

Brave New Weird:
Anthropocene Monsters in Jeff VanderMeer's
The Southern Reach

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Abstract

This paper investigates and compares language and imagery used by contemporary ecocritics in order to argue that the Anthropocene discourse contains significant parallels to cosmic horror discourse and (new) weird literature. While monsters from the traditional, Lovecraftian weird lend themselves well to Anthropocene allegory due to the coinciding fear affect in both discourses, the new weird genre experiments with ways to move beyond cosmic fear, thereby reimagining the human position in the context of the Anthropocene. Jeff VanderMeer's trilogy *The Southern Reach* (2014) presents an alien system of assimilation and ecological mutation into which the characters are launched. It does this in a manner that brings into question human hierarchical coexistence with nonhumans while also exposing the ineffectiveness of current existential norms. This paper argues that new weird stories such as VanderMeer's are able to rework and dispel the fearful paralysis of cosmic horror found in Lovecraft's literature and of Anthropocene monsters in ecocritical debate. *The Southern Reach* and the new weird welcome the monstrous as kin rather than enemy.

Keywords

Anthropocene, climate change, ecology, climate fiction, horror, weird, Jeff VanderMeer

The Thing cannot be described—there is no language for such abysses of shrieking and immemorial lunacy, such eldritch contradictions of all matter, force, and cosmic order. . . . The Thing of the idols, the green, sticky spawn of the stars, had awaked to claim his own. . . . After vintillions of years great Cthulhu was loose again, and ravening for delight.

—H. P. Lovecraft
“The Call of Cthulhu”

Although our contemporary monsters may not resemble those in Lovecraft’s imagination, we nevertheless live today with the very Lovecraftian awareness of the looming spectre of sudden apocalypse.

—Carl H. Sederholm and Jeffrey Andrew
Weinstock
The Age of Lovecraft

In the 2013 article “Love Your Monsters,” Bruno Latour evokes one of cultural history’s most famous monsters: the creature in Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein*. Dr. Victor Frankenstein’s monster is so well-known and over-appropriated that it is beyond cliché, but the story still evokes feelings of dread, pity, shame, and foreboding almost two centuries after its publication. Consumed by delusions of grandeur, Dr. Frankenstein believes he can trick the forces of God and Nature and give life to the dead, but abandons his creature in disgust and fear once it is born. Dr. Frankenstein’s creature, as Latour notes, is frequently used as “an all-purpose modifier” for technological or environmental crimes (21). However, Latour argues that not only do we often confuse the creature for its creator, we have also “forgotten Frankenstein’s real sin . . . he *abandoned the creature to itself*” (21; ellipsis added; emphasis added). In one of the scenes from Shelley’s novel, the creature explains to its master that it only truly became a monster after its creator left it: “I was benevolent and good; misery made me a fiend” (Shelley 291). Latour therefore reads Dr. Frankenstein’s sin as a “parable for political ecology,” because like Frankenstein, “our sin is not that we created technologies but that we failed to love and care for them” (“Love” 21).

“Love Your Monsters” joins a cornucopia of critical, journalistic, and scholarly work from the past decade dealing with the “Anthropocene” (literally “the human age”), which in August 2016 was formally recommended by environmental scientists as the name of the planet’s current geological epoch (Carrington n. pag.). Latour

connects Anthropocene issues like climate change and global warming to the image of the monster, rejuvenating the old “warning” of *Frankenstein* by pointing out that it is not the monster itself we should fear, but Frankenstein’s negligence of it. Just like Dr. Frankenstein, humanity has turned away in dread, shame, and self-righteousness at the birth (and growth) of their own many-headed monsters: global climate change, deforestation, mass pollution, and species extinction.

To overcome the “terror of trespassing Nature” (“Love” 24), Latour emphasizes the importance of a global shift in mentality from the modernist fable of emancipation from nature, to *attachment to nature*: in the age of the Anthropocene we must learn to take care of our monsters. Ecocritic Timothy Clark also evokes the figure of the monster when he recalls Thomas Hobbes’s famous Leviathan as a metaphor for humans in the Anthropocene. As he writes, however, “the tragic environmental Leviathan” representing the planetary force of humanity is more like a “psychopath” compared to Hobbes’s mighty figure, which represented the new, liberal commonwealth of seventeenth-century Britain (Clark 15). Prevalent as it is in recent discussions on the Anthropocene, the contemporary fascination with the monstrous is also ubiquitous in critical cultural analysis, and has been much discussed in, for instance, feminist discourse.¹ Donna Haraway’s iconic 1992 article “The Promises of Monsters” is particularly important in this regard, as she uses there the monster figure as an allegorical means to move beyond thinking in binary oppositions,² thereby establishing herself as one of the first cultural theorists to argue that culture and nature are deeply intertwined, rather than separated, sites of knowledge (“Promises” 66). Both Latour and Clark (and as we shall see many others) argue that a similar shift away from the (“Western”) modernist, binary-ridden way of thinking about the world is necessary if Anthropocene issues such as climate change are to be tackled. The monster thus emerges as a figure through which differences can be productively re-examined. Philosopher Stephen T. Asma likewise calls the monstrous a “cultural category” (13), and Marina Levina and Diem-My T. Bui go as far as to call monstrosity a “condition of the twenty-first century” (2).³ The realm of monsters is the realm of individual and cultural (mis)representation, (literary) imagination, psychology, morality, and essentially—as Haraway reminds us—difference.

¹ See for instance Rosi Braidotti, “Signs”; Margit Shildrick, *Embodying the Monster*.

² I here use “binary opposition” as Jacques Derrida defines the term: a “classical philosophical opposition” run by “a violent hierarchy” in which “[o]ne of the two terms governs the other (axiomatically, logically, etc.)” (41).

³ See also W. Scott Poole, *Monsters*.

