

Aesthetics of Absence: An Exploration of the Apocalypse of the Anthropocene

by

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Bachelor of Arts, University of Calgary, 2015

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Abstract

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The tension inherent in the Anthropocene is the tension between what is rendered (in)visible, and what attempts to be made visible. It is, in this sense, a conflict of ontology and aesthetics: ghosts flutter around us, in and out of our dimension (Bourriaud, 2016; Morton, 2013), and, as Poe would say, “man” is being driven mad by the heartbeats heard through the floorboards. This study addresses two main ideas: (a) that it is the modern subject that is the *anthropos* of the Anthropocene, and (b) that we must further conceptualise claims about the ‘end of the world’ (Morton, 2013). Ultimately, however, both these claims are intimately linked: the ‘subject’ and the ‘world’ in modernity cannot be separated from each other, and are indeed part of the same process (Mbembe, 2003). Thus, the central argument herein is that the Anthropocene should be viewed as a threshold (Clark, 2016; Haraway, 2015) to an epoch (namely, modernity) rather than the start of a new one. To this end, what is at its ‘end’ or threshold then, is the modern subject, and the ‘world’ that it inhabited. We are faced with the utter abyss of the negative (Sinnerbrink, 2016). The sixth extinction is imminent, and a whole host of morbid repercussions of making-world (Mbembe, 2003) are creeping *towards us* (Morton, 2013). Ultimately, we must reckon with *absence*. But what does this mean? How are we to perceive and think about this *lack*? This study aims to address this problem, arguing that we now face the *presence of absence*, rather than the *absence of presence*. Indeed, we must seek a new *aesthetics of absence*.

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I want to acknowledge, first and foremost, my obtrusive presence on the unceded territories of the Lkwungen-speaking peoples on whose traditional territory the university stands, and the Songhees, Esquimalt and WSÁNEĆ peoples whose historical relationships with the land continue to this day. My Word software does not recognize “unceded” as a proper word, just as we should not accept the violent and colonial occupation of these territories, on land that we settlers fail to recognize as propertyless [lacking in the capacity to be owned; unclaimable]. This red squiggly line is written in blood.

Further, I would like to thank my committee for helping me sort through my frustratingly expansive and quite chaotic ideas, rhetoric, and prose. To my colleagues and friends to whom have aided in this journey, thank you kindly. And to all the staff who ensure the ivory tower does not crumble, I see you.

I want also to thank (if it is listening) the great, rich, and wonderful Pacific Northwest to which I have been living these last three years; particularly the rain forests; and particularly “Lookout Point” along the coast of what we now call Oregon, for teaching me about the unbelievable presence of absence (among plenty of other invaluable lessons). Ghosts, spirit, magnetism, electricity, and all the other “spooky action[s] at a distance”, are truly more real than we give them credit for (in their own right of course). This *wilderness*, this problematic term the ‘actual earth’ has been helping me (for some reason) understand more, is the most loving gift I could ever have even imagined.

And beyond all else, thank you to Hana: my co-conspirator, my resolve, my autumn leaf.

It may be passé these days, but the radical knowledges and music genres I am steeped in would not want me to finish an acknowledgment without a proper send-off:

Let us continually rage against the machines, grieve for the loss of the world and ourselves, and love ferociously—even beyond *death*. Above all else, courage.

You, darkness, of whom I am born—

I love you more than the flame
that limits the world
to the circle it illumines
and excludes all the rest

But the dark embraces everything:
shapes and shadows, creatures and me,
people, nations—just as they are.

It lets me imagine
a great presence stirring beside me.

I believe in the night.

--Rainer Maria Rilke, *Book of Hours*, from "The book of a Monastic life" (2005, p. 63).

I IN LOVE & DEATH

Hegel once said that the owl of Minerva only spreads its wings with the falling dusk. The reading of this portend may be interpreted in many different ways, but it is not the least bit difficult to see this as a lamentation of an epic and fated tragedy all too human in its reverence. Yet perhaps for the German philosopher this was not such a tragedy, but merely the inevitability of understanding something only after that which is sought to be understood has passed through the light of its day. For Hegel, dusk is not so ominous; there will always be a tomorrow that we may build. In the anthropocentric night of global warming, however, the pale blue of dawn is much less certain. For, as Bill McKibben has suggested, in the Anthropocene we¹ are born into a world that no longer exists (2010).

As Aristotle proclaims in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, “death is most frightening, since it is a boundary” (Norris, 2005, p. 1). The Anthropocene, some scholarly word we have contrived, represents potential species extinction, and a mass extinction capable of wiping out vast swaths of biodiversity, and life (Kolbert, 2014). Ocean acidification, atmospheric CO² overdose, and a global flood seem immanent. Life, as we know it, will forever be changed, and blame—perhaps inversely related to suffering—is vastly unequal. Power,

¹ A crucial distinction to be made here is what I mean when I say “us”. As Žižek (2011) suggests, the Anthropocene may be seen as way to finally make humanity universal, as it is something completely external to ‘us’. However, this grand ‘we’ simply put is violent, untenable, and is ignorant to the vast inequalities in both life and death. Meant to be framed as a ‘we’ of the species, I still think this as problematic. For, as will be argued in this thesis, I claim that it is the modern subject—that creature of European origin, often times white, and most certainly a cis-gendered heteronormative male—who is to blame for global warming. Thus, even a theorisation of a ‘disunified we’ is a stretch, and still erases the genealogy of the *anthropos* of the Anthropocene. Thus, when I say ‘we’, or ‘us’, I mean the modern subject, however that may be interpreted. As complex and problematic as this language is, I hope that this note will at least partially explain my use of it (and I count myself as part of this ‘we’).

fear, and divisiveness reign, and in my view, are poised to only accelerate in the coming century. This project starts from the admission of a sort of deep love for what we inhabit, and what inhabits us. This project germinates out of a mixture of utter desolation felt at the (invisible) hand of an injustice that has truly reached a geological, and eco- and suicidal depth, and a sobering feeling of something that I have no words for that pushes me to delve into this quagmire of sorrow. Solace, and a hope for a radically different future, flutters in and out of perceptibility, sometimes there, often times channeled into something.

It is my contention that those who study, write about, and think-with the Anthropocene are eschatologists—this term, from *eschatos*, “originally means either a spatial or a temporal end, or edge”. This edge, to wit, can be further conceptualised as a “horizon that always recedes again into a ‘not yet’ that ‘already is’, or is nothing at all” (Keller, 1996, p. xiii). This quote, from Catherine Keller’s book on apocalypse, perhaps sums up the entire Anthropocentric literature; and, at the risk of overgeneralising, the entire “dystopic turn” of thought (Derrida, 1969; 1982; see also Dawdy, 2010). For it is at this end, or edge, that we may find ourselves already occupying—standing upon a thinly woven, rapidly fraying, and stubbornly inflexible rope that was forged in the cloistered and protected world of holocentric, perfect, and infinitely stable self-righteous preponderance. Balancing on this artefact of modernity is difficult enough, yet we are continually buffeted by the beyond-powerful, chaotic gusts of Machiavelli’s Lady Fortuna (or what Ulrich Beck has sanitised to “risk”).

But if we are eschatologists, what is the end or edge we study? And which is it—end, edge, horizon, or “nothing at all”? Is it truly a linear end we are all unequally facing—a teleological finale of epic and cosmically dystopic imagining the likes of which Kant and

Christianity could only dream of? Or is it a much more complex, nonlinear, and quasi-theological experience than we might expect, us exiles of modernity, us Terran Wayfarers (Harway, 2016a)? More still, has the world already ended—and twice—and are we just now realizing this (Morton, 2013)? My question is perhaps less profound, but it might help to take a step back and reground ourselves: if thinkers, poets, and artists of/in the Anthropocene are eschatologists, what is it that we study? If we can all agree that we are facing something akin to *absence*, what lack—what (manifold) ending(s) (if not an *end*) do we study? Going back to Keller’s discussion of *eschatos*, how does this discussion force us to think about *time*? Linear clock-time is not so easy now, is it?

And in any case, as a sort of safeguard, preamble, and postscript to the turbulence of this debate, we can at least all agree that “Apocalypse, then, provides a kind of kaleidoscope for cultural self-consideration” (Keller, 1996, p. xiii), which, after all, is what the globalised world seems to be crying out for. This thesis is situated in this complex, murky, and violent debate (violent because of the gravity), and I do not pretend to exist outside of this—in fact, this is the very predicament of the Anthropocene, as Morton (2013) has shown: *we are all inside of it*. What this thesis does strive to argue, however, is that we must first *start to think seriously about* something akin to ends. This has been far too infrequent in the anthropocentric literature: for the more Marxian leaning political ecologists, I do not think it gets enough serious attention; from the new materialist side of the literature, I think they paint too rosy of a picture, and are perhaps too optimistic and in some cases even opportunistic. More will be said about this point at the end of this introduction, but for now, it is important to understand the barriers surrounding this impetus: death, ends, and the anthropocentric cause of these, are hard pills to swallow—

particularly when one's mouth goes dry from the fear and adrenaline. Second, and of course relatedly, I claim that we must reckon with *death*, as the most terrifying spectre that Modernity has indeed attempted to suffocate (Foucault, 1984) (hint: you cannot hope to suffocate death and *win*). Third, and most importantly, we must begin to theorise *absence*, however we are to define this term. In fact, I will go as far as to say that this is the most important problem to work through in the 21st century.

It is my contention that, while I hope to escape both the somewhat reductionist and overly optimistic versions of the readings of the Anthropocene I have briefly over-generalised above, I can nevertheless attempt to reframe this Anthropocentric and eschatological problem in a more nuanced way. Absence, it is argued in this thesis, is not the opposite of Being. Rather, I argue, it is the opening-upon (opening: from under) of a positive notion of alterity. Absence, in this light, makes the *presence* we have constructed, unthinkable (Harway, 2016a).

Without giving away too much, I think it is imperative that we do not give in to either reckless fear, or to starry-eyed enchantment. Further, we must embody the chaotic, effervescent now (not the present), in an attempt to remain attuned to the multifaceted *dying* the Anthropocene is ushering unto us, as well as the *birthing*: as Haraway reminds us, the earth is “a fearful and devastating power that intrudes on our categories of thought, that intrudes on thinking itself. Earth/Gaia is maker and destroyer, not resource to be exploited or ward to be protected or nursing mother promising nourishment” (2016b, n.p.). We must bear witness—especially those of us in the privileged global North—to the changes that are occurring at an ever accelerating rate. We must, as Haraway puts it, stay with the trouble (2016a).

II THE JESTER DOTH WEEP

A note on style.

The Anthropocene does not much care for academic inquiry. It does not much care for correlationist thinking, and laughs at a modern subject who, for all intents and purposes of this generalised caveat, assumes that reality must pass through them to be real. The confidence in this position, I am happy to report, is violently misplaced. Whatever “reality” is, it does not need to be mediated through the ‘black box’ of experiential, cognitive, and ‘human’ understanding. And this is precisely the point! “Reality”, this beast of burden, overflows—positively tidal, perfectly uncaring—over the ontological boundaries of our modern world. The times some call ‘the Anthropocene’, are, to put it simply, weird, and the painting outstrips the frame.

In this vein, the reader here is warned: this is an exploration of, an inquiry into, something foundationally removed from the careful and patiently reified ‘world’ of the trillions of assemblages of meaning that lay the groundwork for today’s Being. As such, I consciously depart from the form of expectation with as much tact and poise as I can manage. Despite this warning, this text is probably a work of what Kalleiney (2016) describes as modernism: something that studies, critiques, and challenges modernity, but to which belongs itself to that which it attempts to gain distance from. Yet nevertheless, my goal here is to attempt to think-with the Anthropocene—no easy task—and to follow, silently and tenaciously, the murky, dissolving, and leaky ontological frame that attempts to constrain me (and all of us, of course). I follow the smell of compost, of humus, where it leads me. Most often, it has led (and will continue to lead) me to what Donna Harway

(2016) calls trouble. This thesis is an attempt to tell the story of this journey beyond the leaky and composting borders of our collective imagination.

Art can be seen as a way to draw from the inky darkness of the unknown to paint the canvas of the known. In this way, the artist straddles these two worlds—these two dimensions, even. I do not claim to be this, yet it is the direction I wish to take. “Art” and “artist” here, are fluid, multiple. Stagnant definitions tend not to hold water in the age of melting ice caps, yet the main idea to convey is the resurgence of form that I see as needing to occur (and indeed is already well under way). Despite the practical need to fulfil the request of Content (which of course should not be neglected either), this thesis foremost attempts to grapple with the question of form, and to ultimately try and wedge open a bracket or scaffold or rebar in the architecture of modernity that has so solidified our estrangement from life—the messy, overgrown, and chaotic stuff we have desperately tried to sort into flimsy and ultimately meaningless categorical boxes.

By venturing into the abyss, we undo ourselves. Yet by undoing ourselves, we may find ourselves—or, more crucially, we may even lose ourselves. The latter outcome, by far the most frightening of propositions, is also by far the most exciting, and enchanting. The Anthropocene challenges Being, and ultimately dissolves Truth. What then, is the fate of the human? The fate of Being? The fate of Earth? Perhaps these questions are not really separate.

This study asks the following question as guide: How do we conceive of subjectivity in our anthropocentric moment, and how can we begin to rethink the relationship between the human and the ‘actual earth’? In this way, this thesis is about exploring, naming, and rethinking the abyss of anthropocentric subjectivity.

Fundamentally, then, this thesis delves readily into the theoretical and technological (perhaps more so in the Heideggerian sense) ‘world’ of post/nonhumanism, new materialisms, and speculative realism. How are we to think the human in our supposedly “post”-anthropocentric times ahead? What does the human even mean now? In what ways can we even begin this process?

I go now to Maria Mies (1993, p. 137) for an alternately worded description of the problematic addressed herein:

On average men in industrialized societies have, for most of their lives, hardly any direct body-contact with plants, the earth, animals, the elements. Almost everywhere their relationship to nature is mediated through machines which function as a kind of ‘distancing weapon’, by which nature is dominated, manipulated, destroyed. The more technology progresses the greater this distance, the more abstract becomes the relationship between man and nature, and the more alienated man becomes from his own organic, mortal body, which, nevertheless remains the source of all happiness and enjoyment. The more modern man interposes machines between himself and nature, the more he dissects nature and women, the more he projects his desire only to these sections of the whole, the greater becomes his hunger for the original whole, wild, free, woman, and nature: the more he destroys the greater his hunger

From the outset, it would seem then, we ought to address the question of gender. To what extent is the Anthropocene a problem of masculinity and power, and the intersection between? What of the female/feminine/earth? If “man” is the ‘world’, does that then insinuate that the earth is feminine? Does a posthuman (read: post- masculine subject) reading of the Anthropocene aim to celebrate this feminine presence stirring around us? Are ‘Gaia’, ‘mother earth’, the ‘goddess’, labels we should still strive towards? In short, do we ‘nature’ the feminine, or make feminine the ‘natural’? Do we worship this connection, as some ecofeminist literature has done in the past (and to an extent, the present)? Debates surrounding this ‘goddess’ question are wide ranging, and have been, as stated parenthetically, already asked and answered (Haraway, 1991; Mies & Shiva, 1993).

This thesis, drawing from the debates of ecofeminism and posthumanism, suggests that we ought to de‘nature’ the female and degender ‘nature’ (see Haraway, 2016). Yet how can we post-human something that was never human to begin with?

These are questions mostly beyond the scope of this paper, but bear critical import on it nevertheless. What I do want to focus on here, however, is the aforementioned relationship between masculinity, power, and the destruction/negation of the earth. This study has at its epicenter the patriarchal, often times ‘white’, modern subject—this creature I here call “man”. I agrammatically specify this pronoun—one that is often taken to mean the human species more generally—as a foil and stand-in against the specific, dynamic, and infinitely complex substance it seeks to negate, namely, everything else—or more specifically still, the feminine, the natural, the whole. More so than just the standard critique of improperly generalized pronoun use, the demarcation of this term helps ‘poke fun’ at a creature that has been given far too much ancient gravitas in modernity, even up till now. Indeed, this is not to say that “man” is not dangerous: this is just patently inaccurate. No, this is beyond, yet also below, an ironic crusade of millenarian nihilism. As Haraway (1991, p. 117) says, “irony is about humour and serious play”. This view of irony places blasphemy at its centre—and blasphemy, as she says, has “always seemed to require taking things very seriously”.

Precisely because this haughty term has remained so, I aim to inject a bit of the Jester into the dialogue—a character that is often times the only and best way to critique a fading Power that is now so laughably—and violently—flailing in its hyper-fragility. The winds of change are too stiff a gust for our main character in this Tragedy, and, with the aim of completely composting “man”, I think it prudent to use as many tools to do this as

possible. Why do we still bear this pronoun and figure with such weight? Why does it still garner such a response, such a reckoning when handled by the hands of its children unfaithful?

Secondly, I aim to denature this term, like frying an egg and cooking the proteins therein, changing the cellular make-up of it (Morton, 2007). There is nothing ‘natural’ about “man”, if by ‘natural’ we mean here (and only here) organic. This creature is metaphysical—or better yet, it is a figure in the way Haraway describes it: “material-semiotic nodes or knots in which diverse bodies and meanings co-shape one another”, which help her “grapple inside the flesh of mortal world-making entanglements” she calls “contact zones” (2008, p. 4). This creature is the contact zone that will help us delve into the quagmire of problems that the Anthropocene comes entangled with: it is central, yet not in any pleasant way deserving of the dusty fervor and worship with which this study takes indirect aim at.

Problematically, as mentioned above, this study fails to really touch on the feminine, or what we might also problematically (and temporarily) call the ‘non-“man”’—the ‘everything else’ that modernity suppresses, oppresses, objectifies, and marginalizes (Mies & Shiva, 1993). This study is problematically devoured by that which it studies, and is part and parcel inculcated in the epoch it says is withering to death. Thus the problematic “Greek-ish tendrils” (Haraway, 2015, p. 162) grapple still upon this work, frustratingly, patiently, and with surprising vigor grasping me with their slimy, post-mortem digits. Yet it is precisely this beast, this decaying husk, that I seek to entangle myself with: modernity, and the modern, patriarchal subject, need to be decomposed, and that is, lamentably, here

relegated to a very specific project that will come off as unfairly gendered, Eurocentric, and perhaps even overly Jester-ed. What I want to stress, however, is this:

Cyborgs are not reverent; they do not remember the cosmos [...] In a sense, the cyborg has no origin story in the Western sense—a “final” irony since the cyborg is also the awful apocalyptic telos of the “West’s” escalating dominations of abstract individuation, an ultimate self untied at last from all dependency, a man in space (p. 118). The main trouble with cyborgs, of course, is that they are the illegitimate offspring of militarism and patriarchal capitalism, not to mention state socialism. But illegitimate offspring are often exceedingly unfaithful to their origins. Their fathers, after all, are inessential (Haraway, 1991, p. 117, emphasis added).

III BEING, AND THE UNWELCOMED GUEST

The Anthropocene can be thought of as a threshold (Clark, 2016), or as a boundary event (Haraway, 2015), where—like a ship passing through the fabled Bermuda Triangle—the ontological and epistemological bounds of Bulteig become unstable, fluid, and almost infinitely unpredictable and complex. Morton (2013) suggests that we can think of this anthropocentric threshold as a *hyperobject* – an object that exceeds the spatio-temporal awareness of the human, among other things. These objects engage with us in numerous ways that, to put it lightly, usher unto us a quake in our very being (p. 10). But talking about ‘Being’ can be problematic for a multitude of reasons, and hyperobjects make us painfully aware that how modernity, for example, has painted being (a coherent, singular subject), is not only erroneous but exceedingly dangerous (Clark, 2016).

Indeed, this study will engage with the idea that it is the modern subject, and the ‘world’ this creature inhabits, that is at stake in the Anthropocentric dusk. Ultimately, this project aims to disclose or reveal the multifaceted *abyss* that undergirds our current

moment; modernity, as an epoch, has died (Brown, 2001; Vattimo, 2004); and to wit, this void demands a fundamental re-evaluation of the human, the subject, and subjectivity as it pertains to how we relate to the earth around us, or put another way, to *life*² (e.g. Haraway, 2016a; Agamben, 1993a). Put this way, this project situates itself in the realm of *nihilism*: as Vattimo describes the term, nihilism is the “dissolution of any ultimate foundation, the understanding that in the history of philosophy, and of western culture in general, ‘God is dead’, and ‘the real world has become a fable’ [...] nihilism is an increasing awareness that we do all our thinking within the boundaries of that same culture”. This is especially relevant to this study, as “the very idea of a universal truth and a transcultural humanism have arisen precisely within this particular culture” (p. xxv). And, similar in understanding to the Italian philosopher, I view this nihilism as related to *emancipation*, or at least to a greater possibility.

Indeed, some scholars (Bauman, 2015, p. 747; Keller, 2014) view the Anthropocene as a

a type of not-knowing [that] is not blind mystery but recognition of the ground of relationality in which impossible possibilities emerge along with the becoming of the entire planetary community. Chaos and uncertainty, from within this type of reality, are the grounds for new creations and new ways of being. Our actions then are never complete but rather in an Arendtian way they ripple out beyond our control, affecting multiple Earth bodies and creating unforeseen impossible possibilities for future becomings. In order to begin to live into this planetary ground of impossible possibilities, perhaps some queer sensibilities and new thought-habits need to be produced (Bauman, 2015, p. 747).

² i.e. to the understanding of the earth as not some rocky crust supporting humankind, but as *life itself*—as an agential entity that both goes beyond and recedes from our anthropomorphic conceptualisations of it. For instance, when we frame the earth as Gaia, or some other goddess, we are personifying it, and gendering it. How we view earth must recede from this; yet on the other hand, earth as life itself, as Haraway (2016) seems to highlight well, is most certainly more expansive than a simple divine anthropomorphization.

In this sense, the Anthropocene can be seen as a radical closing, but also an *opening*. Donna Haraway has done much work on this opening, as shown in her 2016 book *Staying with the Trouble*. This thesis, however, will focus predominantly on revealing this radical *closure*, despite perhaps framing this exploration through the aforementioned understanding. But further than this, this thesis puts forward the idea that these two terms (“to open”, with a root meaning of under, or from under, above; and “to close”, with a lineage denoting confinement, secrecy, concealment) must not be thought of in a binary, modern way—indeed that is the whole contention here, that the Anthropocene acts as a boundary that decomposes the metaphysics and ways of thinking in Modernity. But indeed, we may start to think about closure and opening as perhaps one in the same thing, or perhaps even in some other epistemological framing that exceeds modern epistemology. Opening, perhaps, may come from the going-under of the concealment of closure. Does *absence* contain within it *presence*, and vice versa? This was Heidegger’s contention, whose teachings, perhaps more so than the man himself³, are paramount for this nihilistic exploration (Vattimo, 2004). Nevertheless, the kind of work highlighted above would be a nice addition to this thesis, but outstrips this project’s limits. More important is the act of decomposing what we mean by the ‘Anthropocene’.

In this vein, we shall critique and explore this term in the first chapter: specifically, what does *anthropos* mean, exactly? Who is the Being at the heart of this inquiry? In engaging with this question, it will be useful to refer to a term from Foucault’s later period, this idea of the “ontology of actuality”. As Vattimo (2004, p. 3-4) describes,

The expression is meant to be taken in its most literal sense: it does not simply indicate, as Foucault thought, a philosophy oriented primarily toward the

³ Especially considering his abhorrent relationship to Nazism.

consideration of existence and its historicity rather than toward epistemology and logic—that is, toward what would be called, in Foucault’s terminology, an “analytic of truth”. Rather, “ontology of actuality” is used here to mean a discourse that attempts to clarify what Being signifies in the present situation.

Put differently, and in light of the well founded complexities with theorizing Being in such a manner, or even of the problem of the language of “the present situation”, I shall explore the “‘ontological ‘significance’ of the present situation” (Vattimo, 2004, p. 4). Often we speak of the epistemological side of the modern subject; however, this chapter will argue that we should, rather, view “man” as ontological. Further, it is indeed “on the terrain of ontology that many of the urgent ecological battles need to be fought (Morton, 2013, p. 22): as Heidegger expressed, after all, Being is “epochal”, and, as argued here, the *anthropos* of the Anthropocene should be thought of as, essentially, this modern subject. And therefore, as we shall also posit, the Anthropocene can be seen as arising with modernity, rather than either the human species (*homo sapiens*), the agricultural revolution, or capitalism (we shall get into this below). Indeed, “Being should be thought of as ‘event’” (p. 6), and as such, corresponds with the event of both modernity and the Anthropocene. As such, the Anthropocene represents the threshold, and ultimate future (or present) unthinkability of the modern subject. This will be the central argument of the first chapter.

Yet “Being is not an object, it is the aperture within which alone man and the world, subject and object, can enter into relationship” (Vattimo, 2004, p. 23). This will be the focus of the next chapter, where we will discuss the idea of the ‘end of the world’ (Morton, 2013): what does the Anthropocene have to do with this proposed “end of the world”? And how can we speak of this supposed ‘event’ if I am still here writing this? This chapter will be dedicated to deconstructing this precise relationship between “man” and ‘world’, arguing that—and stemming from the conclusion of chapter 1—the end of the modern

subject necessarily entails—and is precisely the same thing as—the end of ‘world’. What does this concomitant absence mean? And how we can usefully think about this purported “lack”?

Both of these chapters will frame the modern in a Hegelian sense, although with important injunctions of thought from Heidegger, Nietzsche, Jean-Luc Nancy, and Giorgio Agamben, among others. Centrally, this thesis, while essentially using the Anthropocene as a “case study” of sorts (although if we frame it in this way it sounds positively macabre...), is interested in deconstructing and decomposing modernity. As Foucault posits (1978, as cited in Norris, 2005, p. 2),

What might be called a society’s ‘*threshold of modernity*’ [...] has been reached when the life of the species is wagered on its own political strategies. For millennia, man remained what he was for Aristotle: a living animal with the additional capacity for political existence; modern man is an animal whose politics places his existence as a living being in question

In modernity, then, particularly after Nietzsche’s (and then Heidegger’s) exploration of nihilism, biopolitics (or, as we shall argue, *necropolitics*) “fulfills the potential of its origin in turning against that origin” (Norris, 2005, p. 2). Thus, the Anthropocene, rather than representing the beginning of a new epoch, represents the *end of one*—namely, modernity. Global warming has been anthropocentrically produced by our own politically strategies, and *a la* Foucault, threatens the very life of *all* species. Politics, as the above formulation posits, has been placed above life; modernity, placed above earth.

Yet “modernity”—that impossible-to-pin-down “epoch” (c.f. Carvounas, 2002)—is a complex concept, generally occurring within the bounds of the “western” cultural narrative. We will discuss what we think of as “modernity” throughout this thesis; for now,

however, it would be well to at least historically and genealogically define the demarcations we shall be covering here. Historically, as Foucault shows in *The Order of Things* (1994), we may say that our conceptualisation of modernity takes place in his “modern period”, rather than the “classical period; the hinge being essentially the Renaissance. Further, we may also define the start of our study as that which comes after the death of God (Nietzsche; Vattimo, 2004; Agamben, 2004; 1993b).

For instance, as Debord (2012, p. 92) describes,

As the Middle Ages came to an end, the irreversible time that had invaded society was experienced by a consciousness still attached to the old order as an *obsession with death*. This was the melancholy of a world passing away—the *last world where* the security of myth could still balance history; and for this melancholy all earthly things were inevitably embarked upon the path of corruption [...] This was the moment when a millenarian utopianism aspiring to *build heaven on earth* brought back the forefront an idea that had been at the origin of semi-historical religion, when the early Christian communities, like Judaic messianism from which they sprang, responded to the troubles and misfortunes of their time by announcing the imminent realization of God’s Kingdom, and so added an element of disquiet and subversion to ancient society.

