The Poetics of Posthuman Knowledge-Making: the Inscription of Political Possibilities and Limits in the Anthropocene

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Abstract

This thesis takes as its starting point that the Anthropocene marks two interrelated crises. A crisis of the Modern figure of humanity, underpinned by the nature/culture binary specific to Modern societies, and a crisis of radical political possibility. It is interested in the way posthuman knowledge-making emerges in the unfolding of these crises.

From this position, the thesis draws upon Rancière's politically charged 'Poetics of Knowledge' to deconstruct the 'poetic' operations of a number of posthuman approaches to knowledge making. Organising these approaches into a series of key 'poetic regimes,' which describe the way these knowledges are fabricated through distinct narrational, metaphorical, and logical constructions, the thesis critically evaluates and responds to the political possibilities and limits inscribed in their construction. Making the analysis of these poetic regimes through a series of illustrative case studies, the thesis argues that if posthuman knowledge-practices offer important insights into the crisis of the nature/culture binary, nonetheless, the crisis of political possibility is inscribed in their very poetic fabrication, marking their political horizons with troubling limitations that off-stage radical politics.

The thesis responds to these deficiencies with a unique theoretical approach that pairs Barad's posthumanism, particularly their focus on exclusion-making and the reconfigurative capacities of 'the void,' with Rancière's radical, egalitarian account of political practice. In doing so, the thesis aims to redirect posthuman thought towards a thoroughgoing engagement with concrete, radical, and ecologically oriented struggles, where agency is configured in the voiding of key practical operations of Modernity's nature/culture binary. The thesis argues that practices of voiding make space for new forms of egalitarian logic and allow new, ecologically attuned modes of bounding the human and the natural to gain force. The potency of this approach is demonstrated through a reading of the Hambach Forest occupation against lignite mining in Germany.

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Contents

Abstract i

Acknowledgements ii

Contents iii

Chapter 01. Introduction 1
- 1.1 Setting the Scene 1
- 1.2 A Critical Analysis of the Poetics and Politics of Posthuman Knowledges 6
- 1.3 A New Framework for Engaging a Radical Politics of the Anthropocene 9
- 1.4 The Structure 11

Chapter 02. Theory and Method 16
- 2.1 Introduction 16
- 2.2 Aesthetics in Posthuman Knowledge 16
- 2.3 Rancière, the Distirbution of the Sensible, Politics, and Police Orders 19
- 2.4 A Poetics of Knowledge and Poetic Regimes 25
- 2.5 Affirmation and Negation 30
- 2.6 A Case Study Approach 34
- 2.7 Developing Categories, Selecting Texts 36
- 2.8 Selecting Case Studies and Materials 39
- 2.9 Ethical Considerations 42
- 2.10 Conclusion 44

Chapter 03. The Poetic Regime of Uncertainty: Tracing the World 45
- 3.1 Introduction 45
- 3.2 Uncertainty, Violence, and Political Gradualism in Actor-Network Theory 49
- 3.3 Uncertainty, Harm, and Amelioration in Vital Materialism 57
- 3.4 Uncertainty as Practice: RWE and Governing Socio-Natural Networks 61
- 3.5 Stakeholder Management: Mapping and Sensing Publics 64
- 3.6 Biodiversity Restoration: Mapping the ‘Natural’ 72
- 3.7 Conclusion 76

Chapter 04. The Poetic Regime of Brutality: Brute Facts and the Biopolitics of the Lifeboat 78
- 4.1 Introduction 78
- 4.2 On Lifeboats and Limousines 84
- 4.3 Haraway’s Haunted Camille 90
- 4.4 Latour’s Place to Land 93
- 4.5 Building the Lifeboat: Green Ethno-Nationalism in the Anthropocene 99
- 4.6 Conclusion 105

Chapter 05. The Poetic Regime of Pessimism I: Minimally Extensive Negativity 107
- 5.1 Introduction 107
- 5.2 The End of Progress: Interstitial Freedom in the Ruins 113
- 5.3 The End of a Knowable World: Hyperobjects and Hyposubjects 118
- 5.4 Tinker’s Bubble: Hyposubjectivity and Escape 123
- 5.5 The Practicalities of Escape: the Non-Politics of Invisibility 129
- 5.6 Conclusion 133

Chapter 06. The Poetic Regime of Pessimism II: Intensive Negativity 135

6.1 Introduction 135
6.2 The End of Politics: the “Geologic Sublime” and Irrecuperable Humanity 139
6.3 Destruction without Subtraction: Between Active and Passive nihilism............................143
6.4 Feral Insurgency: an Anti-Geography of Destruction Without Subtraction 146
6.5 Conclusion 154
Chapter 07. The Poetic Regime of Potentiality: Possibilities, Exclusions, and Voids........157
7.1 Introduction 157
7.2 Apparatus, Agential Cuts, and Spacetimemattering 161
7.3 Agential Cuts, The Partition of the Sensible, and Rancière’s Police 163
7.4 The Cartesian Cut and the Police Order of ‘Man’ 166
7.5 Thinking Politics from Exclusions..169
7.6 Barad and the Void...173
7.7 Rancière and the Void 178
7.8 A More-Than-Human Politics of Void-Making...184
7.9 Conclusion 187
Chapter 08. Political Void-Making: Dissensus and Radical Possibility in Hambach Forest 189
8.1 Introduction 189
8.2 The Clearance Line ‘Speaks’ 191
8.3 The Critique of Domination 194
8.4 Refusal and the Political Apparatus of Void-Making..197
8.5 A New World and a New Human 204
8.6 The World of Equality in Organising the Occupation 206
8.7 The World of Equality in Anti-Colonial Solidarity 211
8.8 The World of Equality in Ecological Relations with The Forest 215
8.9 Conclusion 218
Chapter 09. Conclusion..220
9.1 Summary..220
9.2 Contributions and Implications...223
9.3 Future Directions 225
9.4 The Final Word..226
Bibliography 227
Appendix A 258
Appendix B 259

Chapter 01.
Introduction

> *All dates are conventional, but 1989 is a little less so than some. For everyone today, the fall of the Berlin Wall symbolises the fall of socialism. 'The triumph of liberalism, of capitalism, of the Western democracies over the vain hopes of Marxism': such is the victory communiqué issued by those who escaped Leninism by the skin of their teeth. While seeking to abolish man's exploitation of man, socialism had magnified that exploitation immeasurably. It is a strange dialectic that brings the exploiter back to life and buries the gravedigger… The liberal West can hardly contain itself for joy. It has won the Cold War.*
>
> *But the triumph is short-lived. In Paris, London and Amsterdam, this same glorious year 1989 witnesses the first conferences on the global state of the planet: for some observers they symbolize the end of capitalism and its vain hopes of unlimited conquest and total dominion over nature. By seeking to reorient man's exploitation of man toward an exploitation of nature by man, capitalism magnified both beyond measure… nature over which we were supposed to gain absolute mastery, dominates us in an equally global fashion, and threatens us all. It is a strange dialectic that turns the slave into man's owner and master, and that suddenly informs us that we have invented ecocides as well as large-scale famine.*
>
> Latour, 1993, p. 8

1.1 Setting the Scene

Narrative is a central aspect of knowledge-making practices, and it does political work. Christophe Bonneuil and Jean-Baptiste Fressoz put it simply: "each account of 'How did we get here?' makes assumptions through which we frame 'What to do now?" (2017, p. xii). The narratives we pursue in knowledge-making determine the frame of a problem, the actors that compose and respond to it (the 'we' who got here), and the terrain of possible responses. In Katherine McKittrick's *Dear Science and Other Stories*, they draw on Sylvia Wynter's oeuvre to attend to the way that Black Studies scholarship pursues a method of "entangling and disentangling varying narratives and tempos and hues that, together, invent and reinvent knowledge" (2021, p. 5). Thus, narrational practices can offer forms of (re)inscription that contest both the imperatives and warrants of knowledge production and their capacities to reproduce colonial and racist systems of power, whilst giving shape and voice to the experience of the oppressed within and beyond these systems (ibid., pp. 12-13). And in Jacques Rancière's account, narrative is an element continuous with the "poetic operations" of knowledge: the acts of "description, narration, metaphorization, symbolization, and so on… that make its objects appear and give sense and relevance to its propositions" (1994, p. 14). Knowledge carves out a special space for itself from a broader field of shared but contested language and experience, in which it is situated and through which it must make itself intelligible (Rancière and Panagia, 2000, p. 116). For Rancière, knowledge cannot be extricated from its social and literary nature, meaning that its poetics, including its narrative constructs, can be contested in ways that disrupt the social hierarchies and attendant practices that they often license (Grünfeld, 2020, p. 55).

The political significance of narrative in making and critically contesting knowledge practices informs my decision to preface this introduction with Bruno Latour's vignette of 1989, as part of the self-conscious effort to construct a narrative that frames the problems that occupy this thesis. As a starting position, I posit that this narrative gestures to the conditions of emergence for Latour's project *and* the broader collection of 'posthuman' theoretical approaches that have emerged in the last three decades or so. These are conditions of rupture, in which "the material self-evidence of initial conditions, those stable analytical reference points that allow us to identify a problem and then debate what needs to be done to correct it, have suffered a significant assault" (Kirby, 2011, p. 68). Moreover, these conditions have not resolved since Latour's early sketch, but have instead become increasingly exacerbated and more visibly intertwined. Centrally, then, this thesis is concerned with the relationship between these conditions, the problems that they pose, and the ways that posthuman theoretical approaches are narrated and poetically constructed in order to respond to them.

The quotation is taken from Latour's 1993 text, *We Have Never Been Modern,* and it narrates a double crisis to which, as he saw it, knowledge practices originating from Modern, Western traditions must respond: "we are called into question by the double debacle of 1989" (Latour, 1993, p. 10). Firstly, the narration of this 'double debacle' gestures towards what would come to be understood as a wide-spread crisis of radical political possibility in 'Modern' societies. The end of actually existing communism undermined the dominant, Marxist frame for both imagining and practically realising universal human emancipation. The unique relationship between critical knowledge—in which the Marxist science could unveil the essences of socio-natural relations from the complex appearances of society—and revolutionary political practice—in which that unveiling informed and enabled the revolutionary agents of emancipation to pursue their 'world-historic' role—lost its analytical and political purchase. As Nick Srnicek and Alex Williams put it, "the seemingly intrinsic links between the future, modernity, and emancipation were prized apart" (2015, p. 72). The failures and defeat of the Soviet Union became a symbol for broader defeats of the left and the impossibility of communist utopia (Badiou, 2003). The terminus of Modernity's universalising humanism was allegedly already upon us (Fukuyama, 1992), in the hierarchies of capitalism and its Bourgeois, individualist, consumer-based model of emancipation.

Since these defeats, we are sometimes said to be living in a post-political condition (Swyngedouw and Wilson, 2014), where "techno-managerial planning, expert management, and administration," naturalise and preserve the status-quo, attempting to close the world to "ideological or dissensual contestation and struggles" (Swyngedouw, 2010, p. 226; see also Fagan, 2023). On the other hand, the victories of figures like Donald Trump, Narendra Modi, Jair Bolsonaro, and Viktor Orbàn, as well as the growing popularity of figures like Marine Le Pen and Geert Wilders, suggest that the main challenger to this technocratic malaise are an emboldened global fascism (Gandesha, 2020). In this context, it has been increasingly difficult to stage a radical, left-wing politics of contestation, which might otherwise transform the horizons of the possible. Even recent political resistances 'from below' such as the anti-globalisation movement and Occupy Wall Street were inculcated with and limited by a fatalistic pessimism about the possibilities for large-scale, radical social change (Srnicek and Williams, 2015, p. 46; quoting Sharzer, 2012, p. 3). As Mark Fisher's infamous invocation of *Capitalist Realism* posited, any "hope" of radically different worlds now seems only to represent a "dangerous illusion" (Fisher, 2009, p. 5).

Secondly, the 'double debacle' demonstrates that this purported end of all other possible worlds coincided with the discovery that the Modern, liberal, capitalist figurations of the human and of nonhuman others are at the crux of a "specific and absurd mode of environment-making… revealed in today's biocidal wreckage" (Moore, 2015, p. 11). This is often attributed to Modernity's so-called 'nature/culture' binary (Barad, 2019; Bennett, 2010; Latour, 1993; 2004a; Moore, 2015; Morton, 2013). A central construct of Modern thought, the binary emerged, evolved, and was consolidated by Bourgeois philosophical figures implicated in the historical development and expansion of capitalist Modernity, such as René Descartes (Eldon, 2005; Moore, 2015; Negri, 2007 [1970]), Francis Bacon (Scalercio, 2018, Mignolo, 2011), John Locke (Harney and Moten, 2021, pp. 14-20; Rekret, 2019; Wynter, 1992), and Isaac Newton (Barad, 2017; Jacob and Stewart, 2004; O'Brien, 2013). It established the thinking being of the white, Western, bourgeois tradition—the construct that Sylvia Wynter referred to as 'Man' (2003)—as the exclusive and autonomous figure of the human, and the locus of reason, of agency, and culture. On the other side, it established the domain of 'Nature', where everything else was located and reduced to the passive mechanics of 'mere' matter.

The production of the binary was an act of symbolic bounding that opened 'Nature' to knowledges "aimed at controlling, mapping, and quantifying" in order to feed the growing capitalist economy with objects of "commodification and appropriation" (Moore, 2015, p. 29). This process enabled the self-valorisation of the wealth, power, and autonomy of 'Man' as the "lords and possessors of nature" (Descartes, 2008 [1637], p. 29), enabling the instrumental domination of all deemed 'Nature'. It is the ecocidal effects of this binary that were a central concern of the 1989 conferences that Latour's account references. However, even as conferences on the state of the environment have proliferated and the binary's premises have become increasingly untenable, the binary and the practices it licenses have persisted (Moore, 2015; 2022; Rekret, 2019). In the intervening years between Latour's account and now, the increasing power and scope of the forces producing ecocidal wreckage have transformed the discourses of modernity that Latour sought to reject into those of the 'Anthropocene' and a series of interrelated problems of human and other-than-human agency, including the very bounding of those categories.

In the past decade or so, the concept of the Anthropocene has secured traction in the social sciences, including within the disciplines of Human Geography and International Politics that I locate myself within (Castree, 2014a; Castree, 2014b; Chandler *et al.,* 2021; Johnson *et al.*, 2014; Harrington, 2016; Larsen and Harrington Jr., 2021). The term indexes an epochal change in the environmental conditions of the Earth; the point at which the collective impact of 'human' activities has come to exert geological force upon the planet to a degree that has disrupted the relative stability or 'boundary conditions' of the previous geological epoch, the 'Holocene' (Crutzen and Stoermer, 2000; Rockström *et al.*, 2009; Steffen *et al.*, 2007). This disruption is manifest most accutely in the increasing temperatures of climate change and the ecocidal ruins of the 6th mass extinction event. In the first place, then, the Anthropocene names the scope and scale of the collective agency of 'Man' inaugurated by the nature/culture binary, as well as the violent markings 'he' leaves on the supposedly separate 'Nature' that 'he' attempts to dominate.

Secondly, the term denotes not only the present impact of 'human' activity, but a rapidly unfurling future marked by increasing global temperatures that will see "substantial increases in the occurrence and/or intensity of… extreme events" (Allen *et al.*, 2018, p. 68). Indeed, a 2022 report from the *Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change* (IPCC) warns that current trends will see a near-term "increase in multiple climate hazards" (2022, p. 36). Yet, whilst the warnings have grown ever-more dire (Harvey, F., 2023), they are often accompanied by line graphs that plot temperature trajectories with a predictive force that signal the way that the supposed 'human agency' of the Anthropocene appears determinately locked into patterns of production, consumption, and distribution that reproduce and exacerbate the conditions of crisis (IPCC, 2022). These warnings call out for different conceptions and enactments of what it means to be human in relation with the other-than-human (Barad, 2019; Bennett, 2010; Haraway, 2016; Gibson-Graham, 2010; Latour, 2014; Morton, 2013; 2021; McKittrick, 2015). However, if debates over the starting point of the Anthropocene announce key historical moments and processes in the development of 'Man' (Bonneuil and Fressoz, 2017; Haraway *et al.*, 2015; Yusoff, 2018; Zalasiewicz *et al.*, 2015), then 1989 and the purported 'end of history' signals the way in which capital, far from being brought to an end by its own vain hopes of domination, has successfully secured the human within patterns of agency and impotency that figurate 'Man' as inextricably capital-valorising and ecocidal.

Finally, despite the anthropo- of the moniker or the force of 'Man' that it denotes, many scholars suggest that the Anthropocene instead marks the forceful intrusion of the other-than-human agencies that compose the planet, which "undoes thinking as usual" (Haraway, 2016 p. 4, see also; Bonneuil and Fressoz, 2017; Latour, 2014, pp. 3-4; Morton, 2013; Stengers, 2015, pp. 43-51; 2017). In the time since those early conferences of 1989, the severe weather events and necrotic traces of the Anthropocene seem increasingly to push back on the figure of 'Man' and its claims to autonomy from and dominion over 'Nature', whilst also dispelling the passivity of 'Nature.' Other-than-human beings, systems, and processes seem to resist the will of 'Man'. Instead, these events have increasingly demanded 'posthuman' approaches to knowledge-making. At once, "decentring the human" (Wolfe, 2023, p. 195) and projecting "variable degrees of subjectivity and agency well beyond the human estate, far into the biosphere" (Connolly, 2013, p. 400). Such strategies are said to be able to better diagnose and respond to this moment as a problem of relational entanglements that are marked by but also reach through the snare of the nature/culture binary (Barad, 2007; Braidotti, 2013; Connolly, 2013; Colebrook, 2016; Haraway, 1992; Latour, 1993). Furthermore, it has been argued by some that rethinking this relationship might have important effects, helping to dispel "the impediments to the emergence of more ecological and more materially sustainable modes of production and consumption" (Bennett, 2010, p. ix), and to foster mutual obligations of care and responsibility that traverse the nature/culture binary (Barad, 2007; Puig de la Bellacasa, 2017).

1.2 A Critical Analysis of the Poetics and Politics of Posthuman Knowledges

With all that in mind, the first task that this thesis performs is a critical analysis of the way these sociohistorical conditions have shaped and left their mark on posthuman approaches to knowledge making, which have become increasingly favoured over the past decade. It addresses the way these conditions enter into practices of narrativisation that, in turn, shape the acts of description, metaphor, and symbolism that produce the poetic accounts of how knowledges sense, process, and represent their objects of study. In order to make the analysis, I draw on theoretical tools from Jacques Rancière's oeuvre, including his radical, aesthetic account of politics (1999), his politically attuned, polemically charged mode of reading knowledge practices, which he calls a "poetics of knowledge" (1994), and his analytical frame for grouping distinct modes of knowledge-making, the "poetic regime" (ibid.). I outline and justify the use of these concepts thoroughly in the next chapter. For now, it is enough to say that these tools are critically attuned to what Rancière calls the 'partition of the sensible' (*partage du sensible*) (1999; 2010), the boundary between what is made intelligible and what remains unintelligible, through which systems of knowledge and social orders alike are organised and made operational. Thus, Rancière's approach asks us to read for what knowledge makes unintelligible as much as what knowledge makes intelligible, and with what effects.

My first key claim is that whilst posthuman approaches provide us with useful tools for critically analysing and working beyond the nature/culture boundary, nonetheless, the crisis of radical political possibility is woven into the poetic fabrication of posthuman knowledge practices and expressed as a lacuna of radical political practice. In making the argument, I don't treat posthuman thought as a monolith or a unified 'school' with a singular set of poetic operations, but rather I seek to demonstrate that the problem holds, albeit in different ways, across a number of distinct approaches and positions—'poetic regimes'—that have risen to prominence as the posthuman turn has unfolded. Forms of aversion, avoidance, and absence push the relationship between knowledge production and radical political practices explicitly or implicitly beyond their frames of intelligibility. This circumscribes the horizons of possibility even in approaches that actively proclaim to engage with potentiality and to seek to change those horizons.

This analysis isn't an abstract one. As the critical theorist Benjamin Noys suggests, forms of thought "not only mimic social forms, but also imply particular social forms" (2010, p. 172). Similarly, Rancière argues that knowledge is not a distinct realm outside of social life, but part of a broader "configuration of sense", or "knots tying together possible perceptions, interpretations, orientations and movements" (2009, p. 120). Knowledge practices are thus part of a broader "common-sense," which shapes what can be "seen, said, and done" (ibid.). This means that the academy from which posthuman knowledges have emerged exists on a continuum of sense and intelligibility with the rest of the world: posthuman knowledges are shaped by just as much as they shape the social world, loosely and informally just as much as concretely and explicitly. As such, the thesis draws on a series of case studies to ask what kind of social forms are implied by knowledges that are lacking a relationship to radical political practice? How are these knowledges knotted in configurations of sense with modes of seeing, thinking, and doing beyond the academy? Or, put more directly, what kinds of projects do they legitimate? Do these projects reproduce the socio-natural hierarchies of the world-as-it-is, or do they contest them?

I consider this analysis to be important for a few reasons. Firstly, Lucas Pohl argues that the effects of climate change, "the apocalyptic impact of processes such as sea-level rise on social spaces worldwide, including hundreds of millions of people losing their homes, the destruction of entire cities, and the enormous loss of cultural heritage" transgress the limits of imagination (2023, p. 2). That is, the increasingly volatile conditions of the Anthropocene introduce previously 'impossible' and 'unimaginable events' (ibid.; Dixon 2022). In turn, it is an impossibility that these events and their increasingly necrotic effects can be addressed by the frames of possibility that are implicated in their very production. As critical scholars continue to demonstrate, the terms of possibility dictated by contemporary 'post-political' horizons are not simply inadequate but are also a deeply problematic basis from which to build practical responses (Apostolopoulou, 2019; Arsel and Büscher, 2012; Bowsher, J. and Reeves-Evision, 2020; Brock, 2020; Büscher *et al.,* 2020; Büscher and Fletcher, 2014; Dehm, 2016; Lubarda, 2019; Malm and the Zetkin Collective, 2021; Tregidga and Jones, 2013).

By contrast, drawing on Alain Badiou's radical account of politics as the "art of the impossible" (Badiou, 2018), Pohl argues that the political is "a moment of rupture that traverses the realm of… possibilities and reveals their inherently repressive nature" (2023, p. 3). Political rupture is not given in the terms of the possible and, as a transgressive performance of impossibility, it exposes the problems of the given and opens up terrains of possibility previous rendered unintelligible, impossible, or unimaginable (ibid.). If the impossible events of the Anthropocene require problematising and resolving in ways that are not given within the parameters that currently govern the terms of possibility, then by engaging the thought and practice of radical politics, posthuman theorising can better attend to the problems of the Anthropocene by coupling them to practices that transform the conditions of the possible. Without this attention, these approaches can sometimes help to reproduce capitalist logics or those of the biopolitical and necropolitical operations of the state. Whilst at other times, they imply forms of withdrawal and refusal that are, broadly put, insufficient to the tasks demanded by this historical juncture.

Secondly, if theorising radical political practice has traditionally been concerned with the practical enactment of both social emancipation and equality (Rancière, 1999; Badiou, 2007a; Laclau, 2007) then this thesis also takes the position that this should be a central concern to posthuman theorising. The figuration of 'Man' through the nature/culture binary is not a separate problem to those of social hierarchies. The uneven distribution of exposure to and insulation from the necrotic effects of the Anthropocene is to some degree organised through the coordinates of the nature/culture binary, understood as a division between the fully reasoning figure of Bourgeois 'Man' and lesser figures of incomplete humanity, whose material bodies can be manipulated like the rest of 'nature' (Federici, 2004, pp. 138-140; Wynter, 1992). The hierarchical subjugations and exclusions that have produced the "overrepresented" account of 'Man' as the figure of all humanity (Wynter, 2003)—of class (Huber, 2022; Malm, 2015; Moore, 2015; 2022a), race (Barad, 2019; Bhambra and Newell, 2022; Povinelli, 2021; Sultana, 2022; Yusoff, 2018; Zalloua, 2021), and gender (Grusin, 2017; Walton, 2020; Zylinska, 2018)—have gained new implications when read as continuous with rather than distinct from ecocide. As such, adequate responses to the Anthropocene are inseparable from the practical dissolution of those systems of subjugation and, therefore, the radical political practices that aim to dissolve them.

Finally, despite the apparent technocratic and post-political malaise, hidden within the noise of failure and horror, there are emerging signals of radical political practices, and this thesis argues that they reveal the potential seeds of a new, eco-communist struggle. New forms of egalitarian, ecologically attuned figurations of the human and the other-than-human, new forms of reason that could govern our practices, as well as strategies for giving space and material force to these constructions are all conjoined in tentative practices that point well beyond contemporary horizons. In this light—and considering that radical political practices are central to shifting the boundary between possibility and impossibility—a more thorough-going engagement with the terrain of radical political practice is needed now perhaps more than ever.

1.3 A New Framework for Engaging a Radical Politics of the Anthropocene

Whilst the thesis problematises some key political limits of prominent posthuman theories, the argument is not that we should reject these approaches outright, as some critics suggest (Arboleda, 2018; Malm, 2018; Rekret, 2019; Swyngedouw and Ernston, 2018). In this respect, I affirm the contributions of posthuman approaches to addressing the problematics of the nature/culture binary, which are undoubted and extensive. The posthuman turn has enriched and enlivened the disciplines of International Politics (Eroukhmanoff and Harker, 2017) and Human Geography (Margulies and Bersaglio, 2018). Posthuman approaches have offered important tools to expand the scope of their research agendas, address the growing ecological crises of the Anthropocene epoch, and reframe its terms (Wilmer and Žukauskaitė, 2023, pp. 1-10). These approaches have "paved the way… to consider why non-humans are subjects worthy of social inquiry rather than just inanimate backgrounds or hapless objects" (Margulies and Bersaglio, 2018, p. 104) and deflated the "anthropocentric hubris of social theory" (Arboleda, 2016, p. 336).

