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Perspectives on the Anthropocene

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An Introduction

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Jens Kirk,
Lars Bang Larsen &
Morten Ziethen[1]

Abstract
This article falls into two sections. First, the Anthropocene is outlined in terms of a fundamental and unique shock to the imagination. Secondly, the article sketches out a range of responses and attitudes to the Anthropocene shock, including apathy, activism, and intervention.

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Keywords: Anthropocene shock, apathy, activism, intervention.

It was geologist Paul Crutzen and biologist Eugene F. Stoermer, who in 2000 were the first to claim that the Earth has now entered what they called the Anthropocene. They argued that this new period has begun since the most important transformations within the life zone of earth (including the biosphere, atmosphere, hydrosphere and geosphere) are the results of human activities – and not, for instance, of meteors, volcanoes, ice ages, etc. Since then, the term has become increasingly widespread in culture and society, and our understanding of the Anthropocene has undergone important changes. Most important is the fact that the term is no longer solely used as a scientific designation for a geological period, but also as a sign for the discomfort and disorientation felt by many contemporary humans when it comes to the question about how we should continue our shared journey in time as earth dwellers. Put differently, it is the ordinary modern production apparatus, based on science, industry, and technology, and the corresponding lifestyles, that has produced the Anthropocene condition on Earth. This life is in many ways a good life (in our part of the world) – but it seems to be incompatible with Earth and its ecosystems now and in the long run. For this reason, the concept of the Anthropocene also signifies a sense of paralysis and alienation – we produce and consume more and more, knowing well that we thereby inevitably contribute to the processes accelerating the Anthropocene condition. So, what to do, and how to live – and let live? Promising a convenient solution, politicians and decision makers promote the 'green transition' of the production apparatus. However, will that transformation steeped as it is in paradigms of growth be enough to secure the habitability of the Earth? The stakes are of the highest magnitude, and this is why the term 'Anthropocene' exists as a riddle of life and death – and not just as a scientific designation.

In bringing together this volume, the editors agree with Robert Macfarlane's claim that "the Anthropocene has administered – and will administer – a massive jolt to the imagination." (2016, np). Macfarlane uses "jolt" in its figurative sense as a signifier for "a surprise; a shock which disturbs one's mental composure". Despite the experiences of being paralyzed by the "massive jolt" of the Anthropocene, it also produces demands for action and behavioral

change in the battle against CO2 emissions, global warming, habitat destruction, and mass extinction. And not everybody is paralyzed. We can identify at least three different forms of jolt-reactions. One way of reacting is represented by the activism of, for example, Gretha Thunberg, Fridays for Future, Just Stop Oil, and Extinction Rebellion. Activism can be disruptive, or even involve breaking the law. And while the act of throwing soup at van Gogh's *Sunflowers* is illegal, it does bring out the idea that we tend to value art higher than life extremely well. We cherish art as eternal and protect it by laws and regulations, behind glass and in museums, so that future generations may enjoy it. Skilled professionals are at hand as restorers and conservators of great works of art to make sure they are not harmed by anything that time may throw at them. Our planet, on the other hand, we consider in a completely different light (Just Stop Oil 2023; Gayle 2022). With few exceptions, no one holds anybody responsible for protecting Earth for future generations (Future Generations Commissioner for Wales 2022). Instead, we colonize and deplete the resources of the future (Krznaric 2020). In this manner, the Just Stop Oil activists – ironically or tragically – call our attention to the *ars longa, vita brevis* trope because art could very well outlast (human) life on earth! Activism, then, attempts to continuously disturb our mental composure.

At the other end of the spectrum, the demand for action produces the beforementioned paralyzed apathy (which notably is something else than mere not-knowing and ignorance). In response to the question why we do not do more to curb the climate crisis, moral philosopher Elizabeth Cripps lists (and rebuts) seven of the most common justifications for climate crisis apathy current in first world countries before she concludes with some resignation that "[h]owever much we should do to avert this tragedy, it's more than most of us do now." (Cripps 2022, 3-4). It's difficult not to agree.

Situated somewhere between activism and apathy, perhaps, lie the numerous interventions and attempts to find new ways (or answers) that have accrued around the term since 2000, not only across academia but in the public sphere as well. As any Google search will demonstrate, the term has burrowed its way into studies of all walks of life, for instance, angling (Elmer 2017), childhood education (Sjögren 2020), food (Willett et al. 2019), gardening (Diogo et al. 2019; Paola 2018), health psychology (Bernard 2019), polic-

ing (O'Sullivan 2019), and sports (Eriksen 2021) to name but a few examples. Outside academic discourse, the April-June 2018 issue of *The Unesco Courier* entitled *Welcome to the Anthropocene* – available worldwide in nine languages, electronically as well as in print – arguably marks a high point in the popular reception history of the term so far. Moreover, YouTube distributes a large number of videos on the subject, including, for instance, Norman Wirzba's ambitious *Facing the Anthropocene* series (e.g., Wirzba 2021).

AQ25: Perspectives on the Anthropocene contains a variety of articles that together register the impact of the Anthropocene across several fields. Thus, the articles play out across genres and media, popular as well as elite, and deal with poetry, prose fiction, television, and Hollywood and Bollywood cinema. The contributions, moreover, address and represent diverse geographical locations: the USA, Greenland, Scandinavia, Europe, and India. The contributors come from across the university ranks and include students completing their degrees, doctoral students, post docs, associate and full professors. Lastly, the contributors hail from across the globe, representing nationalities from Asia, Europe, North America, and Scandinavia.

Bageshree Trivedi's article "Re-viewing the Anthropocene: Ecofeminism and Decoloniality in Dhruv Bhatt's *Akoopār*" shows how a novel by a contemporary writer from Gujarat, a state on the west coast of India, critiques the notion of the Anthropocene, offering an alternative, nonwestern, narrative of human involvement with the environment instead. In "Twisted Skeins of Women and Wilderness: Retelling Shakespeare's Shrew in Amit Masurkar's *Sherni*," Amar Singh and Shipra Tholia examine the contemporary Bollywood film *Sherni* and show how tropes of the shrew – familiar from Shakespeare, for instance – emerge as the film expresses its resistance to the legacies of colonialism and patriarchy, creating empathy for the nonhuman actor – a tigress. In her article "Dansk grønlandslitteratur og jagten på det antropocæne", Emilie Dybdal deals with the representation of climate change in a contemporary novel in Danish about Greenland: Bjarne Ljungdahl's *Korsveje i Nord*. Dybdal shows that it offers some interesting perspectives on the future of Greenland in the Anthropocene. Irina Souch's article "Troubling the Water: Hydro-Imaginaries in Nordic Television Drama" shows how Anthropocenic imagery is used by Nordic television series in

general and *The Legacy* in particular to problematize the green self-image regularly cultivated by Nordic governments. More particularly, Souch's reading demonstrates how television drama questions naive conceptions of water. In "Ghostbusting in the Late Anthropocene: The 1980s, (Un)Conscious Climate Culture, and Our Holocene Afterlives", Robert A. Saunders addresses a contemporary American film *Ghostbusters: Afterlife* – the sequel to the *Ghostbuster* movies of the '80s. Saunders argues that it critiques its precursors' values and functions as an intervention in the discussion of the climate apocalypse we're experiencing. Anna S. Reuter's article "It's complicated: On the responsibility of literature and literary criticism using the poem 'Gentle Now, Don't Add to Heartache' as an example," discusses how the Anthropocene produces new ideas of responsibility, guilt, and complicity for literary criticism. In "Econarratology, the novel, and Anthropocene imagination," Jens Kramshøj Flinker asks if fiction is able to provide forms of expression that offer an alternative to the discourse of science concerning the Anthropocene. Flinker's reading of a Danish novel - *The Abominable* (*Den afskyelige*, 2016) by Charlotte Weitze – demonstrates how it immerses us into a storyworld, engaging us in ways that are rarely possible outside literature. In "Knowing the Anthropocene," Mads N. Jespersen, Jens Kirk & Asger J. Rosendorf ask the question of how we best approach the Anthropocene in terms of knowledge. After a reading of attempts in STEM and SSH of imagining Anthropocene knowledge in terms of interdisciplinarity and integration, they conclude that knowing the Anthropocene remains an ongoing project.

The articles in AQ25, we hope, are helpful in administering further jolts to the imagination and thereby in contributing to the ongoing dialogue among humans who, between activism and apathy, try to find a way in the Anthropocene – for themselves, and for other living beings.

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Notes

1 Originally, the editors of the present volume included Jørgen Riber Christensen. Unfortunately, Christensen had to withdraw from the editorial board due to illness.

Re-viewing the Anthropocene
Ecofeminism and Decoloniality in Dhruv Bhatt's Akoopār (2010)

Bageshree Trivedi

Currently a Ph.D. scholar at the Department of English, the Maharaja Sayajirao University of Baroda, the author holds an M.Phil. (English) and has researched and published in the areas of region studies, gender studies, and cultural studies, with an emerging research interest in decolonial thinking.

Abstract

Theoretical research on Dhruv Bhatt – one of the most important contemporary Gujarati novelists – has remained restricted to simplistic ecocritical reading(s). In this article, I analyse Bhatt's novel *Akoopār* (2010) to investigate how layered exploration(s) of the 'female' as human, ancestor, myth, or affective attitude, as negotiated by the artist-anthropologist narrator, prises open the violence of centres (the Anglophone / the urban / colonialist) and offers an alternative narrative of the Anthropocene by tracing human intervention in the environment through local-cultural mytho-history. In doing so, the novel recentres the subject from eco-'logy' whose definition is often hijacked by the 'logos' of 'discovery', to 'ecosystem' depicted as a complex network of environment, cultural knowledge(s), linguistic practices, myth, memory, and collective action. I also use the theoretical approach of ecofeminism to highlight the use of 'female' as an approach of resistance in battling ecological crises in postcolonial regions structured through the complex collusion of colonial and traditional patriarchy, and the framework of decoloniality to foreground the significance of epistemic revisions in re-viewing the human-nonhuman divide.

Introduction

Since the use of the term in 2000 by Paul J. Crutzen and Eugene F. Stoermer to define "the current epoch of geological and historical time…in which humans have become the single most potent force in shaping terrestrial and marine ecology, global geology, and the atmosphere", the Anthropocene has emerged as a frame dominating critical discussions in the sciences, social sciences, and humanities (Mikhail 2016, 211). Alan Mikhail (2016) has discussed the lack of unanimity regarding the periodization of the Anthropocene, and the centrality that the term lends to the *anthropos* or human in imagining planetary challenges (220-23). Yet, in spite of its biases, it continues to be an important "discursive frame" generating significant questions (Gibson and Venkateswar 2015, 6).

The notion of anthropogenic impact on the planet was not unheard of before the term Anthropocene emerged, but this term highlighted the scale and permanence of the impact of human activity on the environment (Mikhail 2016, 214). The disproportionate importance attached to human agency in the idea of the Anthropocene draws from its grounding in the knowledge project of the Enlightenment. The dovetailing of the Anthropocene and Enlightenment allows (western) modernity to be understood as a shift in perspective – when nature came to be defined and delimited with human subjectivity at its centre (Mikhail 2016, 212). Gibson and Venkateswar (2015) concur in reading the alienation of the human from his/her surroundings as a consequence of the "[d]ualisms" inherent in "Western configurations of knowledge" such as "nature/culture, organic/inorganic, alive/dead, human/animal" (6). Such epistemic binaries have framed conservation in the West within a paternalist and romanticist approach that imagines humans as saviours of nature (Philip 2014, 978). Ecofeminism, further, points out the investment of western epistemic binaries with gendered notions such as "nature/female and culture/male" (Diamond 2017, 72).

Walter D. Mignolo (2018) views the imbrication of the modern view of nature within western knowledge frames in terms of "epistemic coloniality" (214). Thereby, he advocates the strategy of epistemic reconstitution to re-claim non-western and non-modern

approaches to knowing (epistemology) and being (ontology). Combatting epistemic violence is viewed, here, as the initial step to combat other forms of violence that emerge in its wake.

Edmund Burke and Kenneth Pomeranz (2009) and Karen L. Thornber (2014) have emphasised the role of (South) Asian studies in bringing into relief the impact of colonialism on the environment while also offering alternative modes of relationality between the human and nature. For Gregory D. Smithers (2019), this alternative is, specifically, offered by native ecologies – the ecological knowledge and practices of Native people – that allow the relationality between different species and the environment to be viewed in terms of interconnectedness (268-9). Barbara T. Gates points out the allied approach "[i]nherent in ecofeminism" marked by "a belief in the interconnectedness of all living things" (quoted in Diamond 2017, 72).

Methodology

In this article, I draw on the ecofeminist idea of interconnectedness to analyse a Gujarati novel – *Akoopār (2010)* – as an instance of native ecology that structures a dynamic idea of 'female/feminine' at the centre of the given region's ecosystem. I approach the novel using the decolonial premise that "ontology is an epistemological concept" (Mignolo 2018, 134). This premise not only privileges modes of (knowledge) perception in constituting the intelligibility of being(s), but also focuses on the role of narration in the process. In mediating the constitution of ontology through epistemological frames, the act of narration signifies an act of representation. I problematize representation in the novel through the figure of the narrator. The narrator's engagement with modes of verbal representation (language) and visual representation (painting) to map *Gir* – the region where the novel is based, is structured to match the figure of a colonial anthropologist and his effort to name/represent that which he observes. The process of naming and recording serves to legitimise and delegitimise what constitutes (authoritative) information, while engendering a distance between a subject who names and the object that is named. I, thus, use representation to engender an analytic connection between epistemic violence and environmental violence. In doing so, I foreground the role of language.

The analysis of language draws on Mignolo's insights regarding the etymology of the term 'human' drawn from Greek and Roman linguistic-epistemic traditions (2018, 157-8), and how the so-called equivalent terms for 'human' in other languages like the Andean "[r]*unas*, *sallqas*, and *huacas*" do not denote the same field of signification or relationality with nature, as the English-language term 'human' (2018, 161). Thus, language is used as an entry point to critique the Anthropocene, and the ontological hierarchies generated by modern/colonial epistemic frames.

I further examine alternative modes of representation, consistent with alternative relationalities between knowing and being,[1] and the central role of the 'female' in sustaining the interconnectedness between the two. I explore whether the specific imaginary in the given native ecology is marked by essentialisation of the female with nature or an alternative conception of gender.

Denotation and Delimitation

Bhatt's narrative directly broaches the complexity of concerns structuring the ecological crises by locating it within *Gir* – the protected region for Asiatic lions and other wildlife in the western part of the state of Gujarat in western India. This area came under the territory of the Nawab of Junagadh in the nineteenth century and was used as his "private hunting grounds", where British colonial officials were often invited for "hunting expeditions" (Wikipedia 2022). During this time, it is reported that the population of the Asiatic lion had dwindled to only a dozen which led to the prohibition on hunting and the conversion of the area into a protected zone for wildlife.

Bhatt uses location as a device to not only highlight the environmental impact of colonisation but also question the idea of 'protection' – he questions the discursive content of the idea of 'protection' as well as whether such 'protected' regions truly are environmentally secure in the contemporary period of the story.

The figure of the narrator brings into relief the cognitive biases structured into these discursive modes framed by secular western epistemology. While the narrator is a painter by profession, in his approach and practice, he embodies an anthropologist. Bhatt structures the narrator's visit to *Gir* in terms of a 'project' that involves the process of observation and meaning making by an outsider.

When the narrator enters the region, his observations of the landscape around him make him wonder whether it could be called a "jungle" (Bhatt 2010, 9). He considers it strange to find people casually walking across a territory populated by wild animals. Further, when Sãsāī uses the term "*jaṇī*"[2] to refer to a lioness, the narrator finds this to be an aberration caused by Sãsāī's uncultivated language (Bhatt 2010, 27). Thus, the narrator approaches his surroundings through preconceived categories such as 'jungle', 'animal', 'human', and attempts to mould what he views in the limits set by the terms available in his cognitive-linguistic repertoire. Mignolo has argued that "[w]estern civilization was built on *entities* and *de-notation*, not in *relations* and *fluidity*" (2018, 135). Thus, the narrator's consternation with fluidity between separate entities indicates the nature of his epistemological biases.

The narrator embarks on his 'project' to create a series of paintings that capture the Earth as an element. The act of painting the landscape, then, becomes a trope for the anthropological process of attempting to make what is 'strange' intelligible by representing it in and through pre-existing terminology and categories. As a result, he often finds what he views to be 'incomprehensible'; in other words, resisting intelligibility within his epistemological framework. The novel does not elaborate on the nature of the paintings. Yet, the narrator's dissatisfaction with his own visual depictions indicate that he had begun to recognise the gap between the perception of *Gir* by those who were part of its ecosystem, and his own cognitive location as an outsider.

The limits of his approach are highlighted using the narrative device of an 'unknown voice'. This voice appears at crucial moments in the plot. From the beginning to the end of the narrative, the origin or nature of this voice that the narrator hears from time to time, is not clarified. From a narratological perspective, the voice depicts the alternative forms of knowing/being that are marginalised by the logic of coloniality. According to Ashis Nandy (1983), the colonial culture made certain aspects of the cultures of the coloniser and the colonised dominant, while simultaneously marginalising others. G.N. Devy (1992) uses the term "amnesia" to describe such othering of aspects of non-colonial cultures and their banishment to categories like primitive, pre-modern, and obsolete, in the cultural memory of the colonized (55). The appearance of the voice,

then, depicts the breaking out of alternative ways of knowing through the authoritarian epistemic framework of the 'modern' mind. It functions to question the limitations of the narrator's perception at various junctures. For example, when the narrator questions whether the landscape around him rightfully fit into the idea of a 'jungle', the voice tells him, "Who talked about a jungle? As far as I understand Mītā had only spoken of *Gir*, hadn't she? Do we have anything to do with descriptors?" [3] (Bhatt 2010, 10). The voice, thus, makes the narrator and, by extension, the reader, conscious of the biases underscoring the process of categorisation in modern/colonial meaning-making systems.

More significantly, the narrator's lack of comprehension is not rooted in the conflict between two different languages (and the consonant knowledge perceptions structured in them), but the conflict between different usages of the *same* language – Gujarati.

In doing so, Bhatt complicates the idea of linguistic difference alluding to the role of colonial intervention in restructuring the relation of the colonised to their own languages, engendering development of an e-*strange*-ment from native languages, and the ways of knowing structured in the same.

Denotation, Difference, and Deference

It could be argued that the linguistic usage of the locals was a form of anthropomorphising the environment in *Gir*. However, the village-head at the coast of Ghed – Rāṇī – challenges this notion. The fishermen, here, were habituated to trapping whale-sharks who travelled to the coast to give birth to their offspring. Rāṇī exhorts the fishermen to refrain from this practice by projecting it as a moral-emotional crime equivalent to the murder of a daughter and an expectant mother, rather than reasoning with them based on scientific ideas of species extinction. The narrator realises that Rāṇī's argument was not a case of anthropomorphising but represented a perception that viewed all forms of existence as the same; that did not separate life forms into species and categories, or sought to establish a hierarchy of higher-lower, intelligent-unintelligent, civilized-primitive, and so on (Bhatt 2010, 224-5).

Neither is the idea of life romanticised as pacific and conducive to all life-forms in the native perception. Āīmā, the elderly matriarch of the region, stops the narrator from sitting on the floor after

nightfall to safeguard him from poisonous creatures. When the narrator reasons that the insects or creatures could also attack Āīmā sitting on the floor, she responds: "I have been living in *Gir* since my birth…With us, the insects maintain an *āmanyā*. You are a stranger. They wouldn't maintain it with you" (Bhatt 2010, 14).

The relationality of diverse species in *Gir* pivots on the idea of *āmanyā*. *Āmanyā* refers to a discretion in conduct based on deference for another. As Āīmā points out, humans, flora, fauna, and even the rocks and rivers of *Gir* have developed a fine balance after centuries of co-existence with one another. However, for the equilibrium to be maintained, every form of life must stay within the bounds of *āmanyā*, ensuring that the interests of one do not exceed those of the other. For the same reason, the locals in the region do not feel threatened by the presence of a predator like the Asiatic lion who is repeatedly referred to by the locals as a highly genteel creature.

The *āmanyā* a of every being in *Gir* is crucial to the character of Sãsāī. She is sceptical towards the presence in *Gir* of all those who do not comprehend the balance of life that preserves it. Sãsāī brings to Āīmā's attention the growth of the *kūvādiyo* plant in the forest which leads Āīmā to berate the herders who take their cattle grazing in the forest (Bhatt 2010, 83). Āīmā explains that the presence of the poisonous plant indicated that disequilibrium had set in. When the land of *Gir* allowed a plant to grow that could not be consumed by any animal, it was *Gir*'s way of indicating that the human community had begun to cross the *āmanyā* towards forest vegetation and consume faster than the rate of regeneration.