I have dwelt on monsters for a while because I want to argue that it is in the conceptualized, tension-fraught space between that which is (perceived as) “real” and “normal” and that which is (perceived as) “imagined” and “weird,” that “Anthropocene monsters” can be found. Although Anthropocene monsters have kinship with Frankenstein’s creature as it is read by Latour, they are more closely related to what Timothy Morton calls “hyperobjects”—events and objects such as global warming that are massively and unfathomably distributed in time and space, (*Hyperobjects* 1). Morton’s hyperobjects are monstrous because, by encompassing and affecting the planet and humanity while simultaneously vastly exceeding human time, space, and comprehension, they evoke an “oppressive, claustrophobic horror” (132). Morton at one point uses H. P. Lovecraft’s iconic monster Cthulhu to elucidate the scary nature of hyperobjects:

By understanding hyperobjects, human thinking has summoned Cthulhu-like entities into social, psychic, and philosophical space. The contemporary philosophical obsession with the monstrous provides a refreshing exit from human-scale thoughts. It is extremely healthy to know not only that there are monstrous beings, but that there are beings that are not purely thinkable, whose being is not directly correlated with whatever thinking is. (64)

Lovecraft’s Cthulhu is famous for the cosmic horror it represents; its vast proportions and inconceivable existence make humans feel powerless and insignificant in comparison. Like Latour and many other (eco)critics discussing the Anthropocene, Morton argues that the scale on which we conceive of the world should expand. *Hyperobjects* moreover contains several references to the horror genre,⁴ and Morton constantly comes back to the dread evoked by hyperobjects. As will be shown below, delving into current ecocriticism reveals a prevalence of horror-evocative words, and fear and paralysis emerge as the most important emotional reactions when confronting Anthropocene issues.

Building on Morton’s hyperobjects, I introduce “Anthropocene monsters” as a term that invites us to read monsters of cosmic horror such as Lovecraft’s Cthulhu as metaphors for ecological issues like climate change. Academics and (eco)critics discussing Anthropocene issues often use words and imagery associated with fear,

⁴ Notably David Lynch’s *Twin Peaks* (30), *The X-Files* (106), and China Miéville’s *Perdido Street Station* (175).

comparable to (cosmic) horror-apocalyptic imagery in the “weird” literary tradition of Lovecraft. Lovecraft’s stories have, moreover, seen an upsurge in popularity almost simultaneously with the rise of the Anthropocene discourse—alongside the development of “new weird.” Crudely put, traditional weird fiction, closely tied to Lovecraft, is all about encounters with, and subsequent escapes from, inconceivable, monsters whose mere existence drives people mad (Cthulhu). The *new* weird has adopted the cosmic horror of the old weird, but typically approaches it in different ways; often it is more about researching, articulating, and *embracing* the monster rather than escaping it. This paper will therefore analyze and compare the horror-evocative language of recent works of ecocriticism and cultural criticism to Jeff VanderMeer’s new weird trilogy *The Southern Reach*, to underline the parallels between contemporary cosmic horror narrative and the Anthropocene discourse. The paper argues from the standpoint that while Lovecraft’s monsters lend themselves well to Anthropocene allegory due to the coinciding fear affect, the new weird movement experiments with ways to move beyond cosmic fear. As such, the (sub)genre of new weird seems promising for future ecocritical thought.

Monsters and the Anthropocene

Jeffrey Jerome Cohen attempts to establish a “method of reading cultures from the monsters they engender” (3). As he writes, “monsters ask us how we perceive the world . . . [how] to reevaluate our cultural assumptions about race, gender, sexuality, our perception of difference, our tolerance towards its expression. They ask us why we have created them” (20; ellipsis added). The figure of the monster may thus be used to question, disturb, and alter the cultural conventions it helps us to analyze. To go back to the cliché: Frankenstein’s creature is often read, in allegorical terms, as the monstrous result of Western society’s technological hubris since the beginning of the Industrial Revolution (Shelley’s novel was published in 1818). But Shelley’s novel can also, as Latour suggests, be read as an eco-political parable, urging us to take care of, rather than fear, the monsters that we have unknowingly unleashed upon the planet: climate change, global warming, species extinction, pollution, deforestation, ecocide, and overpopulation. Enter Anthropocene monsters: the ominous, seemingly out-of-control creatures with the promise of apocalypse trailing behind them in the smog. As opposed to Frankenstein’s creature, they do not have voices of their own, and yet their questions are screaming to be heard. They not only ask us why we created them, but also how we can survive them.

In “Love Your Monsters” Latour emphasizes that the inherently (and inherited) modernist way of viewing the environment as the “reserve on which to discharge all bad consequences of collective modernizing actions” is the reason why for instance global warming is now being received with such paralysis and passivity: “The return of [environmental] consequences, like global warming, is taken as a contradiction, or even a monstrosity, which it is, of course, but *only according* to the modernist’s narrative of emancipation [from the natural world]” (26; emphasis in original). In other words, Latour suggests that confronting and treating Anthropocene issues necessitates a complete turnaround of typical binaries such as society and wilderness, human and nonhuman, as well as a reorientation away from the old modernist fable of human excellence towards a collective narrative of *attachment to* rather than *emancipation from* nature. What is interesting for the present paper is how literature, and particularly weird fiction, comes into play in such an attempted collective shift in contemplating the universe.

Although articles and books on the Anthropocene are virtually flowing out of press in all disciplines at the moment, and the term has been gaining traction within ecocriticism, there are only a handful of books that consider the role of literature in discussing Anthropocene issues. Adam Trexler ties Latour’s actor-network theory to the new literary genre climate fiction (more popularly called “cli-fi”), and writes in his conclusion of *Anthropocene Fictions* that climate change “changes the literary potentialities of setting, conflict, the organization of characters, and the fundamental way that diverse characters and nonhumans interact in narratives” (234). In *Ecocriticism on the Edge*, Timothy Clark wishes to deconstruct environmental criticism itself, impatient with the idealist notion often found among ecocritics that literature can “save the world.” Clark sees the Anthropocene as a concept which can more effectively help ecocritics and others expand and thereby improve their perception of the position of humans in the world and the environment. As he writes, the Anthropocene “enacts the demand to think of human life at much broader scales of space and time. . . . Perhaps too big to see or even to think straight (a “hyperobject,” certainly), the Anthropocene challenges us to rethink counter-intuitive relations of scale, effect, perception, knowledge, representation and calculability” (Clark 13; ellipsis added). Clark’s “counter-intuitive relations” (by which he means relations too large in scope or scale to fathom) should be read alongside Morton’s hyperobjects and “ecomimesis.”