Indeed, the Renaissance, as a “joyous break with eternity”, valorized the infinite (usually thought of in terms of knowledge, but also commerce, art, and commodities), and “life came to recognize itself as the enjoyment of the passing of time”. Yet this love of the infinite, of the irreversibility of the passing of time, did not remove the *telos* that preceded it. In fact, eternity was simply replaced with infinity as the end goal of humanity (and therefore of time): the song of Lorenzo de’ Medici, which is considered to be (through Burckhardt), “the very spirit of the Renaissance”, is, to Debord, the “eulogy delivered upon itself by this fragile historical feast” (103/139):

How beautiful our Youth is
That’s always flying by us!
Who’d be happy, let him be so:

Nothing's sure about tomorrow.

More will be discussed of this demarcation, but for now we may call this period, as James Scott (1998) does, “High Modernity”.

However, this project also views modernity as a *philosophical narrative*—or, more precisely, many narratives all strewn together, vying for hegemonic dominance (Jameson, 2001). Specifically, I take issue with the narrative that says, “from the beginning, the metaphysical attempt to grasp the *archē*, the first principle, *was inspired by the will to dominate the totality of things*” (Vattimo, 2004, p. 10; emphasis added; Horkheimer & Adorno, 1974⁴). Indeed, modern metaphysics (or perhaps we could just say ‘metaphysics’) is at issue, especially if we view “the true meaning of metaphysics: will to power, violence the destruction of liberty” (p. 11); or, to put it another way, as Vattimo does through a reading of Heidegger’s ideation of technology: “the effective rationalisation of the world through the reduction of all beings to a system of causes and effects controlled by man” (p. 13). It is this precise desire to dominate—and the dominion of *anthropos* specifically (*Anthropos-cene*) that this project grapples with.

Ultimately, and politically,

we need to remember the meaning of Being and to recognize that this meaning is the dissolution of the principle of reality into the manifold of interpretations, precisely so as to be able to live through the experience of this dissolution without neurosis and avoid the recurrent temptation to “return” to a stronger (more reassuring and also more threatening and authoritarian) sense of the real (Vattimo, 2004, p. 20).

⁴ Interestingly, this desire bears a shocking similarity to the alchemical (and magical in general) thrust of the Renaissance: perhaps the quest for the ‘philosopher’s stone’—for immortality and dominion over life and death—has not ceased to possess our imaginations (perhaps specifically in the Hegelian sense of this last word).

In a world of increasing and radical polarization, fascism, xenophobia, and general denialism, these words should not go unheeded; moreover projects such as this may help pave the way for hopefully a more peaceful 21st century (and beyond) amidst such chaos, strife, and horror as will be (and is already being) unleashed. I am reminded here as well of Judith Butler's work on grieving and vulnerability: "open grieving is bound up with outrage, and outrage in the face of injustice or indeed of unbearable loss has enormous political potential" (2009, p. 39). The realms of death we are approaching and living in are not to be taken lightly. Precisely because of this fact we may wish to acknowledge our death(s)—of both the world, and ourselves. And to grieve. Haraway (2016a, p. 39) furthers this idea when she tells us that

Grief is a path to understanding entangled shared living and dying; human beings must grieve *with*, because we are in and of this fabric of undoing. Without sustained remembrance, we cannot learn to live with ghosts and so cannot think. Like the crows and with the crows, living and dead "we are at stake in each other's company".

Indeed, death swirls about us, through us, and within us; our world has died, and its spectre remains, however, slowly fading away from visibility and thinkability. This 'world' we have forged from the bounty, beauty, and seeming benevolence of the Holocene has turned vast amounts of refuge into radioactive burial grounds, landfills, mass genocidal graves, warming and acidifying waters, and the whole world into a site of mass extinction. Earth is changing rapidly, and we are quickly losing what we know; reality untethers. For this, we must grieve. For this, we must learn to live with ghosts, for we are indeed at stake in each others company.

We will now turn towards the literature review, and explore the pertinent themes of the current state of the Anthropocene literature, and to situate this research—and the points made above—among it.

IV LITERATURE REVIEW

The Anthropocene is typically viewed as the event at which the human has become so powerful that it becomes a geological force (Petrocultures Research Group, 2016; Davis & Turpin, 2015; Angus, 2016; Chakrabarty, 2009; Bauman, 2015; Haraway, 2016b; 2016c). Yet what do we mean when we say this? There appear to be three main points in the literature that scholars point to when they talk about the beginnings of this threshold. Some say the agricultural revolution of roughly 9-10,000 years ago (see Dawson, 2016; Davis & Turpin, 2015). Others portend that it was in modernity – and specifically, 1789 (Davis & Turpin, 2015; Angus, 2016; Morton, 2013). And a great many suggest that it was 1945, with the Great Acceleration (Harvey, 2014; c.f. Morton, 2013; Davis & Turpin, 2015), and further, that we should rename this era the “capitalocene” (Davis & Turpin, 2015; Haraway & Kenny, 2015; Moore, 2016; Malm, 2013; Haraway, 2016c). Yet all these arguments share in their common understanding of this threshold as centred on the actions, characteristics, and even nature of the *human*, or with the capitalocene thesis, a structure. But taken at face value, we may end up with a problematically fatalistic reading of the Anthropocene.

Dawson (2016) contends that it is extremely problematic—if not factually wrong—to assume that the human qua human, *homo sapiens*, is the underlying basis of the

Anthropocene; that, unfortunately, this telos is just the result of a tragic humanity that is ceaselessly destructive. How convenient to power this sentiment is. Politically, this feeds into, rather than trying to subvert, a mortified politics. Davis and Turpin (2015) moreover suggest, “we like to think that the credulous pseudonym *Homo sapiens*—that perpetrator also known as *anthropos* by the social scientists—is merely a place-holder” (p. 21). Why then is there such a casual linkage between *anthropos* and *homo sapiens*? And amidst critique of the term “Anthropocene” (Angus, 2016; Moore, 2016; Haraway, 2015; Bauman, 2015; Harway, 2016a; 2016b; 2016c), how can we think of *anthropos* beyond its status as placeholder? There is something deeply amiss, yet understandably so, in this re-questioning and re-evaluation of the human inherent in this critique of the Anthropocene literature. Rainer Maria Rilke, the German poet of the early 20th century, so prominent in the thinking of Heidegger (1971), can perhaps be of use here. In the “Eighth Elegy” in the *Duino Elegies* (1977, p. 55), Rilke admonishes:

And we: always and everywhere spectators,

turned toward the stuff of our lives, and
never outward.

It all spills over us. We put it in order.

It falls apart. We order it again

and fall apart ourselves.

[...]

Who has turned us around like this?

Whatever we do, we are in the posture
 of one who is about to depart.
 Like a person pausing and lingering
 for a moment on the last hill
 where he can still see his whole valley –
 this is how we live, forever
 taking our leave.

The “who” in the above stanza, of course concerns power, capitalism, and the exploitation inherent in our western metaphysics (Vattimo, 2004). This project attempts to supplement, rather than critique this line of inquiry, and recognizes the necessity of attacking those that have “turned us around like this”. Herein, though, the focus lies in the process of turning around, rather than who or what does the turning. In a sense, this is the divide between the two main currents of thought in the Anthropocene literature: this project is wedged between two sides of a heated debate: on the one side, there are the more Marxist leaning political ecologists, who house the Anthropocene (as an epoch) in their critique of capitalism. They do so by way of what is denoted as the “Great Acceleration thesis” (Davis & Turpin, 2015; Angus, 2016; Chakrabarty, 2009; Moore, 2016), which tells of an exponential rise in greenhouse gas emissions, nuclear waste and fallout, and a whole host of morbid repercussions stemming from *Pax Americana* and the exponential rise of capitalist imperialism globally. This is not so wrong. It is this camp that seeks the question of “who” that Rilke introduces above.

I am sympathetic to this more Marxist-leaning side. Capitalism must still be accounted for, as should *power*; although, in our line of inquiry here, capitalism should not remain the central locus of critique. This point is central to this project: which fundamental cultural and/or philosophical underpinnings provide the legitimation for the capitalist enterprise and associative exploitation and destruction of the earth? We are, in essence, taking a step back, and, as stated above, looking at the *turning*. Indeed, this camp seems to tack on the Anthropocene to the fascist/capitalist world-system as simply another layer in the fight against capitalism. This is a grave mishandling of our troubles, as it is frankly problematically lacking the historic depth required to fully understand the wickedest of wicked problems (Morton, 2013) that is the Anthropocene⁵.

The other side of this debate cite the human – sometimes as the modern subject (Clark, 2016), sometimes as *homo sapiens* (c.f. Dawson, 2016; Scranton, 2015)– as the root problematic of the Anthropocene, not capitalism. This side of the debate is filled with figures from new materialism, post-humanism, and ecocriticism, and performs an archaeology of the ontological and epistemological template to which the global hegemony of today resides upon. As such, this debate bleeds into political contestation as well. Indeed, this latter camp suggests that perhaps it is not capitalism that is at the root of this problematic, but rather the “West” itself (Vattimo, 2004); perhaps this is a ‘civilizational problem’ (Scranton, 2015)—something that the former camp tends to neglect almost wholly (Angus, 2016); although, importantly, if the former camp puts too much emphasis on capitalism, this latter group puts too little import on Power. Nevertheless, this problem

⁵ And indeed, it may be parenthetically suggested that capitalism has in fact surpassed and outlasted the epoch of modernity, and may continue to do so long after this metaphysical, ontological, template has withered away. In this sense, the capitalocene thesis may hold great import; however, as stated, this is not the thesis for that line of inquiry.

may be framed in more specific ways than this: as this study articulates, modernity may be better able to explain the Anthropocene and its development more acutely than simply capitalism and the industrial revolution (see Davis & Turpin, 2015; Clark, 2016; Haraway, 2015). This side also, for the most part, is at the very least sceptical of the notion that the Anthropocene is an epoch, and more so side towards it being a threshold (Clark, 2016), or a boundary event (Haraway, 2015): people have known for many centuries of humanity's geopower (Bonneuil & Fressoz, 2016). This latter camp is where I primarily locate this project, and seems to me to represent an attempt of reckoning the process of this turning, rather than focussing on who turns.

Where both sides coalesce is in the ruthlessness of the Anthropocene.

I THE SPECTRE OF [___] IS HAUNTING...

The Anthropocene, a term that is heavily contested in its meaning and scope (Haraway, 2016a; Moore, 2016), comes from *anthropos*, and from ‘-cene’, or more specifically, *kairos*—a momentary, event-based time wherein fluidity, multidimensionality, and the mystical reign. It is a time “full of inheritances, of remembrance, and [is] full of comings, of nurturing what might still be. I hear *kainos*⁶ in the sense of a thick, ongoing presence, with hyphae infusing all sorts of temporalities and materialities” (Haraway, 2016a, p. 2). Both of these terms (but particularly for our discussion the first) on their own have been taken for granted in the Anthropocene literature (minus Haraway and *kairos*, but even then she’s the exception), despite themselves bearing critical import to the problematic of the term ‘Anthropocene’ more generally. Yet this quagmire of thought becomes only more hazy when we think of this latter term as representing a threshold (Clark, 2016), boundary event (Haraway, 2015), or *apocalypse*. Indeed, this last foreboding term, originally denoting a revealing, or an unveiling (Keller, 1996), highlights in the starkest of ways the abyss of groundlessness (Heidegger, 1971; 1999), and the abyss of the radical negativity of subjectivity (Hegel, 1974; Žižek, 1999; Sinnerbrink, 2016; Mbembe, 2003; Debord, 2012)—both of which are taken in this study as inseparable, and indeed, imperiously related. This chapter argues that it is the *modern subject* that is the *anthropos* of the

⁶ Haraway uses ‘*kainos*’, whereas I (among others) use ‘*kairos*’. The meaning is the same, if not the spelling.

Anthropocene, as both the *archē* and *telos* (or, more specifically, *eschatos*)⁷ of an ecocidal, genocidal, and suicidal *modernity*. The literature is problematically unclear about just who or what is this *anthropos*, and this chapter will attempt to sketch a possible direction of clarity on the matter. Put differently, the Anthropocene is the apocalypse (revealing) of the radical negativity that the subject imposes upon the ‘actual earth’ (Hegel, 1974), where this negativity, to riff off of Latour, is ‘striking back’ (Mbembe, 2003; Morton, 2013; 2017; Clark, 2016; Haraway, 2015; 2016a; Chakrabarty, 2009; Žižek, 2011).

The tension inherent in the Anthropocene—viewed using this Hegelian framework—is the tension between what is rendered (in)visible, and what attempts to be made visible. It is, in this sense, a conflict of ontology and aesthetics: ghosts flutter around us, in and out of our one dimension (Bourriaud, 2016; Marcuse, 1964), and, as Poe would say, “man” is being driven mad by the heartbeats heard through the floorboards—the heartbeat of the Other—and of course, *himself*.⁸ The central argument in this chapter then, is that, as the abyss of the negative becomes forcefully more apparent—in both a Hegelian and Heideggerian sense—the *modern subject becomes more and more invisible*; ontology collapses (Morton, 2013), bringing “man” down with it, unto its own constitutive *oblivion*, and ultimately to its undoing. Thus, this chapter will argue the following:

⁷ Importantly, we should view *archē* as a way to describe origin, or a beginning (e.g. Heidegger, 1999); *telos*, on the other hand, denotes an end, and for our purposes, an end correlating with the *archē*. *Eschatos*, from *eschaton*, signifies an end of sorts as well, but in a different sense: crucially, it provides a sense of finality, of the last, the ultimate. It has religious connotations, but not exclusively; and as Morton (2013) purports, it could also be related to the term *doom*: as Morton describes, doom is conventionally thought of as a decree, ordinance, or directive. But it can also mean judgement. In this sense, doom is a sort of eschatology, as it can also refer to fate, destiny, and in the strongest sense, *death* (pp. 147, 148).

⁸ Indeed, it is peculiar that, as described in the short story by Poe, the *anthropos* of the Anthropocene has also been attempting to convince its readers that it is sane (read: rational, calculating, right, and just), while at the same time alerting us through a plethora of ways of its ecocide (“insanity”).

- 1) The modern subject, (or “man”) is founded upon an abyss of negativity, whereby in the process of ‘becoming-subject’ (Mbembe, 2003) the conflict between ‘world and earth’ (Heidegger, 1999) is played out. The modern subject becomes the *exform* of modernity (Bourriaud, 2016);
- 2) The apocalypse (unveiling; *Aletheia*; truth) of the Anthropocene signifies the abyss (*Abgrund*) of groundlessness (Heidegger, 1971; 1999) of both the metaphysical ‘world’ (here represented as ‘modernity’) and the modern subject, both of which are foundationally inseparable. Put another way, the abyss of subjectivity (Sinnerbrink, 2016; Žižek, 1999; Debord, 2012)—the “night of the world” (Hegel, 1974)—and the epochal groundlessness Heidegger describes, *are foundationally related processes and ends*.

In short, we have severed ourselves from the earth, from that which we are fundamentally inseparable from (Morton, 2017). Not only this, but the modern subject has founded itself upon *this very severing*, and the multiple consequences of which we shall here unpack. The “Anthropocene” is in desperate need of a rethinking, and probably of an overhaul. The idea that the Anthropocene should represent some new ‘epoch’, that is somehow just starting now is obtuse and myopic—we have known about the climactic geopower of humanity for centuries (Bonneuil & Fressoz, 2016), and any idea of a ‘new epoch’ falls into the trap of modernity, adhering in good form to the metatemporal epochalisation and linearity of time and myth (Carvounas, 2002; Nancy, 1991). Thus, as stated before this section, we should seek to view this concept differently in terms of scope and *scale* (Clark, 2016). Global

warming outstrips modernity in its hyperobjective reality⁹ (Morton, 2013; Clark, 2016), and evades the boxes of thought of modern metaphysics. Further, although I am sympathetic to rebranding this concept and all of its conceptual and methodological issues (for instance, I am particularly convinced of the idea of Haraway's *Chthulucene*), I am not willing to throw out the centrality (and blame) of the *anthropos*, as long as we are careful not to correlate this latter prefix with the human species more generally (or, biologically) (Dawson, 2016), and are mindful of the massive inequality attached to global warming and the catastrophes thereof.

This earth, as geological and geographical, is asserting itself with agential force (e.g. Barad, 2007). Trapped within the context of a relatively stable, slightly warmer, and refuge-filled Holocene (Haraway, 2015), the (geo)trauma of the Anthropocene alone is enough to usurp our Western world of meaning, let alone other forms of abyss, such as the death of God (Nietzsche). We assumed the earth slumbered, and built a world from its negative exploitation and destruction. We did this through a variety of means, but this chapter will focus on the violence of ontology. What we have deemed as 'real' and visible, and what we have deemed oblivion and invisible, come to intersect, if only for a moment, in the hope(lessness) and fatalism of the Anthropocentric moment. The modern subject will most likely die; the question becomes, however, if the human will survive—and if so, in what form?

⁹ Global warming, as Morton (2013) describes, can be thought of as a *hyperobject*, an entity that vastly exceeds the spatiotemporal dimensionality of that which views it (i.e. "us"). Implicit in this position is a critique of correlationist thinking, both weak and strong forms of it (Meillassoux, 2016). Further, it describes a problem of contradicting or very difficult to make compatible scales and scopes.

Why “Man”? Why do we start with this creature, and how is ‘he’ at the heart of this complex term called the Anthropocene? Because this being is phantasmagoric. Binary and supposedly unitary. An utterly aporetic paradox. It does not exist, and yet, it is the being at the heart of modernity, the forger and the forged of our modern world that is the opening to the strife between world and earth (Heidegger, 1999; 1971). To quote Guy Debord, one of the main founders of the Situationist movement, “Man—that ‘negative being who *is* solely to the extent that he abolishes being’—is one with time¹⁰”. As we shall discuss below, the modern subject is fearful of the night, and of the ending of time—and therefore of itself (Bourriaud, 2016). This has massive consequences, and it is this tragedy to which the next sections will be dedicated. Indeed, and ultimately, as Debord argues, “Man’s appropriation of his own nature is at the same time *the apprehension of the unfolding of the universe*” (2012, p. 92, thesis 125; emphasis added). We should not take this point lightly: to what extent does our paranoia control us? This chapter will take this one step further, and argue that “man’s” appropriation does not stop with his own nature, but with “nature” itself. This last point will be the ultimate focus of our exploration of *Anthropos*.

There are a plethora of ways to interpret this creature. This chapter will wrestle with and critique the Hegelian view of “man”, which is also the approach Debord indirectly took. It is in this stream of thought that the modern subject is viewed to be constitutively

¹⁰ Parallel with our grasping of modernity, and the modern subject who occupies the central analogous centre of this epoch (Foucault, 1994), is the question of time. Further research, as Debord’s quote here points to, would be useful in detailing the metatemporal hegemony of modernity, how it may be the central facet of the modern, and how the modern subject has become melded to this straight line of time (see Dawdy, 2010 for a refreshing mediation on this topic). In short, this passage denotes the hegemony of *Kronos*, or chronological time, in modernity, and the modern subject’s implacable relationship with it. Further research should be done to see how the emergence of *kairos* attempts to usurp this temporal hegemonic articulation of reality.

negative. As we shall explore, this quality is also directly related to a fear of death, and of our attachment to earth and all that entails. Indeed, as Debord illuminates, and as Kant (2008), Heidegger (1962), Weber (1978, p. 212), and Žižek (1997) have elaborated on as well, the problem of how to think human finitude is a tremendous one. This is a problematic that has endured many attempts at resolution, not least due to the influence of Descartes and his Cartesian binary, that “thoroughly repudiated theoretical spectre” which nevertheless haunts our imaginaries (Sinnerbrink, 2016, p. 2): the radicality of this Cartesian, modern subject, this binarized and constitutively split or ruptured “I”, cannot be underscored enough. As will be argued in this chapter, we are said to have both heaven and earth within us—we are a being who is both constellated and earthbound (Foucault, 1994), both celestial and terrestrial; a mind from the sky, and a body from the earth. Yet perhaps most importantly here is the separation of the human from earth—even if the Latin *homo* is etymologically connected to ‘humus’ (Benveniste, 1969)—we are from the earth, and foundationally terrestrial, yet we wish to live amongst the stars and reach our “human form divine” (Morton, 2013, p. 21). We are foundationally ruptured, suddenly afraid of where we dwell: we have sundered ourselves from ourselves¹¹. How can we think this apparent paradox through?

¹¹ Interestingly, I think we can see the effects of this sundering of “man” from the earth in the recent developments of bioengineering and virtual reality—both of which are intimately connected in their repudiation and replacement of the *bios*. As what we call ‘nature’ dies or is fundamentally changed all around us; as pollution, urbanization, and the removal of the human psyche from the earth becomes more and more pronounced; and as we deem our terrestrial dwelling as something not deemed worthy of our presence, it makes sense that we are becoming-cyborg (Haraway, 1991). The film *Interstellar* is a good example of an earth that is deemed beyond salvageable, with an exploration into colonizing space becoming necessary. This film, of course, is not the first to essentially give up on the earth, but the depth of its sense of depravity is worth noting. This notion of becoming-cyborg is worth meditating on, however. As the severing of the human from earth widens and becomes deeper, what we are negatively composed of (the negation, exploitation, and alienation of nature) falls into disarray: we can no longer base ourselves off of our negativity, as the positive existence of ‘nature’ falls into question with global warming already destroying the routine movements of our biosphere. Thus, if freedom (in this case, of being) is predicated on slavery for the modern (Hegel), the modern subject must find a way to constitute itself on something other than a wasted and dried up ‘nature’. This of course mirrors our exploitative economic model: ‘nature’—our vast reserve of wealth and resource

And indeed: how do we *see ourselves*? Particularly, if, as argued above, we are a sort of phantasmagoria—a performative *dispositif*, even (Esposito, 2010). Phantasmagoria can be thought of here as the underlying cultural realm that lies *beneath* the collective unconscious. It speaks ‘behind our backs’, much like ideology; however, as Bourriaud (2016, p. 73) is quick to point out, we can think of the phantasmagoric as something that ideology mirrors as the political version of this. Yet we must go further than this, as the phantasmagoric is certainly much deeper than political ideologies. Keller (1996) would suggest that phantasmagoria “represents the unrepresentable” (p. 6); it is what holds the deep silence of that which is unspeakable, unsayable, and ultimately *unseeable*. And that which is unspeakable, and hidden, is what is at the core of (our) being¹². Richard Kearney, in speaking of the unspeakable (for him here represented as *strangers, gods, and monsters*) defines this realm of the phantasmagoric as the “boundaries where maps run out, ships slip moorings and navigators click their compasses shut. No man’s land. Land’s end. Out there, as the story goes, ‘where the wild things are’”; it is a “frontier zone where reason falters and fantasies flourish” (2003, p. 3). It is where the unknown-known dwell, the darkest hiding place in our collective cultural psychic landscape—the place where unholy paradox, fear and trembling, axiomatic secrets, and mutilated origins (and prophetic ends) fester. It is to this dank and squalid place we must go, because the Anthropocene, this chaotic and monstrous event, demands it—or at the very least, permits it.

created solely for us—is failing, for both our metaphysics and physical existence. The question becomes, however: can we exist on the back of this triple abstraction? I.e. can the human be founded on a technology that is founded upon our conceptualisation of ‘nature, which is in turn founded upon the earth?

¹² One may see the similarities here between Heidegger’s discussion of the truth of be-ing, or of truth more generally. However, we are here historicising be-ing against his wishes (1999, p. 7), and even delving into psychoanalysis. But this is the point: we should not de-historicise be-ing, and particularly not if we are to centre the *anthropos* as the bearer of the truth of be-ing. In this sense, we are critiquing Heidegger, and suggesting that before we even talk about the swaying of be-ing, we must ask: *who sways*?

But therefore how is the modern subject *seen*? It is interesting that the almost surreal physical point of the incomprehensibility of blindness we inhabit resides in the simple fact that we cannot directly see ourselves: we are ourselves *un-see-able*. The idea of ‘man’ in modernity (and here I hope I may briefly stretch this epoch to its ancient Greek origins) revolves around the conceptualization of man as mask, or as face: Garnier (2008) suggests that this term *anthropos* (ἄνθρωπος) has commonly been thought of as describing man (and here the distinction between ‘man’ as universal pronoun and ‘man’ as the particular pronoun is quite blurred), “having a manly face”, or “he who looks like a man”. If we go a bit further, the term ‘person’, coming from the Latin *persōna*, derives from “actors wearing large, wooden masks in the theatre during performances, through which their voice would resonate (per-sonar, to sound through) (Campagna & Campiglio, 2012, p. 2); in Greek, *prósōpa* parallels ἄνθρωπος, meaning face or mask. The face, whether represented by a mask or by its etymological roots in Latin (from *facies*) as *form*, or *appearance*, both suggest a politics of representation and aesthetics, which, as mentioned, becomes the ground upon which oblivion becomes contested (e.g. Nancy, 1997). In this sense, in modernity, the human is related foundationally to the face, *to that which sees, but cannot be self-seen*. And as this chapter argues: *sight becomes cartography; cartography becomes ontology; ontology becomes sight*.

This is an important point that deserves unpacking. If the modern conception of what it means to be human is founded upon the metaphysical metaphor of a mask, and if this mask resides upon the face—that which sees and is seen—then the modern subject is a creature that sees, but does not allow itself to be seen. Distortion, projection, and representation become the grounds of identity. As Campagna and Campiglio seem to

insinuate, “man” is a dramatic creature, one who stands “against the silent background of the stage, of which the masks of the actors would simply be a scenographic function were it not for their autonomous speaking” (2012, p. 3). Thus, both sight and sound become important, and the act of speaking—of naming—cannot be overlooked. Indeed, much of 20th century philosophy attempts to deal with this issue of naming, speaking, and language. Yet sight, and the contestation between visibility, and the violence of the ‘silent background of the stage’ where the masked creature dwells, threatens to subsume the modern subject into the invisibility of the stage—the ontology of the mask.

Ultimately, we must distort ourselves to see ourselves. To not wear a mask is to not be on stage, which is to not exist within the ontological realm of hegemonic articulation (Laclau & Mouffe, 1985). Narcissus, who fell in love with his own reflection, gazed into a pool of water, not fully understanding that this was merely an image, a *reflection of the real*. He stared at his reflection until he died, as we know. Yet perhaps this tale can be seen in a more fundamental light—we develop technologies to do precisely this, aiming, of course, not to die. Modernity is aesthetic, and narcissistic. And if so, we are finding ways to *see ourselves*, having forgotten long ago the masks that are required with our subjectivization. We have created a situation where that which we use to see ourselves has been blurred into distortion simply by ideas of *how* we should see ourselves. We are the product of Heidegger’s modern *technē* (1977). This goal of self-definition, which echoes Sartre’s idea that “the desire of being is always realized as the desire of a *mode* of being” (1957, p. 22; emphasis added), upholds the Narcissus tale as fundamental to our epoch. Form overlays Being, and cartography—the act of creating maps—overlays territory. The

problem with this last transition, as Baudrillard has pointed out, is that the map comes to dictate (and eventually erase) the territory. Again, the mask devours the face.