The narrator realises that the perception of life as reflected in the language of these people neither signified their imagination nor the incompleteness of their knowledge. Rather, it reflected their perception of a consciousness in every aspect of nature around them – whether animate or inanimate (Bhatt 2010, 97). It is this consciousness that pulsates in the rhythm of *Gir* – from the rhythmic pace of the walk of the lady bearing pots of water, the flow of the river, the murmur of the insects, to the cycle of the seasons and *Gir*'s shifting landscapes. Walking through the forest at midnight, the narrator experiences the oscillation of this rhythm in his own being: "Right now I can consciously experience that the supreme rhythm is also making every pore of my being sway to its beat. Perhaps this is the rhythm of a universal dance and this dance is what life is" (Bhatt

2010, 143). The conscious experience of the narrator, here, has moved on from conscious-as-rational perception of *Gir*, to conscious in terms of partaking in the shared conscious-ness of the network of life in the forest. In this transition, Bhatt challenges the idea of knowledge in empirical and cognitive terms and revalidates forms of intuitive and experiential knowledges that do not draw a stark distinction between knowing and being.

Female Alter-Natives

Bhatt invests the mystery of Gir in the personage of two female protagonists – Āīmā and Sãsāī. However, while Āīmā explicitly elucidates the meaning of, what to the narrator is a mysterious utterance, Sãsāī remains an enigma. Āīmā mentions that Sãsāī understands everything about the forest. Āīmā reasons that although Sãsāī was a *chāraṇ*,[4] she understood the behaviour of all the animals in the forest as she had grown up roaming it, and had touched it every day (Bhatt 2010, 95). The narrator later understands that the name Sãsāī was that of the younger sister of the Mother Goddess *Khōdiyār* who is also imagined as a *chāraṇ*, and who, in local mythology, is believed to have created *Gir*. By interlacing the elusive figure of Sãsāī with the mythical figure of the Goddess, Bhatt turns her character into a trope for the region, while also highlighting the complex intersections of social, mythological-cosmological, and ecological perspectives and practices. Further, Bhatt reverses the ecofeminist perspective that equates the exploitation of nature with the exploitation of women. He signifies the essence of the female *Gir* in the figure of a fierce, fearless, outspoken, often aggressive, and protective *chāraṇ* female.

   Sãsāī is not pitied but empowered in her singularity. She is identified as the descendant of the family of the legendary Ravā'ātā – the blind *chāraṇ* who walked from his remote hamlet in the forest to the seat of the Nawab of Junagadh to stall the impending hunt being organised for a British official as well as undertake steps to prevent the extinction of the Asiatic lions. On his return to his village from the historic meeting which led to the conversion of *Gir* into a protected wildlife area, Ravā'ātā adopted the hill *Ghaŋṭlō* as his son, asked the Diwan to adopt the *Ghaŋṭlī* as his daughter, and celebrated the wedding with the entire community. It is on this occasion that he demanded a promise from the community to not use these

two hills to graze their cattle. The narrator later realizes the significance of this seemingly 'strange' act in maintaining the forest cover.

The direct line of descent of Ravā'ātā in the same community as the Mother Goddess who created the forest, does not entail Ravā'ātā's rights over the forest, but defines his duties towards the land. Thus, in the cosmology of *Gir*, the forest and the forms of life within it are imagined in a model of relationality where each sustains the other. The dance of the universe that the narrator discovers in *Gir*, draws on the music of life – where each note must perform its function in the larger composition.

Ratanbā, the mother of the forest guard Dhānū, bears no resentment towards the tourist who fled the scene after disturbing a lion in heat who attacks Dhānū. She draws on the cosmological understanding of the community where the earth is imagined as balanced on the back of a turtle. Ratanbā argues that the turtle had no reason to bear such a heavy burden, but because it does its duty, life on the planet can exist; similarly, Dhānū had the duty of mediating between the lions of *Gir* and outsiders (Bhatt 2010, 167).

Such effortless application of cosmology to everyday life occurs through stories. The cosmology of the turtle, the mythology of the *chāraṇ* goddess, or the legend of Ravā'ātā are stories that structure their perception of consciousness which is cosmic in its scale; it is through stories that this distinct eco-consciousness is passed down from one generation to another.

Alter-Native Pasts and Possible Futures

Bhatt counters the amnesia engendered by the colonial intervention by centralising the role of memory in maintaining cultural systems bearing an intricate balance with ecology. The unknown voice that the narrator hears, then, is nothing but the long-lost memory that may have faded in one's consciousness, but which carries the lessons learnt in living alongside nature. Consciousness emerges as a hybrid time-space constituted by memory and experience; located between knowing and being. Memory and experience interact in the consciousness to re-legitimize alternative modalities of knowing and reclaim them from the universalising and linear time of coloniality / modernity. Memory and consciousness overlap in their collective and non-linear nature. The recourse to memory depicts a circular notion of time and the imagination of life as a cycle and

circle. This memory is further not restricted to human cognition but also includes the impressions of the transactions between life forms that the nonhuman carry.

This idea is symbolised in the title of the novel. Akoopār is the name of the mythical turtle who balances the earth on his back. However, he is also the oldest being on the planet – in other words, an ancestor. He is the only one who remembers the meritorious deed of the king Indradyūmna who is re-admitted to *swarga* or heaven based on Akoopār's testimony. The story of Akoopār, thus, underlines the idea that the earth remembers; that actions can have consequences which cumulatively span centuries and generations. A simple mythological tale drawn from native cosmology, thus, carries within it the worldview of the people of *Gir* who perceive space, time, and life, on a planetary scale. This realisation illuminates the strange utterance of Āīmā with which the novel opens: "*Khamā gyarné*" (Bhatt 2010, 3). The subjunctive form '*khamā*' derives from the root verb '*khamvū*' in Gujarati which means 'to be able to bear or endure'. Thus, what affects any form of life on the land, affects the entire *Gir*, the entire planet, and thus Āīmā prays that may *Gir* be able to endure it, rather than praying for any single form of life that is affected by the single action.

Conclusion

Thus, Bhatt's novel establishes a critique of the idea of the Anthropocene and foregrounds narration as a central mechanism of representation and resistance. On one hand, it mediates the constitution of an ontology based on a distinctly colonial epistemology. On the other hand, it preserves the delegitimised pasts and modes of knowing through stories passed down across generations.

The novel presents an alternative ecofeminism where the imagination of earth as female is empowering. Set in *Gir* – a region uniquely identified as female, it presents the land as female exploited for its resources, yet possessing the ability to fight back. Her gatekeepers exist in the form of the commanding Rāṇī who dictates the commercial activities of a male-dominated profession, to the fierce Sāsāī who fearlessly questions those who exceed the balance of the forest including her own husband, to the wise Āīmā who berates a group of village elders for being ecologically indifferent. The creator of the forest and its fierce women is also an adventurous

unmarried *chāraṇ* Goddess, while the cosmology identifies the feminine traits of patient forbearance in the turtle as the reason for life on the planet. This consciousness, however, equally permeates the understanding of Ravā'ātā, Vikram, and Dhānū resisting an essentialisation of traits with biological sex or gender.

In re-legitimising non-rational and non-empirical modes of knowing, the novel breaks down the distinction between knowing and being. It, thus, indicates the reclaiming of alternative vocabularies and imaginaries as a fruitful direction in reimagining alternative relationalities of life on the planet.

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Notes

1 The separation between knowing and being is maintained here for clarity of argument and does not represent an underlying assumption that the distinction between knowing and being is universal across human societies.

2 This is a noun used in standard Gujarati to refer to a person/individual who is female.

3 All translations and paraphrases are mine.

4 A herder.

Twisted Skeins of Women and Wilderness
Retelling Shakespeare's *Shrew* in Amit Masurkar's *Sherni*

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Abstract
Anthropogenic development has reduced the concept of stability to an imaginary state. Thomas Nail prefers the term "Kinocene" to Anthropocene or Capitalocene to describe modern times since it suggests a reconfiguration of human-nonhuman relations. This is where the interpretation of classic tales through contemporary lenses becomes relevant concerning re-imagining them in the context of marginalized voices. An example of this is the Bollywood film *Sherni*, which finds its tropes in the Shrew tales, famously used by Shakespeare.

This article is divided into three sections, followed by a conclusion. The first section introduces Thomas Nail's concept of border, allowing the analysis to focus on extensive and intensive movements. The former pertains to the observation of external manifes-

tations of hegemonical exercise perpetuated within India as a legacy of colonialism. Following the discussion of the colonial legacy, examining the intensive movement illustrates how Shakespeare's Shrew tropes emerge as the film expresses its resistance to patriarchy and creates empathy for the nonhuman actor.

Keywords: Kinocene, Anthropocene, non-human actor, colonial legacy, border

Introduction

Anthropocene is a term that was first used in 2000 to refer to the extent to which human intervention has altered the fabric of our planet profoundly over the last two centuries (Corlett 2014; Zalasiewicz et al. 2011). Using the term facilitates the understanding of how humans have utilized the resources of the planet, thereby disrupting the ecological balance. Conversely, by giving primacy to humans, it also confers an unfair advantage on humans relative to other species. It is this myopic view that causes humans to fail to recognize that the "critical zone" (coined by Bruno Latour; see Watts 2020) is controlled by the biodiversity of the planet, which enables Gaia to maintain her homeostasis (Lovelock and Lynn Margulis 1974). The process of extinction has always been an integral part of evolution; however, the unnatural acceleration of extinction as a result of human dominance has brought the loss of biodiversity to a level that has begun to threaten human well-being (Johnson et al. 2017).

The philosopher Thomas Nail introduces the concept of "Kinocene" (Nail 2019) to which Anthropocene and Capitalocene are only subcategories. The idea behind his "motion philosophy" is to emphasize the fact that our planet and its inhabitants have always been in motion. However, the kinetic transformation that the planet is currently experiencing has been accelerated by human players, who are increasing entropy by causing a disturbance in such a way that its impact can be observed in real-time. In this context, the question arises as to what can be done to convey to human actors the effects of their actions, which have been causing havoc on other nonhuman species on the planet? An approach that attempts to alleviate this problem and cultivate compassion among humans is the advocacy of anthropomorphism – the concept of finding ech-

oes of human life in nonhuman nature in order to defy human narcissism (Bennet 2010, xvi).

Since its conception, the cinema has possessed the unique capability of providing audiences with insight into other perspectives, whether human or nonhuman. Moreover, the interconnected elements of this medium, "a technology of the Anthropocene" (Fay 2018, 3), create a truly uncanny "Eaarth"[1] that facilitates the evolution of "kinetic memory" (Nail 2019b, 31). As part of this article, we evaluate a film from India's leading film industry, Bollywood, known for its hyperreal rendering of the world through the 'fragmentation of the familiar' (Devasundaram 2016, 110-14). Amit V Masurkar's *Sherni* (2021) tells the story of taming the shrew, which culminates in the subjugation of a tigress. As a result of ecological disruption, a tigress is attacking humans in the villages surrounding a forest in Madhya Pradesh, India. The job of securing the villagers and protecting the tigress falls on officer Vidya Vincent, a female Indian Forest Services (IFS) officer. The officer becomes obsessed with safeguarding the villagers as well as the tigress as she recognizes how this nonhuman actor is challenging the sexist, patriarchal world of hunters, politicians, and bureaucrats in India. In saving the tigress, she believes she can save herself.

Among the issues discussed in this article are the following: a) How has colonialism impacted the collapse of ecosystems in countries such as India?; b) How has the equating of nonhuman actors with their colonized counterparts affected the psyche of natives?; c) In what ways does the film *Sherni* challenge the patriarchy by anthropomorphizing nonhuman actors? Consequently, the article is organized into three sections, followed by a conclusion. The first section introduces Thomas Nail's concept of border, which limits the analysis of the film to the extensive and intensive movements, a theme that is continued in the subsequent sections. Accordingly, the following section explores the hegemonical exercise fostered within India as a legacy of colonialism as well as the efforts made to maintain the division, illustrated through examples drawn from the film. Colonial heritage is also evident in the appeal of Shakespeare, whose writings have been adapted and nativized extensively in Indian contexts. Furthermore, the Hindi film industry, popularly known as Bollywood, has also had a longstanding relationship with Shakespeare, particularly the Shrew theme, whose mutations

can be seen recurring throughout Bollywood films (see Singh and Tholia 2022). As a result, the third section discusses the intensive movement, i.e., the qualitative change that is brought about through the division of men's world with that of the marginalized other utilizing Shakespeare's Shrew tropes. In this case, the analysis seeks to demonstrate the substantial change experienced within the shrew trope played in the film that serves to challenge patriarchy while facilitating empathy for the nonhuman actor.

Border: An anthropogenic phenomenon

Societies are essentially products of the border without which they would simply be called the earth: "a purely presocial, undivided surface" (Nail 2016, 4). Taking Thomas Nail's perspective, "society is first and foremost a product of the borders that define it and material conditions under which it is dividable. Only afterwards are borders (re)produced by society" (4). The film *Sherni* also addresses the issue of borders, mainly constructed by humans to assert their dominion over nature, as well as the limits humans enjoy imposing upon each other. It is possible for nonhuman agents to negotiate the border motion resulting from natural phenomena. Nevertheless, human-induced border movements, such as territorial conflicts, political and military conflicts, legal conflicts, etc., restrict the living conditions of nonhuman agents.

In the film, a tigress attempts to cross the jungle and reach the national park so that her cubs may be provided with a safe habitat. Unfortunately, the space between the national park and the jungle has been occupied by humans, encompassing them in the form of villages and cities. There is only one remaining path leading to her destination, which has also been converted into a mining site. Thus, she comes into direct conflict with humans, who declare her to be a "man-eating," ferocious creature. The incident turns into a politico-bureaucratic nightmare where both the authorities and the locals insist on killing her as a demonstration of their superiority.

In their hubris, humans tend to overlook that they have disconnected themselves from "natural" border motion by imposing artificial limits upon it. Humans exist within a "fuzzy zone-like phenomenon of inclusive disjunction" characterized by "neither/nor, or both/and" (Nail 2016, 3). Therefore, humans occupy "the thing in between the two sides that touch the states" (3). In this context,

the film focuses on the states that exist between regimes of social power, which are not considered "strictly a territorial, political, juridical, or economic phenomenon, but equally an aterritorial, apolitical, nonlegal, and noneconomic phenomenon at the same time" (2-3). Despite its in-betweenness, borders do not imply a lack or absence of human activity; rather, they facilitate the division of social space, allowing it to multiply. Consequently, Thomas Nail distinguishes between extensive and intensive divisions:

> The first kind of division (extensive) introduces an absolute break – producing two quantitively separate and discontinuous entities. The second kind of division (intensive) adds a new path to the existing one like a fork of bifurcation producing a qualitative change of the whole continuous system. The bifurcation diverges from itself while still being the "same" pathway.
> Although borders are typically understood according to the extensive definition, this is only a relative effect of the intensive kind of division. Borders emerge where there is a continuous process that reaches a bifurcation point. After this point, a qualitative divergence occurs and two distinct pathways can be identified. The result of this bifurcation is that the border is experienced as a continuity by some and as a discontinuity by others. (3)

Sherni effectively describes this conflict of extensive and intensive movement of boundaries. This film contains characters such as hunter Ranjan, officer Bansilal Bansal, officer Nangia, legislator G K Singh, etc., who recognize a clear divide between the other and the men's world and are determined to preserve it. There are also others, such as officer Vidya, prof. Hassan and some local villagers, who are willing to take on the challenges posed by the world order of men and become entwined with the faith of the tigress. As soon as the nonhuman actor crosses the anthropogenic limits imposed on the ecological order, it threatens patriarchal codes by challenging and assimilating the diverse categories of marginalized groups along with her. Even though Vidya and the others do not succeed in eliminating the man-nature divide, they experience a qualitative

shift in their perspectives, which results in negotiations with the limitations imposed on them by patriarchal institutions.

The following section will examine how tiger hunting in India became a symbol of colonial power imposed on the native population by tying them to this nonhuman actor. A devastating result of anthropogenic activity on this planet has been the colonization of other populations, which has allowed a small fraction of humanity to not only dominate other races but also destroy cultures and disrupt ecosystems.

Tiger Hunting in India: A colonial legacy

In the film, one of the 'Forest Friend' volunteers from the village discusses the symbiotic relationship between the tiger and humans, emphasizing its importance as such: "If the tiger exists, so does the jungle. If the jungle exists, there's rain. If it rains, there's water. If there's water, there's human life" (1:13:00-1:13:20). This volunteer's opinion reflects an understanding informed by Indian cultural memory, which has always viewed the tiger as an integral part of the ecological chain. Essentially, his statement echoes the prescription regarding tigers in *Mahabharata*'s "Udyoga Parva," which states: "Do not, oh, cut down the forest with its tigers, and let not the tigers be driven away from the forest. The tiger, out of the woods is easily slain; the wood also, that is without a tiger, is easily cut down. Therefore, it is the tiger that protects the forest and the forest that shelters the tiger" (51). In fact, tigers and wildlife have been so integral to Indian history that cave paintings dating from 1000,000 and 30,000 B.C. have been found in central India depicting them (Jhala et al. 2021, 283; Badam & Sathe 1991). So why has a nation whose people are culturally motivated to find resonance with nonhuman life, particularly tigers, become hostile to them?

Part of the answer may be attributed to British colonialism, in which native savagery was linked to tigers as a means of establishing their dominion over indigenous populations, as noted by Ralph Crane and Lisa Fletcher (2014): "For the British India the tiger – despite its power and "Royalness" – was regarded as dishonourable while the lion, the symbol of Britain, was regarded as noble" (373). Similar to the distress Derrida experienced with the "bottomless gaze" (Derrida 2008, 12) of his cat, the tiger's gaze, which Britishers innately affiliated with Indians, gave the British a similar experi-

ence of the "abyssal limit" of their naked savagery. As a means of overcoming this fallacy and retaining their superior semblance over the native population, the "New Mughals" had to surpass regional rulers, such as Tipu Sultan, who had employed tigers to symbolize their rule (Sramek 2006, 659). As a result, tiger hunting became associated with British masculinity (664), which even influenced native citizens. In order to please their colonial masters, Indians had to participate in similar activities. On the one hand, tiger hunting became a luxury, symbolizing VIP (Very Important Person) culture. In addition, deforestation became a necessity to ensure access to natural resources for revenue purposes.

Even after India gained independence, the British system left a lasting impression. As a means of connoting membership in an elite circle and belonging to the warrior castes, the middle-class, educated officers attempted to emulate the former British lords (Rangarajan 2001, 97-98). Apparently, the conquest of nature, which was widespread during the imperial era, gained greater traction after they left:

> Monocultures were promoted even within wildlife sanctuaries to meet the growing demands of paper mills and wood-based industries. The federal government funded many such schemes to clear-fell forests with a rich variety of shrubs, bushes, grasses and a wealth of tree species to make way for single-species stands of commercially valuable trees. These could include sal, teak, pine, eucalyptus or wattle, depending on the region in question. (97)

During the 1970s, an intensive effort was made to protect wildlife with the enactment of the Wildlife Protection Act 1972 (WPA 1972), which led to a modern conservation program for tigers, regarded as a symbol of national pride.

Sherni references the continued exploitation of wildlife and the hunting of tigers as colonial legacies. There are two instances where this is explicitly stated: A first instance is when Vidya meets Saiprasad, the officer who previously held Vidya's position. He offers her advice on approaching this challenging job in the same manner as he did: "Can I confess something? It was tough posting. The first two months were a nightmare. Then I learned how to handle

things... The Forest Department is a legacy of the British Raj. So work like them. Bring in the revenue, your superiors are happy, promotion guaranteed. You know the score. You're smart" (51:13-51:44).

In the course of the film, Vidya finds herself entangled in a mess of bureaucracy, where her attempts to save the tigress are met with stiff resistance from her superiors, only to realize that this "government of big cats" (Mathur 2021) works within a framework of "conspiracy of silence" (167) that places profits and prizes at the top of the agenda. This is where she observes the "extensive division" that the authorities wish to preserve, the status quo, to exploit the system to their advantage.

A second instance in which the film expressly depicts the colonial exploits of tiger hunting occurs at the end of the film when Vidya sees an embalmed tiger that was killed by Britishers 70 years ago. This frozen tiger represents a frozen moment in time in which nothing has changed, and patriarchal society still exploits the weak and vulnerable, including the wild beauty of tigers, a species not immune to the wrath of humans. The unnerving gaze of helplessness lingered on Vidya's face for a few fleeting seconds before she abruptly removed her attention from the frozen beast. However, the silence surrounding Vidya does not come without some resistance, in that the killing of the tigress prompted a rage inside her, and as she speaks, it unsettles the rotten system of bureaucracy.

Taming the Shrew: Women and Animals in the (m)Anthropogenic world

Anna Kamaralli (2012) defines a shrew as "a woman who makes the wrong kind of noise, who says things that people do not want to hear.... History is full of attempts to silence women, but just as full of representations of women as talkers" (204). Shakespeare has been one of the leading dramatists in carving many representations of "female talkers" and showing the attempts made to silence them. The term 'shrew' is rarely used today, but the "power of the concept remains unchanged since Shakespeare first coined his remarkable range of vocal women" (1). Silence is not typically regarded as a virtue among men. However, they are bracketed as saints or prophets if they practice silence. On the other hand, this has not been the case with women throughout history, as their primary virtues, "obedience, chastity and silence" (1), are considered paramount.