In *Hyperobjects* but also in earlier and later works,⁵ Morton argues for a philosophical reconceptualization of the very concept of *nature* or *environment*. Also in *Hyperobjects*, the focus is on developing what Morton calls a “weird ecomimesis” (6). In *Ecology without Nature* (echoing the critique regarding binary- and Cartesian-dualistic thinking made by, among others, Latour and Haraway), Morton describes “ecomimesis,” or ecological writing, as a rhetorical device by which one attempts

to undo habitual distinctions between nature and ourselves. It is supposed not just to describe, but also to provide a working model for a dissolving of the difference between subject and object, a dualism seen as the fundamental philosophical reason for human beings’ destruction of the environment. If we could not merely figure out but actually *experience* the fact that we were embedded in our world, then we would be less likely to destroy it. (63-64; emphasis in original)

Weird ecomimesis, then, is the rhetorical device seeking to encompass hyperobjects in this non-dualistic way of thinking about existence—about *co*-existence. Morton actively refers to and treats both literature and various other art forms as examples of such ecomimesis in relation to the Anthropocene, and evokes the same question of scale as Clark when he argues that there has been a “gradual realization by humans that they are not running the show, at the very moment of their most powerful technical mastery on a planetary scale” (*Hyperobjects* 164). But in addition to Clark’s “counter-intuitive relations,” Morton shows (as Haraway and Latour do) that Anthropocene issues expose humanity as a geological agent *without agency*. This paradox is inflated by the historical habit of viewing nature in binary opposition to humanity, a view which the Anthropocene has finally revealed to be regressive. Therefore, Morton’s undoing of “habitual distinctions between nature and ourselves” can be read as one example of rethinking counter-intuitive relations, as Clark suggests. The issue of (larger) scales, of attempting to think outside the hubris-haunted box of humanity, of recognizing our attachment to—or as Morton would call it, *enmeshment* in (*The Ecological Thought* 28)—nonhuman entities from the most trivial act of eating a salad to contemplating the inconceivable cosmos, is a common denominator for Anthropocene-oriented ecocriticism. However, there are some who point out the weak points in this development in Anthropocene discourse.

⁵ *Ecology without Nature* (2007); *The Ecological Thought* (2010); *Dark Ecology* (2016).

Although clearly in favor of Anthropocene as a term, Claire Colebrook in *Death of the PostHuman* points out that the product of human imagination will always be *for* humans, even if it pretends to be otherwise: “The positing of an anthropocene era . . . deploys the idea of human imaging—the way we have already read an inhuman past in the earth’s layers—but does this by imagining a world in which humans will be extinct” (28; ellipsis added). Thus, claims Colebrook, any imagined future in which humanity is (going) extinct, just “like the thought of extinction itself—will always be *for us*, and are always co-opted by the narrative lures they fragment” (28). Colebrook, engaging specifically with the often paradoxical projection of human extinction in art and philosophy, nevertheless argues along the same lines as Latour, Clark, and Morton, calling for a global modification of largely human-centered histories, philosophies, sciences, and politics. As she argues, we talk about climate change, but “assume that the climate is what environs us, and that change—or the danger of change—needs to be calculated according to the degree to which it enables or precludes ongoing existence of humans” (22). It is clear, in other words, that the concept of the Anthropocene as perceived in ecocriticism and in the humanities in general, demands an attempt to think on a larger scale—preferably a scale that is planetary in scope. The question is whether such a broadening of the human attention is in any way possible, and how it can be productive.

Dissonant Discourse

The language of Clark, Colebrook, Morton, and Trexler is strikingly horror-evocative and apocalyptic. Clark uses words and terms like “bewildering” (9), “large-scale” (21), “crisis of scale and agency” (139), “destructive” (147), “Anthropocene disorder” (139-54), and “hopelessness” (154). Colebrook, critical of the strange paralysis exhibited when contemplating our own extinction, talks about “climactic terrors” (62), “sublime annihilation” (90), “malevolence” (137), and the Anthropocene as a “radical intrusion” (87). Morton, whose hyperobjects are essentially horror-evocative, applies terms like “ecological trauma” (9), “daunting, horrifying coincidence” (9), and “unreal, spectral” (194). Trexler, the more optimistic of the four, calls the Anthropocene “anticipatory” (1), “transformative” (5), “threatening” (95), and “complex” (220). The Anthropocene is thus on the one hand perceived as a time of disorientation and chaos, of overwhelming confusion and terrifying realizations; it demands a reorientation away from anthropocentrism and individualism, and its massive scope seems to require new definitions and ideals.

On the other hand, Clark and Colebrook (Trexler and Morton as well, but less explicitly) also discuss the odd general *lack* of reaction to the crises embedded in the Anthropocene in the world society at large—the extreme pole of which is represented by climate change deniers.⁶ More commonly, however, people appear to ignore or dismiss the issues presented by the Anthropocene due to the massive scale on which they play out. As Colebrook writes: “now that life appears to be in danger of disappearance, diminution or mutation beyond recognition, living humans indulge both in greater and greater insistence on the sanctity of life, *and* seem incapable of directly confronting the intensifying threats that menace the present” (186; emphasis in original). Clark explains this by using the term “Anthropocene disorder,” which he presents as the affliction caused when attempting to consider the enormous scale of the Anthropocene, and failing. Using the example of an SUV, Clark writes that scale effects “inhabit, contaminate and destabilize the meaning of an individual action or object such as an SUV, precisely in that its significance as an individual object is in a kind of suspense, depending on just how many other sources of pollution there are or may be” (142-43). Morton uses the even more trivial example of changing “a confounded light bulb” forcing him to think about global warming: “The enormity of very large finitude hollows out my decisions from the inside” (*Hyperobjects* 124). The dizzying sense of insignificance in other words causes a kind of cognitive dissonance when (not) dealing with Anthropocene issues, one that leads to either rejecting as false the information which caused the uncomfortable emotion (denial), or *trying* to act, but being forced to accept that the large-scale issues will remain inherently inconceivable and that therefore it is best to do nothing until we *do* understand more (paralysis).