With this in mind, the critical work of the thesis changes over its course. It moves from a position of negative criticality, in which I identify, critique, and depart from those approaches that I conclude that we should leave behind, to a position of recovery, in which I alter the nature of my critical gaze to recover elements of approaches that can contribute to a new, posthuman framework for radical politics. Nonetheless, the thesis responds to the lacuna of radical political practice that presents itself across *all* of the approaches it studies. It does so by bringing those elements worth recovering into dialogue with Rancière's account of radical politics in order to build a 'Poetic Regime of Radical Politics'. I suggest that by doing so, we gain important tools for locating and thinking through a posthuman approach to radical politics, attuned to those moments of movement, blockage, and contestation that rupture the given, intertwined hierarchies of the nature/culture binary. I argue that it is in these practices that radically different worlds are tentatively brought into being. Moreover, they are given force through the material configuration of a political dissensus and articulations of justice that implicate and contest the terms of the nature/culture binary. It is these practices that enable an intelligible shift in the boundaries of the possible and the impossible that are so necessary for the contemporary moment.

Therefore, the approach I arrive at doesn't restage the Marxist relationship between knowledge production and radical political practice, in which knowledge comes from outside to give agency to passive subjects by demystifying the veil of prejudices that keep them oppressed. This isn't to dismiss the utility of diagnostic critical work *tout court*, but it is to accept some of the lessons of the past century regarding its capacity to create certainties for political practice. In the wake of the failures and defeats of radical political practices marked by the 'miraculous year of 1989,' Latour was right to be critical of a certain kind of hubris that comes with imagining oneself as a researcher that is simultaneously "the Lenin of social change" (2007, p. 38). Whilst the thesis disagrees with Latour's solution to the problem, nonetheless, paraphrasing Latour, I am suspicious of the manoeuvre that imposes an account of where radical politics should come from, who should perform it, and with what forms of articulation, both in advance and "in place of the actors" (ibid., p. 41).

Instead, Rancière's approach asks us to surrender the hierarchical premise of the relationship between the knowers and practitioners of radical politics. The aim is not to properly explain these practices from a point of view that is situated outside of them and claims to expound what they really mean (Genel and Deranty, 2016, pp. 148-150). Nor does it "purport to provide instructions or forms of energy for any specific struggle" (ibid., p. 152). As Rancière argues, "no positive boundary separates the texts that make up the discourse of science from those that are merely the objects of science" (ibid., p. 150), for they are all expressions of a common language and a common capacity for thought; that of "literary animals" (ibid.). In this approach, then, the hierarchy between one kind of subject of knowledge and another and between one genre of discourse and another is suspended. Instead, the approach demands "weaving a fabric of language within which [radical political practice and its articulations] can experience egalitarian connections with other performances situated in different historical contexts pertaining to different fields" (ibid.).

The result is a multi-vocal bricolage of narrative, posthuman and political theory, the discourses of political actors, and the performances that give those discourses force. Rather than positing the researcher as the vanguard of political change, this approach posits that locating and circulating accounts of radical critique as they are practiced, and the fledgling worlds they put into play, can make a very modest contribution to redistributing the partition of the sensible that determines the current, post-political horizons of possibility in the Anthropocene. As such, the role of the researcher becomes to help disrupt the inevitability of the hierarchies and violences of this world by adding to the bricolage of discourses and performances through which political subjects assemble their own egalitarian worlds and use them to carve away at this one.

Finally, the thesis demonstrates the utility of this approach by engaging with a case study of the radical, anarchist resistance to lignite mining at Hambach Forest in Germany. I argue that the protestors' occupation of the Forest is precisely one of those emerging sites of radical politics that alters the terrain of the possible in the Anthropocene. The occupation constructs new forms of egalitarian, ecologically attuned figurations of the human and the other-than-human, new forms of reason that could govern our practices, as well as strategies for giving space and material force to them against those that govern our contemporary moment. Whilst I do not claim that all the solutions to the Anthropocene can be found in engaging with emerging forms of ecologically attuned, radical politics, nonetheless I suggest that a more thoroughgoing engagement with struggles like the one at Hambach Forest can help posthuman knowledge practices attune to spaces, temporalities, matters, and practices by which the horizons of the possible are transformed. In turn, this engagement can contribute to a broader literary and poetic fabric that interrupts and disturbs the post-political, techno-managerial, and doom-laden common-sense of the contemporary moment.

1.4 The Structure

In order to make my arguments, the thesis is structured as follows. In chapter 2, I explain my theoretical commitments and the way they inform my methodology. I begin by situating the thesis in a broader turn to aesthetics in posthuman theorising, which I suggest reflects an increased focus on ontology and a pluralising of epistemological approaches. The upshot is an increased attention to what is made intelligible by knowledge practices, what remains illegible, and what pushes back on stable terms of intelligibility. From there, I argue that Rancière's aesthetically oriented account of radical politics—a process that disrupts and redistributes the 'partition of the sensible,'—is a particularly useful frame for reading the politics (or their lack) of posthuman theorising. I flesh out this approach by outlining Rancière's 'poetics of knowledge.' I demonstrate the utility of his concept of 'poetic regimes,' which I deploy as a way of grouping together distinct poetic practices by the logics of knowledge production and practice that they produce across the rest of the thesis. I outline my case-study approach, through which I explore the practical implications of the poetic regimes I explore more thoroughly. Finally, I explain the processes of selection and categorisation by which I arrived at and organised the texts and case studies that the thesis engages with.

In chapter 3, I begin my analysis with what I call 'The Poetic Regime of Uncertainty.' I demonstrate that one central way of narrating the 'double debacle' of 1989 has been to understand the contemporary moment as one in which any and all certainties have been dispelled. The socio-political upheavals of the past 40 years have worked alongside the new intelligibility and proliferation of other-than-human agencies to neutralise the utility of traditional, critical approaches to knowledge production. Instead, these new conditions require the aesthetic practice of 'tracing' by which the composition of the world can be understood anew. Critically engaging with Bruno Latour's Actor-Network Theory (2007) and Jane Bennett's vital materialism (2010), I demonstrate the way that the poetic constitution of this approach creates a conservative bent that renders this world as fragile and complex, demanding forms of modulating governance that preserve 'what is' and insulate it from destabilising shocks. Through a case study of governance practices mobilised by the German energy company *Rheinisch-Westfälisches Elektrizitätswerk* (RWE), I demonstrate the ways this approach supports capitalist practices in the affinities between the theory and the practices of RWE, which that stabilise the socio-natural entanglements that sustain them and exclude relations that might threaten their profitability.

In chapter 4, I assess what I call 'The Poetic Regime of Brutality.' I argue that it relies upon an aesthetic appeal to 'brute facts,' which narrate, either explicitly or implicitly, a quantitative disequilibrium between the population of humanity and the resources of nature. I argue that the appeal to 'brute facts' off-stages critical modes of analysis by gaining a non-interpretive quality, as if it were simply representing reality itself. Arguing that such an account has a long lineage, I draw on older accounts from mainstream social sciences writers, Garrett Hardin and Robert Kaplan, to outline some of its key dimensions. I argue that the metaphors of the lifeboat and of the limousine that they deploy respectively draw a diagram of the brutal biopolitical/necropolitical logic that is summoned by the poetics of 'brute facts.' I then demonstrate the ways this has found its way into more critical accounts in recent years. Examining Latour's *Down To Earth* (2018) and Donna Haraway's *Staying With The Trouble*

(2016), I argue that they submit to the 'brute facts' of the Anthropocene, but they shy away from the biopolitical/necropolitical implications of their assessment, instead conjuring narrative fantasies of how the problem might be resolved 'non-violently.' I problematise this by examining the continuities, affinities and uneasy tensions that circulate between Kaplan and Hardin, Latour and Haraway, and the case studies of the ecologically oriented manifesto of the French far-right party Ressamblement National as well as the ecofascist rhetoric found in the manifesto of the 2019 Christchurch shooter.

In chapter 5, I introduce 'The Poetic Regime of Pessimism.' Drawing on Thacker's aesthetic account of pessimism as the disarticulation of *logos* and *phone* (2015, p. 31), I argue that approaches within this regime formulate the terms of new modes of negative critique, in which the frames and practices of Modern civilisation (our *logos*) are fundamentally misaligned with the complex, volatile, infinite forces that compose the planet (its *phone*). This misalignment constitutes an absolute break that cannot be rectified within the terms, spaces, and practices of Modern Civilisation itself. I suggest that this renders two different practices of the negative which take up chapter 5 and chapter 6. In chapter 5, I explore what I call 'minimally extensive negativity.' Visiting Anna Tsing's engagement with the 'ruins' (2015) and Timothy Morton's theorisation of hyperobjects and hyposubjects (2013; Morton and Boyer, 2021), I illuminate the way that rendering Modern Civilisation as inaccessible to intervention implies forms of retreat and withdrawal to the interstices. On the one hand, the 'escape' from Modernity enables new forms of aesthetic and poetic engagement more attuned to the complex multiplicity of other-than-human life. On the other, I draw on the case study of Tinker's Bubble, a fossil-fuel free intentional community, to draw out the way that these interstitial spaces exist only because they pose no trouble to capitalist relations. Therefore, they do not disturb the distribution of the sensible but recede behind it. I argue that this diminishes the purported political effects that these spaces are said to have.

In chapter 6, I analyse what I call 'intensive negativity,' the second rendering offered by The Poetic Regime of Pessimism. In this account, even modes of withdrawal are rendered problematic, becoming practices from which capitalist Modernity can be recuperated and redeemed. Drawing on Claire Colebrook's *What Is Anthropopolitical?* (2021) and *Can Theory End The World?* I demonstrate that this more severe form of pessimistic narration licenses a radical from of critical negativity, in which destruction, dis-unification, and effacement are the very horizons of thought and of practice: the ultimate severing of *logos* and *phone.* I then draw on the case study of a fragmented network of zine-making anarcho-nihilists to demonstrate the limits of focussing on the destructive domain of negativity. I argue that whilst destruction disturbs the distribution of the sensible and is therefore a necessary component of radical politics, what is missing is a concept of 'subtraction', in which destruction creates space for the aesthetic, poetic articulation of a political subject freed from its materialisation within the hierarchical discourses and practices of capitalist modernity, enabling contestation and new, positive horizons. Without this, the political horizons of intensive negativity are impoverished.

In chapter 7, I take forward the notion of destructive negativity, but I attempt to find terms through which it can be re-articulated with subtraction. I argue that this can be located in what I call 'The Poetic Regime of Potentiality.' Central to this regime is a shared narrational structure that demonstrates the contingency of the present and signals the potential that the world could be otherwise. I suggest that this means theorists from this regime poetically gesture towards the possibility of subtraction, but they too-often begin and end at this gesture. Nonetheless, exemplified by the work of Karen Barad, I argue that these approaches have an oft-submerged kernel of negativity within them. Therefore, this theoretical kernel can be radicalised and drawn into an account of destructive negativity that opens out onto subtraction. Working from the importance of exclusions in Barad's account of potentiality to the role of 'void' in their more recent work (2012a, 2017), I pair insights about the potential-opening capacities of the void with Rancière's aesthetic account of politics in order to generate what I am calling a 'Poetic Regime of Radical Politics'.

In Chapter 8, I put this theoretical framework to work in a 'poetics of politics.' I deploy the case study of the Hambach Forest occupation, *Hambi Bleibt!*, in which radical anarchists barricaded the forest to resist RWE's clearance project, which would otherwise make space for a lignite coal mine. I demonstrate that the occupation of Hambach Forest enacted a more-than-human political subjectivity. The occupation relied upon an infrastructure of voiding in the form of barricades, tripods, treehouses and so on that cut a hole in the continuities of space, time, and matter that render the forest as of no value to the order of 'Man.' By disrupting RWE's efforts to cut the forest and access the lignite beneath, I argue that the occupiers resisted a key site where 'Man' and his nature/culture binary are reproduced. This gave material force to a fledgling positive project. The practice of political void-making opened the space of otherwise unrealised yearning and making, in which impossible relational entanglements were formed that were otherwise excluded by the order of 'Man'. By creating the discourses and infrastructures of a radical, posthuman equality, I suggest that the occupation opens a vista to the kinds of aesthetic disruptions, poetic fabrications, and material constructions necessary for an eco-communist struggle.

In chapter 9, I offer some summative remarks about the thesis. I reflect upon the contributions it makes to an understanding of politics in the Anthropocene. In the end, I suggest that by thinking through an aesthetically oriented, radical political lens—which I found by drawing on Rancière's work—I have demonstrated a novel mode of reflecting upon the political limits of prominent posthuman knowledge practices. Rather than dismissing posthumanism, however, I suggest that the thesis also offers a novel theoretical framework that can reorient a posthuman theoretical project towards a research agenda that attends to the political distribution of (un)intelligibility and, therefore, the distribution of possibility and impossibility that the Anthropocene epoch demands. I then turn to some of the limits of my work and avenues for future research.

Chapter 02.
Theory and Method

2.1 Introduction

Over the course of this chapter, I will outline and justify my theoretical approach and demonstrate the ways this informs my methodological choices. In the next section, I contextualise my turn to Rancière's aesthetic account of politics within a broader interest in aesthetics within posthuman theorising. I follow this with an overview of Rancière's account of politics and its opposite, the police, where I demonstrate the ways that these concepts will inform my approach to reading posthuman knowledges. I then introduce the poetics of knowledge and how this approach shapes my project, including an account of what the term 'poetic regime' means and why I find it to be an especially helpful framing device for processing different ways of making knowledge and its effects. Subsequently, I explain how this approach speaks to current debates over affirmation and negation occurring in both politics and geography. This introduces the concepts of affirmation and negativity as an important strand of my analysis. Subsequently, I detail my methodological commitments, beginning with the decision to take a case study approach, followed by an account of the decisions regarding the theorists and texts I chose, the case studies I decided upon, and the materials I selected to represent these case studies.

2.2 Aesthetics in Posthuman Knowledge

Across this thesis, I adopt an 'aesthetic' orientation to the analysis I perform. In invoking aesthetics, I follow Rancière (1999; 2010) in decoupling the term from its 18th Century attachment to the concept of Art and its appreciation, instead reclaiming the Greek term *aisthanesthai*, meaning 'to perceive' (see also; Buck-Morss, 1992; Merleau-Ponty, 1964). By aesthetics then, I simply mean the processes of making in/sensible or un/intelligible in broad terms: a question of visibility, readability, audibility, legibility. I differentiate this from an epistemological interrogation, concerned with the criteria by which knowledge is established as the regime of truth and falsity under particular sociohistorical conditions (Foucault, 2005 [1970]). I don't abandon epistemology, but I shift the emphasis from assessing the criteria by which truth is produced to the way this is part of broader practices of intelligibility-making in knowledge production, of which there are multiple, valid epistemologies.

There are a few reasons for this decision. In the first place, this broad sense of the aesthetic is increasingly occupying a visible role within posthuman knowledge-making. For example, Anna Tsing asks us to engage with the “art of noticing”, and this helps us "to pick out separate, simultaneous melodies and to listen for the moments of harmony and dissonance they created together” (2015, p. 24). Rather than epistemology, the emphasis is upon the aesthetic disclosures of human-other-than-human interactions, which take on a certain musicality. Similarly, Barad speculates on the void as a source of potentiality in suitably aesthetic (and musical) terms, as the “quiet cacophony of different frequencies, pitches, tempos, melodies, noises, pentatonic scales, cries, blasts, sirens, sighs, syncopations, quarter tones, allegros, ragas, bebops, hip- hops, whimpers, whines, screams… threaded through the silence, ready to erupt” (2012a, p. 13). Timothy Morton tells us that the relationships between objects are to some degree withdrawn from each other and so their interactions are always “vicarious and hence aesthetic in nature” (2013, p. 14), or mediated by one sensory apparatus or another, whether biological or technological. And Colebrook’s account of the Anthropocene asks us to interrogate “aesthetic ideology” or “the transition from what is given—the sensible—to what that givenness presupposes or demands that “we” assume” (2016, p.115), in order to better come to terms with what the Anthropocene might be telling us about this ‘we’.

Whilst the aesthetic is a central part of all knowledge-making practices, perhaps it has become more obvious and an increasing object of inquiry because the event of the Anthropocene—the “intrusion that undoes thinking as usual” (Haraway, 2016 p. 4)—brings with it a series of new demands for knowledge practices that are innately aesthetic: to narrate, visualise, and contextualise this intrusion (Bonneuil and Fressoz, 2017; Demos, 2017; 2023; Dixon, 2022; Malm, 2015; Moore, 2015; Morton, 2013; Parikka, 2015; Povinelli, 2016; Yusoff, 2018); to engage with the aesthetic processes that sense and make a multiplicity of emergent other-than-human agencies intelligible (Dixon, Hawkins and Straughan, 2012; Harman, 2018; Lorimer, 2013; Mirzoeff, 2013; Morton, 2013; 2017a); to problematise the mediational finitude of human sense-making in relation to other-than-human scales and temporalities (Bryant, Srnicek and Harman, 2011; Cohen, Colebrooke and Miller, 2016; Harman, 2018; Thacker, 2011; 2017; Weinstein and Colebrook, 2017a; Wolfe, 2023); and to decentre the human by dwelling upon the intelligibility-making processes that exist beyond human sense-making and how they shape our entanglements with other-than-human beings (Barcz and Cronin, 2023; Grusin, 2015; Haraway, 2008; Kirby, 2011; Malin, 2016; Parikka, 2023).

At the same time, posthuman knowledge practices have emerged in the wake of the scientific upheavals of the 19th and 20th centuries, in which the 'foundational' model of scientific practice —with its claim to privileged epistemic criteria for unveiling universal truths (Cruickshank, 2004; Monteiro and Ruby, 2009)—has been heavily contested and transformed (Susen, 2015; Latour, 1993; Law, 2004; Feyerabend, 1993 [1975]; Haraway, 1988). The advent of quantumn physics in the natural sciences (Barad, 2007; Kirby, 2011) and various challengers—phenomenological, Marxist, feminist, post-colonial, decolonial, post-structural and so on—in the social sciences have undone the seemingly straightforward relationships between practices of observation, the world, and the necessary orders of social and natural life that knowledge practices were supposed to unveil. Anti-foundational approaches have demonstrated that knowledge is not a simple conjunction of observation, representation, and revelation, but a co-constitutive act of mark- or even world-making that produces and organises a relationship between the intelligible and the unintelligible (Barad, 2007; Butler, 1993; Foucault, 1980). Nor can observation be gleaned from a God's eye view of the totality that is taken to be seperated from the uneven social circumstances of the gaze; instead, knowledge is always situated and partial, reflecting the in/visibilities of that situatedness (Haraway, 1988).

Taken altogether, these developments have opened increasingly fraught questions about the juncture of sense-objects, the social, and meaning-making (Barad, 2007; Colebrook, 2016; Povinelli, 2021). This means that the posthuman turn has involved a veritable proliferation of distinct accounts of knowledge, each mobilising distinct forms of poetic fabrication that engender accounts of the aesthetic relationship between world, sensoria, and knowledge, each with their own distinct logics and implications. This epistemological plurality means that the tension has, to some degree, left epistemological critiques of truth-criteria as we increasingly embrace a plurality of practices by which our understanding of the world is reached.

Acknowledging this epistemological plurality and the conditions from which it has emerged, Elizabeth Povinelli draws upon the pragmatist William James to argue that knowledge is "irreducibly immanent to one's location in… entangled regions of existence and thus irreducibly informed by the forces and powers that kept it in place or could be mobilized to displace it" (2021, p. 5). As such, truth is both innately plural and inseparable from the politics of what "part of the world it helps to matters forth" (ibid., p. 6). As Povinelli puts it, "the question is not what is true in a metaphysical sense, but what is true in a political sense" (2021, p. 6). It does not matter whether the idea "meets the criteria of absolute intensive consistency[,]" instead it is about what difference is made intelligible and where; what part of the world does knowledge help to "matter forth" (ibid.).

This pragmatic focus shifts us away from an epistemological question of whether this or that knowledge practice reveals truth in any absolute terms and towards more politically loaded questions like: what parts of reality do they help make visible, shape, and produce? And what parts of reality do they help to make invisible, diminish, or destroy? In accepting that there is no priveleged relationship between any singular set of epistemological procedures and the truth that they produce, this political pragmatism responds to the conditions of epistemological pluralism by moving the terrain of critical analysis toward the aesthetic and poetic practices by which knowledge practices create their terms of legibility. In turn this is a question of the way these terms of legibility are connected to questions of social legitimation.

2.3 Rancière, the Distirbution of the Sensible, Politics, and Police Orders

If Povinelli's engagement with pragmatism gestures towards a relationship between the aesthetics of knowledge and political practice, I argue that the conceptual ouvre of Jacques Rancière's radical, aesthetic political theory provides a novel window through which to more thoroughly engage the political stakes of posthuman knowledge production at this aesthetic level. Whilst Rancière has been deployed to try to understand some of the political character of other-than-human actors (Bennett, 2010; Bryant, 2011; Booth and Williams, 2014), or as a piecemeal resource for political concepts to engage the (non)politics of the moment (Swyngedeouw, 2010; Kalonaityte, 2018; Barthold and Bloom, 2020), his work has been little appreciated as a possible lens for reading the shift from the Modern coordinates of thought to those of the Anthropocene. This is a shame, as he offers a number of concepts that enable a politicised reading of the nature/culture boundary, the specific figures of the human and the other-than-human that it produces, the hierarchical practices that these figurations enable, and the terms of contestation. Here I will offer a few of the concepts that will guide my reading practice. This will also set the stage for the final chapters, where I will give a more substantive reading as part of the project of developing a knowledge-practice engaged with posthuman radical politics.

Let's start with his concept of the *partage du sensible*, variously translated as the 'partition' or 'distribution' of the sensible, which I use hereafter interchangeably. As Rancière notes in *Ten Theses on Politics*:

> The partition of the sensible is the dividing up of the world (de monde) and of the people (du monde), the nemeïn upon which the nomoi of the community are founded. This partition should be understood in the double sense of the word: on the one hand, as that which separates and excludes; on the other as that which allows participation. A partition of the sensible refers to the manner in which a relation between a shared common (un commun partagé) and the distribution of exclusive parts is determined in sensory experience. This latter form of distribution, which, by its sensory self-evidence, anticipates the distribution of parts and shares (*parties*), itself presupposes a distribution of what is visible and what not, of what can be heard and what cannot. (Rancière, 2010, p. 36)

In this respect it is the ground of communal intelligibility that gathers together the bodies of a social order and enacts the inclusions and exclusions that give those components specific form and function within it. A 'common-sense'. It is thus the intelligible, hierarchical demarcation of bodies, spaces, and tasks. As a distribution of intelligibility, it marks the limit point of "what is visible and what not… what can be heard and what cannot" (Rancière, 2010, p. 36), in the field of collective perception as a determination of a social order. As such, it makes certain social configurations both possible and naturalised or common-sensical.

The distribution of the sensible underpins what Rancière calls '*the police*'. This term does not indicate the official law-enforcing representatives of the state, nor does 'policing' mean their enforcing activities, though when they are present, they are certainly part of the police. Instead, Rancière borrows the term from Foucault's genealogy of governmentality, where he demonstrates that in the 17th and 18th century, the term "covered everything relating to "man" and his "happiness"" (Rancière 1999, p. 28; Foucault, 2002). That is, policing is everything related to the logics and measures appropriate to the organisation and reproduction of societies. As Rancière summarises:

> The police is, essentially, the law, generally implicit, that defines a party's share or lack of it. But to define this, you first must define the configuration of the perceptible in which one or the other is inscribed. The police is thus first an order of bodies that defines the allocation of ways of doing, ways of being, and ways of saying, and sees that those bodies are assigned by name to a particular place and task; it is an order of the visible and the sayable that sees that a particular activity is visible and another is not, that this speech is understood as discourse and another as noise. (1999, p. 29)

Thus, policing describes the processes of arranging and maintaining the hierarchies of a particular social order, which means that it is simultaneously the processes that create, naturalise, and administer a common world of experience, understood as a particular distribution of the sensible, or a consensus over the intelligible. This is not to say that 'order' here means something consciously planned and enacted by a master-sovereign agent. Rancière is clear that the "distribution of places and roles that defines a police regime stems as much from the assumed spontaneity of social relations as from the rigidity of state functions" (ibid.). The term is also non-pejorative; the "police can procure all sorts of good, and one kind of police might be infinitely preferable to another" (ibid., p. 31).

Nonetheless, a police order is always a hierarchical ordering. An essential part of the police's functioning is that these hierarchies are legitimated through the partition of the sensible, which creates a naturalising correlation between a body, its (in)capacity for speech, and its role in the hierarchy of the social order. In *Disagreement* Rancière deploys the examples of French workers and women in the 19th century. As he suggests, ""Workers" or "women" are identities that apparently hold no mystery. Anyone can tell who is meant" (1999, p. 36). That is, in the police distribution of 19th Century France, it is readily understood that workers are those bodies that belong in spaces of occupation who labour in order to live, and moreover, the legitimacy of their lowly position within this hierarchy is simply that they are not capable of the kinds of speaking and reasoning required for governing. Similarly, women are naturalised and feminised as objects of sexuality and social reproduction, whose dispositions and capacities for speech similarly place them 'naturally' within the home as carers, cooks, cleaners, and educators. They too appear to 'lack' a capacity for the kinds of speech that would place them anywhere else or make them capable of self-governing. In another example, this time relevant for posthuman theorising, we might say that through the operations of the nature/culture binary, it appears obvious that the other-than-human doesn't speak at all, and that this is the justification for its instrumental domination in the order of 'Man'.

