

LITERARY GEOGRAPHIES

Climate Crisis, Financial Crisis: Negative Mobility and Domicide in 21st-Century American Cinema

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Abstract:

This article considers films that portray negative mobility and domicile in the wake of the housing crisis and recession on the one hand, and climate change on the other. It puts forward the thesis that these films register a pervasive reversal (not unprecedented, but newly urgent) of archetypal American notions about mobility, which render the process in optimistic terms—upward and outward. These give way to a dominant image of downward, aimless mobility in the context of impoverishment and homelessness, an imagery I condense in the concept of ‘negative mobility.’ The trope of domicile—the intentional destruction of home—provides a theoretical lens with which to examine the upheavals and growing inequalities in the contemporary US. These two concepts enable me to theorize the renewed significance of home and mobility in contemporary culture with the advent of the twin crises of the housing crash and climate change. Both crises play out across ‘homes’ located at multiple scales, from the individual and family to the national and beyond, bringing challenges to representation. Cinema is a prime location for articulating the kinds of affective scenarios that can make such complex issues graspable, interweaving emotional and visceral engagement with more considered intellectual responses and (sometimes) aesthetic pleasures. This will be exemplified with case studies of two films, *99 Homes* (2014, director: Ramin Bahrani) and *Snowpiercer* (2017, director: Bong Joon Ho).

Keywords: Negative mobility; domicile; financial crisis; climate change; *Snowpiercer*; *99 Homes*.

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Life in the post-financial crisis Anthropocene means recognizing, coming to terms with, and finding ways to survive what humans (especially Americans and those in other high carbon-consuming populations) have done to destroy homes, both private homes as real estate property and our collective home, the Earth.¹ This article takes as its premise that human activity, in the form of financial irresponsibility and fossil fuel emissions, has enacted domicide, destroying home(s) and instantiating certain forms of forced mobility in both cases. While these two contemporary crises are rarely theorized together, I propose ways in which this joint analysis can be productive. To illustrate the imbrication of these two forms of destruction, I will employ two key concepts: domicide and negative mobility. Two recent films will serve as case studies to consider how the staging of affective scenarios in contemporary screen culture reflects and shapes our responses to the financial and ecological crises.

I rely on the concept of domicide to consider the precariousness inherent in the twin concepts of home and mobility. This term, coined by geographers J. Douglas Porteous and Sandra E. Smith, and helpfully reframed by subsequent scholars including Mel Nowicki, refers to the ‘deliberate destruction of home by human agency in the pursuit of specific goals, which causes suffering to the victims’ (Porteous and Smith 2001: 12). The gravity of the term domicide lies in its unmistakably dark echo of murder words like homicide, genocide, fratricide, infanticide. In their definition, Porteous and Smith distinguish between everyday domicide—such as forced displacement through economic restructuring or building projects—and extreme forms of domicide such as war or colonization, all of which can have traumatic and lasting repercussions.

My quasi-metaphorical appropriation of the term in my case studies depends on a careful unpacking of this deliberateness: I argue, for example, that the extreme weather exacerbated and fueled by anthropogenic climate change ought to be termed ‘deliberate,’ in that its disasters were and are largely preventable. In this sense, I consider the conscious political decisions to consistently underfund necessary infrastructure and adequate warning and preparation protocols, and the failure to organize a comprehensive, global initiative to reduce carbon emissions forms of domicide. My extension of the notion of domicide here is analogous to Rob Nixon’s use of Johan Galtung’s ‘indirect or structural violence,’ which similarly refers to an extension of ‘what counts as violence per se’ to include ‘the vast structures that ... constitute forms of violence in and of themselves’ such as social inequalities, austerity programs, and deregulation (Nixon 2011: 10). After the lessons learned in the US from the 2005 Katrina disaster, Superstorm Sandy in 2012, and the subsequent extreme weather events that are increasingly becoming ‘the new normal,’ like 2017’s Harvey, Irma, and Maria, it is difficult to justify the continuing status quo in which even basic maintenance (ahead of the disaster) and relief operations (after the disaster) are routinely neglected or botched; indeed, major infrastructure and emergency response plan upgrades will soon be needed to cope with the predicted increase of sea level rise all over the world, including the US, where one fifth of Miami will be underwater at high tide by 2045 (Kormann 2018).

