change. Latour sees in this loss the beginning of a new form of "agency," a status that both humans and nonhumans acquired after human interference achieved the unprecedented geological scale. That is, Gaia was animated by humans, and, as a result, becomes a different kind of agent. By the same token, humans lose the mistaken self-understanding status as autonomous subjects and gain a new status by both becoming geological agents and also becoming subjected to the planet's actions. By losing their autonomy, both become "quasi-subjects." Humans become new subjects "because he or she might be "subjected" to the vagaries, bad humor, emotions, and even revenge of another agent [Gaia], who also gains its quality of "subject" because it is also "subjected" to his or her action" ("Agency"5) (Emphasis in the original). Souza's vision at the end of the narrative could then be an expression of the realization that neither humans nor the planet will carry on as they have hitherto.

Returning to the central theme of my analysis, the multiplicity and complexity of the conceptualization of history in the novel, I identify at least three distinct representations, each with their own epistemology. The first, and most conventional, is expressed in Souza's attempts at establishing a linear, cause-effect chain of events that could account for the ecological disaster he witnessed in the brief scope of his lifetime. Souza's views fall faithfully within the precepts of a long tradition of humanistic scholarship started by Francis Bacon and further developed by Giambattista Vico, Benedetto Croce and Robin George Collingwood.<sup>24</sup>

Along with this attempt at establishing a linear timeline, Souza

encounters more frequently a second form, a circular or cyclical representation of history, which Elizabeth Ginway and Robert DiAntonio identified. This repetitious cyclical historicity represents the first challenge to Souza's conventional way of understanding historical time and adds to the dizzying effect of the narrative. The discrepancy between Souza's understanding of the historical process and the "evidence" he finds through his punitive experience in the streets opens up paths in which the impact of nonhuman histories can be factored in. That is, the protagonist's frustrating attempts at establishing logical causality within the confines of political, economic, and social processes lead him to contemplate other aspects of history that challenge and ultimately invalidate Souza's conception of history. The cyclical movement he identifies is enough to discredit the well-established linear norms of cause and effect that guide historiography, but it also demolishes the teleology of progress, development, and human mastery over nature that have guided modernization endeavors in Brazil and everywhere else.

In addition to this impossibility of establishing logical connections in a linear manner, Souza also encounters a third, and even more complex representation of history outlined in the man-who-sat-at-the-head-of-the-table speech. This man's description of an acceleration process that causes a disturbance in the "coordinates" of humanistic views of political, historical and social processes constitutes an alternative, synchronic temporality previously unaccounted for. If Souza had put more thought into it, all previous explanations would have merged and collapsed. Each of these representations or conceptualizations of history only make partial sense. The synchronic conceptualization adds another layer of signification. This is exactly the central and disconcerting effect of the overlapping of geological and human, or more precisely, humanistic

historical timescales of the Anthropocene, which renders both partially obsolete.

*And Still the Earth* is, therefore, a unique narrative, not only in regard to its complexity and prescience, but also for being one of the rare texts that endures the test of time. It endures in its popularity, in its favorable critical reception, and in its growing relevance. Despite the fact that it relates so closely to a somewhat dated political and historical context, I hope to have demonstrated in this essay that it, in fact, extrapolates these boundaries, inscribing itself in a much broader historical and global context. Ignácio de Loyola Brandão was able to represent and articulate the chaos, contradictions, dilemmas, and misconceptions that are, unfortunately, more truthful than ever. The narrative reflects and anticipates, with uncanny richness of detail, the current debates on climate change, the Anthropocene, and the new possibilities for cultural, social, and political criticism. The novel points out the narrowness of the predominant conceptualizations of history, of our understanding of the relationship between human and nonhuman life. It places emphasis on the irrationality of humanity and capitalism. Brandão also successfully avoided the narcissistic reaffirmation of human superiority that still underlies certain forms of environmental discourse. The author's choice of non-realist aesthetics of the absurd, hinging on surrealism, was an effective one, for it represents, not only in content but also in form, the irrational drive of capitalism. The novel deals with a wide range of issues that affect the environment not through a morally superior, or even rational condemnation of human abusive consumption of natural resources, but through a satirical, self-ironic, and self-implicating narrative that will remain relevant (for better or for worse) through many decades to come.

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## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> According to Jedediah Purdy, it was ecologist Eugene Stoermer who coined the term (*After Nature* 1). Crutzen later adapted and formalized the term in a short article published in *Nature* in 2002 ("Geology of Mankind" 415-23).

<sup>2</sup> A curious example of "non-fictional" literature related to issues of climate change is the best-selling book by Alan Wasserman, *The World without Us* (2007). In it the author describes life on planet Earth after humanity has disappeared. Wasserman's thought experiment has been harshly criticized as a sensationalist and ineffective type of speculation. See Brent Bellamy and Imre Szeman.

<sup>3</sup> What Trexler calls "Anthropocene novels" are those that deal more specifically with atmospheric changes caused by global warming. Earlier novels anticipate the Earth's temperature increase. A good example is J. G. Ballard's *The Drowned World* (1962). Set in a semi-submerged London, Ballard's novel attributes such change in climate to solar radiation. Trexler categorizes this novel as fallout or plague novel. According to the author, Ballard's novel represents an intermediary step between the plague novels and the Anthropocene ones, as it sets a "stable archetype for subsequent fiction" (87).