A second part of the police's claim to legitimacy is grounded in its self-understanding precisely as having accurately accounted for everything with no remainder or supplement (2010, p. 44). In this sense, the correlation between sense and being that legitimates a police order must be total in order for that legitimacy to sustain. Because of this, the speech of an excess or remainder that has no part to play in that order would disrupt the common-sense relationship by which the distribution of bodies, speech, spaces and tasks are naturalised. This kind of disruption to the partition of the sensible would demonstrate that the police order, rather than a simple reflection of the 'nature' of the world, is a contingent affair, and one that is sustained by the exclusion of that excess. As such, the intrusion of an unaccounted-for part—or *a part of those who have no part* as Rancière names it (1999, pp. 29-30)—is politically charged, generating the possibility of what Rancière calls *dissensus*, or a disagreement over the nature of both the part and the order that counts it (1999; 2010).

Dissensus is a two-fold process. On the one hand, this rupture can be made to demonstrate that the police's accounting for the world is wrong, in the double sense that it is a miscount and that this miscount is unjust. The latter claim comes from exposing a gap between the common-sense that suggests a body is exactly where it belongs in the hierarchies of the police and a capacity for speech not given in that order, which takes political shape "as the assertion of equality" (Rancière, 1999, pp. 39-42). Thus, it fundamentally contests the hierarchies of the police order with a radical claim to equality grounded in the demonstration of the capacity that the part of no part were supposed to lack; the capacity of speaking beings (ibid., pp. 35-42). On the other, the police order tries to process this rupture in order to administrate away the threat this antagonism poses to its very foundations (Rancière, 2010, pp. 36-37; Shaw, 2016, p. 58). It is the push and pull of this process that Rancière calls politics. As a process that disrupts and contests hierarchies, politics is privileged by Rancière as the process by which orders are altered and transformed: "political activity is whatever shifts a body from the place assigned to it or changes a place's destination" (Rancière, 1999, p. 30).

In the example of 19th Century French workers, politics proceeds precisely because the bodies that the term 'worker' signifies produce practices and speech that don't belong to the location that the term worker signifies within the order of the police. A worker's strike disrupts and suspends the order of being, doing, and saying of the factory, transforming it into a political space where the workers speech connects a sense of the equality of speaking beings to the wrong of the hierarchy that sees them labour in order to live a meagre existence whilst their bosses live freely (1999, pp. 40-41). Despite the ambiguities of the shape that policing these disruptions has given to contemporary society, it is nonetheless the capacity for political events to rupture common-sense that have altered the police order over the 19th and early 20th centuries, increasing leisure time and wages, opening workers to trajectories, cultural practices, and objects otherwise unimaginable in the early capitalist police order.

What I propose, then, is to read the Anthropocene through an adapted version of this schema. If the Anthropocene concept really does index an intrusion that undoes thinking as usual, this intrusion should be understood as a disruption of the Modern, capitalist partition of the sensible. In turn, this should be read in terms of the capacities of the other-than-human in excess of the nature/binary culture that renders it as mute and passive. Perhaps above all else, this means that the Anthropocene marks this binary as a 'wrong,' both in terms of the figure of 'Man' that the binary elevates and the figure of 'Nature' that it dominates. From this perspective, the proliferation of knowledges announcing the end of this binary are the processing of that wrong in one way or another. For example, if Bennett uses a Rancièrean frame in Vibrant Matter to argue that she seeks to undo this partition as it is operative in political theory (2010, p. vii-viii), then I take as a starting point that it is already ruptured in a broader sense, and that the knowledge of 'vibrant matter' that she produces is one response amongst many to the already intelligible disruption of those bodies which have, by rights, no capacity to speak nor to act; the other-than-human forces that compose our planet.

However, as some have noted (Bennett, 2010, p. 106; Bryant, 2011; Janicka, 2020), for Rancière, the human is understood to be the exclusive locus of political agency. A common reading of Rancière is that he is a profoundly anthropocentric thinker, rooting the political in the equal intellectual capacity of people to exceed and undo the hierarchies of the police order through reasoned speech acts. This formulation looks suspiciously like it is rooted in Descartes' notion of 'good sense' (Shaw, 2016, pp. 26-46; Descartes, 2008 [1637]); the equal capacity for intelligence and rationality amongst human bodies enabled by the infamous mind/matter dualism. If Descartes account of the mind/matter dualism is the nature/culture binary by another name (Moore, 2015), could a Cartesian account of politics permit a political analysis of the disruption to the 'Cartesian dualism' we are addressing here?

The problems of anthropocentrism in Rancière's thought are an issue that I will return to in more detail in chapter 7, when I try to think more specifically about my own theoretical approach to a posthuman politics. At that point I will try to demonstrate his anthropocentrism is not insurmountable because the 'speaking being' of politics is marked by its excess, which makes political speech continually open to new and unaccounted for presences; it is precisely understood not to be a speaking being by the police order prior to the event of its political speech (1999, pp. 26-30). There, I will suggest that this means that Rancière cannot foreclose ahead of time that a speaking being ends at the material boundaries of human bodies. For now, I will say simply that the phenomena we have come to associate with the Anthropocene—ocean acidification, species extinction, climate heating, forest fires, the escalation of natural disasters, and so on—are telling us something about the exclusionary and hierarchical limits of the Modern police order! But what that something 'is' possesses a unique degree of ambiguity insomuch as it doesn't necessarily operate within the human systems of signification: the audible and readable inscriptions of logos.

Logos or 'reason' has been distinguished as the human basis to articulate the distinction between the just and the unjust in comparison to the *phone* of animal noise, which can only express pleasure and displeasure (Rancière, 1999, pp. 1-19). This potentially problematic distinction has been at the centre of understanding the human as a political animal since Aristotle (1981 [350BCE]; Rancière, 1999, pp. 1-19). However, without a straightforwardly accessible logos, concepts such as translation—originating in the work of Michel Serres (1982) and Michael Callon (1986)—have been essential to the development of accounts of more-than-human relations, though whether this has gotten us to a *political* understanding of these relations is contested (Arboleda, 2016; Barcz and Cronin, 2023; Hornberg, 2013; MacCormack, 2020; Rekret, 2016; 2018; Petersen, 2018; Swyngedeouw and Ernston, 2018).

What does this rupture with the distribution of the sensible, its ambiguity, and the necessity of translation mean *politically*? For one thing, it means that there is an extraordinary level of *dissensus* precisely over what it does 'mean': a proliferation of more-or-less coherent accounts of knowledge that hold together socio-historically constituted forms of narration, perception, epistemological reflection, and ontological speculation in order to translate this intrusion, which is simultaneously to render forms of practice (im)possible. Here I want to take Rancière's account of knowledge as part of a broader 'configuration of sense' seriously. I suggest that posthuman knowledge practices are part of a loosely woven conglomeration of common-senses emerging in the Anthropocene, which co-constitutively shape the terrain of possibilities for practice. In this sense, "there is not, on the one hand, 'theory' which explains things, and, on the other hand, practice educated by the lessons of theory. There are… knots tying together possible perceptions, interpretations, orientations, and movements" (Rancière, 2009, p. 120).

Following Rancière and addressing Povinelli's pragmatics, we can ask what kind of knots of sense these knowledge-practices bind themselves up with, and with what implications for practice? What is the specific 'wrong' of the Anthropocene that these approaches make intelligible and how does this intelligibility shape how that wrong can be remedied, rectified, or politically engaged? Put more bluntly, Rancière's narrow, aesthetic account of radical politics gives me a navigational heuristic with which to assess the kinds of political work these knowledge practices do. Do they contribute to practices of policing that actively or passively reassert the dominant or hegemonic coordinates of the Modern world and administer the wrong away? On the other side, do they contribute to a radical, political understanding of the rupture, binding themselves to knots of sense in which the hierarchies of the nature/culture binary are radically contested?

2.4 A Poetics of Knowledge and Poetic Regimes

Rancière's aesthetic account of politics and policing is a useful foil for engaging the political possibilities and limits located in different posthuman theories that tackle the nature/culture question. However, because these concepts are primarily engaged with analysing the *practices* of governance and contestation, there is a need to engage these concepts with a methodological approach to reading knowledge-making practices. Handily, these concepts find their way into Rancière's own reading practice, which he terms a '*poetics of knowledge.'* In this section I outline the way Rancière's poetics of knowledge informs my own approach. Before proceeding, I want to caution, as Martin Grünfeld does, that the fluid nature of Rancière's invocation of the term *poetics of knowledge* means that "there is no ready-made theoretical framework that can be distilled and transposed to other contexts" (2020, p. 44). In response, I work between Rancière's account and Grünfeld's careful reconstruction to dis-locate and appropriate the term to direct my own study.

Rancière's understanding of poetics designates the always literary and aesthetic techniques by which knowledge is created and signified as such. As Rancière would later say:

> A poetics of knowledge can be viewed as a kind of 'deconstructive practice', to the extent that it tries to trace back an established knowledge – history, political science, sociology, and so on – to the poetic operations – description, narration, metaphorization, symbolization, and so on – that make its objects appear and give sense and relevance to its propositions. (Rancière, 2011, p. 14)

In this sense, a poetics of knowledge takes a suitably anti-foundational position towards knowledge, wherein knowledge isn't simply an act of collecting facts about objects in the world that are already well defined and ready to present. Instead, making knowledge is understood to be a *literary* practice of production that shapes and marks the objects that it seeks to identify and brings forth as objects of knowledge. In Rancière's account, knowledge is thus an aesthetic practice that has an active hand in producing the legible contours of the world.

This means that a 'poetics of knowledge' seeks to locate the account of knowledge's self-account: the narrativisation that designates and legitimates its operations; the way this shapes a series of aesthetic translations between the objects of knowledge, sensoria, and the configuration of the knowable and its limits; and all the descriptive, metaphorical, and symbolic acts that this requires. As White notes in his foreword to Rancière's text, this understanding of poetics is not simply a question of the style through which knowledge is presented, but an account of the "making" or "invention" of knowledge practices (Rancière, 1994, p. viii). It is only by deploying these aesthetic techniques that knowledge becomes intelligible as knowledge rather than another kind of discourse. Therefore, in Rancière's account the aesthetic or poetic dimension of knowledge is not a secondary phenomenon to thought but the act of fabrication that shapes the nature of the *thinkable* itself (Grünfeld, 2020, p. 48; Rancière, 1994, p. 101).

From this perspective, the ambition isn't to identify or rectify knowledge practices in terms of verifying their truth or falsity: a poetics of knowledge does "not to provide norms for it, nor to validate or invalidate its scientific pretense" (Rancière, 1994, p. 8). Instead, it is, on the face of it, simply an account of the thinkable and its social and historical conditions of intelligibility. Rather than a debate over the falsity or truth of particular knowledge-discourses, a poetics of knowledge "requires the assertion that these knowledge-discourses, like other modes of discourse, use common powers of linguistic innovation in order to make objects visible and available to thinking, in order to create connections between objects etc" (Rancière and Panagia, 2000, p.116). Thus, the aesthetic or poetic dimension of knowledge attunes us to the fact that, whatever form it takes, it is a communal practice of intelligibility making; the "creative activity of invention that allows for a redescription and reconfiguration of a common world of experience" (ibid.).

This relationship between knowledge-making and the (re)configuration of a common world of experience is significant because it suggests that knowledge proceeds from and helps reproduce or alter the fabrication of the partition of the sensible, with its necessarily political connotations. Indeed, Rancière's account is always attuned to the way that performing the "poetic operation on the objects of knowledge puts into play their political dimension" (Rancière and Panagia, 2000, p.116). As Grünfeld argues, "not only are politics and aesthetics interrelated, [but they are also] connected to the production of knowledge, because aesthetics designates a specific regime of visibility and intelligibility. Knowledge always has an immanent aesthetic dimension" (2020, p. 54). The fact that knowledge is involved in the practice of parting what is sensible from what is not means that "visibility is also invisibility, possibility is also impossibility, inclusion is also exclusion" (ibid.) In short, a poetics of knowledge is attuned to the practices of legibility-making by which knowledge shapes a distribution of the sensible, determining how we understand the world, the entities that compose it, the spaces that divide it and, as a necessary consequence, the political terrain of possible actions (ibid., p. 55).

By attuning us to this nexus of knowledge-making, communal intelligibility, and political practice, a poetics of knowledge does in fact invite us to do more than describe the aesthetic construction of knowledge. It is also a polemical and normative exercise with an emphasis on "the possibilities of redistribution" (ibid., p. 54). Here Rancière's characterisation of a poetics of knowledge as a deconstructive exercise comes to the fore (2011, p. 14). Analysing the poetic or aesthetic dimensions of knowledge exposes that any regime of knowledge-making is always contingent upon articulating itself within and to a given sociohistorical set of circumstances, mobilising a broader set of discourses, including the aesthetics of narrative, to assign itself the role of knowledge and to construct the necessities of its objects and operations (Rancière and Panagia, 2000, p. 116). It is through these operations of articulation that certain ways of producing knowledge appear as necessary rather than contingent, certain objects, processes and practices become visible whilst others become invisible, and certain modes of seeing and acting upon the world appear as necessary, whilst others become impossible.

Exposing these procedures of aesthetic fabrication undoes the intelligibility of that partition of the sensible, by which its consequences appear necessary; there is no grander or more universal sense of 'why' knowledge should be this way and with these effects rather than another way with different effects. This is not to contest the validity of an account of knowledge, but it does unpick the way a given regime attempts to foreclose, naturalise, or otherwise (re)produce a particular partition of the sensible. As Grünfeld summarises:

> poetic regimes are uncovered not merely to show what and how they make knowledge possible through historically specific distributions of the sensible, but also how they are historically constituted and may be challenged by alternate poetics that redistribute the sensible and the thinkable. (2020, p. 55)

Thinking about this in terms of Rancière's conception of politics, in which altering the distribution of sensibility is part of a political practice that also alters what it is possible to say, do, and be in a particular space and time (1999, p. 40), it is clear that such a redistribution changes the linkages that make one field of vision legible and another illegible and, consequently, one type of practical task necessary and another impossible. As such, the polemic tasks of deconstruction and production make it possible to contest certain accounts of 'what is necessary' or 'what is circumscribed' and to engage with political activities that are otherwise obscured and occluded.

Grünfeld's invocation of the term 'poetic regime' is significant here, too. As he argues, "Rancière introduces the concept *regime* to articulate how the thinkable is potentially demarcated by historically variable poetic regimes in which specific objects are thinkable and truth can be produced" (Grünfeld, 2020, p. 49). It allows Rancière to move between the operations of a particular text and a level of generality through which he can identify a socio-historically constituted set of aesthetic axioms that determine the shape of knowledge at a particular moment. However, there is a potential danger here. As some critics have argued (Davis, 2010, pp. 59-60; Méchoulan, 2009, p. 60), when Rancière talks about the historically constituted modes of doing history in *The Names of History* (1994), he seems to imply that his chosen texts could stand in for the totality of the discipline of history at a particular historical moment. On this account, an account of the poetic regime is far too universalising.

Contrary to this criticism, Grünfeld argues that Rancière works to both historicise and de-historicise the poetic regimes that he analyses (2020, pp. 49-50). On the one hand, he locates them within a given historical moment, but, on the other hand, he de-totalises the relationship between historical moment and knowledge such that one poetic regime is not a stand in for the whole. The result is that poetic regimes should be understood to "co-exist in varying ways… one regime does not delimit all options of expression and thought… poetic regimes are potentially contradictory, plural, non-exhaustive and open" (ibid.). As such "there is always the possibility of different competing poetics" (ibid.).

As I suggested in section 2.3, I believe that the invention of the Anthropocene concept marks a distinct period of rupture, in which Modernity's distribution of the sensible and its figure of autonomous humanity has been disrupted by the nonhuman or inhuman agencies of the planet. This means that we are in a unique moment of dissensus within the realm of social-scientific knowledge production, which is defined by different, competing poetic regimes, all symbolically representing and narrativising in order to make this rupture intelligible or meaningful, which is simultaneously to render forms of practice (im)possible.

With all this in mind, my thesis performs a poetics of knowledge in the examination of four different 'poetic regimes' that process the rupture of the Anthropocene. I attend to the way these regimes are fabricated as 'necessary' knowledge-making responses to this rupture, proffering narrative accounts and aesthetic procedures that work between the objects of knowledge and its knowers, all with different effects of distribution and redistribution upon the sensible, which imply different political possibilities. I name these regimes; *The Poetic Regime of Uncertainty*, *The Poetic Regime of Brutality*, *The Poetic Regime of Pessimism, and The Poetic Regime of Potentiality*. These categories are a heuristic device, homologous to what Weber called 'ideal types,' admittedly one-sided analytical constructs designed to highlight contrasts and comparisons between different groupings (Allen, 2004, p. 77; Weber, 1949). This means that, as Rancière's account of the poetic regime implies, they are not exhaustive of a reality that is often more complex and hybrid than my presentation here appears, nor do I claim this to be the case. Nonetheless they offer a style of presentation that allows me to heuristically draw out a series of narrations, their logics and aesthetic procedures of knowledge production, and their political effects in a way that offers a unique vantage point to engage posthuman theorising at a level of generality.

Whilst the terms I adopt here reflect the insights of my analysis, there is another benefit I see in attempting to adopt a nomenclature that avoids some of the dominant terms of the day; posthumanism, new materialism, speculative realism and so on, which all indicate different emphases within a field we might otherwise loosely term the 'posthuman' turn. Chiefly, it enables me to sidestep debates pertaining to these names: whether a posthumanism actually escapes humanism (i.e. Weinstein and Colebrook, 2017b), whether this or that paradigm is really materialist (i.e. Arboleda, 2016; Lemke, 2017; Malm, 2018), or what the 'real' of speculative realism might mean (i.e. divergences between Brassier (2007) and Harman (2018) on the 'real'). No doubt, some of these debates have political implications, but I believe that where this is so, they can be pulled into very different dialogues that centre these implications.

Thus, my own typology is designed to redistribute the sensible boundaries that have previously demarcated their groupings. By rebinding these works into new groupings, the ambition is to capture something significant about the way they create certain structures of aesthetics-knowledge-politics. In this sense, and in line with Rancière's polemical, political orientation, I am much less concerned with what they 'are' than with their central aesthetic organising principles and what these 'do' to political possibility. Echoing Povinelli's reading of James, the question is not about an absolute marking of truth in knowledge production, instead it is about what difference is made intelligible and where; what part of the world does it help to "matter forth" (2021, p. 6)? It points to the questions I alluded to in the preceding section: what kinds of practical projects do these forms of knowledge help to sustain? Do they allow us to see practices that move us towards ecologically just futures, towards emancipations from the hierarchies of the nature/culture binary that mark human and other-than-human bodies in patterns of domination and exploitation? Or do they (re)produce these hierarchical practices?

Informed by the normative impulses of my reading of Rancière's poetics of knowledge, the thesis is structured so that it moves from a position of criticality, in which I identify and critique those approaches that I conclude that we should leave behind, to a position of recovery, in which I alter the nature of my critical gaze in order to recover elements of approaches that contribute towards the culmination of this thesis: *a Poetic Regime of Radical Politics.* This begins to take shape in chapter 6, when I try to think about the 'destructive' elements of critique and political practice and continues through chapter 7 on the Poetic Regime of Potentiality, both of which I bring together through Rancière's account of the political. This means that the final case study, the forest occupation at Hambach Forest is not intended to open a critique of the political limits of a certain poetic regime, but to utilise the concepts I developed in the final few chapters in order to read a radical politics of the Anthropocene. This account demonstrates that there are radical rumblings out there, often occluded by forms of posthuman theorising, which the theoretical tools I develop can help us begin to approach.

2.5 Affirmation and Negation

The work I perform over the course of the thesis also enters into ongoing theoretical debates over 'affirmation' and 'negation,' which have coalesced around questions of agency, impotency, and politics. This means that both of these concepts are threaded through the thesis, marking key reference points for the analysis. On one side, affirmational approaches have moved away from the oppositional understanding of both critique and political practice engendered by classic figures of critical thought such as Marx (Dekeyser and Jellis, 2020). No doubt, this tendency is at least in part a consequence of the failures of radical, negatively oriented politics over the 20th Century (Badiou, 2007a). In this light, negative critique is understood to have "run out of steam" (Latour, 2004a). As Thomas Dekeyser and Thomas Jellis argue, it is accused of "too.. much. But also too little" (2020, p. 322). On the one hand, its destructive power is alleged to license 'too much', severing us too radically from a world that is too relationally entangled and complex to be handled without care for what has been fabricated (Barad, 2007; 2012). Rather than revealing the grounds for effective political action, the negativity of critique is understood to engender paranoiac, conspiratorial, or disenchanted orientations to the world. In this sense, it operates as 'too little', bringing only ineffectual moral condemnations that irresponsibly misapprehend and disengage the world and the agencies that can be politically engaged with (Barad, 2012; Bennett, 2010; Braidotti, 2022; Latour, 2004a; Sedgewick, 2003).

Instead, as Rosi Braidotti suggests, the affirmational stance focusses upon "empowerment… the increase of one's ability to relate to multiple others on a productive and mutually enforcing manner" (2022, p. 152). An emphasis on affirmation explicitly or implicitly subtends many approaches to more-than-human knowledge making, from Bruno Latour's affirmation of actors' capacities to help shape and generate the power of networks (2007), to William Connolly's account of political agency developing slowly from the agentive capacity to push at the boundaries of subjectification through "role experimentation" (2013, pp. 179-

196). Despite the diversity of affirmational approaches, a commonality is an emphasis on the relational, which means that they commit to find and make connections with and through the capacities, and creativities within the world, “mobilising resources that have been left untapped in the present, including our desires and imaginations” (Braidotti, 2022, p. 152). This is often pitted against the negative, not just in its original Marxist, dialectical association, but in general. Here the negative takes on a largely pejorative sense, where it is more closely associated with “the effect of arrest, blockage, and rigidification that results from a blow, a shock, an act of violence…” (ibid., p. 153), which destroys the relational capacity to engage productively with the world. Even those approaches that admit the necessity of the negative ensure that it is “treated as secondary to *relationality*” (Giraud, 2019, p. 172; emphasis in the original).

However, affirmationism has undergone increasing challenge in recent years (Bissell *et al.*, 2021; Colebrook, 2021; Dekeyser and Jellis, 2020; Harrison, 2015; Philo, 2017a; Noys, 2010; Torrent, 2023), from stances pertaining to (at least) three different but often intermeshed senses of the negative that are often intertwined in thinking politics in the Anthropocene. One sense is emblematised by Paul Harrison’s (2015) questioning from the position of a ‘loser’; what is disavowed by the affirmational stance? The risk is “of forgetting dying, or of forgetting finitude, and forgetting the give and take of living” (ibid., p. 288). Harrison’s question keys us into an understanding of the negative as limits, finitude, and impossibility. In this sense, the ability to know through relational entanglement and its agential effects—otherwise celebrated under an affirmational approach—risk being artificially inflated over and above the very real problematics of our agential limitations and constraints that gave us cause to look for them in the first place (Bissell et al. 2021, p. 21). What if, instead of potentiality, we are marked by “our incapacities in the face of a world that is perhaps more mysterious, unknowable, and unpossessable than we might previously have been comfortable in admitting” (ibid., p. 25)? This sense of the negative hovers around the Anthropocene: the world and its objects seem far more withdrawn and weird than they used to (Morton, 2013); the destructive force of capitalism turns the world into fodder, continuing apace in exceeding the limits of both planet and people (Moore, 2015); and, relatedly, violence and catastrophe persist despite no end of careful, well-intentioned thought (Colebrook, 2021; Grove, J., 2019).

Of course, from the perspective of political potency, I am less enamoured with the ways that this line of critique risks pathologizing and delegitimising radical political activity, policing possibility from a conservative position. Whilst it is crucial to reckon with finitude and impotency and to use them as guards against instrumental rationalities, this can sometimes leave us retreating from political positions, including into support for existing forms of social and political organisation, no matter how untenable or dysfunctional they are. For example, Mitchell Rose's invocation of unknowability as a limit that normatively constrains us to the institution of liberal democracy resembles Hayek's invocation of unknowability as the limits that form the normative basis for market organisation over egalitarian economic alternatives (Rose, 2021; Hayek, 1982), with similarly conservative effects.

The second and third sense of the negative arrives at politically sharper conceptions. The second asks a more politically charged question about what is lost in the affirmational stance, taking Donna Haraway's questioning of "who renders whom capable of what, and at what price, borne by whom?" seriously (2016, p. 23). As Eva Giraud notes, the emphasis on relationality and complexity that accompanies affirmational approaches can over-emphasise connection and proximity as the resources for ethical and political thought, which can obscure the more radical nature of this question (2019, p. 177). What is lost is attention to the constitutive exclusions that render these forms of connection possible. The world of connection and meaning-making that generates our ethical and political concern is itself predicated on unaccounted for and therefore unproblematised disconnection and exclusion that we are unable to properly reckon with—both ethically and politically—by committing wholesale to an affirmational emphasis on connection and relationality (Colebrook, 2021; Dekeyser, 2023; Giraud, 2019; Noys 2010; Philo, 2017a). Indeed, as Sophie Lewis (2017) and Dixa Ramírez-D'oleo (2023) point out, this is true of Haraway's own work, which increasingly seems to emphasise making connection with 'what is' over and above tackling the exclusions that made 'what is' possible. An anti-affirmational stance is most forcefully argued in discussions of the role of dehumanising anti-blackness and racism in constituting our world (Ramírez-D'Oleo, 2023; Warren, 2018; Wilderson III, 2020; Yusoff, 2018). Accordingly, an unbridled commitment to the ethics and possibilities of connection and composition is problematised as de-facto good and engagements with the negative as an important site of ethical and political consideration become necessary.