And yet on top of this, perhaps there never was a face to begin with. As Agamben (2004) shows, this creator-artifact (Hobbes, 1651), was created “without a definite model”; “he does not even have a face of his own and must shape it at his own discretion” (p. 29). This “humanist discovery” of “man” (which coincides with the Renaissance), “is the discovery that [“man”] lacks himself, the discovery of his irremediable lack of *dignitas* [rank]” (p. 36). We *are* to the extent that we *are not*, and have no specific identity—no *essence*—other than the ability to *recognize* ourselves. This is central to the phantasmagoria of “man”. *Form*, then, is an obsession, a *founding* of the modern subject, and this *lack* begets ontology, *which begets identity*. As Agamben puts it, devoid of any “*notable characteristic*”, we must rely on our “self-knowledge”. This, ultimately, suggests that “man is the being which recognizes itself as such, that *man is the animal that must recognize itself as human to be human*” (p. 26), emphasis in original). Thus, for the modern subject, Being is form, not essence: ‘human nature’, then, is mythological, and Sartre’s above point holds true for us here. We become human only when we see ourselves as such, and in so doing, we engage in the act of *projection*, and we place a mask upon our facelessness. Indeed, it is in this light that we should see the etymology of *anthropos* as faceless, as mask. This mask, however, is the mask of an ontology, the map of human-as-artificer that hides and makes invisible that which we are-not. But is this *absence* truly lacking in *presence*? Does the human truly lack a face, or a positive identity upon which to stand? Do we need a “definite model”? These questions are perhaps moot in this section’s

ontological archaeology of the modern subject; however, perhaps the apocalypse of the Anthropocene may indeed reveal something behind our rapidly dissolving masks.

Indeed, and nevertheless, it would appear that to become-“man”, the human (*homo sapiens*) must be turned toward oblivion, toward the void. We found and surround ourselves with death, infinity, and the negative, and what we are-not is rendered *un-see-able*, negated-for in the process of becoming-subject. We are masked by the cartographic and imaginative dissolution of the modern metaphysics that give us meaning (Sinnerbrink, 2016; Žižek, 1999, p. 29, 30; Hegel, 1974).

Yet again, this *lack*: does the human (as that which is negated by “man”) lack a ‘nature’? This seems like an outdated question; moreover, this chapter grounds itself in the “too late” of this problematic: as we shall see herein, the founding of the modern subject—and therefore of *anthropos*—assumed this lack, and thus we shall journey with this assumption. Yet this perceived lack may even be at the root of our *anthropos*, and the maddening quest for identification. This *lack*, therefore, must be explored. Where can we see this un-see-able? How does this constitutive and foundational quality make sense of/in the Anthropocene? Perhaps, despite the genealogical limits of this chapter (as mentioned above), we must rethink this very question, precisely as what we are-not becomes perhaps the only tenable quality remaining to us, and our understanding of being in the Anthropocene.

Indeed, this lack may be most powerfully described by Hegel:

The human being is this night, this empty nothing, that contains everything in its simplicity—an unending wealth of many representations, images, of which none belongs to him—or which are not present. This night, this interior of nature, that exists here—pure self—in *phantasmagorical representations*, is night all around it, in which here shoots a bloody head—there another white ghastly apparition, suddenly here before it, and just so disappears. One catches

sight of this night when one looks human beings in the eye—into a night that becomes awful (Hegel, 1974, p. 204, as cited in Sinnerbrink, 2016, p. 5; emphasis added).

This is the infamous ‘night of the world’ passage, and speaks vividly of this lack. We can gather many themes from this. What is interesting, for starters, is how Hegel frames this “empty nothing” as that which “contains everything in its simplicity—an unending wealth...”. Stolen away from the human antecedently, we lack *possession* of these ‘representations and images’, or cannot *perceive* them. This nothing that is everything, that which will ultimately be negated, is here described as an *aesthetic* realm: representation, image, presence, absence uphold the boundaries of this dimension that is (supposedly) invisible to us. The ‘night’, metaphorically, becomes this evil realm of spectres—those entities, ideas, forms, figured as unseeable to us. This is another assumption. Indeed, *sight* manifests itself as fundamental to this entire problematic, and it is the eye with which modernity and the modern subject are defined, segmented, and seen (Agamben, 2004; Rousseau, 1964; Hobbes, 1651); conversely, it is when one sees, essentially, *sight*—that *sense* that maps what *is* and defies what cannot be immediately perceived—when one “catches sight of this night[...] a night that becomes awful”.

As Sinnerbrink (2016, p. 5) eloquently describes it, this passage

expresses the “pure” or impersonal self, whose dark unconscious domain of phantasmagorical partial objects—“a bloody head”, a “ghastly white apparition”—is precisely what marks the ‘violent’, traumatic transition from natural being to social and cultural subject. This netherworld of unconscious fantasy, subjective dissolution—the “night of the world”, of intersubjective meaning—is an irreducible dimension of the finitude of subjectivity. It is the abyss of negativity glimpsed in the uncanny gaze of the Other—in the night of the eye, the abyss of subjectivity, “a night that becomes awful”, as Hegel says.

This uncanny gaze of the Other, this ‘night of the eye’ is indeed an abyss. And indeed, here we can say that the other is much more complex than the self, and also provides us with

the oblivion we must traverse in order to understand “man”. But does this abyss have parameters, or boundaries with which we can attempt to further clarify it with? As Rousseau (1964, p. 149, 155) suggests in his *Second Discourse*, this abyss spans the width of the gap between the verbs “to be” and “to appear”. Plato, in the *Republic* (1991), would frame this distinction as the gap between form and sense, and in *Timaeus* (1969) between “what always is and never becomes, and what becomes and never is” (p. 40) where the former is reached by reason, the intellect, and understanding (*noêsis*); the latter grasped by sense perception (*aesthêsis alogos*). This opens up the verb “to be”, and presents the early link between being and becoming, and the subsequent challenge that the modern subject presents to this abyssal gap. For, in our modern philosophic articulation, *anthropos* is a creature of *being*, not *becoming*. The understanding trumps perception; sight triumphs over aesthetics, and the embodied truth (*Aleitheia*) of becoming contradicts the stability and infinity of being. In this way, “to appear” manifests itself as the mask of being. And as Rebekah Sheldon (2015, p. 193) suggests, we are beginning to question representation and its connection to *projection*. Further, there is a problem here: the gap between these two modalities, as suggested above, is founded upon an abyss. But this abyss has a form: Plato calls it space, or *chora* (1969, p. 70). As Sheldon (p. 211) explains,

The problem is this: To move into the temporal world of becoming, the transcendent form must have “birth and visibility” (50D). Eternal models must become imitations of themselves. If this is so, then the form must have something into which it descends, something separate from the copies that it will generate and that make up the temporal world. Since eternal forms cannot enter the realm of becoming, yet must put its impress into substance, then there must be a third realm. Form must be housed *somewhere* in *something* while it undergoes its transformation. To correct this difficulty, *Timaeus* conjures up a third kind, neither a model nor a copy, neither being nor becoming: the *chora* or the space of generation. Explicitly framed in hetero-reproductive terms, the *chora* is “mother”, “womb”, “wet nurse”, and “receptacle” (48C-50E) to the fathering form. The eternal form enters into the *chora* but takes nothing of her

nature. She serves wholly as the space of transmission. Yet it is not for nothing that the chora is introduced late: it is both necessary and inassimilable, *disrupting the distinction between being and becoming* by taking part in both but being faithful to neither. Where, after all, did this third realm come from? Part of neither kingdom, the chora is the “wandering cause” (48C) that holds together and disrupts the movement from potentiality to actuality, swerves the smooth transition from model to copy and offers a notion of systemic agency that operates in the interstices between objects.

The chora, or space, of the being of modernity, is the metaphysical realm we call the ‘world’, where the suppression of the agency of this chora is paramount. The Anthropocene represents a *disruptive chora* (Sheldon, 2015, p. 212; Butler, 1993), and disrupts and usurps the precious connection thought to be stable and itself eternal between form and sense, being and becoming. It intermediates in a monstrous way the smooth transition between the infinite and the finite; the soul and the body. The Anthropocene is of the earth; it is as Haraway describes it Chthonic: “monstrous in the best sense”, they “demonstrate and perform the material meaningfulness of earth processes and critters. They also demonstrate and perform consequences. Chthonic ones are not safe [...] they writhe and luxuriate in manifold forms and manifold names in all the airs, waters, and places of earth” (2016a, p. 2). Put simply, the Anthropocene fundamentally disrupts the central aporetic of modernity, and, as such, undoes that which holds together this epoch: “man”. Because this monstrous event makes visible the invisible, and raises the spectre of the phantasmagoric, we are made aware of and thrust suddenly into our abyss; the grounds of being shudder and begin to collapse.

This abyss, moreover, is one that, again, keeping with the theme of the negative, is a hollow one, yet one fittingly beyond any conceptualisation of ‘empty’ or even negative (in the *negative* sense). Agamben, in speaking of the anthropological machine—which, as

Hobbes' focus on the eye in *Leviathan* confirms, is an optical one (2004, p. 26)—is a machine that

necessarily functions by means of an exclusion (which is also always already a capturing) and an inclusion (which is also always already an exclusion). Indeed, precisely because the human is already presupposed every time, the machine actually produces a kind of state of exception, a zone of indeterminacy in which the outside is nothing but the exclusion of an inside, and the inside is in turn only the inclusion of an outside (p. 37).

Here we see the countervailing and teleological tethering of the abyss to *anthropos*. This abyss is most certainly not *empty*, or lacking, but it is not entirely mortal and alive: instead, as Agamben posits, this abyss, and the human subject it continually fosters, exists in a sort of space of nonexistence—a zone of indeterminacy. A world. However, this emptiness is not *nothing*, we must be careful to note; for to be nothing, as we shall see, is not to be *empty*. Thus this zone of indeterminacy is not empty, nor is it frictionless or a vacuum. It is something perhaps *monstrous*: we are dealing with here the night of the world, something to which all of modernity has bent its will to attempt to dominate. As Richard Kearney posits, the monstrous is something deeply embedded in the modern subject, despite attempts made to destroy it hearkening back to Parmenides and Plato. Indeed, as Hegel knew, when looking someone in the eye—looking at *sight*—the “contemplated quietude of metaphysical reasoning”, this *pathos* “reminds the logic of the Same that it always carries traces of its spectral origin and that this origin can never be fully purged or controlled” (2003, p. 14).

Further, this anthropological machine can only function by placing this zone of indifference at the centre,

within which—like a “missing link” is always lacking because it is already virtually present—the articulation between human and animal, man and non-man, speaking being and living being, must take place. Like every space of

exception, this zone is, in truth, perfectly empty, and the truly human being who should occur there is only the place of a ceaselessly updated decision in which the caesurae and their rearticulation are always dislocated and displaced anew (p. 37).

Thus, the abyss of subjectivity is *theorised* to be ‘perfectly empty’, and a pure *self-relation* (Sinnerbrink, 2016, p. 7). Yet we may wish to pause on this. The interesting quality of the eye, in this context, is the pupil. Dark, bleak, and to some, utter nothingness. This part of the eye is absolutely crucial to sight, yet it does not project; rather, it inverts and refracts. More specifically, *light enters it*; the gaze is inverted, and “man” thinks he is the centre of the universe, as all of reality (at least the reality cordoned off by the limits of *sight*, this most valuable sense), passes through this pupil. Foucault: all things (analogies) pass through “man” (1994). Is not the pupil this space of exception, where reality is parsed through by our consciousness? Is not the pupil this black hole of the night of the world Hegel speaks of? Perhaps this pupil is a reflection of this “empty nothing[ness] that contains everything in its simplicity—an unending wealth of many representations, images, of which none belongs to him—or which are not present”?

This nothingness is not empty, but it is spectral, and monstrous. As Agamben shows us elsewhere, Leibniz, among others, did not afford the possible, or the potential, any autonomy to create for itself, or to even exist (1999a, p. 259). Being, for modernity, is privileged, and non-Being, or nothingness (or even existing with an indifference to both) is forbidden. Yet as we know, the night of the world, and nothingness, seeps in regardless—more than this, it is at the centre of sight, and is indeed at the centre of the modern subject (Kearney, 2003). The Anthropocene rends its earthy claws towards us, devouring the chains we have placed upon potentiality; the mother womb, the eternal wanderer, the *disruptive chora*, intermediates at the precise point that grounds the anthropological

machine. Like the end of Kafka's *Penal Colony*, where the man with the blueprints of the torture machine finally submits himself to his monstrous creation, only to find that the machine collapses under the contradiction of the self meeting its constitutive other and does not offer him the spiritual awakening he so believed in. The machine, said to clearly falling in disrepair due to lack of maintenance—and most crucially, belief—was shown in the final analysis to be like that of the chora of modernity: supremely artificial, constitutively contradictory, negatively operational, and utterly tragic.

Thus, we see here the radical abstractness of the modern subject, and have perhaps answered a question before it was asked: this is the abyss of subjectivity, and the perfect emptiness that constitutes it, but how did we open up this abyss? And perhaps, if we are being bold, *why*?

III DISMEMBERING SIGHT

It appears that we have indeed only replicated that which we feared: *absence*. From one abyss to another, the suppression of the 'nothing' was deemed wildly imperative based solely off of the unparalleled violence at which it sought its goal (the negation, exploitation, and domination of earth and its resources, places of refuge, and its nonhuman inhabitants; the othering of that which the self is-not; etc.). Sight, as was described earlier, is the sense of modernity. As Kafka said in the *Penal Colony* (1941), Enlightenment "begins around the eyes. From there it radiates. A moment that might tempt one to get under the Harrow oneself" With it, we can dismember *what-is*—what is, to put it another way, what is *given*—in order to mask this absence. Hegel's philosophy emphasised the imagination as

the ‘activity of dissolution’, “*which treats as a separate entity what has effective existence only as part of some organic whole*” (Žižek, 1999, p. 29; emphasis added). According to Žižek, in his book *The Ticklish Subject* (1999), Hegel viewed this negative power of dissolution—“of dissolving the whole into distinct and independent parts”—as *both* the power of imagination and of understanding. The imagination, and importantly the radically negative power of it, which Heidegger charged Kant for ‘shrinking back’ from, was ultimately shrinking back from it himself (Sinnerbrink, 2016, p. 3); indeed, it was Hegel who made the connection between imagination *qua* the ‘activity of dissolution’ (p. 4). Thus, this is the Hegelian methodology through which the modern subject uses imagination (as dissolution or dismemberment) as the productive or constructive aspect, but also—and precisely because of this—the negative or destructive. Sight here becomes cartography: the empty nothing that contains an “unending wealth of many representations, images, of which none belongs to him [the modern subject]”, is the topography to which the modern becomes chief cartographer. Relationality to the earth is manipulated through the lens of anthropocentrism, and a world is created on top of the earth—a careful, sinister, masterpiece wherein these representations and images are constructed to place, everywhere and always, “man” as centrifuge¹³. As we will explore in the next chapter, *world-making is earth-destroying* (Mbembe, 2003).

¹³ We also see here the power of reification, and the necessity of constantly (re)working the boundaries of the hegemonic articulation of reality (world) so that the earth does not show through. Keeping in mind the spectacularly obvious example of the film *The Matrix*, this process is not perfect. Yet, if modern epistemology values sight above all other senses (and perhaps there are more than five), the very mode by which we would be able to *see-through* the constructed *world* would be rendered a priori impossible (or at least very difficult). The tool by which we would undo our oppression, is already contaminated by that same oppression. Indeed, this is what Marcuse (1964) was discussing in another context: the colonization of consciousness, for him, meant that reality existed on a one dimensional plane, and that our very consciousness being so ‘introjected’ with this ontology, we are often times unable to grasp precisely how we are even oppressed. The radicality of the Anthropocene, thusly, is the dissolving of these artificial boundaries. What we deem ‘nothingness’ may

Foucault, in referring to the Paracelsian metaphysics he uses to genealogically sketch the archaeology of modern epistemology from the classical age to the modern age, quotes Paracelsus thusly:

But we men discover all that is hidden in the mountains by signs and outward correspondences; and it is thus that we find out all the properties of herbs and all that is in stones. There is nothing in the depths of the seas, nothing in the heights of the firmament that man is not capable of discovering. There is no mountain so vast that it can *hide from the gaze of man* what is within it; it is revealed to him by corresponding signs (1994, p. 32)¹⁴.

Here Paracelsus speaks of the wondrous type of freedom espoused in and around the event of the Renaissance—the rebirth of “man”—exuding the exploratory, colonial, and exploitative power of “the gaze of man”; this same gaze so vast in itself that not even the greatest mountain or the immeasurable depths of the sea can escape it. It is in this unabashed excitement where we can see more fully the rationalisation of this rather alchemical perspective developed into the modern metaphysical template of the Anthropocene¹⁵.

intrude more forcefully on what is deemed ‘somethingness’ as these boundaries collapse. More will be said on this.

¹⁴ More should be said about this archaeology; and indeed, a project expanding upon this one where the thrust of inquiry I espouse here is married with an exploration of the socio-cultural genealogy of Foucault’s precise demarcation between the classical and the modern age (1994), and its relationship to the development of the Anthropocene, would be of much use. Agamben, in *Infancy and History* (1993b, p. 21) makes an important addition to this discussion, where he elaborates the connections between the broad paradigms of science, magic, and religion.

¹⁵ Indeed as Bennett (1997) describes it, Kant was obsessed with overturning the metaphysics of Paracelsus, the former charging the latter with foolish teleology. Space does not permit it, but there is an interesting case to be made as to just how different the teleological (and eschatological) schemata of Kant is from Paracelsus. Foucault provides an interesting archaeology of this in his oeuvre, although an ecological reformulation of this would bear undeniable importance, especially given the renewed popularity of Kant’s ‘Copernican Revolution’ taking place in the Anthropocene literature (Angus, 2016; Davis & Turpin, 2015; Scranton, 2015).

But crucial to this understanding of how the modern subject relates to that which it fears (empty nothingness, and this supposed quality that appears within us—the ‘night of the world’), is through this precise destructive→productive process of imagination. It is firmly that which dismembers what immediate perception puts together: “the uncanny power to imagine a partial, phantasmagorical object abstracted from its proper whole: a head without a body, a ghost without flesh, colours without shape, a body without organs and organs without a body” (Žižek, 1999, p. 30, as cited in Sinnerbrink, 2016, p. 5). Thus, what Žižek is describing here, through a reading of Hegel, is the extremely *anti-ecological* and post-aesthetic thinking that founds, grounds, and furnishes “man”. We are removed here from our sense of the world (Nancy, 1997), where *perception* is sacrificed (negated) to the altar of *sight*. Cleaved parts of an anterior whole become essential building blocks for the posterior ‘world’ of the subject. They become viewed as the atoms of an ecophobic Democritus: less about the ‘matter’ itself than the (constructed) form of this matter. Put again another way, this is ‘world’ without earth—or at least, ‘world’ built from the rubble of earth. This anti-ecological thinking has severe ramifications that will be explored throughout this chapter (and thesis), but it is here where the logic of “man”, this modern subject, fits extremely well with this figure—this *anthropos*—of the Anthropocene. This requires further elaboration.

Ultimately, as Sinnerbrink (2016, p. 5) contends,

Hegel’s ‘night of the world’—the negative aspect of the synthetic power of subjectivity—is thus ‘transcendental imagination at its most elementary and violent’: the empty or abstract freedom of imagination as the power of dissolution rather than synthesis; the power of dissolving all objective relations grounded in things in themselves (Žižek, 1999, p. 30). The night of the dissipative imagination is the radical negativity of *arbitrary freedom*; the

power, to cite Hegel once again, “to tear up the images and to reconnect them without any constraint” (Žižek, 1999, p. 30; see also Foucault, 1994, p. 33).

Indeed, the subject, through the ontological and violent cartography of sight and dissolving, severs things from themselves, perception from “reality”, sense from faculty, order from relationality, and vision from sight. This is the problematic of being-constellated without the responsibility of our earthboundness (Foucault, 1994). And if we are to think of ecological modes of thought that go beyond the logic of the modern subject, it would do well to start here. For it is this arbitrary freedom that we have assumed from *humanism*, and all that problematically entails (Braidotti, 2013), that imposes itself most violently upon the whole earth, and all that is subsumed into oblivion (that which is negated by the “synthetic power of subjectivity”).

Moreover, and again, this is an aesthetic dilemma: in order to “tear up images”, we must first have had them printed in the format whereby we could *grasp them*, and thus *tear* them. These torn up images, reconstituted without regard for their autonomous order of things, are the postcards from the lost Other that are made to be invisible, unseeable; this is why, to add to Esposito’s notion that the modern subject “has erased its own proper genealogy and with its own very real effects” (2010, p. 124), we can only see that which is negated through the deconstruction of that which negates. ‘Appearance’, then, is the hiddenness of what-*is*, and the visibility of that which *is-not*, but appears *as if it were*. To put it differently, following Agamben’s (2004) engagement with Kojève, who was an important reader of Hegel, it is negating “the given” (p. 24).

Ultimately, this night of the world—this venturing into the abyss of appearance—can be seen as the “*experience of the self qua pure ‘abstract negativity’*” (Žižek, 1994, p. 145). This is the realm which undergrids the creation of this cartographical ‘world’ we have

created through our negation of the topography of the given. This is the point of “utter madness in which phantasmatic apparitions of ‘partial objects’ wander around” (1997, p. 8), and the point at which we come closest to the radical negation (nothingness) of our Being. This is Tartarus, and this is where the monstrous dwell (Kearney, 2003). Both Hegel and Žižek, claims Sinnerbrink, agree that this madness is the cutting of all links with external reality, which here we can read ontologically. Yet where Žižek differs from Hegel, is in claiming that it is this precise madness that absorbs the modern subject, and draws it in; it was the subject’s first true dwelling (Sinnerbrink, 2016, p. 6):

this withdrawal from the world [earth], the subject’s contraction and severing of all links with the *Umwelt*, is rather the founding gesture of ‘humanization’, indeed the emergence of subjectivity itself (1997, p. 8). This passage through madness is thus an ontological necessity; there is no subjectivity without this experience of radical negativity, this cutting links with the *Umwelt*, which is then followed by the construction of a symbolic universe of meaning (1997, p. 9; 1996, p. 78).

This space of emergence, this dwelling in the negative, resigns “man” to the realm of facelessness (Agamben, 2004), and this Hegelian reading of becoming-subject (Mbembe, 2003) proves fruitful in the archaeological (de)construction of the *dispositif* of our *anthropos* (Esposito, 2010). Indeed, it would do well for this study to here provide a positive definition of what “man” is, for he is certainly *not* to be seen biologically, as many Anthropocene scholars tend to do (problematically) (c.f. Dawson, 2016). As Agamben (2004, p. 12) tells us,

In Kojève’s reading of Hegel, man is not a biologically defined species, nor is he a substance given once and for all; he is, rather, a field of dialectical tensions always already cut by internal caesurae that every time separate—at least virtually—“anthropophorous” animality and the humanity which takes bodily form in it. Man exists historically only in this tension; he can be human only to the degree that he transcends and transforms the anthropophorous animal which supports him, and only because, through the action of negation, he is

capable of mastering and, eventually, destroying his animality (it is in this sense that Kojève can write that “Man is a fatal disease of the animal”).

Thus it is that “man” is not only a fatal disease of the animal, but of the earth. The violent and radical anti-ecological thinking of the modern subject and the parallel process of negating ‘the given’ (the earth, or perhaps more abstractly, *earthboundedness*) has led to, unsurprisingly, fatal consequences. Morton calls this catastrophe “The Severing”, which he describes as “a foundational, traumatic fissure between, to put it in stark Lacanian terms, *reality* (the human-correlated world) and the *real* (ecological symbiosis of human and nonhuman parts of the biosphere)” (2017, p. 13). This Severing, as stated, is a deep trauma, perhaps even a bit older than the Holocene (p. 16): indeed, “Hiding in very plain sight, everywhere in post-agricultural psychic, social, and philosophical space, is evidence of a traumatic severing of human-nonhuman relations” (p. 16). In this vein, and as we shall see throughout this thesis, to study the Anthropocene is to study *death*, and *ends*. Further, it is to study the *invisible*, or what is rendered invisible.

The Anthropocene is an aesthetic event (Morton, 2013), and frees *perception* from ontology (*sight*). Yet this does not mean that we have suddenly regained our sense of the world (Nancy, 1997); rather, it means that we have entered into a *spooky* time (*kairos*) of the Anthropocene, where spectres, ghosts, and the monstrous night suddenly appear real, despite ‘reality’ attempting to feverishly shore up its ontological boundaries (Morton, 2013; Haraway, 2016a; Bourriaud, 2016).

IV WHEN WORLDS CARESS

Ultimately, as we have seen, the abyss of negativity that constitutes the modern subject is indeed an utterly aporetic paradox. It is founded upon that which it excludes and pretends

does not exist, yet is nevertheless the being at the heart of modernity. At its centre, moreover, is something unsayable, something *unseeable*. Indeed, this night of the world—this abyss—is concealed behind a mask that is that which is not. This abyss is actualised in the violence toward the Other (Tønder & Thomassen, 2005, pp. 110-111), and lives within *oblivion*. It is made to be unseeable, much like the Other. It is the void. Indeed, Nicolas Bourriaud describes the positive void of constitutive oblivion – or waste, as he prefers – as that which “*one cannot bear to see*” (2016, p. IX, emphasis in original). Bourriaud calls this the realm of the *exformal*: “the site where border negotiations unfold [and en-fold] between what is rejected and what is admitted, products and waste”. This is the realm where oblivion and ‘politics’ conflict in their constitutive contradiction. This realm of the *exformal* can be ‘seen’ in the ongoing unfolding of the refugee crises that continue to provoke sympathy, empathy, xenophobia, fascism, compassion, and anger. There is no longer an ‘over there’, nor is there an ‘away’ (Morton, 2013; Clark, 2016). We can *see* the Other, and we can see the “uncanny gaze of the other, in the night’s eye”. Global warming and its manifold, destructive unfoldings will only exacerbate the subject’s view of oblivion—that which one cannot bear to see.

This void, or oblivion, as we shall call it, is, in another context, what Dawdy (2010) would exponentiate as the “ruins of modernity”. And yet, increasingly these ruins are becoming more and more visible. Indeed, as Bourriaud claims, there is a centrifugal logic to “all that is hidden, evacuated, or banished[...] which consigns beings and things to the world of *waste* and holds them there in the name of the Ideal” (2016, p. xi). And it is precisely towards these ruins which this project strides. Therefore, this thesis shares in Walter Benjamin’s project in a sense as well then (see Bourriaud, 2016, p. xi). As the

French art theorist and curator continues, figures of exclusion, and these ruins, “traverse the unconscious, ideology, art, and History”, precisely where the figure of Benjamin, in describing this venturing-towards-oblivion as being ragpickers of history, resides. The ragpicker of history dwelled in the oblivion of the forgotten battles whose victors continually try to erase. As Jefferies (2016) suggests, Benjamin’s focus was on what had been consigned to the rubble of History; “the subversive Benjamin, then, aimed at breaking through this widespread amnesia, shattering this delusive notion of historical time, and awakening those who lived under capitalism from their illusions” (p. 19). It was a noble and lofty goal, and for Benjamin personally, ended tragically. But even death – even the past – is a political terrain of vast proportions. As Benjamin describes in *On a Concept of History* (1968), written near his death, “not even the dead will be safe from the enemy, if he is victorious. And this enemy has not ceased to be victorious” (Thesis IV). This clarion call whispers insight from the breath of the past (Benjamin, 1968) to our historic-temporal constellation we of the (mostly) living inhabit today. That which is attempted to be made invisible must be explored, uncovered, and sought; further, we must be made able to see these ghosts and spectres.