Clark moreover “diagnoses” both Morton and Colebrook with the “Anthropocene disorder,” Morton due to his hyperbolic language (144), and Colebrook due to her “clash” in language. “Colebrook’s version of ‘Anthropocene disorder,’” writes Clark, “draws on the denunciatory force of more moralistic kinds of environmental ethic even while denying their plausibility,” which Clark suggests

⁶ Climate change deniers either refute that climate change and global warming are as serious as environmental scholars and politicians make them out to be, or reject the fact that human action significantly contributes to climate change and global warming (or both). An illustrative example is the United States Republican Senator James Inhofe, who brought a snowball to the Senate floor in February 2015 as evidence for his claim that global warming is “the greatest hoax ever perpetrated on the American people” (Nicky Wolfe, “Republican Senate” n. pag.). Or as Donald Trump said in a tweet on 19. February 2015: “Record setting cold and snow, ice caps massive! The only global warming we should fear is that caused by nuclear weapons—incompetent pols” (Trump n. pag.).

is due to the “unresolved and perhaps unresolvable conflicts revealed by thinking the world of the Anthropocene at different scales” (154). Interestingly, diagnosing academics with Anthropocene disorder is not unheard of in the environmental humanities. In a 2013 article in *cultural geographies*, Paul Robbins and Sarah A. Moore identify the condition “ecological anxiety disorder” (EAD) in certain academic communities as a result of “recent anxiety, discomfort, conflict, and ambivalence experienced by research scientists in fields confronting ecological novelty in a quickly-changing world” (4). The application of a clinical diagnosis normally used for mentally ill individuals to entire communities or a whole society might seem radical (and is certainly not scientifically correct), but it nevertheless says something about the general perception of Anthropocene issues as fearsome, monstrous, and threatening.

Engaging with Jacques Lacan’s psychoanalysis, Robbins and Moore suggest that by “directly confronting what we *want* as scientists and citizens and acknowledging where these desires put us relative to others in the world, we can begin to sort through what to measure and what to change, what to alter and what to preserve” (16; emphasis in original), and thereby move beyond the “phobias” and “anxious paralysis” caused by Anthropocene issues (12). In other words, there is an odd tension between the unproductive fear found in scholarly Anthropocene discourse, and the broader public response to Anthropocene issues as too big to concern them; in both cases, denial or paralysis appear to be the main resulting reactions. The most important reason for this paralysis seems to be the confrontation with planetary-size issues extending across space and time, and from which emerges, disruptively, the cosmic scale on which humans are asked to understand existence.

Underlying the Anthropocene discourse and the horror-evocative language in the works discussed here is thus the bracing question of human significance (Morton 7; Colebrook 12; Clark 198). This question, or challenge, is, I argue, the most important analogy between Anthropocene discourse and cosmic horror, because they can both be characterized by their use of human *insignificance* when faced with planetary- or cosmic-scale (Anthropocene) monsters—and, as we have seen, the fearful, panicked, impotent response elicited by them. It is therefore high time to introduce the specificities of the literary genre in which the insignificance of the human is the most important source of fear: namely weird fiction, of which Lovecraft was the pioneer.

The Weird Ecology of *The Southern Reach*

Literary critic and Lovecraft expert S. T. Joshi writes that the distinction of weird fiction is the shift in the “locus of horror from the terrestrial to the cosmic” (qtd. in Johnson 100). Brian Stableford notes that the tradition of cosmic horror can “be regarded as a heroic but doomed attempt [at communicating] the incommunicable” (71). Lovecraft was, of course, a forerunner in this style of writing, and his definition in “Supernatural Horror in Literature” is still influential:

The true weird tale has something more than secret murder, bloody bones, or a sheeted form clanking chains according to rule. A certain atmosphere of breathless and unexplainable dread of outer, unknown forces must be present; and there must be a hint, expressed with a seriousness and portentousness becoming its subject, of that most terrible conception of the human brain—a malign and particular suspension or defeat of those fixed laws of Nature which are our only safeguard against the assaults of chaos and the daemons of unplumbed space. (1043)

Lovecraft thus implies that the weird is the genre, and cosmic horror is the rhetorical device which the genre favours. Moreover, when Lovecraft writes of weird fiction, there is a sense that it is not supposed to be “just” horrible—that it can also be awesomely, terribly, beautiful. This suggests that Lovecraft believed there were deeper qualities to weird fiction than “merely” its ability to scare the reader.

In the introduction to *The Weird: A Compendium*, Ann and Jeff VanderMeer accordingly note that the weird can also contain “the strangely beautiful intertwined with terror” (n. pag.). Furthermore, the VanderMeers emphasize the strong connection between the weird and the monstrous: “The Weird can be transformative—sometimes literally—and it entertains monsters while not always see [sic] them as monstrous. *It strives for a kind of understanding even when something cannot be understood, and acknowledges that failure as sign and symbol of our limitations*” (“The Weird: An Introduction” n. pag.; emphasis added). The last part of this statement characterizes the weird as fiction that tries to think the unthinkable, and emphasizes, when read in the context of the Anthropocene, how the genre of (cosmic) horror can be valuable when contemplating for instance climate change. Moreover, it ties into monster studies and the general scholarly contention that monsters are metaphorical constructs that are used in different societies as

responses to cultural tensions, or as demands to re-evaluate or help (re)conceptualize assumptions or ideals.

Ann and Jeff VanderMeer have also edited a volume containing twenty-first century stories which they argue belong to the new weird, and Jeff VanderMeer defines it as follows:

New Weird is a type of urban, secondary-world fiction that subverts the romanticized ideas about place found in traditional fantasy, largely by choosing realistic, complex real-world models as the jumping off point for creation of settings that may combine elements of both science fiction and fantasy . . . [New Weird] has a visceral, in-the-moment quality that often uses elements of surreal or transgressive horror for its tone, style, and effects . . . [It is] acutely aware of the modern world, even if in disguise, but [is] not always overtly political.... (xvi; ellipses added)

To summarize and simplify, the “old” weird as defined (and partly developed) by Lovecraft, demands from a story first and foremost a sense of cosmic horror (described above), and the features of place, characters, and style are not emphasized, although the latter is perhaps hinted at by the characteristic wordy style that Lovecraft employs even in *Supernatural Horror in Literature*. The “new” weird does *not* emphasize cosmic horror as a necessary factor (although it is common), it involves a reaction to and movement away from traditional fantasy, and it requires a distinct urban or modern setting. Although Lovecraft’s Cthulhu has been evoked by both Morton and Haraway (and others), cosmic horror in the tradition of Lovecraft cannot seem to get *further* than the paralysis its monsters inflict. This is also a criticism offered by ecocritics such as Colebrook and Clark regarding reactions to Anthropocene issues. Levina and Bui’s observation in *Monster Culture in the 21st Century* is therefore pertinent:

We must see our ontologies reflected in the figure of the monster. But on the other hand, monstrosity as an imaginary also offers a possibility of monstrosity as a destabilizing change to the known regimes of truth. Precisely because monstrosity can never be, because it must exist in the future outside of the realm of the possible, it offers ways of becoming that are not known, not domesticated, and not appropriated by the existing discourses of power. (7)

This understanding of the monstrous reflects the upsurge of new weird fiction in the twenty-first century, which tends to use Lovecraft's established weird tradition (explicitly or implicitly) as motivation to move beyond the limits associated with the weird's cosmic horror. By close-reading VanderMeer's trilogy *The Southern Reach*, the remaining half of this paper will address how new weird fiction attempts to perform that shift in mentality proposed by Haraway in "Promises of Monsters" and Latour in "Agency in the Anthropocene": to break open binaries, question convention, and embrace, in Levina and Bui's words, other ways of becoming that are unknown, *weird*. As shown above, the Anthropocene discourse is full of monsters, brimming with imagery directly or indirectly tied to the (cosmically) monstrous. New weird fiction both incorporates and moves beyond this monstrous-apocalyptic way of thinking about the world.