A quick peek over the invisible wall that separates first-world from third-world disasters reveals that, for example, a rudimentary warning system could have lessened the

approximately 250,000 casualties of the 2004 Indian Ocean Tsunami, while modified home and well designs could improve resilience in Bangladesh, a poor country situated on a floodplain. The growing climate justice movements of recent decades also point out that the countries with most to lose in the climate-changed future are those who have contributed least to the problem (see Shue 2014; Nixon 2011). The question of representation becomes crucial here, and ‘writers, filmmakers, and digital activists may play a mediating role in helping counter the layered invisibility that results from insidious threats, from temporal protractedness, and from the fact that the afflicted are people whose quality of life—and often whose very existence—is of indifferent interest to the corporate media’ (Nixon 2011: 16). Only as extreme weather begins to have spectacular, recurring, and economic effects on the developed world does the news cycle begin to take notice, a development that brings to the fore the ‘culturally variable issue of *who counts as a witness*’ (16, original emphasis).

As Jason Moore aptly phrases it, human development has relied too long on what he terms the ‘law of cheap Nature’ through which we (and this ‘we’ refers to the relatively privileged on a global scale) have pursued ‘the ongoing, radically expansive, and relentlessly innovative quest to turn the work/energy of the biosphere into capital’ (2015: 24). That destructive engine of resource conversion and consumption drives both ever-increasing mobility through continued growth in air travel, and mass climate migrations. The likelihood of future scenarios of imminent domicide illustrates the ways in which climate change acts as a “threat multiplier” that exacerbates already dangerous situations such as armed conflict or socioeconomic inequality (CNA 2007). And while the dangers of fossil fuel dependency remained unproven until perhaps the mid-twentieth century, that knowledge has still failed to motivate adequate restraints on the globalizing petroculture in which we now find ourselves mired. If the rising waters don’t get us, we might all cook in our skins as mean temperatures continue to rise—Peter Brannen details the alarming effects of extreme heat on the human body (2017), and global media coverage of the heat waves and wildfires during the northern hemisphere’s summer of 2018 reached a fever pitch (Dunne and McSweeney 2018). If most can now agree that the effects of anthropogenic climate change are to a great extent preventable, then I would argue that the resulting loss of homes constitutes a form of domicide on a global scale—one that is motivating mobility across national borders.

This article argues that there is a growing sense that this is an age of involuntary mobility, driven by two rather different, but ultimately convergent forms of domicide, one connected with climate change, the other with the economic recession. Examining anthropogenic climate change and the financial crisis together provides an opportunity to reframe them and to bring into focus not only the damage wrought by both, but the human responsibility for causing both. Domicide and negative mobility prove useful concepts in the context of the housing crisis and ensuing recession: another completely preventable mass upheaval that could also benefit from an attention to domicide and mobility, and in fact bears closer scrutiny for the ways in which it operates in similar ways to the upheavals of climate change. Upending clichéd understandings of home as a refuge from turbulent public life, many post-financial crisis screen texts portray the intrusion of economic transactions and discourses into that allegedly inviolate but actually precarious homespace

as part of the new prevalence of neoliberal subjectivities in daily life (Leyda 2016a; Leyda 2016b). I refer here to films and television series that portray the loss, abandonment, and destruction of physical homes as well as the precarity of the unemployed, the evicted, the homeless. This century's US housing crisis carried echoes of the earlier economic meltdown, the Great Depression, brought about by some of the same mistakes and also exacerbated by an environmental crisis in the form of the Dust Bowl.

The forms of mobility portrayed in these two films – climate migration and eviction – are both clearly undesirable forms of movement, diametrically opposed to the motivations often connected with mobility in American history, such as the search for a better standard of living and the embrace of new adventures in the name of Manifest Destiny, which have often underlain the myths bound up in the so-called American Dream. In my previous work on the US 1930s, I developed the term 'negative mobility' to describe what struck me as a new phenomenon in the literature and popular culture of that time.