Tales relating to the shrew, whether derived from folklore or Shakespeare, are shaped by two key elements. First, there is the vocal woman, who contests the notion of masculinity in men, thereby challenging them to tame her. To further control the woman, the man (lover or husband) degrades her to the level of an animal, while at the same time, in these tales, a real animal is punished as a means of intimidating the woman. Essentially, the situation evoked presumes that the men respond to the verbose women who need to be silenced. In this case, the problem is similar to that described by Donna Haraway concerning humans and animals (by humans, she clearly means men) that "only the Humans can respond; animals react. The Animal is forever positioned on the other side of an unbridgeable gap, a gap that reassures the Humans of his excellence" (2008, 77). Women and animals are intertwined through their shared faith, in such a way that when one is brought into the equation, into the process of othering, the other is not far behind. Judith Still points out in "Women and Other Animals" (2015) that when the man "*insists* on the difference between man and the animal then it seems that it is also woman who silently enters into play as the non-man, the other to man" (306).

Within the ecological masculinities of the (m)Anthropogenic (Pulé & Hultman 2021) world, *Sherni* plays out quite explicitly this shared equation of women and animals. The ubiquity of Shakespearean literature in bits and pieces, referred to by Poonam Trivedi as "Shakebyte" (Trivedi 2022), is quite evident within the mainstream of Bollywood storytelling. Several Bollywood films have incorporated Shakespeare's *The Taming of the Shrew* subtly or overtly (Authors 2022). However, Bollywood romance films or romcoms tend to overuse a trope in which the hero is adamant about winning the heroine regardless of whether or not she rejects him. It is not crucial whether the heroine suffers or not since she is what the hero desires. Ultimately, she must succumb to the hero's wishes and return his love.

The significance of what *Sherni* does is to return to the roots of the shrew tale, which allegedly originates in India and has travelled to the west (Brunvand 1966). Jan Brunvand discusses the folktale Type 901, which may have originated in India, in which an animal is subjected to severe punishment in order to frighten the wife. In most cases, the punishment is imposed on a cat (347). However, the pun-

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ishment meted out to the wild cat in *Sherni* does not silence the woman this time. Shakespeare, being the genius he was, was able to illustrate women's inventiveness even by being silent about how, despite pretending to obey their lords, they actually achieve their goals through men. While deriving its inspiration from the shrew, Bollywood rarely depicts the ingenuity of women in a Shakespearean manner and tends to portray mainly male-dominated stories. *Sherni* breaks the tradition of women being tamed, as punishing the animal makes the woman more rageful. In Shakespeare's Shrew, Bianca's silence is "not absolute...but relative, compared to the noisy resistance of her shrewish sister Katherine" (Maurer & Gaines 2010, 101). Vidya's relative silence during the film is broken when she becomes confrontational following the death of the nonhuman actor and calls her superior officer Nangia "pathetic" when he fails to initiate an appropriate investigation against hunter Ranjan.

With the film's opening shot showing a man prowling like a wild beast, the film clearly conveys to the audience that the world they are about to experience is dominated by the beast known as man. As the story unfolds, the audience comes to understand the animal to be more human than the men in the story. Throughout the story, all attempts to make an anthropomorphic connection between the characters and the audience are thwarted by the men. For instance, when it is discovered for the first time that T12 has two cubs with whom she is crossing the jungle towards the national forest, Vidya watches their innocent demeanour, when her (and the audience's) attention is interrupted by the voice of hunter Ranjan who demands not to be fooled by their innocent faces. A clear boundary is drawn in the film, which indicates that it is primarily a drama of men where killing animals or othering subjugated groups is only collateral damage. As the men brewed in colonial hangovers strive endlessly to kill the tigress, women (and a few men) have taken charge to protect the tigress. In the film, it is clear that women and tigresses share a strong affinity when one of the female forest guards reveals that she has begun to "see pugmarks in my dreams" (1:23:40-1:23:45).

Conclusion

With its attempt to anthropomorphize nonhuman actors, what does the film achieve? When viewed within the "limitrophy" (Derrida 2008, 29) applied to the analysis of the film, one may observe the

extensive and intensive development that feeds and multiplies in the confines of the limit by "multiplying its figures, in complicating, thickening, folding, and diving the line" (29), thereby achieving two distinct objectives. In the first instance, there is resistance against the extensive limits whereby people wish to maintain the status quo as it currently exists. In its attempt to resist the desire to keep exploiting the vulnerable, especially nonhuman actors (animals and nature), the film makes a strong statement against it. In accordance with Haraway's adage that all beings "except Man can be killed but not murdered" (2008, 78), *Sherni* describes the killing of the tigress as murder without any semblance of hesitation. The liberal idea of justice is "based on human exceptionalism and separation from the rest of the natural world" (Schlosberg 2014, 75). Such an idea conveniently ignores the harm caused by humans to the nonhuman world as well as "our integration within, and responsibility for, broader systems, communities and practices of humans, and nonhumans alike" (75). The biocentric approach can no longer work as it must be replaced with a Zoe-centred egalitarianism, which is an "unsentimental response to the opportunistic trans-species commodification of Life" (Braidotti 2013, 61). As a result, this Zoe-centred approach generates a desire to integrate nonhuman actors into community life, which Haraway refers to as 'living in a companion-species world' (2008, 134). The "conception of *integrity* accomplishes for nonhumans what dignity does for human beings" (Schlosberg 2014, 75).

As the characters (and perhaps the audience) are brought to terms with the notion of integrity in the film, where after Vidya and the Forest Friend volunteers come together to look after the cubs, a question posed by officer Nangia looms in the forefront that he had posed earlier in the film: "Is a balance between development and environment essential? But if you choose development, you can't save the environment. Save the environment, then you break development's heart" (54:50-55:26). In finding the answer, the film shows the reflection of the "hospitable Anthropocene," a concept dealing with human dominance "but a refined one" having a "conscious control of our interaction with the environment" (Arias-Maldonado 2014, 26). Perhaps that would be something humanity as a whole should strive for in order to make this planet habitable for all species.

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Note

1   Taking inspiration from environmentalist Bill McKibben, Jennifer Fay uses this term "to propose the idea of a planet that appears to be our home, but with a difference" (2).

Dansk grønlandslitteratur og jagten på det antropocæne

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Abstract

This article examines the role of climate change and the Anthropocene in contemporary Danish literature about Greenland. I argue that even though Danish literature in general has been very concerned with anthropogenic climate change in recent years, this is not the case for Danish literature specifically about Greenland. To illustrate this, I begin with a short literary overview, after which I focus on the novel *Korsveje i Nord* (2015) by Bjarne Ljungdahl. This book, I define as an example of cli-fi ("climate fiction" or "climate change fiction") that *does* engage with Greenland, and I analyze its view on the Anthropocene. Following this main part of the article, I briefly discuss what potentials cli-fi's such as *Korsveje i Nord* might hold in the discussion of anthropogenic climate change and the Anthropocene, and I turn my attention to literature about Greenland from outside Denmark.

Keywords: dansk grønlandslitteratur, Grønland, antropocæn, klimafiktion, cli-fi

Indgang

Med værker som Lars Skinnebachs *Øvelser og rituelle tekster* (2011), Theis Ørntofts *Digte 2014* (2014) og Charlotte Weitzes *Den afskyelige* (2016) er en bølge af klimakritisk skønlitteratur de seneste år skyllet ind over Danmark.[1] Orienteringen mod klimaet og herunder *antropocæn* – forstået som "en ny geologisk epoke, hvor den teknologiske udvikling har sammenfiltret menneske og natur i en hidtil uset grad, og hvor konsekvensen er en lang række uoverskuelige klimaforandringer, der truer planetens eksistens og overlevelse" (Tønder 2019, 729) – kan ses i sammenhæng med en større, aktuel strømning af politisk engageret litteratur i Danmark. Tendensen er i forskellige variationer blevet kaldt *den etiske drejning* (Bunch og Salling 2015) og *den sociale vending* (Flinker 2015; Nexø 2016), og Louise Mønster taler specifikt om *det politiskes genkomst* i dansk litteratur. Hun betoner, hvordan især samtidspoesien "er optaget af problematikker, der angår vores samfunds- og klimamæssige virkelighed. Den forbliver ikke i en eksistentiel intimsfære, men taler ud i en fælles verden og forsøger at vække læserens engagement" (Mønster 2019a, 155).[2]

Hvad der dog kan undre i hvert fald undertegnede er, at denne massive interesse for klimaet og antropocæn *ikke* ses i den danske skønlitteratur om Grønland – også kaldet *dansk grønlandslitteratur* (Thisted 2013, 296).[3] For er Grønland ikke det perfekte udgangspunkt for at diskutere de enorme aftryk, mennesket har sat på kloden, og de fremtidsscenarier, vi måske går i møde, hvis ikke vi ændrer vores levevis radikalt? Rapporter har gang på gang slået fast, at klimaforandringerne er særlig ekstreme i Arktis, herunder Grønland, hvor temperaturen stiger dobbelt så hurtigt som i resten af verden (Śmieszek og Koivurova 2017, 1), og al isen måske er smeltet om bare 1.000 år (Aschwanden et al. 2019). Det er derfor bemærkelsesværdigt, at store dele af grønlandslitteraturen ikke synes synderlig optaget af disse udfordringer.

Netop dette (mis)forhold er omdrejningspunktet i nærværende artikel, hvor jeg undersøger klimaforandringerne og antropocæns rolle i ny dansk grønlandslitteratur. Nærmere bestemt lægger jeg ud med et kort litterært overblik, hvorefter jeg fokuserer på Bjarne Ljungdahls roman *Korsveje i Nord* (2015). Denne bestemmer jeg som en såkaldt *klimafiktion* på et tematisk såvel som formelt plan, og jeg belyser i forlængelse heraf dens *antropocæne natursyn*. Til sidst diskuterer jeg kort, hvad skønlitteratur som *Korsveje i Nord* kan bidra-

ge med i diskussionen af klimakrise og antropocæn, og jeg vender blikket mod grønlandslitteratur udenfor Danmarks grænser.

Dansk grønlandslitteratur, klima og antropocæn

Litteratur om Grønland har de seneste 10-15 år – sideløbende med det aktuelle politiske engagement i dansk litteratur – opnået en betydelig popularitet og anerkendelse: Flere forfattere end tidligere skriver om landet, og en del af bøgerne vinder vægtige priser (Dybdal 2021). Men det er altså ikke antropocæn, der er i fokus. I stedet synes de danske grønlandsforfattere i høj grad at beskæftige sig med selve koloniseringen i 1721 og dens lange efterspil. Eksempelvis har Kim Leine med sin stort anlagte trilogi *Profeterne i Evighedsfjorden* (2012), *Rød mand/Sort mand* (2018) og *Efter åndemaneren* (2021) behandlet årene omkring og efter Hans Egedes indtog på øen, og Iben Mondrup har med *Tabita* (2020) og *Vittu* (2022) givet stemme til nogle af de grønlandske børn, der kort efter koloniens officielle opløsning i 1953 blev adopteret af danske familier.

I enkelte værker nævnes klimaforandringerne med en kort bemærkning, men de bliver sjældent det centrale emne. Fx kan man – i hvert faldt momentant – spore en klimakritisk holdning i Kim Leines *De søvnløse* (2016); her i forbindelse med den grønlandske fanger Nathaniel:

> For nogle år siden ville han have taget indvoldene med hjem til hundene, måske ville han endda have taget en sæl med hjem til dem. Men hundene har han skudt, hver og en, ligesom alle andre fangere i distriktet har skudt deres hunde. Ingen grund til at have hunde når isen og sneen forsvinder fra landet, sådan som det er sket de sidste tyve år (Leine 2016, 143).

Kongenialt med dette ses også i Rasmus Theisens debutroman, *Andre hunde* (2021), en stedvis beskæftigelse med de presserende klimaforandringer, fx da tilflytteren Arno udtrykker, at "[d]e gamle grønlændere slår hundene ihjel for at skåne dem for et liv uden is, nu hvor jøkelen smelter" (Theisen 2021, 168). En større rolle spiller klimakrisen og i nogle tilfælde også antropocæn i de såkaldte *arctic noirs* – altså krimier, der foregår i Arktis (Andersen et al. 2019, 46). Dette gælder eksempelvis Robert Zola Christensens *Is i blodet* (2013),

Steffen Jacobsens *Et bjerg af løgne* (2015) og Rune Stefanssons *Den sidste olie* (2016), der alle handler om råstofudvinding i Grønland. Som hos Leine og Theisen er de klimamæssige udfordringer dog ikke værkernes primære anliggender, og de indgår snarere som én blandt mange brikker i de højspændte geopolitiske konflikter og kriminalsager.[4]

Man skal med andre ord lede grundigt, hvis man ønsker at finde eksempler på dansk grønlandslitteratur, hvor klimaforandringerne er det væsentligste element. Faktisk skal man helt ud i periferien, hinsides de efterhånden kanoniserede værker af Leine og Mondrup samt de voldsomt populære arctic noirs, for at finde en egentlig *klimafiktion*, nemlig Bjarne Ljungdahls relativt ukendte *Korsveje i Nord*. Og selvom denne roman næppe er den stærkeste rent litterært og æstetisk, rummer den vældig interessante perspektiver på antropocæn, litteratur og Grønland, som det nu skal dreje sig om.[5]

Korsveje i Nord og klimafiktion

Begrebet klimafiktion kaldes også *cli-fi* – en sammentrækning af *climate fiction* eller *climate change fiction* (Andersen 2020, 1) – og forstås her som en genre, der er særlig optaget af menneskeskabte klimaforandringer.[6] Antonia Mehnert præciserer:

> However, taking a more narrow definition of climate change fiction as a starting point, I am interested in works that explicitly engage with anthropogenic climate change. In these books, meteorological phenomena do not just provide the background setting against which the story unfolds; climate change significantly alters and is a prevalent issue for characters, plot, *and* setting (Mehnert 2016, 38).

I klimafiktion trækkes meteorologiske fænomener altså helt ind i forgrunden af fortællingen, og de indtager en aktiv, betydningsbærende hovedrolle. Klimaforandringerne ses som et direkte resultat af menneskelig aktivitet, og som Jens Kramshøj Flinker noterer, omfatter genren derfor ikke miljø- og naturkatastrofer; kun når disse er forårsaget af menneskeskabte klimaforandringer (Flinker 2018, 44). Og netop dette ser vi i Bjarne Ljungdahls *Korsveje i Nord*.

I romanen befinder vi os i et hyperglobaliseret og hyperteknologiseret fremtidens Grønland. Landet har løsrevet sig fuldstændig

fra den gamle kolonimagt Danmark og i stedet indgået en samar-bejdsaftale med Kina, hvilket blandt andet betyder, at et kinesisk mineselskab borer efter jernmalm tæt ved indlandsisen. Dette fører til en massiv kinesisk tilstedeværelse på øen og har konsekvenser både demografisk og geografisk. Eksempelvis forlyder det i en rap-port, at befolkningstallet på kort tid er steget fra 57.000 til 130.000, og at kun halvdelen af disse indbyggere er af grønlandsk afstam-ning (Ljungdahl 2015, 163). I nogle tilfælde er det ligefrem umuligt at fastslå etniciteten: "På vejene rendte en del børn af udefinerbar oprindelse rundt" (Ljungdahl 2015, 216). Ligeledes er den grøn-landske natur sat under et stort pres fra både den kinesiske minein-dustri og den globale opvarmning. På vej mod jernminen møder arbejderen Pavia derfor ikke et sne- og isdækket Grønland, men et stenet og afsmeltet:

> Først store græsfyldte sletter med utallige arme af rivende elve, som med stor kraft transporterede det lysbrune lere-de smeltevand ned og ud mod kysten, hvor det aflejredes i store vifteformede faner flere kilometer ud i havet væk fra klippekysten. […] Når de største alpine [sic!] fjeldkæ-der var passeret, ændredes landskabet til utallige afrunde-de klippetoppe, som stak op gennem en tilsyneladende uendelig stenørken med et virvar af løse stenblokke og vandmættede flerfarvede grus- og sandområder aflejret i ejendommelige mønstre kun afbrudt af utallige større og mindre vandstrømme (Ljungdahl 2015, 12-13).

Fortællingens klimaks opstår, da minearbejderne en dag – trods tal-rige forvarsler – trænger for dybt ind i jordens overflade, og vold-somme mængder af smeltevand skyller ind over området. Minear-bejdere og uskyldige pårørende omkommer, hele bydele udraderes, og det kinesiske minedriftseventyr får en brat ende. Romanen spe-kulerer på den måde i konsekvenserne af menneskets langvarige slid på planeten, hvor "alle [jo ved], at klimaet [går] mod varmere perioder" (Ljungdahl 2015, 68-69), og "isfronten [har] ændret sig" (Ljungdahl 2015, 67). På baggrund af dette samt den mere overord-nede betragtning, at den aktive natur og de af mennesket forandre-de meteorologiske fænomener skubbes helt ind i forgrunden af fortællingen, kan romanen altså ses som en klimafiktion jævnfør Mehnert ovenfor.

Det er imidlertid ikke kun tematisk, at *Korsveje i Nord* beskæftiger sig med natur, klima og antropocæn. Også på det formelle plan tager bogen nemlig livtag med den igangværende klimakrise, idet den – typisk for genren (Flinker 2018, 45-47) – gør brug af en naturvidenskabelig stil. En sådan ser vi blandt andet i forbindelse med de mange højteknologiske apparater såsom *multi-cordere* og *magnetroner* samt en optagethed af fagspecifik, teknisk terminologi. Om området omkring jernminen lyder det eksempelvis:

> Kraftstationen, *Electronic Power Plant*, EPP II, i daglig tale kaldet 'lille EPP', var kun et transformeranlæg med induktionsmodulatorer til magnetronebanen, og den fyldte kun det halve af et område i forhold til den store kraftstation EPP I, i daglig tale kaldet 'store EPP', som var bygget længere inde ved isen, og som leverede kraften til lille EPP (Ljungdahl 2015, 18).

I tråd med dette ses også en sproglig afsmitning fra geologien, idet vi gentagne gange læser om vulkanske stentyper, malm og krystaller, borestænger, sprængningsledninger og jordskorpebevægelser. Foruden at bidrage til værkets naturvidenskabelige stil peger dette direkte mod tankerne om antropocæn, der som bekendt netop angår jordklodens geologiske strata (Crutzen og Stoermer 2000, 17). Romanen kan således siges at bearbejde det antropocæne på en meget konkret måde.

Endvidere knytter de tekniske og teknologiske begreber an til en naturvidenskabelig forståelsesramme, hvor der udvises tiltro til, at hændelserne, både de smeltende ismasser og den følgende flodbølge, kan forklares rationelt og gennem (natur)videnskabelige logikker. Derfor er det selvfølgelig "videnskabsfolk [med] baggrund indenfor elteknik, klima, geologi, hydrologi, glaciologi og beslægtede videnskaber" (Ljungdahl 2015, 71), der sættes på opgaven at kaste lys over situationen.

Effekten af en sådan naturvidenskabelig orientering er blandt andet, at der skabes et plausibelt billede af, hvordan fremtidens Grønland *kan* se ud, hvis mennesket fortsætter med at drive rov på klodens ressourcer. For nok er Korsveje i Nord fyldt med hyperbler og science fiction-teknologi[7], men det er alt sammen forankret i et naturvidenskabeligt paradigme og realistisk motiveret.

Korsveje i Nord og det antropocæne natursyn

Som man kan fornemme af ovenstående, møder vi i Ljungdahls Fremtidsgrønland en vild og ubehersket natur, der nok lader sig underkaste naturvidenskabelig undersøgelse, men altså ikke kan kontrolleres. Naturen er – i hvert fald i størstedelen af værket – destruktiv og voldsom; den er aktiv, uregerlig og uharmonisk. Med Flinkers ord har romanen derfor et *antropocænt natursyn*: "dvs. at materialiteten fremstår monstrøs. Her trækkes på en gammel diskurs, hvor monstrøsitet er et symbol på det farlige, som kommer snigende og synes ude af kontrol. Samtidig er der også tale om realisme, idet der skildres en antropocæn natur" (Flinker 2018, 62). En sådan monstrøs, antropocæn natur kommer særlig til udtryk i forbindelse med den mine, arbejderne udvinder malm fra, samt den smeltende indlandsis, der transformeres til en flodbølge.

På den ene side er minen et billede på modernitet og industriel fremdrift; det er den, der – ikke ulig i virkelighedens debatter – potentielt kan føre Grønland mod en egentlig selvstændighed. På den anden side er minen et meget konkret billede på menneskets langvarige vold mod kloden, hvor jordoverfladen i bogstaveligste forstand penetreres, og råstoffer udvindes til egen vinding. Det er i den sammenhæng, at minen beskrives som monstrøs og farlig – ja, flere steder direkte djævelsk: Den har tidligere taget flere menneskeliv, er præget af ulidelig varme, og dens labyrintiske gange fordeler sig som treforke (Ljungdahl 2015, 32).

