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# On Climate Refugees

## *Biopolitics, Aesthetics, and Critical Climate Change*

YATES MCKEE

*A review of Argos Collective, Climate Refugees (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2010). Cited in the text as CR.*

Us? . . . who is talking about crisis?

*Derrida, "Economies of the Crisis"*

Among the most provocative theoretical developments in the contemporary humanities is what has recently been called “critical climate change.”<sup>1</sup> At once an institutional initiative and a concept-metaphor, this phrase speaks to two overlapping concerns. The first concern is the so-called anthropogenic or man-made crisis of the planetary climate system resulting inadvertently from the residual carbon footprint of two centuries of fossil-fuel capitalism centered in the Global North. Thinkers from Marx to Braudel to Lefebvre have long emphasized the dialectical co-production of socioeconomic practices and nonhuman environmental systems as an essential dimension of any historical analysis worthy of the name. But the advent of what climate scientists have recently begun to call the “anthropocene” involves an epochal transition from humanity understood as a “biological agent” whose activities alter this or that particular environment within the life span of several

generations to that of a “geological agent” that destabilizes the taken-for-granted global climatological patterns against which the life in general of both human and nonhuman species has been assumed to occur since time immemorial. However, in both meteorological and tropological terms, “climate” (Greek *klima*) has always already involved what Eduardo Cadava calls “the tendency of incline or drift away from understanding . . . of what falls from the sky and what falls away from understanding . . . of whatever is incalculable and uncontrollable,” the contemporary climate crisis radicalizes this sense of uncertainty.<sup>2</sup> Thus, the anthropogenic derangement of planetary geochemistry only radicalizes the ordinary uncertainty that climate, weather, and atmosphere has always brought to bear on human affairs. This leads to the second concern, namely, a potential reorientation of the “critical climate” of humanities scholarship that would interrogate the *anthropos* routinely invoked as the simultaneously self-destructive and self-redeeming protagonist of global warning. Calling for new forms of scholarly inquiry, cultural production, and political engagement that would take account of the radical undecidability of human and nonhuman history, critical climate change asks: Who or what is the humanity that has recently begun to claim responsibility for the destabilization of climate, weather, and season (*temps*)? What are the limits of that humanity, and how has the “time of the human” mutated in light of these destabilizations?<sup>3</sup>

The project of critical climate change positions itself as an extension of a certain unfinished heritage of Jacques Derrida, whose oeuvre is marked by a conspicuous silence on problems of ecology and environment. Among the tantalizing exceptions to this silence is his remark in “Economies of the Crisis” (1983) that the very idea of crisis is “the signature of a last symptom, the convulsive effort to save a ‘world’ that we no longer inhabit: no more *oikos*, economy, ecology, livable site in which we are ‘at home.’”<sup>4</sup>

For Derrida, discourses of crisis “economize” crisis, implicitly setting up the continuity and predictability of non-crisis as the normal state of life. Derrida’s point is not to ignore or dismiss the actuality of ecological crises, but to situate them within a certain continuity of instability, volatility, or incalculability that would

displace any ideal of “being at home,” for instance, as the proper state of existence of a unified humanity. Derrida asks, “Us? . . . who is talking about crisis? Who is talking the most about it right now? Where? To whom? In what form? In view of what effects and what interests? By playing on what ‘representations’? Who are the individuals, which are the interest groups, the countries that hold forth this discourse of the crisis, hold it forth or hold onto it?” (“EC,” 71).

Though not specifically engaged with climate change—a scientific diagnosis familiar only to expert bodies and a handful of activists in 1983—Derrida’s questions concerning the “us” of the contemporary *oikos* and its crisis are germane to the recent published volume *Climate Refugees*. Put together by Argos, a French collective of writers and photographers, *Climate Refugees* is composed of a series of nine portraits of populations around the globe exposed to uneven levels of ecological vulnerability in the planetary climate-change crisis. In assembling these case studies, the book aims to highlight the contemporary reality and future possibility of massive population displacements caused by global warming and its associated effects on life-support systems ranging from rising sea levels in island nations such as the Maldives and Tuvalu, to the intensification of storm dynamics in coastal Alaska and New Orleans, to drought and desertification in Chad and northeastern China.