The Strangling Fruit of Area X

The Southern Reach follows a set of characters whose fates intertwine through their relation with the mysterious "Area X," a land suffused in secrets since an alleged environmental catastrophe occurred there thirty years before the plot takes place. The Southern Reach is the name of the government research facility set up near the strange border to Area X, and all three books chiefly take place in or around the Southern Reach and Area X. *Annihilation*, the first volume, follows a woman known only as "the biologist," joining a psychologist, an anthropologist, and a surveyor on the twelfth (and last) expedition into Area X to try to decipher its secrets. It quickly becomes clear that whatever is happening on the other side of that strange border is not from Earth. *Authority* then takes on the perspective of John Rodriguez, known as "Control," who is sent to the Southern Reach as functioning director after the previous director disobeyed orders and joined the twelfth expedition in *Annihilation*, in guise as "the psychologist." *Acceptance* merges the viewpoints from several of the characters introduced in the previous two books: the biologist, Control, the previous director Gloria, the biologist's doppelgänger Ghost Bird, and the old lighthouse keeper Saul Evans. The third book also merges past and present, all the while building up to finally solving, or perhaps getting solved by, the mystery of Area X.

The first sentence of VanderMeer's trilogy sets the tone of the books: "The tower, which was not supposed to be there, plunges into the earth in a place just before the pine forest begins to give way to swamp and then the reeds and wind-gnarled trees of the marsh flats" (*Annihilation* 3). The ominous sense of something which is

not supposed to be is combined with the picture of pristine wilderness, creating an uncanny expectation of what is to come. Upon entering the “Tower,” the biologist breathes in spores from the florescent fungi covering the inner, flesh-like wall of the tower, fungi forming strange sentences, and this contamination triggers a form of organic transformation in her which is linked to the later creation of her doppelgänger. Area X appears to be the attempt by an alien entity to colonize and improve Earth by way of biological decomposition and subsequent cyclic reproduction. As Whitby, one of the researchers at the Southern Reach, notes in a report: “Area X has been created by an organism left behind by a civilization so advanced and so ancient and so alien to us and our own intent and our own thought processes that it has long since left us behind, left everything behind” (*Acceptance* 209). The driving force behind the transformative process of Area X is a monstrous alien slowly sliding its way down to the center of the Tower while ceaselessly “writing” the florescent, fungal sentences covering the walls. The biologist calls the creature the “Crawler.”

The Tower plunging into the ground is suspected to be the “engine” of Area X’s transformation, driven by the Crawler’s slow descent while it shapes the phosphorescent fungi on the walls into words, forming a spiralling sentence without pause:

Where lies the strangling fruit that came from the hand of the sinner I shall bring forth the seeds of the dead to share with the worms that . . . gather in the darkness and surround the world with the power of their lives while from the dim-lit halls of other places forms that never could be writhe for the impatience of the few who have never seen or been seen. . . . There shall be in the planting in the shadows a grace and a mercy that shall bloom dark flowers, and their teeth shall devour and sustain and herald the passing of an age. . . . (*Annihilation* 46-67, 170; emphasis in original; ellipses added)⁷

The image of a “strangling fruit” which will gracefully and mercifully plant in the shadows in order to “herald the passing of an age,” sounds ominously like a prediction of what will befall the planet if Area X takes over. After taking samples of the fungi and inspecting them, the biologist suspects the words to be some sort of randomized, biological “building material” for Area X (*Annihilation* 92), but cannot

⁷ The rest of the recital (200-300 words more) is given in pieces throughout *Annihilation* and the subsequent books, but is too large to cite in its entirety here.

exclude a ritualistic, more conscious effort by the Crawler to communicate something to the Tower that would trigger some reaction. When finally encountering the alien creature on its way down the Tower, the biologist attempts to describe it, but her five senses are not enough; human language is not enough to convey its weirdness. And yet she tries, though beholding the creature almost drives her mad:

As I adjusted to the light, the Crawler kept changing at a lightning pace, as if to mock my ability to comprehend it. It was a figure within a series of refracted panes of glass. It was a series of layers in the shape of an archway. It was a great sluglike monster ringed by satellites of even odder creatures. It was a glistening star. My eyes kept glancing off it as if an optic nerve was not enough. Then it became an overwhelming *hugeness*. . . . (176; emphasis in original; ellipsis added)

The hugeness, the oddness, the overwhelming of the senses: this passage not only recalls Lovecraft's Cthulhu, but also Morton's hyperobjects, and is not at all far from Clark's "Anthropocene disorder" discussed above. However, the terrible weirdness approaching cosmic horror meets in the biologist a surprisingly unafraid and quizzical mind, one that is prepared to view the monstrous as something potentially positive. As Siobhan Carroll writes in a review: "whereas a Lovecraftian story would exclaim in horror at a challenge to humanity's place in the universe, *Annihilation* asks whether 'the human' is a stable category to begin with" (n. pag.).