Det er også denne mine, der bliver katalysator for de store mængder af smeltevand, der oversvømmer området, og som indtager en endnu mere aktiv, handlende rolle i fortællingen. Som Flinker forklarer, handler det antropocæne natursyn om, "at naturen gives stemme. Eller man kan sige, at i cli-fi'en taler naturen med en egen stemme og en anden stemme end normalt" (Flinker 2018, 47) – og netop dette gør vandet i *Korsveje i Nord*. Det er nemlig hverken livgivende eller harmonisk, men konstant faretruende og ultimativt dødbringende. Eksempelvis ses det, hvordan vandet flere gange advarer mennesket, inden katastrofen finder sted: *Udenfor* minen forlyder det, at "gennemsnitstemperaturerne var på få årtier steget med fire-fem grader, og verdenshavenes temperaturer var også begyndt at stige" (Ljungdahl 2015, 87-88), og *nede i* minen er arbejderne omgivet af vandpytter, hvilket indikerer smeltevandslækager. Den danske arbejder Ulf fatter mistanke: "Det klare indsivende

vand kunne komme fra gletscheren [sic!] over minen. Hvis det var tilfældet, var det kun et spørgsmål om tid, før vandet for alvor brød igennem" (Ljungdahl 2015, 78). Og *bryde igennem* gør det selvfølgelig – da mennesket, i særdeleshed den grådige leder mineingeniøren, ikke tager advarslerne alvorligt. Med ét fyldes minen med smeltevand forårsaget af den globale opvarmning, og vandet fosser videre ud til det fattige byområde:

> Det var som et mareridt. Den store bølge skyllede frem i landskabet og nu hørtes en tydelig næsten tordenagtig brusen fra vandet […]. Bølgen var nu fyldt med brædder, træplader, plasticstykker, presenninger og personlige ejendele af enhver slags. Et sted sejlede et halvt hus af sted båret oppe af vandet, og nu kunne man se, at vandet havde nået de første personer, som straks forsvandt i de frådende og brølende vandmasser (Ljungdahl 2015, 125-127).[8]

Smeltevandet og minen er altså udtryk for et antropocænt natursyn, idet de skildres som mørke og monstrøse, aktivt handlende og med egen stemme. De er imidlertid også antropocæne på et mere konkret niveau: Som talrige forskere har fremlagt, er den antropocæne epoke kendetegnet ved, at det menneskelige og ikkemenneskelige har filtret sig sammen i en sådan grad, at de ikke længere kan holdes adskilte (se fx Latour 2014 eller Tønder 2019 tidligere i artiklen), og dette er også tilfældet i Ljungdahls roman. Her forekommer hverken minen eller smeltevandet som *rene* naturlige fænomener, men tværtimod som sammenblandinger af menneskeligt og ikkemenneskeligt: Minen eksisterer kun, fordi mennesket har boret i fjeldet, og smeltevandet findes kun, fordi mennesket har opvarmet kloden. De kan derfor ikke "reduceres til noget menneskeligt eller naturligt, men er begge dele, noget tredje midtimellem" (Flinker 2018, 48).

   Som jeg selv har argumenteret for andetsteds, er det oplagt at tolke romanen mytologisk (Dybdal 2021): som en genfortælling af syndflodsmyten i den antropocæne tidsalder. Hvor Gud i *Første Mosebog* lader det syndige menneske oversvømme af en syndflod, er det i *Korsveje i Nord* smeltevand fra menneskets egne destruktive og grådige aktiviteter, der skyller ind over mineområdet. På samme

vis er romanen ikke en dystopi; i stedet markerer katastrofen, som i den bibelske fortælling, et nulpunkt, hvorfra livet på ny kan blomstre: Mineselskabet lukker ned, og romanens hovedkarakterer søger mod det rurale Grønland, hvor de påbegynder nye tilværelser i pagt med den uspolerede natur. Beskrivelserne i denne del af bogen er vældig romantiserede, og på dette punkt adskiller *Korsveje i Nord* sig fra en række skandinaviske klimafiktioner, der typisk er renset for al natursentimentalitet (Flinker 2018, 62). Endvidere er det muligt at forstå romanen og de problematikker, den bearbejder, i lyset af *økologisk imperialisme* (Crosby 1986): Det kinesiske mineselskab reproducerer en række koloniale strukturer, og klimaforandringerne gøres særlig synlige gennem den nye 'kolonimagts' geologiske udnyttelse af Grønland. Romanen befinder sig således i intersektionen mellem økokritik, antropocæn og postkolonialisme.

Udgang

I ovenstående har jeg fremlagt den betragtning – og undren – at dansk grønlandslitteratur ikke synes særlig optaget af klimakrise og antropocæn.[9] Dette er til trods for en markant aktuel strømning i dansk litteratur, der beskæftiger sig med netop disse emner, samt det faktum, at klimaforandringerne i Grønland og Arktis påkalder sig ekstraordinær opmærksomhed. Faktisk skal man helt ud i periferien af dansk grønlandslitteratur for at finde et værk, der for alvor tager livtag med den antropocæne epoke, nemlig Ljungdahls *Korsveje i Nord*. Romanen er som nævnt af svingende kvalitet rent litterært, men den fremlægger nogle interessante perspektiver på Grønlands mulige fremtid og klimaforandringernes rolle heri. De væsentligste af disse er i nærværende artikel blevet belyst ved at indkredse romanen som en klimafiktion og i forlængelse heraf undersøge dens antropocæne natursyn.

Man kan spørge sig selv, hvad skønlitteratur kan bidrage med i diskussionen af og eventuelt løsningen på de enorme klimaudfordringer, vi står overfor. Antonia Mehnert mener i den forbindelse, at litteratur og andre fiktioner kan være med til at forme den offentlige debat, engagere modtagerne affektivt og skabe kritisk refleksion:

> The cultural realm offers a rethinking and reimagining of contemporary environmental problems such as climate change that not only intervenes in current debates but

> also fundamentally shapes them. Performances […], but
> also literature and film, make an important contribution
> to our understanding of climate change by depicting how
> future generations might adapt or might fail to adapt to
> climatic changes (Mehnert 2016, 2).

I samklang med dette ser Flinker litteraturen som et rum for *økologisk dannelse* (Flinker 2018), og han argumenterer for, at klimafiktioner kan fremme en særlig *økonarrativ forestillingsevne* (Flinker 2022).[10] Endvidere er fiktioner ifølge både Mehnert og Flinker nødvendige supplementer til naturvidenskabens diagrammer og statistiske prognoser, som kan virke abstrakte og svære at forbinde sig med (Mehnert 2016, 3-4; Flinker 2022, 13). På den måde kan litteraturen måske hjælpe os til bedre at forstå, forhandle og forestille os et liv i en klimaforandret verden.

Til sidst er der blot at sige, at vender vi blikket *ud over* Danmarks landegrænser, findes der mig bekendt heller ikke mange, men dog *nogle* adækvate eksempler på egentlige klimafiktioner og antropocæn litteratur, der beskæftiger sig med Grønland. Dette gælder eksempelvis australske Charlotte McConaghys *Migrations* (2020) og grønlandske Jessie Kleemanns *Arkhticós Dolorôs* (2021).[11] Og lad da bare Kleemann få de sidste lakoniske ord:

> polerne smelter
>
> komastøv
>
> yellowcake
>
> (Kleemann 2021, 71).

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zels Forlag.

Notes

1   Herudover kan nævnes værker af blandt andre C.Y. Frostholm, Dennis
Gade Kofod, Julie Sten-Knudsen, Kaspar Colling Nielsen, Kristian By-
skov, Liv Sejrbo Lidegaard, Peter Adolphsen, Rasmus Nikolajsen, Siri
Ranva Hjelm Jacobsen, Ursula Scavenius samt øvrige udgivelser af de
nævnte forfattere.

2   Som Jens Lohfert Jørgensen bemærker, kan en lignende tendens ses i
aktuelle litteraturstudier, idet de i høj grad "orienterer sig mod, hvad
man med en bred formulering kan kalde det sociale liv, mod menne-
skenes samspil med hinanden og med sociale institutioner, mod sam-
fundsmæssige udfordringer og mod politiske begreber og problemstil-
linger" (Jørgensen 2019, 5).

3   Kirsten Thisted definerer *dansk grønlandslitteratur* som litteratur skre-
vet af danske forfattere om grønlandsk relaterede emner (Thisted
2013, 296).

4   I Lars Skinnebachs *Øvelser og rituelle tekster* (2011) samt Julie Sten-
Knudsens *Syv lag* (2021) kobles klimaforandringer og Grønland også.
Hos Skinnebach fungerer Grønland dog mest af alt som en geografisk
baggrund for hans såkaldte øvelser, og hos Sten-Knudsen er digtsamlin-
gens primære emne moderskab; Grønland nævnes kun meget kort.

5   Bjarne Ljungdahls *Korsveje i Nord* (2015) fortsættes med andet bind i
romanserien, *Invasioner i Nord* (2016). I nærværende bidrag beskæftiger
jeg mig dog kun med førstnævnte, da denne er en egentlig klimafikti-
on, mens sidstnævnte snarere bevæger sig mod krimigenren. Man kan
i øvrigt diskutere, hvorvidt romanerne bør betegnes som danske eller
grønlandske; jeg ser dem i denne artikel som en del af dansk grøn-
landslitteratur, idet forfatteren er dansk, og de er skrevet på dansk.

6 Der er divergerende opfattelser af, hvad klimafiktion kan omfatte. Eksempelvis mener Jens Kramshøj Flinker, at genren udelukkende angår prosa og film (Flinker 2018, 41), mens Louise Mønster plæderer for at medregne lyrik (Mønster 2019b, 46).

7 En række forskere, i Danmark blandt andre Jens Kramshøj Flinker og Louise Mønster (Flinker 2018; Mønster 2019b), har belyst klimafiktionens nære slægtskab med science fiction-genren. Bemærk i den forbindelse de lignende betegnelser *cli-fi* og *sci-fi*.

8 Romanen beskæftiger sig også med kapitalisme- og klassekritik, blandt andet fordi de største ofte er fattige, udnyttede migranter.

9 Der findes som tidligere nævnt en del krimier, som omhandler Grønland og klima, men de kan sjældent kategoriseres som egentlige klimafiktioner.

10 Begrebet er centralt i Flinkers ph.d.-afhandling, *Nordiske økofiktioner og økonarrativ forestillingsevne: Romanen i den antropocæne tidsalder*, Københavns Universitet, 2021.

11 Man kan hertil føje, at en række grønlandske kunstnere er optaget af klimaforandringerne. Dette gælder blandt andet i filmindustrien; se fx Grønlund 2021 og Körber 2017. For en behandling af international klimakritisk, men ikke nødvendigvis antropocæn grønlandslitteratur se i øvrigt Riquet 2022 - og for en behandling af kunst og antropocæn i Norden mere generelt se Hedin og Gremaud 2018.

Troubling the water
Hydro-imaginaries in Nordic television drama

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Abstract

"Troubling the Water: Hydro-imaginaries in Nordic Television Drama" discusses a selection of Nordic television series to consider how they employ Anthropocenic imagery to challenge the Nordic governments' long-established attitude as sustainable and environment-friendly. Despite their different genres and aesthetic qualities these series share their concerns about the availability of clean water usually perceived as everlasting given the Nordic countries' physical geographical features. The close reading of relevant fragments from various series allows to interrogate such uncritical understanding of water as a "passive" commodity to serve modern societies anthropogenic wants, rather than eco-social needs. The article particularly focuses on the last season of the Danish family drama *The Legacy* which explicitly engages with water as being central to issues of social justice as much as issues of environmental concern.

Keywords: Nordic TV drama, hydrohumanities, eco-activism, Arvingerne, The Legacy

Water narratives in Nordic drama series

The credit sequence of the Danish series *The Rain* starts with a low angle shot of the darkening grey bluish skies. We see a raindrop slowly falling towards the screen from the milkily opaque clouds, hitting a tree leave and exploding in a myriad of sparkling water beads. This mini-event is followed by a succession of standard post-apocalyptic images of abandoned streets, dilapidated buildings, a human skeleton on a bed covered by spiderweb, a dry and dusty flower, a revolving DNA molecule, an electronic map and a human figure in a yellow protective suit ascending the steps of a bunker, – all presented through a lens covered with water. Then the shot of the tempestuous skies returns to serve as a background for the series' title. In the story, the heavy precipitation carries a virus, that kills people quickly and horribly. And although shortly after, the narrative shifts towards the issues of bioterrorism, I wish to retain the shot of an exploding raindrop, and use it as an iconic image that prompts us to ponder how water's constitutive, for human life and subjectivity, qualities are brought into focus, or obfuscated, in this and other Nordic television series concerned with climate change and Anthropocene.

In recent years, Nordic serial drama has produced an array of texts challenging and critiquing the regional governments' self-congratulatory attitude as exceptionally sustainable and environment-friendly.[1] Underlining the value of this trend, Reinhard Henning, Anna-Karin Jonasson, and Peter Degerman contend that "various forms of cultural production can contribute to a better understanding of historical developments that contributed to the construction of the Nordic countries' contemporary green image" and thus open the way for the critical reappraisal of their "environmental exceptionalism" (Henning, Jonasson, and Degerman 2018, 5). To that extent, Pietari Kääpä asserts that "critical interdisciplinary exploration of the diversity of Nordic ecocinema can not only make a significant contribution to the study of Nordic cultures, but also to bring back political participation to a field which has lost some of its explicit engagement with political issues" (Kääpä 2014, 25-26). And while ecocinema scholars increasingly argue that "it is important, in an era of expanding media universes, that critics look at mainstream as well as alternative uses of visual media" (Ivakhiv 2008, 24; see also Rust and Monani 2013), Julia Leyda expands generic

boundaries further to suggest that popular quality television series often bear textual and visual traces of what she calls the "climate unconscious," fostering baseline awareness of the anthropogenic footprint even when their narratives do not explicitly revolve around environmental issues (Leyda 2016, 16-17). Although, as David Ingram notes, (eco)critical cultural meanings may not be easily acknowledged by viewers depending on their prior predispositions and training (Ingram 2013), various modes of these texts' circulation together with the heterogeneity of their audiences always encourage multiple interpretations, and it is within this dynamic cultural field that dominant ideologies can be both reasserted and contested (cf. Hall 1980).[2] Leyda rightly points out that "engrossing audiences in … fictional narrative means allowing them to process emotionally the implications of what they may well already know via facts and figures" (Leyda 2016, 14). In line with this special issue's focus on contemporary representations of Anthropocene, I would like to argue that the growing global appreciation of drama serials makes them especially well-suited for retraining viewers' perception of ecological awareness.

This article's particular interest in aqueous manifestations of Anthropocene motivates my attention to the series that weave water-related themes in their story lines. The most prominent ones in this sense are Norwegian petro-thriller *Occupied* (2015-2019), Danish economic thriller *Follow the Money* (2016-2019), Icelandic police procedural *Trapped* (2017-2021), Finnish crime drama *Deadwind* (2018-2021) and Swedish geopolitical thriller *Thin Ice* (2020). While *Occupied* and *Thin Ice* can be described as speculative fiction, other narratives integrate elements of apocalyptic horror of which *The Rain* serves as a good example; others again, introduce motives of Nordic folklore and eco-gothic imagery. This happens, for instance, in the Swedish series *Jordskott* (2015-2017), and in the Norwegian production *Ragnarok* (2020-2022). *The Rain* is not the only tv drama in which water prominently features in the opening sequence. This is significant in light of credit sequences' ability to create an effect of a mise-en-abyme, to convey each series' ideological and thematic concerns (cf. Bruhn 2018).

Thus, *Follow the Money*, which tells a story about fraud in a research company producing new "green" windmill technologies, starts with showing the protagonists in their habitual milieus (work-

place, car workshop, manager's office) filmed as if they are submerged in clear water. Suggestive of flooding, water bubbles, papers, and children's hair move upward creating a drowning effect. The images of this threatening, rising presence of water can be read as a metaphor of sinking deeper and deeper under lies and deception, but also, as literally offering a perspective on the consequences of future climate change—the flooding.[3] Yet, this theme is not taken further than the opening shots as the plot soon evolves in the one of an economic thriller. Another series, *Occupied*, features a Green Party government taking a decision to cut off all fossil fuel production and is subsequently occupied by Russians who collude with the EU. The series opens with the up-tempo rock soundtrack depicting a dramatic, documentary-like footage of typical effects of climate change. The sequence displays the images of ice melting, heavy storms, floods, and human rescue actions. In the pilot episode, which also contains references to both the influential Norwegian oil industry and Norwegian nationalism, viewers are informed that a catastrophic hurricane, obviously understood as a sign of climate change, was the main reason behind the political popularity of the Green Party.[4] After that, however, the action moves towards the geopolitical intrigue and the ocean's tempestuous waters disappear from view. The opening sequence of season three again, in a more subtle way, shows maelstroms of oceanic water with whirling weeds and other debris as a background for characters' portraits and credit titles.

Trapped, Thin Ice, Ragnarok and *Jordskott*, in turn, equally include water imagery in their openings but engage more directly with the notion of nature's devastation brought about by mankind. Different in terms of their stylistic and aesthetic qualities each series unveils the damage inflicted upon the environment as a result of governmental corruption and corporate consumption, often exacerbated by individual human greed or negligence. The narrative climax here is often reached with the dramatic collapse of basic infrastructures involving power and telecommunication crashes, but also cutting of water supply chain for reasons of contamination. Social unrest follows forcing the authorities to resort to radical measures which propels the conflict towards its final resolution. Compared to electricity and communication that are relatively new human-made conveniences, the availability of clean water seems something "nat-

ural" and everlasting (especially considering Nordic countries' physical geographical features). The absence of clean water is perceived, in these narratives, as an exceptional calamity bringing to the surface fundamental water qualities that influence people's daily lives as water-based beings. Yet, despite the co-constitutive nature of human bodies and water, water-related crisis usually happens at the diegetic periphery and remains underexposed. My aim here is to unsettle the easy understanding of water as a "passive" commodity to serve modern societies anthropogenic wants, rather than eco-social needs.

Gaston Bachelard seminally wrote that water provides a "type of intimacy" that is very different from the kind suggested by the "depths" of rock (Bachelard 1983, 6). A being dedicated to water, he notes in *Water and Dreams*, is a being in a flux, she or "he dies every minute; something of his substance is constantly falling away" (Bachelard 1983, 6). Water, far from being an inert substance, let alone a mere resource or utility, is a dynamic entity that infuses ways of thinking and being. And, as elemental ecocriticism scholars Jeffrey Jerome Cohen and Lowell Duckert insist, human knowing of the world is matter mediated. This mediation happens through the "intimacy of substance, force, flesh, trope, plot, and weather" (Cohen and Duckert 2015, 11). Why Cohen and Duckert move towards the elements, and water in particular, is because they sense how natural "matter's 'expressive' dimension" (Opperman, 2014, 30) is increasingly being turned into an objectified resource reservoir that serves commodity capitalism, while leading to environmental degradation. When water's lively flows are captured, when they are managed well, or when threats of rising and toxic waters sediment into stillness, water is often forgotten, as if not part of our terrestrial existence. Even when the rising sea levels, plastic and acid oceans, polluted rivers, melting ice caps, worsening weather events and contagious precipitation remind us of the enormous role water, in all its abundance, lack or composition, plays in the Anthropocene drama.

The series as *Thin Ice* and *Ragnarok* additionally testify how water-related concerns are mostly coming to us via news broadcasts or scientific data in which water figures as an abstract substance detached from phenomenological experience. However relevant for raising public awareness, the scientific modeling and mediated stories come at a price. The abstraction brings the risk of relating to

ecologic phenomena as externalized facts such as temperature, acidity or plasticity. Through this abstracting operation water again becomes effectively compelled to an existence in the background of human activity. And in the times of Anthropocene, while mankind are promoted to the level of a geological force, the aqueous reality tends to lose even more ground. The orientation towards the ground that Melody Jue and Rafico Ruiz call a "terrestrial bias" (Jue and Ruiz 2021, 12) produces environmental imagination that is situated terrestrially. Although water is an intense site and agent in shaping current and future planetary conditions, the prevailing geologic Anthropocene narrative tends to obscure these hydrological forces. This is why in their collection *Thinking with Water* Cecilia Chen, Janine MacLeod and Astrida Neimanis, bring water to the forefront in the engagement with eco-political questions. They suggest that sensing the presence of water in all aspects of our life is a way to find more "inclusive politics and invigorated practice of cultural theory" (Chen, MacLeod and Neimanis, 2013, 5). Informed by these critical insights I now turn to one series in which water plays a prominent role, bringing to the surface the relationality between its material flowing and the social and cultural forms that emerge from and with it.

Water, art activism and public awareness in the Danish family drama *The Legacy*

Loosely labeled as a "family noir" (Hochscherf and Philipsen, 2017, 169) Danish television drama *The Legacy /Arvingerne* (2014-2017) portrays the life of four adult children of a famous artist Veronica Grønnegaard, who come together after Veronika's sudden passing. All damaged, in various ways and to different degrees, they don't always get on with one another, but beneath the squabbling there always remains a strong familial bond. While the family tribulations drive the narrative throughout, its last, third part contains a plot line which explicitly focuses on water as being central to issues of social justice, as much as issues of environmental concern.

This subplot revolves around the daughter of the eldest brother Frederick, Hanna, – a leader of a young artist collective who work to activate and to embody a sensibility for human-water interdependency in the context of ecological crisis. The story starts with the vernissage of the collective's first multi-media installation at the

prestigious Copenhagen Art Hall. We see a large industrially look-
ing space illuminated by soft sea blue light and on the walls – video
displays of schools of small fish frozen in ice, ice lumps floating in a
glass water tank, formations of crushed ice driven by streaming wa-
ter, and a human face submerged in clear water exhaling air bub-
bles. One of the artists, Inuit poet Malik, steps, barefoot, in a pool of
water on a low stage with the images of melting ice in the back-
ground. He starts reciting: "The house I don't have, kills me …
when I cross the ice virtually…"

Quiet music plays, on the opposite stage a girl in a white kimono
gracefully moves and sings, spellbound, against the backdrop of
streaming water. Hanna circulates the space recording the audi-
ence's reactions. The viewing is suddenly interrupted when a group
of Inuit people appear with barking husky dogs on a leash. Freder-
ick hurries to evict the uninvited guests, gets into a scuffle with
Malik's inebriated uncle and hits Malik who tries to intercede.
Lights are switched on, the security steps in to remove the intruders
from the building. When the performance resumes we watch rain
falling on the dancing girl whose kimono gradually dissolves re-
vealing her naked body. She slowly crouches down and behind her,
the scandalized audience sees the detailed recording of their par-
ticipation in the violent incident that just happened.