Oblivion, as construed here, has not remained static. In Benjaminian terms, this oblivion is constituted by the victors, and by Historical Idealism – the wielder and the tool, respectively and vice-versa (see also Bourriaud, 2016). Martin Heidegger, in his essay “The Thinker as Poet”, talks about the *Abgrund*, or Abyss – that which has no ground. Originally meaning “the soil and ground toward which, because it is undermost, a thing tends downward”, it takes on a new meaning in this work: as the German thinker posits, our age is currently without ground to stand on, and hangs in the abyss. This can perhaps be taken

to mean an erasure of *topoi* – place – particularly in light of global warming, and the impending flooding of the earth upon which we stand¹⁶. But Heidegger, in discussing the Abyss, of course is not discussing solid earth upon which flowers may grow, though of course he does not so much separate the physical from the metaphysical in this overly simplistic way. Rather, he is talking about the ground of “world” – that complex mixture of terrestrial and celestial providence to which the whole next chapter will be dedicated. This is then not really “place” so to speak, but nevertheless is what fosters place: it comes *a priori* to “world”, and grounds the grounding.

Let us now juxtapose another related proposition: Frederic Jameson, in a 2003 article on architecture and postmodernism, famously quips (or suggests that a ‘friend’ told him) that it is now easier to imagine the end of the world than the end of capitalism. Here, then, we see the erasure of utopia—*ou-topos*: non-place; the erasure, to put it another way, of dreams and of future. Capitalism, despite no longer requiring ideological control/consent of utopic collective consciousness (Beasley-Murray, 2010), simply must claim that There Is No Alternative (TINA), and we believe it. Perhaps this latter end arrived after the great uprisings of the late 1960’s and early 70’s (Murray, 2016).

Yet in contrasting these two ideas, we see a reversal. Instead of Jameson hailing the end of utopia (Kunkel, 2014), he now hearkens the end of *topos*: we have taken him up on his claim and can now read his dictum as “it is (all too) easy to imagine the end of the world in the ends of capitalism”. As proponents of the Capitalocene thesis argue, it is capitalism more than anything else that has led to the destruction of Earth (Angus, 2016; Harvey,

¹⁶ As an aside, it is interesting to note the parallels between the “folly of man”, so to speak (global warming and the melting of the ice caps), and its relation to the global flood myth.

2014; Haraway, 2015; 2016c; Davis & Turpin, 2015; Malm, 2015; Moore, 2015; 2016; 2017a; 2017b). The abyss that Heidegger outlines, then, hints at the difficulty of imagining something that does not yet exist, and importantly, of reaching that other world that is supposed to come after (Heidegger, 1999)¹⁷. But more than this, we are in such a destitute time that we don't even know we're in a destitute time (Heidegger, 1971; 1999): climate change denial, and denial of all sorts exemplify this¹⁸—a denial of the invisible suddenly becoming *visible*¹⁹, in short. We are in a truly terrifying double bind, where the world from which we belong to is fading out of existence²⁰ both metaphysically and all too physically, and the oblivion—that which we have made invisible—is fading *into* (our) existence more and more. Both *topoi* and *ou-topoi*, place and non-place, are fastening their relationship to oblivion; and oblivion, to wit, is fastening itself to us (Morton, 2013).

It is this double bind that distances us from Benjamin. Being a ragpicker of history to me seems now akin to those ghastly figures, usually children, who are seen in post-

¹⁷ We see this also in Marx of course, whose idea of “an other beginning”, to use Heidegger’s terminology (1999), is remarkably similar in its general metaphysical-transformative imperative.

¹⁸ The ecomodernist manifesto, for instance, is a supreme example of this radical denial: on the main page of their website (www.ecomodernism.org/manifesto-english/) they begin with claiming that the Anthropocene (the “Age of Humans”), with the proper balance of a technocratic elite (“as scholars, scientists, campaigners, and citizens”), with a hearty dose of “wisdom”, “might allow for a good, or even great, Anthropocene”. I could not bear to read much more, for the epically pretensions magnanimity and patent and outright refusal to accept that global warming has already *begun*, and is already destroying humans around the globe, is callous and just out of line with the reality of it all. The idea that we could even have a “good, or even great Anthropocene” reveals the severe and chronic denialism about the scope and scale of this wickedest of problems; the stiflingly absurd idea that the Anthropocene could in any way be good on the whole of it; and the refusal to here discuss issues of inequality, geopolitics, or even *politics* in general comes across as absolute balderdash, and quite frankly, offensive. Moreover, they are getting eerily close to a Trumpism by even suggesting that the Anthropocene could be good or even great. In short, this “manifesto” reeks of the status quo, technocracy, denialism, and a whole host of problematic renderings of both the problems and solutions proposed; further, the whole manifesto reminds me of the scene from *Lord of the Rings* where Boromir becomes obsessed with the idea that he (or other men) could wield the One Ring against Sauron, leading him to madness, and ultimately, death.

¹⁹ In this way, too, the abhorrent rise in fascism and xenophobia—not unrelated to global warming—can be seen as a denial of the increasing visibility of the Other, in relation to the self.

²⁰ Or as Morton (2013) argues, is already gone—and twice!

apocalyptic films sorting through heaps of rubble looking for valuable metals to sell for their meagre survival. Oblivion may still reside in dark European streets, or dusty arcades in Paris. It certainly remains in the Congo, and still has a “heart of darkness.” One can probably smell it on the streets of Detroit, Flint, and Fergusson as well. But there is a difference. We can bear to see it even less than before (Bourriaud, 2016). It is radioactive, and toxic. It is like the Fukuyushima reactor in Japan: bleeding out, but with a wound unseeable *with our eyes*, made all the more surreal by its supposed impossibility.

Thus it is that we have entered into the Anthropocene. And, as argued above, I claim that this is a fundamentally different time—thinkers such as Heidegger (1999) and Benjamin (his concept of divine violence) have sought the unsee(k)able, have sought the end of metaphysics, the end of modernity, the end of history. This study shares in their general aim, and is (quite unfortunately) bolstered by the all too real (hyperobjective) nature of this wickedest of wicked problems (Morton, 2013). What separates this event from other such events all hearkening the end of modernity, I argue, is the precise untethering of the invisible from the clutches of the visible; the boundaries between the real and reality, as Morton (2017) elaborated, are wearing out, and the veil becomes thin; porous; see-through. This is a more than metaphysical event, one that has ramifications of even changing the oxygen levels on earth. Further, this is not to delegitimize the various other ‘ends’ of modernity: for, as Jameson contends (2001), modernity is narrative, and multiple narratives at that. Modernity, in this light, is a hydra with many heads; a cancer metastasized in many layers, levels, and directions. There have indeed been many endings to modernity prior to the Anthropocene, but as I will argue below, this event (at least from my purview) has been built into the sinews of this epoch as a teleology, and more

specifically, an eschatology. We are welcomed unto the realm of our own self-destruction, and meet again nothingness, the night, and oblivion.

As Narcissus taught us, we may seek this sight which is directly unseeable, but it may indeed come at a fatal cost: oblivion is the fabric both of our (re)making and undoing (Bourriaud, 2016; Heidegger, 1971; 1999; Haraway, 2016a). This resurgent visibility of oblivion, through the thrust of Anthropocene, can be seen as an *apocalypse*: from Ancient Greek, the word “apocalypse” (*apokalypsis*) means to unveil, or disclose; it is a revealing (Keller, 1996, p. 3). This is the central theoretical concept of this thesis. It is argued here that the Anthropocene *is this apocalypse*, that it is a revealing of the invisibility of oblivion, that same oblivion which constitutes and underlies (as *abyss*) modernity and the modern subject. Put another way, it is the violent rending-open of the invisibility of oblivion, which can for now be regarded as the *abyss of modernity*—the abyss of both the groundlessness of subject, and of the world (Chapter 2). In other sections we will critique the common iterations and connotations of this word, and its relationship to the Anthropocene and the literatures thereof; for now, however, it is important that we simply open up this older understanding of this word.

Indeed, what apocalypse represents is often that which is unrepresentable (Keller, 1996). It is the shadow which lies beneath consciousness, beneath being; and indeed, it is this shadow through which we may strive toward in the apocalypse of the Anthropocene. The question then becomes: if what the Anthropocene is thrusting upon us is unseeable, how do we come near it? There is a way to *approach* the unseeable, and during our apocalyptic times, we must attempt this glaring feat, and it may consist in wandering

through the shadows of the night. The sun is oft regarded as patriarchal²¹, and creates the darkest shadows, the darkest contrasts. Modernity is filled with sun-worshippers, exemplified by all those that seek Power, energy, fossil fuels, nuclear fusion. Icarus provides an essential figure in this matter. The sun is that which sees, but is not seen; dangerous to look upon but in the most indirect means. Isaac Newton, one of the great thinkers of modernity, became obsessed with this celestial entity, and would stare directly for hours on end, leading ultimately to his blindness. The sun provides light to see, but we cannot safely see that which provides the context for sight²². But during the moonlit night, shadow and light blend, worlds caress. Beaumont's (2016) epic history of the night illuminates the radical fear of the phenomenological as well as metaphysical darkness. Either in spite of this, or because of this, it is during the night that we may glimpse the Open (c.f. Heidegger, 1971). As Rilke (1996, p. 3) illuminates:

Forget, forget, and let us live now
only this, how the stars pierce through
cleared nocturnal sky; how the moon's whole disk
surmounts the gardens. We've sensed so long already
how the darkness breeds many mirrors: how a gleam
takes shape, a white shadow in the radiance
of night. But now let us cross over
and invest this world where
everything is lunar –

In a sense, Rilke is discussing the concept he calls “the Open”. This is a concept he and Heidegger share, and one where perhaps he may have been closer to where this project attempts to go. As Heidegger described in “What are Poets for?” (1971, p. 103-104, emphasis added), Rilke

²¹ We may exclude here the pre-dynastic Egyptian cultures who are deemed to be quite matriarchal in ordering, while at the same time worshipping the sun.

²² Although of course, we have developed technology to do so.

likes to use the term “the Open” to designate the whole draft to which all beings, as ventured beings, are given over [...] In Rilke’s language, “open” means something that does not block off. It does not block off because it does not set bounds. It does not set bounds because it is in itself without all bounds. The Open is the great whole of all that is unbounded. It lets the beings ventured into the pure draft draw as they are drawn, so that they variously draw on one another and draw together without encountering any bounds. Drawing as so drawn, they fuse with the boundless, the infinite. *They do not dissolve into void nothingness*, but they redeem themselves into the whole of the Open.

It is here that we see Rilke, through Heidegger, describe a place that is seemingly beyond the confines of self/other; subject/object, etc. It is beyond the central aporetic constitution of modernity and the modern subject; indeed it lays beyond all bounds, origins, or ends. In a sense, it is that which is unseeable, but also what evades the invisible: it is beyond the condition of being-(un)seen. And importantly, it maintains that Being does not “dissolve into void nothingness” (c.f. ‘the night of the world’); conversely, it suggests in fact that nothingness does not equal non-Being, but rather something much more radically *open*, containing within it a profound *presence*. We are to stray unto this darkness—into the garden of that which is given, yet negated-for—something that we have ‘sensed for so long’ exposes hidden truths and ideas that fall outside of the reach of hegemonic articulation (c.f. Lacleau & Mouffe, 1985), a time that seems to defy Time. This momentary space—the Open—appears “now” in full, as the “moon’s whole disc surmounts the gardens”; enveloping the participant in the boundless whole of silver, it protects the unprotected, and illuminates the unseeable.

Perhaps, upon careful reflection of Rilke’s above poem, this momentary space enveloped by the full moon above is not in actuality the Open; rather, we can see this as the opening of the opening (c.f. Heidegger, 1999), or what Heidegger elsewhere calls the abyss (1971): it is the moonlight that blends darkness and shadow into reflections that allow

us to see—indirectly—“a white shadow in the radiance of night”. This, perhaps, is the Open Rilke and Heidegger have sought. And if this is so, we must reach deep into it (Heidegger, 1971). But here we must not forget the momentary nature of this gleam that (may) take shape.

This is the purported “whole draft to which all beings, as ventured beings, are given over”, if we so choose. But the choice is not ours to make – or at least not fully. What Heidegger, and his version of Rilke can be charged with, is the metaphysical crutch which makes the passage from our world into the next seem so...*easy*. It may be that there is no Whole, nor Infinite. In fact, these terms reek of Christianity and modern metaphysics more generally²³. This may be why Agamben, at the end of his essay “Absolute Immanence” (1999a), places Heidegger in the middle of two lists of theorists that appear on either the side of ‘transcendence’ or ‘immanence’ (p. 239): he is close to outthinking modernity, but doesn’t make it far enough (see also Morton, 2013; Vattimo, 2004).

I am not sure that we may expect to sense the boundlessness of any Whole in the Anthropocentric threshold; infinity, moreover, smacks of the modern ontology and the metatemporal hegemony of linear time (Žižek, 2011; Sinnerbrink, 2016; Deleuze, 1983). But I do think that we may find gleams of white shadows in the radiance of ‘night’, and in the apocalypse (unveiling) of the Anthropocene. The in-between of the real and reality opens forth more readily; ghosts are a-flutter. Surely these moments where the whole moon surmounts the garden are monumental feats enough. The totality of modernity (and capitalism) is frankly too suffocating to hope for more—I, at least, do not have enough

²³ This particular critique, as well as a more general critique of Heidegger’s metaphysical bent, will appear in the next chapter (see Nancy, 1997; Keller, 1996).

oxygen to even think the thought of the Whole. The sun has not yet turned into stardust, and it is still unseeable. But there may be times, when, at the right moments, we may find a blurring where we may glimpse, indirectly, something that resembles an opening. Agamben, in his engagement with Walter Benjamin, would probably call this the *zone of indistinction* (1999b). This zone exists “between law and nature, outside and inside, violence and law” (p. 63). In short, it is the in-between. Or perhaps this notion of “in-between” is too optimistic: for it suggests something beyond the abyss.

However, this fissure is a political (spiritual?) space that must be continually and ferociously, when or if possible, expanded and (re)opened. More radically still, it must be sought. This is what Rilke was pointing towards when he told us to “cross over and invest this world where everything is lunar”. Resistance lives in shadow.

V A JOURNEY THROUGH ABYSS

Thus, we have been introduced so far to (a) the abyss of subjectivity that underpins the modern subject, (b) the aesthetic struggle between the invisible and the visible, and (c) the apocalypse of the Anthropocene. Further, we can theorize this using Bourriaud’s conceptualisation of the realm of the exformal (2016), as described above. Indeed, this concept helps us talk about this site of “border negotiations” and “edge states” (Halifax, 2009); as Haraway describes, the Anthropocene is a boundary event (2015), composites borders, and ruptures both origins and ends. Put bluntly, a fear of finitude is creeping towards us (like the encroaching mass of a zombie horde) rapidly; the event of the Anthropocene has alerted us to the growing realization that we are indeed beings of the

mud, not the sky (Haraway, 2008; 2016a)—meaning that we are not immortal, nor are we the masters of the unfolding of the universe. The ghosts of our destructiveness, wrought from the negation of all that is given²⁴, haunt us now much more visibly than before, as the boundaries between this spectral realm and our comfortable (for the privileged) world of artificiality, construction, and dominion is being shown to be built upon the frailty of an abyss. We have already stopped believing in the metanarratives of modernity, as postmodernism has shown us. Yet the Anthropocene is making a much more radical, profound, and molar critique: *we are starting to question the very world we inhabit*, and it appears that our entire civilisation (what this means is of course highly contested) of what we call the ‘West’ is dying, if not already dead. I claim that the Anthropocene represents a geo-politico-metaphysical threshold through which the crumbling mythological edifice we have based our entire world on (through various processes of colonisation) (Brown, 2001) cannot survive. This survivability will be a topic of intense debate, as there is no reason that capitalism cannot survive in a disaster state (Žižek, 2011); further, as elaborated above, there have been many claims of the end of modernity (e.g. Vattimo, 2004). I may be wrong in this estimation, but I think all signs point to this. Our ‘world’, and our subjectivity, are radically questioned by this gigantic event; Being itself runs aground upon the shores of nothingness and the invisible. The question becomes, to wit, how are we going to deal with this thrust of oblivion, of *absence*?

The way to approach the unseeable, as mentioned above, coincides with the ability to see the unseeable—to “cross over and invest this world where everything is lunar”. We must move beyond ontology, and specifically the ontology of modernity and the modern

²⁴ And we can see the molecular colonization of *life itself* and more and more of the human psyche,

subject; we must move through, in other words, abyss. And the *exform* is the aesthetic dimension of this abyss. In the singular, the *exform* “designates a point of contact, a ‘socket’ or ‘plug’, in the process of exclusion and inclusion – a sign that switches between centre and periphery, floating between dissidence and power” (Bourriaud, 2016: x). It is the gleam in the radiance of night. The claim I make here which enfolds all other claims I will make in this chapter is that *this nodal point is “man”* (see also Foucault, 1994, p. 22). In other words, it is through deconstructing the modern subject—and more specifically, the abyss of subjectivity thereof—that we can attempt to indirectly explore the apocalypse of the Anthropocene²⁵.

Indeed, as Roberto Esposito (2010, p. 124) suggests, the modern subject, “rather than being a simple concept, appears as a true and proper performative *dispositif*, one that has been in operation over a very long period of time, and who has erased its own proper genealogy and with its own very real effects”. “Man”, that being which created and is created by modernity, fundamentally resides at the centre of this epoch; further, the dialectic between the reflection and projection of the human—the aforementioned aporetic binary—has hidden within it this in-between. We can, indirectly, view the un-see-able through the de(con)struction of “Man”. Esposito defines the imperative of our times: reconstruct this genealogy of the subject, and deconstruct “Man”. We should add to this the complete uncovering and opening of the abyss of subjectivity.

In this sense, I am picking up on Foucault’s project as well (as is Esposito). The question of the subject, subjectivity, and subjectification is central to this entire project.

²⁵ This is a philosophic, but also a phenomenological task as well: how do we feel about this abyss, apocalypse, and absence? Affect theory, qualitative research, and art and poetry remain essential to exploring, commenting, and reflecting upon this event.

The growing awareness of anthropocentrism in light of the red glow of the dawn of the Anthropocene, makes this question all the more urgent, meanwhile adding a vertiginous element that necessitates an even deeper engagement with this problematic. As Foucault says at the end of *The Order of Things* (1994), “man is an invention of recent date. And one perhaps nearing its end” (p. 387); furthermore, “man is neither the oldest nor the most constant problem that has been posed” (p. 386): is “man”, however, the most lethal? Foucault here calls for the end of “Man”. At the end of his life, he called for the end of the subject: during the last 20 years, writing in 1982, the French intellectual would claim that his work had not been about analysing the phenomena of power, but rather, to “create a history of the different modes by which, in our culture, human beings are made subjects[...] Thus, it is not power but the subject which is the general theme of my research” (1982, pp. 777-778). Indeed, it is to subjectivity to which we must turn in the Anthropocene, and ask old questions anew.

If the quest of the modern subject is indeed narcissistic, perhaps Rilke can again provide some wisdom:

And we: always and everywhere spectators,
 turned toward the stuff of our lives, and
 never outward.
 It all spills over us. We put it in order.
 It falls apart. We order it again
and fall apart ourselves.

This self-centred, autopoietic condition, so molecular in modernity, has become our doom, much like Narcissus and his own drowning. Rilke concludes, ominously:

Ever turned toward what we create
 we only see reflections of the Open,
 overshadowed by us.
 Except when an animal mutely looks us
 through and through.

This is our fate: to stand
in our own way. Forever
in the way.

[...]

Never, not for a single day, do we let
the space before us be so unbounded
that the blooming of one flower is forever.
We are always making into a world
and never letting it be nothing: the pure,
and the unconstructed, which we breathe
and endlessly know, and need not crave.

It is crucial to highlight this process of making-into-world. This process will be described in the next chapter, but it is crucial for our purposes here as well, as this idea of *form* appears as central to the creation and continuation of the modern subject (Agamben, 2004). Is it such that we can say the modern subject is ontological? Perhaps not yet.

In short, there is this radical tension between what is ‘given’ (Agamben, 2004) and made to be unseeable (oblivion) and what is created from this negativity (“man”, modernity, the ‘world’). The exform of modernity (“man”), contains this tension in its being—this is not a new idea. However, the Anthropocene reveals this tension, and, as is argued in this thesis, undoes the quality of *invisibility* that attempts to hide it. This tension has classically been made up of the conflict between the self and Other; however, for the purpose of this study of the Anthropocene, we shall constitute and frame this tension in the conflict between “world and earth”, as Heidegger puts it:

At times those founders of the Abgrund [abyss] must be consumed by the fire of what is deeply sheltered, so that Da-sein becomes possible for humans and thus steadfastness in the midst of beings is rescued—so that in the open of the strife between earth and world beings themselves undergo a restoration. Accordingly, beings move into their steadfastness when the founders of the truth of be-ing *go under* (1999, p. 6).

This passage illuminates the grounding-attunement of the apocalyptic thrust of the Anthropocene. The ‘fire of what is deeply sheltered’—the fire²⁶ of the Anthropocene exposing the abyss of groundlessness that underlies the modern subject (Being)—must consume us if we are to be able to dwell after the truth of the Anthropocene has been revealed (if indeed we can even use terms like ‘after’ anymore); in the strife between earth and world, the *human* may be restored²⁷. Yet this restoration also implies destruction.

How then, can we see this tension in the modern subject? It is to this question that we shall focus the rest of the chapter on.

VI ATLAS FALLS

It would appear in this reading that the modern subject has taken up the position once held by the mighty titan Atlas, holding up the sky and separating it from the earth, making room for the middle realm (Foucault, 1994, p. 22). As we will get to below, and as we have seen above, the modern subject is neither celestial nor terrestrial, but is both more and less than either (Agamben, 2004; Foucault, 1994). Yet crucially, “man” is that which “all figures in the whole universe can be drawn”; relations among things may indeed exist in their own right, but nevertheless must first pass through this point of “man”, who

stands in proportion to the heavens, just as he does to animals and plants, and as he does also to the earth, to metals, to stalactites or storms. Upright between the surfaces of the universe, he stands in relation to the firmament (his face is to his body what the face of heaven is to the ether; his pulse beats in his veins as the stars circle the sky according to their own fixed paths; the seven orifices in his head are to his face what the seven planets are to the sky); *but he is also*

²⁶ Global warming.

²⁷ This was, to a large degree, also the project of Nietzsche in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*.

the fulcrum upon which all these relations turn, so that we find them again, their similarity unimpaired, in the analogy of the human animal to the earth it inhabits (p. 22). [...] He is the great fulcrum of proportions—the *centre upon which relations are concentrated and from which they are once again reflected* (1994, p. 23; emphasis added).

The modern subject separates, yet crucially, connects through a dual constitutive negation, the stars and earth. Yet we may propose a third category of belonging-to, and one of our own invention—specifically through, again, the exform called “man” and his imaginative, negative dissolution: the term ‘nature’ can be seen as a conceptual framing of that which we deem as not necessarily Other, but perhaps more so the grounding of our metaphysical dwelling on earth. ‘Nature’ does not mean earth (Morton, 2007), and it does not really exist—what do we mean, exactly, when we say ‘nature’? Yet it bears central importance to the understanding of “man” as the exform of the conflict between world and earth.

‘Nature’, then, is more akin to the Other of ‘world’—the other of ‘society’, as it is often contrasted with. It is ‘nature’ which gives our modern world the coordinates of meaning upon which we can ground and base our systems of meaning, and why the destruction and rapid change of this ‘nature’ is so unsettling in the Anthropocene. Indeed, as Marx proclaimed, “history itself is a *real* part of *natural history*, and of nature’s becoming man” (as cited in Debord, 2012, p. 92, thesis 125). In this sense, what we call ‘nature’, is at one with *myth*: as Debord posits, “myth was the unified mental construct whose job it was to make sure that the whole cosmic order confirmed the order that this society had in fact already set up within its own frontiers” (p. 93, thesis 125). The idea he proposes from here, is that monotheistic religions (which he proposes are foundational to the development of modernity) “were a compromise between myth and history”, and thus, indirectly, of ‘nature’. He conducts a genealogy wherein it is argued that the time of

Eternity emerged from the semi-historical, semi-mythological, semi-‘natural’ metaphysics of the Abrahamic religions, which was based upon, in part, the cyclical or seasonal time of the “pre-modern”. Important for us, however, is the idea that time influences myth, which influences History, which influences what we view as ‘nature’.

Therefore, if time is central to both myth (Nancy, 1991; Žižek, 2011), history, and, ultimately, modernity (Dawdy, 2010; Angus, 2016; Davis & Turpin, 2015; Hammer, 2011; Foucault, 1994), then the latter has created for itself a myth of myth, where modernity has been cast doubly as the real. Modernity grabs hold of time (Deleuze, 1983), and in so doing, creates a reality that supersedes that which came before (Carvounas, 2002); this ontological and pseudo-Darwinian supremacy becomes all the more totalizing because of the stranglehold on time—not only is the myth of modernity hegemonic, but time, the method of myth-making, is itself usurped. Further, if the modern subject is indeed the *dispositif* of modernity (Esposito, 2010), and if, as Žižek intones, “the ontological presupposition of such a notion of the *dispositif* is a general and massive partition of being into two groups or classes: one the one hand, living beings (or substances), and on the other hand, the *dispositifs* within which the living beings are instantly captured” (2011, p. 417), we are ontotheologically ruptured as well. Deleuze discusses this splinter in terms of the ‘Ego’ and the ‘I’: Time, he claims, flows through us: “the Ego is that which happens *in time*”; the ‘I’ on the other hand, “constantly carries out a synthesis of time, and of that which happens in time, by dividing up the present, the past, and the future at every instant” (1983, p. viii).

The modern subject is constituted fundamentally as myth at the precise moment that it is deemed above myth (negates the monstrous, negates the given) (Kearney, 2003). This rupture, fundamentally composed of this mythological untethering (or unhinging) of

time from movement, cultivates the modern subject. As Vattimo proclaims, “Because there is no way to grasp Being as something stable apart from its event” (2004, p. 8), he can ultimately say that “to define modernity” is to see “being modern [...] as the most basic value (p. 21). This is why modernity is qualitatively different than other epochal metaphysics (Carvounas, 2002), and why the concept ‘nature’ is so foundational to both the construction and destruction of modernity: for the latter is founded on the abyss of ‘nature’: as Horkheimer and Adorno (1974) outline, “myth becomes enlightenment and nature mere objectivity. *Human beings purchase the increase in their power with estrangement from that over which it is exerted*” (p. 6, emphasis added). The negation of the earth, through the creation of ‘nature’, grounds “man”.

Further, Horkheimer and Adorno, in *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1974), understand modernity (through Enlightenment) as striving towards placing “man” as master of this ‘nature’. This desire cannot be separated from the Anthropocene, and an ecological critique of modernity must place this ‘mastery script’ at the centre of our understanding of anthropogenic warming and general cataclysms. However, we cannot uncouple this desiring from the a priori separation of the human from nature: as Davis and Turpin (2015) suggest, “the moment at which human and natural history become inseparable coincides with the most decisive event of their (philosophical) separation, Kant’s alleged ‘Copernican Revolution’” (p. 5)²⁸. This separation is the focus of Horkheimer and Adorno, and represents the aporetic paradox this section aims to highlight: this separation is crucial in the Anthropocene, and reflects the negation of what we call ‘nature’ (the metaphysical

²⁸ For us, this ‘revolution’ is perhaps the most pertinent, but of course the division between what we can call ‘society’ and ‘nature’ can be found all the way back in *The Epic of Gilgamesh*.

conceptualisation and mythologization of the ‘actual earth’) as the founding of modern subjectivity. We *are* to the extent that we are *above* ‘nature’²⁹. “Man” sends ‘nature’ into the oblivion, attempting to make it unseeable (‘nature’ as ‘wilderness’, as ‘away’), and places itself above. This ‘nature’ contains within it, of course, the question of the modern subject’s relation to the animal. This is another foundational split or rupture within the modern subject (“man”/animal), and despite how important and close to the distinction of tension addressed herein (world/earth), there is simply not the room to go down that road. However, as Agamben suggests, “It is as if determining the border between human and animal were not just one question among many discussed by philosophers and theologians, scientists and politicians, but rather a fundamental metaphysico-political operation in which alone something like “man” can be decided upon and produced” (2004, p. 21). Despite our focus being something a bit different than this distinction, I think that we can view ‘nature’ as the broad generalisation of our politics of identifying the animal (and ‘nature’) as it relates (and grounds) the modern subject.

