CHAPTER THREE

WHO NEEDS FAMILY? I'VE GOT THE WHOLE WORLD ON MY SHOULDERS: HOW THE DOCTOR’S NON-DOMESTICITY INTERRUPTS HISTORY

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To be domestic. To be domesticated. Two slightly different phrases with different, yet related senses: to be domestic is, according to the Oxford English Dictionary, to be “at home,” “familiar,” and in a “family” (2nd ed., 1989). The phrase brings to mind giggling children, crackling logs in brick fireplaces, and well-read books resting on thick comforters. Unlike the cozy connotations of “domestic,” to be domesticated ushers in a series of grave political issues. The OED defines domesticate as “to naturalize,” “to civilize,” and to “attach to home and its duties.” This second phrase suggests that the option of domesticity may be less a “personal” choice, and more a socialization process intent on limiting freedom.

The Doctor of the 2005 series is not domestic. This is obvious, and perhaps not that interesting, except for the fact that Russell T. Davies has, arguably, gone to extreme lengths to accentuate his non-domesticity as a critique of the obsessive human tendency to domesticate the world, both ideologically and more concretely through colonialism.

The ultimate form of domesticity is imperialism, a rationalizing ideology that justifies its more concrete counterpart, colonialism (McLeod 2000, 7). Colonialism might be defined as an obsession with homemaking, that is, forcing all places into a home for an imperial self. This is interesting first because of Great Britain’s imperial past and present, which I see Doctor Who as in part effecting on the level of content and form, and, second, for what it says about the nature of violence. Since the Doctor is above all a time traveler, I address the issue of imperialism’s domesticating violence within the context of history. I argue that it is because the Doctor cannot be “naturalize[d],” or made “familiar” (OED), that he disrupts those stories which are too quickly writ large as history. As David Tennant’s Doctor puts it, in the 2006 series, “Who needs family? I’ve got the whole world on my shoulders” (“The Age of Steel”).

It is best to begin at the beginning, even though Doctor Who puts every “beginning” in scare quotes. In this case, the beginning I have in mind is the first episode from the 2005 series (the Doctor Who canon is enormous and, admittedly, unmanageable at this point, therefore what follows deals exclusively with the post-2005 Who). In “Rose,” written by Davies, Rose Tyler and the Doctor first meet in the midst of an enemy invasion of Earth. The name of this villain? The Doctor refers to it as a “Nestene Consciousness.”

Throughout “Rose,” the Doctor is harsh on humans, attacking a terrestrial existence characterized by food, sleep, television, and obliviousness to the “war” being fought all around them. When the Doctor invites Rose on board the TARDIS, he explains that she has the option to travel anywhere in time and space, or choose the mundane, which, for Rose, entails remaining on Earth and finding another dead-end job. Ultimately, in this episode, it is Rose’s lack of a job, future, or A-levels—that is, her lack of success at being “at home” or domestic—that compels her to take action against the Nestene Consciousness.

When Mickey is transformed by a malevolent plastic trash can, the Doctor, busy trying to save “every stupid ape” on the planet, hardly notices. What’s more, he tells Rose to leave the “domestics outside” when she and Mickey, discovered to be still alive, are noisily commiserating. Apparently, the Doctor can only think in generalities and loses sight of the particular as he attempts to save the world for the hundredth time. Even so, in the “Rose” episode it would seem that the problem is less the particular than the way that the particular is linked to the domestic scene. Here the Doctor’s enemy is a “consciousness” whose primary activity is nest[ing],” making it logically consistent for him to criticize Rose for exhibiting a self-centered nesting consciousness.

Who is the Doctor if he is not a nesting consciousness? And what does this term or state of being suggest? In another conversation with Rose, he reminds her of the first time she heard that the world was “turning,” and how remarkable that knowledge was “because everything looks like it is standing still.” But then, remarkably, she forgot this truth, while the Doctor is incapable of forgetting it. The Doctor “feel[s]” the “turn of the earth” and “ground beneath [his] feet spinning.” He says, “We are falling through space, you and me, clinging to the skin of this tiny little world,
and if we let go..." [original's pause].