Thirdly and relatedly, we might ask, as Andrew Culp does (2016), if the project of connection and relation has failed to live up to its political promise? A growing body of literature across social-scientific disciplines criticises the emphasis on affirmation for its potential to be outflanked by or otherwise reproduce the dominant forces of the world that it exists within (e.g. Alt, 2018; Culp, 2016; Dekeyser and Jellis, 2020; Finkenbusch, 2018; Giraud, 2019, pp. 98-117; Noys, 2010; Ramírez-D'Oleo, 2023; Schmidt and Koddenbroch, 2019; Stuelke, 2021; Torrent, 2023). In affirming our capacities to act through the connections we make in the world, are we simply reproducing the agential possibilities (and their violences) already determined by the world and its exclusions? As Kennan Ferguson argues, "Yes is a modality of power" that asks us to compromise ahead of time; it is complicit in the violences and injustices of the world-as-it-is (2022, p. x). If that is so, perhaps an emphasis on precisely what Braidotti refutes is necessary: blockage, arrest, and rigidity. Perhaps we must "break circuits rather than extend them" (Culp, 2016, p. 19), and "find a way to say 'no' to those who tell us to take the world as it is" (Culp, 2016, p. 32). There is a growing chorus of voices that seek to restage the necessity of the negative in radical politics; non-relation against relation, the non-productive manoeuvres of, in and against the productive, and the necessary exclusion of inclusion (Coole, 2000; Culp, 2016; Dekeyser, 2022; Ferguson, 2022; Giraud, 2019; Noys, 2010).

This thesis makes a novel contribution to these debates. In the first place, it draws out some of the stakes from the vantage point of radical political practice. With notable exceptions (Giraud, 2019), I argue that a key absence from these debates, much like the poetic regimes I draw out, is an engagement with the way the negative and the affirmational are bound together in concrete, radical political practices. Without this attention, the debates are polarised around one position or the other. Indeed, across the thesis, by reading knowledges through Rancière's poetic approach, I attempt to demonstrate the limits of over-emphasising one position or the other. In chapters 3 and 4, where I address The Poetic Regime of Uncertainty and the Poetic Regime of Brutality, I draw out the way in which affirmational approaches can indeed be outflanked by dominant forms of contemporary power: capitalist governmentality and state sovereignty respectively.

On the other hand, whilst the negative is an obvious and necessary component to radical politics, I try to demonstrate the reasons that I have some apprehensions about the way in which the negative is mobilised in some of these discussions. In a particular articulation of the problem of the Anthropocene, the three senses of the negative that I described above become problematically intermeshed. If the question of the Anthropocene is fundamentally one of the relationships between humans and world (how these relationships are configured and if they can be reconfigured, with what acts of bounding and exclusion, and with what effects), then an exclusive attention to the negative risks a certain absolutism of non-relation that moves us towards forms of nihilism that I worry become less politically useful.

Put succinctly by David Chandler, “it is the case that whatever is done to preserve humanity will inevitably be construed to be problematic, when humanity is collectively seen to be the problem rather than the solution, i.e. in the era of the Anthropocene” and so positive gestures towards ‘solutions’ to the problems are frequently read as “operating on the side of maintaining an unsustainable status quo” (2018a, p. 704) or, at best, simply fantasy (Grove, J., 2019, p. 17). Here humanity is figured as the product of an “original metaphysical sin” as Rancière noted in a recent interview (Crisis and Critique, 2023, 01:22:45). Indeed, the possibility and desirability of reconfiguring the human and a shared world of commonality and meaning, even in an anti-foundational sense, has become an increasingly fraught question (Colebrook, 2021; Dekeyser, 2022; MacCormack, 2020; Pugh, 2023; Ramírez-D’Oleo, 2023; Warren, 2018). The result is a certain sense of impotency that dulls political sense (Crisis and Critique, 2023, 01:22:45). In chapters 5 and 6, where I engage the Poetic Regime of Pessimism, I try to demonstrate that these senses of the negative, lead to forms of withdrawal and refusal that reproduce forms of political impotence rather than political power.

In chapters 7 and 8, where I attempt to build a Poetic Regime of Radical Politics, I counteract this polarity and propose that the best way to navigate the deadlock between affirmation and negation is to draw on Rancière’s account of the political and of political agency. I will deal this with in more detail there. For now, I will say that Rancière allows us to see radical politics as a distinct modality of practice in which his attention to both aesthetic disruption and the articulation of ‘wrong’ gives primacy to the negative, but this is always and necessarily intertwined with the affirmational project of a political subject’s capacity to build a “world of equality” in order to litigate the political struggle (Rancière, 2017).

Having briefly outlined the way the thesis speaks to these debates; I now turn to the way the theoretical coordinates I have assembled inform my methodological approach.

2.6 A Case Study Approach

My commitment to the political implications of knowledge-making means that I will not simply be performing an aesthetic/discursive reading of theoretical texts. I draw on case studies as a research strategy (Yin, 2009) to attend to the relationship between theory and its political stakes. My approach to case studies is distinct from the way they are mobilised to ‘test’ theories in foundationally moored, positivist projects (Priya, 2020, p. 100; Bennett and Elman, 2006). Because I share an anti-foundationalist and aesthetic orientation with Rancière, I am not interested in testing the theories under review in terms of their truth or their falsity. Instead, I subscribe to the view that theorising is part of all practice, effectively co-productive of phenomena, rather than merely descriptive of them (Barad, 2007; Zalewski, 1996). In that regard, my approach is designed to reflect the way that the forms of narration, symbolic practice, and accounting that compose poetic regimes of knowledge-making are knotted in threads of non/sense that traverse the socio-natural world as a communal terrain of intelligibility-making and its effects.

My intention is not to identify direct lines of causation operating between these boundaries, but to situate academic knowledge within a broader context and to draw out the continuities and affinities that tread across the sensible demarcations that mark off the academic from the political, as well as important differences. This understanding informs the normative dimension of my reading practice, which demands that we be pragmatically selective about the poetics of knowledge we subscribe to and the practices they help to validate and set in play. To that effect, it is only by working across the boundaries of academic knowledge production and political constitution that one can really attend to what Povinelli names as "the ethical question", which I am going to suggest is, instead, a political question: "which part of the world does one wish to lend their efforts and attention" (2021, p. 6).

To that end, I deploy case studies in acts of what Deena and Michael Weinstein call "bricolage" (1991), where the object(s) of the theoretical text and those that compose the case study are "put into a disciplined conceptual play… the task is to seek whatever orders of homology and analogy can be discerned in what initially appears to be radically heterogenous" (ibid., p. 160). That is, the case study becomes a mode of redistributing the sensible, helping to bring forward the "tangle of tightly and loosely coupled syntagmatic chains" that operate across posthuman knowledge-making and particular forms of practice (ibid.). This isn't necessarily a one-way dialogue that moves from the theory to the case study with ease, but an approach that attends to the play of similarities and differences between the two as a mode for producing critical analysis that reflects upon the possibilities and limits of the theoretical approach, always with a Rancièrean account of politics operating as the lens with which to view this interplay.

If, as Grünfeld notes, the term 'regime' allows Rancière to move from specific works to a level of generality (2020, pp. 49-50), then stakes of my own analysis required a relationship between the specificity of the examples and the general; that the case study is representative of a terrain of tendencies, both major and minor, that imperfectly and incompletely grasp at the whole. As Chandler's account of mapping and sensing demonstrates (2018b), the governmental operations of RWE that I explore in the chapter on the Poetic Regime of Uncertainty are representative of processes that are much more widely deployed. There are even international standards guides for businesses and governments that aim to formalise them (e.g. International Organization for Standardization, 2015). As Andreas Malm and the Zetkin Collective's work on "Green Nationalism" shows (2021, pp. 113-180), the political programmes of Rassemblement National and the violent ecofascists I examine are part of a much wider canon of practice that shares their poetic fabrication with the terms of the Poetic Regime of Brutality. As the International Communal Studies Association's (ICSA) research agenda shows (icsacommunity.org, 2023), Tinker's Bubble, which I examine in the Poetic Regime of Pessimism, is far from the only community formed by withdrawing from Modernity in order to experiment with different, ecologically attuned forms of life. The anarcho-nihilists that complete my account of the Poetic Regime of Pessimism reflect a radical current of political negativity that includes The Invisible Committee (2009) and other insurrectionary anarchist groups (Conspiracy of Cells of Fire, 2013). Finally, the forest occupiers that help me explore the poetics of politics in the last chapter resonate with radical resistance movements like the occupation at Standing Rock (Estes, 2019), the ZAD, and No-TAV (Mauvaise Troupe Collective, 2018). In short, whilst the case studies are of course particular and specific, they are designed to have resonances that radiate beyond these specificities.

2.7 Developing Categories, Selecting Texts

The account of poetic regimes that I give could never truly be an exhaustive one, but the categories that I came to emerged from a careful practice of what Lina Katan and Charlotte Andreas Baarts call "inquiry-based reading" (2018). As they argue, an initial orientation to reading originates in the idea for the project and this informs the kinds of theoretical selections made, rather than the other way round (ibid., p. 65). In this sense, some of the early questions of the project, chiefly, 'if the Anthropocene seems to be a moment in which the problems of the nature/culture binary gain urgent political attention, what are the dominant modes of conceptualising this issue?' and 'what are the political possibilities and limits inscribed into dominant modes of critically processing Modernity's nature/culture binary?' animated my initial inquiry. These questions informed both my initial attraction to Rancière's politically attentive poetics of knowledge and my engagement with those forms of 'posthumanism' most attentive to the question of the nature/culture binary.

I began with what Katan and Andreas Baarts call "cursory reading", which is not so much "a matter of developing one's own thinking as much as a matter of acquainting oneself with the thinking of others" (ibid., p. 66). At this stage, I was largely attentive to reading as an initial exercise in selecting and sorting the texts that I read and by making note of how these choices were beginning to take shape. The first aspect of the initial selection process emerged from reading with a certain received hierarchy of knowledge production that became apparent early on in the cursory reading stage. Rather than sticking to texts belonging to the disciplines I locate myself within, politics and human geography, I quickly began to identify theorists that operated at a 'broader' philosophical level of the social sciences in general that had, over the past 30 years, been incorporated at the sub-disciplinary level. For example, Sarah Whatmore's *Hybrid Geographies* (2002) is a foundational text for re-imaging the field of Human Geography beyond the nature/culture boundary. However, it is clearly a text that relies heavily on the principles of Latour's Actor-Network Theory and the feminist ethics of figures like Barad and Haraway for much of its substance. As such, what began as a disciplinary reading process quickly evolved into locating and reading a series of significant figures within the corpus of posthumanism who have come to exemplify, across a range of disciplines, a series of clearly identifiable positions.

In order to identify key figures and texts, I assembled a reading list by searching variations of key terms such as 'posthuman,' 'new materialism,' 'more-than-human,' 'nature/culture,' and 'speculative realism.' This search drew upon databases such as Google Scholar and Scopus and involved cross-referencing author names with the number of citations that their work had garnered. I used citational numbers as a way of indexing the influence that scholars exerted. Whilst I tried to avoid being overly prescriptive with the number that I considered to warrant the label 'significant', all of the representatives of the poetic regimes I discuss possessed over 10,000 google scholar citations, and the broader pool they were selected from had a minimum of 7,500 citations.

From a broad pool of key authors, I moved to identifying a narrower pool by engaging texts at what Katan and Baarts call the "in-depth" reading stage. This is characterised by "a thorough analysis of the text grounded in critical thinking" (ibid., p. 67). That is, reading rooted not just in what the texts say, but a process that holds them up to my own project as a lens to view it from: "[researchers] look not below the surface but are literally looking through the text, holding up its perspectives like a lens through which they examine anew the appearance of their own research object" (ibid., p. 68). At that point, then, I engaged a process of reading and careful re-reading from which I began grouping texts together in ways that began to shape the account of distinct poetic regimes that I have presented in the thesis. Here I drew upon

Rancière's emphasis on narration found in an account of a poetics of knowledge. This allowed me to reconstruct important resemblances and differences in how the texts narratively justified their ontological and epistemological accounts of thinking about and beyond the nature/culture binary, the processes of knowledge production that these narrations gave rise to, and the way that these processes created partitions of the sensible with political consequences, whether they were rendered explicitly or implicitly.

In the main, I aimed to find texts that were concerned most systematically with an ontological and epistemological account of producing knowledge and, if possible, the political implications of producing knowledge in this way. Occasionally, these two aspects were present in the same text, as with Bennett's *Vibrant Matter* (2011) or Barad's *Meeting the Universe Halfway* (2007). Sometimes this was not as clear, and I drew on secondary texts that were more politically engaged to support those concerned with knowledge production. For example, Latour's *Assembling the Social* (2007) is a self-consciously narrow account of Actor-Network Theory as a model for producing knowledge, but books like *The Politics of Nature* (2004) and *Down To Earth* (2018) were more politically focussed texts derived from his approach. In other cases, systematic accounts of knowledge production were less forthcoming. This is most clear in some (but not all) of the texts that came to be sorted into the Poetic Regime of Pessimism*,* which I characterise as negative knowledges that often deployed deconstructive rather than productive logics. In these instances, I tried to locate texts that engaged the political stakes of the critique the authors made most clearly. For example, Claire Colebrook's approach departed from laying out an ontological and epistemological account of more-than-human relations, but texts like *What is Anthropopolitical?* (2016) and *Can Theory End the World?* (2021) were interventions directed at creating and addressing the shifting political stakes of a critique she was producing.

Importantly, the process of selection was not a linear one. Instead, it was forged in a reiterative back and forth that relied upon reading a broad selection of texts alongside each other, tracing the trajectories of the authors, and responding to changing trajectories. Sometimes this produced interesting results, for example in Latour's very different account of the political stakes in *Down to Earth* (2018) than those he identified in *The Politics of Nature* (2004), and in Haraway's unnerving populationist turn in *Staying with the Trouble* (2016). Both of these engagements represented interesting divergences from earlier positions, which led me to a productive engagement with populationist rhetoric and biopolitics that eventually became the chapter on the Poetic Regime of Brutality.

Some of the time, concepts that had been introduced in texts published after a key text I had initially decided upon became useful for drawing out aspects of the theory I was already wrestling with. This is most apparent in Barad's conceptualisation of the 'void' in a series of texts from 2012-2019, which allowed me to think about the negative as a productive site in relation to Rancière's own account more clearly. Colebrook's increasing engagement with the negative around themes of extinction and critique has also been fast-moving. In this respect, marking out the relationship between the critique of politics in her account of the 'anthropopolitical' and the culmination of its logic in her more recent conceptualisation of "world-destructive theory" seemed to me to add to the understanding of her position. Similarly, Morton's *Hyperobjects* (2013) was a politically ambiguous text, and this resulted in a number of different ways to try and incorporate his work into my account of the Poetic Regime of Pessimism. However, a 2021 text on *Hyposubjects* allowed me to reread this work in a different light and to position him much more clearly in what I ended up calling the "minimally extensive negativity" rendering of the Poetic Regime of Pessimism.

By the end of the process, I had roughly charted the poetic regimes that I had categorised (Appendix A), which included the key narrational theme, the aesthetic process by which knowledge was said to be produced, an account of whether the positions under review were broadly affirmational or negative, and a brief summary of the implications for practice. Firstly, the chart acted as a kind of 'narrative guide' for the poetics of my thesis, helping me to organise the material in a series that suited the normative commitments of my approach by moving from positions that I knew would be the objects of critique towards those that I would eventually seek to recover something from and direct towards what would become a Poetic Regime of Radical Politics. On the other hand, it provided me with a guide that formed the basis for selecting my case studies.

2.8 Selecting Case Studies and Materials

In order to make the analysis, I pursued case studies by collecting a broad range of textual artefacts for aesthetic analysis (reports, policy documents, books and book chapters, manifestos, blogposts, documentary footage, interview transcripts). The main reason for this decision was that the thesis is heuristically driven. The empirical work is part of a demonstration of the poetic regimes I am attempting to expose and their distinct analytics, this means choices were driven by their dialogical capacity to draw out relations of similarity and difference across the 'knots of sense' that these regimes came to stand for. My research process was not interested in generating knowledge inductively, neither by "describing social life-worlds 'from the inside out'" (Hamilton and Taylor, 2017, p. 26), as Hamilton and Taylor note of the utility of ethnographic methods, nor by using the empirics as the basis for theory generation. Instead, focussing on textual artefacts allowed me to target the existing traces of specific practices, processes, and events that could be engaged dialogically with the theoretical works I had already categorised and collated. This allowed me to weave between analogous and homologous narrational, ontological, processual, identity-making activities present across the texts (Dittmer, 2010, p. 280). In short, through this approach, I was able to take more control over my encounter with and selection of the empirical data. I could prioritise attributes that I was looking for, particularly how actors constructed the relationship between the human and the nonhuman within the broader context of the world they are a part of, how that shaped their commitments to the practices they were engaged in (Lamb and Higgins, 2020), and, most importantly, how that spoke to the typology of poetic regimes I had developed.

This offered a range of case-study possibilities for each poetic regime and so I had to make choices about selection. The most important general criteria was the ability to access texts or "stock" as Weinstein and Weinstein call it, from which to assemble my bricolage (1991, p. 162). A full list of the sources I drew upon for each case study is available in the appendices (Appendix B). Of course, given the varying nature of the theoretical approaches I covered, I was less inclined to put a particular number on the amount of sources that I used than I was in their quality and depth, the people who made or spoke through the texts, and their contextual relationship to the case study. Usually the quantity of resources available to me wasn't a significant issue, but at times this posed certain difficulties for selection, particularly when targetting groups corresponding to the strategies of withdrawal and destruction in the Poetic Regime of Pessimism, who, for different reasons, often don't leave much of a trace. Tinker's Bubble and the network of zine-making Anarcho-nihilists I located represented the most textually-available examples in this respect.

Beyond quantity, the consideration of the quality or utility of the texts was important. I selected case studies based on whether I could access texts that that disclosed both the context of the case study and the narrational accounts of why the practitioner—whether that was a company, a community, a political party, an individual, or an activist group—was motivated to pursue the particular practices they did, how this was related to the way they made account of nature/culture boundaries, and how that operated within a broader distribution of the sensible; an intelligible field of spaces, bodies, activities through which their account and their practices made sense. There was no hard and fast rule for this and no unformity to what these texts might look like from poetic regime to poetic regime, which was a necessary consequence of the diversity of approaches that they represent. At various points, blogposts, political manifestos, documentary footage and interviews, online interviews, corporate reports, brochures, zines, books, and book chapters all contributed to productive dialogical engagements between case study and theory. Where necessary, I also relied upon secondary academic literature as a way of contextualising the discussions I engaged in, or in order to access further statements from my target groups if they offered insight I was unable to locate elsewhere.

Finally, a consideration of the case study's wider significance drove my choices. Rassemblement National's 2019 manifesto for the European parliamentary elections was both high profile and relatively novel in its adoption of ecological issues to frame far-right political issues, at a time when climate denialism was much more common. 2019 was also the year of two shootings in Christchurch and El Paso, where the far-right shooters also deployed nature/culture tropes and populationist rhetoric to justify their attacks. Not only did this suggest that the relationship between ecology and the far-right had become increasingly pressing, but it shaped my re-reading of Latour's *Down to Earth* and Haraway's *Staying with the Trouble* in the process, and these linkages helped me develop my account of the Poetic Regime of Brutality.

Tinker's Bubble, which I drew on in examining the Poetic Regime of Pessimism*,* happens to be both the longest running intentional community in Britain and one of the only ones that practically operates without fossil fuels. The first fact perhaps explains why there was more material available on this group than other similar groups. The second informed my choice in the sense that it presented a rare chance to explore a form of 'withdrawal' from Modernity that was genuine insomuch as it tried to extricate itself from the regime of energy production upon which Modern civilisation relies.

I had stumbled upon the occupation at Hambach Forest, which became the case study for the Poetic Regime of Radical Politics, on Twitter in 2019. By then the occupation had secured the temporary right for the forest to remain and had already established itself as a central node in a network of relations that formed the climate justice movement in Germany. As such, it seemed to me to represent a significant and interesting example of more-than-human political contestation, an assessment that was vindicated as 2020 and 2021 unfolded, and the forest was granted a permanent reprieve, whilst Germany's coal phase-out policy was dramatically brought forward. In turn, the study of this case lead me to discover that the company wanting to clear the Forest were also using the kinds of governmental techniques I was interested in exploring for the Poetic Regime of Uncertainty. That led me to select it as a case study, meaning that, for better or worse, Hambach Forest bookends this thesis.

Where possible, I have tried to rely upon case studies where many of the texts would be in English or that were already translated into English. There were some notable exceptions where the significance of the text or case study over-ruled this. For example, there was no existing English translation of the French Rassemblement National manifesto for the European parliamentary elections (2019). This was a problem because I lack French language skills and I lacked the budget to pay a translator. For this reason, I adopted the use of the AI machine translator *DeepL* to perform an initial translation of the text. Plenter's rigorous testing of *DeepL* to translate political party manifestos (2023), concluded that it "produces reliable and trustworthy results" (ibid., p. 07). Nonetheless, I wanted to ensure the quality of translation and so a trusted, fluent, French-speaking family member helped me to carefully proof-read the translation and confirm that it accurately conveyed the meaning of the text.

Similarly, there were a few important German texts that I could find no English translation for, including RWE's *Acceptance Study for Major Projects* (2012a). In these instances, I drew upon *DeepL* to perform the initial translation. Plenter's study assesses that its German translation is "high quality" (ibid., p. 5), whilst a study that used *DeepL* to translate German scientific research articles into English concluded that it was a reliable tool (Zulfiqar *et al.,* 2018). Nonetheless, as Plenter assesses, sometimes *DeepL* can miss the context that informs the meaning of sentences (2023, p. 2). With that in mind, I was careful to assess the translation as I was making it. Using my own German reading skills, I took passages slowly and moved between the German and its English translation to ensure the accuracy of translation. This required staying vigilant, attending to the way context shapes the particular meaning of a word that could have several, and making edits when the translation was either ugly or could be rendered more clearly by paying attention to context that the translator had missed.

2.9 Ethical Considerations

There are few ethical risks that come from the methods I deployed in the thesis. I relied on texts that were publicly available and so there was no risk of exposing identities and practices that have not already been disclosed. In a broader sense, the research was absent of some of the thornier ethical dilemmas that result from engaging directly with research subjects. Nonetheless, I have taken seriously my responsibilities to my interlocutors, both the theorists that I have relied upon, and those people whose lives and practices have been pulled into this dialogue. Here I recognise the power imbued in representing others and particularly the necessary task of selection required to make them intelligible in the research. In this sense, I have tried to take Barad's account of an ethics of responsibility (2007, pp. 391-395) seriously as an ethical guide to my researching and writing.

As Barad argues, ethics is "about responsibility and accountability for the lively relationalities of becoming of which we are part" (ibid., p. 393), which includes "the differential patterns of mattering of the world of which we are a part… but also the exclusions that we participate in enacting" (ibid., p. 394). I take this to mean that, in selecting what to present and by combining it with other elements, I have enacted relational encounters from which both I and those I have drawn upon have become other than we were. Whilst this process of selection means that I could never be making a simple representation of theoretical judgements, writing practices, lived experiences, and personal views, I have tried to maintain a spirit of generosity and fidelity to them, even at points of disagreement and critique. I note that this has made being critical more difficult at times, particularly in the case of the residents of Tinker's Bubble and of the Anarcho-nihilists compared to a large multinational corporation like RWE. Whilst I have engaged both critically, I hope that it is obvious that I have taken their views and their voices seriously. Conversely, when views are actively harmful and demand a violent irresponsibility to relations with the Other, as in the case of Rassemblement Nation, the Christchurch, and El Paso shooters, I have been robustly critical.

At this point, it also behoves me to acknowledge some of the limitations that my approach implies. Chiefly, whilst there are always limits upon what intellectual community and projects you can engage with, my focus on significant texts, key figures, and case studies of text and speech-producing communities means that I engage a particular account of what is significant in Western European and Anglophone intellectual and political communities. On the one hand, I consider this focus to be well justified, given the reach of posthuman theorising within these communities, to which I belong. Furthermore, my approach comes from a critical perspective that contests some of their terms of intelligibility, and it attempts to push back on them as hegemonic interpretations and expressions of the Anthropocene. On the other hand, such a project necessarily precludes an engagement with minor traditions and other forms of critical literature, particularly a more substantive engagement with critical Black studies and decolonial studies. Whilst I have mobilised some of this work as part of my own critical concerns, there is, nonetheless, limits to the focus that this could be given. In the conclusion of the thesis, I will gesture to where some of these engagements may be possible in the future. Similarly, I necessarily have a limited engagement with works that haven’t been produced within or entered the anglophone community via translation.

2.10 Conclusion

In the above, I discussed the reasons for my methodological choices, which are informed by engaging dialogically in the relationship between theoretical accounts of posthuman knowledge production and their political implications, as expressed by a series of case studies designed to illuminate their horizons and their limits. As such, the analysis will rely upon a discourse analysis of texts assembled from each case study as a way of producing a fruitful, critical dialogue. In line with a normative commitment to radical politics and emancipation, the rest of the thesis takes the form of a series of dialogues within each poetic regime. In the next chapter, I begin this task by examining the Poetic Regime of Uncertainty.

Chapter 03.
The Poetic Regime of Uncertainty: Tracing the World

> *Unable to foresee, to master, [the collective] must govern. Its white cane in hand, it slowly takes the measure of the furnishings of the universe that surrounds or threatens it. If it does not know how many obstacles it has to reckon with, it does not know either how many helpful objects it can rely on. Like little Tom Thumb, it can only keep track of where it has travelled; it expects no salvation except the recording of the protocols that accumulate behind it.*
>
> Latour, 2004, p. 209

3.1 Introduction

Reference to a novel level of uncertainty is profligate in the Anthropocene (e.g., Barad, 2010; Braun, 2008; Charbonnier, 2020; Chester et al., 2021; Connolly, 2013; Cornell and Berkowitz, 2022; Grove, K. and Chandler, 2017; Johnson and Morehouse, 2014; Méndez, 2021; Polasky *et al*., 2020; Stengers 2015). Whilst uncertainty might also be read as potentiality (Grove, K. and Chandler, p. 81), what I am calling the Poetic Regime of Uncertainty takes as its central principle that the rupture of the Anthropocene marks a point at which uncertainty has become an intractable condition, imposing heavy limits upon our ability to know what is out there in the world, and the nature of how we can detect or sense it.