What I am interested in here is the emphasis the exhibition puts
on water's expressivity, its saturating and gathering qualities, and
in how it brings into focus the watery worlds human beings are
dwelling. Astrida Neimanis notes, "Just like bodies of water, stories
are rarely autochthonous; they usually begin in many places at
once, with many unspoken debts" (Neimanis 2017, 8). Here we wit-
ness the intertwining of stories and debts Neimanis writes about, –
disconnecting the characters (and viewers) from a stable ground of
terrestrial weight, the matter flow of water invokes the imaginaries
of damaged landscapes, drawing attention to individual and col-
lective bodies' entanglement with, and responsibility for climate
change but also metaphorizing the unmooring and incessant flux of
Greenlandic people (and animals) brought about by the Danish
post-colonial regimes. In other words, by staging embodied en-
counters with water the artistic installation and performance unveil
both the cultural and the biological, chemical, and ecological impli-
cations of what Neimanis calls the "watery embodiment" (Neima-

nis 2017, 3). The episode also shows that hydro-sensibility is not easily achieved as the selected party of invitees are only prepared to value aesthetic dimensions of the art work refusing to recognize themselves as subjects partially dissolved and continuous with their aqueous environment.

Denied the exhibition space as a consequence of the scandal, shortly after Hanna tragically dies in Greenland on a mission against a mining company who have falsified their permits to release extremely toxic materials into the ocean. Yet, the collective perseveres undertaking an attempt to intervene in the local borough's plans to sell their water supplies to a private company. To raise public awareness of the impacts of this decision the group infiltrate the water distribution facility and inject (harmless) red colorant into the network, while broadcasting a phone message about the local authorities' concealed intentions. The next morning farmers find "rusty" water flowing in the drinking troughs and spraying over crops through irrigation sprinklers, the local gym has to close the canteen, red water fills the commemorative bird bath in Grønnegaard's private garden, and the elder sister Gro wakes up to find her hair turned bright red after having taken a shower in a dark bathroom the previous night. When the police arrive to the Grønnegaard estate to arrest the resident artists the front yard is covered with clothes dyed in different shades of red.[5] The dyed fabric can be read as symbolizing water's fluidity and its ability to saturate, impregnate and discolor, each shade expressing singular material interactions. But this deliberate articulation of water on non-aqueous tissue also urges us to think about what water actually means to the people in the neighborhood, apart from the practical inconveniences they momentarily experience.

Geographer Jamie Linton writes, in a somewhat provocative manner, "Water is what we make of it" (Linton 2010, 14). Rather than treating water as a cluster of molecules or a functional resource, Linton proffers an idea that water, at any point in history, must be understood in the relationality between the material flowing and the social and cultural forms that emerge from and with it. In other words, what water is cannot be disentangled from how we imaginatively produce it. The colored textiles suggest a kind of togetherness, a tentative community. While different shades of red stand for myriads of practical but also spiritual connections indi-

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vidual people might have with water, this display also emphasizes human interrelatedness through the watery qualities of their bodies. Serving as a protective layer, close to the human skin the clothes laid out in the yard, invite for a new kind of imaginative construction, – shifting attention from external uses of water to internal ones, interlinking our watery bodies with other bodies of water around us. In this, the art piece is evocative of Neimanis's contention that "in an ocular-centric culture … membranes, like our human skin, give the illusion of impermeability. Still, we perspire, urinate, ingest, ejaculate, menstruate, lactate, breathe, cry. We take in the world, selectively, and send it flooding back out again" (Neimanis 2012, 106). Through water, our connectivity to the world comes into sharper focus. As Neimanis argues, and the series' episode implies, the waters we drink are the same waters we pollute with the toxins of our industries; the waters we urinate are washed back to the seas along with the chemicals our bodies consumed. The waters outside us are the same as the waters inside. Our bodies are already implicated in the circulation of water and its contamination.

Although it would be too optimistic to assume that this becomes immediately clear to the different members of the community (or the viewers) the series ends with yet another watery assemblage, illuminating our and others' bodies as part of the same stream and circulation in which we flow. The last episode of *The Legacy* concentrates on Gro Grønnegaard's own art project set in and around the familial home. We see clear water flooding the floors of the house while the entire family, donning ocean blue shirts, sit in the middle of the space barefooted, each family member holding a huge frozen fish in their lap. They are surrounded by standing neighbors also clothed in blue. While this formation is being photographed, the audience outside the house watch a succession of water images projected on the façade and superimposed by the real water steadily streaming down the wall.

Once more, in this episode, the family and community are united through the ever present flow and flush of waters that sustain each individual body but also connect all bodies (and not necessarily human) thorough their shared, material and conceptual, wateriness.

The series ultimately demonstrates how engaging with water's aesthetic dimensions and expressivity might help us find alternative modes of ecological engagement. The art projects offer a per-

spective of a radical collectivity, connecting human bodies of water to the watery planet through a fluid continuum. In its flows between and through matter, bodies and borders water allows for a way of thinking in which the differentiation between outside and inside loses its meaning, the boundaries between self and other dissolve and our seemingly individually protected selves, sealed off in our skins become continuous with our environment.

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Notes

1   The consistent pursuit of an ecologically conscious societal model is illustrated by the 2017 Nordic Council of Ministers' campaign Nordic Solutions to Global Challenges which ascribes a great significance to the long-term environmental cooperation between the partners (Nordic Council of Ministers 2017). Internationally, Norden's reputation as environmental forerunner is supported by the fact that already in 1972, Sweden took the initiative to host the first United Nations conference on environmental issues in Stockholm. However, the above discourse stands in opposition to the extensive exploitation of natural resources by the Nordic countries to maintain their welfare infrastructures. It is remarkable, for instance, that Sweden is ranked, by the World Wide Fund for Nature, at number ten in the list of the most resource demanding and polluting countries in the world (WWF 2014, 35). The long-standing reliance of Norwegian economy on the trade in fossil fuels, in turn, feeds into the public feelings of what Ellen Rees calls "petro-guilt that is a by-product of the collision between a social democratic ideology predicated on solidarity, equality and democracy, and the enormous wealth generated by the offshore oil and gas industry" (Rees 2016, 45).

2   For a discussion of the ways television drama can influence audiences' understanding of how the world works and what it will become, see Saunders 2017.

3   A similar idea is employed in the credit sequence of the political thriller *Borgen - Power and Glory* (Demark/Netflix, 2021), where the aerial shots of the Arctic ocean are juxtaposed with an image of water literally rising above the protagonist Birgitta Nyborg's head. Interestingly, water reappears on the plot level in the concluding part of the series, when the risk of destabilizing the particular chemical composition of Arctic water and causing damage to its fragile ecosystem is used by the Danish government as a last-minute argument against a large-scale oil extraction project in Greenland.

4   For further discussions of the water imagery in *Follow the Money* see Bruhn 2018, 70; and in *Occupied* – Bruhn 2018, 70-71, and Mrozewicz, 2020, 86-87.

5   Apart from being culturally coded as alarming, the color red also connects this installation with the artists' earlier attempt to make visible the contamination of oceanic waters by the toxic waste. During that particular action, they dye a school of dead fish red and dump it into the water in front of the mining company's flagship.

Ghostbusting in the Late Anthropocene
The 1980s, (Un)Conscious Climate Culture, and Our Holocene Afterlives

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Abstract

This paper examines the latent ecocriticism of the horror-comedy *Ghostbusters: Afterlife* (2021) against its original source material in the context of climate catastrophe culture. As a sequel to the *Ghostbusters* films (1984, 1989), *Afterlife* shifts the setting: (geo)physically, from metropolitan New York City to a 'dirt farm' in Summerville, Oklahoma, and generationally, from the original middle-aged, male ghost-catchers to the teenaged grandchildren of the brightest among them. While the original antagonist – the (fictive) Sumerian god Gozer – returns once more to end the world, the Anthropo(s)cenic landscapes of *Afterlife* establish the film as a geopolitical intervention in the debate on the already-in-progress environmental apocalypse. In its (partial) rejection of the values of its 1980s-era source material, which is critically assessed herein, I argue that *Afterlife* speaks to humanity's emergence as a geological agent defined by geopolitical cultures rooted in human exploitation, hydrocarbon extraction, agro-industrialisation, and nuclearism. Indeed, the decade of Reaganism haunts the film, serving as a ghostly reminder of how

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we arrived at our current Anthropocene predicament through white heteropatriarchal triumphalism, neoliberal excess, and ecocide.

Keywords: Popular culture, nuclearism, Anthropocene Epoch, landscapes, ecocide

The Original *Ghostbusters*: A Paean to Reaganism, Nuclearism, and Environmental Disregard

Ghostbusters (1984) premiered shortly before the actor-turned-politician Ronald Reagan won re-election to the US presidency by a landslide. With its valorisation of neoconservative entrepreneurialism (Sirota 2011), pronuclear triumphalism (Horton and Brashinsky 1992), and anti-environmentalism (O'Brien 2016), the film serves as the paragon of what Paul (1988) has labelled 'Reaganite comedy'. *Ghostbusters* features three recently-fired (white) academics, Peter Venkman, Ray Stantz, and Egon Spengler, who form a 'paranormal investigations and eliminations' agency responding to phantasmal sightings across Manhattan. After several missteps, Spengler develops a nuclear-powered system for capturing spectres and storing them in a facility located below an old firehouse. As their celebrity grows, the trio – now rounded out by Winston Zeddemore, an African American – draw the attention of Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) inspector Walter Peck, who is concerned about the danger the Ghostbusters' catch-and-containment system poses to the city. The Ghostbusters ultimately trace the wave of paranormal activity to an Upper West Side apartment building. Built by the occultist Ivo Shandor, the skyscraper concentrates psychic turbulence to conjure the Sumerian death-god Gozer, a world-ending outcome. Rebuffed by the Ghostbusters, the zealous bureaucrat Peck leads a police raid on their facility and shuts down the containment unit, releasing a plague of ghosts on New York. Personifying the regulatory bogeyman of Reaganite nightmares, Peck presents the small business-owners with a 'cease and desist all commerce order, a seizure of premises and chattels, a ban on the use of public utilities for unauthorised waste handlers, and a federal entry and inspection order to tour the facility'. Despite their subsequent arrest, the Ghostbusters convince the Mayor of New York that 'they're here to save the world' (the tagline of the original movie poster). Freed from police custody, the foursome battle Gozer's avatar – a 34-metre-tall

Stay-Puft Marshmallow Man – and, with its destruction, prevent Armageddon.

Reflecting on its resonance, Bryan and Clark declare: 'Ghostbusters never disappeared as a cultural touchstone of a generation' (2019, 151); yet, they highlight the film's troubling anti-environmental inclinations and how such fare reinforced Reaganite ideals, referencing the sitting president's often-quoted maxim: 'The nine most terrifying words in the English language are: "I'm from the government, and I'm here to help"' (152). Here, I would like to focus on the ideology of nuclearism as presented both in the film, and more generally in the context of the Reagan's 'cold war', a conflict that took place as much within pop-culture as it did on the surrogate battlegrounds of Nicaragua, Angola, and Afghanistan. Despite holding advanced degrees, the founding Ghostbusters are presented as 'everymen' of Middle America, replete with 'receding hairlines' and 'beer bellies' (Bryan and Clark 2019, 152). Yet, when prompted by fate, they (led by Spengler, who 'haunts' the film *Ghostbusters: Afterlife*, hereafter *Afterlife*) master the atom in short order, weaponizing positron colliders and building a nuclear-powered containment unit. In doing so, these 'entrepreneurs' effortlessly replicate the Big Science of government-funded physicists who unleashed the power of first nuclear bomb at Los Alamos on 16 July 1945 – an event which many Earth Systems Scientists use to mark the beginning of the Anthropocene.

While Reagan railed against government as the enemy of progress and profit at home, he positioned the US into an ever-more aggressive footing against the USSR in a nuclear stand-off by spending billions on weapons that could end all life on Earth. By placing 'unlicensed nuclear accelerators' in the hands of its anti-authority protagonists, *Ghostbusters* provides a popular-cultural cipher for the paradox of Reaganite nuclearism: a belief that the acquisition of more nuclear weapons functions as the *only* guarantee against nuclear annihilation, ultimately endowing the master of such an arsenal with god-like powers (Ungar 2010). In its vilification of the 'dickless' EPA inspector, who takes (appropriate) action against a group of unlicensed entrepreneurs running a nuclear reactor and wielding hand-held positron colliders in midtown Manhattan – but who ultimately save the 'world' after their (wrongful) disarmament is reversed (Grant 2009) – the film paradoxically validates Ameri-

can gumption in opposition to an ineffectual state. Likewise, the narrative affirms the US as the true master of the atom in its global contest with the Soviets via the Ghostbusters' development of the 'indispensable defence science of the next decade'. In its climax, these paunchy middle-aged men (and their Black employee) cross the streams of their electromagnetic-radiation weapons, eradicating the threat to Manhattan and metaphorically saving 'America' from Soviet aggression (Grant 2009). *Ghostbusters* trades in unapologetic boosterism of nuclear fission as the solution to the existential threat of nuclear winter, rather than a dangerous geological intervention that accelerated the cumulative effects of the (as-yet-unnamed) Anthropocene Epoch. Moreover, by shifting the possession of such god-like powers to 'up-by-the-bootstraps' businessmen, *Ghostbusters* signals a cultural shift wherein the (white, male, *and* American) individual – freed from governmental oversight – comes to command 'fundamental forces' that can disrupt 'planetary existence' (Kosmina 2021, 974), while also personifying the 'geological praxis' of resource extraction – 'natural and psychic' – that maintains 'white heteropatriarchy' (Yusoff 2021, 665).

The Anthropo(s)cenic Cartographies of *Afterlife*'s 'Oklahoma'

Afterlife (2021) provides an unironic, though problematic apologia to the excesses of its source material, *Ghostbusters*. Decades after the Manhattan Interdimensional Crossrip, *Afterlife* opens on Spengler's 'dirt farm' outside of Summerville, Oklahoma. The prologue features Spengler luring a ghost through rows of corn into a giant trapfield sewn into soil of his front yard; however, his ploy fails when the technology malfunctions, triggering his death. Following Spengler's passing, his estranged daughter, Callie, and her two children are evicted from their apartment and travel to Oklahoma to take up residence in the ramshackle house bequeathed by their bankrupt forebear. The siblings – Phoebe and Trevor – soon discover that their grandfather was an original Ghostbuster, and relocated to the town due to its defunct mine, once owned by Ivo Shandor and which houses a Gozerian temple within its depths. Under the guidance of Phoebe's teacher, Gary Grooberson, an amateur seismologist, the teens unravel the mystery of Spengler's death, being drawn into conflict with Gozer, who has been trapped beneath the mine

since 1984. Aided by the surviving members of the original team and the physical manifestation of Spengler's ghost, the next generation of Ghostbusters dispatch the world-ending threat once more, trading the backdrop of Manhattan for the Oklahoma prairie.

Figure 1. Spengler's Dirt Farm in Oklahoma

In the choice of location for the inter-generational continuation of the Ghostbusters story, Jason Reitman (son of *Ghostbusters* producer Ivan Reitman) situates the narrative in a 'haunted landscape' of the (American) Anthropocene – a space where ghosts serve as 'the vestiges of past ways of life still charged in the present' (Gan et al. 2017, 1). As Anthropocene scholars have argued, supported by Indigenous Studies colleagues, the world has already been irrevocably transformed for the worse for many human populations around the globe; however, it is only now that the (Geo)Humanities is coming to grips with this fact through the explicit 'conjoining of genocide and ecocide' as central to the colonial project (Yusoff 2021, 667). As the terminus of the notorious Trail of Tears for the Choctaw, Chickasaw, Creek, Seminole, and Cherokee, Oklahoma – formerly Indian Territory – served as a sort of *off-world* settlement zone following the end of these Native American nations' *worlds* at the hands of the US federal government. These peoples were forcibly removed from their ancestral lands in the south-eastern United States, resulting in massive casualties before, during, and post-transit. This physical violence was compounded by the loss of connection to that territory which had long served as a space of creation and maintenance

for their myths, lifeways, and interactions with the more-than-human (animals, plants, bodies of water). Compounding the tragedy, Oklahoma was shortly 'opened up' to settler colonialism in the Land Rush of 1889, negating Native American sovereignty, and amplifying the deportees' physical, economic, and spiritual precarity, effectively visiting a second apocalypse upon the first Oklahomans.

A generation after Oklahoma gained admission to the union (1907), it became ground-zero for the environmental catastrophe known as the Dust Bowl. Due to over-farming and unsustainable land-use practices, combined with changing weather patterns (extended drought, hotter temperatures, increasing winds), the Southern Plains States suffered massive erosion and frequent dust storms in the 1930s. Environmental degradation triggered widespread crop failures and livestock die-offs, as well as respiratory illnesses amongst the human population. Treating the phenomenon as a 'climatic event, a geomorphic event, and a socioeconomic event', Cordova and Porter (2015) posit that future geoarchaeologists will link sedimentary evidence and the ruination of settlements in the 1930s, when so-called 'black blizzards' carried Great Plains topsoil as far as Greenland and California. Descendants of those Euro-American settlers who had quite recently displaced the five Indian nations thus watched their own *world* become subsumed in dust, with some 2.5 million 'Okies' quitting the region to move west. Yet, these Homo sapiens were luckier than those other-than-human beings who could not flee the ecological catastrophe. The wheat farmer Lawrence Svobida recalls:

> As [the dust storm] sweeps onward, the landscape is progressively blotted out. Birds fly in terror before the storm, and only those that are strong of wing may escape. The smaller birds fly until they are exhausted, then fall to the ground, to share the fate of the thousands of jack rabbits which perish from suffocation. (qtd. in Richardson 2015, 59-60)

Within American popular culture, such imagery of environmental cataclysm remains vibrant, with the continued circulation of John Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939), the motion picture *The Wizard of Oz* (Fleming, 1939), and Dorothea Lang's iconic photograph

of an 'Okie' mother, Florence Owens Thompson and her two toddlers (1936). Born in Indian Country in 1903, Thompson claimed Cherokee heritage on both sides of her family, thus linking the loss of two worlds in one lifetime.
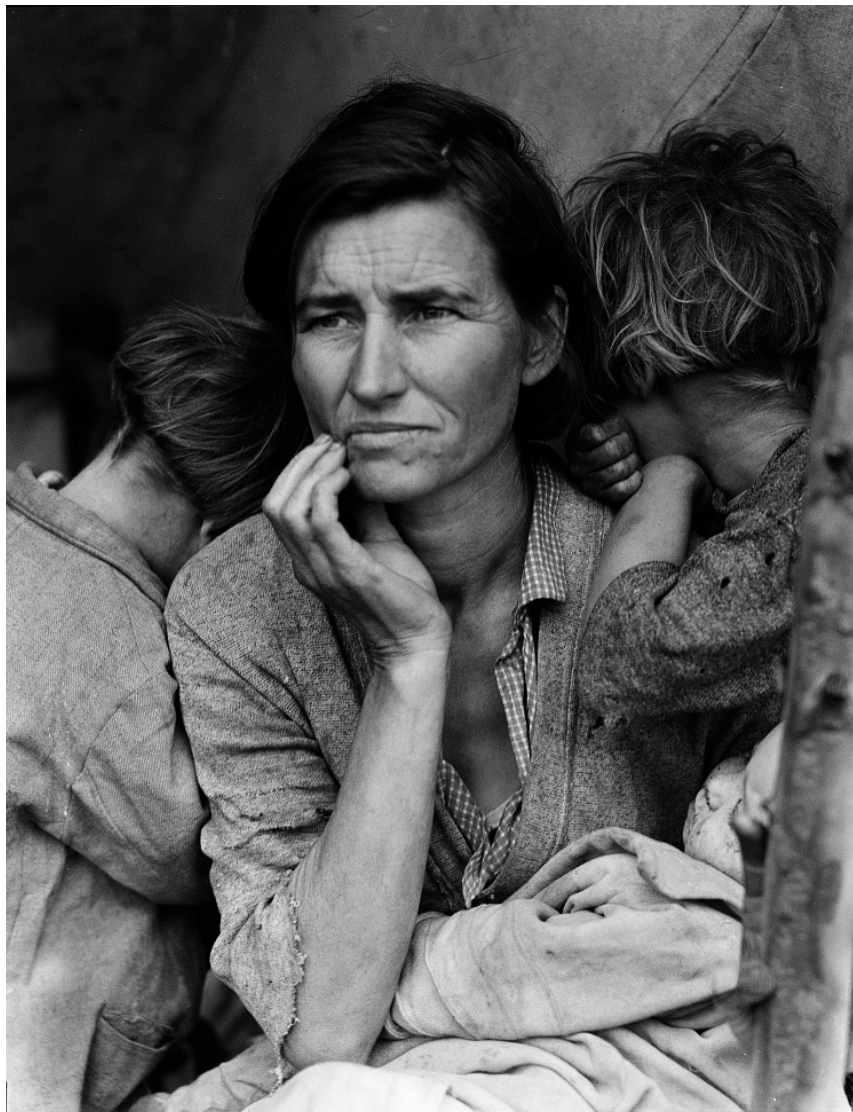

Figure 2. Migrant Mother by Dorothea Lang. 1936. Courtesy of the US Library of Congress

Even before becoming a state, Oklahoma ranked as the largest oil-producing territory in America, only losing that title to California in 1927 when its output peaked. However, since 2014, crude oil production has increased dramatically, with Oklahoma ranking fifth in

the country. Despite its small size, the state is the US's third-largest producer of fossil gas, with 70 percent of output being sold outside the state. While agriculture has greatly diminished in its importance to Oklahoma's economy, it retains its position as the country's fifth-largest producer of both cattle and wheat. Regarding these monocultures, it is incumbent for any discussion of the Anthropocene and the American 'frontier' to highlight the necropolitical 'geosocial relations' (Yusoff 2021, 670) that bind westward colonisation and the near-extinction of the American bison (from a peak population of 30 million to just over 1,000 around 1900), a government-abetted ecocide that bound genocidal Indian Wars *and* the 'targeted' destruction of the 'entire prairie ecosystem' to make way for cattle grazing (Grove 2019, 2-3).