In the book’s short introduction, the Argos Collective appeals to “humanity” as both a unitary historical actor and a target of public address: “As it gains awareness of its responsibility for global warming and the related impoverishment of biodiversity, humanity is discovering that it is more vulnerable than ever, that its diversity, if not its very existence, is threatened” (CR, 14). Argos cites an estimate put forth in a recent UN report that migration related to global warming could involve 50 million people in 2010. For Argos, this new dynamic of population displacement involves an essential injustice, considering the fact that the populations most intensively affected by global warming are those that contribute the least to the overall carbon emissions that drive the ecologically disruptive alteration of climatological patterns. Argos frames climate change as a potential demographic crisis if “these displace-

ments are not organized in advance or negotiated with receiving and transit countries”—a situation that could lead to “violent disturbances and humanitarian disasters.” Argos continues, “the international community must urgently address the migration issue” by developing legal, logistical, and financial tools for responding to and managing the apparently inevitable displacements catalyzed by global warming (CR, 15).

The elaboration of an international legal framework pertaining to the emergent phenomenon of climate refugees, however, is obliged to challenge the definition of refugee status laid out in 1951 by the United Nations High Commission for Refugees, which states that a refugee is any person who, “owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable, or, owing to such fear, unwilling to return to it” (CR, 15). According to Argos, “too often, countries hide behind this restrictive definition to refuse asylum” to those exposed to the dangers induced by climate change (CR, 15). Thus, the definition of refugee status needs to be expanded—a vexed juridical and biopolitical question to which we shall return at the end of this review.

*Climate Refugees* is a significant effort to publicize this set of problems through a combination of texts and photographs, yet it is flawed in numerous respects. The book suffers from an identity crisis, presenting itself as neither an academic volume charged with expert analysis, nor an avowedly artistic project, nor even a popularizing visual information-design project in the manner of the book version of Al Gore’s *Inconvenient Truth* (though it does include a perfunctory set of statistical graphs on the back flap of the cover). Rather, the book presents itself as a set of vaguely poetic first-person travel essays pertaining to the sites in question. In terms of both style and content, many of these entries are qualitatively inferior to the day-to-day climate-change journalism found in well-informed liberal publications such as the *New York Times*,

the *Guardian*, and *Le Monde*. Nonetheless, despite the uneven quality of the individual entries, the book as a cumulative artifact deserves distinct recognition for drawing attention to the emergent crisis of climate-related displacement as a worldwide concern that is likely to intensify at an exponential rate.

In the plethora of documentary photographs accompanying each of the nine essays, *Climate Refugees* seems to want to emphasize the importance of visual images and media practices in framing global warming and “climate refugees” in particular as a matter of public concern. Like the uncertain genre of the book, however, neither the introductory text, nor the individual entries, nor even their accompanying photographs indicate any self-conscious interrogation of the role of photography or visual media in articulating a politics of climate change. The only references to media come in the brief preface by Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change scientist Jean Jouzel, who begins with the truism that “every week, the media—newspapers, magazine, radio, television, and websites—remind us that we’re living on a planet that is getting warmer” (*CR*, 7). Jouzel correctly lauds *Climate Refugees* for reorienting the increasingly global awareness of anthropogenic climate change as an established scientific fact with respect to the specific plight of climate refugees: “The great value of this outstanding work is that it highlights the phenomenon [of climate refugees] in a very concrete fashion, accompanied by stunning photography” (*CR*, 7). Jouzel’s perfunctory reference to photography as a secondary supplement—however “stunning”—belies the logic of the book as a whole. Despite the fact that more than half of the book is taken up by photographs, they end up functioning as auxiliary illustrations of the texts in question. To be sure, many of the photographs are interesting in their own right, and all are marked by at least minimal captions linking them to the articles with which they are paired. But the image/text relation is rendered unwittingly frustrating by the editorial decision to place the images at the end of each travel essay instead of embedding them in such a way that the experiences of reading and looking might be more dynamically and horizontally interwoven. Rather than a deliberate avant-garde device of defamiliarization, the image/text disjunction comes off

as merely an awkward inconvenience to the reader as she shuttles back and forth across twenty or so pages struggling to link this or that textual reference to its image.