Geographic mobility could no longer be equated with nation-building progress; rather, the migration, displacement, and homelessness of millions of unemployed Americans during the Depression constituted a real threat to the nation itself. Instead of signifying upward social mobility, geographic movements during the depression resulted from involuntary relocation in search of work, food, and shelter. Up to this point in American history westward movement had always implied progress, development, and opportunity, and had thus been linked ideologically with upward class mobility (Leyda 2016c: 12; see also Leyda 2016a).

The next point in US history when negative mobility again comes to the fore on such a scale is in the early twenty-first century, another moment of extreme wealth inequality in the US when cracks begin to appear in the façade of its prosperous popular image.³ Americans are increasingly squeezed by the narrowing of the middle class, growing precarity in employment and social services, and the rampaging gentrification making it impossible for working people to live anywhere near the center of most major cities. As in the 1930s, demographic shifts and xenophobia are being politicized to bolster right-wing politicians, as the ideal of egalitarianism loses traction even among the most privileged white middle-class Americans. In this article, I argue for the continuing relevance of the critical geographies of home and domicile, and of the negative mobility analytic, particularly in the context of two dire, world-changing events: the collapse of housing markets that led to the global financial crisis and the subsequent normalization of precarity, and the slow-motion disaster of anthropogenic climate change that appears likely to leave many coastal cities well below sea level by the end of this century, and which is causing already short- and long-term evacuations to escape rising sea levels, desertification, and wildfires.

To exemplify how the concept of negative mobility can be, in conjunction with the powerful neologism domicile, brought to bear on films released during and after these contemporary crises, I offer a pair of case studies: Ramin Bahrani's *99 Homes* (2014) and Bong Joon Ho's *Snowpiercer* (2014).² In their portrayals of negative mobility and domicile, these very different texts both deal with the loss of home as motivation to movement. Unemployed, nearly homeless, and out of luck, Dennis Nash (Andrew Garfield) signs on

with the unscrupulous real estate developer responsible for his own foreclosure, losing the respect of his family and community as he earns enough money to move his family out of their dingy post-eviction motel room and into a suspiciously luxurious foreclosed home. The science fiction dystopia *Snowpiercer* offers a dark allegory of one possible future in a climate-changed world, set after a failed attempt at climate engineering triggers a sudden and enduring ice age. The two films serve my argument precisely because they are so different in genre and aesthetics: they help to show that many kinds of film can contribute to critical cultural conversations about the financial crisis and the climate crisis, and the potential social critiques that these films pose can be read productively with the combined theoretical lenses of domicile and negative mobility.

In analyzing these films, I consider aesthetic elements such as characterization, visual style, and story, but I also illuminate how the films participate in contemporary neoliberal affective scenarios. Collective affects, according to Ben Anderson, 'are part of the sites, networks, and flows of neoliberalism'; we must learn to detect both 'the atmospheres that envelope and animate neoliberal reason as it emerges, circulates, and changes' and 'the structures of feeling that in enigmatic ways accompany the translation of neoliberal reason into policies and projects' (2016: 735-36). All cultural production takes place within these atmospheres and structures of feeling, and many of those products bear the marks of that context. Lauren Berlant argues that cultural texts provide insights into what she calls the cruel (or unwarranted) optimism of our time if we study them 'not to see what happens to aesthetically mediated *characters* as equivalent to what happens to people but to see that in the affective *scenarios* of these works and discourses we can discern claims about the situation of contemporary life' (2011: 9). Tracing individual character arcs alongside their encompassing affective scenarios, particularly those inflected by their proximities to neoliberal reason, provides another route to interrogating the centrality of home and mobility in contemporary screen texts. Films depicting negative mobility and domicile also often allow for departures from conventional representational strategies in film and television, which typically rely upon identification with individual characters and often privilege mimetic realism in the dramatic mode over allegorical varieties of the fantasy or science fiction genres. Both these case studies prod audiences to oscillate between familiar viewing orientations involving identification and spectacle, and more analytical, critical, even political, interpretive modes.