For indeed, it is not simply the animal that grounds the human (although of course it is central, as Agamben has shown), but ‘nature’ itself: Horkheimer and Adorno posit further that modernity has “always regarded anthropomorphism, the projection of subjective properties onto nature, as the basis of myth” (p. 4). Thus, the metaphysics of modernity, of the very mythological tethering of this epoch and world, are based upon the anthropocentric thrust upon the earth. The Severing, as Morton (2017) calls it, becomes All; and the excrement of the smokestacks of industry are what sustain our lungs³⁰. We

²⁹ It is in this sense where we can perhaps shift the discussion from viewing “man” as that which destroys his animality in his becoming, to more of an ecophobic framing more generally (c.f. Agamben, 2004).

³⁰ Indeed, we can see this process as the means by which the modern human ‘works’ on the earth, and transforms it into a dwelling. This can clearly be seen in the urbanisation of the world. But above this, we have the

see here the importance of the construction of ‘nature’. This is the Hegelian imagination at work, and shows how the modern subject can employ its radically anti-ecological thinking to de-‘nature’ the earth. It is also in this sense that we can say that anthropomorphism actually constitutes the whole of modernity, with the negation of ‘nature’ (and the earth that grounds this groundlessness) as the basis for becoming-subject. Modernity is ecocidal, and “man”, in modern metaphysics, becomes—instead of master of nature—‘nature’ itself. And this, we can say, is the *birth of the Anthropocene*, whereby what we have negated is too monstrously unconquerable, and is striking back³¹.

Thus, this creature we call “man” becomes the onto-theological totality of existence; in other words, modernity is foundationally composed of an anthropocentric necessity, and “man” becomes ontological. Anthropocentrism, and correlationist epistemology more generally, are deeply embedded in the epoch of modernity. This is why the Anthropocene, and the rapid destruction of ‘nature’ (from earth) threatens modernity and the modern subject to its core. And this is why the *anthropos* of the Anthropocene is the modern subject: in this light, the “Anthropocene” can be read as: a *time of the unveiling of the abyss of “man”*. ‘Nature’ can be seen as the anthropocentric reassemblage of the earth; it is the anthropocentric part of the ecological whole, a casualty of the dissolution of

destruction of the Amazon rainforest (the earth’s actual lungs), being torn apart, burnt, and utterly obliterated for cattle production. But on top of this nonsense, and direct capitalistic exploitation, there is deeper level of dwelling that we terraform the earth for. This is the metaphysical dwelling we have been discussing throughout: as this section argues, we need to *master* the earth, and centre the constellations of the universal harmonies (Foucault, 1994). Again, the black hole we have created from the constitutive abyss within us is unabated, and requires endless negation-of-other to sustain its feverish existence. In this sense, the modern subject is insatiably parasitical.

³¹ Kronos, the titan who swallowed his children (excluding Zeus) could not contain this negation, and ultimately was slain for his betrayal and vain desire for dominance. The hubris of “man” shows uncanny parallels.

the radical negativity of the Hegelian imagination. The earth falls victim to cartography, ontology, and negation, but it could not be dominated forever.

The real, destructive catastrophes of global warming, and the decomposing of ‘nature’ constitute an abyss from which the modern subject cannot recover. When we can no longer see the difference that constitutes the identity of “man”, or when these differences are made visible, “the difference between being and the nothing, licit and illicit, divine and demonic also fades away, and in its place something appears for which we seem to lack even a name” (Agamben, 2004, p. 22; see also Agamben, 1993a). Indeed, this problem of indistinction has already occurred in another context, and also has signalled the end of modernity: as Agamben suggests, “perhaps concentration and extermination camps are also an experiment of this sort, an extreme and monstrous attempt to decide between the human and the unhuman, which has ended up dragging the very possibility of the distinction to its ruin” (p. 24).

This great atlas, this figure of “man” through which all else is refracted, parallels Derrida’s notion of our “becoming-god”. In his essay “The End of Man”, Derrida suggests that “everything takes place as though the sign ‘man’ has no origin, no historical, cultural, linguistic limit, not even a metaphysical limit” (1969, p. 35; c.f. Foucault, 1994). He goes on further: “that which was thereby named, in a supposedly neutral and indeterminate way, was none other than the metaphysical unity of man and god, the project of becoming god as a *final objective* constituting human-reality” (p. 36). Whether this figure of man-as-Atlas leads to our becoming-god or not, exceeds the scope and limits of this project; however, our historical and genealogical period of “High Modernity” does inhabit a radical void. Perhaps the ending of modernity can be seen as a desperate attempt to replace the figure of

God, and perhaps the nihilism developed by Nietzsche, as stated in our introduction, signifies the beginning of this end.

We now turn to the next chapter, where we will further explore the radical untethering of the apocalypse of the Anthropocene as it relates to the ‘world’ of modernity, which parallels the decomposition of the modern subject.

I INFINITY

In both *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (2005), and *The Gay Science* (2001), Nietzsche pronounces the death of God. This statement proclaims the decline and ultimate end of the moral authority in Europe that had made sense of the continent and culture for two millennia, and describes the subsequent vacuum this death creates. This is a void that, arguably, the project(s) of modernity have been attempting to attend to since then (Norris, 2005, p. 3). As Bourriaud (2016, p. 35) outlines, citing Machiavelli, Althusser, and Baudrillard, political action revolves around the dialectic between the invisibility and visibility of the *void*, between ‘void’ as oblivion, and the ‘void’ as *beginning*. In short, ‘the void’, or oblivion, is a powerful site of contention and conflict, as we discussed in the last chapter. In *The Gay Science*, in a reply to a ‘madman’ asking “Where is God?”, Nietzsche responds:

‘I’ll tell you! *We have killed him* – you and I! We are all his murderers. But how did we do this? How were we able to drink up the sea? Who gave us the sponge to wipe away the entire horizon? What were we doing when we unchained this earth from its sun? Where is it moving to now? Where are we moving to? Away from all suns? Are we not continually falling? And backwards, sideways, forwards, in all directions? Is there still an up and a down? Aren’t we straying as though through an infinite nothing? Isn’t empty space breathing at us? Hasn’t it got colder? Isn’t night and more night coming again and again? Don’t lanterns have to be lit in the morning? Do we still hear nothing of the noise of the grave-diggers who are burying God? Do we smell nothing of the divine decomposition? – Gods, too, decompose³²!’

³² An interesting metaphor considering the ecological contours of the Anthropocene that Haraway (2015; 2016), among others, elaborates.

In this fantastic passage, Nietzsche illuminates the groundlessness of the abyss of the modern world (Heidegger, 1971;1999), attempting to highlight the great significance of this epochal change; in its place: infinite nothingness, empty space, and the metaphoric night that Heidegger (1999), Weber³³, Hegel, (1974) and many other scholars have detailed (e.g. Cohen, 2012). Imagery of space, time, and most importantly, *movement* assail the reader, and the very spatiotemporal fixedness of life falls into oblivion. The ‘movement’ described here is experienced as motion devoid of direction, barring the falling away from the protection of suns: great ends produce traumatic loss of coordinates (Morton, 2013, p. 22). But it is also a movement that has placed “man” as the captain of the ship, whom has erased the very horizon that would have furnished movement *qua* movement (as opposed to movement as *directed*) in the first place—hence the focus on *falling*, and *straying*: “isn’t night and more night coming again and again?”. Location, finitude, and place become unhinged—the very sun that provides life to the earth is rendered other. Night and more night fall upon us, but we are afraid of the dark of earth (Cohen, 2012), and think of it as death, as other (Beaumont, 2016). The light from God no longer shines solely upon the human species (or the privileged subsections of it), the earth (or Europe) no longer resides at the centre of the universe, and *time* is seen as an entity to fear, and subsequently control: it reeks of earth, death, and of chaos without the eternity of the celestial realm.

As Deleuze (1983, p. vii) tells us, “[c]ardo, in Latin, designates the subordination of time to the cardinal points through which the periodical movements that it measures pass. As long as time remains on its hinges, it is subordinate to movement: it is the measure of

³³ At the end of “Politics as Vocation”, Weber (1978, p. 224) says that “not summer’s bloom lies ahead of us, but rather a polar night of icy darkness and hardness, no matter which group may triumph externally now”.

movement, interval, or number”. The Earth, in this calibration, is still chained to the sun. However, referencing Hamlet, Deleuze tells us this: that *time is out of joint*, unhinged. “It is now movement which is subordinate to time”, he says (1983, p. vii);

everything changes, including movement. We move from one labyrinth to another. The labyrinth is no longer a circle, or a spiral which would translate its complications, but *a thread, a straight line*, all the more mysterious for being simple, inexorable as Borges says, ‘the labyrinth which is composed of a *single straight line*, and which is indivisible, incessant’. Time is no longer related to the movement which it measures, but movement is related to the time which conditions it³⁴.

Deleuze here argues that this is the “first great Kantian reversal” of the first *Critique*. Indeed, location, finitude, place, and *cardo* have been subsumed by the straying “through an infinite nothing”, where “empty space [is] breathing at us”. Ultimately, with the death of God, we were faced with the problem of unmediated *infinity*. Time, much like Machiavelli (1961) theorized, threatened to unleash itself from the realm of the unchangeable form of eternity to an active, agential entity—Lady Fortuna, as the Italian political theorist puts it; or to put it less (or more) Machiavellian, *chaos*. A fear of death coincided with a fear of *time*, a time which was eroded by the burgeoning fields of natural history (e.g. the Royal Society of the UK), anthropology (broadly speaking), biology, and geology. Who indeed gave us the sponge to wipe away the whole horizon? Preferring infinity over finitude, a remodeled transcendence over the “curse of futility to which all finite creatures are subject” (Weber, 1978, p. 214), with the “death” of the Christian spatiotemporal nexus that once enplaced “man”, the movement of the earth became unhinged.

³⁴ Perhaps this is what Debord (2012) meant when he said that “man—that ‘negative being who *is* solely to the extent that he abolishes being’—is one with time”. Or, interestingly, what Hundertwasser, the great mid-century radical architect was getting at when he said that the “straight line is godless and immoral” (1958).

This is not to say that with Christianity the subject was ‘hinged’ to the movement of the earth—indeed the opposite notion was the main drive of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. But what is important to suggest here is that, if in Christianity there were two worlds—the celestial and terrestrial; or, as Plato would philosophise it, unchangeable and perfect Form, and the changeable sense-world—there is, after the death of God, one world. Jean-Luc Nancy, in *Sense of the world* (1997) tells us that “*finitude is the truth of which the infinite is the sense*”, meaning that we exist within the truth (and here Nancy relates this term somewhat to Heidegger’s *alētheia* [p. 16]) of finitude, but our sense dwells in the realm of the infinite (p. 29, emphasis in original). However, as he also points out (and as we shall get to later), ‘sense’ no longer makes sense with the end of the world (p. 3, 4). We are experiencing the thrust of *finitude*, which he says “is not the being-finished-off of an existent deprived within itself of the property of completion, butting up against and stumbling over its own limit”; finitude, as he establishes, “*is not a privation*” (emphasis in original); moreover, and problematically for anthropocentric and correlationist thought more generally (Meillassoux, 2016), “*finitude affirms itself*” (p. 30, emphasis in original).

As we shall see, the enfolding of the celestial and the terrestrial of Christianity—and more specifically, of the growing unthinkability of *infinitude* coinciding with the thrust of *finitude*, or at least the sudden meeting of a concept so estranged from modern thinking (since it has of course always been here)—is proving to be lethal in the Anthropocene. This is the moment, I claim, where modernity becomes truly unthinkable. The Anthropocene is a threshold that modernity cannot pass, though we may not be ready to give up the ghost. In this sense, going back to Nancy, the question of (*in*)*finitude* is one of vast proportions: “there is perhaps no proposition it is more necessary to articulate today[...] Everything at

stake at the end of philosophy comes together there: in the need of having to open the thought of finitude, that is to reopen itself this thought, which haunts and mesmerizes our entire tradition” (1997, p. 29). This moment that Nietzsche describes, as stated in the introduction, is the historical demarcation of this project. *Anthropos* is fundamentally a modern creation, and deserves special attention particularly after this death of God. And more so especially as it marks a prominent shift in *History* in the way Agamben (1993b, p. 91) elucidates the latter term:

Every conception of history is invariably accompanied by a certain experience of time which is implicit in it, conditions it, and thereby has to be elucidated. Similarly, every culture is first and foremost a particular experience of time, and no new culture is possible without an alternation of this experience. The original task of a genuine revolution, therefore, is never merely to ‘change the world’, but also—and above all—to ‘change time’.

Thus, it is that this genealogical moment invariably suggests a change in the epistemological configuration of ‘History’ via the hegemonic articulation of the metatemporality of modernity (Brown, 2001; Foucault, 1994; Carvounas, 2002), i.e. the Kantian reversal mentioned above: linear time, progression, and infinity guide what is modern; teleology and eschatology ground it. Indeed, ‘History’, from this point, has been a history of finding a replacement for God, and most importantly, finding a replacement for the legitimation and continuation of *world as All*. The Anthropocene in this sense, represents the end of *this particular ‘History’*³⁵, and ultimately, *the end of the world*. This chapter hopes to highlight the grave danger this ultimate ‘decomposition of God’ signifies.

II BECOMING EARTHBOUND

³⁵ ‘Geohistory’ may be the continuation of this becoming-History, or it may refer to a real end of *history as such* (perhaps an ideation of ‘post-history’)

In short, this death of God has created a void of meaning in (European) human existence³⁶, and robbed us of that which dealt with the radical fear of death at the centre of modernity (hooks, 2000; Rowe, 2016; Foucault, 1984): this madman, representing the temporal power (Machiavelli, 1961) in Europe, is unable to hear the gravediggers and decomposing of the world, leading us to wonder: “What, other than anarchy [chaos] or free fall, is harboured by the destabilization of constitutive cultural and political narratives?” (Brown, 2001, p. 3).

In the section prior to the one quoted above from *The Gay Science*, entitled “In the horizon of the infinite”, Nietzsche expounds upon this idea of groundlessness:

We have forsaken the land and gone to sea! We have destroyed the bridge behind us – more so, we have demolished the land behind us! Now, little ship, look out! Beside you is the ocean; it is true, it does not always roar, and at times it lies there like silk and gold and dreams of goodness. But there will be hours when you realize that it is infinite and that there is nothing more awesome than infinity. Oh, the poor bird that has felt free and now strikes against the walls of this cage! Woe, when homesickness for the land overcomes you, as if there had been more *freedom* there – and there is no more ‘land’!³⁷

Reminiscent of Plato’s (through Alcaeus and Aeschylus) ‘Ship of State’ metaphor (1991), Nietzsche can be here read in an anthropocentric and Heideggerian light: we have “forsaken the land and gone to sea”; completely removed from the possibility of return to the earth, for we are spellbound by the infinite at the cost of the real—*forsaken the earth*, as we shall expound below, *for the sake of a world*. Nietzsche’s ecological thinking is

³⁶ And, to the extent that the ‘West’ has colonized most of the globe, the rest of the world: As Mishra (2017, p. 25) describes, referencing Benjamin, the self alienation of humankind “has reached such a degree that it can experience its own destruction as an aesthetic pleasure of the first order”.

³⁷ In a futuritive way, this passage reads gravely ominous. Ice caps melt, sea ice turns into water, and land becomes flooded: “Woe, when homesickness for the land overcomes you, as if there had been more *freedom* there—and there is no more ‘land’!”

highlighted here, as is his belief that Christianity and modernity have removed the human from our context (our hinge) of earth; again, the death of God is not the main contention, but the void it represents is. *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* is fundamentally dedicated to this problem as well: at the age of forty, Zarathustra, symbolising the surpassing-across of the form of human Nietzsche critiques in the book (the “last man”), proclaims “Behold! This cup wants to become empty again, and Zarathustra wants to become human again”. The narrator concludes: “Thus began Zarathustra’s going-under³⁸”. As Zarathustra climbed down from the mountain to the forest, he met an old man who had “left his holy hut in order to search in the forest for roots”—a kindred spirit delving into the (geo)history of earth in search of wisdom. This old searcher of roots, recognizing Zarathustra from when he ascended the mountain, asks: “You lived in your solitude as if in the sea, and the sea bore you up. Alas, you want to climb onto land? Alas, you want to drag your body yourself again?” (2005, pp. 9-10). The imagery employed here again introduces the metaphor of the sea to act as a foil to the presence and finitude of the land, and importantly, to the embodied being that in its very earthboundness moves away from the transcendental. The gap between the infinite and the finite has been bridged by Zarathustra, a literary figuration of the journey humankind must take as well, according to Nietzsche. What we need to unhinge, according to him, is not the earth from the sun, but the ‘world’ from the earth.

The ecological refrain of what we can call here “becoming-earthbound” is one that strikes us as common today, yet is rendered with austere reverence in this novel, and Zarathustra is laughed at. In addition, it is in a way a conservative notion; although, importantly, Nietzsche is sure to note that this process does not imply a *going back*, because

³⁸ *Untergang*, which can be translated as going-under, also means ‘sunset’ and ‘downfall’.

there is no going back. This process of *becoming-earthbound* acts as a careful response to the worldlessness and subsequent unmasking of groundlessness humanity is experiencing. But can Nietzsche be here charged with falling into the (very Christian) ‘apocalyptic script’, the same one that mirrors the fall from Eden/decline myth³⁹ (Keller, 1996; Haraway, 1989; Bennet, 1997)? Or are we truly in the throes of the abyss, as Heidegger would claim (1971)? Or moreover, are we simply in *trouble* (Haraway, 2016a)?

III APOCALYPSE, THANATOS, AND EDEN

Catherine Keller, author of *Apocalypse Now and Then: A Feminist Guide to the End of the World*, claims that the ‘West’ stands “even now in the unfinished history of apocalyptic finalities” (1996, p. 2). What is modern is tied fundamentally to notions of teleology, and, ultimately, to ends. In this sense as well, the study of modernity in this capacity is eschatological work, if by *eschatology* we mean—tracing this word back to *eschatos*—a spatial or temporal end or edge, sometimes both; or as Keller puts it, a “horizon that always recedes again into a ‘not yet’ that ‘already is’, or is nothing at all” (p. xiii). This “unfinished history” ought to be translated into “unfinished becoming-modern, as captured by History”; and it is precisely for this reason that we must take apocalypse seriously: modernity is suicidal, and cannibalistic. Indeed, Keller points out that “modernity is hell-bent on producing some literal form of that end”, a phantasmagoric prefiguration with ecological and other dooms, curiously juxtaposed with the Kantian-Hegelian ideal of a linear and progressive flight to perfection (p. 2; see also Kant, 1784). This raises a very idealist

³⁹ e.g. all the imagery of going-under/going-down, the night, sunset, etc.

question however: does the philosophical/theological/political discourse surrounding this fixation on ‘the end’ act as a sort of self-fulfilling prophecy of sorts? Is this ‘death drive’ built into modernity (hooks, 2000)?

As Keller (1996) posits, many now fall into what she calls the ‘apocalyptic script’—the not quite subjective, not quite ideological phantasmagoric shadows of *ends* that float beneath the surface of consciousness: what apocalypse represents is often that which is unrepresentable. It is the shadow which lies beneath consciousness. Yet it is, as Keller argues, a Christian script, whether one is theist or atheist—whether, in fact, God has died or not. Indeed, as Nietzsche adds, “After Buddha was dead, they still showed his shadow in a cave for centuries—a tremendous, gruesome shadow. God is dead; but given the way people are, they may still for millennia be caves in which they show his shadow. –And we—we must defeat his shadow as well!” (2001, section 108). This shadow of doubt—“that the belief in the Christian God has become unbelievable”—was to him already casting itself over Europe (section 343, p. 199). This shadow pervades the modern phantasmagoria, despite its very being-phantasmagoric.

And further, as is demonstrated in apocalyptic entertainment—whether it be in the form of zombies, climate catastrophes, the second coming of Jesus, etc.—suggests that this idea of the end of the world is also quite a facet of current pop culture (e.g. Drezner, 2015). Indeed, the boundaries between “real” threats to humanity, the earth, and the plethora of plant, animal, bacteria, and fungal queendoms on this planet, and fiction (or horror) is a complex one. But, as Sean Gaston (2011) contends, “when it comes to the end of the world, we are always dealing with a certain relation to the fictional and the virtual” (p. 500). Even the concept of futurity implies some relation with fiction. Yet is this inherently a problem?

And can Nietzsche's death knell (as but one of many examples) thus be rendered as solely a symptom of this apocalyptic script? Is it merely a rhetorical or political fiction? Or does he diagnose something that is beyond discourse? Is there even cause for this separation? The 'apocalypse' that Keller (1996) wants to 'reveal' is a "multidimensional, culture-pervading spectrum of ideological assumptions, group identities, subjective responses, and—perhaps most interesting of all—historical habits" (p. xi). However—and this is the question that should be at the heart of the Anthropocene literature (e.g. Haraway, 2015)—what *does* this (anti/post/geo)historic moment signify with regards to *ends*? What is it about the affective and apocalyptic flows that are—even if partly constructed by this script—very much tied to the 'real' goings on around the world?

Timothy Morton (2013) suggests that the Anthropocene is an *aesthetic event*. It is something pervading us all in a very physical, affective, psychological, and cellular level. Indeed, it is crucial, I think, that in the times labelled the 'Anthropocene', that we take seriously this concept of 'apocalypse': indeed, this study will predominately focus on this term, using it as a linguistic-conceptual jumping-off point, foil, and radical (by the roots) critique of modernity. For, if we are to take affective, aesthetic, and apocalyptic flows seriously, it means that, facing us in the Anthropocene—its macabre dance flitting in and out and between shadows—is *death* (which will, as shall be described below, be italicised to denature this term to highlight the specific spectre of 'death' we shall deal with herein).

Why is this ancient figure so novel in the Anthropocene? How can we suggest that *death* is in any way something to re-evaluate while the American Empire is still waging wars across the world, when Syria and other countries are still devoured by brutal civil war and strife, when Donald Trump is attempting a fascist regime change, when horrific

famines and disease threaten the most vulnerable of this world? Because the ‘death’ we must consider in addition to (and, crucially, never *instead of* the very real phenomenological death⁴⁰) is the *fear of death as a cultural phantom*. Put another way, there is nothing new to the ruling elites, governments, and privileged and willfully ignorant citizens of the world in the death, destruction, and totalizing subjugation of the *other*; what *is* different with the Anthropocene, is, in tragic irony, the threat against the self, against the modern subject, which was indeed the focus of chapter 1. It is both the threat of something *external* to the system of dominance, fear, and control exercised ruthlessly by the 1% (as Occupy Wall Street would call them) (i.e. global warming as something beyond the human), and the *internal* threat posed by the looming possibilities and realities of a global refugee crisis and mass displacement, chronic water and food shortages, extreme weather of all kinds, flooding (to name but a few scenarios), and the socio-political ramifications of all of the above. And it is to this that we must hold the *anthropos* responsible, for of course these disastrous consequences will be experienced unequally. And even beyond this, the Anthropocene represents an *unthinkable death*—unthinkable in its very possibility of eviscerating the planet to the extent that there may be no life left on earth to think it (Clark, 2016; Meillassoux, 2016).

bell hooks, in *All about love* (2000) suggests that cultures of domination, like the culture of what we problematically call the ‘West’, “court death”; the modern subject (in broad strokes) prefers necrophilia to biophilia, and has a *death wish*—a desiring of death as the end or goal of life (p. 191). She claims that we actually *worship* death: however,

⁴⁰ We do not want to fall into the trap of forgetting about real, existential death as MacCormack (2012) charges necrophilosophy with often doing.

“ironically, the worship of death as a strategy for coping with death’s power does not truly give us *solace*. It is deeply anxiety provoking” (p. 193, emphasis added). Put this way, our worship of *death* turns into a negative feedback loop: the more we worship *death*, and continue our necropolitical path of destruction-for ‘life’ (Mbembe, 2003), the more anxious and *fearful* we become about death, which leads us back to the start of this circle, and creates ultimate paranoia (Bouriaud, 2016). hooks sums it up this way: “we cannot embrace the strangers with love, for we fear the stranger. We believe the stranger is a messenger of death who wants our *life*. This irrational fear is an expression of madness”. It may be beneficial to replace the term ‘stranger’ with ‘strange’, or ‘other’. This is a *biopolitics of fear* that acts as the central affective flow of our worldless, global society (Debrix & Barder, 2009). This biopolitical realm of fear, moreover, is constituted by what Debrix and Barder call “*dispositifs* of terror”. Among them, *death*, the eternally patient anti-being (or so we *imagine*), stands distorted, projected, manipulated, and *other*.

Thus, in modernity, we attempt to control *death*, and to base the ‘positive’ being of the modern subject on the negative power-over of the other (Tønder & Thomassen, 2005, pp. 110-111), and specifically *death-as-other*. This makes “Man” a necromancer. The problem of the Anthropocene, filtered through this lens, is the radical inability to ground this world in the negation of the other, and specifically, the negation of *death-as-other*. The Anthropocene *gives* death *life*, so to speak; put another way, global warming is the *non-constitutive outside* that negates the relationship between the subject and its constitutive outside, which untethers the sovereignty of the subject, and ultimately, the ‘world’. This inability runs aground the modern subject unto the land of *hyperobjects*, as Morton would say (2013): spatio-temporal entities that vastly exceed the dimensionality of that which

perceives them. Global warming, it would seem, is truly *unthinkable* in the hegemonically articulated epistemo-rational system of knowing espoused and regulated by modernity (Clark, 2016), and as such, erodes the possibility of the creature we call “man” (Chapter 1). Climate deniers, in this light, are in denial of much more than just changing climate. They are in denial, fundamentally, about the incomprehensibility between our lived experience and our ability to conceptualize and comprehend our world (or, as we will see below, our lack thereof). As we discussed last chapter, we begin to *see the unseeable*, which appears to be quite a spooky sight.

As Mbembe (2003) has shown, and as will be expounded upon later in this chapter, our world runs on what he calls ‘necropower’. This worship, and attempt to master death itself, along with the necropolitics Mbembe describes, creates a situation wherein we should perhaps be calling our historic epoch by a different name. This study, from this point, shall call this demarcation of History, which aligns with the moment of the death of God, and the enfolding of the two-place system of Christianity (heaven and earth) (Gaston, 2011), which roughly corresponds to Foucault’s ‘modern era’ (1994), *necromantic modernity*: the era of melancholic romanticism of immortality and eternity, and the erotic attachment to the control, suppression, and negation-for-world (Mbembe, 2003) of both death and earth⁴¹. The ‘end of the world’, which concomitantly arises with the spectre of

⁴¹ Mbembe (2003, p. 163) suggests a similar framework when he says that “the romance of sovereignty [...] rests on the belief that the subject is the master and the controlling author of his or her own meaning”. As the critical theory of the Frankfurt School has shown, however, this dominion of ‘meaning’, is a most “triumphant calamity” (Horkheimer & Adorno, 1974, p. 1; see also Josephson-Storm, 2017). In the introduction, moreover, Debord is quoted, suggesting that

As the Middle Ages came to an end, the irreversible time that had invaded society was experienced by a consciousness still attached to the old order as an *obsession with death*. This was the melancholy of a world passing away—the *last world where* the security of myth could still balance history; and for this melancholy all earthly things were inevitably embarked upon the path of corruption [...] This was the moment when a millenarian utopianism aspiring to

death, creates a deep shuddering of being in the necromantic subject (c.f. Morton, 2013). The illusion and preoccupation with *infinity* is confronted with the hyperreality of *finitude*: as Morton (2013) decries, infinity is easy—it is very large finitudes that are truly terrifying (p. 21). In addition to this, we all perceive the aesthetic dissonance and horror of the Anthropocene, whether we are living on an increasingly smaller and more waterlogged island in the Polynesian Pacific (Klein, 2014), or are witnessing merely the haze surrounding the small talk of weather—something so drastic and horrible as the full submergence of home, and the uncomfortable feeling one gets while engaging in the smallest of small talk point to a vastly unequal, yet arguably ubiquitous feeling of dread.