That said, as a whole the essays and the photographs manage to present fairly detailed portraits of the texture of everyday life in climatologically vulnerable regions of the globe. The extent to which, however, the individual entries situate the vulnerability of each region in terms of local politico-ecological dynamics varies greatly. Among the weakest entries are those written by Argos member Aude Raux on the climate-related degradation of the historical fishing economies on Lake Chad, glacial melting in Nepal, and desertification-related population displacement in agricultural regions just miles from Beijing. Instead of writing a comprehensive scholarly or journalistic account, Raux opts for a kind of amateur poetics of the disaster in a pseudo-Blanchotian vein. His three entries, which include evocative headings such as “Ocean,” “Phantom,” “Creation,” “Odors,” and “Time,” montage together fragments of official governmental reports, testimonial discourse from those affected by the environmental crises, local aphorisms, and quasi-anthropological, first-person observations by the author himself that border on a kind of ecological primitivism, if not racism. Under “Time,” for instance, he writes,

For Chadians, time doesn't exist; people are all that matter. It is people, in their submission to god, who create time. When a nasara (white person) asks the rational, objective question, “what time are we leaving,” a Chadian does not answer “11:32,” but rather, “when everyone has gotten into the 4 x 4, inshalla.” Chadians take their time, even though their time is limited. . . . So we learn to be like them. We stop looking at our watches. We learn to live in the present. (CR, 97–98)

And, toward the end of Raux's entry on Chad, we read under the heading “Urgent”: “How can people ‘take the long view’ when they're confronted with such an urgent situation? How can they do so when time is no longer counted in generations but reduced to a short stay on earth where each day is an obstacle, and the past no longer has a future?” (CR, 101). Lacking any framework

for principled ethnographic research, political analysis, or activist advocacy, Raux's attempts at cross-cultural speculation read as simultaneously pretentious and patronizing, ultimately making a travesty of stereotypically "French" concerns with existence, time, and finitude. This is unfortunate given that the emergent disaster of anthropogenic climate change does indeed pose essential questions about the status of the human, historical temporality, and the limits of representation.

The accompanying image-essay on Chad by Cedric Faimali documents various facets of lake-dependent communities, alternating between portraits of people at work fishing, mongering, and farming with physical indices of the increasingly precarious status of local life-support systems. Most notable in this regard are the dramatically receding shores of the lake, which have left entire fleets of fishing boats stranded on recently formed deserts and marshlands that were once home to abundant deep-water fish stocks that provided both subsistence food and commercial income for local communities. The imbrication of these local textural details with broader global politico-ecological dynamics is not successfully treated in the text. References to such dynamics are episodic and impressionistic, and the reader ends up muddling through anecdotal details in an attempt to piece together some basic sense of the local, national, and global actors involved in this ecological crisis zone.

The strongest entries in *Climate Refugees* are those that forgo pseudo-ethnographic commentary or half-baked poetic meditations in favor of sustained investigative narratives concerning both the crises to which particular regions are subjected and the modes of political response that have emerged to grapple with these crises on the part of governmental and nongovernmental actors alike. Worth noting in this respect is the profile by Guy-Pierre Chomette on the Maldives, a tiny archipelago of coral-based islands in the Indian Ocean whose sheer physical existence is put at risk with the rising of sea levels. Chomette discusses the precarious intertwining of the political economy of coral-reef tourism that largely sustains the island nation, the infrastructural and relocation projects undertaken by the government to protect human settlements from flooding, and the global role assumed by Maldivian president

Maumoon Abdul Gayoom in the drafting of the 1989 Male Declaration on Global Warming and Sea Level Rise. The latter was a prescient statement by postcolonial island nations concerning the responsibility of industrialized countries in the North to take the lead both in moving away from carbon-based development and assisting in efforts of preparation, protection, adjustment, and, if necessary, evacuation and relocation for low-lying nations such as the Maldives.