Linking these products (hydrocarbons, cattle, and grain), all being major inputs to anthropogenic climate change, it is feasible to describe the landscape of Oklahoma as a paragon of what Ellis and Ramankutty (2008) have deemed an 'anthrome' (anthropogenic biome). As a species capable of remaking ecosystems through technology, most notably the 'human control of combustion' (Dalby 2018, 718), vast portions of the world have been altered into spaces that are nigh unrecognisable due to the presence of humans. Beyond human habitation and its attendant transformation of the landform into built-environments of concrete, steel, glass, and lumber, we must also consider the conversion of wildlands into croplands and rangelands. As an anthrome, Oklahoma demonstrates how dramatically the landscape can be altered, a process that began in earnest in 1830 with Congress' passage of the Indian Removal Act (de Beurs 2016).

The Climate Catastrophe Culture of *Afterlife*

Within *Afterlife*, anthropogenic impacts on the planet are obliquely addressed through symbolic representation. However, there is no reason why we should not unpack such interventions, since even small depictions – such as that of *Afterlife*'s 'Oklahoma' imaginary – can help us to *see* the 'always invisible' hyperobject that is planetary catastrophe: a thing which defies our framing of the world and which 'presses chaos, complexity, and non-linearity upon us' (Bould 2021, 14). In *Afterlife*, this is done via its meaning-laden Anthropocenic landscapes, which haunt the present, serving as ghostly re-

minders of past misdeeds done to the land and the people on it. While a red herring, fracking (and its connection to frequent earthquakes) is raised by Mr. Grooberson in his discussions with the Spengler family. He declares that the earthquakes – the first of which occurs as the Spenglers arrive – cannot be attributed to hydraulic fracturing, thus begging the question why does Grooberson mention fracking? Perhaps we can find the answer by diagnosing what Bould (2021) refers to as the Anthropocene unconscious of the text, i.e. the latent ecocriticism of Homo sapiens' millennia-long despoiling of the planet and our unseen violations of those other 'lives' that call it home (fauna, flora, and various forms of nonlife).

In order to access fossil gas deposits, a mixture of water, hazardous chemicals, and sand is injected at high velocity into underground rock formations creating fissures that enable access to 'trapped' pockets of fossil fuel. The highly polluting and literally earth-shaking technoscience of fracking thus serves as a paragon of extractivism combining 'verticality, subterranean spaces, and volumetrics' (Yusoff 2021, 666-667). Since 2000, there has been a precipitous increase in fracking across North America, quickly making the US the world's largest producer of fossil gas and oil. The environmental impact of the practice is notorious, from air pollution and flammable well-water, to water supply depletion and 'human-induced earthquakes' in places where they were almost non-existent – with Oklahoma serving as the most dramatic example of this phe-

Figure 3. Grooberson's map of seismic activity near Summerville

nomenon (Denchak 2019). Perhaps there is no better metaphor of the geological agency of humans than the causation of seismic events as a by-product of our pursuit of ever-more energy at ever-cheaper prices. But the viewer must remember that the earthquakes in *Afterlife* are *not* related to such fracking, which resulted in Oklahoma going from between 0-3 earthquakes per year before 2008 to a peak of 887 in 2015 (Lewis 2019).

While the diegetic setting of *Afterlife* is Oklahoma, primary filming took place in the Canadian province of Alberta. Such visual legerdemain invites scholars of the (Geo)Humanities to bring the *real* and *imagined* landscape into the frame of analysis. Apropos of our discussion of Oklahoma as a focal point of US hydrocarbon production, Alberta's Athabasca oil sands rank as the fourth-largest reserve in the world, behind Venezuela, Saudi Arabia, and Iran. An extremely 'dirty' practice, tar sands production produces triple the global-warming pollution when compared to conventional crude. Its impact on the surrounding landscape and local ecosystems are also acute, as a 'hugely expensive energy- and water-intensive endeavour that involves strip mining giant swaths of land and creating loads of toxic waste and air and water pollution' (Denchak 2015). *Afterlife*'s evocative use of landscape speaks to these issues. The elder Spengler grandchild Trevor lands a summer job at the local drive-in, itself a visual manifestation of the American car culture/petroculture, which has dramatically contributed to global

Figure 4. Defunct mine owned by the occultist Ivo Shandor

climate change. After proving himself, he is invited by his workmates to visit the old mine, which serves as the locus of evil for the remainder of the film. Their mode of transportation is a Ford Ranchero, an iconic vehicle of the 1970s when leaded gasoline peaked in North America – another potential marker of the Anthropocene. While the 'mine' is digitally fabricated, the vistas of Horsethief Canyon are not, and the area is indeed defined by the robotic stolidity of pumpjacks churning out oil from the region's geological composition, which has long produced dinosaur fossils (Ebner 2010) – a material reminder of the fragility of our own relationship with a planetary ecosystem that hinges on 'extractive afterlives' (Yusoff 2021, 663).

Afterlife's climax occurs at the edge of a corn field, pointing us to the last element of the film's Anthropo(s)cenic engagement. Although wheat is king is Oklahoma, placing the fictive Summerville within America's corn belt is meaningful (interestingly, cinematic trickery represents both wheat and corn fields; from a distance, the 'dirt farm' is dominated by the former, but in action shots, we see the characters framed by rows of maize). Interestingly, Alberta is part of Canada's 'new corn belt', where maize has supplanted wheat due to longer growing seasons and warmer temperatures, both of which are expected to increase by 2050 (Bjerga 2012). Corn – like petroleum – has been diversified for its by-products as part of the Great Acceleration: the result is that corn has entered the food system in other ways, being responsible for a dramatic increase in American waistlines since 1980, especially as a less-healthy substitute for cane sugar. 'King Corn' is at the root of not only the far-ranging transformation of the North American landscape, but has also contributed to the breaching of planetary boundaries by disrupting biogeochemical cycles. Via millions of tonnes of artificial fertilizers to increase harvests, both nitrogen and phosphorus levels are skyrocketing, threatening local plant and animal life and causing run-off into distant water sources portending 'epidemics of toxic tides, lifeless rivers, and dead oceans' (Pearce 2018). Moreover, twenty-first-century corn is perhaps the most reflective of (neoliberal) humanity's god-like powers when it comes to nature, with patented genetic modifications that increase yields and make the crop resistant to herbicides (thus encouraging the widespread use of patented weedkillers,

which disrupt traditional forms of soil renewal, simultaneously endangering pollen-distributing bee colonies and human health).

Nuclearist/Neoliberal Afterlives, or the 1980s as a Cultural 'Golden Spike' of the Anthropocene

Considering the vibrancy of the Ghostbusters franchise, I will conclude with a brief discussion of how *Afterlife* serves as a mediation of the Accelerationist sins of the (grand)father, without explicitly repudiating the past. In their shared existential adversary, both films focus on defeating a being revered by the first civilisation, Sumer. Via its advances in technology, agriculture, commerce, and record-keeping, the Sumerians set the species on its Anthropocene path towards self-annihilation. Near the end of *Afterlife*, the young protagonists poignantly discover evidence of several near-misses of Armageddon carved into the subterranean temple walls: 1883 (Krakatoa Eruption), 1908 (Tunguska Event), 1945 (Los Alamos), and 1984 (Manhattan Interdimensional Crossrip). As Kosmina (2021) points out in her analysis of *Twin Peaks: The Return*, the first nuclear bomb test in 1945 is marked not only as an Anthropocenic event, but also a supernatural one, opening up the world to evil. Linking 1945 to 1984, Relidzyńska (2021) argues that the sf-horror series *Stranger Things* – set between November 1983 and July 1985 – locates the peak of Anthropocenic culture via its ironic treatment of mid-1980s Reaganism: nuclearist, neoliberal, consumerist, and extractivist.

While both of these artefacts filter their plots through 'today's political and environmental consciousness and anxieties' to express our 'current, collective angst' (Relidzyńska 2021, 238), *Afterlife* takes another approach, *resurrecting* its decades-old source material to accomplish an analogous outcome. From my reading of the film, I see three particularly representative examples. First, when placed in the hands of a 12-year-old girl attended by her even younger companion, Podcast, the awesome power of the positron collider – which emits a rope-like beam of highly-concentrated gamma rays – is on full display, creating a frisson of dread markedly different from the affect produced in previous films where misfires of the weaponry were employed for comic relief. Second, rather than the tony Manhattan high-rise where the most successful Americans of the 1980s would have aspired to live, the climactic locus of *Afterlife* is a derelict farm in 'Oklahoma'. A socio-geographic shifting of the

existential battlespace from the (urban) apex of consumerism to a (rural) synecdoche of the collapse of America's smallholders subtly critiques what ghostbusting means in a world haunted by past eco-cidal actions. Third, the absent presence in *Ghostbusters* was inarguably the USSR (and its superior nuclear arsenal), whereas the transcendent signified of *Afterlife* is the Anthropocene (and its multivalent threats to Homo sapiens' dominance of the planet). While both films metaphorically counterpoise the same supernatural threat (Gozer) against a genuine existential one (nuclear winter versus an unliveable planetary ecosystem), the former revels in its disregard for the environment, while the latter curates a landscape assemblage that reminds the viewer of humanity's injustice to the planet and its (other-than-)human denizens.

Like the oft-referenced cli-fi film *Interstellar* (2014), *Afterlife*'s mission to save humanity from Armageddon is launched from a corn field: a telling manifestation of the Anthropocene-inflected ecoanxiety that is increasingly haunting our screens. While it playfully and profitably commoditises catastrophe, *Afterlife* nonetheless invests in a generational revision of the original values of the Ghostbusters franchise. In doing so, it steers the viewer towards a subtextual understanding of the Anthropocene and its attendant calamities, which find fertile soil in the prairies of *both* Oklahoma *and* Alberta. Consequently, the most recent iteration of the Ghostbusters franchise makes a contribution – however tentative – to 'limit the destruction we call the Anthropocene and protect the Holocene entanglements we need to survive' (Gan et al. 2017, 2), specifically by placing the hero's mantle on the shoulders of the next generation who will need to 'save the world' from the damage previous ones have done to it.

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It's complicated

On the responsibility of literature and literary criticism using the poem "Gentle Now, Don't Add To Heartache" as an example

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Abstract

What kind of critical approach do literary texts require that portray environmental misdeeds and display an ethos ostensibly calling into question the practices responsible for those misdeeds? Novels and poetry that address guilt and responsibility in the Anthropocene often aestheticize supposedly natural conditions, evoke nostalgic settings, and imagine a return to better times. Thus, they require literary criticism to focus on human responsibility and culpability toward the environment. However, the notion of responsibility is not only to be found in the text as a topic but might also be a necessary stance toward the text. Then, literary criticism would be a matter of responding and making responsibility productive. That means making intelligible the potential of being (speaking) with one another inherent in the structures of language. Drawing on the concept of interpellation and analyzing Juliana Spahr's poem "Gentle Now, Don't Add to Heartache", this article examines the relevance of the notion of responsibility for literary criticism.

Keywords: Anthropocene, lyric, literary criticism, responsibility, language theory

The Anthropocene demands collective responsibility for the damage that humans inflict on their environment, and literature, at its best, can help create attention to the urgency to take action against the environmental destruction. But if literary texts (re-)present things that concern a collective responsibility, then it is necessary for literary criticism to question the notion of responsibility and how it is implicated in novels and poetry as well as in the way literary criticism responds to those texts, since they require the same medium: language. On the basis of the assumption that literature that takes up the situatedness of humans in the Anthropocene is the effect of a discursive practice in which the reading of literature is just as involved as its object of analysis, I will discuss how notions of responsibility, guilt and complicity can be implicated in language – and how this, in turn, complicates literary analyses.

In order to illustrate the nexus of literature, implication, and responsibility, my argumentation will proceed in three steps. In the first section I will analyze Juliana Spahr's poem *Gentle Now, Don't Add to Heartache* (hereafter referred to as *Gentle Now*). The poem, which is about human's relationship to nature and processes of transformation, and its reception, serves as an example to trace the potential of responsibility that language may hold. In the second part I will take a cursory look on Judith Butler's understanding of Althusser's term of interpellation. Althusser introduces in *Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses* interpellation to describe the process by which the individual is addressed by the institutions of power and thereby constituted, made (into a) subject. But more relevant in this context is how Judith Butler draws on Althusser's term. She understands interpellation more comprehensively as the fundamental possibility of discourse to grant or deny the subject agency. Essential for my analysis is the observation that the "subject comes into being after language" (Butler 1995, 1). To explore how responsibility is related to language, I will also refer to an essay by Juliane Prade-Weiss, in which she proposes "language as a model for comprehending implication in a pre-formed structure that […] prompts and demands individual responsibility" (Prade Weiss 2020, 1). In the third and last part I will conclude that for today's literary criticism a conception of language is necessary that allows to emphasize one's responsibility toward that which is expressed.

Gentle Now, Don't Add to Heartache

Juliana Spahr's *Gentle Now* fulfills the usual parameters of contemporary lyric dealing with the loss of nature and human culpability: the status of the lyrical subject is ambiguous; the structure of the poem, at first glance, does not follow any fixed scheme; topoi already found in Whitman and Emerson are cleverly continued; the image of a pristine nature is evoked in order to lament that it has long been gone and humans are responsible. Finally, in the trenches of the lines, a pedagogical impetus can be identified that reading must transform the reader in order to counteract the misery that corresponds to real conditions outside the poem. Published in 2011, the poem is composed of 249 verses unevenly distributed over five stanzas, and addresses the clash of subject and environment from the perspective of a lyrical "We", who transforms into a lyrical "I" over the course of the poem. As the plurality of the "We" atrophies into a singular "I", the multiplicity of nature also undergoes a lamentable decay, caused by the practices of the human collective.

Spahr understands her own writing, as well as reading poetry in general, as a collaborative practice. She states that reading is "a communal, not individual, act" (Spahr 2001, 3). Unfortunately, the reception of her own work is proof that such a conception of reading can prevent critical analysis. For example, when Dianne Chisholm's essay examines the poetics of refrain in Spahr's work and describes in a rather one-sided way the supposedly positive effects of her poems (Chisholm 2014). Chisholm plausibly identifies repetition as an elemental stylistic device of Spahr's but overlooks that texts such as *Gentle Now* could as well be read as anesthetic rather than thought-provoking due to their aestheticization of humanity's entanglement with its environment. Rather than allowing the complexity and ambiguity, the co-implications of human existence, to persist, such readings unify temporality, contexts, and subject constellations. What remains is an optimistic interpretation that stands in astonishing contrast to the poem itself. That the constant repetitions suggest not only chaos and entropy, as Chisholm notes, but despair, is overlooked.

In Spahr, "We" is an initially unspecified entity that acquires its contours by listing natural things such as the sun, fish, human characteristics, and bodily functions, and by placing "We" in the midst of those. More and more plants and animals are named, with which

"We" seems to be connected: "The stream was a part of us and we were a part of the stream and we / were thus part of the rivers and thus part of the gulfs and the oceans" (Spahr 2011, 125). "We" cannot be clearly classified as human or non-human animal, questioning the dichotomy of nature and culture. Only in the last stanza, with the introduction of "I", can it be deduced that it is human, since the "I" takes up human work (Spahr 2011, 132). However, the evoked multiplicity of an untouched nature, which stands in contrast to the polluted world demands critical consideration. Thus, Oliver Völker points out that the emergence of a concept of nature that takes shape as a counterspace to human culture and labor in parallel with an increasing mastery and utilization of nature in step with technological innovations was already a topos among German Romanticism as well as the authors of American Nature Writing (Völker 2021, 13). What is romantically idealized as pristine natural space offering refuge from a technocratic civilization turns out, on closer examination, to be a cultural product of that very civilization. Postnaturalist philosophers such as Steven Vogel therefore outline a holistic worldview, which, contrary to the assumption of a dualism of culture vs. nature, is based on the idea that the world surrounding humans is always already socially constructed. Vogel argues for abandoning the concept of nature altogether in order to focus instead on the social practices that produce what is perceived as natural:

> [B]ecause 'nature' in the sense of a world unaffected by human action doesn't exist any longer (and arguably never did), and because the very idea of distinguishing the natural from the human or the social involves a metaphysical dualism that treats human beings as somehow outside the world instead of acknowledging them as simply another organism within the world (Vogel 2015, 65).

The topos of a nature untouched by humans must resignedly also be given up by Spahr's poem, after it initially evoked it. The resistance is made emphatic by the repetitive, almost prayer-like passages and sprawling lists that make up most of the poem. With regard to enumeration as an art form, Sabine Mainberger notes that an excess of details in description makes the described object disappear. She highlights that even a colorful variety reaches a point

where it tips over into uniformity (Mainberger 2011, 8f). Spahr's poem reaches that point where what is described can be read as diverse due to the sheer quantity of things listed, but is no longer imaginable in this diversity. Thus, the listing of animals, plants, insects, etc. can be read more as a last desperate inventory of what threatens to disappear than as "evocative assemblages, that reactivate local-global connections, and potentially, a cosmic bodies politic" (Chisholm 2014, 144).

While in the first stanzas "We" seems to be part of a single natural organism, and a harmonious connectedness of everything is evoked, in the fourth stanza inorganic remains, mountains of civilizational garbage and chemicals appear, which dissolve the idyll, because: "[i]t was not all long lines of connection and utopia" (Spahr 2011, 130). Partly "knowingly", partly "unknowingly" (Ibid, 131) changes take place that retrospectively turn out to be lamentable:

> We were born at the beginning of these things, at the time
> of chemicals combining, at the time of stream run off.
> These things were a part of us and would become more a
> part of us but we did not know it yet.
> Still we noticed enough to sing a lament (Ibid).

Lament takes a prominent role and gains intensity in the course of the poem: first, the object of mourning (the loss of the harmonious connectedness) is portrayed, before lament itself is named as such and finally culminates performatively in lamentations ("otototoi" (Ibid, 133)). This vocal intelligibility represents the tipping point between "We" and "I", between so-called nature and culture. In stanza four, the indeterminate, undifferentiated "We" affirmatively laments the loss, while the "I" of the last stanza is entangled in a *double bind* of lamentation: lamentations can be read on the surface of the text, but within the framework of negation: "I did not sing" (Ibid). The lyrical subject's non-lamentation illustrates the contrast to the plurality of the "We", which is not aware of any guilt (yet), and evokes questions regarding the responsibility for the loss of what is lamented.

By the lyrical subject's turning towards civilization and away from nature, the poem implements a chiastic structure and thus complicates the scope of meaning. The participation in the world is

differentiated into a communal and an individual part: on the basis of the personal pronouns, a change from the plural to the singular takes place; at the same time, the multiplicity of nature is subsumed under the other, stranger. With the appearance of "I", the plurality of the human community becomes manifest. Finally, it is said:

> I just turned to each other and the body parts of the other suddenly
> glowed with the beauty and detail that I had found in the stream (Ibid, 133).