Theorists belonging to the Poetic Regime of Uncertainty deepen the crisis of modernity outlined by figures such as Jean-Francois Lyotard who note the end of “grand narratives” and their capacity to essentialise and universalise our understanding of the world (Lyotard, 1984). And Ulrich Beck, who noted the self-destabilising nature of industrialised Modernity, which sets people free from the “certainties and modes of living of the industrial epoch” whilst exposing them to the risks it produces (Beck, 1992, p. 14; see also Bauman, 2000). Of course, these assessments respond to the failures of the Modern projects of socio-political organisation in the 19th and early 20th Century; of Modern ‘governmentality’ (Foucault, 2002). On one side, the failures of the various constitutions and reconstitutions of the liberal order and its predominant knowledge schema, economics, to grapple with the uncertainty and contingency of the world; to know and hold its objects within an order that possesses any long-term stability or sustainability (e.g. Beck, 1992; Dardot and Laval, 2013; Polanyi, 2001 [1944]). On the other, the failures that followed from the truth claims of emancipatory challenges to that same order (e.g., Arendt, 1990 [1963] pp. 47-58; Latour, 1988; 1993, pp. 1-13; Serres and Latour, 1995 [1990] p. 5).

In the Poetic Regime of Uncertainty, the rupture of the Anthropocene also brings with it a proliferation of agencies that further compound and intensify this uncertainty. The end of the Modern nature/culture binary is the end of the stable, Modern sense of what the 'we' of the community consists of, which has always been subtended by the binary's anthropocentric skew (Latour, 1993; Bennett, 2010; Connolly, 2013; Haraway, 2016; Morton, 2017a). It is now plain to "us" that human agency is entangled with the agency of nonhuman others, and that these entanglements have important, often unpredictable, and, therefore, risky effects. Consequently, the neat bounding of the social body as an anthropocentric totality, within which the practice of politics was supposed to take place, has lost the certainty that held its edges in place.

This means that, knowing under these novel conditions requires adopting a non-Modern set of aesthetic practices. Firstly, without the certainty of a neat border that bounds off human agency from the natural or material world, we must become sensitive to an expanded sense of agency, composed of an ever-more complex set of entangled relations that now span the nature/culture divide. Secondly, the complexity of these relations means abandoning the Modern propositions that there are essence underlying appearances, or an accessible view of the totality by which to impose a totalising schema of order. Indeed, the promethean notion of agency that such forms of 'truth' engender are deemed misguided, hubristic, and dangerous. Instead, we must remain at the surface of things, tentatively *tracing* the world *only as it has been actualised*—the world-as-it-is—through the 'networks' of concrete, localised, and relational composition that straddle human and nonhuman actors.

It is this commitment to engaging with the concrete world of surface—of only that which is made present—that gives the Poetic Regime of Uncertainty its depoliticising impulses. To work within its parameters is to know the world only as it appears, which is to engage the world entirely on its own terms. Without essences there can be no radical truth lying in the disjuncture between appearance and essence, waiting to ground a radical politics and its practices of critique and negation. Without the promethean human agent there is no central locus of causal force or agency that allows us to readily locate responsibility for any given state of affairs, nor any guarantees of reasonable control over the consequences for our actions in addressing these affairs. In the Poetic Regime of Uncertainty*,* working without these guarantees means that we must assume the posture of a groundless relativism, with the logical consequence of an affirmational skew towards ‘what is’ and a phobic dismissal of negativity and critique.

In practice, the relative and limited stability of the world-as-it-is reproduces and reinforces a governmental gaze, in which ‘what is’ must be affirmed, regulated, and insulated from the risks of the unknown. Firstly, from potential material harms and unexpected shocks, but also from ungrounded attempts to undo, transform, or challenge its order and composition, which now lack the Modern epistemological warrants of truth and its guarantee of a better world to come. The consequence of this manoeuvre is that political possibility is conservatively confined within the intelligible parameters of the world only as it already exists. Newly intelligible agencies must either be incorporated through technocratic and managerial procedures or disarmed and excluded, rather than be allowed to pose any radical challenge to the way the world is. The space for a radically different future that encompasses nature and culture—a just socio-natural world—that could be opened up by negating the actual (Culp, 2016; Giraud, 2019, p.12; Noys, 2010) is simply placed beyond the horizon of possibility. In short, the terrain for radical, emancipatory politics must be surrendered.

Consequently, I argue that the practices supported by the Poetic Regime of Uncertainty are *exemplary* of what Rancière (1999) calls ‘the police’, “the organisation of powers, the distribution of places and roles, and the systems for legitimising this distribution” (ibid., p. 28). In this sense, the term ‘police’ describes the processes that fabricate and militantly reproduce the boundaries of what is. I use the term police here as an overarching concept that defines the logic of their function, but the specific modalities of policing resemble the forms of Anthropocene governmentality that Chandler has called ‘mapping’ (2018b, pp. 31-58), and ‘sensing’ (ibid., pp. 85-111).

On the one hand, mapping means identifying the particularities of the relational constitution of things, avoiding top-down solutions to administer “careful management or modulation of interactions to attempt to balance and ease the strain” (ibid., p. 51). Put differently, it is the governmental smoothing and optimisation of socio-natural entanglements. On the other hand, sensing means “the responsive governance of effects rather than seeking to address ostensible root causes” (ibid., p. 89). It is the construction of human-nonhuman sensory assemblages in order to see “indirectly via effects: making ‘imperceptible harms’ perceptible” (Chandler and Pugh, 2021, p. 125). Sensing detects these potential harms in order “to keep everything as it is ‘by cancelling out or absorbing events’” (Chandler, 2018b, p. 107 quoting

Wakefield and Braun, 2018). I will unpack these terms in greater detail later in the chapter. For now, they can be summarised as follows: where mapping works to trace, stabilise, and optimise a given state of affairs, sensing works to insulate this state of affairs from exogenous shocks and unforeseen events. As such, the overarching narrative construction of the condition of *uncertainty* generates a politically conservative commitment to 'what is' (its affirmation) and the practice of preserving it (conservatism) in ways that governmentally support relations of capital.

To make the argument, the first two sections of this chapter examine the work of two key theorists who I consider to be emblematic of this poetic regime: Bruno Latour and Jane Bennett. They represent two ends of the spectrum regarding the way they formulate the relationship between aesthetics, knowledge production, and political possibility. I characterise Latour as *explicit* in his separation of aesthetics and knowledge from radical political horizons politics. He is a fanatic of the regime of uncertainty, committed to the necessity of this separation and evangelical in his pronouncements on their end. Bennett's work is much more *implicit* in creating this separation. As we shall see, she holds transformative political ambitions for the knowledge that she produces. Nonetheless, uncertainty about what can be sensed and inscribed regarding that which is part of the community or that which possesses agentive responsibility forestalls her transformative political commitments. The consequence for both Latour and Bennett is a political imaginary in which dominant and existing conceptualisations of the political, of identity, and of process are affirmed and reinforced at the expense of any possibility for radically different alternatives.

In the final sections of the chapter, I will draw out the fuller political implications of the Poetic Regime of Uncertainty by examining the sensible threads of continuity that run between its academic formulation and the set of concrete practices—those that I name as 'police' practices—that put these logics to work in the organisation of the social and the natural. I will do so by examining the forms ecological and stakeholder management that govern the operations of the German energy corporation *Rheinisch-Westfälische Elektrizitätswerke*'s (RWE) at a lignite coal mine they own next to Hambach Forest, an ancient Forest in North-Rhine Westphalia, West Germany. The setting of Hambach Forest is useful for a number of reasons. Firstly, the interconnected practices of biodiversity restoration and stakeholder management at work in RWE's governance of the site allow the company to take account of and secure their socio-natural entanglements from the risks of uncertainty. For this reason, they are an apt demonstration of the political limits that inhere in the practices licensed by the Poetic

Regime of Uncertainty. Secondly, these methods of accounting and mitigation allow the company to persist with practices such as extracting and burning lignite that, nonetheless, contribute to the escalating crises of the Anthropocene epoch and the risks they entail. Hence, the case study effectively demonstrates the way that attending to socio-natural networks can actually reinforce the terms of capitalism and its reliance on fossil energy, rather than contest them.

3.2 Uncertainty, Violence, and Political Gradualism in Actor-Network Theory

As the most renowned theorist of Actor-Network Theory (ANT) (see also Callon, 1986, Law, 2004, Mol, 2010), Latour has become a particularly influential figure in science and technology studies (Engel, 2020; Montiero, 2001; Sismondo, 2004, pp. 65-74; Suchman, 2000). Additionally, his work is in high favour within the disciplines of human geography and politics, where it has supplied a cache of tools for thinking through questions of ecology and materiality (Castree, 2002; see also; Bennett, 2010; Bingham, 2006; 2008; Dittmer, 2013; Holifield, 2009; Janicka, 2020; Lorimer, 2006; 2007; McFarlane, 2011; Müller, 2015; Squire, 2014a; Whatmore, 2002;). As the question of ecology becomes ever-more pressing, it is easy to understand why this is so.

These are laudable achievements, in tune with the need to address the kinds of hubristic notions of human mastery over 'nature' inherited from the 'Modern' tradition often placed at the root of the Anthropocene (Schulz, 2017a). Nonetheless, ANT's critics have long argued that its theoretical framework is depoliticising (Arboleda, 2016; Bender, 2010; Brenner *et al.*, 2011; Fine, 2005; Noys, 2010; Puig de la Bellacasa, 2017). In this section I will unpick Latour's approach with this criticism in mind. I argue that Latour's ANT is structured by the narrative of uncertainty such that it rejects the possibility that the given order of the world could be negated. It is this aspect of ANT that is depoliticising insomuch as it confines political possibilities to the intelligible parameters of the world as it already exists. Radically different futures are placed beyond the horizon of possibility.

Latour's framework is thoroughly shaped by the disruptions that would come to shape the Anthropocene epoch (e.g., Latour, 1993). For him, these shocks are the source of a proliferation of uncertainties. Indeed, the chapter titles of part one of *Reassembling the Social (*2007)—his paradigmactic explication of ANT—all relate to uncertainties (e.g., "First Source of Uncertainty: No Group, Only Group Formation", "Second Source of Uncertainty: Action Is Overtaken", "Third Source of Uncertainty: Objects Too Have Agency"). Most central to

Latour's thought is the uncertainty that comes with the apparent end of the nature/culture binary as a useful conceptual tool, which is the end of Modern understandings of the social world. Indeed, the litany of ecological disasters that scar the 20th Century attest to the problematic limits of the Modern, anthropocentric conception of the social (Latour, 1993, pp. 8-10). Hence, the 'We' of Modern societies has entered a crisis of composition.

For Latour, this means that it is necessary to begin again in understanding the world and our presence in it. As Latour argues, "[w]e are no longer sure about what 'we' means… the sense of belonging has entered a crisis" (ibid., pp .6-7). This translates into a project of remapping our socio-natural world, necessarily sensitive to the relational network of human and nonhuman components. Rather than being understood in Modern terms "as mere retro-projection of human labour onto an object that is nothing in itself" (Latour, 1999), the nonhuman stuffs of 'nature' must be understood as co-productive agents in their own right. Both the human and the nonhuman must sit on the same plane of existence, without recourse to the transcendental plane of human thought and action and the lowly plain of passive nature (Latour, 2007, pp. 165-172). Therefore, they must be described symmetrically as 'actants' (ibid., pp. 106-108), who compose 'networks' of human-other-than-human relations, in which "each point can be said to fully act" (ibid., p. 59).

As Latour notes elsewhere, this uncertainty is compounded by the troubled history and subsequent collapse of the Soviet Union and the failures of other socialist projects (Latour, 1988; 1993, pp. 5-13, 43-46; Serres and Latour, 1995 [1990] p. 5). The Marxist tradition of critique, with its appeal to the unmasking of a univocal essence otherwise hidden beneath the veil of appearances, is discredited by the socialist countries' alleged tendency to "destroy both their peoples and their ecosystems" (1993, p. 9). This wreckage demonstrates that the complexities and contingencies of relational networks cannot be apprehended by a model of knowledge that relies upon the singularity of truth and the hubristic superiority of the knower, which engender violence against those same networks (Latour, 1988; 1993, pp. 5-13, 43-46; Serres and Latour, 1995 [1990] p. 5). Consequently, "the very foundation of the modern critique … turns out to be ill-assured… [the] upper ground for taking a critical stance seems to have escaped us" (Latour, 1993, p. 43). Therefore, the aesthetic gap between essences and appearances must be collapsed; they are no longer distinguishable in a world of relational complexity and uncertainty. Moving forward, the world 'is' only as its appearances are constituted.

In levelling the gap between appearance and essence in this way, the force of uncertainty affects a move from knowledge understood as the ground for radical action to a more tentative imaginary as the humble practice of observation and recording. If Marx famously ended his *Theses on Feuerbach* by reorienting the philosopher's task towards changing the world (1976 [1845], p. 65), then Latour subjects this to an inversion; "[social] scientists have transformed the world in various ways; the point, however, is to interpret it" (2007, p. 42). Without deeper essences, the idea that the philosopher or social scientist can access a more 'real' understanding of how socio-natural worlds are made than the actors who create them takes on a paternalistic dimension that repeats the violences of the Modern past (Latour, 1993, pp. 45-46; 2007, p. 41). After all, there is no longer a stable vantage point from which to assert the superior posture of the knower, to command the judgement of what 'really' is, or to dictate what should be done.

Consequently, the aesthetics of uncertainty require us to see the world only as it has been actualised and only on its own terms; "it is crucial that enquirers do not in advance, and *in place* of the actors, define what sorts of building blocks the social world is made of" (Latour, 2007, p. 41). ANTicians must positions themselves on the outside of unfolding events, creating an "empty, relativistic grid" (ibid., p. 221) that is filled by the actors themselves, who are affirmed in their right to "unfold their differing cosmos" (ibid., p. 27). This means that knowledge production must be '*strictly limited*' to an aesthetic practice of 'tracing' or mapping the networks that pass through the 'grid', by which a multitude of realities or 'truths' are captured (ibid., pp. 6-7).

Moving from locating essences to tracing the production of a plurality of truths requires paying attention to the co-constitutional processes of "stabilising" relational networks (Latour, 2007, pp. 35-37). In this vein, Latour asks us to move from the Modern understanding of nature as a 'matter of fact' to a 'matter of concern' (ibid., pp. 115-120; 2004a; 2004b). If the former concept reflects the Modern category of 'Nature', imagined as a firm material basis for a transparent, unmediated, and uncontested collection of facts, then the latter concept reflects the denaturing of 'Nature' via the collapse of the nature/culture binary and the uncertainties this engenders. From chimpanzees to spermatozoids, from topsoil to computing technologies, 'Nature' is no longer so straightforwardly apprehendable (Latour, 2007, pp. 115-116). 'Matters of concern' names this new contested quality that the aesthetics of uncertainty introduces to the ontology of things, whilst 'matters of fact' reflect their point of stabilisation.

Nonetheless, the 'relativistic grid' of ANT means its practitioners do not and should not possess a set of lenses—beyond the grid's empty categories of 'actant' and 'network'—from which to take a critical position on these contestations and stabilisations. Alongside the general logic of critique, 'predetermining' categories from the critical social sciences, such as 'power', 'capitalism', and 'society' are no longer useful heuristics to adjust our gaze, but—ironically—the veils of misidentified essences. Accordingly, they can only misperceive the reality of complex relationality. Pejoratively, Latour argues these terms "mobilize gigantic force, to detect dramatic patterns emerging out of confusing interactions, to see everywhere in the case at hand yet more examples of well-known types, to reveal behind the scenes some dark power pulling the strings" (2007, p. 22). Thus, it seems that the only permissible negation for Latour is that of the critical tradition, whose terms become the only 'unreal' ones (Noys, 2010, p. 84), masking—rather than filling—ANT's grid lines. As the only set of constructions that ANT's grid finds unassimilable—i.e., that force Latour to construct a gap between appearance and reality contrary to his own commitments—perhaps they occupy the position of *the* constitutive exclusion that makes this form of knowledge possible.

This means that ANTicians should simply trace how 'matters of concern' are resolved into 'matters of fact' on their own terms, "with their mode of fabrication and their stabilizing mechanisms clearly visible" (ibid., pp. 120). In Latour's words, "the best solution is to trace connections between the controversies themselves rather than try to decide how to settle any given controversy" (ibid., p. 23). Without access to the 'no' of the critical stance, we are invited to pass over these contestations silently or to affirm their stable constitution. In the absence of the negative, we are left with the relativist indifference to or affirmation of "the world as it is, a world in which nothing may be subtracted and nothing is dispensable" (Noys, 2010, p. 80), with both indifference and affirmation possessing the same effect; the world-as-it-is, including the processes by which objects are collected and added to it, must stand.

It is here that the aesthetics of Latour's approach becomes particularly depoliticising. This is because Latour's project asks us to remain indifferent to, or even affirm, the aesthetics of dominant perspectives; the dominant modes of 'common-sense', and their role in constructing the world, in delimiting spaces and distributing roles and functions. Though ANT's relativism may also affirm the perspectives of marginalised peoples and of other-than-human 'actants,' for whom their incorporation into the world of networks looks both different and more difficult (Haraway, 1988; Haraway, 1996; Harman, 2018, p. 113; Star, 2007; Puig De La Bellacasa, 2017), the transmogrification of uncertainty into relativism can only reinforce the sensible distributions of the relative positions of domination and dominated. For if every network has its right to its existence, to be perceived and stabilised only within its own terms, then any criteria by which the forms of relation that compose the assemblage can be deemed as wholesale wrong, injustice, and, thus, worthy of negation in any convincing fashion are bracketed from intelligibility.

Whilst Latour is sensitive to the potential violence of simplistic aesthetic translations, the problem of how actants are incorporated into the network, whether this entails forms of violence, exploitation or exclusion constitute an absence. As Noys summarises, “the potential violence of networks is largely left to one side and we are encouraged, in an affirmationist vein, to simply accept” their existence and our place within them (Noys, 2010, p. 93). As such, Latour’s mode of sensing-knowing entails only a thickening of relations, of ‘collecting’ and ‘adding’ (Latour, 2004b; 2007) participants to an unassailable world of existing social and political horizons. This thickening leaves the substantive order of things and its attendant violences intact, whilst leaving us no space to entertain a virtual realm of radical possibility. Without that, we are unable to see the world as something that could change and become otherwise (Harman, 2018, p. 49; Noys, 2010, pp. 85-110).

As a consequence, Latour’s approach seems to invoke a governmental gaze, in which the question is how to manage, from the perspective of the world-as-it-is, what can be added to and what must be excluded from ‘what is.’ This is most apparent when Latour lays out his political imaginary, which is modelled entirely within the post-Soviet horizon of Western, parliamentary-style democracy. As early as *We Have Never Been Modern,* Latour advocated a parliamentary model with added ‘things’: “[will] a different democracy become necessary? A democracy extended to things?” (Latour, 1993, p. 12). In his later text, *Politics of Nature* (Latour, 2004b), he elaborates further by mobilising the concept of parliamentary houses as a structuring metaphor. If society has discussed ‘social things’ in the representative parliament, so Latour argues, then nature has been exiled to a separate house where it lays either mute, largely unheard by the house of the social, or it sits atop a hierarchy, in which the kinds of truths that belong to ‘nature’ impose themselves deterministically upon the house of the social. “Instead of two distinct arenas in which one would try to totalize the hierarchy of beings” Latour’s ‘politics’ “proposes to convoke a single collective whose role is precisely to debate the said hierarchy—and to arrive at an acceptable solution” (ibid., p. 29). With obvious resemblance to Stenger’s *cosmopolitics* (2005), the task is to denaturalise the given, ‘unproblematic’, and objective understanding of ‘nature’ and to subject it to a process of deliberation within a communal human-nonhuman parliament. Hence, Latour’s ‘parliament of things’ is the political correlate of the scientific procedures that move us from matters of concern to matters of fact. Whereas the ANTician must remain positionless on those contestations, the 'parliament of things' provides us with a normative framework for this stabilisation.

Latour's acceptance of post-Communist political horizons means that he is unable to grapple with the limits of those same horizons. Barad queries "what, if anything, does this proposal do to address the kinds of concerns that feminist, queer, postcolonial, (post-)Marxist, and critical race theorists and activists have brought to the table?" (Barad, 2007, p. 58). Echoing other critiques of actor-network theory from feminist perspectives (e.g. Haraway, 1996; Sturman, 2006; Star, 2007), Barad points to Latour's inattention to the practices of inclusion and exclusion that simultaneously constitute the gaze of governing and produce materialities, identities, and representations of gender, race, class, sexuality, and able-bodiedness that, ahead of time, constrain who can speak in the house of representative democracy and impose limits upon what it is possible for them to say (ibid., pp. 58-59). What can it mean for 'nature' to speak in a parliament that is already exclusionary for so many humans? Is there anything important to be understood by accounting for what is excluded or suppressed, as much as what is made present in representation? Latour seems doggedly committed only to the presence of what leaves a trace (2007, p. 150), and so, reflecting his general indifference to the violence of how actants are incorporated into networks, his account seems unwilling to speak to issues of absence.

Compounding this conservative bent, uncertainty also structures his account of the political process. Uncertainty requires being sensitive to the unintended consequences of relational networks, which can only be treated with a precautious mode of action (Latour, 2011) that mirrors Latour's emphasis on 'collecting', rather than negating relations in the social sciences. Whilst precaution is not 'abstention', nonetheless, it inculcates a hyper-sensitivity to risk into political practice (ibid.), limiting politics to the possibility of sensing entities, adding them to, and sorting them within the existing order of the world (Latour, 2004b, pp. 102-109). This is formulated in Latour's concept of 'hierarchization'; "before the discussion ends… entities that are candidates for the establishment of the collective *find their rank and place among those which are already established*" (2004b, p. 108; *emphasis added*). In sum, the uncertainties of the Anthropocene era dictate "a new political gradualism that can respect the contours of the world as we find it" (Noys, 2010, p. 80). Whilst Latour's politics of nature addresses the nature/culture binary, he is not inclined to substantially alter its hierarchies.

Consequently—and reflecting his aversion to critical knowledge in the social sciences—Latour's democracy can contain no antagonistic disagreement between opposing views of what the world *should* be, which would require radically rethinking and reordering it. Such a claim would rely on a hubristic notion of certainty and entail risky and violent practices that don't take account of the uncertainties that inhere in relational complexity. Instead, Latour's political strategy is one of consensus that "consists in a gradual reduction of dramatic tension that allows the current warrior's swords to be converted into plowshares for future citizens" (Latour 2004b, p. 77). This is licensed by Latour's relativism, which unmoors us from any claims to any form of essence belonging to any-thing. This lack of foundation displaces the principle that there is any hard line or limit might make an 'actant'—human or otherwise—insurmountably oppositional to being incorporated into the collective.

Latour's example of toads from *The Politics of Nature* is illuminating in this respect (ibid., p.87). The toads possess the *habit* of returning to their birthplace to lay their eggs. Humans, confusing this habit for an essence, created an accommodating but costly set of "toadways" through a road that they were constructing, in order to allow the frogs to pass through unharmed. However, the frogs discovered a pond they could access without crossing the toadways and began laying their eggs there instead. The concern about the antagonism of essence was misplaced and the extra affordances of the toadways were unnecessary. Freed from the determining coordinates of an unfounded commitment to essence, actants become malleable, "negotiable" and subject to a consensual incorporation into the existing collective through a process of "discussion" (ibid.), a term that masks the power that inheres in shaping objects and subjects to fit the collective. Here, the focus is shaping entities for the collective rather than transforming this world in potentially 'costly' ways to accommodate other forms of being, be the costs financial or violent.

Within this framework, new entities can only become part of Latour's deliberative democracy so long as they cannot ask meaningful questions of the necessary existence and order of already established networks of association, nor of the potentially violent demands made of them to adapt to the network. Indeed, once incorporated, forms of contestation must be bracketed off from debate altogether and surrendered to the stability of the collective. As Latour suggests, when an entity has reached a threshold of facticity, of "clear boundaries, precise definitions, threshold, fixed habits…" it is marked beyond the bounds of contestability. At that point, Latour requires their "interlocutors to stop challenging the state of things" (2004b. p. 104). It is only through enacting the permanent closure of what is actualised, by turning it into the common-sense of fact, that we can find “solidity, harmony, coherence, and certainty” (ibid., p 105).

Nonetheless, Latour acknowledges the possibility of the persistently resistant. As in Latour’s aversion to critical approaches in the social sciences, where troublesome actants threaten substantive transformation to- or destabilisation of- the existing collective, they must be “excluded” and “exteriorized” (ibid., pp. 121-127), because they possess the potential to “put the collective in danger” (ibid., p. 124). Thus, the interior of the collective must remain “sensitive and alert” to the excluded (ibid., pp. 124-125), which can be admitted only if-and-when they prove themselves to have become amenable to it (ibid., pp. 121-127). When Latour asks of political decisions of inclusion and exclusion “are these propositions well-articulated or not? Do they form a good or bad common world?” (ibid., p. 188), he does not ask for whom the common world is good or bad, nor does he reflect too deeply on what the would-be-excluded might say about the limits and impositions of our current common world, nor the potentials that are lost to exclusion, nor why they’re deemed acceptable losses. Once again, these questions cannot be satisfactorily answered because Latour defers to the existing play of identities and reasonings that compose his Liberal parliamentary account of the collective.

Ultimately, Latour’s framework cannot afford the rupture of the Anthropocene any antagonistic dimensions, nor a supporting cast of radically dissenting voices that might persistently and violently interrupt the smooth running of things—that might raise troubling questions of justice and injustice. In a passage that discloses Latour’s governmental gaze (ibid., p. 209), he notes that, absent of the certainties that the Modern account of essences and totality brings, the collective must still govern. With its “white cane in hand, [the collective] slowly takes the measure of the furnishings of the universe that surrounds or threatens it. If it does not know how many obstacles it has to reckon with, it does not know either how many objects it can rely upon” (ibid.). Exposed to the permanent condition of contingency, the collective can only establish parameters for the best practice of inclusion and exclusion. There can be no guarantees, no salvation, “except the recording of protocols that accumulate behind it” (ibid.). Therefore, I suggest that the ‘political’ logic engendered by Latour’s account of sensing and knowing is the logic of the police par excellence, focussed upon generating procedural practices to administrate the proper order of bodies within the terms dictated by the existing order of things. Such an order is determined by the relative stability of what is, which is operative in responsively governing uncertainty: the contingencies, risks, shocks, and unaccounted for entities that pose problems or even dangers to it. The effect is to off-stage questions regarding the justices and injustices of this order and its modes of governance.