Living Underwater: *99 Homes*

In his 2014 film, *99 Homes*, Ramin Bahrani constructs affective scenarios to encourage audiences to feel the effects of the housing crash not only on the individual main character, Dennis Nash, and his family members, but also, crucially, on the large number of people affected by foreclosures and evictions. The character of Nash is a challenging and complex protagonist, making decisions and taking actions that many viewers will see as beyond the pale of moral behavior, though he justifies this to himself with the desperate situation he faces at the start of the film: unemployed with no clear prospects for work, then losing the family home to foreclosure and eviction.



Nash thus resembles other familiar anti-heroes in popular culture who cross over to the dark side with the most understandable of motives: love for his family and desire to provide for them. As the film follows this character's arc, it depicts his mother and son losing respect for him and ultimately choosing to abandon him rather than live on the proceeds of his despicable work. Watching Nash's tragic decline as he transforms from an honest, self-respecting blue-collar worker to a hypocritical sell-out working for the very person who repossessed his home, audiences witness the devastation of the housing crisis up close. The narrative of Nash's negative mobility, as he moves out of his former house, into a motel room, paralleled by his ethical decline over the course of the film, engages audience involvement and interest in his individual storyline, but the film also travels a parallel track to work on a larger scale.

One of the challenges facing fictional depictions of large-scale domicile such as the housing crash (and climate change) is to find ways of conveying destructive effects on something approximating a larger temporal and spatial scale, without diluting the intensity of the emotions that audiences can process over the course of a relatively short time: the running time of a feature film, for example (Kinkle and Toscano 2011: 39; Nixon 2011). In this sense, both the global financial crisis and the global climate crisis are what Timothy Morton calls 'hyperobjects': phenomena so vast that they frustrate conventional efforts to represent them (Morton 2013). Even in climate disaster films like *The Day after Tomorrow* that are known for their spectacular visual effects depicting rapid global climate change, the story zooms in on the more bite-sized family drama of the main characters, a father and son separated in the midst of the catastrophe. However implausible such rapid-onset climate disaster spectacles may be in films, movies about the financial crisis have even fewer visual representations to draw upon; as a result, filmmakers must innovate in their efforts to move beyond the classic individualized drama to incorporate the wider affective scenarios of the film into existing structures of feeling familiar to the audience.

99 Homes succeeds in engaging audience sympathies on a wider scale in its creative use of montage to portray the collective experience of eviction. After Nash begins working for the nefarious developer Carver (Michael Shannon), he is tasked with evicting people from the foreclosed homes Carver has acquired from their banks. Not only does this echo the earlier scene in the film in which we see Nash himself being evicted, with his family's

belongings stacked along the side of the street; it also devises a way to portray the seriality of trauma inherent in the national catastrophe of the housing crash. The montage edits together multiple scenes of individuals as they open the door to Nash and he explains to them their situation; the camera films them in the same ways, with similar angles and framing, as they respond by crying, arguing, panicking, and so on. The rhythmic repetition of these shots in the montage sequence produces a powerful witnessing effect that confronts audiences with multiple characters, showing a range of emotional responses playing across their faces at the precise moments when they learn that they are losing their homes. Diversity in age, race and ethnicity, class, and gender mark these evictees as individuals who represent a cross-section of a diverse population; the parallel editing that connects them all in the montage simultaneously situates them within a collective.

Although the film cannot develop the backstory of each of these characters, it paints a kind of group portrait, with brief but powerful emotional scenes portraying a moment of life-changing crisis for each of them—it is the same crisis of losing their homes, although it plays out differently depending on personality and situation. The sameness of this experience of domicide, combined with the emphasis on difference through serial images of a diverse range of characters, allows the film to achieve a kind of widescale, collective representation of extreme emotion that goes beyond the usual cinematic drama centered around an individual.





The portrayal of the villainous character of Carver expresses the film's clear judgment against those who benefited from the housing crisis and crash; he serves as a repository for a large measure of the audience's anger and contempt. Carver's own family home is situated beside a lake in Orlando, Florida, and is already showing signs of water

damage and rot despite its relatively new condition, a symbolic indication of his moral corruption made manifest in the apparently shoddy structure of his house.



The interior shots of Carver's home often emphasize its lovely water views, although after the revelation of rot in the walls and ceiling, those lakefront vistas seem more ambivalent.