With this conversation in mind, a nesting consciousness appears to be an entity that is incapable of living with movement, that likes identity to be grounded, desires stasis and domesticates chaos, and, as the example of the "nesting consciousness" indicates, inevitably creates violence as it domesticates space. By contrast, the Doctor's consciousness does not nest; it does not force reality into neat, static boxes, but remains forever alive to the dynamic movement of the world. As his "final" comment to Rose suggests—"That's who I am. Now, forget me, Rose Tyler. Go home" (my emphasis)—the Doctor considers his own being to be just as difficult to bear for humans. Forgetting the Doctor is linked with domesticity, an erasure of reality because that is what humans do when faced with chaos.

The entire first series is framed by the fairy tale of the "Three Little Pigs," a.k.a., "Bad Wolf." In "The Parting of the Ways," the Doctor and all humans on Earth are about to be destroyed by the Daleks. Worried about Rose's safety, the Doctor sends her home in the TARDIS. Back in her own time, Rose is despondent, even while Mickey and her mother try to make her feel at home. They try to sell her on Earth, on eating chips and having a "proper life," but she will not have it. At the moment that Mickey is wooing Rose with a proper [domestic] life, Rose looks up and sees "BAD WOLF" written in front of her on the pavement. In the typical version of this tale, the wolf destroys the first two pig's homes, only to be killed in the end by the third pig. But in Doctor Who, the "Bad Wolf" functions not as an enemy, but a reminder of the dangers of domestic life. "Bad Wolf" keeps Rose from the naturalization that is synonymous with domesticity. Here "naturalization" points to the process by which aliens become socialized into a new communal home. However, I am also gesturing toward its use in ideological theory: If something is naturalized, it is not questioned. Who, after all, questions that which is natural, biological, or grounded in God? Such things are common sense (Althusser 1994, 119, 129).

By contrast to a proper life, the Doctor's identity is open-ended, not naturalized. He has a name, but he does not share it. He is simply the Doctor. Following the overt allusion to 1988's The Last Temptation of Christ (the last temptation being the temptation to lead a normal, domestic life), the writers of Doctor Who have connected the Doctor's non-domesticity explicitly to divinity ("The Family of Blood"). It is difficult not to see the Doctor as god-like in the manner in which his core identity takes on many different personas (and even—based on the conversation regarding the Doctor's regeneration in "The Parting of the Ways"—seems to change itself at its core). While a typical notion of the Cartesian subject is that it is localized, focused around a center of being, the Doctor seems to exist with no fixed center. His various faces suggest a dynamic center, and when, as eventually happens, we see two Doctors on the screen at the same time, it is difficult not to see him as complicating identity in much the same way as some Trinitarian notions of God. Such theories suggest that the Judeo-Christian God is much more linked and affected by the world than traditional notions of God warrant.1 Such a Trinitarian God exists in a non-exclusive relation to others as befits a God with no home, no walls to shield "him" from otherness.

It is worth asking whether this state of non-domesticated being is an "essential" fact of the Doctor, or whether this state of being is a product of the traumatic destruction of Gallifrey? In other words, if the Doctor still had a home world (and family), would he embody a critique of domesticity? Or, must we see Gallifrey in its prime as a home that is defined by an essential homelessness? Clearly, the answer to the latter question is negative based on our experience of the Master, who, in his domestication of space, is as obsessive as a Dalek.

Of course, the Doctor still has a "home" that predates the trauma of his home world's loss and whose nature is telling. As a home, the TARDIS violates domestic or metaphysical notions of an inside and an outside, which have historically operated in Western thought as domesticating metaphors (the inside of the TARDIS is larger than the outside, and this is the epitome of horror for many—consider Mark Z. Danielewski's House of Leaves). Along with this strange spatiality, the TARDIS travels not only in time, but also through space, serving as a concrete metaphor for the Doctor's own essential groundlessness. In fact, the TARDIS suggests that the Doctor appears to have always experienced the world as in constant flux—trauma and turmoil over the destruction of Gallifrey aside.

The TARDIS represents how humans exist in the world. The Western tradition has generally tried to remove humans from existence by privileging a god-like individual whose basic nature implies that it has no relation, no connection with anything outside of itself (Nancy 1991, 4). This monadic, domesticated self then became the basis for a whole series of binary oppositions and exclusions. Given that the TARDIS's exterior is a police box, it for that reason suggests order, control, and the law. In short, as a box, as a home, as an object connected with the police, it should operate as an image of this individualistic and exclusionary Western tradition. But within that box, we find all of these things bracketed by scare quotes.