The dualisms that Spahr's poem initially offers (present - past, nature - culture, plural - singular, non-human - human, own - strange) are not tenable as either/or categories, but point to the division of a common situation. Being with each other changes the contours of togetherness and the question of guilt for the loss of nature finds no addressee. The co-implication of being with each other includes sharing the guilt for destructive cultural practices, suggests *Gentle Now*. The awareness of this guilt is most clearly expressed in reference to another cultural product that is usually predicated as valuable: poetry. Spahr alludes to a rich cultural history of poetry with the final lines, uniting in the singular "I" the plurality of voices emerging from the depths of history:

> I put my head together on a narrow pillow and talked with each other
> all night long.
> And I did not sing.
> I did not sing otototoi; dark, all merged together, oi.
> I did not sing groaning words.
> I did not sing otototoi; dark, all merged together, oi.
> I did not sing groaning words.
> I did not sing o wo, wo, wo!
> I did not sing I see, I see.
> I did not sing wo, wo! (Ibid)

Otototoi: the lament of Cassandra, taken up by Virginia Woolf in her essay "On Not Knowing Greek" and developed further by Heather McHugh in her poem "Three To's and an Oi," end *Gentle Now* and

leave the apocalyptic impression: "We're all about to die" (McHugh 1999, 28). *Tertium comparationis* of Woolf's essay and McHugh's poem, which Spahr uses for *Gentle Now*'s scope of meaning, is what Yopie Prins calls "the creation of an interlingual space that allows us to read in multiple directions" (Prins 2006, 165). Cassandra, tragic heroine whose prediction of coming doom was not taken seriously, functions as an intertextual reference for transgressions of time and language, illustrating the impossibility of finding an adequate addressee for the lament over the loss of nature. Language as an essential distinguishing feature vis-à-vis everything non-human loses its significance when, in the face of a real impending catastrophe, nothing remains but infantile babble ("o wo, wo, wo"). The aesthetic achievements of human culture stand in clear contrast to the blind destructiveness of the same culture. The latter can only be overlooked with the former, suggests Spahr's poem with its titular imperative: Gentle Now, Don't Add to Heartache! The confrontation with destructive social practices is aestheticized and thus presented in an anesthetizing way. But the anesthetizing moment of the aesthetical makes every reader of the poem an accomplice of both social practices: destruction and creation.

Responding to responsibility

Can literature, by virtue of its linguistic character, compel beings who – in Judith Butler's words – "require language in order to be" (Butler 1997, 1), to take responsibility for what is portrayed? As beings who experience their constitution through language, we are always in a language community in which we are addressed and can respond. However, literature does not demand a response in the sense that the other might demand; and yet it is often classified as resistant, relating, implicitly or explicitly, to something other than itself. Literature is thus situated in, interwoven with, a space and time. What form of responsibility then can literature evoke? With the title of her monograph *Excitable Speech*, Butler refers to the capacity of speech to not only excite, but arouse, or upset, in short, to give substance to the deontological status of the other and to make relations visible – whether by addressing (*name calling* in the literal sense) or whether by violating (*name calling* in the pejorative sense up to hate speech). Moreover, *excitable* alludes to the *citationality* of discourse that transcends every utterance. Both a speaker

and a literary text are involved in a social system in which they manifest themselves on the basis of a language that is already there. Language is repetition of what was and anticipation of what will be. In this space between past and future, it is necessary to elicit the accountability of speech. In order to grasp the subjectification of the one being addressed Butler refers to Althusser's concept of interpellation:

> [Interpellation] seeks to introduce a reality rather than report on an existing one; it accomplishes this introduction through a citation of existing convention. [...] Its purpose is to indicate and establish a subject in subjection, to produce its social contours in space and time. Its reiterative operation has the effect of sedimenting its "positionality" over time (Butler 1997, 33f).

The interpellative function that she describes here applies to verbal acts of speaking as well as to literature. She makes clear that conventions are produced by discursive practices and consolidated through repetition. The linguistic operations necessary for this, such as interpellation, determine the mode of literary texts beyond verbal utterances, insofar as they introduce a reality. Without claiming to explicate what is true or false, literature accordingly produces *a* reality – based on pre-existing conventions; even if literature can articulate resistance to them. Thus, when Butler writes, "[t]he speaker assumes responsibility precisely through the citational character of speech" (Butler 1997, 39), this possibility of assuming responsibility must apply equally to literature. For not only the speaker, but literature, too, "renews the linguistic tokens of a community [...]. Responsibility is thus linked with speech as repetition, not as origination" (Ibid).

The ambiguous structure of literature consists in that very moment of repetition, which is always accompanied by recollection. Repetition and recollection represent the same movement, only in opposite directions. They are constitutive elements of language, so that it is characterized by the possibility of either cementing what exists in a backward-looking way or varying it in a forward-looking way. Literature as a specific manifestation of language outlines this potential and requires a stance in the form of responsibility for what

is represented. Implicit in the structures of language is a movement that binds the individual to something other than itself. This means for the critical analysis of literature that it is necessary to make conscious one's own implication and complicity.

But *Excitable Speech* is not the only text with which Butler makes use of Althusser's interpellation. In the essay "Conscience Doth Make Subjects of Us All", published two years earlier, she examines the "the acceptance of guilt" (Butler 1995, 2f), which seems to be inherent to the subject formation. This is an interesting aspect of interpellation in this context, because it makes it possible to build a bridge between a literary text that depicts environmental damages, such as *Gentle Now*, and its analysis. Guilt, then, is not just a topic of the poem, but that, which makes the implication of both the poem and the analysis intelligible. The hailing of the poem infuses guilt; the poem reenacts the interpellative function of language on a different level, since the subject of the analysis is already existent before reading the poem. It changes the status of guilt. No longer the guilt invoked by the allegorical authority of language that *makes subjects of us all*, it is rather a more conscious version expressed through a specific variant of language: literature.

The notion of guilt finds resonance in Juliane Prade-Weiss account of "language as presented in literature" (Prade-Weiss 2020, 1). Based on the observation of a contemporary democratic crisis regarding participation and implication, Prade-Weiss critically examines the idea of resistant literature. Her thoughts on Herta Müller's novel *The Hunger Angel* prove to be analytically relevant not only for contemporary literature depicting totalitarian systems, but also for literary text portraying ecological damage. "[U]nderstanding implication in terms of language" (Prade-Weiss 2020, 17), as she states, is necessary for understanding (the literary representation) of guilt as well as of responsibility. Prade-Weiss elucidates that the "implicated-ness in the pre-established forms of language is a basic condition of human life" (Prade-Weiss 2020, 23), thereby rendering it possible to make visible the involvement of a "reader in a dilemma of complicated guilt and impossible agency" (Ibid.). As beings endowed with language every reader of a text is inevitably complicit in the guilt the text might articulate. Thus, making every reading complicated – which is precisely the dilemma *Gentle Now* postulates, as I discussed earlier.

Making visible the implications

Texts like Spahr's poem pose two difficulties for literary criticism. First, they challenge dualisms of nature and human and of individual and collective. However, it cannot be sufficient for literary criticism to just explicate and repeat the challenges a literary text portrays. It can only be the starting point for the second, real difficulty: to make visible the consequences, meanings, entanglements – in short, the implications – of the representation of a changing human environment and to put a stop to the repetition of the same old thing, to take a stance. If a critical literary analysis falls into the same lamentations as literature, if it merely repeats what has already been written it runs the risk of being complicit in what the object of the analysis, the text, implicates. Instead, literary criticism is a matter of responding and making responsibility productive. That means making intelligible the potential of being (speaking) with one another inherent in the structures of language, insofar as, even in the absence of a clear addressee who has to assume responsibility, the address or interpellation finds resonance. Interpellation in this case means the ability of an environmentally conscious literary discourse to constitute a subject that responds, but without naming an addressee. This subject, however, is a "subject in subjection" (Butler 1997, 34), when it merely affirms the discourse. Not to relate to the discourse affirmatively but differently, would be the first step in order to reflect on one's own entanglement and to dissolve its unity. This thought seems all the more urgent the more difficult it becomes to think individual and collective responsibility. If any form of responsibility has its origin in speech, in language, it would be the task of literary criticism to answer it, perhaps first with a question peculiar to it: *Qui parle?*

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Econarratology, the novel, and Anthropocene imagination

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Abstract

Can fiction provide forms of expression that offer an alternative to the discourse of science regarding the Anthropocene? This question is interesting to examine, as the widely accepted science of the Anthropocene seems to have a limited effect on the various public audiences they attempt to reach. Methodologically: I use econarratology to investigate how literature can affect the reader's understanding of the Anthropocene reality. More specifically, the article focuses on how Charlotte Weitze's novel *The Abominable* (*Den afskyelige*, 2016) immerses us into a storyworld and thereby engages the reader in ways that are rarely possible outside the world of fiction. The article demonstrates how the world-creating power of *The Abominable* involves, among other things, a disruption of the reader's storyworld.

Keywords: Anthropocene, econarratology, climate fiction, Anthropocene imagination, Charlotte Weitze.

The novel and Anthropocene imagination

The Anthropocene, a term coined by American biologist Eugene Stoermer and Dutch geochemist Paul Crutzen, describes a new geological epoch dominated by the "role of mankind in geology and ecology" lasting what in human terms may be felt as long periods (Stoermer and Crutzen 2000, 18). The recognition of this reality has catalyzed an ongoing discussion among cultural theorists, historians, and artists on how the humanities and art are expected to raise awareness and convey a sense of urgency regarding the Anthropocene. As Mike Hulme has pointed out, the Anthropocene is a "wicked problem". Wicked problems are difficult to recognize because of their fundamental complexity. More specifically, a solution to one aspect of a wicked problem often reveals or creates other, even more complex, problems demanding further solutions. Wicked problems, according to Hulme, are therefore "beyond the reach of mere technical knowledge and traditional forms of governance" (Hulme 2009, 334). That is why it is worth reflecting on the usefulness of how literature — in this context, the novel — can help us enrich our understanding of the Anthropocene. After all, a crucial claim in ecocriticism is that the environmental crisis is a crisis of imagination, and new ways of imagining humanity's relation to the physical world in literature can be at the vanguard of this (Buell 1995, 2).

I use Danish author Charlotte Weitze's novel *The Abominable* (*Den afskyelige*, 2016) as my case study. However, the scope of the article does not allow me to make an in-depth analysis, which is why I instead concentrate on a few examples that highlight how the novel can activate the reader's Anthropocene imagination. The following sections provide further context for understanding the perspectives and questions raised above.

Anthropocene challenges for the novel

Let me begin this inquiry by looking more closely at the problem of the concept of scaling as put forward by Timothy Clark, Richard Kerridge, and others. According to Clark, the Anthropocene blurs some crucial categories by which people have made sense of the world. The most prominent feature of the Anthropocene is that it cannot immediately be seen or localized. In other words, there is no simple or unitary object directly to confront, no simple object to

"fix" or to "tackle" (Clark 2015, 9–10). In representing the Anthropocene, in consonance with Axel Goodbody and Adeline Johns-Putra, literature therefore must grapple with the problem of the relative unrepresentability of the phenomenon (Goodbody and Johns-Putra 2019, 10). Richard Kerridge emphasizes a similar concern: The problem is that conventional plot structures require forms of solution and closure that seem absurdly evasive considering the global and complex scales in which climate change occurs (Kerridge 2002, 99). Furthermore, according to Roman Bartosch, we live in an Anthropocene world that is so technological and post-nature that neither apocalypse nor pastoral as current tropes are trustworthy (Bartosch 2012, 117). This is why Greg Garrard emphasizes that the global environmental crisis is also a crisis of representation (Garrard 2009, 709). Timothy Clark seems to be even more skeptical on behalf of the novel:

> The global context is now one of variously dangerous environmental tipping points, but in which changes are happening at scales that we do not perceive with ordinary human faculties, and with a complexity that may escape us, though we cannot escape it. This is a world whose 'unconformities' in a broad material sense may well elude the novel understood as a form which privileges the realm of personal human experience as the basic reality. (Clark 2019, 80–81)

According to Clark, it is an important task for contemporary literature to find ways of representing this new reality of elusive agencies and counterintuitive scales. However, in Clark's opinion, the Anthropocene cannot be represented, at least "not in the realist mode still dominant in the novel." Its modes of appearance as a totality are possible only in graphs, statistics, and computer projections and modelling — of CO_2 emissions, population figures, waste generation, proportion of the Earth's land surface used, and so on (Clark 2015, 73).

I do not completely disagree with Clark on this diagnosis. However, what he seems to forget is that the novel's greatest advantage is not necessarily that it should represent the Anthropocene in its totality. It is instead the opposite; the hallmark of the novel is that it

represents different human (or human-like) experiences of environmental change, climate change, etc. Precisely because the novel is centered on the particular — a how-it-is-to-experience-perspective — it prompts its readers to activate a storyworld that is completely different from modes that seek to transcend the particular (for example graphs and statistics). I believe that Clark's skeptical attitude to the novel is rooted in the fact that he is more preoccupied with philosophy than narratology.

Econarratology: The novel, the reader, and the Anthropocene world

In *The Storyworld Accord: Econarratology and Postcolonial Narratives* (2015), Erin James coins the term 'econarratology' as she connects cognitive narratology with ecocriticism. To explore the interfaces between narratives and the reader, James draws on David Herman's concept of storyworld. Storyworlds can be defined as the worlds evoked by narratives, that is, how readers use textual cues to build up "mental representations" of the worlds evoked by stories. In other words, storyworld is about the "world-creating power" of narratives (Herman 2002, 14–17). Of key importance in this form of econarratology is the following: While structuralist narratologists failed to adequately investigate issues of narrative referentiality, storyworld, or the reader's world-modeling, cognitive narratology is about how readers in the reading process construct, reconstruct, or co-construct the narrative world. That is, the reader's reconstructions of narratives are based on spontaneous real-life frames of existence, grounded in linguistic and physical experiences. In other words, readers use their experiences of the world to bridge the gaps in narrative texts (Herman 2002, 17–22).

James's groundbreaking work is particularly preoccupied with how postcolonial texts catalyze an imaginative relocation of readers to a new and often unfamiliar world — an experience that enriches our understanding of how others in different spaces live in their ecological homes (James 2015, x–xiii). That is, she examines how the reconstructions of the narrative space provide sufficient information for the reader to participate in a transnational exchange of historical and ideological ideas and environmental assumptions. However, while spatiality remains a focal point in James's analysis, I am also preoccupied with the 'temporal dimension of storyworld'

and 'disruption of the storyworld'. This, in order to examine how these textual structures can stretch the reader's sense of the Anthropocene. I elaborate on this below in my analysis of *The Abominable*.

The Abominable is narrated by Heidi and takes place in a climate-changed future somewhere in Scandinavia; probably in Norway. The first-person narrator laments that there is almost — due to global warming — no snow left, that many children are born with genetic damage, and that most people do not seem to care, let alone bother to act, in relation to the dramatic climate changes. The state of sadness that characterizes Heidi when we meet her changes when she falls head over heels in love with the climate activist Kenneth. Kenneth is suffering from hyperhidrosis, which is excessive sweating related to the subtropical climate that has found its way into the Nordics. Heidi and the reader slowly find out that Kenneth is half human and half yeti and as such, it is a typical Weitze novel filled with fantastic elements in a realistic everyday life. According to Sissel Furuseth, ice and snow, in *The Abominable*, are associated with pleasure. Heidi longs for her childhood skiing holidays, the snow and the cold. In addition, Heidi is literally cold inside, which is why Kenneth cannot get enough of her coldness because of his severe perspiration problems (Furuseth 2021, 167-168).

The temporal dimension of storyworld

In this section, I am preoccupied with the temporal struct ure of stories. With reference to David Herman, I examine the following: How does the chosen narrational mode of temporal profiling affect the process (or experience) of the reader's co-constructing the narrative world? (Herman et al. 2012, 71). When a narrator tells his life story, for example, these stories are, among other things, an operation of segmentation, where the narrator marks a starting point in a temporal continuum. However, such a segmentation not only says something about the narrator's life but also indexes the world in a value-based way (Herman 2003b, 172–174). How is this mode to be seen in *The Abominable*?

As already described, *The Abominable* transports the reader into a climate-changed, near future somewhere in Scandinavia. The novel places something radically changed (the Gulf Stream is declining, there are extreme weather phenomena, and mountains without snow) in what, for the Scandinavian reader, is a very recognizable

social and geographical locality. In this way, according to Jørgen Bruhn, the novel incorporates various scientific predictions about climate change and makes these directly recognizable and understandable for readers who "either do not wish to or are not able to read scientific articles". This suggests that the reader of *The Abominable* is helped to experience what life might feel like in the future (Bruhn 2020, 140). However, by structuring narrative time in this way, the climate fiction does more than just stimulate the reader's imagination about potential future climate scenarios. By making use of flashbacks, the novel manipulates the narrative *order* in a way that explains what has triggered the climate changes that make lives difficult for the main characters Heidi and Kenneth:

> I remembered that Dad and Mom looked at each other, really long. Mom nodded, and Dad sighed. "We have talked about when you should know." He hesitated. "But you are old enough. One of the major ocean currents, the Gulf Stream, has changed. The climate is changing. That is why we replant" [in their garden]. Dad said that cars and planes pollute. That many of the things he and Mom bought were not good for the environment. It was most of the clothes, all the meat and some of the exotic fruits. The use of electricity and the heat we used in the winter was also a problem. All of this led to the emission of a gas, CO2, which heated the Earth. That is why the ice caps were melting, that is why the oceans were rising, and that is why the Gulf Stream was changing. Maybe this place, the parched fjord, would one day become the sea again. (Weitze 2016, 33, my parentheses)[1]

Heidi narrates this passage, which is filtered through her child's perspective. In the reader's cognitive mappings of the passage's temporal structure, he or she quickly notes that it is modern generations that are solely to blame for when things started to go wrong. In addition, it also becomes clear that climate change is a result of private consumer choice rather than an industrial or political problem. One may ask, what about nuclear tests conducted in the 20th century or the political system's lack of pervasive green impact? The ideological message this novel invites the reader to respond to

is that the fight against climate change is dependent upon the contemporary reader's consumer lifestyle. In other words, changes must occur at the level of the reader's everyday decisions.

Is this storyworld able to make the reader more receptive to the Anthropocene, or is it rather a simplification of its complexity? The fact is that numerous human actions such as heating a house, flying, and drinking coffee are altering the basic ecological systems on the planet. Furthermore, the scale effect and the ethical implications of these actions are invisible to the individual. Nevertheless, no matter what the answers to these questions are, the point is that the novel has the potential to initiate such a (critical) environmental dialogue with the reader. In other words, novels are not about solving problems; rather, they — in this case — complicate potential solutions by pluralizing our understanding of climate change. This suggests, too, that there may be some views of the world — views, especially, that emphasize the world's complexity — that cannot be fully and adequately stated in the language of conventional scientific and philosophical prose but only in a language and in forms themselves more complex, more allusive, more attentive to particulars (Nussbaum 1992, 3).

Disruption of the Storyworld

The Abominable's dialogue with the reader is not just rooted in temporality but also in expectation, or rather in the violation of what is expected. I make use of Herman's concept of — with reference to Jerome Bruner — "canonicity and breach." To be worth telling, a tale must be about how a canonical script or frame has been breached, violated, or deviated from. Hence, Herman emphasizes that, to a greater or lesser degree, all types of narratives appeal to the interpreter's involvement, curiosity, or storyworld through disruption (Herman 2009, 134–35). Herman's premise is that norms, as well as narrative expectations, are rooted in the traditions and institutions of a culture or subculture. These expectations have developed through a process of negotiating what should or should not be done in particular domains of conduct, which also include narrative storytelling (Herman et al. 2012, 169). Most readers have narrative experiences of, for example, apocalypse narratives, magical realism, and unreliable narrators, experiences that are embedded through films, TV series, everyday conversations, children's and

adult literature. Furthermore, according to Herman, paratextual features, as well as narratives, in relation to a more or less dominant template, trope, or master narrative, can also activate the reader's expectations (Ibid. 169–71).

In *The Abominable,* Heidi and Kenneth want to be role models and put their environmental ethics into action by moving out into the wilderness and living a carbon-neutral life. They build their own house from recycled materials, eat only local and homegrown foods, keep a strict CO2 account, and only have electricity when there is sunshine. Thus, *The Abominable* makes use of a wilderness trope, which is very prevalent in traditional environmental thinking. Greg Garrard distinguishes between "old world wilderness" and "new world wilderness." The latter developed in narratives of the 19th century and was composed as a sublime wilderness, in which one can get "contact" with authentic and conservative values. In the wilderness, there is no material, moral, or bodily pollution (Garrard 2012, 66–75):

> Like the philosopher Henry Thoreau out in the woods in Walden, in the old days in the United States. He could also do without anything. In the end, there were not even chairs for the guests. Actual conversations were not needed either. The best thing was, and perhaps it was precisely the essence of life, to swim in the forest lake. Have I ever seen Kenneth enjoy anything? [. . .]. My stomach growls; is it because I am human? (Weitze 2016, 246).

Unlike Thoreau, Heidi and Kenneth's relationship slowly burns out in the wilderness due to hard labor and hunger, which is why life in the wilderness does not eradicate but reinforces a number of moral dilemmas from which the couple has sought escape.

This is a violation of what is expected based on a standard or canonical pattern in earlier environmental novels. Thus, the novel has the potential to position the reader within various environmental considerations, such as the following: Is the trope useless in contemporary environmental discourse? Why do many contemporary novels seem to be somewhat critical of it? How is this trope used in many other contexts such as advertising, politics, etc., and how are my own dreams involved in this fantasy? What is essential in this

'disruptive storyworld' is not that the novel tends to offer concrete solutions to Anthropocene challenges. Instead, with reference to Axel Goodbody, such narratives work with ideas from a reservoir of the collective imagination, representing and overcoming problems symbolically, and thus contribute, indirectly and over time, to changing how we think about nature, climate change, and culture (Goodbody 2012, 22-23).