Area X is already in the beginning of *Annihilation* experienced by the biologist as a positive opposition to Earth: "The air was so clean, so fresh, while the world back beyond the border was what it had always been during the modern era: dirty, tired, imperfect, winding down, at war with itself. Back there, I had always felt as if my work amounted to a futile attempt to save us from who we are" (30). When the biologist grimly suspects the Southern Reach research facility of keeping up the fruitless expeditions because they assumed that was the only way they could keep the "monster" dormant, it easily reads as a satirical analogy for humanity's failed confrontation with Anthropocene issues: "*Feed Area X but do not antagonize it, and perhaps someone will, through luck or mere repetition, hit upon some explanation, some solution, before the world becomes Area X*" (*Annihilation* 159; emphasis in original). Change a couple of words, and the sentence directly applies to the current ecological crisis: keep feeding *global warming* blindly and wait for someone to figure out what to do, before the world irrevocably changes. Despite the Southern Reach's best or worst efforts, Area X cannot be infiltrated: rather, it mimics the expeditions

sent in and infiltrates the world in turn. The biologist is the only one of VanderMeer's characters ready to accept this colonization and transformation. As she explains in her last words as human in a journal entry, her old world seems "a hazy, indistinct sphere radiating a weak light . . . a kind of mythic tragedy . . . a disembodied globe of light [with] all the poison that leaked out of it" (*Acceptance* 156; ellipses added). This embracing attitude towards the weird ecology of Area X might be what allows the biologist to withstand the metamorphosis imposed upon her by Area X for so long. Moreover, it might be the reason for her doppelgänger's comparative success.

Every time an expedition has entered, Area X has absorbed the members' DNA, mimicked and remade them in some mysterious way, and sent human copies out beyond the border with the purpose to spread its own, alien genes. Control realizes this at the end of the second book: the "invasion had been under way for quite some time, had been manifesting for much longer than anyone could have guessed" (*Authority* 314). The biologist's doppelgänger is found in an empty parking lot in the "real" world and brought to the Southern Reach for questioning, with the biologist remaining in Area X, completing her transformation. The locations at which the doppelgängers from the twelfth expedition are found serve as spreading sites for Area X's contamination; "[t]he kind that cleanses everything" (*Authority* 303). Upon entering the Southern Reach in a desperate attempt to clean up the mess, Control reads in the reports that samples taken by one of the expeditions, showed that "no trace of human-created toxicity remained in Area X. Not a single trace. No heavy metals. No industrial runoff or agricultural runoff. No plastics" (*Authority* 125). It is almost as if Area X is attempting to "fix" the planet upon which it has been unleashed. In a sense, Area X thus represents the ultimate revenge of Gaia (or humanity's unloved monsters), striking back and colonizing the human world in the same way that humans have possessed and exploited nature for centuries.

Nonhuman Perspectives: Becoming Monster

In *Annihilation*, the biologist narrates the plot from the first-person perspective in the form of her journal or field report. *Acceptance* revolves around Control, Ghost Bird, and the Southern Reach assistant director Grace trying to find the biologist in Area X, and also includes the first "phase" of Area X's history as a parallel narrative timeline. Most striking in the final book, however, is the viewpoint of "Ghost Bird,"

the organic doppelgänger of the biologist.⁸ Ghost Bird reaffirms the biologist's antagonistic attitude towards human ecological behavior several times, and in one particular scene she appears to get a glimpse of the wretched future of the world if Area X had not interfered. On her journey into Area X through a kind of wormhole, Ghost Bird sees "the blackened ruins of vast cities and enormous breached ships, lit by the roaring red and orange of fires that did nothing but cast shadow and obscure the distant view of mewling things that crawled and hopped through the ash" (*Acceptance* 37). The critique in this passage is clear, and can be read in accordance with VanderMeer's essayistic relation of how the trilogy came to be, where he professes his "anger and grief over the BP Gulf Oil Spill." VanderMeer claims that the vision of Area X was strongly inspired by this natural disaster, and that to him "it had seemed like they would never stop the leak, that the oil would keep gushing out into the Gulf for decades" ("From *Annihilation* to *Acceptance*" n. pag.).

Ghost Bird is a physical exact copy of the biologist and shares the biologist's memories, but she is also acutely *non-human*, extraterrestrial. This is especially noticeable when she mentally criticizes Control and Grace (the two only humans with whom she has a chance to develop any form of relationship) for grasping at "such banal answers because of a lack of imagination, because human beings couldn't even put themselves in the mind of a cormorant or an owl or a whale or a bumblebee" (*Acceptance* 190). Ghost Bird thus becomes the ultimate emissary of Area X and most important mediator of VanderMeer, taking on the viewpoint of the nonhuman and offering this viewpoint to the reader. The reader has already been prepared for this transition in focalization by the sensitivity for the nonhuman perspective in the biologist. In *Annihilation* the biologist speculates that wherever the alien organism that became Area X has come from, it is driven by "an endless, perhaps automatic, need to assimilate and to mimic" (190). Ghost Bird's existence, and her "improved" imagination regarding empathy or connectedness with other organisms, suggests that Ghost Bird is the enhanced version of *Homo Sapiens*, as designed by the alien entity that they call the Crawler.

The nonhuman, or more-than-human, copy of the biologist moreover contrasts the biologist's perception of the Crawler. The biologist despairs in *Annihilation*: "What can you do when your five senses are not enough?" (178), but nevertheless she understands that the Crawler is an organism, inexplicable and imperceptible. "For even then," she writes in her journal, "I believed that it might be

⁸ Ghost Bird has taken the nickname given to the biologist by her husband, a fitting name for the doppelgänger whose uncanny existence becomes more ghostlike when it appears that the biologist is no longer human—has in fact become a monster.

pulling these different impressions of itself from my mind and projecting them back at me, as a form of camouflage” (179). When Ghost Bird finally encounters the alien entity that is also her creator, she repeats the biologist’s impression of the Crawler as huge and bright, but everything else is different: “There was none of the remembered distortion, no throwing back of her own fears and desires. It simply lay revealed before her, so immense, so shockingly concrete” (*Acceptance* 284). The monstrosity of the Crawler is here somewhat clarified, deducted from the viewpoint of a being that is closer to the monster than any of the humans in *The Southern Reach*, whereby the monster loses some of its horror. Ghost Bird’s perception of the monstrous is thus in a position to *evolve* the reader’s relationship with the monstrous.

The Crawler and Area X are encountered and processed by (just as they *process*) five narrator voices in the course of the trilogy. The first one, the biologist, has the close-to nihilist, but also sensitive, viewpoint of the environmental researcher/activist, who thinks Area X’s form of annihilation might be just what the world needs, does not require any of Area X “to have a deeper meaning,” and knows that in confronting Area X, all human “instruments are useless, our methodology broken, our motivations selfish” (*Annihilation* 192-93). This is both contrasted and reinforced by the subsequent perspective of Control: the absolutely-not-in-control, quite pathetic character in charge of cleaning up the Southern Reach on the government “Central’s” orders. As it turns out, however, Central is rather under the authority of Area X; “a soul-crushing failure . . . unable to conceive of a scenario in which Area X was smarter, more insidious, more resourceful” (*Authority* 305; ellipsis added). The amalgamation of several timelines and viewpoints in *Acceptance* then suggests the struggle and pain of each character’s journey from escaping and fighting the monstrous, to accepting and even embracing it, seeing “the beautiful awful brightness of the world” through the weird prism of a monstrous, alien ecosystem (*Acceptance* 337).