This police box cannot police anything in a simple manner, because policing requires borders with insides and outs, and this police box
questions all such spatial constructions. The TARDIS embodies on the outside how we look as supposedly monadic and non-relational individuals. Once we step inside, we realize that the inside appears to be on the outside; if the exterior walls are in fact the size that they appear to be, the inside is on the outside. In the work of Jean-Luc Nancy, this sort of spatiality—in which the self finds itself outside itself and in others—is an indication of the breakdown of the Cartesian individual (Nancy 1991, 19). This breakdown demonstrates how essentially social and un-domesticated our identities are no matter how high our home’s walls.

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The Doctor is provided with many villains who operate like the “Nestene Consciousness” as figures of domesticity. In “The End of the World,” his foil is the “last human,” an utterly selfish, purity-obsessed person who will do anything to live forever. When she dies, the Doctor states simply that everything dies. The Davros era overflows with such enemies: there is the god of the Daleks at the end of the first series who claims that he is immortal, and the family in “The Family of Blood” that wants to “consume” the Doctor so that each one of them will live forever. The latter example is telling because it connects the family to immortality, and all of its related corollaries: domesticity, exclusion, and violence.

Daleks, as the Doctor’s primary foil, represent domesticity to the extreme. Daleks never leave their “homes,” but roll around tank-like, peering xenologically at the world from behind small picture windows. Purity and the eradication of difference is their defining obsession. Theirs, clearly, is a world of simple insides and outsides. Their obsession with a purifying symmetry is ironic (or, rather, unsurprising) as their actual bodies are far, far from symmetrical, but look instead like a mélange of different and indifferent body parts. Not only do Daleks never leave their homes, they also want to domesticate the universe in their own image, that is, in conformity to their illusory symmetrical conception of their being. Their law—lex—must be made to work here—da—and everywhere is here for the Daleks.

The best example of Dalek control of domestic space occurs in “Bad Wolf” where humans (often) gladly participate in murderous reality television programs. Beamed into one of the house programs, the Doctor is shocked to find how easily humans have bought into a system predicated on their own control and the death of themselves and others. One “contestant” is so controlled by the game that he believes that the Doctor is a “plant, only brought in to stir things up.” The Daleks control viewing habits at home, but also are able to choose contestants at will from among the human populace, whether in public or in the privacy of their own home. One show similar to Big Brother makes clear the importance of home for the Daleks: to be evicted from the home is to be literally murdered. By controlling others’ homes, the Dalek Emperor has essentially made his own home secure. Having said that, this correspondence between eviction and death clearly underwrites all Dalek ideology.

By desiring to be at home, Dalek ideology violently others everyone else. Ultimately, the best way to think of the Dalek species is to see it as an imperial power as it spreads across and domesticates the universe. They are quite the opposite of everything that the TARDIS represents. While the TARDIS demonstrates how identities are connected to others even when borders appear insurmountable (remember: the inside is bigger than the outside), Dalek identity will always be on the side of the impassable border. The notion that the self is connected to and owes its identity to others is “blasphemy,” according to the Daleks in “The Parting of the Ways.” The fact that the Daleks exist to elide the complex identitarian metaphor that is the TARDIS is vividly demonstrated in “Doomsday” (2006) when the Daleks use TARDIS technology to mount an offensive against Earth. Their power is built upon the control of everything that the TARDIS reveals about identity.

Against the monolithic Dalek Empire, the Doctor affirms the importance and, implicitly, the ethics of transience, as does Rose. In “The Parting of the Ways,” Rose adopts the powers of (and beyond) a Time Lord and says, “everything must come to dust; all things. Everything dies.” If immortality is connected to domesticating violence, living in the face of mortality appears to impede the violence of Daleks and those like them. The Doctor is not immortal; he simply appears to be so. His regenerations are just as much markers of transience and change as they are suggestive of permanence. At his core, in other words, the Doctor embodies the chaos and mortality that domesticity seeks to elide as it reaches toward immortality. But it is probably inaccurate to emphasize either end of the opposition—mortality or divinity—because one without the other is more liable to be domesticated and, certainly, the series has been intent on emphasizing both simultaneously.