Another noteworthy entry in *Climate Refugees* concerns the South Pacific island of Tuvalu, the government of which has taken the lead in putting forth the legal concept of “climate refugee” in the international political realm. Donatien Garnier quotes the Tuvaluan foreign minister, Pani Laupepa: “We asked the governments of Australia and New Zealand to acknowledge the concept of climate refugees. . . . They refused, saying that, according to international law, refugees can only be people subject to persecution or political, ideological, ethnic, or religious pressure—a narrow definition that suits them just fine” (CR, 279). In other words, by defining *refugee* in terms of a finite causal structure of deliberate discrimination or oppression, a major northern carbon emitter such as Australia has been able to eschew responsibility for the displacement of populations within what it has long considered its regional sphere of strategic influence and aid (i.e., Micronesia and Melanesia).

A similar issue is detailed in the best profile included in the book, which portrays the Inuit village of Shishmaref in Arctic Alaska. Also written by Chomette, in this profile we learn about the coastal erosion that has progressively worn away at the physical foundations on the village in recent years, due to the intensification of storm dynamics in the Chukchi sea and the melting of the permafrost that has provided the ground for human and nonhuman life in the region for thousands of years. Chomette artfully weaves together a historical account of the place, testimonial discourse of residents, and, perhaps most importantly, the voices of local activists from the Shishmaref Erosion and Relocation Coalition mobilizing to demand resettlement and adjustment funds from the U.S. government. In a book of nearly four hundred pages, it is disap-

pointing to find only this single reference to proactive political activism on the part of so-called climate refugees themselves.

The entry on Shishmaref is additionally remarkable for the ways in which the photographs, taken by H el ene David, stage the precarious survival of the affected communities not only in terms of sheer physical life-support systems, but also in terms of cultural traditions and memory systems. For instance, one photograph shows the interior wall of a village residence that is entirely saturated with layers of accumulated family photographs of every size and tone, ranging from faded black-and-white ID images to casual snapshots to formal portraits, a dense domestic archive in which numerous generations coexist in a kind of photographic palimpsest. This image is coupled on the facing page with a stark photograph of Shishmaref resident Mina Weyiouanna standing in the foreground against a seascape, the horizon-line of which is violently interrupted by an upended wooden house that appears suspended on the brink of collapsing into the ocean. As we read in her testimony, this is the ancestral home Weyiouanna inherited from her grandparents, a faded photographic portrait of whom she displays for future public memory to David’s camera. The domestic structure in question was once situated on solid ground several hundred meters from the shore into which it now dissolves (fig. 1). David’s photograph eloquently captures the derangement of any stable relation between ground and figure, earth, sky, and water, and the natural patterns against which humanity has typically been assumed to make its home. If traditional models of ecology have appealed to a harmonious equilibrium between humanity and its naturally given *oikos*, here the figure of the home, metonymized by the specific structure in which Weyiouanna’s grandparents once lived, becomes a matter of what might be called haunted housing, of ghosts and phantoms that make claims on the living present.<sup>5</sup> “I can still see myself playing dominoes with my grandfather,” says Weyiouanna while contemplating the disjointed, collapsing structure of the house (CR, 45).

David’s photograph allegorizes a claim for what activists across the world have called in recent years “climate justice,” defining justice not in terms of an ideal readjustment between “nature” and



Fig. 1. The house where Mina Weyiouanna grew up, abandoned long ago, has just fallen over onto the beach. “I still remember playing dominoes with my grandfather,” she says with dignity. “Then, the house was still more than a hundred yards from the shore.” Photo by H el ene David, Argos Collective.

“humanity” understood as essential entities, but rather what Derrida would call a planetary “disadjustment” between past, present, and future.<sup>6</sup> Obliquely informed by Walter Benjamin’s “Theses on the Philosophy of History” and its invocation of the image of “enslaved ancestors rather than liberated grandchildren,” Derrida’s notion of justice as the “disadjustment of the living present” involves an incalculable economy of intergenerational responsibility. This economy involves an endless negotiation between specific grievances, demands, and claims on actually existing laws or policy, and an injunction to bear witness to the catastrophic and unrepresentable losses on which human history—and specifically the history of capitalist globalization—continue to be founded.