3.3 Uncertainty, Harm, and Amelioration in Vital Materialism

If, in Latour's account, uncertainty operates to articulate the explicit denunciation of any relationship between knowledge production and radical political horizons, then it finds its implicit articulation in the work of Jane Bennett. Though incorporating vitalist elements from Bergson and Dreich (2010, p. 62-81), Bennett's work shares many of the assumptions of ANT, most notably the distribution of agency across a flat network of human and other-than-human actors (ibid., 20-38). The important distinction for this reading of Bennett's work is her purported political ambition. Against Latour's passive retreat to 'tracing', Bennett hopes to challenge "the image of dead or thoroughly instrumentalized matter [that] feeds human hubris and our earth destroying fantasies of conquest and consumption" (ibid., p. ix). The ambition is that by making the liveliness of matter visible, it creates an ethico-political concern through which we might affect a change, instating greener, more 'sustainable' modes of living (ibid., p. x). It is perhaps for this reason that Bennett's work has been generative in studies that share this ambition (Barua, 2014; Booth and Williams, 2014; Gibson-Graham, 2011; Lorimer, 2012; Shotwell, 2016; Sundberg, 2014; Taylor, 2016; Tiainen *et al.*, 2015; Whatmore, 2013). This is, of course, an understandable ambition in the context of the ecological crises of the Anthropocene. Nonetheless, I argue that such political ambitions are stultified by the way in which uncertainty structures her formulation of the relationship between aesthetics, knowledge production, and political possibilities. Despite her best attempts, the conservative force of uncertainty is merely submerged by her political ambitions, and it resurfaces at crucial moments in the development of her politics.

The connection between uncertainty as an aesthetic condition and Bennett's conservative political impulses is most explicit in her case study of the 2003 North American blackout (Bennett, 2010, pp. 24-31). It is here that the problem of uncertainty in a dispersed network of agency—and the "chain of indirect, unpredictable consequences" it instantiates (ibid., p.101)—most clearly demonstrates its political limitations. And it is here that we find the most pronounced disavowel of Bennett's purported political ambitions.

In an aesthetic process similar to that which one could find in ANT, Bennett traces the "volatile mix of coal, sweat, electromagnetic fields, computer programs, electron streams, profit motives, heat, lifestyles, nuclear fuel, plastic, fantasies of mastery, static, legislation, water, economic theory, wire and wood…" (ibid., p. 25) imbricated in the blackout. In the process, she attempts to afford each entity in this messy assemblage its own agential affordances. As might be expected, this multiplication and dispersion of agency neccessitates that there is no essential process; no clear, singular causal force driving the blackout. Absent the 'certainties' that would otherwise shape the lens and the view from critical theoretical perspectives, Bennett is unable to give undue emphasis to relations such as the imperatice of capital accumulation and the assembling of the electric grid—the divisions of the private and the public, the pressure of valorisation and wealth accumulation that inhere in its construction etc.—as a key determinant of the blackout. Instead, for Bennett, agency is dispersed through the assemblage such that these factors are de-essentialialised and agentially-reduced, beoming equivocal with other agential forces such as the "strivings" of electricity (ibid., p. 27).

This causal uncertainty structures what Bennett does next, and it is this that becomes a problem for her political imaginary. Stripped of any reasonable certainty about the driving force of the blackout, "the federation of actants" becomes "a creature that the concept of moral responsibility fits only loosely around" (ibid., p. 28). Accordingly, responsibility, blame, or determinacy for the blackout becomes equivocally dispersed too. It becomes an impenetrable phenomenological event that overloads the sensorium. Bennett's great accumulation of actants incapacitates any critical modes of perception. This means that she cannot place responsibility with "deregulation and corporate greed" in any way that would license a radical and transformative politics (ibid., p. 37). The most she "can honestly affirm is that corporations are one of the sites at which human efforts at *reform* can be applied" (ibid.; emphasis added). More clearly stated, the effects of agential uncertainty create a binary in which the only possibilities are to "acknowledge the distributive quality of agency to address the power of human-nonhuman assemblages and to resist a politics of blame…" or to "persist with a strategic understatement of material agency in hopes of enhancing the accountability of specific humans" (ibid., p. 38). That is, the multiplication of agency is a multiplication of uncertainties, and the dispersion of agency is also the dispersion of accountability.

This is subsequently mapped onto a moral binary. In shades of Latour, an understanding of the blackout that centralises human accountability amounts to a politics of outrage, moralism, and violence, whilst the diffusion of agentive responsibility, and its attendant politics of reformism becomes the necessary way to think about political practice in a world of "vital cross-cutting forces" (ibid., pp. 37-38). Absent of choices for analysis beyond this binary, Bennett's framework prohibits any radical claim to injustice or justice in the form of holding humans or the role of their agencies in shaping assemblages *to account*. To attempt to take this radical path and pursue its radical, transformative claims is to operate within a realm of certainties that reinscribes the anthropocentrism of the nature/culture binary and deflates the importance of the other-than-human. Within the logical coordinates of Bennett's framework, such a manoeuvre runs the risk of creating the same unintended ecological consequences that proliferated through the Modern misperception of the nonhuman.

Uncertainty is similarly—although more implicitly—structuring of Bennet's political theorisations too. To begin with, and perhaps interestingly given my own Rancièrean commitments, Bennett draws on the political aesthetics of Rancière to describe the political problem of the Anthropocene. Non-human agency has broken the partition of the sensible (Ranciére, 2010, pp. 27-44; quoted in Bennett, 2010, p. 1) that divides what can be sensed or perceived from what cannot. For Rancière, such a breach is political because it exposes the limits of the way in which the social is ordered, its contingency, and the possibility for a new, more egalitarian social order (ibid.). For Bennett, the liveliness of matter exposes the problematic way in which 'Modern' knowledge has imposed an aesthetic partition that renders matter's agency unintelligible such that it becomes dominable. To confront this wrong, her project affirms "a figure of matter as an active principle, and a universe of this lively materiality" (ibid., p. 93). A significant part of this project is to translate this affirmation into a new account of political capacity and possibility.

Whilst this seems more politically engaged than Latour's approach, the conservative tinge of Bennett's work is visible in the way she tames the radical force of Rancière's work. It is a manoeuvre, as we shall see, that reflects the same problems of uncertainty that were identified in unpacking Latour's approach. On the one hand, Rancière's project is emphatically a theory of emancipatory politics; for Rancière, the breach of the partition of the perceptible is supposed to draw our attention to the fundamental wrong of that order – that its hierarchy is a miscount, and that it needs to be redistributed in egalitarian ways (1999). But in contrast, Bennett manoeuvres to immediately tame the emancipatory potential of this particular breach: "I… identify with members of my species, insofar as they are bodies most similar to mine. The political goal of a vital materialism is not the perfect equality of all actants, but a polity with more channels of communication between members" (Bennett, 2010, p. 104). In short, the uncertainty of the 'we' of the community does not displace the division and hierarchical ordering of the human and the other-than-human, but rather reinforces it. It sees Bennett turn to the relative certainty of what has already been constituted, offering a more responsive but no less authoritative human demos.

Consequently, Bennett is unable to confront the Cartesian ordering of Modernity as a wholesale wrong, even as she identifies it as the source of civilisational horrors. It is a strange position to take, given her later attempts to capture the "alien" character of the human body, cut through with bacteria and other inextricable bodies that defy the distinction between self and other and thus reshape notions of 'self-interest' (ibid., pp. 110-122). Nonetheless, through the a priori identification with the aesthetics of the human form, what it might mean to truly perceive the radical alterity of the other-than-human as a potential equal in the community or as a truly inseparable part of the self is supressed. Though she has afforded the other-than-human agency, this must be hemmed within an order that cannot be radically overturned. The difference between the human and the other-than-human is, from the start, reinforced even as it is made of some account, securing existing hierarchies.

This move is reflected in Bennett's more explicit formulation of political processes. Having taken the emancipatory force out of his work, Bennett instead pairs Rancière's insights with the liberal democratic theory of publics from John Dewey via Latour, refigured to include nonhuman agencies. For Bennett, publics are collective human-nonhuman agencies that emerge in response to specific problems to "engage in acts that will restore their power, protect against future harm, or compensate for damage done" (Bennett, 2010, pp. xix, 100-104). Thus, Bennett's deployment of Dewey redirects Rancière away from a political focus on the 'wrong' of any social ordering process—and towards practices of egalitarian invention and reordering—to a much more conservative position where the emphasis is amelioration, restoration, and negotiation.

Here, the French word *tort*, which Rancière uses to describe 'wrong', but that can also be translated as 'harm', has been given the latter, tamer meaning. Though this is certainly some improvement on Latour's seemingly ambivalent attitude towards the existing violence of networks, it does nevertheless imply a politics of protection and compensation rather than, say, politics as a practice of justice-seeking or freedom-seeking. It should be argued that this is a mistranslation, since Rancière frames the expounding of *torts* as "the simple counting of the uncounted, the difference between an inegalitarian distribution of social bodies and the equality of speaking beings" (1999, p. 38). Rancière's 'wrong', then, is the miscount of the social order, wherein the 'justice' of the hierarchy's order is belied by the presence of an unaccounted-for speaking being. As such, wrong enables a challenge to the very ordering of being. Despite

Bennett's noble intentions, the best that she can muster instead is an ameliorative salve placed over the wounds of a world that will continue largely just as it is. At the same time, moving from wrong to harm leaves her woefully equipped to address the same questions of the relationship between power, representation and the order of bodies that constitute the public that Latour's account begs. Without being attentive to questions of the socio-natural *order* of things and the constraints it places on publics, her account can only reproduce them.

Despite her political ambitions, then, to be sensibly attuned to the plethora of agencies in the Anthropocene means that the possibilities for political action cannot be too hasty, too dramatic, or too conflictual. This is because we simply do not possess the degree of certainty that would license these kinds of actions. Instead, possibilities must be limited to a political gradualism and reformism that she shares with Latour. Though Bennett is more sensitive to the violence of networks and assemblages, and indeed this is a key focus of her concern, what is to be done about this does not deviate too far from the Latourian prescription. Certainly, actants within assemblages are entitled to express their mistreatment. They can even 'campaign' to ameliorate harm within the political horizons dictated by their incorporation into a world that must be taken on its terms, with all the limitations that imposes. But, despite Bennett's insistence at the outset of her project, it turns out that they cannot make a claim to being mi*saccounted* for; to a radical 'wrong' that antagonistically confronts the ordering of the world and how they are incorporated into it.

3.4 Uncertainty as Practice: RWE and Governing Socio-Natural Networks

Through my readings of Latour and Bennett, I have fleshed out some of the stakes that are implied by their formulation of the relationship between uncertainty and the aesthetic dimensions of knowledge, and, in turn, what this means for political possibility. In the latter half of this chapter, I want to deepen these insights by drawing out the 'knots of sense' that operate between these modes of producing knowledge with forms of practice that are emerging beyond the academy. The term I am using to describe these practices is 'policing', after Rancière, to describe the way these practices mirror the conservative logics of Bennett and Latour. Linking these theorists to the practices I examine here is a depoliticising focus on mitigating the harms and conflicts that may emerge and destabilise the relationally composed, more-than-human and, crucially, *uncertain* world we find ourselves in. It is, in sum, a question of *stabilising what is*. As such, the concrete modes of policing at work here bear resemblance to the governmental technics that Chandler has described as 'mapping' (2018a, pp. 31-58) and ‘sensing’ (ibid., pp. 85-111). As we shall see, it is precisely these technics that are in operation at the RWE-owned lignite mine at Hambach.

RWE are a large German energy firm with global reach (RWE, 2022a). They are engaged with all stages of the energy cycle: resource extraction, power generation, and supply and trading. At the point of extraction, RWE have several coal mines in the North-Rhine Westphalia region of Germany, including the open-cast (surface) lignite coal mine at Hambach. It is the largest lignite mining site in Western Europe, built through the ongoing destruction of the ancient Hambach Forest, and periodically expanding into what remains (RWE, 2022b).

The mine at Hambach is a “hotly contested” site, totemically representing RWE’s imbrication in the wider industrial-scale production and emission of fossil fuels and the destruction of eco-systems these practices cause (Brock, 2020, p. 3; see also, Brock and Dunlap, 2018; Kaufer and Lein, 2020; Mohr and Smits, 2022). Beyond its size, there are three other reasons for its notoriety. First, it requires the periodic, expansive destruction of the nearby ancient forest. Second, it extracts lignite or ‘brown coal’, which is one of the biggest CO_2-emitting fossil fuels (Juhrich, 2016). Third, it is an open-cast or surface-level mine, which means that the process and effects of stripping the earth are uniquely visible (Hildmann and Wünsche, 1996), rather than hidden beneath the ground as in other forms of coal mining. Consequently, and in no small part thanks to an occupation by protestors, it is the subject of debates “regarding the transition towards renewable energy, the diminishing role of fossil fuels, future energy security and efficiency” as well as the “severe and irreversible impacts” that lignite mining has on the “community and the environment” (Imboden and Moczek, 2015). In Latour’s parlance, we might say that RWE’s activities at Hambach have passed from a Modern ‘matter of fact’ to a ‘matter of concern’ in the Anthropocene.

It is perhaps unsurprising, then, that a large firm that continues to profit from the given order of things is compelled to police these antagonisms; to find a way of engaging and understanding their entanglements so that they may insulate themselves from the uncertainty and potential risks that these entanglements pose to the company’s operationality. As such, their motivation chimes with the Latourian logic outlined above, which turns uncertainty into an affirmational commitment to conserving the world-as-it-is. Strategically, it means that the company has become more tightly enmeshed in a broader network of institutional governance for environmental and stakeholder management that has emerged with the express intention of governing within the existing horizon of possibility, ostensibly balancing social and ecological harms with a capitalist economy that nonetheless compels the expansive and ongoing exploitation of socio-natural phenomena (Brock 2020; Büscher, *et al.* 2019; Igoe, *et al.* 2010).

There is a long trail of reports and policy documents published by or in collaboration with RWE that give a concrete account of RWE's imbrication with these practices. After the growth of protests by environmental NGOs around the mine from around 2010 onwards, and the occupation of the remaining Hambach Forest in 2012 (Brock and Dunlap, 2018), concerns about how to adequately govern the site—as well as the implication if similar events sprung up elsewhere—left RWE seeking answers to deal with these risks that had otherwise been unaccounted for by their environmental management system. As Brock and Dunlap note (2018, p. 38), they conducted and published "a largescale acceptance study" entitled *Acceptance Study for Major Projects* (RWE, 2012a). By consulting with a series of societal 'experts' through structured interviews, the study aimed "to explore how stakeholder engagement and dialogue can 'avoid or reduce resistance' against megaprojects, as 'the future viability of our business also depends on it'" (ibid., *quoting* RWE, 2012a, p. 19, p. 6). Put differently, the document was designed to address the troublesome social part of the socio-natural context the company operates within by locating acceptable procedures of participation for the publics affected by their entanglements. Their findings here contributed to the company developing a comprehensive *Stakeholder Engagement Framework* (RWE, 2019).

Relatedly, they sought aid from the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) to further develop ways of managing their natural entanglements whilst keeping one eye on how this might help to smooth out their problematic social entanglements. As IUCN suggests in its *Business Engagement Strategy* document, the organisation operates in a context where businesses increasingly "recognize that [they not only have] a responsibility for mitigating the impacts of its environmental footprint, but that positive contributions to nature conservation can be good for their bottom line." (IUCN, 2012, p. 5). Subsequently, the organisation aims to work with businesses to help them improve their relationship to the environment through biodiversity management strategies.

This partnership began in 2013 with the report *A Strategic Approach on Biodiversity: What, Why and How* (IUCN, 2013). It then culminated in the more context-specific report, *Risks and Opportunities in the Biodiversity Management and Related Stakeholder Involvement of the RWE Hambach Lignite Mine* (Imboden and Moczek, 2015), which analysed RWE's existing biodiversity and related stakeholder strategies and provided them with a series of policy recommendations. The document makes recommendations for RWE to optimise their biodiversity management strategy, allowing them to better balance the socio-natural harms of lignite mining with the economic compulsion to mine, this has culminated in the 2019 release of RWE's *Biodiversity Strategy* (Eyll-Vetter, 2019). The document also demonstrates how these strategies can help with stakeholder issues, arming the company with a concrete set of policies to demonstrate their commitments to ecological issues to stakeholders who might otherwise be troubled by the processes in operation at the mine. It is through the texts described here that I will explore in the subsequent sections to further develop my account of the practice licensed by the Poetic Regime of Uncertainty.

3.5 Stakeholder Management: Mapping and Sensing Publics

RWE's 2012 acceptance study is a fascinating document. Ostensibly it grapples with the role of democracy and the public in building infrastructure projects, broadly conceived. However, read in the context of the protests and occupation that unfolded at Hambach Forest that year, it reads as a treatise on the best way for the company to process and stabilise their socio-natural entanglements. Sharing the affirmational commitments of Bennett and Latour, it aspires to find a method to reconcile the collective to a consensual treaty, where "[b]usiness, politics and society are called upon to work together to create a responsible solution" (RWE, 2012a, p. 7). This requires an honest appraisal of the causes of current tensions. As the report puts it, "developers would be well advised to abandon the view that planning that is legal on paper is automatically legal in the eyes of the rest of society" and "legitimacy" cannot be acquired through legality (ibid., p. 18). The company has had to acknowledge that there is too much of a gap between those imposing infrastructure decisions and the public who "feel increasingly alienated" (ibid.; ibid., pp. 55-56). It is the "polarisation" created by the gap between top-down governance and the realities of those governed, they argue, "that leads to real confrontations" (ibid., p. 18).

In Chandler's account of the governmentality of mapping (2018b, pp. 37-45), he demonstrates that the strategy emerged from the critique of Modern 'command-and-control' governance, which relied upon a conception of the world that has clear, fixed, linear and universal principles that are applicable across all of time and space. This entailed a disregard for locality and specificity, which allowed for singular, 'radical' solutions to be imposed in a "top-down" fashion (ibid., p. 37). Indeed, it is this same insensitivity to the difference of localised contexts and concerns that RWE believe has fuelled their discontents.

Though Chandler attributes this critique to the emergence of neoliberal institutionalism (2018b, pp. 36-45), it also resembles Latour's critique of Marxist knowledge production laid out earlier in the chapter. Indeed, the parallels between neoliberal thought and Latour's ANT are well documented (Dean, 2013; Mirowski, 2017). Little wonder that their prescriptions for solutions are homologous. Echoing Latour's demand that, lacking certainties, knowledge production can take no shortcuts and must trace the concrete, localised network of relations that constitute reality (Latour, 2007, pp. 165-172), Chandler (2018b, pp. 42-50) demonstrates that the governance of mapping also requires engaging in a 'context-specific' way. It is thus sensitive to the localised relational constitution of things as they are found, with all the contingency and uncertainty those relations entail. It is only by approaching the world in this manner, and by seeking solutions that accommodate the world on its own terms, proponents of mapping suggest, that we can escape the persistent failures and violences engendered by the Modern insensitivity to the uncertain and the contingent. Thus, mapping affords space for the mapped to, as Latour might put it, "unfold their differing cosmos" (2007, p. 27).

Mapping also shares the de-essentialised understanding of its objects found in Latour's ANT, meaning that they are pliable and can still be (gently) acted upon. In Latour's example of the toads (2004b, p. 87), they lacked the essences that would make them inassimilable to the collective. Instead, they possessed habits that could be delicately shaped. Similarly, Mapping seeks to shape and smooth out relations to control and reduce uncertainties. As Chandler notes, mapping produces knowledge and corollary practices geared towards adapting the specifics of existing systems, "redirecting" their processes for optimisation and regulation (2018b, p. 43). Governing through mapping is a question of modulating and managing relational interactivity for the benefit of stability (ibid., p. 51).

This is borne out in the concrete circumstances of RWE and its oppositional publics, who are configured as the object of reform and 'rebalancing' via mechanisms that create increased channels of communication that enable the company to close the conflictual gap, shaping them into a smooth, responsive, and consensual set of relations. The key, they argue, is to engage in forms of participation, with "early, transparent and open-ended involvement of citizens" where their "concerns, worries and ideas about a project are being heard and taken seriously" (RWE, 2012a, p. 19). As the report argues "participation can lead to conflicts being recognised at an early stage and reasonable solutions being found" (ibid., p.26), including financial compensation (ibid., p. 36) and the mitigation of ecological harms (ibid., p. 93). In this way, the proposals bear a superficial resemblance to Bennett's socio-natural democracy, which requires enhancing channels of communication amongst a socio-natural public in order to "protect against future harm, or compensate for damage done" (Bennett, 2010, pp. 101-104).

But RWE's own reformist strategy does not reflect Bennett's democratic ideals. Instead, it is more closely resembles Latour's emphasis on "hierarchization" (2004b, pp. 108-109); its mechanisms of incorporation are modulated by the imperatives of the existing collective. In this case, the needs of a business to reduce unwanted costs by securing itself from certain risks. As the politician Joachim Herrman notes in the report, without adequate mechanisms of participation, "the risk of demonstrations or waves of lawsuits and thus delays is considerably greater" (RWE, 2012a, p. 94). Consequently, using participatory techniques is identified as "an indispensable calculatory factor in the realisation of a major project" (ibid., p. 19).

With costs in mind more so than ideals, participation must be handled very carefully, as the ensemble of business and political experts consulted for the report attest to. Volker Kefer, Chief Technology Officer at Deutsche Bahn notes that giving the public a yes-no choice over matters, as in the mechanism of a referendum, is too risky; it is "not a compromise solution, but a polarising one with a winner and a loser" (ibid., p. 27). Whilst Rolf Martin Schmitz, Deputy Chairman of the Executive Board at RWE worries that subjecting the technical affairs of infrastructure to the will of the demos runs "the risk of populism" and runs counter to the limits of representative democracy which "has proven its worth over the years" (ibid.). There is a palpable fear of participatory mechanisms that are too direct and, therefore, powerful; that RWE may become the loser of popular democratic decisions and, as a result, that they may have to halt some of their business activities or even see their role in the collective negated. Instead, the correct process requires choosing appropriate methods of participation to suit their goals of completing the project, above all staying in contact with the people on the ground and modulating forms of participation as the project unfolds (ibid., p. 103, 111).

This provides the strategic impetus to limit—where possible—public participation "to real opportunities to be heard" (ibid., p. 92). As Rainer Baake, director of the Agora Energiewende foundation initiative proposes, if "citizens have the feeling that the project developers and approval authorities have taken their arguments seriously and weighed them up properly, then there is a good chance of acceptance," (ibid., p. 87). But it also requires governing responsively when this is not adequately placatory. In these instances, it may be necessary to accede on some decisions. Reflecting the neoliberal critique of top-down decision making central to the governance of mapping, the emphasis is on presenting "agential choice in concrete conditions" (Chandlerb, 2018, p. 42). As prominent theologian Eberhard Pausch argues in the report, an “idea presented without alternatives has the character of coercion, and of course responsible citizens would not appreciate that” (RWE, 2012a, p. 82). In cases like this, it becomes a matter of controlling the uncertainty that choice represents by constraining the possible choices the public can make ahead of time, as the sociologist Dieter Rucht suggests in the report (ibid., p.81). Thus, presenting engaged publics with choices avoids the problems of top-down imposition, which is likely to meet resistance. At the same time, redirecting the democracy of choice into a limited and calculated field of possibilities prevents sub-optimal outcomes; publics can’t perform their own top-down, radical changes, which radiate from an absolute ‘yes’ or ‘no’.

So far, RWE’s proposals conform to the kinds of practices that are hinted at in Latour’s account of sensing-knowing-practice. Whilst Latour is both an advocate for forms of hierarchisation and ambivalent to the kinds of power involved in shaping networks in this way, I also think that some of the political limits to Bennett’s reformism can be located here. Her prescriptions for ameliorative reformism as the maximal form—the most she can “honestly affirm” (Bennett, 2010, p.37)—of possible political engagement are insufficient. Reform already accommodates the determinations of the existing horizon of possibility, which are governed by powerful actors who play a substantial part in shaping them. Bluntly, there can be no meaningful question of democratically challenging the very place of RWE and their operations in collective life if they help shape the mechanisms for ‘allowing’ the public to participate in their projects. In doing so, they create an a priori affirmation of their own existence, which enables them to control and redirect opposition so that they may persist in their practices without the potential cost of unravelling the collective ensemble. Whilst this process might malform the kinds of democratic venture Bennett would find desirable, her deference to causal uncertainty, her affirmational commitment to the assemblage, and the reformist horizon this produces displace the possibility that she could radically exclude those institutional formations that are deeply embedded in and productive of the assemblage, despite the undesirable effects of the power they wield.

We can see the way RWE shapes the limits of democratic participation in the assemblage through subsequent strategy documents. The *Stakeholder Engagement Framework* (RWE, 2019) that evolved out of these discussions and experiences incorporates the IAP2’s *Spectrum of Public Participation* (2018), a widely used standard for organising public participation. The spectrum provides a concrete set of guidelines for RWE to enact the processes outlined in the acceptance study; hierarchising the public and modulating the forms of responsivity that are required in a strategic calculation of cost vs risk. The spectrum charts "goals" or forms of participation and "promises" or public-facing messaging about what the participation goal allows them to do. The diagram works from those methods of participation which require the least intensive interventions to those that require the most, from providing information, through to consultation, collaboration and, finally, to the costliest; the as-yet unused possibility of empowering the public to make the decision themselves.