IV SOLASTALGIA: DESOLATION//SOLACE

Indeed, despite the well founded caution to avoid harmful, salvific, religious or ideological, or otherwise constructively problematic ideations of an ‘apocalyptic script’, the Anthropocene literature, and thought more generally, must begin to seriously think about *ends* in the light of the red anthropocentric glow. Donna Haraway, quoting Ana Tsing, reminds us that the Holocene—a period of (re)worlding that entailed the creation of vast refuge (or *refugia*)—is over, and we are currently faced with the crisis of exponentially shrinking refugia and exponentially increasing refugees. The Anthropocene has eviscerated places of refuge world-wide (and of course unevenly). As sea levels rise, and drought,

build heaven on earth brought back the forefront an idea that had been at the origin of semi-historical religion, when the early Christian communities, like Judaic messianism from which they sprang, responded to the troubles and misfortunes of their time by announcing the imminent realization of God’s Kingdom, and so added an element of disquiet and subversion to ancient society.

This is a fascinating way to describe this necromantic ethos.

famine, and general unliveability of place increases, this problem will only become more pronounced. The late summer of which this was being written saw a string of deadly category 5 hurricanes strike a path through the Caribbean and southern United states, with earthquakes devastating Mexico as well as raging forest fires in Canada and the U.S. Catastrophes abound in no short supply. In short, global warming avowedly threatens all life on earth (Clark, 2016): apocalyptic affects (at the very least) must be given considerable consideration, as we attempt to *stay with the trouble*. As Haraway (2016a, p. 1) describes,

Mixed-up times are overflowing with both pain and joy—with vastly unjust patterns of pain and joy, with unnecessary killing of ongoingness but also with necessary resurgence. The task is to make kin in lines of inventive connection as a practice of learning to live and die well with each other in a thick present. Our task is to make trouble, to stir up potent response to devastating events, as well as to settle troubled waters and rebuild quiet places.

This directive, let alone the beautiful and terrifying description she gives us, comes with vast and unimaginable affective consequences. Extinction, and the very threat to ongoingness (Haraway, 2015) are knocking at our door. These feelings, emotions, and affective flows must be a most pertinent area of study for our greater understanding, and ability to cope with this (geo)trauma, on an earth that is changing at an enormously problematic and lethal rate. The *Chthulucene*, the term Haraway prefers to the Anthropocene, is a simple word, she tells us; “it is a compound of two Greek words (*khthôn* and *kainos* [or *kairos*] that together name a kind of timeplace for learning to stay with the trouble of living and dying in response-ability on a damaged earth” (2016a, p. 2). The Anthropocene is an opening, as well as a closing.

Naomi Klein, in her book *This changes everything* (2014), quotes an Australian philosopher by the name of Glenn Albrecht. Dealing in the realm of what is called

‘psychoterratic typologies’, he, among others, is attempting to “re-place our emotions and feelings” (Albrecht, 2012). Klein (2014, p. 165) tells us that this type of re-placing originally was used in studying “sacrifice zones”—areas like Nauru where a globalised and utterly destructive capitalism has exploited certain bio-geological areas to the point of bioextinction. However, Albrecht introduces us to a term he calls *solastalgia*, which he describes as the “homesickness you have when you are still at home”; put another way, it is the existential melancholy associated with the inability of returning to one’s home despite being-at-home already. It is a spatial paradox, and one this chapter hopes to wedge open further: this feeling, as Klein and Albrecht are careful to note, is “fast becoming a universal human experience, with climate change creating a ‘new abnormal’” (Albrecht, 2012; Klein, 2014, p. 165).

The suffix ‘-algia’, Albrecht tells us, denotes a sense of pain and suffering; the suffix (and term more generally) is fixated on the melancholic, but also offers a lens through which we may hopefully find action that may negate this thrust of solastalgia. In this sense, solastalgia is *pain* in the way that Freud (1923) described it: a material-emotive symptom of dissonance between what we experience and how we are conditioned to perceive said experience. It is the pain of knowing that there is no going back, because, *fait accompli*, the world has already ended (Davis & Turpin, 2015, p. 10; Morton, 2013; McKibben, 2010; Albrecht, 2012). The spatio-temporal realm of the past, and of History, are truly ghosts, no longer with us. ‘Back’ is oblivion⁴², as we have become unhinged from the metaphysical time-scape of modernity. And as Albrecht points out, even the wisdom

⁴² Perhaps akin to Macolm X and his linguistic subversion to colonialism: his last name (X), denotes the feeling of not being able to return to the past, as it is oblivion, nor the ability to move forward in a linear way from the past. ‘X’ is the tragedy of the disruption of colonisation; it is an intrusion, and nothing is the same afterwards.

of the elders no longer may be able to make sense of the world; even the “pre-modern” ways of knowing fail to reckon with this rapid change in climate.

Affectively, Albrecht appears to be capturing with this term the dual affective flows of *solace* and *desolation*. And perhaps these terms are not a bad way to conceptualize the Anthropocene, albeit expressed as they are in a frustrating binary all too typical of modern epistemology. ‘Solace’ is here denoting comfort in grief, and as Albrecht suggest above, *action*—a freedom from the paralysis and the weight of this great pain. This term goes beyond ‘hope’ in that the aim is not to directly hope-for something, but ultimately to find a sort of peace in the present. ‘Hope’ often projects expectation into the future, some horizon of ‘tomorrow’ that often times eviscerates the possibility of action ‘today’. The affective flow of solace is *staying with the trouble*, which “does not require such a relationship to times called the future [...] [it] requires learning to be truly present, not as a vanishing pivot between awful or Edenic pasts and apocalyptic or salvific futures, but as mortal critters entwined in myriad unfinished configurations of places, times matters, meanings” (Haraway, 2016a, p. 1). Solace is the desire to both live-with and die-with each other, and can act as a “fierce reply to the dictates of both Anthropos and Capital” (p.2).

‘Desolation’, with roots in the Latin *desolare*, implies abandonment: to be desolate suggest a state of emptiness, anguish, loneliness, without companion, uninhabited. T.S. Eliot’s *The Wasteland* (1922) is a good example of the latter. It needs no description further than this, perhaps. It is the affect imposed upon us by global warming itself, along with the myriad of other socio-political flows of the capitalist-imperialist monolith of global dominance. This is what we feel when we read excerpts from the IPCC reports. Further, this is the affect related to the crisis Heidegger describes in *Contributions to philosophy*

(1999)—the experience of the abandonment of being that we must endure, which comes at the end of the first beginning.

‘Desolation’ is also different, it is important to note, from ‘despair’. The latter suggests many of the same feelings: loss of, or absence of, hope. But ‘desolation’ implies importantly an idea of *loneliness*, and being-abandoned to oneself. In short, in contrast to the binary of hope and despair, which connote much of the same feelings as solace and desolation, the latter pairing implies *connection* and *relationality* as central to the grounding of these affects. As Haraway suggests, we either learn to live-with and die-with each other, or we simply die alone (2016).

V WILDERNESS OF SPIRIT

In the preface of her book mentioned above, hooks (2000) suggests that we are “moving into a wilderness of spirit” that is “so intense [that] we may never find our way home again” (p. xi). It is perhaps only through the bad practise of historiographic presentism that I can take delight in the delicious irony of the term ‘wilderness’: that which modernity sought to other—‘nature’—is in the end that space where Being experiences its flung-outness⁴³. As discussed at the end of Chapter 1, the modern subject has made an abyss out of ‘nature’—which, importantly, coincides with the negation of finitude in the strongest sense, and the negation of earthboundedness. And in this sense the Anthropocene is perfectly Hegelian, albeit in a mediated way: if the modern subject creates a ‘world’ from the negation of

⁴³ This is an interesting word, derived from a reading (and translation) of Rilke’s poetry: “O the curves of my longing through the cosmos/and on all the streaks: my being’s/flung-outness” (1996, p. 21). I take it here to denote the character of the wilderness of spirit: uncontained, unbounded, flowing-forth, and *open*.

‘nature’, the Anthropocene can be read as that precise negativity that strikes back at us and our flimsy holographic ‘world’. It is like *The Truman Show* (1998), where the main character does not realize he is living on set of a television production; his entire world is fake, although regarded as ‘reality’ until the ‘truth’ of this grand deception is revealed in his bumping into a catering trolley *back stage*. There is an apocalypse—a deep shuddering of being-in-‘world’—and his reality comes crashing down, when what is negated and hidden (‘back stage’) thrusts its truth violently into the ‘front stage’ of negative ontotheological existence. Oblivion becomes, very suddenly, all too visible, and we are made painfully aware of our radical and multifaceted abyss.

It may be that hooks’ description of this ‘wilderness of spirit’—despite her overt Christian attachment—serves us as a better metaphor to describe this psychology of desolation, this apocalyptic flow, than say Heidegger (1999) or Morton’s (2013). Indeed, Heidegger suggests that we are experiencing an “abandonment of being” (1999), where it is the human-being that may open the Open for the passing of the last god. Despite the brilliance of the book *Contributions to philosophy* (1999), which is a meditation of thought on the end of what he calls ‘the first beginning’, and the leap into ‘an other beginning’, his ‘solution’, as it were, is anthropocentric, although convincingly so. Further, any ideation of linear end, or revolution (in the literal, movement-based sense) of totalities (from one ‘whole’ epoch to another) fundamentally misses the point, and is trapped in the narrative of modernity, which places time as successive and epochal (Carvounas, 2002; c.f. Agamben, 1993b, p. 91). Morton (2013) suggests much the same, and attempts to resuscitate Heidegger for the 21st century by speaking of a ‘quaking of being’. I think this conceptualization hits much closer to the mark, and carefully attempts to decentre the

human from the universe of Heideggerian Being. But the metaphor of ‘wilderness of spirit’ denotes something much more vast, much more uncertain, and to an even greater extent decentres the human. Further, if I may take the liberty, we can play with the meaning of ‘spirit’ to dethrone it from its (notably Hegelian, notably Christian past) to perhaps mean something even less resolute than Being. This metaphor may take us away from Being and closer to the rhizome. As Deleuze and Guatarri describe in *A Thousand Plateaus* (1987, as cited in Berardi, 2015b, p. 9; emphasis added):

A rhizome has no beginning or end; it is always in the middle, between things, interbeing, *intermezzo*. The tree is filiation, but the rhizome is alliance, uniquely alliance. The tree imposes the verb “to be”, but the fabric of the rhizome is the conjunction, “and ... and ... and ...” This conjunction carries enough force to shake and uproot the verb “to be”. [...And to] establish a logic of the AND, *overthrow ontology, do away with foundations, nullify endings and beginnings*.

As Berardi continues, “The rhizome is simultaneously the announcement of a transformation of reality, and the premise to a new methodology of thought. It is a description of the chaotic deterritorialization that follows modern rationalism, as well as a methodology for the critical description of deterritorialized capitalism” (2015, p. 10). Thus, this idea of wilderness of spirit, in “overthrowing ontology”, eviscerating foundations, endings, and beginnings, leaves no room for the modern subject, as we have described this creature. But this is precisely the point! This “logic of the AND”, this unsettling of being, is the threshold the Anthropocene represents. Indeed, a ‘quake’ in being, while denoting the effects and affects of global warming on being, while important, still retains the centrality of the verb ‘to be’, and focusses on *essence* rather than *movement*, which is one of the many massive disconnects of the anthropocentric threshold (e.g. Clark, 2016).

Moreover, if, in the ending of the world (Morton, 2013), of which we shall cover in the section immediately following this, we are experiencing the wrath of the negative, this wrath also includes the violent (re)opening of the Open (Rilke, Heidegger), or put differently, of the *positive*. Put again another way, the absence of (negative) presence also comes with the presence of (positive) absence, and ultimately, as hooks describes it, the *wilderness of spirit*. This is an affective and aesthetic flow, vigorously inseparable from the aforementioned apocalyptic flow(s) of the Anthropocene, and one that modernity has so laboriously attempted to strangle. This is a politics of the void: a politics of visibility and invisibility, perception and aesthetics. It is to this decisive point that the next section will be dedicated to. Before we journey there, however, let us take one last look at the first quoted passage of Nietzsche in this section: his response to a ‘madman’ asking “Where is God?”:

‘I’ll tell you! *We have killed him* – you and I! We are all his murderers. But how did we do this? How were we able to drink up the sea? Who gave us the sponge to wipe away the entire horizon? What were we doing when we unchained this earth from its sun? Where is it moving to now? Where are we moving to? Away from all suns? Are we not continually falling? And backwards, sideways, forwards, in all directions? Is there still an up and a down? Aren’t we straying as though through an infinite nothing? Isn’t empty space breathing at us? Hasn’t it got colder? Isn’t night and more night coming again and again? Don’t lanterns have to be lit in the morning? Do we still hear nothing of the noise of the grave-diggers who are burying God? Do we smell nothing of the divine decomposition? – Gods, too, decompose!’

This passage so eloquently and with utter desolation describes the tragedy of the Anthropocene, if we view ‘God’ (more so as what it represents, i.e. the not-void) as the *movement* of the universe, of the “conjunction ‘and ... and ... and ...’”. The absolute violence of ontology, and the elevation of it to ontotheology, has torn (or shook) the fabric of being asunder (Morton, 2013; Nancy, 1997). As Deleuze and Guatarri posit, ontology

brings origins and ends, and unhinges 'world' from earth (see also Deleuze, 1983). Yet, on a cosmic scale, or extraterrestrial scale, global warming really poses no threat. What we call the 'Anthropocene' can be better conceptualized as a product of the militant enfolding (Marks, 2015, p. 101) of self/other, negative/positive, subject/object, 'world'/'nature' into an unsustainable and suicidal telos (or *eschatos*, and the two terms really now are hard to separate) of the metaphysical power of modernity. The tragedy of this collapse will result in a drastic loss of real life (the sixth extinction, for example), and incomprehensible pain and suffering.

I ORIGINS

Gaston (2011), in referring to the Torah (translated by Everett Fox), and Genesis, suggests that in fact this concept of ‘world’—which, crucially, is separate from heaven and earth—is not founded upon the moment of creation, but at the moment of destruction. This idea, he furthers, is only the “first gesture in a long tradition” (p. 499). This idea of ‘world’ in Western philosophy and theology is not something anterior to the celestial (or metaphysical, and above “man”) or terrestrial (or physical, and often regarded as below “man”), but something founded upon negation: the great flood myth, as Gaston points out, suggests that by God saying “I will blot out all existing things”, for example, creation is very much founded upon destruction. For Hegel, too, who studied and made commentary on the flood myth, the process of making world is founded upon negation (Mbembe, 2003; Gaston, 2011), as we will explore below. Yet we must bear in mind as well that the disappearance of the world, from Descartes, Husserl, and even Derrida (Gaston, 2011; Derrida, 1969), and certainly Heidegger (1971; 1999), has become a persistent theme in Western philosophy (Keller, 1996).

However, despite the critique of this “dystopic turn” (Dawdy, 2010; Derrida, 1969; 1982; Davis & Turpin, 2015) as merely discursive, or (onto)-theological (Keller, 1996), we are experiencing in many ways the ruins of modernity (Dawdy, 2010), particularly in the wake of global warming. According to Derrida, Gaston (2011) tells us, “the end of the

world is the only possible response to the death of the other”⁴⁴. Indeed, it is “part of the task of marking death as other, of challenging the tradition of harnessing ‘the tremendous power of the negative’ from G.W. F. Hegel to Martin Heidegger” (p. 499, emphasis added). Thus, both the idea of a ‘world’ as something posterior to what was already existent (see also Nancy, 1997), and the end of this ‘world’ is fundamentally tied up in the vast baggage of modernity. It is in this sense that I can say that the Anthropocene, construed as a threshold or boundary event, signals the end of the ‘world’, and that this alerts us as well to the death rattles of modernity as a historico-philosophic ‘epoch’—and an epoch (‘world’) of its own making (Carvounas, 2002).

This section will elaborate on this “end of the ‘world’” motif in proper detail. Yet this is a sticky area of inquiry: we must make many distinctions between ‘world’ and what came before it (earth, heaven); between ‘world’ and the physical ground we stand upon; and this idea of ‘world’ in an extremely globalised “world”. Further, Derrida associates the Hegelian idea of ‘world’ with a ‘theoretical fiction’ that is used primarily as an “ideal-historic origin of human [or some human] society” (Gaston, 2011, p. 500). Metaphysics, in other words, requires mythology. Or, as Derrida’s Hegel in *Glas* (1974) suggests, “frankly speaking, you must make the whole world [*tout le monde*] of signification intervene, beginning with the relief [*Aufhebung*], truth, being, law, and so on” (p. 43). Thus, we can here take this conceptualisation of the ‘whole world’ [*tout le monde*] as a semiotic-material concept (or “prop”, as Derrida claims) as well as justification for the hegemonic

⁴⁴ And as Agamben (2004, p. 7) says, discussing Kojève’s reading of Hegel, “If history is nothing but the patient dialectical work of negation, and man both the subject and the stakes in this negating action, then the completion of history necessarily entails the end of man”. Though this is framed through the lens of the “end of history”, and in a way runs parallel to the ideas purposed herein, and despite the many iterations of this ‘end’ (e.g. Bogost, 2015), this thesis will not delve into this area of inquiry (despite its relation to our topic here)—there is simply not enough room to do this idea justice, although I hope to indirectly bear upon it.

articulation of the violent ontology of modernity. The ‘world’, in short, is the ‘reality’ that contains the sensibility, truth, being, law, of modernity, and is the realm wherein the process of becoming subject (Mbembe, 2003) takes place—and as we shall see below, by which becoming-subject takes place. Moreover, we can here define ‘world’ as the cartographic and hegemonic articulation of the truth (*Aletheia*) and possibility of the modern subject, which negates (and *natures*) the ‘actual earth’ as its constitutive other. The ‘world’ is the metaphysical construction of our material-semiotic dwelling.

Here, then, we have a brief and positive definition (or at least general parameter) to work with. It will be useful at this point, however, to explore how this process of making-world has been theorized. And how can we suggest that the world has ended? After a brief overview of some of the key literature surrounding this end of the world thesis, we will here delve into Hegel’s conceptualization of this process of world-making, as well as critiques of it (Mbembe, 2003); then, we will discuss Heidegger’s concept of “abyss” (1971; 1999). From here we will attempt to connect the thought of Heidegger and Jean-Luc Nancy’s (1997) discussion of the end of the world and the end of the sense of the world. An argument will be made following this, where the concept of *absence* will be proposed as a useful way of thinking about this feeling of solastalgia and the apocalypse of the Anthropocene more generally. How can we conceptualise this feeling of loss in a way that is not problematically negative—as in, falling into the power and trap of “the tremendous power of the negative” that plagues both modern philosophy and reeks of the apocalyptic script—but is rather a positive, and ultimately, useful way to avoid political mortification and spiritual/affective paralysis that is all too common while facing the

Anthropocene? How might we use this conceptualisation of absence to “stay with the trouble (Haraway, 2016) rather than free-fall into oblivion (e.g. Brown, 2001)?

II OVERVIEW

I aim to propose two arguments in this chapter, following from the introduction and previous section. The first argues that the Anthropocene signifies nothing less than *the end of the world* (Morton, 2013; Clark, 2016). It is a threshold (Clark, 2016), or a boundary event (Haraway, 2015). It is *kairos*—that sticky ‘now’, that is both ancient and not, breaking apart the hegemony of *kronos*, or linear time. It is a time of desolation (and maybe solace), multiplicity, and of opening (which contains within it closure⁴⁵), which cannot be separated from a time of what we can call *chaos*—a process of becoming-undone, becoming *scattered*. Relatedly, I problematize and critique the concept of ‘world’, demonstrating that we can speak of both the end of the ‘actual world’, as Thoreau would put it, (Morton, 2013; Haraway, 2015; Clark, 2016), and the concept of ‘world’ in the modern—and in this case, Hegelian—sense (Mbembe, 2003).

Secondly, and concurrently, I describe the ‘sudden’ groundlessness of a world-less planet: as Heidegger (1999) illustrates, this complete absence of ground (*Ab-Grund*) is indicative of our anthropocentric untethering:

There fails to appear for the world the ground that grounds it [...] In what follows we shall think of the *Ab-* as the complete absence of the ground. The ground is the soil in which to strike root and to stand. The age for which the ground fails to come, hangs in the abyss. Assuming that a turn still remains open for this destitute time at all, it can come some day only if the world turns

⁴⁵ As Heidegger (1999, p. 285) would claim, the truth of the first beginning intersections with the thrust of an other beginning—both creation and destruction exist like the Ouroboros.

about fundamentally⁴⁶—and that now means, unequivocally: if it turns away from the abyss. In the age of the world’s night, the abyss of the world must be experienced and endured (Heidegger, 1971, p. 90).

In this sense, we are experiencing the abyss of groundlessness. The world—both as ontotheological construction, and perhaps as the actual earth—has ended, and we are left with this affective flow of *absence*. However, we must be careful here to not return to a messianic and redemptive metaphysics, Heidegger included. Jean-Luc Nancy, in *The sense of the world* (1997, p. 4) claims as well that there is no longer any world,

no longer a *mundus*, a *cosmos*, a composed and complete order (form) within which one might find a place, a dwelling, and the elements of an orientation. Or again, there is no longer the “down here” of a world one could pass through toward a beyond or outside of this world. There is no longer any Spirit⁴⁷ of the world, nor is there any history before whose tribunal one could stand. In other words, there is no longer any sense of the world.

Indeed, he suggests that all sense has been abandoned, that we “feel a little faint” from it, but that “still we sense (we have the *sense*) that it is precisely this exposition to the abandonment of sense that makes up our lives” (p. 3; Brown, 2001; Morton, 2013; McKibben, 2010). As we have discussed in the introduction, we are born into a world that no longer exists: *worldlessness is our sense ‘of the world’*. Nancy, a reader of Heidegger, no doubt could also be talking about an abyss here, but it would be in sense only, and perhaps less so in the idea of groundlessness: “In our time, on the one hand, we are exposed to all the risks of expectation of, or demand for, sense, all the fearful traps that such a demand sets (security, identity, certainty, philosophy as a distributor of values, worldviews, and—why not?—beliefs or myths)” (1997, p. 2).

⁴⁶ What does this turning mean? This will be addressed in the conclusion, but here perhaps we can ask this question: after the end of this world, after the ‘end of man’, *can we make this turn?* Global warming makes this question all the more pertinent and timely.

⁴⁷ An important distinction that would be of use would be the difference between the disenchantment thesis, and the idea of a Spiritless world, in the Hegelian sense.

This is the thrust of the sense of meaninglessness pervading our cultural milieu. This is the void of the death of God, and of the world; in the Anthropocene literature, this is the very desperate call for “cultural reimagining” (c.f. Clark, 2016), and a re-evaluation of ‘life’ in the metaphysical and subjective sense. In a sense, this is Vattimo’s conclusion that we will never get beyond metaphysics, and (implicitly) anthropocentric and correlationist thinking—his ‘weak thought’ (2004). But perhaps there is another way:

On the other hand, we also have the chance to recognize that we are already beyond this expectation and demand, that we are already in the world in an unheard-of sense—that is, perhaps, in that unheard-of sense that eternally returns to make itself heard in sense, an unheard-of sense that precedes all senses, and that precedes us, warning and surprising us at once (1997, p. 2).

This is the ‘sense’ of the Anthropocene, which is why this threshold is so disturbing to us. Morton (2013) calls this era the age of asymmetry: an overall “aesthetic feel” of the time of hyperobjects (such as global warming) where the infinity of *cogito* conflicts with the infinite conceptualisation of Being. For him “there occurs a crazy arms race between *what we know* and *what is*, in which the technology of what we know is turned against itself. The arms race sets new parameters for aesthetic experience and action, which I take in the widest possible sense to mean the ways in which relations between beings plays out” (p. 22). Haraway, as already mentioned, uses the term “Chthulucene”. The idea, to put it simply here, is basically that we are feeling earthquake-like thrusts of earth protruding into the topography of our metaphysical consciousness. The first option Nancy outlines above, as will be shown, is rendered unthinkable (or at least absurd) in the Anthropocene. There is no way (or point) to redress this loss of sense and loss of world with the hyperobject of global warming spilling ice-cap melts, hurricane-rain, and human and nonhuman tears alike

into the neat categories and boxes of modernity. We realize that these boxes are made of cardboard: no longer do we have the trees to rebuild, nor can these boxes recover from such a water-logging. Thus, towards this unheard-of sense that may not be so unheard of: as Benjamin suggests, “are we not touched by the same breath of air which was among that which came before?” (2005, p. 1). Perhaps that is too messianic, but as Agamben notes, at the end of the world in Judaism, the human is transfixed with the head of an animal (2004, p. 3).

Thus, we are left with many questions. What is the “world” that ended? What does this loss entail? How can we make sense of it? Is there a way to think through this *lack*—if it is indeed a lack? What would this turning of thought mean?

III THE SOVEREIGN WORLD

Many scholars contend that the death camps of Nazi Germany marked the suicidal *telos* of a fundamentally bio- and, as Mbembe (2003) convincingly shows, necro-political epoch (Agamben, 2004; Arendt, 1951; Norris, 2005). The radical conclusion of the mythology of the modern subject (self vs. other) played itself out to utterly tragic ends. Hannah Arendt claimed that “there are no parallels to life in the concentration camps”; she goes on: “it’s horror can never be fully embraced by the imagination for the very reason that it stands outside of life and death” (Arendt, 1951, as cited in Mbembe, 2003, p. 161). The sovereignty of one ‘race’ stands diametrically opposed to another, such that the ultimate death of one is necessary for the survival of the other (Foucault, 2003). Pushed to this metaphysical and (all too) physical extreme, we can safely say that, as Mbembe does, that the death camps may indeed serve as the central metaphor for the destructive violence of

necropolitical sovereignty, and more specifically, as the “ultimate sign of the absolute power of the negative” (2003, p. 162). More than this, as cited at the end of the last chapter, it may be that concentration camps are also “an extreme and monstrous attempt to decide between the human and the inhuman”, as Agamben (2004, p. 22) suggests, which “has ended up dragging the very possibility of the distinction to its ruin”.

As we have discussed, this idea of the negative is one that is absolutely foundational to modernity. Indeed, a plethora of scholars contend that it is perhaps the temporal ideology that “valorizes newness, rupture, and linear plot lines” that provides the “thin skin for a global culture that developed some time in the sixteenth century” that accelerated rapidly after the philosophico-technological events of the 18th century (Enlightenment) and the mid-twentieth century (WMD’s, consumer capitalism and the associated imperialist globalisation) (Dawdy, 2010, p. 762⁴⁸). In other words, they suggest that modernity can be conceptualized around its metatemporality. I hesitate to disagree to this notion, but even temporality is founded on the negative: as Hume (2009) shows us, from his analysis of *The Heart of Darkness*, modern metatemporality is founded on the ‘other’ of time, the “savage” prehistories of that are foundationally built into the anteriority and even possibility of ‘the modern’. Those who aren’t *in time*, are oblivion (Hume, 2009; Brown, 2001, p. 6; Carvounas, 2002).