This definition of climate justice as situated between a demand for unconditional responsibility on the part of the global North and the calculus of existing policy regimes and legal norms brings us to the aporias of the concept of the climate refugee. *Climate*

*Refugees* conveniently skirts these in favor of the self-evident benevolence of expanding the purview of the 1951 Geneva Convention to those groups unevenly exposed to climate-change vulnerability. While the book deserves credit for attempting to depart from the publication format and mode of address of, say, an expert law journal, in its well-intentioned desire to popularize the concept of the climate refugee, it overlooks the considerable theoretical debate that has emerged around the concept by international lawyers, activists, and indeed by those groups to whom it would presumably apply.

Legal theorist Angela Oels, for example, has recently sounded just such a note of caution about the category of the climate refugee in light of broader critiques of policy regimes concerning refugees, asylum, and transnational migration.<sup>7</sup> Informed by Giorgio Agamben, Oels notes that the determination of refugee status under the 1951 Geneva Convention depends on a sovereign exception to be made between “legitimate” migrants on the one hand—that is, those who fit under the parameters of “political persecution” (thus imposing upon UN signatory nations an obligation to allow them to enter their territory)—and, implicitly, a disposable population of “irregular” migrants who do not deserve to be saved or assisted. In other words, despite its appeal to a universal law pertaining to humanity in general, the Geneva Convention not only inscribes a division between two orders of protected and unprotected humanity—privileging those exposed to “exceptional” persecution while abandoning those who subsist in permanent states of emergency—but also lacks any binding force in its own right, leaving the interpretation of that division in the hands of the sovereign nation-states. Furthermore, pointing to the legal limbo in which hundreds of thousands of people are caught across Europe’s network of migrant camps, Oels notes that the granting of refugee status does not necessarily translate into the rights of asylum, let alone full citizenship. Indeed, the manner in which refugee populations are governed by the nation-states in which they find themselves is often on the order of “bare life,” treating them as objects of humanitarian administration whose right to protection can be revoked at any time, rather than as civic subjects invested with the

capacity to make rights claims about the ways in which they are governed.

An Agambenian framework is certainly pertinent to a critique of *Climate Refugees*, which defines its concern with expanding the purview of the refugee in terms of a kind of biopolitical planning and management—as when it evokes the specter of “violent disturbances and humanitarian disasters” that might be set in motion by climate change. All the conundrums of the refugee concerning sovereignty, biopower, humanitarianism, and citizenship are intensified by climate change, given the added difficulty of determining what constitutes a climate-based displacement, as well as determining who or what is responsible for such a displacement. Whereas the causal chain resulting in the flight of a minority group from a discriminatory if not genocidal ethnonationalist regime can, in principle, be pinpointed with regard to a specific piece of legislation, a campaign of military or paramilitary violence, or even the formal or informal fostering of a cultural milieu conducive to discrimination or violence, the agency and responsibility involved in climate-related displacement is much less finite insofar as no particular entity can be assigned responsibility to the anthropogenic impact on the climate system.

This speaks to the relatively long-standing debate over the related category of the “environmental refugee.” Subjected to “environmental” forces beyond the precise control of any particular governing agency that might be held accountable for their plight, environmental refugees move across national boundaries in search of physical protection and sustainable livelihood. From the beginning, of course, the very definition of the “environmental” in such discourses has been a matter of considerable ambiguity, and again the question of how, where, and when to demarcate the causal links in the chain of forces involved in the creation of an ecological disaster such as a drought, a famine, a flood, or an earthquake is highly complex; as humanitarian, environmentalist, and development activists have long argued, “there is no such thing as a natural disaster” given that every environmental process will always be mediated to various degrees by economies, policies, infrastructures, and practices aiming to calibrate between natural

forces and human populations, however negligently, unequally, or dysfunctionally.<sup>8</sup>

This category of the environmental refugee further begs the question of the economic migrant, whose decision to migrate arguably always has an environmental dimension. Should not those fleeing the neoliberal privatization of collective landholdings in Mexico or the World Bank–directed shift from subsistence fishing to aquaculture in Southeast Asia—to cite just two important origin points for “irregular migrants” to the global North—be considered “environmental refugees”?