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Faced with this considerable theorization and critique of domesticity, how does the Doctor’s difference from domestic ideology make a
difference in terms of history? And, secondly, how does *Doctor Who*, the series, make a difference in terms of its content and form in the lives of its viewers?

In the first season, "The Long Game" deals most directly with narrative and history during the "Fourth Great and Bountiful Human Empire." The Jagraffess and its human proxy, the Editor, control all information in the "human empire" through a sort of mega CNN media station (of course, as we learn later in "Bad Wolf," the Dalek Emperor is controlling them). The episode is a commentary on how the centralization of information leads to homogeneity and a non-thinking populace. As Cathica, one of the workers, explains, they do not merely "broadcast" the news, "We are the news. We're the journalists. We write it, package it, and sell it [...] Nothing happens in the whole human empire without going through us." Even this underlying understands (without understanding) that the real world is not being represented in Satellite 5's news channels. She already understands that the broadcasters are representing themselves and implicitly filtering out a much more dynamic reality.

The human proxy for the Jagraffess states, "We can rewrite history" and keep humans from ever developing. History, in this sense, is understood to be a construct, a creation of those in power, which is wielded in such a manner that the status quo power structure is never questioned. The Editor explains, "For almost a hundred years mankind has been shaped and guided, his knowledge and ambition strictly controlled by its broadcast news, edited by my superior." All events are filtered through this media station. Information is molded, revised in a manner that is most useful for those in power. If humans are the sum total of our information inputs, this is an amazing power because this narrative builds invisible walls around human actions. To what end? For the Jagraffess, the purpose is primarily life support, that is, its need for a stable, properly air-conditioned home. For bankers, this control creates lucrative opportunities. For the Dalek Empire, it means domesticating control of humans. Inextricably connected with this domesticating work, Satellite 5 is used to "create a climate of fear" that makes closing the borders to the outside much easier. The resultant absence of outsiders such as, for example, the Doctor assists in stabilizing the power structure.

The Doctor enters this world and almost immediately can tell that something is wrong. His "history is perfect," he says, as it should be: he has seen this (as opposed to a parallel) Earth at the point of its death. Setting aside his own potentially subjective point of view, the Doctor has empirical knowledge of the real history of the Earth as opposed to that filtered by Satellite 5. Based on his surroundings, he explains that humans have been set back a hundred years.

When the Doctor enters the scene, the power structure immediately realizes that something is wrong, "something fictional." In this context, that means that the real has somehow not been representationally domesticated in accordance with power. How could it be when a very real space-time ship has just materialized across borders that were supposed to be impermeable? Confused, this power structure, which has every "fact" in its memory banks, does not even notice the Doctor at first, taking an undercover anarchist to floor 500 instead. He and Rose are "no one," we are told repetitively, and this appears to be part of the reason that they are not at first noted. Indeed, once they are discovered, the Editor, in amazement, says, "how can you walk through the world and not leave a single footprint?" The Editor goes on to explain, "Knowledge is power," making the point that the Doctor, being "unknown," is therefore dangerous. Hence, the Editor's repeated question: "Tell me who you are?"

Faced with the ideological control of Satellite 5, the Doctor does not take on these corrupt shapers of history in a head-on manner. He attacks oppression by remaining other to the system. His alien identity cannot be naturalized, domesticated, or narrated, and this is the worst possible ally for an enemy who exercises ideological control through narrative. The Doctor impedes the domesticating narrative, not only because the narrative cannot digest the Doctor, but also because the entire narrative becomes denaturalized. People around the Doctor begin to see that they are trapped in a narrative of life that is not natural, but constructed. The naïve and opportunistic Cathica, when confronted with the Doctor's idiosyncratic way of being, begins to ask incisive journalistic questions. She begins to think for herself.

How, then, does the Doctor constitute a difference? He enters History, which makes possible the home of the Jagraffess, and in so doing punches a hole in its narrative walls. The Doctor is that which disturbs domesticating narratives and suggests that things are not quite that simple. He is that which demonstrates the limits and dangers of the rationalizing mind. He is that alienating event that cannot be rationalized and put to work by power.