Indeed, the modern subject is foundationally constructed from such negativity (Hegel, 1974; Žižek, 1999; Sinnerbrink, 2016; Mbembe, 2003; Debord, 2012; Morton, 2017). “Man” is not a positive creature; it is a being with a ruptured foundation, that is

⁴⁸ Dawdy here cites Kossalleck, 1985; Latour, 1993; Ou-fan Lee, 1999; Schnapp, Shanks, & Tiews, 2004; and Taylor, 2002.

beyond the animal, but below the angel (Agamben, 2004). “Man” is defined in the negative. More specifically, this creature is indelibly inseparable from its constitutive outside/other; the modern subject, further, is a creature that lives in the domain of *sovereignty*, and as such, requires fixed boundaries (Brown, 2001; Mbembe, 2003; Agamben, 1999; 2001), origins (Gaston, 2011), and *ends* (Derrida, 1969). Yet, as expressed above, the modern subject cannot be separated from this idea of ‘world’, particularly if, as argued in chapter 1, “man” is ontological—form, rather than content; mask, rather than face. And in both cases, the blurring of boundaries that the Anthropocene entails leads to the meeting of hooks’ (2000) *stranger*, whom is out to steal our *life*. Sovereignty requires these boundaries, but also “power conceived as generated and directed from *within the entity itself*” (Brown, 2001, p.10). As Mbembe (2003) also posits, sovereignty is the ability to “exercise control over mortality and to define life as the deployment and manifestation of power”. It is the “power and capacity to dictate who may live and who must die” (p. 161). Sovereignty grounds itself on death, on necropower (as opposed to biopower), and it is in this sense where the Anthropocene acts as a shock to this system of sovereignty, and as we discussed earlier, necromancy. In short, the emergence of the non-constitutive outside, or hyperobject (Morton, 2013) of global warming makes *visible* the invisibility of these boundaries, and usurps absolute necropower from the self, and from the ‘world’: in the Anthropocene, we meet that which exists on the (non constitutive) *outside*; and we begin to be aware of ghosts, spectres, and all sorts of phantasmagoria previously relegated to oblivion. As Bourriaud intones,

Things and phenomena used to surround us. Today it seems they threaten us in ghostly form, as unruly scraps that refuse to go away or persist even after vanishing into the air [...] we inhabit an overfull world, living in archives ready to burst, among more and more perishable products, junk food, and bottlenecks.

All the while, capitalism boldly dreams its dreams of ‘frictionless’ exchange”
(2016, p. vii).

Thus, we can say here that the Anthropocene ruptures the *sovereignty* of the ‘world’. It makes visible and importantly *composts* the boundaries and processes of exclusion that prop up this fiction, or “truly feigned” (Gaston, 2011, p. 501). It is, in a way much more real than perhaps Hegel thought (c.f. Morton, 2013), this negativity striking back at us. But what is this ‘sovereignty of world’?

Mbembe (2003) explores this negativity through Hegel’s interwoven conceptualization of death, and the process of “becoming subject” (p. 163). More generally, Mbembe argues persuasively that necromantic modernity is founded upon not only this somewhat lofty conceptualisation of ‘the negative’, but specifically, *death*⁴⁹, and it is through a radical fear of death that Hegel frames this process of becoming-subject. This a process whereby “man” negates what we call ‘nature’—linguistically, we are already there by using the term ‘nature’ (Morton, 2007)—by subjecting it (earth, we can say) to the exploitation and exteriorization that the self violently exudes on the other. This is a process foundational to the justification of slavery, colonialization (Atleo, 2004), and the “development of underdevelopment” (Gunder Frank, 1966) (i.e. forced and indentured servitude under conditions of artificial scarcity). This negated part (earth), is transformed by work, struggle, and exploitation, and in such a transformation, the human “creates a world” (and the other

⁴⁹ Furthermore, this fixation on death provides us with a better way to understand what is going on around us than tired and decomposing philosophical discourses of modernity: for instance, “instead of considering reason as the truth of the subject, we can look to other foundational categories that are less abstract and more tactile, such as life and death” (Mbembe, 2003, p. 164). Thus, the focus on the end of the world, and, as we explored in the last chapter, the death of “man”, are important means whereby we can attempt to reckon with something (the Anthropocene) that is pushing modern epistemology into a realm of the unthinkable.

of this: ‘nature’). For Hegel, subjectivity is relational (2001). The creation of a ‘world’, then, is the negation of the grounding of such a ‘world’. As Mbembe (2003) contends, “the human being truly *becomes a subject*⁵⁰—that is, separated from the animal—in the struggle and the work through which he or she confronts death (understood as the violence of negativity). It is through this confrontation with death that he or she is cast into the incessant movement of History” (p. 163). Indeed, we are exposed to our own negativity, and, as we are ourselves earthbound and biological creatures of this earth, we are also forged into subjects (this is the whole point of this process in fact). Thus for Hegel there is no separating the subject from its world. This appears very similar to Rousseau in his discussion of the political versus the natural human (1968). Important for us here, however, is the idea of this separation of ‘world’ from ‘nature’. As we discussed earlier as well, this ties in with Gaston’s (2011) implication that the ‘world’ came from the destruction, in part, of both (the) heaven(s) and the earth. The negative relies on the power of death and undoing (oblivion).

It is in this way that Mbembe (2003, p. 164) can say that

becoming subject therefore supposes upholding the work of death. To uphold the work of death is precisely how Hegel defines the life of the Spirit. The life of the spirit, he says, is not that life which is frightened of death, and spares itself destruction, but that life which assumes death and lives with it. Spirit attains its truth only by finding itself in absolute dismemberment.

Yet we may wish to pause on this thought. What ‘death’ are we speaking of here? And if Hegel’s Spirit finds its truth in dismemberment, might we also be tempted to suggest that this spirit lives in the realm of *infinity*—particularly if death is beyond *time* (Debord, 2012, p. 92, thesis 125)? For, this Spirit, or ideal, is that which negates its own embodiment and

⁵⁰ And, becomes-subject-to

earthboundedness. It is an entity of the sea, of the unchained. It does not spare itself destruction, but, rather, seeks out destruction of the other, which of course is the destruction of that which grounds the self (the abyss). It is a form of living-death, and there is power in that. Indeed, this is why Mbembe suggests that “politics is therefore death that lives a human life” (2003, p.164).

As Mbembe (2003) details, Georges Bataille was critical of Hegel’s conceptualisation of death, and sought to rethink this spectre. Indeed, as Bataille posited, death that *does not* live a human life is something beyond the control of “man”, and something beyond the death described above—something beyond the modern subject’s distortion and *projection*. Death construed this way, is an “*anti-economy*⁵¹” (Mbembe, 2003, p. 164)—“death is therefore the point at which destruction, suppression, and sacrifice constitute so irreversible and radical an expenditure—and expenditure without reserve—that they can no longer be determined as negativity”. This is the death that necromantic modernity fears: *chaos, excess, expansiveness*. This is the death that exists outside meaning, outside *life*: for Bataille, “life itself exists only in bursts and exchanges with death” (Mbembe, 2003, p. 163). And it is this death that Hegel’s Spirit attempts to uphold through dismemberment, through its own oblivion-through-negation. The modern subject, in becoming-subject, flings itself into the void of ‘world’, the absolute negative, in order to both escape and emulate the positive weight of this latter death. Necromantic modernity,

⁵¹ It is in this way, too, that the ‘death’ of the Anthropocene is antithetical to capitalism—the latter of which is of course founded on a certain kind of death. This former death is an extreme problem for capitalism. How this system will respond to global warming, and the manifold destructions it is and will reap, is not clear. However, the cost of mitigation will be much cheaper than the cost of repair in what will come of global warming; this mitigation course, moreover, will in many ways challenge the ethos of capitalism and its exploitative underpinnings. Yet as Žižek (2011) reminds us, there is no reason to believe that capitalism and catastrophism contradict—“disaster capitalism”, for instance, would not be so far removed from the horizon of possibility. Further, and interesting exemplification of this anti-economical nature of death is in the pharmaceutical world of the U.S., where neither healthy nor dead people make money.

thusly, exists in a state of negative death—death without re-creation, without belonging-to the realm and dominion of death (at least in theory).

“Man” attempts to paint himself with the varnish of eternity (Bourriaud, 2016); for Bataille, this translates into a *sovereign world*, and one crucial aspect of sovereignty for him is the refusal to accept the limits imposed upon oneself (or the ‘world’) by the fear of death—to put it another way, for the infinite, absolute subject to accept the idea of *finitude*, earthboundedness, and, ultimately, *mortality*. The sovereign world, argues Bataille, “is the world in which the limit of death is done away with. Death is present in it, its presence defines the world of violence, but while death is *present* it is always there only to be negated, never for anything but that” (Mbembe, 2003, p. 165). As Bataille concludes, the sovereign is “*he who is, as if death were not* [...] He has no more regard for the limits of identity than he does for the limits of death, or rather these limits are the same; he is the transgression of all such limits” (emphasis added).

It is absolutely crucial to our understanding of death, this subtle yet imperiously distinct idea of this figure as *presence*. This underlies the negation of death-*as-other*. It is the precise object of negation that founds the inversive creation of ‘world’ that necromantic modernity is predicated on: *the negation of death, thusly, is the founding moment of politically sovereign life in this constellation*. But of course we must be wary of claims such as these, as is implicated by the supposition “*as if*”. The violence of the Anthropocene, to this epoch, is the violence of the untethering of this “*as if*”, which may be the biggest ‘as if’ axionically present in the epistemological template of modernity (Davis & Turpin, 2015). But it is central to our understanding of the end of the world this precise untethering—for, if, as Mbembe (2003) argues, modernity is founded upon necropower,

then the Anthropocene seriously challenges the sovereignty of the subject, the ‘world’, and the “world” of globalised (and global) capitalism.

No longer can the modern pretend to be a necromancer; he is now revealed as an executioner: we hear the heartbeat through the floorboards. And as Mbembe argues, politics can no longer be considered the “forward dialectical movement of reason”. It can only be traced as a “spiral transgression, as that difference that disorients the very idea of the limit (modernity, capitalism). More specifically, politics is the difference put into play by the violation of a taboo” (2003, p. 165).

IV AB-GRUND

Thus, we can think of the Anthropocene as a boundary event where the boundary of the negative constitutive power and founding of modernity has been usurped, and made visible, and more importantly, *perceivable*. We feel the dissolution of the legitimation of the sovereign world, but also the possibility of it. Apparent, suddenly and with force, is the realization of our own groundlessness. We are made aware of *chaos*, perhaps:

Chaos never died. Primordial uncarved block, sole worshipful monster, inert & spontaneous, more ultraviolet than any mythology (like the shadows before Babylon), the original undifferentiated oneness-of-being still radiates serene as the black pennants of Assassins, random & perpetually intoxicated.

Chaos comes before all principles of order & entropy, it’s neither a god nor a maggot, its idiotic desires encompass & define every possible choreography, all meaningless aethers & phlogistons: its masks are crystallizations of its own facelessness, like clouds (Bey, 1985, p. 3).

This section will deal with Martin Heidegger, a figure inseparable from this topic. If this study sets its historic parameter beginning with the moment of the death of God, Heidegger would suggest that we begin with the death of Christ: he contends that “the appearance and

sacrificial death of Christ mark the beginning of the end of the day of the gods. Night is falling” (1971, p. 89). The ‘world’s’ night is spreading its darkness, and has been doing so since what he refers to as “the united three”—Herakles, Dionysos, and Christ—have left the world. This night has created a void, or as he calls it, an abyss [*Abgrund*] (this is already quoted above).

This abyss is the abyss of the groundlessness of the end of ‘world’. This is the *Abgrund* of the negative. And to Heidegger, for this abyss of the world, that “must be experienced and endured”, there must be those “who reach into the abyss (1971, p. 90). These “men” that may reach down into the abyss are better able to do so precisely because of their mortality, or *finitude*. In another context, he suggests that it is the human’s responsibility (and privilege) to care for beings on earth, and to guide the world through this “destitute time” (1999, p. 13). This is of course very anthropocentric (Morton, 2013). However, important for us is the idea that mortals “remain closer to that absence because they are touched by presence, the ancient name of Being” (Heidegger, 1971, p. 91). But for Heidegger, it is important to understand that this presence is concealed at the same moment that it is present (*lēthē*, the forgetfulness or concealed nature of being). Thus, presence is already absence, and *absence therefore contains within it presence (alēthia*, unconcealedness of being, or truth). And for Heidegger, it is the abyss that “holds and remarks everything”. This abyss, then, bears close resemblance to chaos, that primordial entity that precedes both earth (Gaia) and the transcendental sky (Uruanus)—or as Hakim Bey admonishes, it is the anterior and eternal oneness of being that radiates potentiality, creation, destruction, and death. Thus it is the abyss that holds within it the potential for “an other beginning” that Heidegger describes in *Contributions to philosophy* (1999); for

our contexts, to wit, the Anthropocene represents this precise abyss: the first beginning (modernity) of the West's mythological rupture and emergence (the 'origin' that lays within the Greek philosophical and mythological tradition so many thinkers⁵² outline) whereby the emergence (Urry, 2005) of this 'original' thrust becomes unthinkable, untenable, and impossible. With the Anthropocene, living (politically, spiritually, economically, ecologically, etc. etc.) becomes impossible to continue with as we've construed it. We truly have reached the "last political scene" (Lotringer, 2015). Beginnings, and therefore ends, become eroded by the sands of *alēthia*; a civilization collapses (Scranton, 2015).

As mentioned earlier, this feeling of *solastalgia* contains within it both the possibility of desolation, but also the possibility of solace (and more precisely, both). If we follow Heidegger, and perhaps more so Nietzsche, the idea would be to now become-grounded. Reground ourselves in what, though? The actual earth is changing; human folly has geological power. And in any case, this is highly metaphysical; the Heideggerian ground being the transcendental's basement. Thus far, we have journeyed through some of modern philosophy that has attempted to other the entirety of 'nature', to de'nature' it (or, simply, to 'nature' it), and exploit it. This has in turn created the precise conditions for the tragedy of the sixth extinction, and the plethora of other multifaceted consequences for such philosophical (and physical) abuse of earth. A re-grounding of an other beginning, then, might perhaps start with the goal of becoming-earthbound, of becoming attuned to the earth that quite literally grounds us. This of course is not meant to be a final directive,

⁵² Hegel (1805-6), Nietzsche (2005), and Heidegger (1971; 1999), for example. Also pertinent here is Alfred North Whitehead's infamous quip.

for there are none sufficient for the times ahead (Albrecht, 2012), although some may be better than others (Indigenous metaphysics, for example); moreover, this study is fundamentally concerned with the actions of ‘the West’. But what of this idea of *ground*? Is this idea tenable after the abyss of the Anthropocene? After the erasure of both *topoi* and *u-topoi*?

V AB-SENSE

And how are we to think about this absence? How are we to think about this *end*, as it were? Nancy, much like Heidegger, suggests that we can do this only “in the very opening of the abandonment of sense, as the opening of the world” (1997, p. 3). In this instance, Nancy frames ‘world’ as that which signifies itself as “dwelling, haven, habitation, safeguard, intimacy, community, subjectivity: as the signifier of a proper and present signified, the signifier of the proper and the present as such”; this is perhaps the more generous reading of Heidegger. Yet he is careful to critique the German thinker as well on his conceptualisation and employment of the term “the Open” (c.f. 1971, 1999; c.f. Agamben, 2004), and posits that “the ‘open’ is neither the vague quality of an indeterminate yawning nor that of a halo of sentimental generosity”. It is “tightly woven and narrowly articulated, it constitutes the structure of sense *qua* sense of the world”. This “abandonment of sense” thus coincides with the ending of the possibility of ‘world’, as we have defined it above, and moves Heidegger out of the shadow of correlationist and anthropocentric thinking (Morton, 2013; Agamben, 1999a; Meillassoux, 2016). Here, then, we must speak not only of *Abgrund*, but of *Ab-sense*: the abandonment of the *possibility* of the negation of existence-for-being, and of grounding-attunement. This is the “opening

of the world” in Nancy’s sense, whereby it is, in addition to Heidegger’s abyss—which speaks of an abyss of the grounding-attunement of (an overly privileged human) being—the abyss of Being’s groundedness to the earth, in the “vague quality of an indeterminate” transcendence (i.e. the modern subject). *Ab-sense* then indicates the “structure of sense qua sense of the world” that the Anthropocene is showing us. This *Ab-sense* is what is left of earth after a ‘world’; it is the wilderness of spirit towards which Being no longer experiences *rootedness*, for there is no metaphysical ‘ground’ which to attune-to, least not for the *anthropos*. Indeed, to quote again Nancy:

There is no longer any world: no longer a *mundus*, a *cosmos*, a composed and complete order (from) within which one might find a place, a dwelling, and the elements of an orientation. Or again, there is no longer the “down here” of a world one could pass through toward a beyond or outside of this world. There is no longer any Spirit of the world, nor is there any history before whose tribunal one could stand. In other words, there is no longer any sense of the world.

There is no longer the thinkability of a ‘world’, and therefore, of even a “composed and complete order”, of an orientation, or crucially of a place to stand (grounding) (Morton, 2013). The peaceful dominion of the Holocene, where dwelling, warmth, and refuge abounded, has ended. No longer do we have the physical-philosophic luxury of a stable space-time environment, and no longer can we map out the cycles of the earth to predict and ultimately control it⁵³. We are thrust into unknowability, and the radical unthinkability of chaos.

The violent ontological cartography of modernity no longer creates reality (Baudrillard, 1988) in a sovereign, legitimate, way. This is not to say that there aren’t very

⁵³ Indeed, interesting work might suggest that the philosophy of Plato, and therefore of modern philosophy more generally, could not have taken place (or have looked the same) had not the Holocene been what it was for us. Put differently, how has the Holocene grounded human thought, culture, civilisation, etc.? How does geology add another layer to discourse?

real and readily oppressive ‘zombie categories’ (Beck & Rutherford, 1999) that still linger. But the Anthropocene is a process whereby this epoch is composted; as such, these regimes of signifying sense are slowly becoming *unthinkable*, and the growing catastrophic wake of global warming will only push this process further along. For, if our metaphysical moorings of space and place are untethered, we can no longer locate and fix ourselves in the unfolding of the universe; apprehension, anxiety, and paranoia may by their selves dissolve philosophy (see Bourriaud, 2016). Being so unmoored, and thrust into the wilderness of spirit, much of how modernity makes sense of the world no longer becomes thinkable. How, for example, are we to legitimate anthropocentrism—as shown above, something so fundamental to this epoch—when we must replace our ‘natural’ faculties with robotic ones? What does the advent of the cyborg, or the reassertion of anarcho-primitivism suggest about the current state of the human? Further, are we not all horrified at the destruction of our planet, and thus ourselves and other beings—in a sense, at the visibility of the abyss of modernity—or, as stated previously in a footnote, has the self alienation of humankind truly “reached such a degree that it can experience its own destruction as an aesthetic please of the first order”? (Mishra, 2017, p. 25). Perhaps we can even say here that the Anthropocene represents the end of the world solely for this reason.

What this *is* to say, however, is that the concepts, ideas, and words determined in this regime of sense that is ending (such as history, philosophy, politics, art, world), are not reality. The ontological moorings are eroding, which ground the entirety of our world (globalised system of dominance and order, also earth), and to which being strikes root and stands. Thus, when Nancy (1997, p. 4) proclaims the end of the world is the end of *mundus*,

this cannot mean that we are confronted merely with the end of a certain “conception” of the world, and that we would have to go off in search of

another one or to restore another one (or the same). It means, rather, that there is no longer any assignable signification of “world”, or that “world” is subtracting itself, bit by bit, from the entire regime of signification available to us [...] One must attempt to envisage in all of its scope—which may well be infinite, namely, infinite in finitude—this *end of the sense of the world*, which is the *end of the world of sense* in which we had—and still have, day by day—all the points of reference we need in order to continue to manage our significations.

And is this not precisely the destructive (deconstructive) thrust of the Anthropocene? To make ‘sense’ oblivion? Construed thusly, this is also Morton’s (2013) main argument of *Hyperobjects*: that the sudden awareness of these hyperobjects, such as global warming, or even *earth itself* (the actual earth) represent or ‘signify’ the end of signification as such; aesthetic distance is dead (Morton, 2013). Additionally, this is a fundamental distinction Nancy makes between his and Heidegger’s (e.g. 1999) philosophy. This thesis has not the room to delve into this issue, but perhaps the Anthropocene can as discussed here be regarded as the answer to Walter Benjamin’s problem of divine violence (1986; Agamben, 1999b).

Ab-sense is the much more pressing violation the Anthropocene brings to our attention as opposed to *Abgrund*: this thrust may truly move beyond metaphysics. Heidegger came close to solving the problem this violation alerted us to—the question of *ends*, to put it simply (c.f. 1999)—but could not escape the transcendental, metaphysical, or human (*anthropos*) (Morton, 2013; Agamben, 1999a). Heidegger, despite describing the radical groundlessness of the abyss of ‘world’, nevertheless is beholden to its negative necessity, and is still “unwilling to step outside the human-world correlation” (Morton, 2013, p. 13). The implications of this line of questioning, moreover, end the possibility of transcendentalist philosophy/anthropology (Kant), transcendentalist phenomenology (Husserl), and transmetaphysical “leaps”, or “crossings” (Heidegger, 1999). Indeed, as

Morton (2013) claims, hyperobjects (like global warming) “end the possibility of transcendental leaps ‘outside’ physical reality”: what is “experience”, even, in the “absence of anything meaningful like a ‘world’ at all”? (p. 3). This is why thinking through Heidegger’s philosophy in the Anthropocene becomes highly problematic as well: as Morton posits, the German thinker is a “correlationist who asserts that without Dasein, it makes no sense whatsoever to talk of the truth of things, which for him implies their very existence”; then, quoting Heidegger: “Only as long as Dasein is, ‘is there’ [gibt es] being...it can neither be said that beings are, nor that they are not”. Ultimately, says Morton, he is unable to step outside of this anthropocentric human-world correlation (2013, p. 13). Indeed, as Vattimo (2004, p. 19) says, “what is the meaning of Heidegger’s philosophy for our present?” To put it another way, “what are we to do with Heidegger?”

Yet we are here stuck with this violation of modern metaphysics, this end of the world and all that it represents, without an answer:

it is the “end of the world”, but we do not know in what sense. It is not merely the end of an epoch of the world or the end of an epoch of sense because it is the end of an epoch—an epoch as long as the “Occident” and as long as “history” itself—that has entirely dominated both “world” and “sense”, and that has extended this determination over the entire *world*. Indeed, we cannot even think of what is happening to us as a modulation of the same world of sense (Nancy, 1997, p. 6).

Plato, especially if one follows Alfred North Whitehead’s reading of him⁵⁴, has finally and truly died. There is no world, no *republic* to which we are to order and lord over (or, probably, be lorded over). We are to ask, in leu of an answer, something that “already precedes us in our obscurity, much younger and much older than that obscurity: *how our world makes sense*” (Nancy, 1997, p. 8; emphasis added). To ask this question is to accept

⁵⁴ i.e. the idea that all of western philosophy can be found in the footnotes of Plato (1979).

our entrance into the wilderness of spirit, especially and precisely because of the end of the Holocene; it is to endure the abandonment of being (Heidegger, 1971; 1999) and the abandonment of sense (Nancy, 1997), and to be affected by the affective flow of this apocalypse. It is to allow the Anthropocene to compost us⁵⁵. To put it another way, “as long as the world was essentially in relation to some other, it could have sense. But the end of the world is that there is no longer this essential relation, and there is no longer essentially (that is, existentially) anything but the world ‘itself’. Thus, the world *no longer has* a sense, but it *is* sense” (1997, p. 8, emphasis in original). Representation, and more specifically, aesthetic distance, is dead, and the Kantian gap between the phenomena and the thing becomes strange (Morton, 2013)⁵⁶. More to the point, as Derrida (through Gaston) has shown us above, without the constitutive relation to the other, there can be no world.

As Haraway intones, “I think our job is to make the Anthropocene as short/thin as possible and to cultivate with each other in every way imaginable epochs to come that can replenish refuge. Right now, the earth is full of refugees, human and not, without refuge” (2015, p. 160). If we are to attempt to stay with this trouble, then we must strive to ask this incommensurable question: how does our world make sense?

VI ABSENCE

Absence, then, is here regarded as the outgrowth of

⁵⁵ Rather than us compost the Anthropocene (Sutcliffe, 2015).

⁵⁶ If there is to be an “end of philosophy”, Nancy asserts that it is in “How the end of the world of sense opens the praxis of the sense of the world” (1997, p. 9). Clearly responding to Heidegger here, Nancy opens up thought to and end of history that would appear to correspond with the limits placed upon us by the Anthropocene.

- 1) the end of ‘world’ (both *Abgrund* and *Ab-sense*); and
- 2) the negation of earth (and our earthboundedness, and the possibility of such) inherent in making-world, means that being is now exposed to a radical groundlessness of Being—this is the *wilderness of spirit*; whereby,
- 3) The absence of the presence of ‘world’, as a *negative presence* (or ‘*absence*’ in the negative sense of oblivion), reveals (*apokalypsis*) the *positive presence of absence* (or ‘*absence*’ in the positive sense of *finitude*, *death*, and *life*).

This presence of absence (in the latter sense described above) constitutes the “aesthetics of absence” at the core of this thesis. Absence, perceived and thought after the end of the world (and of course *because* of the end of the world) should be conceptualised as *positive*, and importantly, *not as the end of being* (oblivion)⁵⁷.

If this study falls within the realm of “necrophilosophy”, then perhaps it can be an amendment to MacCormack’s (2012, p. 115) description of it:

Necrophilosophy describes the aspects of post-structuralism and the posthuman that resonate around (and mourn) the death ‘of...’. Perceived as benevolent or malevolent, necrophilosophy focuses on what is lost. It is conceptual – deferred to an abstraction that is compelled to return continuously to the condition of the subject who mourns their own potential absence as one of the casualties of post-philosophy. Necrophilosophy laments the loss of subjectivity[...] and also decides how we lost that self. Death of the subject invokes creations of multiple subject positions and future subjects, but persistent in the lament is the focus remaining on self-realization, representation, and truth as absence or spectacle, simultaneous with a certain emptiness of the multiple.

⁵⁷ It may be, that like Agamben (1993a) shows, this new being (or *whatever* [qualunque] being) or thrust of absence and the wilderness of spirit for our work here, will not have a name. This may be hard for modern philosophy and scholarship more generally to come to terms with, but for now we must start with this absence, this lack.

This description, while not necessarily fitting of the nuances of this thesis, is quite close to what I am conducting here. Yet again, it is trapped into the logic of thinking of absence = loss, or lack, or lamentable. As she continues, “Absence is necrophilosophical because it mourns loss, concretizing that which has been lost even in celebrating its absence, and *discursively indulging in loss nihilistically sacrificially*” (MacCormack, 2012, p. 115; emphasis added). If we appear to be “celebrating” this loss of the presence of ‘world’, it is only because we are celebrating the possible end to the violent process of negating-for-being, and certainly *not* the loss of life. Necrophilosophy does not equal necrophilia; as we covered earlier, necromancy is what is being attacked here.