Finally, as Oels points out, established discourses concerning refugees do not account for the problem of internally displaced people, that is, vulnerable populations forced from their homes that end up seeking refuge elsewhere within the sovereign territory of which they are nominally citizens. Exemplary in this regard would be the displaced population of low-income African Americans after Hurricane Katrina—a group whose displacement was not the result of a “natural disaster,” nor even of an anthropogenic climate emergency in any immediate way, but rather of a long-term, sedimented pattern of radicalized infrastructural neglect by the Bush administration and its predecessors at urban, state, and federal levels. In other words, the emergency of “refugees” of Katrina was embedded in a normalized and everyday state of emergency in which they were always already abandoned as citizens. Thus, for Oels, the figure of the refugee and its association with a state of emergency and exceptional governmental measures is bound up with the obfuscation of the regular state of emergency in which many black New Orleanians dwelled prior to the storm.

Oels extends this insight to the current position of the government of Tuvalu. Unlike the earlier administration, for whom Pani Laupepa was the authorized spokesperson (cited by the Argos Collective), the current government of Tuvalu has challenged the horizon of refugee status as the be-all and end-all for the apparently “doomed” island nation. Instead, Tuvalu has called for a combination of large-scale northern carbon-emission reductions and a regime of climate “reparations” in the form of aid for adaptation and mitigation for low-lying postcolonial nations to be funded by

an international tax on the aviation and maritime activities dominated by industries in the global North. Tuvalu has not entirely abandoned the concept of climate refugees but has resituated it as one among a number of terms in a broader set of claims concerning climate justice.

With such examples in mind, Oels acknowledges that an inflexible adoption of Agamben is liable to move from a critical admonishment concerning the ensnarements of contemporary biopower to a morbid cynicism concerning the very possibility of progressive political action. The latter is a betrayal of Foucault's original theorization of the concept, in which the constitution of "life as a political object" involves a double movement of simultaneously totalizing administrative regulation as well as the proliferation of new rights-claims on the part of populations in their status as living beings in realms including sexuality, health, work, and environment.<sup>9</sup> To this point one might also add Jacques Rancière's critique of Agamben's reduction of the "rights of man" to a matter of depoliticized "bare life" rather than a mobile and dynamic set of discursive practices with the potential to unsettle established "partitions of the sensible," which is to say, the division of the realm of public appearances erected by particular regimes between properly political subjects and those whose voices can only register as subhuman "noise."<sup>10</sup>

Rancière's approach to the "politics of aesthetics" is especially relevant to *Climate Refugees* given the volume's emphatic foregrounding of visual images in framing the category of the climate refugee. However, the volume does not critically assess how images or image-related practices (films, photographs, news reports, NGO websites, books) actually function in the staging of the political claims of so-called climate refugees or their advocates in nongovernmental organizations. Here certain questions of media specificity and public address might be posed to the Argos Collective: What is the status of the book qua medium in the contemporary landscape of nongovernmental activism and media work? For the most significant activist groups working on issues pertaining to climate change, the book is an occasional, contingent node in a much broader assemblage of networked media forms targeting a variety of audiences on multiple scales, registers, and campaigns.<sup>11</sup>

Although it does have a website and provides a somewhat perfunctory web directory at the end of its volume, *Argos* seems to take the book form as a good in and of itself, as if providing reportage to the specialized academic readership of MIT Press were a sufficient platform for engaging the emergent biopolitical crisis of those displaced by climate change in its various conditions and mediations across the globe. Thus, without discounting the ethical urgency, benevolent intentions, and occasionally insightful details of the *Climate Refugees* volume, as a whole the book fails to offer much in the way of self-critical analysis for the artistically, academically, or activist-oriented reader in terms of how cultural production or scholarly research might link itself to ongoing mobilizations concerning the climate crisis and its human fallout.

The relationships among seeing, knowing, and action are taken for granted in this volume, which is apparently content to appeal to the moral conscience of an ill-defined “international community” whose track record of indignant “powerlessness” vis-à-vis catastrophic governmental negligence and abuse has been well documented.<sup>12</sup> Put differently, the book leaves the biopolitical and aesthetic conundra pertaining to the precarious figure of the “climate refugee” immune from questioning. In this regard *Climate Refugees* should be acknowledged as an excellent occasion for precisely such an interrogation, and as a potentially generative stimulus for future art, scholarship, and activism concerning the multifaceted planetary emergency of climate change.