Whilst RWE's 2019 *Stakeholder Engagement Framework* codifies best practice for engaging stakeholders, RWE's *Our Responsibility Reports* (2011; 2012b; 2013; 2014; 2015a; 2016; 2017) demonstrate how the company have developed additional forms of stakeholder mapping and participation at the Hambach site in the intervening years. As they suggest, RWE participate in "a large number of different projects and initiatives in the areas of opencast mining *to shape the region*" (RWE, 2016, p. 18; emphasis added). This includes becoming a supervisory board member of Future Agency Rhenisches Revier GmbH, a development company who operate as "strategic partners" with federal and state governments, and coordinate with regional actors to shape the economic strategy of the region (Future Agency Rhenisches Revier GmbH, 2022). As such, the group brings together business, politics, and society in the forms of affirmational and 'constructive' dialogue recommended in the acceptance study (RWE, 2012a, p. 7). Indeed, RWE's presence as a supervisory board member ensures that they can access and influence key stakeholders in the region, securing the company's continued interests in lignite extraction as a central part of the region's economy going forward.

Other important measures include an extensive survey of stakeholders in 2013 (RWE, 2013, pp. 33-34), and a "stakeholder council", a process which extends the methods generated by the acceptance study by creating and drawing from a panel of "eight independent experts representing perspectives from the world of research and civil society" (2014, p. 28). These channels of responsivity and management are necessary additions to pre-existing measures, such as the national-level 'RWE Talk' which facilitates engagement with politicians, journalists and union leaders, and the local-level 'Neighbourhood Forum' established in 2011 (RWE, 2011). This forum was designed to establish "regular dialogue in the Rhineland Industrial area with politicians in the local community... in order to facilitate mutual exchange of views about current developments" (RWE, 2013, p. 42).

Echoing the 2012 acceptance study, all these measures enable the company to "address [stakeholder] concerns with an honest exchange of ideas and an open attitude offering constructive proposals", dialogically shaping consensual relations where "the attitudes of different stakeholders… share common ground with our goals and… lead to various forms of cooperation over the long term" (RWE, 2013, p. 41). As RWE describe it, what is mapped through these processes' feeds back into the company's 'materiality analysis' where they "evaluate the expectations" of their stakeholders and "reconcile" them "with priorities from the perspective of the company" (RWE, 2013, p. 35). It is in the process of mapping that further areas for- and strategies of- responsivity are planned and developed to placate stakeholder concerns.

However, the acceptance study also acknowledges that prioritising the existing order of the world imposes limits upon which stakeholders and with what concerns can be allowed to participate. There is a recognition that whilst participation "can promote acceptance… it will never be able to win over all those affected by a large-scale project" (RWE, 2012a, pp. 19, 111). Manfred Güllner, head of the Forsa Institute of Social Research and Statistics defines the hard limits of these participatory mechanisms; "you also have to find a structure so that planning procedures are not delayed until the end of time… at some point you have to say, this is what we are going to do" (ibid., p. 93). Thus, militantly oppositional and belligerent stakeholders can be allowed no sway in the mechanisms of participation. The decision to plow on regardless must be made. Whilst existing measures of participation must increase the company's social license, this is a question of maximising consent and isolating or excluding persistent dissent, in order to sustain the possibility of continuing with the project.

At Hambach, the protestors that occupy the forest are excluded from being enfolded into the systems of stakeholder participation. This is because they are extremely resistant to both the acquiescence and the strategic moulding of their objectives that would be required to incorporate them into the processes of 'constructive dialogue'. As a post from their blog declares, the occupation is a refusal of RWE's presence there; "*a loud no* to those whose solution [to the climate crisis] is to continue as before and at the same time step on the gas" (Hambi Bleibt!, 2012a, emphasis added). Another pointed blog post published around the same time as the study, entitled *This is What RWE's Public Participation Looks Like* (Hambi Bleibt!, 2012b), shows a series of photographs of the police force evicting and arresting protestors, a legion of police vans entering the area, and the police creating a human barrier between RWE officials and protestors. Rebutting the vision of peaceable and consensual participation, they demonstrate that violent exclusion comes for those who question the very existence of the mine in the context of the climate crisis (Hambi Bleibt, 2012c).

Where the company's needs move from including stakeholders to excluding unwanted belligerents, the strategy of governance also switches from mapping to sensing. As Chandler explains, sensing responds to the limits of mapping as a process that cannot ever completely account for the "interactive complexity" implied by the uncertainty and contingency of relational entanglements (Chandler, 2018b, p. 80). In short, without the Modern 'access' to essences or totality acting as guarantor for the success of the framework, it becomes necessary to engage with the possibility that not everything can be mapped; there might be an unaccounted-for remainder that exists beyond the scope of any mapping process. As Rancière argues (1999, p. 29; 2010, pp. 44-45), an unaccounted-for remainder poses difficulty for an existing state of affairs. The contingency that inheres in the imperceptible or unassimilable unaccounted-for runs counter to the logic of the police order (the order of what is), which only acquires its legitimacy and common-sensical nature from its ability to appropriately account for and govern all that it surveys. Sensing thus polices the remaining instability left by the limits of mapping. It does so by building "responsive" sensory assemblages (Chandler, 2018b, pp. 100-103) to detect and govern real-time problems as they emerge. Sensing is not concerned with the deeper reality of 'cause' but with policing ongoing and potentially dangerous effects as they appear. Mirroring Latour's concern with monitoring potentially dangerous entities that hover outside the accepted socio-natural community (2004b, pp. 124-127), sensing governs the appearance of the unaccounted-for in terms of risky events that produce harmful effects, which require management techniques to detect and defer them (Chandler, 2018b, pp. 88-89).

In the case of RWE's relations at the mine, the petty police—rather than Rancière's more expansive definition of the police—are readily enrolled to form components of sensing-governance in continuum with RWE's own security teams (Brock, 2018). This is because the German state "is intrinsically tied to fossil fuel interests, large scale energy projects and infrastructure provision" (Brock and Dunlap, 2022, p. 102), therefore it is in their interests, as well as their role as guarantor of property rights, to ensure the ongoing extraction and burning of lignite coal. As the regional interior minister for the area, Herbert Reul, argued "We don't know for sure [when RWE can continue clearing the forest in order to mine lignite] but when the day comes, the police have to make sure that right can be enforced" (Deutsche Welle, 2018).

As Brock and Dunlap demonstrate, "police and mine security have a constant presence around the occupation[,]" utilising technologies such as radios, video cameras, drones, and helicopters with thermal imaging cameras (2018b, pp. 42-43; Hambi Bleibt!, 2014). Thus, the police and security staff become part of a large human-nonhuman sensory assemblage, utilising these technologies to detect and control the otherwise invisible movements of the forest occupiers, who use the cover of the forest to obscure visibility and regularly erect barricades to blockade themselves off from easy eviction. Similarly, protesters moving to and from the site are subject to "constant surveillance, stop-and-search at the local train station as well as checkpoints" (Brock and Dunlap, 2018, p. 42). Those moving around the site are monitored for signifiers that mark them out as potential protesters, such as car-stickers that signal opposition to the mine, who are met with stop-and-search tactics (ibid.). Governing the protesters has largely required using different modalities of sense to detect and counteract their movements, rather than to address the root causes of their occupation.

It is here that I think that some of the problems of Latour's model of socio-natural democracy find a practical correlate. What are the protestors for RWE other than an unruly and incongruous force? What does the protestors' belligerent opposition to the extraction and burning of lignite coal mean in practice, other than a persistent and unassimilable threat to negate the collective ensemble of RWE's enterprise at Hambach? In a 'democratic' space of 'constructive dialogue' shaped by the relative power that RWE commands over the network of relations it is enmeshed in, the protestors cannot be 'heard' as speaking beings. They are not intelligible as entities that may have something meaningful to say about the wrong of the socio-natural order that permits the ongoing consumption of lignite coal. Because they do not affirm but wish to negate relations, they are characterised as "sheer criminals… only interested in excessive violence" (RWE CEO Peter Terium; quoted in Brock and Dunlap, 2018, p. 41), that make RWE's employees "fear for their lives" (Baltzer and Meck, 2016; quoted in Brock and Dunlap, 2018, p. 41). Thus, from the perspective of the company and the state, their exclusion is deemed necessary; they are unassimilable. But should they be excluded? Do they and their unassimilability not have something very important to say, despite their inaudibility in the 'democratic' spaces that RWE governs? As we saw earlier in the chapter, Latour's affirmational commitment to the world-as-it-is translates into a relative indifference to both the existing limits of incorporation into the collective and the violence of exclusion that compose networks. From within the terms that his thought sets, it becomes very difficult to contest these exclusions and the restrictions they set on political possibility.

By contrast, Bennett's reliance on Rancière means that she has a greater appreciation for unaccounted-for disruption (2010, pp. 105-108), which would permit her to be more attentive to the voices of the protesters and their relational constitution with the forest. However, her aversion to a politics of causality and responsibility put her at odds with the protestors, who tie RWE’s operations at the mine via chains of responsibility to capitalism and to the climate crisis, demanding their negation. Put bluntly, they “oppose all of this shit!” (Rabbit/ Earth First! Newswire, 2014). Whilst Bennett would reject the out-and-out exclusion of the protestors from participation, her vital materialist framework cannot countenance the centralised account of agency that they invoke, reducing it to an expression of ‘moralism’ and ‘outrage’ that is unable to grasp the real interactive complexes of agency occurring at the mine (Bennett, 2010, p. 38). Moreover, this informs the reformist nature of her commitment to assemblages, which would require her to engage with rather than exclude RWE from any democratic deliberation.

3.6 Biodiversity Restoration: Mapping the ‘Natural’

Stakeholder management is only part of the equation, which also requires forging relations of management and control for the ‘natural’ components of the company’s socio-natural entanglements, including how they interlace with social actors. After all, the unruly social entanglements that the company has attempted to get a handle on, from NGOs to forest occupiers, are intimately tied up with challenging the ecological impacts of the mine. As this is the case, it is possible to interpret the kinds of environmental management that are instigated here as a manipulation of appearances. Indeed, it is hard to disagree that this is at least part of what is happening here. The IUCN report on biodiversity management suggests that a good and well publicised biodiversity strategy can address the risk of “reputational harm from media and NGO campaigns” into an opportunity for the “company to differentiate its brand in a competitive marketplace where there is a growing demand for sustainably sourced or certified products” and to increase its “social license to operate” (Imboden and Moczek, 2015, p. 9).

Further efforts, such as “the strategic positioning of windmills around the mine and its sponsored ‘trees of the year’ plantation next to the new highway along the edge of the mine” (Brock, 2020, p. 15), seem to be rather cynical attempts to massage over the visible negative effects of open-cast mining (ibid.). Such strategies clearly have the ambition of “manufacturing… legitimacy for coal mining” (ibid., p. 3), by creating “the spectacular performance of sustainability” (ibid., p. 25). Even larger-scale interventions such as recultivation of the exhausted parts of the mine appear to be cosmetic when we consider that the mine is still supplying power-stations with brown coal that, once burned, continues to deposit masses of CO_2 into the atmosphere. Here it might be tempting to restage a critique of their practices along the gap between appearances and essences.

Nonetheless, it is important to understand the techniques of biodiversity management deployed here are not *just* part of a complicated parlour trick to secure ongoing fossil-fuel driven capital accumulation behind our backs. Instead, it is important to take them seriously as practices of a governmental rationality designed to combat the problems of uncertainty, contingency, and risk that come with RWE's ecological entanglements, but *within the limits determined by maintaining the existing contours of the world, in which the mine must continue.* Accordingly, I suggest that these operations of ecological stabilisation are continuous with those of the social because they also share a central logic of protecting and ameliorating the world-as-it-is.

Echoing the UN's *Declaration on Biodiversity* (1992), the IUCN's biodiversity report (2013), prepared ahead of their collaboration with RWE, defines Biodiversity as "the life support system of this planet" that cumulatively form interactive and mutually supporting ecosystems, which provide people with "ecosystem services" at different scales, such as bee pollination, freshwater, flood control and climate regulation (ibid., p. 2). Thus, addressing biodiversity means confronting the "risk" activities such as mining pose to "the health of critical ecosystems services" (IUCN, 2013, p. 2). Translated from the more general claim about human survival to the risk it poses to RWE's bottom line, the report notes that "the annual [financial] cost of lost biodiversity and ecosystem degradation [is estimated to be] about US$2-4.5 trillion per year" (ibid.). Thus, if the mine must continue to exist, then managing ecosystems is essential to minimising the risk it poses to itself and the wider socio-natural world it is embedded in.

Both the IUCN report on the Hambach mine (Imboden and Moczek, 2015, p. 11) and RWEs later biodiversity strategy document (Eyll-Vetter, 2018, p. 26) draw on a mitigation and enhancement hierarchy to articulate the overarching strategy to biodiversity management. Beginning from least desirable to most desirable courses of action, the diagram works from actions that mitigate damage to biodiversity to those that enhance it. The mitigation hierarchy begins with the last resort of 'restoration,' or producing "compensatory biodiversity elsewhere" and moves through post-hoc rehabilitation of affected ecosystems, precursive planning and design, and, at the top of the mitigation hierarchy, using technology or alternative locations to avoid biodiversity destruction (ibid.). At the same time, this is complemented by an enhancement hierarchy, which moves from enlarging conservation areas, "ameliorating the quality of current habitats to achieve biodiversity gains" through to creating new, biodiversity-high areas (ibid.). As the IUCN report describes it, the hierarchy is a "series of potential remedial actions, each requiring an increasing intensity of management inputs and associated costs" that "allow the operator to choose the point at which the balance between biodiversity risk and the cost of remediation – from avoidance to minimization, restoration and compensation – are judged to be fair" (Imboden and Moczek, 2015, p. 10).

In essence, the mitigation hierarchy diagram enshrines mapping as the form of governance operative over the biodiversity of the mine. Firstly, the hierarchy indexes most harmful or damaging to the least on a scale of desirability reflects mapping's central concern with avoiding the violence of top-down and universalised forms of intervention. Thus, the mitigation diagram allows the company to perform the process of "hierarchization" (Latour, 2004b, p. 108), sorting various entanglements into RWE's collective through a priority-hierarchy based on the requirements of their existing practices and horizons of possibility. Namely, that lignite mining must take place in what remains of Hambach Forest. Secondly, a de-essentialised notion of nature is operative in this conception of biodiversity, meaning that whilst an attention to harming entanglements mediates the forms of intervention that are possible, within this framework there is nothing essential or irreducible about any biodiversity object(s) that means they are not, in principle, unassimilable to the collective or even completely substitutable with another. Whilst this latter possibility seems positively promethean compared to the humbleness demanded by figures such as Latour, these actions still reflect, via the mitigation hierarchy, a logic of balancing the order of the existing world—which must remain substantively untouched—against the harms this hierarchy produces. Finally, despite the sometimes-promethean tasks enabled by the mitigation hierarchy, it still requires a detailed process of mapping the relations that constitute biodiversity in its localised and specific set of entanglements. Only through mapping in this way are RWE able to carefully modulate interventions with appropriate risk-mitigation.

A key example of the way this allows RWE to manage possibilities against uncertainties can be found in the management response to the IUCN report (RWE, 2015b). Whilst the IUCN report recommends that the company engage with government and civil society to find alternate solutions, "in order to reduce the loss of historic Hambach forestry stock" including mining elsewhere (Imboden and Moczek, 2015, p. 18), the company's response was that such mitigation possibilities would be impossible: preservation "of further parts of the Hambach forest, due to the location of the forest in the immediate vicinity of the open-cast mine, would inevitably lead to closure of the Hambach mine for technical reasons," that being so, "there is no scope for action from RWE in this regard" (RWE, 2015b, p. 3). In short, the uncertainty—perceived as risk—that this course of action poses for the continued profitability of RWE is unacceptable. Thus, the remaining forest is assigned to the lower rung of "restoration" on the mitigation hierarchy.

As the object of restoration, the specificity of the existing forest has no irreducible essences that make it unassimilable to its enrolment in the ongoing expansion of the mine, nor is its exclusion seen as particularly violent. Instead, it is a matter of minimising the harm this does to biodiversity by using a similar set of biodiversity objects—tree species, ground soils and so on—and training them through a careful process of monitoring and action to recreate the stable habits of the original, levelled forest (Eyll-Vetter, 2018, pp 25-52). This reflects RWE's key objectives for restoration; to make the replacement ecosystems "sustainably usable", "ecologically stable", and expressive of the "regional character" of the site the mine is built on (ibid., p. 12).

What would our theorists of uncertainty make of these efforts at restoration? On the one hand, these measures are serious in their attentiveness to our entanglements with 'nature' and the uncertainties its agencies pose for us. In this sense, they mirror both Latour and Bennett's concern to overcome the nature/culture binary. At the same time, the measures seem to maintain the socio-natural ordering established by the nature/culture binary, allowing RWE to master nature by totally re-engineering what is destroyed by the expansion of the mine (Brock, 2020, pp. 20-21). On the one hand, one might argue that the 'promethean' measures of restoration are indexed to a scale of harm and mitigation designed to minimise the potential risks of acting in a world that is uncertain. Hence, they follow the principle of precaution that Latour advocates for (Latour, 2011). On the other hand, this very scale permits RWE to modulate the intensity of mitigation according to the existing needs of the company. Incongruously, rather than disturbing the hierarchy of the nature/culture binary, these measures are adept at reproducing it. This is readily demonstrated in the way that these measures enable the ongoing extraction of lignite as an energy resource for the capitalist economy at the expense of the forest in its totality. Nonetheless, the hierarchy engendered by the nature/culture binary is of little concern to Latour, instead his approach asks that the existing order of things take proper account of its relational constitution, sifting them appropriately into its order (2004b, pp. 108-109). That the process entails including the forest by slowly transforming it into a coal pit would have to pass over without remark under Latour's schema, which, as we saw earlier, has very little to say about the violence of inclusion.

Bennett's framework diverges here, demonstrating a concern to displace the human desire to master nature engendered by the dualism (2010, p. ix), meaning that she would likely object to the prometheanism-by-the-back-door engendered by the mitigation hierarchy. Nonetheless, Bennett's ambitions are limited by her deference to the force of uncertainty. Firstly, she reasserts the hierarchy of the nature/culture binary via an affinity of the sameness of bodies against the uncertainty of what it would mean to explore equality within and across radically different bodies (ibid., p. 104). Secondly, she advocates for a careful reformism within the horizon of what is, having asserted that the complex relationship between causality and unintended effects displaces the certainty that engenders radical action (ibid., pp. 24-38). Given that the rationalisation of coal-burning at power plants and biodiversity management are forms of amelioration that are deemed necessary within the existing contours of what is, how much would her framework be able to challenge them? Whilst she might contest *the degree* of amelioration offered by RWE's adherence to the mitigation hierarchy, and *the scope and scale* of coal production that RWE are engaged in, there is no vantage point of critique through which to make a radical claim against a world ordered by principles that are radically different to the profitability of large corporations, the high-energy demands that can only be met by ongoing fossil-fuel consumption, and the ossified hierarchy of the nature/culture binary.

3.7 Conclusion

In summary, the Poetic Regime of Uncertainty translates the end of the nature/culture binary into a destabilising event that must be greeted with increasing forms of administration and management to minimise its violences and to cancel out the worst of its effects. It displaces the certainties of essence, causality, and even political community. Necessarily, it asks us to jettison the inheritance of critique and leaves us clinging precariously to the surface of the world, beyond which there is simply nothing. The results are the aesthetic of the trace and an affirmation of a conservative orientation to protect what is traced: an orientation to *policing*.

In the case of RWE, this means reproducing their practices of lignite-mining and burning, in order to maintain both current levels of energy consumption and the company's continued accumulation of capital. Indeed, RWE's attempts to manage its socio-natural relations through stakeholder management and practices like biodiversity restoration represent attempts to sift and sort humans and nonhumans alike within the already actualised order of things, carefully modulating strategies to shape these relations such that they no longer pose a risk to that order. But as the IPCC's report suggests, these "risks are becoming increasingly complex and more difficult to manage" (IPCC Working Group II, 2022, p.19). If we really are unable to access root causes, if we really cannot meaningfully reorder the hierarchies engendered by the nature/culture binary, if we really are limited to the practice of policing effects, are we not simply doomed to a repetition of the terms by which these crises were produced.

In the next chapter I examine a poetic regime that seems oriented instead to the other pole of contemporary power: the state. Whilst its expression licenses some forms of practical negation, albeit highly racialised, nationalistic forms of violence, I argue that posthuman theorising becomes imbricated with it by problematically affirming core parts of its narrative.

Chapter 04.

The Poetic Regime of Brutality: Brute Facts and the Biopolitics of the Lifeboat

What to do, when a ship carrying a hundred passengers suddenly capsizes and only one lifeboat? When the lifeboat is full, those who hate life will try to load it with more people and sink the lot. Those who love and respect life will take the ship's axe and sever the extra hands that cling to the sides of the boat.

Linkola, 1989

... a 9 billion increase in human beings over 150 years, to a level of 11 billion by 2100 if we are lucky, is not just a number; and it cannot be explained away by Capitalism or any other word starting with a capital letter.

Haraway, 2016, pp.6-7

4.1 Introduction

Whereas the other poetic regimes that this thesis explores make an explicit break with Modernity in order to understand the Anthropocene, the Poetic Regime of Brutality possesses several key lines of continuity with Modern knowledges. Firstly, there is the aesthetic function of number. In Adorno and Horkheimer's *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (2017 [1944]), they suggest the development of number and quantification was a central development of Modernity; it was the "canon of the Enlightenment" (ibid., p7.). It became the meta-language of scientific procedure that enabled the Modern sciences to map and represent the Earth and its objects. This process enabled a general process of commensurability, making "the dissimilar comparable by reducing it to abstract quantities" (ibid.). It is on this basis that the language of number allowed the Modern sciences to posit, for example, the laws of nature and, as an extension, the laws of economics as the simple physics of interacting quanta.

Poovey's *A History of the Modern Fact* (1998) argues that number operates as a distinct mode of representation in Modernity, gaining a 'preinterpretive' or 'noninterpretive' force through its abstract and universalising qualities. Number's special qualities give the effect of transparency; through number, it is as if we are able to represent what could be called the 'brute facts' of reality. The term 'brute facts' describes "facts that have no explanation" (Fahrbach, 2005, p. 1). This does not mean their explanation is not yet understood, but that *they require no explanation* (ibid., p.2); separated from the problematic mediation of interpretation, they 'just are'. Adorno and Horkheimer argue that using number in this way performs an aesthetic function insomuch as it demarcates that which is real and tangible from that which is not; "that which does not reduce to numbers, and ultimately to the one, becomes illusion" (ibid.). That is, all that '*is*' can be unproblematically reduced to number and then contained within a singular or universal form, whether that is the system of quantification that undergirds scientific procedure, the economic equivalence of value in the capitalist economy, or the unification of the population through political body of the state. On the other hand, all that cannot be apprehended through the prism of quantification cannot exist in a meaningful way.

In the Poetic Regime of Brutality, number is operative in calculating nature's limits as a brute fact. There are, of course, many ways of exploring limits, and so I want to distinguish the arguments I am talking about from critical arguments that deal with questions of limits and ecology quite differently (most notably Kallis, 2019; Moore, 2015; Harvey, 1974; 1996; Smith, 2010 [1984]). Instead, I mean those forms of knowledge production that start from the elevation of 'Nature'—with a capital 'N'—above culture; Nature as a set of concrete limits that act as a transcendental force that must not be transgressed. In these accounts, Nature takes on the quality of Newtonian physics, opposing the arithmetic of Nature's 'natural' state of equilibrium to the arithmetic of human transgression, explicitly configured by relating the quanta of Nature's resources and the quanta of the human population as interacting variables.

Reducing the world to the brute facts of number in this way off-stages critical thought. The seemingly transparent representation of reality that Modernity affords number brackets it off from the kinds of critical interrogation that might expose brute facts as the product of contingent socio-material conditions and open them up to contestation. I argue, then, that recourse to brute fact is also a form of policing in Rancière's terms; it is tied to modes of organising and distributing the social as a fixed terrain to be managed. This is true of the Poetic Regime of Brutality too, which sees critical explanation as illusory explanans for the explanandum of the Anthropocene. Instead, the Anthropocene can only be explained by recourse to the quantifiable forces of disequilibrium between nature (the fact of finite resource) and culture (the fact of too much population). In this regard, the Poetic Regime of Brutality retains the aesthetic qualities of Modern reduction to 'brute facts'; of disregarding all sense-data but the most essential components and forces of interaction, understood via the meta-language of number as their unifying and universal ('the one') mode of representation. It is, in part, the brute aesthetic force of the 'brute fact' that gives the Poetic Regime of Brutality its name.

As is perhaps already apparent, another key line of continuity with Modern thought is that the binary between 'Nature' and 'Culture' remains self-consciously intact. In Modernity, number performed a central function in operationalising the binary. As Adorno and Horkheimer note, the unification of Nature under the significations of number was a means for its domination by the Moderns; "Enlightenment behaves towards things as a dictator towards men. The man of science knows things in so far as he can make them. In this way, their potentiality is turned to his own ends" (Adorno and Horkheimer, 2017 [1944], p. 9). Rendered as objects of the laws of cause and effect through the "neutral counters" of number (ibid., p. 41), any form of power or agency that 'Nature' possessed through the traditions of animism were replaced by a "disenchanted nature" which could be manipulated and operationalised by the human mind (ibid., p. 39). In this respect, number's capacity to make objects commensurable enabled the ever-expanding manipulation of the stuff of nature.

However, if the Modern system of number persists as a tool of domination in the Anthropocene, then this is achieved by the inversion of its nature/culture binary. If number makes 'Nature' malleable and dominable for Capital, then, as we shall see, number in the Anthropocene has become the basis for the domination of human action by 'Nature', an imposition realised through the arithmetical expression of Nature's limits. Here lies the crucial relationship between brutality in thought and brutality in practice. Despite the 'transparent' appearance of number as a brute, fact-giving device, Poovey notes that "even the numbers are interpretive, for they embody theoretical assumptions about what should be counted, how one should understand material reality, and how quantification contributes to systematic knowledge about the world" (1998, p. xii). In short, quanta are no less vulnerable to the problems of interpretation or the powers of narration than qualia.