<sup>4</sup> This is the predominant reading of the novel. The best examples of criticism that ties the novel directly and solely to the historical and political era of the military dictatorship are "Ginway's *Brazilian Science Fiction* (127-136), Silva's "Uma guerrilha literária," and Jaramillo's "Welcome to Hell."

<sup>5</sup> Margaret Atwood makes such a distinction in talking about her own work in comparison to other authors whom she considers writers of SF proper. See *In Other Worlds* 5.

<sup>6</sup> The terms "climate fiction" or "cli-fi" have been used since the late 2000s to describe a specific subgenre of recent speculative or science fiction novels that deal with issues related to climate change. It is not possible to find reliable sources on exactly who and when it was first used.

<sup>7</sup> Giovanni Arrighi reworks Karl Marx's argument that capitalism is based on the perpetual accumulation of capital by adding that this accumulation is also, at least in part, purposeless. The notion of a purposeless accumulation was first proposed by Adam Smith.

<sup>8</sup> For more on the symbolic meaning of the mega infrastructural projects of that era, see Beal (99-120). Some of the classic studies on the Brazilian military dictatorship are Thomas Skidmore's *The Politics of Military Rule*,

(1989) and Elio Gaspari's series *A ditadura envergonhada* (2001), *A ditadura escancarada* (2001) and others.

<sup>9</sup> Christophe Bonneuil utilizes this terminology in order to categorize one of the strands of the current debate on the Anthropocene. According to the author, "tipping point" scholars are those who see human history as a series of violent acts, accompanied by disasters and assault on nature. See Bonneuil, "The Geological Turn."

<sup>10</sup> This mainstream nationalist narrative is pervasive in Brazilian symbolic production. Malcolm McNee describes it as "the enduring sense of an abundant, exuberant, and expansive nature in terms of the sense of national self, in many respects, is amply confirmed by the geographic scale, sheer volume of natural resources, and biotic diversity of the country, validating this first impression of Caminha and his shipmates." (4).

<sup>11</sup> Souza was in fact forced into retirement by the System.

<sup>12</sup> In the Portuguese original, the sphere of power, or the state, is nicknamed "O esquema" (The Scheme). But Ellen Watson opted for "The System," which conveys the idea, but loses the irony and humor of the original. The word scheme, both in Portuguese and in English also means conspiracy or ruse, which is the double entendre Brandão explored.

<sup>13</sup> The Capitalocene strand of the current debate on the Anthropocene, also known as the eco-capitalist view, is composed by scholars such as Jason Moore, Donna J. Haraway, Elmar Altvater among others. For a recent publication that represents their views, see *Anthropocene or Capitalocene*.

<sup>14</sup> The discussion among the scholars of the Anthropocene is complex in its details and would not fit the scope of this general presentation. For a brief but thoroughly informative summary of the positions held within this area, see Bonneuil, "The Geological Turn."

<sup>15</sup> For more on these slogans see Skidmore 138, 160, 217.

<sup>16</sup> In the aforementioned roundtable, the book is said to have sold more than one million copies in Brazil alone. This event marked the release of the 27<sup>th</sup> edition of *Não verás* in Brazil. The novel has been translated in

more than ten languages. See "Redes da criação: mesa *Não verás país nenhum* a realidade construída," available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6PBwvHdkFM>

<sup>17</sup> For instance, Salles's "Palavra de escritor" and "O processo de criação em *Não verás país nenhum*."

<sup>18</sup> Krabbenhoft's "Ignácio de Loyola Brandão and the Fiction of Cognitive Estrangement," and Causo's "Science fiction during the Brazilian dictatorship."

<sup>19</sup> The label Macrohistory has been applied to philosophies of history that seek out long-term trends or patterns in societies with separate trajectories in world history in order to determine whether or not certain processes are inherently cyclical regardless of specific social contexts. Macrohistory also concerns itself with future prognoses. For more on Macrohistory and on how it provides visions of future historical scenarios, see Inayatullah.

<sup>20</sup> I am not sure, but it seems that the decree is not a facsimile of the original document.

<sup>21</sup> I disagree with Ellen Watson's translation of the date. She translated it as 1770, but the text's archaic spelling "feffenta" indicates otherwise. If "f" is in fact "s," the double "ff" indicates "ss," which is equivalent to the modern spelling of the word "sessenta." It cannot be "setenta" because the letter "t" is not represented by the "f" symbol but by the current "t."

<sup>22</sup> For an in-depth analysis of the complex ways humans act in denial of climate change, see Stoknes (3-84). In Souza's case, I believe that his denial comes from the realization that his awareness of some of the causes of the environmental disaster would not make a difference.

<sup>23</sup> The title of the lecture series Latour presented at the University of Edinburgh is "Facing Gaia: A New Inquiry at Natural Religion." Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MC3E6vdQEzk>

<sup>24</sup> For a brief analysis of the precepts of this tradition and its shortcomings in regard to a broader comprehension of the Anthropocene, see Chakrabarty 201-207.

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