## Notes

1. See the Institute for Critical Climate Change page at [www.criticalclimatechange.com](http://www.criticalclimatechange.com) for a mission statement, a list of activities, and a forthcoming series of volumes, including Claire Colebrooke and Tom Cohen, eds., *An Atlas of Critical Climate Change*, and Henry Sussman, ed., *Impasses of the Post-Global* (hereafter cited as *IPG*); see also [www.openhumanitiespress.org](http://www.openhumanitiespress.org).
2. Eduardo Cadava, *Emerson and the Climates of History* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997), 4.
3. Although unaffiliated with the “critical climate change” project of Cohen and Sussman, Dipesh Chakrabarty poses this important ques-

tion concerning the destabilization of season and weather as taken-for-granted backgrounds for human history in his discussion of the so-called anthropocene geological era in Dipesh Chakrabarty, "The Climates of History: Four Theses," *Critical Inquiry* 35 (Winter 2009): 197–222.

4. Jacques Derrida, "Economies of the Crisis," in *Negotiations: Interviews and Interventions, 1971–2001*, ed. Elizabeth Rottenberg (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), 70. Hereafter cited as "EC."
5. On the *oikos* as a matter of "haunted housing," see Mark Wigley, *The Architecture of Deconstruction: Derrida's Haunt* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1993); and Yates McKee, "Haunted Housing: Eco-Vanguardism, Eviction, and the Biopolitics of Sustainability in New Orleans," *Grey Room* 30 (Winter 2008): 84–113.
6. Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx: The Work of Mourning, the State of the Debt, and the New International*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (New York: Routledge, 1994), x. On climate justice, see [www.timeforclimatejustice.org](http://www.timeforclimatejustice.org) and Yates McKee, "Survival," in IPG.
7. Angela Oels, "Asylum Rights for Climate Refugees? From Agamben's Bare Life to the Autonomy of Migration" (2008) available at [http://kmgne.de/yourope4rights/upload/pdf/Oels\\_Angela\\_Asylum\\_right\\_for\\_climate\\_refugees.pdf](http://kmgne.de/yourope4rights/upload/pdf/Oels_Angela_Asylum_right_for_climate_refugees.pdf).
8. See Gregory Squires, Chester Hartman, et al., *There Is No Such Thing as a Natural Disaster: Race, Class, and Hurricane Katrina* (New York: Routledge, 2007).
9. See Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage, 1978), 142–43.
10. Jacques Rancière, "Who Is the Subject of the Rights of Man?" *South Atlantic Quarterly* 103 (2004): 297–310.
11. See Bill McKibben, *Fight Global Warming Now: The Handbook for Taking Action in Your Community* (New York: St. Martins Griffin, 2007), and its accompanying campaign website [www.350.org](http://www.350.org), which takes its name from what climate scientists have identified as the maximum parts per million (ppm) of atmospheric carbon dioxide for the future sustenance of human life on earth. The current ppm proportion of carbon dioxide in the global atmosphere is 392. On the transmediatic landscapes of contemporary nongovernmental activism in the arena of environmental activism, among others, see Yates McKee and Meg McLagan, eds., *The Visual Cultures of Nongovernmental Politics* (New York: Zone Books, 2011). An important counterpoint to the work of the Argos Collective in this regard is to be found in the

Arctic landscape photography of Subhankar Banerjee, who embeds his images of environmental degradation within a multi-platform architecture of media advocacy encompassing museums, websites, courtroom testimonies, and collaborative media campaigns with indigenous human rights activists. See McKee, "Survival."

12. Although his immediate points of reference are the Balkan and Rwandan genocides of the 1990s, Michel Feher's *Powerless by Design: The Age of the International Community* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2000) is relevant to any invocation of "the international community" as a kind of sanctimonious moral authority lacking in any actual initiative for preventative, protective, or ameliorative intervention on behalf of those suffering at the hands of abusive regimes. The gradual and causally dispersed nature of climate-related displacement is obviously not comparable to genocidal persecution, but the basic dialectic of moral alarm and practical indifference on the part of powerful states and organizations remains relevant to the plight of climate refugees.