The common financial metaphor of a mortgage “under water” comes to mind, given how frequently that expression was employed in the news media and in private conversations about individuals whose homes rapidly lost value, falling far below the balances left on the mortgages that they are still compelled to honor. Yet another way to see Carver's decaying waterfront home is as indicative of the state in which it is located and in which the film is set: Florida.

Not only was Florida one of the hardest hit states, with some of the highest numbers of foreclosures and evictions in the country; it is also one of the states most endangered by coastal sea level rise associated with anthropogenic climate change. Carver's home may constitute a desirable waterfront property today, where he can live with his mortgage in order and with his wife and daughters ensconced safe and happy in their large, well-

appointed home (purchased on the backs of scores of evicted families), but in another generation or two it may well be literally underwater.



The film presents a successful aesthetic strategy for conveying the individual and the collective scales of emotional devastation resulting from the housing crash, while at the same time its symbolic representation of Carver's ill-gotten gains underscores its warning that the house he occupies is situated on dangerous ground, ethically and geologically. His business practices routinize and capitalize on evictions, a form of domicide, yet the film also allows us to view the precarity of his own position in relation to the long-term environmental consequences of living on reclaimed swampland.

Stop this Train: *Snowpiercer*

I'd like to turn now to another film that offers an opportunity to interrogate allegorical articulations of domicide and negative mobility, this time with a more explicit connection to climate change: *Snowpiercer*. In addressing the challenge to bridge the gap between the individual and the universal, allegory offers another aesthetic strategy to the filmmaker (particularly in the genre of science fiction) seeking to build affective scenarios that take audience beyond conventional identificatory engagements with realistically drawn individual characters. In a near future when a failed attempt at climate engineering has rendered the entire Earth a frozen wasteland, a microcosm of humanity survives on a miracle train that endlessly circumnavigates the world.

In the aftermath of this planetary domicide, ironically instigated by a human effort to reverse climate change, survivors have established a new 'home' on the train that reproduces the inequalities of previous human society. The ragged workers make their homes in overcrowded bunkbeds in the gloomy, windowless tail of the train, where they survive on gelatinous nutrition bricks recalling *Soylent Green*, the 1973 post-apocalyptic classic starring (as so many post-apocalyptic classics did) Charlton Heston.

Meanwhile, the elites luxuriate in segregated, well-appointed front cars complete with hair salon and night club, dining on steak and sushi. The spatial organization of the train conveys an overt metaphor for social stratification, drastically hyperbolizing the

familiar annoyances of contemporary air travel in which wealth and status insulate more privileged passengers from the headaches (and backaches) of economy class.



Many interpretations of the film read the endless mobility of the train, and more specifically its seemingly self-propelling engine, as a figure for capitalism itself, unable to slow or stop without risking instability (Frase 2017). The narrative portrays a failed effort to radically disrupt the train's progress and thereby produce an opportunity for liberation: a popular uprising that fights its way from the rear to the front car, which in the end turns out to have been subtly instigated and engineered as a way to cull the worker population and preserve the existing power hierarchies. In a canny casting choice that Americanizes the face of the leader of the rebellion, the working-class hero character is Curtis, played by Chris Evans, famous for his role as the self-sacrificing, patriotic superhero Captain

America in the Marvel Cinematic Universe. The rebellion reaches the front car with the cooperation and expertise of the Korean security engineer Namgoong and his daughter Yona, whereupon Namgoong detonates an explosion that blows open an exterior-facing door and triggers an avalanche, causing a partial derailment, apparently killing most of the passengers.



Both attempts to liberate the train fail, in that they achieve their literal goals but within a context in which their success will clearly not lead to liberation, or even survival. When Curtis-aka-Captain-America realizes that the leader Wilford (Ed Harris) has been grooming him to take over and sees that Wilford has been maintaining the train's engine by replacing worn-out parts with small children from the tail section and thus literalizing the commodification and consumption of the (child) worker's body by capitalism, he sacrifices his arm to deliver young Timmy from his machine-slavery.