In *Acceptance*, the biologist has transformed into a monstrous creature comparable in weirdness to the Crawler. When Control, Ghost Bird, and Grace encounter this new, nonhuman version of the biologist, the only thing they recognize is her eyes. The nonhuman version of the biologist—the evolved biologist—could have been taken straight out of Lovecraft’s Mythos: her “vast bulk seething down the hill through the forest . . . reduced to kindling by the muscle behind the emerald luminescence that glinted through the back,” bringing a smell of “thick brine and oil” and a sound like a “sonorous moan” after “the wind and the sea had been smashed together” (194; ellipsis added). Control experiences this encounter as maddening, paralyzing, and when the biologist finally withdraws from him, his sense of self, of

humanity, evaporates into a void: “With words like *collateral damage* and *containment* and *counterattacks* blossoming like old spells, incantations that worked in other, far distant, lands but not here. He was back in control, but control was meaningless” (208; emphasis in original). Ghost Bird, the biologist’s doppelgänger, experiences this extreme instance of doubling right after having read the final words in the journal of her original. Her reaction to seeing the biologist in “all her glory and monstrosity” (193) is awestruck recognition rather than Control’s terrified collapse at the weight of those “thousands of eyes regarding him” (207). Through Ghost Bird’s more-than-human eyes, the cosmic horror of the weird approaches beauty:

Nothing monstrous existed here—only beauty, only the glory of good design, of intricate planning, from the lungs that allowed this creature to live on land or at sea, to the huge gill slits hinted at along the sides, shut tightly now, but which would open to breathe deeply of seawater when the biologist once again headed for the ocean. All of those eyes, all of those temporary tidal pools, the pockmarks and the ridges, the thick sturdy quality of the skin. An animal, an organism that had never existed before or that might belong to an alien ecology. That could transition not just from land to water but from one remote *place* to another, with no need for a door in a border.

Staring up at her with her own eyes.

Seeing her. (196; emphasis in original)

Ghost Bird, because of her close relation to the biologist and Area X, is elevated beyond the cosmic horror of the monsters and the uncanniness of encountering and touching her double. She experiences the encounter as natural instead of supernatural, as glorious rather than terrifying. In its weird process of assimilation and reproduction, Area X has in the biologist and Ghost Bird performed the ultimate act of symbiotic facsimile: the original organism evolving to be kin to the invasive species, while the invasive species takes the place (and face) of the original to improve the copied host organism as well. It very much fulfils VanderMeer’s own definition of the weird as striving for “a kind of understanding even when something cannot be understood, and acknowledge[ing] that failure as sign and symbol of our limitations” (196). Meanwhile, the rest of Area X’s doppelgängers have spread their monstrous DNA for nearly thirty years, with the speculated goal to impose such improvement upon the earth in its entirety. When the transformation is complete, when the world

becomes Area X (or Area X becomes the world), what will remain is a Brave New Weird.

Strange Semantics: Articulating the Monster

The biologist realizes that she is terrified of the Crawler, yet simultaneously has favorable feelings towards what she suspects is its project: to colonize the world with its doppelgängers and thus upgrade humanity to a version more in touch with—or in fact, entirely assimilated into—its environment. As she reflects towards the end of *Annihilation*: “the thought I cannot dislodge after all I have seen, is that I can no longer say with conviction that this is a bad thing” (192). Ghost Bird, the more-than-human doppelgänger, is at first confused as to which “side” she is on, and what her doubling means. Later, however, she reiterates the biologist’s “change of sides” and decides that it is not her lot to stop the Crawler in its strange writing. Ghost Bird sees the words “ablaze with a richer and more meaningful light than she had ever seen” (though what this meaning entails is not elaborated), and she understands that every sentence on the wall of the tower represents a “merciless healing, a ruthless rebuilding that could not be denied” (*Acceptance* 287). *Language* is thus emphasized as a tool by which the human mind may be infected by words and manipulated into misunderstanding or deconceptualizing the world it perceives. The words written on the wall of the tower imply linguistic manipulation, which suggests that the monstrous transformation of Area X to some extent depends upon language—perhaps because the most developed species on the planet, which Area X happens to colonize and mimic, is also dependent on language.

All expeditions to Area X are told to keep elaborate journals recording their observations, and, in a particularly suspenseful scene, the biologist discovers all the journals in a pile, never seen by the researchers at the Southern Reach institute. Towards the end of *Acceptance* Ghost Bird speculates that the reason for the heap of journals might be that,

on some level most [of the expeditioners] came, in time, to recognize the futility of language. Not just in Area X but against the rightness of the lived-in moment, the instant of touch, of connection, for which words were such a sorrowful disappointment, so inadequate an expression of both the finite and the infinite. Even as the Crawler wrote out its terrible message. (243)

Ghost Bird here quite movingly voices the frustrating paradox of the incommunicable, the nameless. As noted above, the words on the fleshy wall of the Tower suggests that Area X depends on a cycle of words being written to fulfil its purpose. In “The Promises of Monsters” Haraway sees language and articulation as two separate things: “Articulation is not a simple matter. Language is the effect of articulation, and so are bodies. . . . I rely on the articulata to breathe life into the artifactual cosmos of monsters that this essay inhabits. Nature may be speechless, without language, in the human sense; but nature is highly articulate” (105-06; ellipsis added). Area X can as such be seen as the hyperbolic example of nature’s surprising powers of articulation, mocking the human delusion of grandeur by “articulating” a perfect ecosystem using the human language, but in a way that is beyond human comprehension.

If Area X’s “effortless manipulation of molecules” (*Acceptance* 189) can be read as a parallel to human manipulation of language, Area X literally *articulates* bodies that are improved copies of humans in order to spread its biosphere. Again, the Anthropocene allegory is striking: VanderMeer’s monstrous Area X mocks human comprehension and evokes a fearful response similar to Lovecraft’s monsters and Anthropocene issues. Rather than leaving at the tipping point where terror becomes paralysis, however, Area X forces the human species to become *part* of the monster by way of weird articulation, word-fuelled contamination. As Daniel Levine writes in a review in *The Brooklyn Rail*: “VanderMeer’s scenario is a fitting fantasy, and a dire warning to our current direction: imagine a more ironic, well-deserved fate than invasion by a mimic that conquers by our enlightened example” (“Strangling Fruit” n. pag.).