The apocalypse of the Anthropocene is not just an apocalyptic script, despite the very real and manifold crises, suffering, and bloodshed that will come of it (and already has come of it). The apocalypse of the Anthropocene reveals the beautiful, and sublime terror, and supreme wilderness of spirit⁵⁸.

But what do we mean when we speak of finitude, death, and life in the same sentence?

⁵⁸ This is not to say that I do not think that we are all (unequally, disproportionately) going to suffer immensely, and be forced to reckon with death, change, and chaos. I think in fact to not bear this thought is to probably misunderstand the Anthropocene and all of its deadly ramifications. However, to avoid the apocalyptic script is to avoid the discursive, cultural, and religious traditions of whose idealism has in many ways prefigured this disastrous ecological event.

don't fear the reaper: death, the infinite, & the immanent

As astrophysics and quantum physics have shown us, the universe is expanding at an accelerating rate, and shows no sign of slowing down, despite the theoretical assumptions this phenomena violates (specifically and particularly in general relativity). And indeed, one recent study argues for the impossibility of the big bang as well as the 'big crunch'—the descriptor for the idea that the universe will expand massively and exponentially, followed by the same process but in reverse (Ali & Das, 2015; see also Das & Bhaduri, 2015). This ends the mathematical and cosmological possibility of universal singularities, origins, and ends⁵⁹. Further, this study destroys time as we understand it: for if there was no beginning nor eventual end to the universe, then it becomes infinitely ageless. This thesis of course exists (mostly) outside of the realm of quantum mechanics, but it is interesting nevertheless, especially when considering Heidegger's friendship with Heisenberg and the complex philosophical-scientific thought taking place around the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th century (Heelan, 2013). What of this wilderness of spirit? What of being, particularly when infinitude is stolen away from the thinkability of it? If we are to dedicate our thought, and ultimately survival in this thrust towards finitude, what of infinity? What of death, and what of (parenthetically) the universe? What, if anything, does the Anthropocene mean to this vast, potentially age- and time-less cosmos?

Additionally, how can we begin to think of absence as positive, rather than negative? Isn't this a paradox? As Nancy (1997) claims, *finitude is not a privation*; if

⁵⁹ Unless, as the universe expands, galaxies become stretched so far apart that the fabric of the universe tears, thus creating many universes from the expansion of one. But even this idea goes beyond the aforementioned teleological understanding of the universe, as the universe we dwell in currently could have itself been the product of a tear in an antecedent universe, and so on.

finitude were such, “it could not be conceived as the structure or “essence” of being or existence” (p. 29). Finitude is not a negation, it is what is negated in the Hegelian sense; finitude is, as Weber contends, the futility to which all creatures are subject, but also of their existential *possibility*. But if we stretch this term ‘futile’ to its Latin origins, it means literally to pour, or to be emptied in an easy way. To put it in context a bit more, we can say that to be ‘futile’ is to be *leaky*. Yet this is precisely what *finitude* does for the modern subject: if the positive weight of the Anthropocene—of *absence*, more specifically—pushes our being to crack (or “quake”, for Timothy Morton), the sense of infinitude pours out. Being entrances the essence, as he says elsewhere (p. 31):

In Spinoza, this is called *conatus*, in Kant, *a being of ends* (“man”), in Hegel, the work of the negative [or becoming-subject], in Heidegger, *Ereignis*. In each case, and taking all differences into account, it signifies at least this: that sense does not add itself to being, does not supervene upon being, but is the opening of its very supervenience, of being-toward-the-world.

Finitude is used here by Nancy as a foil to argue that “there can be no thought here of privation pure and simple—of being as pure privation or of an existent in absolute, and absolutely private, privation.” (p.30). Ultimately, Nancy shows that “*privation annuls itself*”; thusly, in thinking through the idea of finitude, we can say that it affirms itself. Moreover, to think being-finite = being-deprived, or as being-private, would only make sense if we think of being-as-infinite, in its being, reason, ground, and truth, which of course is not the case. The Anthropocene, and the end of modernity limit this being-infinite: there is no reason, ground, nor truth to the modern subject. Nancy: “this infinite being is [...] posited as pure, absolute, consistency-in-itself, as the pure immanence of a pure transience that, itself deprived of *esse* [essence without existence], does not even go so far as to take place. *At bottom, this is the summary of the history of God or of Being as supreme*

being” (p. 30-31, emphasis added). Yet, God is dead, and so is the modern subject. Finitude is here asserted at the same time as infinitude is rendered purely metaphysical, lacking the emphasis on the ‘physical’—on existence.

Indeed, much like existentialism⁶⁰, we begin with existence, not essence. *Esse*, posits Nancy, “drags *essentia* into existence before it is annulled in its immanence, before it has closed itself in on its nowhere [here we may translate this as *anterior to ‘world’*⁶¹], therefore, ‘before’ it has become ‘essence’. ‘Before’ the not-taking-place of a world, *esse* ‘constitutes’ the taking-place of the world, this world here” (p. 31). Being, suggests Nancy, ultimately does not act as a deprivation of essence, but rather, essence does not take place. This is what he means by *being entrances the essence*, and more to the point, what he calls existing. “Singular being, as essence, is essence “existed, *ek-sisted*, expelled from essence itself, disencysted of its essentiality [...] before the cyst has even formed” (p. 32). The essence referred to here is one of *movement*. It is one that does not lay still as absolute, ideal, or metaphysical. It is essence that both affects and is affected by *itself*. This is summed up when Nancy argues that “‘*Finitude*’ names the essential affection that *ek-sists the essence*: the essence is deprived here of its essentiality, but this privation is a privation of nothing”—this privation is a privation of the Hegelian Spirit, of *infinitude*, and thus does not dismember itself. Finitude, put another way, is not what grounds being, it is the wilderness wherein being *may exist* (and *ek-sist*). It is, to answer Nietzsche, the climbing onto land, the dragging of one’s own body (2005, pp. 9-10). Finitude is here unhinged from

⁶⁰ Existentialism, in many ways, was one of the most corrosive philosophic, literary, and artistic movements to modernity (Barrett, 1990)

⁶¹ Or as *mask* (Agamben, 2004)

infinity, from the absolute, and from the hierarchy of metaphysical thought, and from the faceless subjectivity of Hobbes:

“Finitude” should therefore be attributed to what carries its *end* as its own, that is, what is affected by its end (limit, cessation, beyond-essence) as by its end (goal, finishing, completion)—and is *affected* by it not as by a limit imposed from elsewhere [“man”, God, sovereignty] (from the outside of a supposedly essential, infinite immanence of the essence to itself, from the outside of an *essentia* absolute and null), but as by a trance, transcendence, or passing away so originary that the origin has already come apart there, the origin, too, it first of all entranced and abandoned (Nancy, 1997, p. 31).

It is here where we can properly speak of *the movement of the earth deprived* [ek-sisted⁶²] of ‘world’ without going back to Newtonian cosmology or to Paracelsian metaphysics (Foucault, 1994)—without going back to Christianity (Keller, 1996; Gaston, 2011). ‘Movement’ here, is the movement of finitude, the movement of the Deleuzian *rhythm* of the passing of itself-by-itself (see Agamben, 1999a; Berardi, 2012). The earth is finite. The human is finite. The ‘world’ is infinite. The modern subject, that creature at its end in the Anthropocene, is most certainly infinite. Kant’s *anthropos* withers away (Foucault, 2008; Deleuze, 1983; Derrida, 1969), and melts into *thick* air: the air of finitude, of positive being: we are no longer a creature of the sky (Haraway, 2008; 2016), but a creature of the mud—this carries with it the implication that we are no longer creatures ruled by ends imposed upon us by teleology or eschatology, but can begin to dwell in the finitudinal beauty of our own ends, *as ends*.

⁶² Ek-sisted here meaning a proximate of Heidegger’s description of it, where this term denotes the “ecstatic living in the proximity of being [...] to stand outside of [oneself], to withdraw from the immediate reality of the *world* that surrounds [one]” (Pivčević, 2014, p. 110; emphasis added). Here, then, we can speak of the apocalypse (unveiling) of the ‘world’ from the earth—a withdrawal of the ‘world’ at the behest of the positive emergence of the wilderness of spirit, of *absence*.

This movement, this finitude, to push this further, reeks of death. Yet how do we now theorize this? As Bataille says, death is beyond meaning (Mbembe, 2003, p. 164), but as Nancy adds, it is beyond finitude, and concomitantly so. Further, and perhaps paradoxically, it is both infinite, “because it does not have its end *in* itself”, and as such does not contain an end—because it is infinitely affected by that end”; and immanent, because death is the always already of existence: death is birth, as we see in Hegel, Plato, and through Heidegger (Nancy, 1997, p. 32). Indeed,

If death comes to punctuate all of philosophy (from Plato to Hegel and Heidegger) as the truth itself, as the phenomenon of truth, this is—in the first sense, a metaphysically restrained sense—because death is the only presentation of essence as essence. For this reason, philosophy is marked as deadly—and the end of philosophy, in the exhaustion of its sense as sense, is a suicide programmed into the Socratic tragedy⁶³.

Ultimately, contends Nancy, death should be theorized as not a “birth to a beyond-the-world, but simply to this world here. Less a ‘being-for-death’, or a ‘being-towards-death’, than ‘death’ as the *being-toward-infinity*⁶⁴” (p. 32, emphasis added). Thus death is in itself “infinitely perfect”—it is itself always complete (or, more specifically, infinitely incomplete, and thus finitely infinite in its scope; it is unending, yet it has no ‘beginning’ nor ‘end’) and, importantly, like the universe without the big bang or big crunch, *beyond time* (see also Debord, 2012, p. 92, thesis 125). It exists beyond meaning, to go back to Bataille, and it both does and does not exist in flux: it is immanent, yet it is somewhat of a

⁶³ Plato, in *Phaedo*, outlines Socrates thought before he is to be executed thusly: “Well truly, all I say myself is only from hearsay; however, what I happen to have heard I don’t mind telling you. Indeed, it is perhaps most proper that one who is going to depart and take up his (sic) abode in that world should think about the life over there and say what sort of life we imagine it to be: for what else could one do with the time till sunset?” (1956).

⁶⁴ It is here where we begin to see the figure of the necromancer quake under our growing awareness of the death the Anthropocene unveils; for is it not this precise being-toward-infinity that the modern subject strives toward? This striving, this being-toward-infinity as the work of the modern subject, is an area of inquiry that would be quite useful in this context.

pure truth, as Nancy suggests (1997, p. 32). And importantly, devoid of sense. It is for this reason that Nancy says “it is exactly due to this that God, as such a being, is dead” (p. 32). Death is infinite, but because it is also immanent, *it is not motionless*. It is an “*infinite finitude*”⁶⁵, as Nancy implicitly suggests, and, as such, renders meaningless out attempt to control both time and space. And as Nietzsche understood, the death of God thus coincides with the attempt by the modern subject to usurp control over both time and space, the results of the (failure of) which, as examined above, lead to a dire situation.

Death, as construed here, and its seeping finitude, decomposes the modern subject. Being no longer makes sense to us. Hegel’s idea of creating-‘world’ via the negation of, essentially, death, has, for a while, created a subject, and an impressive ‘world’ to speak of. The negative is striking back, and with Anthropocentric vengeance. We should understand, however, that death, as finitude, also does not suggest privation, at least if we stretch this concept beyond the most private (or, personal) of privations. Death constitutes a constellation of existences, of multiplicity and groundingness, of having-become-earthbound, of liminal alterity. To quote at length Nancy’s beautiful formulation of this:

Sense is thus the property of finitude qua existence of the essence. Sense is: that existence *should be* without essence, that it should be toward that which it *essentially* is not, its own existence. Toward death, if you like, but where “death” = the nullity of essence, existence. In other words, *toward* death would mean toward life, if “life” did not refer too simply to the contrary of death (immediacy as opposed to, and in the final analysis identical with, infinite self-mediation. Hence, *toward* existence.

Nancy goes on to reconstitute and ‘play’ with the “neither word nor concept” of “sense” (p. 34). While supremely interesting, it falls outside of the parameters of this thesis; what

⁶⁵ Perhaps the only one (although this is not in the purview of this thesis).

is important from the above passage, however, is the idea that existence *can be* deprived of essence-as-constituted, if as Nancy argues, this privation is a privation of nothing. Existence (and being) can be oriented (and is always-already oriented, whether we like it or no), towards death, which is represented by Haraway as *mud*, or by Bataille as *excess*: death for the latter figure is seen as the “putrification of life, the stench that is at once the source and repulsive condition of life”. It is decomposition, which is a complex (but ‘natural’) process whereby life is a process, or *movement*. Bataille: “although [death] destroys what was to be, obliterates what was supposed to continue being, and reduces to nothing the individual who takes it, *death does not come down to the pure annihilation of being*. Rather, it is essentially self-consciousness” (Mbembe, 2003, p. 164). But this idea of self-consciousness is a tricky one, because with Nancy, this smacks too much of Hegel. Perhaps it would be better, if not more problematic, to suggest that death is simply existence, and shared existence at that:

Existence is opposed—it is this exposition itself—not to a risk that comes from outside (it is already outside, it is being-outside), not to an adventure in the element of the foreign (it is already being-foreign, being-estranged), in the mode of Hegelian consciousness (which, however, has *also* contributed to the modern history of our finitude): it is exposed to and by the *ex* that it is, exposed to and by this swooning of the essence, which is older and more affirmative than any constitution of essence, and which constitutes existence, that is, which throws toward the world, toward itself insofar as it is being-*toward*-the-world, and toward the world insofar as the world is the configuration or constellation of being-toward in the plural singularity.

Nancy delves here partly into Heidegger, but proposes a ‘world’ that grounds the possibility of *existence qua existence*, a *wilderness of spirit* in the full, ecological, and composted (Haraway) sense. Being becomes grounded in death, in existence. It is from here that we can begin to build a theory of relational co-existence, and of adding the figure of *death as finitude* from *absence* into the theorization of thinkers such as Donna Haraway.

We are pushing the modern epistemological, ontological, and axiological constraints upon thought to unthinkability.

Indeed, this chapter ends with Foucault, whose project again comes to bear upon this study in a massive way, and we must ask ourselves the same question he asked in *Dits et écrits* (1994, as cited in Agamben, 1999a, p. 221): “Does not the entire theory of the subject have to be reformulated once knowledge, instead of *opening onto the truth of the world*, is rooted in the ‘errors’ of life?” (*death*) (see also Mbembe, 2003). How can we make sense of being, and specifically the modern subject, after the end of the world? Or, as Agamben puts it, “what is the nature of a knowledge that has as its correlate no longer the opening to a world and to truth, but only life and its errancy?” (p. 221). These questions lead us to “entirely unexplored terrain”; namely, the earth.

What are we left with, if we are left with simply the earth—"this entirely unexplored terrain"? Life, death, and even maybe *love* become the focus of politics (Mbembe, 2003; Badiou, 2012), but, as Foucault posits, "At the limit, life...is what is capable of error...With man, *life reaches a living being who is never altogether in his place*, a living being who is fated 'to err' and 'to be mistaken'" (as cited in Agamben, 1999a, p. 220). Can what was (or still is) the modern subject submit to this? It is not likely that this is in "man's" toolkit, so to speak. Domination, a will to power, and exploitation have been the mainstays of this creature (Vattimo, 2004)—or at least to the extent that we have entered into the Anthropocene, and *continue to live in denial*. Not that I am in the position of forgiveness, but hopefully at this point we may at least *understand* more why we are in such a spot.

And yet, ideally, if the arguments herein prove at least somewhat relevant, we can no longer hold on to our past, at least not in the *Historical* way (Agamben, 1993b; c.f. Bogost, 2015). For indeed, if "life and its errancy"—finitude, to put it differently—constitute our existence, and if we are to allow ourselves to *see* death, perhaps we can start to see the un-see-able: i.e. ourselves.

Indeed, as this thesis has argued, that which has been rendered unseeable should not be thought of as a non-space of waste and exclusion, but as something positive and generative. Standing atop the summit of Cape Lookout with my partner, an old growth rainforest hike mid-way along the coast of Oregon, we could not help but gasp in sublime awe at what we saw: a thick, impenetrable fog or mist subsumed the entirety of the view we might have seen on a less overcast and precipitous day. We could hear the waves

crashing against the shore hundreds of metres below us, but could see nothing beyond the edge of the trail. It was at this precise moment when it came to us that what we were viewing was not ‘nothing’ in the sense exponentiated above. It was not a negative void, a vacuum of meaning, substance, or Being. It was alive. Electric, visceral, and vibrant. It was not simply a lack – in this case a lack of view – but rather an abundance. I could see or imagine vast shapes floating through this weighty nothing-ness; ghosts of yesterday, today, and tomorrow, all phantoms of potentiality – invisible rag pickers of History with an ancient gravitas. It felt like, as Bourriaud suggested earlier, that ghosts were indeed all around us. We were trying to penetrate their earthly and mystical veneer; they were trying to penetrate our human-shaped masks.



This experience has haunted me for months now, and helped me realize that intolerable non-space of potentiality, possibility, and phantoms that terrifies the modern. Indeed, as Agamben (1999a) suggests, if we give autonomy to potentiality—and to ourselves as wanderers in the wilderness of spirit—we may be able to dwell between Being and Nothing, and, as the Italian philosopher suggests, “[e]mancipating itself from Being and non-Being alike, potentiality thus creates its own ontology” (p. 259). We move towards a relationship with not a sense of ‘world’, but towards dwelling in the ontology of potentiality—or, put another way, we *undo ontology*. And this, for our purposes, is the emancipation of nihilism.

This reeks of death, but also of creation. Yet, it would appear to be beyond Power – at least as it applies to the realm of “man”: this *chaos*, this underlying fabric of (un)doing, is truly beyond *politics*. It is a space of enchantment (Bennett, 1997; 2001), and is that which has risen up to usurp modernity through the boundary event of the Anthropocene (Haraway, 2015; Clark, 2016) making space for what Haraway calls the Chthulucene (2016a), which she describes as the

diverse earth-wide tentacular powers and forces and collected things with names like Naga, Gaia, Tangaroa (burst from water-full Papa), Terra, Haniyasu-hime, Spider Woman, Pachamama, Oya, Gorgo, Raven, A'akuluujjusi, and many many more. “My” Chthulucene, even burdened with its problematic Greek-ish tendrils, entangles myriad temporalities and spatialities and myriad intra-active entities-inassemblages—including the more-than-human, other-than-human, inhuman, and human-as-humus (Haraway, 2015, p. 160).

It is this void that acts as an opening to the Open, and as such, threatens the ontological hegemony of modernity. This type of void exposes the architecture of modernity, and, following Hundertwasser, shows how we have been “painting with straight-edged rulers” (1958). It is chaos that shows us that

History occurs as a succession of conjunctions and disjunctions without origin or end. For Machiavelli, political action occupies a *desert*, the perpetual site of ‘beginnings’. Thus, in the film of the same name, the ‘Matrix’, in which the simulacra governing human life are generated, hails the protagonist Neo with the words: ‘Welcome to the desert of the real’. This is what defines the void in our age: society is a simulacrum, decisions are made in a vague *elsewhere*, all political action seems in vain... The subject at the centre of contemporary history is politically irresponsible, stripped of the potential to influence the world and caught up in a sense of emptiness which – *contra* Althusser – cannot be identified as the site of ‘beginnings’. To be able to act then, one must view the real as a *void*. All political action starts here, in a dead zone (Bourriaud, 2016, p.35).

Modernity epochalizes itself, and all of History, into neat and increasingly sanctimonious chunks (Carvounas, 2002). It attempts to contain, control, and curtail life, death, and History by focussing on origin, teleology, and ultimately, eschatology. It bookends Time, and places ‘past’ and ‘future’ as, respectively and almost exclusively, the building blocks of the present, and the vision of perfectibility and ultimate order (Kant, 1784). In this sense, we can say thusly that *chaos is the meta-exform of modernity*. As Bourriaud (2016, p. 28), the “expulsion-machine” of modernity is now more than ever violently “hunting down *exforms*”. Is chaos, this meta-exform, simply too much for this epoch to suppress?

And it is this chaos that now comes to define our lives, and our ability to dwell upon earth. Indeed, what we are dealing with, under the sign of the Anthropocene, is nothing less than the end of...what? An era? An epoch? A civilization? As claimed in the introduction, the Anthropocene *is* the end of modernity. It ends the Greek-European-Christian-Platonic-Patriarchal domination of earth; Holocentric thought unravels (Morton, 2017), and we are left in the dark, without home (hooks, 2000). I have titled this thesis the *Aesthetics of Absence* because I think we are in the process of moving from imaginative cartographic ontogenesis to the wilderness of spirit, where perception is the tool with which

to navigate chaos. Indeed, aesthetics is based upon the sense of feeling. This contrasts with the imagination, which, as we have noted, is founded upon sight. The Anthropocene is something that is *felt* rather than *seen* (Morton, 2013; Clark, 2016), and cannot itself be looked at directly: it exceeds us on that level, and is truly that which is *un-see-able*. So then, how are we to feel through the Anthropocene?

Let us now briefly venture into our last exploration of the Anthropocene, prefigured by one final question: if the Anthropocene unveils simultaneously the absence of negative presence, and the presence of positive absence, we are left with both an ending and an opening. How are we to reach down into our abyss—and how are we to attempt to grasp the truth of the Anthropocene from this abyss? In our journey into the wilderness of spirit, perhaps we may become *enchanted*.

As Jane Bennett describes, enchantment can be thought of as a state or space of wonder where chronological time and movement is suspended (2001, p. 5):

Thoughts, but also limbs (to augment Fisher's account), are brought to rest, even as the senses continue to operate, indeed, in high gear. You notice new colors, discern details previously ignored, hear extraordinary sounds, as familiar landscapes of sense sharpen and intensify. The world comes alive as a collection of singularities. Enchantment includes, then, a condition of exhilaration or acute sensory activity. To be simultaneously transfixed in wonder and transported by sense, to be both caught up and carried away—enchantment is marked by this odd combination of somatic effects.

In short, the Anthropocene makes us *feel differently*. This, of course, is predicated on massive scalar change that will be destructive to a vast majority of species (perhaps even the human one). Yet in thinking towards the future, and this 21st century, the way we think about these changes will significantly and critically effect how we may manage them (or at least mitigate). Further, on the other side of enchantment, is *fear*, and there is nothing to say that the current rise in xenophobia, fascism, machismo, and the life of the self

contrasted even more vehemently and oppositionally to the other (Vattimo, 2004). However, as Bennett furthers, “fear cannot dominate if enchantment is to be, for the latter requires active engagement with objects of sensuous experience; it is a state of interactive fascination, not fall-to-your-knees awe. Unlike enchantment, overwhelming fear will not becalm and intensify perception but only shut it down” (2001, p 7). And in many ways, this is the difference between absence as negative and lack, and devoid of Being (fear), and an absence that has presence, and is generative, and positive (enchantment). Perhaps in this way fear and enchantment can be seen as two of the strongest affective dimensions of *apokalypsis*. Fear, as exemplified here, roughly translates into the Christian-Western notion of ‘apocalypse’ and the end of the world (Keller, 1996), whereas enchantment calls for a deeper, more bodily, and more earthbound engagement with the end of our world. For indeed, to succumb to fear in these times is the gravest of our dangers. Haraway’s call to “stay with the trouble” (2016) is more true than ever, for we will surely be defeated if we do not do this. Bennett:

The mood I’m calling enchantment involves, in the first instance, a surprising encounter, a meeting with something that you did not expect and are not fully prepared to engage. Contained within this surprise state are (1) a pleasurable feeling of being charmed by the novel and as yet unprocessed encounter and (2) a more unheimlich (uncanny) feeling of being disrupted or torn out of one’s default sensory-psychic-intellectual disposition.

“In the first instance”, the Anthropocene is indeed a “surprising encounter, a meeting with something that you did not expect”, and most pertinent, “are not fully prepared to engage”. The second point describing the unheimlich (uncanny) affect of “being disrupted or torn out of one’s default sensory-psychic-intellectual disposition” is without a doubt a most stringent characteristic of global warming; however, the first part of this surprise state (pleasure) is certainly not something anyone would likely associate with the Anthropocene.

However, I think we need not ascribe completely with Bennett's assertion: we may feel 'charmed' by this encounter, if by charm we mean the more original or occult reading of an affective rhythm of spell or incantation. Yet regardless, to be charmed takes a courage and a love of life (Bennett, 2001, p. 4) that is not so easy a task: "What's to love about an alienated existence on a dead planet?"

What indeed? If nothing else, the end of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st in the 'West' showcase a vast, molecular, and overwhelming affective flow of widespread cynicism, and perhaps especially of the political nature. Jane Bennett (1997) suggest that the root of this paralytic political cynicism stems from radical ontological cynicism. The defined reality, especially after the "end of history" constitutes an almost unimaginably tense blockade on social change, and cultural (re)imagining(s). Even Jameson's infamous dictum—"it's easier to imagine the end of the world than the end of capitalism" (2003)—feels passé. Between Nietzsche, Heidegger, Weber, Freud, and the Frankfurt School on the one hand, and Kierkegaard, Kafka, Dada, Debord, Camus, and Sartre on the other, it would appear that modernity festers as if the very corpse of meaning, enchantment, and all that makes life worth living had been slaughtered and left to bleed out. Adorno, during the middle of the last century, after the shift to consumer capitalism at the end of WWII, would quip that "life no longer lives" (2005, p.1).

Yet as Paul Celan proclaims, there are still songs to sing beyond mankind.

We may perhaps conclude with this passage from Bennett:

One also notes that the word enchant is linked to the French verb to sing: chanter. To "en-charn": to surround with song or incantation; hence, to cast a spell with sounds, to make fall under the sway of a magical refrain, to carry away on a sonorous stream. The philosophers Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari describe the refrain as having a transformative or "catalytic function: not only to increase the speed of the exchanges and reactions in that which surrounds it,

but also to *assure indirect interactions between elements devoid of so-called natural affinity, and thereby to form [new] organized masses.*” In other words, the repetition of word sounds not only exaggerates the tempo of an ordinary phrase and not only eventually renders a meaningful phrase nonsense—it can also provoke new ideas, perspectives, and identities. In an enchanting refrain, sense become nonsense and then a new sense of things. The refrain, say Deleuze and Guattari, “turns back on itself, opens onto itself, revealing until then unheard-of potentialities, entering into other connections, setting [things] . . . adrift in the direction of other assemblages ” (2001, p. 8, emphasis added).

Potentiality, aesthetics (perception and sense), and the wilderness of spirit come to haunt us, deadly in their decomposing stench. We must forge a new relationship with death, and with the monstrous that we have tried to hold in the deepest levels of our phantasmagoric underworld. Modernity must continue to be decomposed, and the deepest shadow in the radiance of night must be sought—resistance lives in the shadows. There can be no real conclusion here, as the Anthropocene (*kairos*) does not work like that. What might be said instead is this: it is at this point that this thesis will end—the point at which philosophy and theory depart. We must now, I argue, strive to reacquaint ourselves with the monstrous within—both individually, culturally, and phantasmagorically. And most of all, we must grieve for the end of the world. While I have argued that the Anthropocene has been built into the very fabric of modernity and its *anthropos*, this does not render this potentially cataclysmic event any less tragic. Modernity has turned its back on death (Lawrence, 2014), that is to be sure, but we are now faced with the hooded spectre we have been striving to eradicate.

There is no telling what will come next. Yet there is much work to be done. Most of all, we must stay with the trouble. It will take courage, but we must,

following Rilke, enter unto a world (or open our *senses*) to that place where
“everything is lunar.

Welcome to the Anthropocene. To night, shadow, and abyss we venture-forth.

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