Thus Curtis temporarily disrupts the self-perpetuating movement of the train's machinery, and at the same time rejects the replication of white male autocratic leadership that forcibly maintains the train's social hierarchy, while Namgoong and Yona literally try to blast their way out. Ecocritical readings add some nuance to this ultimately failed disruption, pointing out that Curtis's ethical impulse to save the most vulnerable outweighs any selfish temptation to accept Wilford's offer and thus perpetuate the system. Without recognizing the need to expand the individual's circle of care beyond personal relationships to include a wider contingent of human and non-human populations, the survival of humanity is in jeopardy. However encouraging Curtis's individual actions are, human survival remains uncertain because of the second attempt to disrupt the train's power structures. As Selmin Kara points out, the film's use of the trope of 'cyclicity points to a parallelism between the mechanism of the train and the crisis logic behind neoliberal capitalism: crisis is not antithetical to the system; rather, it emerges as its *modus operandi*' (2016: 31).



When, unbeknownst to Curtis, Namgoong and Yona derail the train, they halt the motion and disrupt the cycle of inequality that defined the train's micro-society. The film's narrative in this sense enables a radical disruption of the self-perpetuating engine of capitalism and presents an image of alliance that features (the white male) Curtis's rejection of his opportunity to preside over the unjust status quo and the potential for hope in a non-white alternative future. Rather than portray Curtis replace Wilford as leader and (most likely) perpetuate the inequalities built into the social systems of the train, the film ends with the train's destruction in an act of domicide. Given Namgoong's suspicion that the ice age is receding and temperatures warming, his decision to destroy the train constitutes a desperate hope for a different future, without the train. Like Curtis's choice to mangle his own arm in the machinery, Namgoong chooses a drastic measure with which to seize a possible future, one that entails crashing the train and forcing the human survivors to establish a new home (if they can). As Mel Nowicki (2014) emphasizes, the overwhelmingly negative connotations of the word domicide (with its echoes of murder) may blind us to the fact that some homes deserve to be destroyed: many who flee home due to domestic violence, for example, undergo a process Baxter and Brickell (2014) call 'home unmaking' to ensure their survival, making the destruction of those 'bad' homes a reasonable and even desirable choice. As Blunt and Dowling (2006) are careful to point out, home can be a site of power imbalances, often requiring constant negotiation and recalibration. Reclaiming agency in the face of inequality or abuse can mean leaving a home behind, destroying it, unmaking it, migrating away from it. These processes may also extend beyond the physical structure to the other dimensions of home at all scales, including not only identity and family, but community, nationality, and more. Curtis's and Namgoong's acts of self-mutilation and destruction do lead to domicide, and yet they contain seeds of hope for a future, literally, outside that system that necessitates its own destruction even if that might also mean extinction.

However, we are not left with a guarantee of utopia after this final domicide. The ending of the film shows only two survivors emerge from the wreckage: Yona and Timmy.



Biologically speaking, two survivors are not enough to repopulate the Earth without serious genetic repercussions down the line, but the ending clearly stands as a tentative symbol of a multiethnic form of reproductive futurism. The film doesn't confirm whether Namgoong was correct when he earlier observed that the ice was melting and the climate warming, and even if the two children don't freeze, the audience must wonder, where will they find food and shelter? Their survival is thus already in question when we see the kids lock eyes with a polar bear in the distance. Many have noted the overused cliché of climate change activism: the starving polar bear, often pictured on a melting ice floe (Chaudhuri 2012; Munger 2019: 121), or more recently, invading remote villages in the Russian Arctic in what could be seen as a form of animal negative mobility as the bears break out of their frequent framing as objects of pity and reclaim their fearsome role as apex predators (Bennetts 2019). In the final frames of *Snowpiercer*, Yona and Timmy face the polar bear as both a sign of hope, in that it was believed to be extinct (along with all life outside the train), and as a threat to their (and humanity's?) existence.

When I teach this film, some students insist that there must be a few other survivors (whom we don't see) and that the children will scavenge food and shelter from the wreckage of the train, making from it a new home; others postulate that there might be other human settlements (that we haven't seen) where they could find a home (Leyda et al. 2016). But although these optimistic imaginings testify to the seemingly infinite resources of young people to manufacture hope, they are not supported by anything we have seen in the film, and the polar bear might be hungry. *Snowpiercer's* staging of this final act of domicide, this home unmaking, although it satisfyingly destroys the unjust system of the train, leaves the future of humanity very much in question (see also Kara 2016; Jeong 2016).