While the Doctor is combating the Jagraffess, the supposed genius Adam is capitalizing on history in a similar fashion. Using Rose's jury-rigged cell phone, he phones home with a message inclusive of the entire historical development of the microprocessor. Adam's dream for power is much the same as that of the Jagraffess. He wants to be gloriously at home in the world, but, just like the Jagraffess, fails in his power grab. Adam gets in over his head and cannot quite handle the forbidden fruit, cannot handle
having an information port placed in the middle of his forehead. Instead of
being able to create a seamless domestic space through historical narrative,
Adam is left with a giant hole. This liminal space points to the spatially
described earlier; the hole demonstrates the impossibility of being at home
in the world—the impossibility of living behind walls (Nancy 1991, 19).

Based on this close content-level analysis of the first series, if the
Doctor is a doctor, he does not make us whole. He demonstrates, instead,
the dangers of wholeness, which is merely another word for domesticity.
He shows us how wholeness does not stop at the borders of the self,
because these borders do not exist; they are open like exploded diagrams
in a car repair manual, or like the interior of a TARDIS.

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The above analysis does not touch on any of the formal aspects of
*Doctor Who*, which are arguably just as crucial as content in the
reproduction of ideology. As John Fiske argues in *Television Culture*, a
realistic television program:

...is ‘realistic,’ not because it reproduces reality, which it clearly does
not, but because it reproduces the dominant sense of reality. We can thus
call television an essentially realistic medium because of its ability to carry
a socially convincing sense of the real. Realism is not a matter of any
fidelity to an empirical reality, but of the discursive conventions by which
and for which a sense of reality is constructed (Fiske 1987, 21).

How does realistic television reproduce this reality effect? By doing
everything it can to suggest that it is an “unmediated picture of external
reality.” Realistic television hides its constructed nature—its status as a
historical-cultural artifact—and contextualizes its representation as
“natural” and in this way does the sort of ideological work that bolsters the
status quo. In general, this sort of foregrounding of artifice or
constructedness is a crucial content-level theme in the new *Doctor Who*.
Indeed, the series provides its own thematicization of the problem of a
mediation that is naturalized into forgetfulness (or domesticity). But the
series also does much on the formal level to undermine the work of
realism.

“The Long Game” opens with Rose playfully deceiving Adam. The
TARDIS has just materialized, and she reports on their space and time as
if she were a Time Lord. In fact, she had just been informed of their
coordinates by the Doctor seconds earlier (crucially, we see them construct the news that will then be taken for unmediated truth). And, she

and the Doctor are wrong. The world they describe does not match their
narrative. This same disjunction between representation and the real is the
subject of the entire episode. By excessively reminding its viewer of
narratives and the distance between representation and the real, the
episode undermines its own realism. This narrative that would domesticate
us in order to provide a home for its own creator (to follow the Jagrafess
example), reminds us in its very form that it is artifice.

If the goal of realism is to produce the illusion of an “unmediated”
portrayal of reality, this illusion also founders in “Bad Wolf” as the Doctor
and his companions find themselves on television shows reminiscent of
*The Weakest Link*, and *What Not to Wear*, and *Big Brother*. To view a
television show, which represents its main characters as viewers of and
participants on television, is to dissolve the illusion of realism. It
foregrounds our own position as outsiders, as viewers, and denies any easy
unthinking identification with the content of the show. By showing all of
the above and the behind-the-scenes-production of these shows reminds us
that what we see in front of us is a constructed thing, not a natural
creation.

*Doctor Who*, of course, is not a realistic television program, as many
have noted. While the above analysis remains operative, *Doctor Who* is
(most of the time) science fiction, and science fiction operates much
differently than realism, as Darko Suvin explains in his *Metamorphoses of
Science Fiction* (1979, 8). He writes,

*SF* [science fiction] *is, then, a literary genre whose necessary and
sufficient conditions are the presence and interaction of estrangement and
cognition, and whose main formal device is an imaginative framework
alternative to the author’s empirical environment (original’s emphasis).

Suvin’s point then is that the essence of science fiction is denaturalization.
By showing us another “empirical” world, science fiction allows us to
cognitively leave home, and imagine that our “empirical” home could be
different than it is. We are unsettled, estranged from our homes, and are
thereby able to grasp the possibility of changing our own world (because,
clearly, it is now no longer the only natural option). Other worlds with
differently different social organizations are constantly on view in *Doctor Who*,
so this argument appears to work.