While she is dying, or transforming, at the foot of the lighthouse, the former Southern Reach director thinks that perhaps “the words aren’t important, but what’s *channelled through them is*” (*Acceptance* 333; emphasis added). Ghost Bird, likewise, comes to realize that the words represent more than their semantic meaning in the moment she touches the Crawler: “Each word a world, a world bleeding through from some other place, a conduit and an entry point” (287). It is tempting to read this as representing the power of language over the implied reader of *The Southern Reach* as well, VanderMeer cleverly insinuating that *his* words, too, are mere channelling-devices for some wider meaning neither he nor any reader may ever know; each word containing a world of its own. More importantly, however, the role of language and words in *The Southern Reach* suffuses language with an organic, living quality, which suggests its inherent influence over and connection to the flesh, the body, the corporeal.

“Perhaps a copy could also be superior to the original, *create a new reality by avoiding old mistakes*” (*Acceptance* 35; emphasis added), Ghost Bird wonders, philosophizing about her own existence, trying to make sense of it. This sentence moreover stands out as a key to reading the entire trilogy. When Ghost Bird steps out from the Tower after the climax of the trilogy, she *senses* that the world has altered: something “had changed beyond the climate” (*Acceptance* 327). If Area X’s infiltration can be read as the revenge of Gaia, the final outlook of the changed, monstrous planet is fittingly triumphant. Ghost Bird approaches the suspicious Grace (as far as the reader knows the only human “survivor” of Area X), and tells her that there is no reason to be afraid: “Why be afraid of what you could not prevent? . . . There was nothing to warn anyone about” (328; ellipsis added). Ghost Bird feels “unaccountably happy, grinning even,” as she walks through Area X-become-earth and sees no signs of human life, declaring that the “time for expeditions was over” (331). The copy and upgrade of planet Earth, cleansed of human contaminants, has left a monstrous ecosystem behind in which even the Southern Reach research facilities have been assimilated into the organism so that Ghost Bird can hear it “breathing” (331). And the last scene from this Brave New Weird blissfully asserts, channelling a more-than-human gaze, that it is “just an ordinary day” (331), as Ghost Bird and Grace walk out to explore whether Area X has borders anymore. The end of *The Southern Reach* thus presents the reversal of the weird itself, for in a world-become-monster, the monsters are *us*, not *other*.

Conclusion

Through the monstrous transformations imposed upon the planet and humanity by Area X, the question resounding throughout the trilogy is whether it is really “such a bad thing” to be colonized, assimilated, altered, and forcefully evolved by Area X’s monstrous system. VanderMeer’s trilogy thus provides that “refreshing exit from human-scale thoughts” that Morton associates with the monstrous (*Hyperobjects* 64) and channels a viewpoint for an approach and reaction to the weird, and to Anthropocene monsters, that is arguably more productive than Lovecraft’s stories. The “strangling fruit” (*Annihilation*) of Area X seems claustrophobic and terrible at first, but through the eyes of the biologist, Ghost Bird, and in the end, Control, the trilogy works its way towards *Acceptance*. Accepting that humanity is simultaneously terrible (in its possession and destruction of nature) and insignificant (now that natural forces respond); that the upgrade executed by Area X is a merciful, required act; that becoming part of a monstrous ecology—becoming monster—is not

necessarily such a bad thing at all. The strange semantics of Area X articulates a new, weird reality, suggesting that words, language, and articulation can perform a similar shift in thinking about the real world. However, *The Southern Reach* also exposes and ridicules the futility of language, emphasizing that words are only words until their message becomes powerful enough to change minds, broaden scopes, and transform reality.

This article has tried to show that the horror-evocative language employed by many scholars when discussing Anthropocene issues contributes to an academic climate in which the figure of the monster and the genre of the weird are naturally at home, and are therefore explicitly or implicitly, consciously or unconsciously conjured. The apocalyptic language in the works by Clark, Colebrook, Morton, and Trexler illustrates this condition of ecocritical debates—Clark calling it the “Anthropocene disorder”; Colebrook pointing out the inescapable anthropocentrism in *any* visions of apocalypse. Morton and Haraway consider the figure of Cthulhu useful for describing the current planetary crisis in the newly realized context of the Anthropocene. Latour turns to *Frankenstein* for monstrous-allegorical support in his critique of the Anthropocene condition. What the critics and philosophers discussed have in common is the contention that humanity needs to be jolted out of its destructive habits, re-evaluate and reconfigure its relation to nature, nonhuman animals, and environmental issues, and move out of the paralysis caused in the confrontation with the “shock of the Anthropocene” (Bonnieuil and Fressoz 5). Precisely how to achieve that, however, appears to be beyond them.

Like VanderMeer’s Area X, Anthropocene monsters display their complete indifference to humanity’s qualms and cares, and nobody knows quite how to tame them—let alone squeeze their massive bodies into a human frame of reference. As much as ever, it seems that people in the oppressive context of the Anthropocene must turn to myths and stories to imagine a humanity able to embrace, incorporate, and understand that which is inconceivably other. Related to the futility of language displayed in *The Southern Reach*, the Anthropocene is only one more concept among myriad theories and notions that have been invented and imagined throughout history to try to articulate the world in a way that makes collective sense. Thinking of Anthropocene issues in terms of Anthropocene monsters is only useful as long as they can help address and provide insight into cultural, philosophical, or political conditions and tendencies. Nevertheless, the paralysis often inflicted upon the human mind when grappling with Anthropocene issues might be broken, or at least understood better, by the introduction of the monster figure. In the Lovecraftian weird tale, the monster of cosmic horror lays bare, mockingly, the insignificance of the

human, thus begging for comparison to the Anthropocene discourse and satirizing that discourse by way of hyperbolic misanthropy. In new weird fiction, with VanderMeer's trilogy as a shining example, the monstrous is rather presented as a potentially emancipatory catalyst for starting to think in weird terms. (New) weird narrative lays bare and challenges the limits of imagination, and explores how to expand, transform, and evolve beyond those limits. That is why the weird is such a promising literary stage for the Anthro(s)cene.

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