Conclusion

This article has indicated how the concepts of negative mobility and domicide can offer scholars working on home and mobility in contemporary culture a useful rubric for tracing connections between two of the most pressing challenges of our century thus far. The unsustainability of the housing markets not only led to evictions on a massive scale in the US after the collapse of the bubble market in 2008, but experts warn that new bubbles continue to form in the wake of that crash, as regulations to prevent another are either weakened or repealed (Werner and Merle 2018). Climate change already displaces enormous populations outside the US and contributes to political instability that also leads to violent conflict, including domicide (Doherty 2017); within the US, the news of climate migrants attracts little attention as yet, perhaps because they usually involve disadvantaged rural populations, but the number of these instances will only increase (Davenport and Robertson 2016; Maguire and von Meding 2017).

Both these problems are very difficult to portray because of their complexity and enormity. The abstractions of the financial marketplace and the statistical evidence of climate change spanning vast blocks of time and space make them challenging for filmmakers to represent visually and in a manageable narrative, demanding innovative aesthetic and affective strategies to bring the audiences along without preaching (Weik von Mossner 2014; Seymour 2014). The creative use of montage to stage the collective trauma of eviction in *99 Homes* and the allegorical narrative of *Snowpiercer* that frames a tale of self-perpetuating, ravenous capitalism are examples of how visual media can and must meet these challenges of representation; they are also examples of how screen media are equipped to do this. As Manjana Milkoreit argues about climate fiction, fostering an audience's imagination of large-scale, real-world crises is a task for creative texts, and engaging with those texts is 'both an individual cognitive-emotional process as well as a collective, social and political one' (2016: 173). Films that deal creatively with climate change, and I would add, the housing crash and resulting financial crisis, participate in the

textual work of ‘shaping our collective imaginations of possible, plausible, desirable, and undesirable futures, thereby helping us reflect not only on the nature of climate change, but on the meaning of human life and social existence in a changing climate’ (177).

Although housing instability and climate change have usually been studied as completely separate and unrelated, I suggest that they can constructively inform one another through a framework that considers them both forms of domicile that motivate negative mobility. After all, with political will and popular support, both crises were in fact preventable. At a time when humans must take responsibility for the imagination and creation of economically and environmentally sustainable futures, we should remember to look to cultural productions such as film to help us recognize and debate as wide a range of available responses as possible, as we develop a process for rethinking home and mobility in post-millennial culture. These films give access to imaginative geographies through which to visualize possible futures, inviting audiences to feel what it would be like to live in them.

Notes

¹ In this study, I prefer to use the term “financial crisis” instead of related expressions such as Great Recession, for example, because it signifies both the housing crash and the subsequent recession.

² In my usage, “negative” here is meant to indicate the shift in connotations of mobility in the mainstream cultural discourses marking the twentieth- and twenty-first-century US; the stability of the meaning of “negative” can easily be problematized by calling attention to recurring US nativist ideologies, for example, that posit immigration as a threat to the implicitly white nation. In this sense, mobility of the “Other” has always had the potential to be demonized; it is only when white, middle-class Americans become mobile by necessity rather than choice, and when their mobility is in an undesired direction, that it contradicts the cherished truisms of upward class mobility and of Manifest Destiny.

³ Discussing *Snowpiercer* as part of an article on US cinema demands a bit of clarification given its global provenances: the film is an adaptation of a French graphic novel, by a South Korean director, with Czech financial support, and featuring several prominent American and British cast members. The film’s dialogue is primarily in English with some conversations in subtitled Korean. The setting is never marked in terms of national identity, but the man at the top of the power structure, Wilford, is played by American actor Ed Harris and the ostensible hero, Curtis, by Chris Evans, the American actor most famous for playing Captain America. The casting of these two roles with well-known white American male actors does, I argue, enable us to read the film’s critique as targeting not only global capitalism but also pointedly American global hegemony and its dangers.

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