Suvin takes pains to show how the mixing of mythic elements with
science fiction undermines this estranging work as religious thematizations
imply another world that is, yes, a foil, but also eternal and unchanging.
Such a mythification of science fiction undermines the radical reinterrogation
of reality that Suvin understands as the essence of science fiction. Suvin
sees science fiction as a genre that brings its viewers and readers to an awareness of the “variable” nature of reality; mythic elements are imbued with “constant[e]” and, even, “authoritarian social norms” by contrast (1979, 27, 35). There is much evidence of this sort of mythic fixing of reality in the 2005 series: Floor 500 in “The Long Game” is mythologized as a place with walls of gold, and the Jagraffess is “holy.” In “Bad Wolf,” people are “chosen” from the population to be contestants as if they are being swept off to heaven, and we should not forget that the Dalek behind all of this considers itself God, and forbids the very mention of racial mixing. Power does like to naturalize itself, or, in this case, eternalize itself so that it is beyond question.

But what about the Doctor? While the Doctor is not God or a god, he is often thematized as such. Even if he is a god, he is a god that has absconded, escaping any human assimilation to myth (it is almost as if Davies is attempting to dramatize the consequences of two different types of religiosity). Neither is the Doctor some simple “empirical”—to use Suvin’s word—reality. In science fiction, Suvin has in mind the juxtaposition of two very concrete worlds whose juxtaposition allows our “real” world to be rethought. The Doctor, who has no home world, is a paradoxical power: he is “mythic” and yet “empirical” at the same time. Arguably, this complexity leads to an even more profound denaturalization as he cannot neatly fit into any dualistic system that would make sense of his being. It is this classificatory confusion that interrupts history, and opens us up to other stories.

In his afterword, Davies writes that while Doctor Who: The Inside Story is a history of the show, “there is no such thing as history. There’s just people. All with different voices, all talking and remembering [...] each one colouring the history of Doctor Who with their own personality” (Davies 2006, 254). Davies understands that history is just a story, reflective of its writer’s perspective, not a cozy, domesticated history beyond question. Davies explicitly discusses the importance of “demythify[ing]” TV, showing, in other words, that Doctor Who and television in general are not natural growths, but the result of an artificial process in which many men and women participate. His description of the Doctor Who set is telling: the crew behind Doctor Who Confidential stalks out one corner, the crew behind Blue Peter invades the other corner, while David Tennant is ready at any instant to whip out his own camcorder. Sharing the creative process with the public in this manner, “opens up TV.” It is a “demicritism[ing] [...] process.” Multiple levels of narrating and publicizing Doctor Who reveal how very constructed, open, and democratic the final product is. “[A]nyone can do this job!” he writes, and he appears to mean it.

CHAPTER FOUR

BENEVOLENT WHOGEMONY: DOCTOR WHO AND THE TRANSMEDIAL TIME TRAVELER

JOSHUA LOUIS MOSS

People assume that time is a strict progression of cause to effect. But actually, from a non-linear, non-subjective viewpoint, it's more like a big bull of wibbly wobbly... time-y wimey... stuff.
—David Tennant, Doctor Who (“Blink” 2005)

Time flies like an arrow. Fruit flies like a banana.
—Groucho Marx

Every child has heard that famous cliché, “time flies when you’re having fun.” The child is taught this as an expression of empowerment. Time’s ability to “fly,” to be mediated and controlled, is within the grasp of any child who is willing and able to “have fun.” This figures an understanding of time without a fixed temporal rhythm imposed upon the child by an outside structure. Instead, time is posited as a spatial journey with active participation, a journey of “flight” guided and controlled by the agency of human subjectivity. The child is taught that time can deviate from its normative rhythms. Time can be controlled, sped up and slowed down. This ability is invoked when one ceases to be regulated by the linearity of the apparatus (the clock) and the quantification of imposed structures of time segments, like chores, schooling and parental dictates.

In the similarly playful language of Groucho Marx, quoted above, the concept of time’s “flight” becomes a commentary on the limitations of the descriptive metaphor. When the scientist states that, “time flies like an arrow,” he is attempting to describe complex ephemera through simplified visual analogy. For the scientist, “time,” that which we can neither see nor direct, moves like an arrow, a signifier of controlled spatial direction. By placing the emphasis on the word “flies,” Marx exposes the limits of
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and Regenerations,
Perigrinations,
Ruminations,