Conclusion

As described in the introduction, the analysis above is by no means exhaustive. Instead, the purpose has been to identify two ways in which *The Abominable* has the potential to activate the reader's storyworld. Thus, I have so far primarily examined the novel-reader dynamics, where I conclude by explaining the reader-world dynamics. More specifically, this is about how the reader uses his or her storyworld to come to grips with a complex Anthropocene reality beyond the page. The premise of this argument is based on – in the words of two leading narratologists – the belief that narratives are sense-making strategies:

> But for almost all of us living and telling are inextricably connected: we make sense of our experiences through the stories we tell about them, even as those stories influence our future experiences. (Phelan 2005, iiii)

> As accounts of what happened to particular people in particular circumstances and with specific consequences, stories are found in every culture and subculture and can be viewed as a basic human strategy for coming to terms with time, process, and change. (Herman 2003a, 2)

Despite the fact that James Phelan and David Herman are not preoccupied with environmental issues, the quotes are useful, as they show that people construct and use narratives to come to terms with real-world processes and developments in time and space – in this context, an Anthropocene world full of environmental change. When we tell, and when we read, listen, see, or actively interpret narratives, this activity becomes a "tool" that organizes and supports our experiences and thinking in such a way that we can gain

a foothold in reality. Expressed differently, the world-creative power of narrative is not a cognitive crutch for those who cannot manage to think in more rigorous ways; rather, it is a basic and general strategy for making sense of the world (Herman 2002, 24). The idea is not that the reader can get a more accurate image of life in the Anthropocene by reading Weitze's *The Abominable*. Instead, in the reader's storyworld or reconstructions of the novel, they build a model of causal, temporal, spatial, ethical, and environmental structures that can scaffold the reader's dialogue with a complex world in change.

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Notes

1   I have translated all the quotes from Danish into English.

Knowing the Anthropocene

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Abstract

How to best approach the Anthropocene in terms of knowledge is an open question. In this paper we outline and discuss how the Anthropocene is imagined as an ongoing project attempting to develop systems of knowledge. Referring to Paul J. Crutzen, Reinhold Leinfelder, and Jan Zalaciewicz, we show how a tradition is forming around the notion of diverse Anthropocene knowledges as unified but split into two, more particularly, into science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) and social sciences and humanities (SSH). After a reading of two representative takes on the Anthropocene and knowledge by Carolyn Merchant and Timothy Morton and Dominic Boyer respectively, we conclude that, despite attempts at interdisciplinarity and knowledge integration, the current ways of approaching the Anthropocene as a field of knowledge

involve an uneasy mix of unification and stratification. We end by suggesting ways of overcoming this situation.

Keywords: Knowledge, STEM, SSH, Interdisciplinarity,

Introduction

How to best approach the Anthropocene in terms of knowledge is an open question and ongoing project. Thus, in their introduction to a special issue on "Knowledge in the Age of Climate Change," Ian Baucom and Matthew Omelsky ask what it means "to generate knowledge in the age of climate change" (2017, 2). Similarly, in his introduction to *Knowledge for the Anthropocene: A Multidisciplinary Approach,* Francisco J. Carrillo states that "if there is going to be a Knowledge for the Anthropocene, it has yet to be imagined" (2021, 4). In this paper, we outline and discuss some of the ways in which Anthropocene knowledge is imagined by some key players in academia in both science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) and social sciences and humanities (SSH). Referring to Paul J. Crutzen, Reinhold Leinfelder, and Jan Zalaciewicz, we begin by outlining how a tradition is forming around the image of knowledge as simultaneously interdisciplinary and integrating yet at the same time hierarchical and divided into two, more particularly, into STEM and SSH. Then, we present a reading of two takes on the Anthropocene by scholars from SSH, Carolyn Merchant and Timothy Morton and Dominic Boyer. We conclude that imagining knowledge for the Anthropocene does involve integration, albeit in a stratified way. We end by suggesting some alternative approaches to integrating knowledge in the Anthropocene.

Integrating and Stratifying Anthropocene Knowledge

Early attempts at imagining the kinds of knowledge needed to address the Anthropocene adequately tend to favour STEM. To give just one example, in a "Concepts" contribution to *Nature* entitled "Geology of Mankind," Paul Crutzen – the inventor of the term – concludes that "[a] daunting task lies ahead for scientists and engineers to guide society towards environmentally sustainable management during the era of the Anthropocene" (Crutzen 2002, 23). Generally speaking, today science and engineering is no longer regarded as having a monopoly on imagining Anthropocene knowl-

edge. Rather, it is commonly agreed in academia that we are facing a challenge that necessitates the integration of knowledges across disciplinary boundaries. Attempts are made to think systematically about the kinds of work and the forms of knowledge that must be accessed by members across the scientific community. However, the integration of knowledges is accompanied by ideas of hierarchy. Integrative attempts split knowledge into two distinct levels.

For instance, in an article entitled "The Anthropocene – The Earth in Our Hands," Reinhold Leinfelder identifies "three levels" or ways of working with and knowing the phenomenon: "a) the Earth system level, b) the geological stratigraphic level, and c) the consequential meta-level" (Leinfelder 2020, 2). Within the Earth system sciences (ESS), Anthropocene knowledge is synonymous with "the coupled "Great Acceleration" of geological and socioeconomic processes" (3) since 1945. According to Leinfelder, knowledge at the second level – the geological level – concerns "to what extent the changes in the Earth system are also manifested" in the geological record and whether the Anthropocene constitutes a new geological epoch. The first two levels of knowledge are regarded distinct from the third – "the consequential metalevel," which concerns "the social relevance of the Anthropocene analysis" (4). More particularly, this involves, for instance, knowledge in the form of "[…] recommendations for urgent behavioral change. This needs translation, dialogue and discourse skills, communicative interaction, ethical discourse, transdisciplinary cooperation with all social groups as well as scientific monitoring of all implementation processes" (4). While Leinfelder speaks of the three distinct levels, they appear to form *two* distinct levels of knowledge: a fundamental level of research involving the STEM disciplines of ESS and Geology and a secondary one dedicated to purposes of communication, mediation, and persuasion. The integration of knowledges across the disciplines comes at a price, then. Unity creates hierarchy.

Leinfelder also makes a rhetorical attempt to unite the levels of Anthropocene knowledge. He forwards the metaphor or image of the physician:

> From a physician treating us we not only expect that his examination methodology is adequate and that his diagnosis is correct, but also that he presents his diagnosis in

an understandable way, suggests further action, monitors the treatment, and, if needed, urgently advises us to change our lifestyle (if necessary, with emphasis on the risks if we do not follow. (Leinfelder 2020, 4)

But the integrating image of single bodied academic unity is splitting down the middle into distinct analytical and broadcasting agents.

A recent article, first authored by Jan Zalaciewicz[2] and crediting Leinfelder as co-author, continues this manner of imagining knowledge in the Anthropocene. It sketches out "a possible integrative and extended multilevel Anthropocene concept, highlighting systemic and interlocking interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary approaches." (Zalaciewicz et al 2019, 9, fig. 3) According to the authors, inter- and transdisciplinarity involve recognizing the contributions made by SSH in creating "criticism and debate" and understanding "more fully the deeper (i.e., political, ethical, cultural, and epistemic) implications of the diagnosis inherent in the scientific term." But the authors' inclusion of SSH rests on a hierarchy with science at the top. Like Leinfelder, the soft sciences are regarded as second order activities engaged in teasing out the consequences of the hard diagnostic facts discovered by geology and ESS. The hard sciences form the "important point of reference" for SSH. The authors suggest that SSH "should be seen as *complementary* to the very precise, strict understanding in geology / ESS." (Italics original).

Zalaciewicz et al. sum up their understanding of the Anthropocene in a manner that enforces the split between the two levels of knowing: "While the scientific term is descriptive and analytical with regard to a given state of affairs, the humanities term is either normative ("what should we do now?") or narrative ("how did we get here?"), or both ("why did we get there?")." (2019, 9, fig. 3) However, their understanding of science as purely descriptive and analytical and the humanities as normative and narrative is inherently problematic.[3] Moreover, the authors have already proposed that the "precise, strict" scientific term actually comes with an implied diagnosis and suggestions to be fleshed out by SSH, suggesting that the scientific term is *already* normative.[4]

While Leinfelder and Zalaciewicz do attempt to forge unity across different kinds of knowledge by speaking about STEM and

SSH in terms of inter- and transdisciplinarity, they tend to do so in a manner that reduces the latter to a secondary role, reserving epistemological primacy for the former. This does not mean that we have a return to the two cultures debate between C. P. Snow's science and F. R. Leavis' literature – that would assume parity between the two epistemologies in so far that each would regard itself as "better '' than the other (Cohen 2001, 8). Similarly, Leinfelder and Zalaciewicz are not reloading the science wars of the 1990s – that would involve the complete rejection of the "perverse theories" (10) allegedly constituting the soft sciences. Rather, we believe that Leinfelder and Zalaciewicz – in attempting to integrate knowledges – come to engage in what we want to call a *social utilities* transformation of SSH knowledge. They are imagining the alleged social usefulness of the hard and soft sciences respectively. Thus, the authors' stance recalls the conclusion of an article exploring the relative social usefulness in academia entitled "Are 'STEM from Mars and SSH from Venus'?: Challenging disciplinary stereotypes of research's social value" (Olmos-Peñuela et al. 2014). Here, the authors also find that academe is not split into opposing planets. Both create social value, but SSH does so "in a less visible way, creating content for the media, and working with government and NPOs to contribute to improving the quality of life" (Olmos-Peñuela et al. 2014, 397). Among STEM representatives of the academe, the Anthropocene, then, is a field where diverse knowledges are sought unified but in a manner that distinguishes hierarchically between kinds of knowledge and their social utility. What is needed is integration on a less hierarchical basis – an equal acceptance of knowledges.

In the following, we outline examples of two basic ways of positioning yourself within SSH in relation to the Anthropocene as a field of knowledge and social utility outlined by Leinfelder and Zalaciewicz: inside it, accepting the supplementary position or outside it, rejecting STEM's claim to epistemological primacy. We argue that neither are useful if we want to regard the Anthropocene as the pursuit of the integration of different kinds of knowledge.

Merchant: In the Service of Science

A highly influential academic in the field of environmental history, philosophy, and ethics, Carolyn Merchant has published widely for more than 40 years (Merchant 2022). In *The Anthropocene & the Hu-*

manities: From Climate Change to a New Age of Sustainability (Merchant 2020), she introduces the term and sets out to "critically assess the various meanings and significance attributed to it by scientists and humanists" (xi).

Carolyn Merchant embraces the distinction between STEM and SSH outlined by Leinfelder and Zalaciewicz. She outlines the necessary knowledge needed for humanity to solve the climate crisis. In the following, we will look at three examples of how she imagines knowledge. Merchant begins by imagining herself as a communicator. For example, she addresses her reader concerning the nature of her book, which "[…] is meant for an educated public interested in the current state of the planet, its future, and what we as humans can do to preserve life on earth" (2020, xi). Here, Merchant expresses that the implied reader of her book is a specific educated public, and she positions herself as a narrator whose goal is to enlighten the implied reader on how to enter an Age of Sustainability. Thus, she creates a distinction between those who possess knowledge and those who do not. Furthermore, she states that her book is meant to "[…] provoke thoughtful responses and inspire creative solutions by examining the arts and humanities, science and history, ethics and justice" (xi). This places the SSH in the complementary role envisaged by Leinfelder and Zalaciewicz, which is clear from the manner she presents knowledge as hierarchical: "We can use our knowledge of science, technology, and society, along with our spiritual and ethical relations with each other and the nonhuman world, to create a new story for the earth's future" (2020, 145). Regardless, she presents the approach as a way of unifying our efforts towards solving environmental problems. She emphasises that all knowledge is necessary but the manner she presents how to solve the environmental crisis depicts a separation into two fields. This is the case as STEM is portrayed as the key actors, while SSH is secondary and, in that sense, something that is supposed to accompany the primary actors.

However, Merchant also counters this complementary role when she states that the soft sciences are supposed to analyse our relationship with the environment and address how climate concerns challenge dichotomies "[…] such as nature / culture, ethics / environment, and mind / body […]" (144). She describes the humanities as highly important and attempts to depict them in this regard.

academic
quarter
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akademisk **kvarter**
research from the humanities

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Nevertheless, she does not actively engage in this act and instead reproduces the already-established conventions by Leinfelder and Zalaciewicz. This is, for instance, clear in the manner she reproduces gendered and ethnic discourses when she incorporates pictures of women and minorities who rarely relate to people that she portrays as able to solve the climate crisis (135-138). Instead, she portrays white men as having the necessary solutions (147-149).

By presenting STEM as the protagonists of knowledge of the climate crisis, Merchant embraces "the consequential meta-level" carved out by Leinfelder and Zalaciewicz because she considers them separate from the context in which they act in. In other words, STEM is allowed to act as if it is somehow exempt from ethical considerations and questions regarding the consequences of their actions. This dichotomy illustrates how the hard sciences are supposed to be the protagonists that solve the problems of the Anthropocene while the soft sciences are supposed to inhabit the secondary role that Leinfelder and Zalaciewicz describe.

The dualistic relationship involving different kinds of knowledge and utility formed between these groups is best illustrated through Merchant's mantra, which is part of her concluding statement: "Solar panels on every roof; Bicycles in every garage; and Vegetables in every backyard" (2020, 156). Here, Merchant proposes that entering an Age of Sustainability requires that humanity adopt a certain lifestyle and embrace specific technologies. She chooses to call her statement a mantra, which insinuates that this is a statement of utmost importance that needs to be repeated almost religiously. This is reflected in how it is supposed to sum up the requirements of exiting the Anthropocene and entering an Age of Sustainability. In this mantra, the aforementioned dichotomy presents itself as the ideas Merchant proposes rely on solutions that do not include SSH. Instead, it reduces SSH to a secondary role as its application is limited to promoting the solutions of STEM. Additionally, the mantra appears to be targeted toward a specific privileged group of people who have the economic means to adopt Merchant's ideas. While Merchant provides the reader with a goal to strive towards, the unified effort imagining a collective knowledge consisting of SSH and STEM seems unfulfilled.

Timothy Morton & Dominic Boyer: Replacing STEM with SSH

Since 2000 Timothy Morton has been an influential philosopher who takes his epistemological departure in phenomenology and object-oriented ontology (OOO), with some of the primary models for his theoretical background being Graham Harman, Immanuel Kant, and Martin Heidegger (Morton 2018, 4). Therefore, it comes as no surprise that, in contrast to Merchant, Morton's work is defined by a distinct reimagination regarding both knowledge and the Anthropocene. Morton aligns himself with the anthropologist Dominic Boyer, as they both position themselves outside the Anthropocene as a field of STEM-governed knowledge and utility. However, in trying to establish a counter-tradition, they succeed in excluding STEM and replacing it with SSH knowledge instead.

They are highly critical of the idea that STEM will be the sole saviour and guide of humanity: "[...] it's going to be very difficult to shift the trajectory of the Anthropocene. At least given the timeframes that science is telling us. But maybe those timeframes are also designed to stimulate heroic interventions by engineers and entrepreneurs, new legions of green hypersubjects" (Morton and Boyer 2021, 82). These hypersubjects are intrinsically linked to STEM, and therefore play an important role in Morton and Boyer's critique. However, to better understand hypersubjectivity it is important to outline the context they are placed within, and where they fit in relation to the Anthropocene. Thus, Morton and Boyer's theory provides a sceptical discourse that is highly critical of knowledge in the Anthropocene: "[…] agrilogistics is the first wave of the catastrophe we call the Anthropocene" (17). Morton uses the term hyperobject to describe agrilogistics, alongside phenomena such as global warming, Covid, and capitalism. They have named this "the hyperobjective era", which they consider to be part of the Anthropocene.

The description of industrial agriculture as a hyperobject and the first wave of Anthropocene catastrophe highlights the dissimilarity between the nature of this theory and the tradition found in STEM that perceives science as the saviour. Not only are they critical of the role of science as the saviour and guide, but they also disagree with Leinfelder, Zalaciewicz, and Merchant on the idea that SSH ought to play a supplementary role in the Anthropocene. In contrast, they see SSH as playing a major role in changing the perspective on

knowledge, making the unthinkable thinkable, and problematising "the grid" (Morton and Boyer 2021, 45) i.e. society based around a neoliberal economic structure. By doing this they establish a responsibility for SSH to reimagine our relation to knowledge in the Anthropocene: "I just wanted to say that part of the unthinkability of moving against the trajectory of the Anthropocene is this idea that we must always continue to supply the grid" (45). In this sense, they are not only looking to reinvent our relation to the Anthropocene but also the industrial and societal structures that constitutes it.

Unlike Leinfelder, Zalaciewicz, and Merchant, Morton and Boyer identify the perpetrator of their hyperobjective era and, in extension, the Anthropocene, who they name the hypersubject. Hypersubjects behave according to neoliberal ideals that denote a certain type of rationality and knowledge to their actions, such as the separation of subjects and objects, which is presented as the primary cause of the hyperobjective era: "They wield reason and technology, whether cynically or sincerely, as instruments for getting things done" (Morton and Boyer 2021, 14). These traits are neither uncommon in STEM nor typically used with a negative connotation. However, according to Morton and Boyer, those that adhere to this type of knowledge and subject position will attempt to use their privilege and technology as a way to seek dominion and control others, and: "You will recognize them as the type of subjects you are invited to vote for in elections, the experts who tell you how things are […]" (14). This type of subject is described as someone willing to continue the trajectory of the Anthropocene, and content to stay within the confines of the grid, even if it is the cause of multiple ecological disasters. In short, hypersubjects recall Leinfelder, Zalaciewicz, and Merchant's notion of STEM.

Even though hypersubjects can be considered as the driving force of the Anthropocene, this way of life, according to Morton and Boyer, is slowly coming to an end as: "It is hyposubjectivity rather than hypersubjectivity that will become the companion of the hyperobjective era" (Morton and Boyer 2021, 14). According to Morton and Boyer, hyposubjects are hard to define, as they have only just started to emerge. They do not reach a definition, but it is clear that the path starts with taking responsibility for our actions:

> [...] we still have to cope with the fact that we have this sort of massive, narcissistic attachment to our own sense of distinctiveness as a species, and this sense that we're at the top of a great chain of being, and that we are the ones who may have gotten ourselves into the Anthropocene but we're also the saviors, the only ones who are going to get us out of this situation. (19)

The desire to be the saviour is a hypersubjective trait, according to Morton and Boyer, and one of the things that have led to the hyperobjective era. They believe that hypersubjects want to transcend themselves and humanity, which criticises our current lifestyle and the assumption that all problems will be solved by us as long as we exceed ourselves. In contrast, hyposubjects do not seek transcendence, instead, they subscend, which could be the key to rethinking our society and the Anthropocene.

With the idea of subscendence and hyposubjects, they present an alternative to neoliberalism: "Their [i.e the hyposubjects] political projects aren't orchestrated, transparent, forced movements, but rather implosive, deliquescent, projects of unplugging" (Morton and Boyer 2021, 71). The idea of unplugging presents a radical change to society, as it means to completely disconnect one-self from all neoliberal systems. STEM is ingrained within the grid, which means that unplugging presents a different option of approaching knowledge and knowing the Anthropocene than those previously discussed in the article, and therefore provides an epistemological alternative in the form of exclusion. However, the notion of imagining knowing subjects as hypo- and hypersubjects or sub- and transcending separates the Anthropocene into two kinds of knowledge instead of reimagining them in terms of a merger. Therefore, Morton and Boyer do not attempt to integrate STEM and SSH knowledge but rather separate them.

Conclusion

Leinfelder's image of the physician as unifying and integrating the knowledge of the Anthropocene remains an unfulfilled one. Merchant mentions the possibility of epistemological parity between SSH and STEM but opts for the complementary role of communicator, nevertheless. And Morton and Boyer's reimagination of An-

thropocene knowledge seems to be very much predicated on the exclusion of STEM. The Anthropocene as a knowledge project remains an ongoing one, then. The best way forward we believe involves the successful integration of STEM and SSH knowledges in a manner that does not involve stratification and division. Anthropocene knowledge must try to integrate opposites such as traditional forms of scientific knowledge and recent object-oriented approaches. Ultimately, a unifying way of knowing the Anthropocene would then make room for other forms of knowledge of the Anthropocene as well: premodern and non-Eurocentric, for example.

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Notes

1   Helena B. Sveigård participated in the early stages of writing the article. Ms Sveigård also proofread the manuscript.

2   Jan Zalasiewicz is an important figure in contemporary Geological Sciences. As Chair of the Subcommission on Quaternary Stratigraphy, he plays a key role in "the establishment of a standard, globally-applicable stratigraphical scale" (Subcommission on Quaternary Stratigraphy 2022). Within this context, he is part of the Anthropocene Working Group attempting to formally define the Anthropocene as "a geological unit within the Geological Time Scale" (Anthropocene Working Group 2022).

3   The idea of pure knowledge without human interest has been problematised by, for instance, Jürgen Habermas, *Knowledge and Human Interests*. Translated by Jeremy J. Shapiro. Beacon Press: Boston. 1971.

4   Geology has never been free from human interest. From the beginning it regarded the world as a *resource*. In his *The Map That Changed the World: William Smith and the Birth of Modern Geology*, Simon Winchester spells out some of the scientific, political, economic, and social effects of William Smith's *geological map England, Wales and the south of Scotland*, i.e., "the first true geological map of anywhere in the world." (xvi) Not just pure scientists but industrialists, colonialists, and empire builders found uses for Smith's and subsequent geological maps.