With critical knowledges off-staged, the brute facts of population arithmetic leave us with a similar core narrative across their manifestations, made all the more compelling by the 'noninterpretive' force that this narrative gains as an account made with and through number. It is the story of an abstracted humanity that has transgressed an equally abstracted Nature, "and now, or sometime very soon, Nature will exact its revenge" (Moore, 2015, p. 16). The *consequence* of reversing the nature/culture binary in this way is that Nature becomes a 'sovereign' agent, as Latour suggests (2014, p. 6, 16). Humans are reduced to acting mechanistically only insomuch as, by hook or by crook, they must, as a matter of absolute necessity, re-enter the fold of Nature's limits. It is for this reason too that I use the term 'brutality'. The knowledges belonging to the Poetic Regime of Brutality produce the conditions of possibility for brutal action, uninhibited by the prohibitive norms of justice or right, directed at control—more specifically, population control—in the name of re-entering Nature's limits and the terms of existence that they now dictate.

Important for our discussions is the way this has developed in intellectual circles across the latter half of the 20th Century and into now, particularly in discussions of the politics of 'the environment', 'ecology' or 'nature', all proffering their own brutal solutions to the disaster of exceeding the transcendental force of Nature (As described by Hultgren, 2015; Malm and the Zetkin Collective, 2021, pp. 133-180; Turner and Bailey, 2022; Examples including; Ehrlich, 1968; Foreman, 2012; Hardin, 1974; Homer-Dixon, 1991; Kaplan, 1994; Kingsnorth, 2017; Linkola 1989; Shearman and Smith, 2007). The concern of this chapter is that this shared set of aesthetic coordinates—undergirded by the reductionist framing of number—is likely to gain increased traction as the Anthropocene era unfolds. This is partly because there is a continuity with mainstream scientific practices that have emerged with the 'Anthropocene', which—via a plethora of numerical abstractions and data-visualisations—suggest that the Anthropocene marks the point at which humanity has transgressed stable limits or planetary boundaries, including quantitatively as a population (e.g. Crutzen, 2002; 2006, p. 14; Lehman et al., 2021; Rockström *et al.*, 2009; Steffen et al., 2007, p. 618; Zalasiewicz et al., 2008, p. 4; 2010, p. 2228–2229). More significantly, at least for the purposes of this thesis, is the way this narrative has been *affirmed* in different ways by prominent Anthropocene theorists in the social sciences, most notably in the more recent work of Haraway (2016; Clarke and Haraway, 2018) and Latour (2018), which add to its presence as an emerging form of common-sense in the Anthropocene.

The problems staged in these texts also share a common-sense with those shaping emerging practices beyond the intellectual sphere, finding their way into the manifestos of ethnonationalist terrorists (Tarrant, 2019; Crusius, 2019) and far-right political parties (Rassemblement National, 2019) alike. Indeed, they are beginning to shape a new 'green nationalism' (Malm and the Zetkin Collective, 2021), or perhaps more accurately, a 'green ethnonationalism'. The formerly dominant position of 'climate denialism' amongst the far right appears to be waning. For example, forms of ecological thought are now being articulated by far-right parties in Britain, France, and Germany (Milman, 2020). In both parliamentary and insurrectionary articulations, the brute force of reduction has been deployed to stage the problem of balancing nature's limits and the population whilst using race as its central organising principle. By this I mean that race is the key principle by which the question is further reduced from that of population as number to race as 'the one' that unites it.

Therefore, race and state become the central categories through which the forms of equilibrating calculation central to the Poetic Regime of Brutality are organised and performed. Moreover, the development of 'green ethnonationalism' takes place in the context of a broader 'mainstreaming' of the far right (Anievas and Saull, 2022; Bracke and Hernandez Aguilar, 2020; Brown and Mondon, 2020; Davey and Ebner, 2019; De Matas, 2017; Parker, 2021; Vrakopoulos, 2021; Worth, 2022) and, relatedly, a hardening of mainstream Western attitudes and policies towards non-Western migrants (Crawley and Skleparis, 2017; Daalmans et al., 202; Garelli and Tazzioli, 2017; Marcks and Pawelz, 2020; Puskarova and Dancakova, 2018; Uniacke, 2016). As such, I argue that the development of 'green ethnonationalisms' should not be dismissed as a relatively minor phenomenon, but something that takes place within increasingly fertile ground.

Here I want to emphasise that the Poetic Regime of Brutality feeds into and from the dominant 'whiteness' or racialised aesthetic ordering of the world (Bhattacharyya, 2018; Blight, 2019; Sabaratnam, 2020; Weheliye, 2014; Wynter, 1992; 2003). Thus, the form of policing that the Poetic Regime of Brutality takes differs from that which I described in the chapter on the Poetic Regime of Uncertainty. Chiefly, its aim is to strip away those aspects of the world-as-it-is deemed to transgress the 'natural limits' of the racialised order of things, including the movements and 'miscagenations' that exceed the naturalised series of reductions that unite population, race, state, and environment as discrete unities, and any limited affordances granted by the liberal order of the world-as-it-is to racialised groups as ways to manage and control anti-colonial and anti-racist struggles. It is, then, a policing of the police, designed to reimpose the combined *archē* of race and nation upon a liberal order that has granted too many concessions, that has drifted too far towards its deregulating capitalist pole and too far from its binding, statist one.

My argument proceeds through four sections. In the first three sections I will examine the Poetic Regime of Brutality as it is found in academic thought. In the first section I will examine two figures from its emergence with the growing ecological crises of the late 20th

Century, the crises that will, by the 21st Century, come to bear the monicker 'Anthropocene'. I am particularly interested in the work of Garrett Hardin (1974) and Robert Kaplan (1994). In the first place, both Hardin and Kaplan are influential thinkers in the fields of economics and geopolitics respectively. As such, their contribution to the canon of knowledge in these fields marks them out as figures who require critical evaluation. Secondly, they deploy forms of metaphorical narrative to account for the situation of ecological crisis and the practices it warrants: Hardin's lifeboat and Kaplan's limousine. It is in these narratives and with these metaphors that we can glean a diagram of biopolitical power, a prototype for the political practice proper to the Poetic Regime of Brutality already infused with the racial forms of unification and codification that we will find in the later section on 'green ethnonationalism'.

In the second and third section I demonstrate the way in which the Poetic Regime of Brutality has been taken up in posthuman theorising. I focus particularly on Latour's more recent work *Down to Earth* (2018) and, perhaps surprisingly, the newer direction of Donna Haraway in *Staying with the Trouble* (2016). As prominent figures of nuanced, intellectual, and—in the case of Donna Haraway—critical thought in the Anthropocene, their deference to the planet's limits as an inescapable, brute reality are troubling omens, haunted by the same diagram of power constructed in Hardin's lifeboat and Kaplan's limousine. Although they treat the 'what to do now' of this problem very differently to the likes of Hardin, they both turn to fantastical narrations of the future that are shorn of practical possibility in order to resolve the dilemmas of population arithmetic without recourse to its brutal ethics of practice. They are, therefore, insufficiently critical to exorcise the intrusive spectre of the lifeboat that haunts their accounts.

In the final section I focus on the way the Poetic Regime of Brutality is operative in the practices of the far-right, undergirding practices of violent insurgency and electoral politics alike. Here we see contemporary manifestations of the brutality licensed by the brute force of number. Whilst they are tentative moments in its development, I will demonstrate how they align with and are productive of the biopolitical configurations of power designed by Hardin and Kaplan. I do so in order to further problematise social scientific interventions such as that of Latour and Haraway, that cede ground to the Poetic Regime of Brutality. Put simply, this is because Hardin's lifeboat is a configuration of power in the making, more so than the fantastical utopias of Latour and Haraway.

This chapter concludes that a shared elaboration of 'how we got here', routed in a shared aesthetic of Nature's limits and the population as a brute, numerical fact, contributes to shaping a brutal field of political possibility. Despite the efforts of figures like Haraway and Latour to distance themselves from these possibilities, it is the noninterpretive force of their shared affirmation of the problem as a brute fact of disequilibrium between nature's limits and the number of the population that makes brute-force solutions all the more possible. For, if the problem is inescapably one of the brute facts of disequilibrium, then some version of re-ordering and controlling the population is the only practical solution, calling forth the biopolitics of the lifeboat. This is especially concerning when a central articulation of brutality-as-practice is located within growing far-right movements.

4.2 On Lifeboats and Limousines

Garrett Hardin is perhaps most famous for his text *The Tragedy of the Commons* (1968), a mainstay of neoclassical economic teaching. More relevant to our discussions is his text *Lifeboat Ethics* (1974), which narrates a tale that operates first through reduction to number and then through the reduction to 'the one'. "Does everyone on earth have an equal right to an equal share of its resources?" asks Hardin (1974, p.1), near the start of the text. For the earth is not and could never be a common, which would only end in tragedy (ibid.; Hardin, 1968). Instead, it is composed of many discrete "lifeboats" or nations. If some are rich nations, then they are buoyant lifeboats. And if some are poor nations, then those lifeboats are capsizing; "In the ocean outside each lifeboat swim the poor of the world, who would like to get in, or at least to share some of the wealth. What should the lifeboat passengers do?" (Hardin, 1974, p. 1). The article then proceeds to work through the conundrum as an arithmetical game; calculations about capacity and their determining force upon logics of inclusion and exclusion for managing the anonymous masses of the poor, the stability of the lifeboats, and the forces of the water.

The metaphor of the lifeboat works to define the essential components and forces here. Humankind is first abstracted into numerical form as the quanta of population before they are placed within the discrete spaces defined by the territorial boundaries of the state. It is this demarcation that is represented by the image of the lifeboat. Though there are many states or lifeboats, members of the population can only find their belonging or legitimacy as part of 'the one' of a singular state or lifeboat. It is, therefore, the state that determines the count of who belongs and who does not. At the same time, the distinction between rich and poor works to locate the forces of equilibrium and disequilibrium. Those rich nations, possessing a harmonised ratio between the population and Nature's resources are opposed to those poor nations in disequilibrium, whose populations struggle, either within their capsizing lifeboat, or as migrant bodies, having fled the sinking lifeboat, now seeking refuge.

As Foucault's genealogical study demonstrated (2002; 2009 [1978]), the development of the Modern state was intimately tied up with the production of a population as its primary object of knowledge. As the state became 'governmentalised' by the eighteenth Century, knowledges of the population became the site of an investment of instrumental power (2002, pp. 219-220). The population became objects of the state as quanta of statistical calculation regarding "the measure of its quantity, mortality, natality; reckoning of the different categories of individuals in a state and of their wealth; assessment of the wealth in circulation, of the balance of trade" (Foucault, 2009 [1978], p. 274; Hacking, 1982). An upshot of this development was that the population and its patterns of behaviour became the naturalised properties of the state; the concrete or real properties by which it was understood to be strengthened or reduced in strength (Foucault, 2009 [1978], pp. 70-79). Governmental knowledges mobilised number to connect the natural to the economic, the quanta of the population with the quanta of resource, in calculations of the wealth and the health of the nation.

Such calculations instrumentalised the population as the object of state intervention, or what Foucault called 'biopolitics' (e.g. 2002; 2004 [1976]). In opposition to the power of the sovereign who, before Modernity, had "the right to take life or let live", Modern biopolitics modified sovereignty with the objectification of the population, reversing its terms to "the right to make live and let die" (2004 [1976], pp. 240-241). As Foucault formulated, it is the "final end of government… to improve the condition of the population, to increase its wealth, its longevity, and its health" (2002, p. 105). In this sense, the population operates as "a given" for the state as biopolitical or governmental actor (ibid., p. 108). The state occupies a kind of quasi-natural position as the proper or legitimate expression of the population and the proper organ for its governance. It is belonging within the state, at least to some degree, that demarcates the investment of making live from the letting die. In short, it is 'the one' appropriate to reduce the population to.

Given the historical emergence of population with the Modern state, it is perhaps no surprise that Hardin's tale of population limits also takes nation states as the basic units of its model and translates them into the ideal representations of success and disfunction in the form of buoyant and capsizing lifeboats. What is this distinction other than the difference between proper and improper *governance* of the population at the state level? On the one hand, those rich nations—or buoyant lifeboats—are so because the relationship between population and resource has been governed properly, maintaining the equilibrium between Nature and population. On the other hand, those poor nations—or capsizing lifeboats and fleeing victims—are the casualties of an improper governance of this relationship. In this sense, *Lifeboat Ethics* is entirely continuous with the canon of Modern, governmental knowledge. *The lifeboat is a biopolitical model* or *diagram of power.*

Indeed, it is as biopolitical logic that the Lifeboat's game of arithmetic proceeds. There might be an equality of being that unites all of humanity—'our brothers'—but in the calculations of a finite planet this must be superseded by the logics of belonging proper to a population, pitting those who belong within a well governed state against those who don't. The lifeboats confer belonging and rightful use to those who already exist within them, whilst those who no longer belong are ascribed an illegitimacy through which they are excluded. For what else can they be but the ruin of all – a calamitous excess to the equilibrium of populations and resources? The lifeboat can only function successfully via the same exclusiveness that is deemed necessary to avoid over-exploitation in *the Tragedy of the Commons* (1968). That is, a lifeboat *cannot* be, under any circumstances, a common. The poor, swimming outside without the proper quality of state-belonging, can only be the ruination of those that already belong inside the buoyant lifeboats. Moreover, the resource of the lifeboat cannot be redistributed to those lifeboats that are sinking, an act that would most certainly sink a buoyant lifeboat; 'complete justice, complete catastrophe'.

Part of the solution to the dilemma framed in these terms is to 'let die'; to withdraw any transversal relations that cross the boundaries between the rich nations and the poor. "Without some system of worldwide food sharing, the proportion of people in the rich and poor nations might eventually stabilize. The overpopulated poor countries would decrease in numbers, while the rich countries that had room for more people would increase" (Hardin, 1974, p. 5). That is, Nature must be allowed to take its course as a balancing force, at least as far as the poor are concerned. Any attempt to ameliorate the brutal balancing game that nature plays with logics of equality and justice is simply to induce more havoc. Hardin concludes, "[f]or the foreseeable future, our survival demands that we govern our actions by the ethics of a lifeboat, harsh though they may be" (ibid., p. 8).

The callousness of leaving Nature to take its course is one form of brutality, but it is only one half of the solution that emerges from the scene of the lifeboat. Elsewhere, the self-described eco-fascist Pentti Linkola invoked Hardin when he wrote "[w]hen the lifeboat is full, those who hate life will try to load it with more people and sink the lot. Those who love and respect life will take the ship's axe and sever the extra hands that cling to the sides" (Linkola, 1989). That is, the problem of populations and limits must find an active and violent resolution; the brutal policing of number so that the lifeboat may stay afloat. Indeed, Hardin asks us elsewhere to suspend discourses of justice, of inequality, and of history to align ourselves to the brute, material, and mathematical necessity of survival (1998). In one telling passage he warns against "loose talk of 'universal human rights' for we can be sure that every partial success in the local control of a population will be achieved by adopting measures that are condemned by some nations somewhere." (Hardin, 1998, p. 187).

Though Foucault classified biopolitics as the governance of 'making live and letting die', he clearly saw a relationship between biopolitics and the older model of sovereignty—the way that biopolitical logic that comes to structure the Modern sovereign operations of "making die" (Foucault, 2004 [1976], pp. 253-263). That is, 'letting die' and 'making die' came to exist concurrently, precisely as a logic of ensuring the population invested with the power to 'make live' remained safe and healthy. As Mbembe makes clear with his account of 'necropolitics' (2003), this logic of 'making die' is not one that has gone away. As it appears in Hardin's text, it seems as if the mode of sensing and organising the population that operates the hinge between 'making live' and 'letting die'—or even 'making die'—is simply the subordination of the population to 'the one' of the state: the inclusion within and the exclusion without that separates the citizen of functioning government from the deficient citizen of the badly governed or the fleeing migrant. Whilst this is no doubt part of it, there is also more going on here, something that is obscured by the purely economic terms, 'poor' and 'rich' used to describe the states and populations of Hardin's account.

In order to get under these categories, I will refer to another version of this story, this time from the field of geopolitics. The foreign affairs writer Robert Kaplan deploys a similar story to Hardin's in *The Coming Anarchy* (1994), perhaps his most influential text in mainstream geopolitical circles and a resource for the Clinton presidency's foreign policy (Cramer, 2002, p. 1848). Kaplan's is the story of a "stretch limo" driving through the potholed streets of New York. The limousine represents the industrialised nations of the West and outside "is the rest of mankind going in a completely different direction." In Kaplan's account, those in the limousine represent the "last man" of Fukuyama's *End of History* thesis (1992), the man that has progressed out of nature through the progressive forces of Modern, capitalist society. On the other hand, those outside the limousine represent Hobbes' 'First Man'; those living in a 'state of nature' where life is "nasty, brutish and short" (Kaplan, 1994, quoting Hobbes).

Insulated from the shocks of environmental catastrophe, the last man within the limo will be able to weather the coming storm, but the first man, still immersed in nature, will not.

What is interesting about Kaplan's account is that it exposes a logic of the nature/culture binary that is otherwise masked by the terms 'rich' and 'poor' in Hardin's account. Though Hardin uses the distinction between rich and poor nations in a way that seems racially neutral, he has been labelled a 'white supremacist' by America's Southern Poverty Law Centre (2020) and has a long history of thinking race and culture in terms of a superior 'us' against an inferior 'them' in a battle over the limited resources of the environment (ibid.). As such it is perhaps no surprise that 'rich' and 'poor' serves to submerge a more fundamental—and more colonial—set of distinctions that become more apparent in Kaplan's distinction between the First Man and the Last Man as symbolic referents for 'the West' and 'the rest'.

This is a distinction that will sound very familiar to decolonial and postcolonial scholars (e.g. Adams and Mulligan, 2003; Schultz, 2017; Wynter, 2003). It is the distinction that is foundational to the self-mythology of the West that has underpinned the planet's colonial history and capitalist present. It is what has always lurked under the Modern imaginary of the universal man; the distinction between that universal man who has been realised through the progressive arc of Modernity (he who has departed from, mastered, and ordered nature), and the less-than-man who is left behind in a state of nature (Bhattacharyya, 2018; Blaut, 1993; Hindess, 2007; Mbembe, 2003; Mignolo, 2011; Zalloua, 2021). Indeed, in both Foucault's work on biopolitics and Mbembe's on necropolitics, they identify race as the quality by which the population could be sorted along the axes of life and death that suffuses bio/necropolitics. Race creates "caesuras" in the biological substratum of the population, providing the basis for making the decision about who should be governed 'to make live,' who should be left to die, and who must be exterminated (Foucault, 2004 [1976], pp. 255-257; Mbembe 2003).

In this account, what can be made visible as 'racial' or 'cultural' differences are posed as a question of where they lie along the lines of Man/Nature, which is simultaneously a temporal scale and gradated threshold that moves from the natural past to the human present, including and excluding what counts as human by locating non-white bodies and non-Western cultures in past moments of the scale (Schulz 2017b). The temporality of past-nature/modern-man—or the racialised manifestation of the nature/culture binary—is simultaneously spatialised along the binary demarcations of 'the West' and 'the rest' (Gupta and Ferguson, 1992). Race is allotted to the discrete and frozen boundaries that separate Europe and its settler colonies from non-Western civilisations or, as Hardin would label it, the boundaries that separate ‘rich nations’ from ‘poor nations’. In this sense, ‘the one’ of the state comes to nest on top of ‘the one’ of the white, European race, a process of sublimation that hides the real normative content of the distinction between rich nations and poor.

This is reflected in Kaplan’s account, where the discreteness of the non-Western ‘rest’ is identified by the concept of “overused Earth”. It is this, rather than any colonial or neo-colonial relation, that is the source of the irrationalities of non-Western life. The brute facts of expanding populations and diminishing resources becomes the central problem that blankets vast swathes of the non-Western Earth; “[the] West African coast, the Middle East, the Indian subcontinent, China and Central America” (ibid; see also Kaplan 2009), whilst disconnecting them entirely from their historical relationships with Europe. It is a manoeuvre that enacts the concealing power of topography. Dispossessed of their distinct histories and their colonial scars, these spaces are determined only by the arithmetical disequilibrium between population and resource; their inability to properly master the laws of nature.

The brutal realities of deprivation generated by this disequilibrium can only result in conflict; “a large number of people on this planet, to whom the comfort and stability of a middle-class life is utterly unknown, find war and a barracks existence a step up rather than a step down” (Kaplan, 1994). The volatility of unstable arithmetic amongst the ‘First Man’ breeds violence and, in turn, violence becomes its own reward. Tying Nature, the transgressive arithmetic of the population, and violence together, Kaplan suggests that “Nature is coming back with a vengeance, tied to population growth” (ibid). This narrative has the effect of sorting the population into legitimate and illegitimate communities. On the one hand, Kaplan bolsters the transcendental status of the ‘West’ and its nations as the progressive, civilised ‘Last Man’; an entirely discrete and, consequently, morally palatable ‘us’ that has the proper command of nature. On the other hand, a ‘them’ that are still immersed in nature and brutish because they are exposed to the violent forces of disequilibrium and reharmonization that regulate natural life. It is this naturalised tendency towards violence that certifies their status as ‘mere’ ‘First Man’ and prevents them from being considered a reconcilable part of the community of the ‘Last Man’.

In this schema, Nature and its ‘First Man’ act as the causal agents that determine the actions of the Modern ‘Last Man’ as mechanical reactions, mere responses to the threat of bringing the violence of Nature from the outside in. This becomes the means by which ethics and justice can be more readily set aside for the coming brutal necessity. In short, what is enacted is the racial hinge that operates over ‘making live’ and ‘letting die’/‘making die’, in which the Last Man is *forced* to act out of necessity in order to protect itself, whilst the effects of these necessary acts—'letting die'/'making die'—can be distributed to those with no part in the community; those problematised as 'less-than-human' or 'still-nature', with greater ease.

4.3 Haraway's Haunted Camille

Having sketched out the most explicit articulation of the Poetic Regime of Brutality, I now turn to the way in which some Posthuman theorists in the social sciences bring themselves to its terms. I will argue that both Haraway and Latour's texts affirm the 'brute facticity' of limits in the Anthropocene, whilst retreating to fantasy in order to resolve the issues that this affirmation present 'peacefully'. This retreat to fantasy means that they are unable to grapple with the brute realities created by the aesthetic and ethical framing of the lifeboat, a problem that is increasingly problematic in a context where the lifeboat, as a material configuration of politics and power, is becoming ever more possible.

Donna Haraway's text *Staying with the Trouble* (2016) shares an unlikely Malthusian commitment to the problematics of population and resource limits with Hardin too (see also Clarke and Haraway, 2018; Murphy, 2018), even as she is committed to a drastically different politics. I say unlikely because of Haraway's longstanding commitment to critical thought. Indeed her *Cyborg Manifesto* (Haraway, 2016 [1985]) charted a different course to Latour's depoliticised commitment to tracing, one devoted to reworking the critical categories of race, class, gender and sexuality at the same time as it reworked the boundary between nature and society, becoming influential for critical feminist approaches to questions of technology and ecology in the social sciences (Barad, 2007; Bennett, 2010; Braidotti, 2013; Brown *et al.*, 2019; Castree, 2003; Collard, 2012; Demos, 2017; Giraud, 2019; Star, 2007; Sturman, 2006; Squire, 2014a; Wilson, 2009). However, if she was able to resist upending a critical approach in her earlier work, the Anthropocene has pushed back on those ambitions, a cause of dismay amongst theorists that found utility in Haraway's earlier work (Lewis, 2017).

The 'trouble' starts in the introduction, where Haraway suggests that "a game over attitude imposes itself in the gale force of feeling, not just knowing that human numbers are almost certain to reach more than 11 billion people by 2100" (2016, p. 4). Here I want to draw on the examination of Hardin and Kaplan to argue that this link between population and action, rather than inducing a sense of passive nihilism as Haraway suggests*, induces a sense of urgency and emergency through which the diagram of the lifeboat gains force as a practical solution*. Indeed, despite Haraway's awareness of the biopolitics of state that questions of population inevitably induce, she too affirms the necessity of realigning the number of the population with the 'one' of the Earth as a matter of "urgency" (ibid., p. 6), with all the connotations of a state of emergency and the violent powers of the state that this conjures (Agamben, 2005). Moreover, Haraway affirms the nature of the issue when she suggests that the problem "cannot be explained away by blaming Capitalism or any other word beginning with a capital letter" (ibid., pp. 6-7). In a footnote that corresponds to this claim (Haraway, 2016, p. 208 n. 18), Haraway argues that "Capitalism, Imperialism, Neoliberalism' Modernization" are not diagnostic lenses for the problem, but rather ways of disavowing it, making the brute fact of population "not us" (ibid.). As with the other accounts this chapter has covered, the brute fact of limits comes to obscure questions of "Inequality, commodification, imperialism, patriarchy, racial formations…" from view (Moore, 2015, p. 173).

When this issue is picked up again in chapter 4, where Haraway urges us to "Make Kin Not Babies" (Haraway, 2016, p. 102), the question of population control is sidestepped. If the slogan invokes 'Kin' and 'Babies' as the objects of strategy, then this renders strategy as two-fold. On the one hand, it demands the positive task of reaching beyond the human to engage a creative practice of kinship-making with other-than-human beings. On the other, it requires the negative and essential task of reducing the population. But if this latter question problematically invokes the biopolitics of coercion and elimination, which demands a substantive engagement to wrestle it away from the lifeboat's distribution of life and death, Haraway disavows this task. Instead, she claims that "making and recognizing kin is perhaps the hardest and most urgent part" (ibid.). This licenses Haraway to jettison any real consideration of how to manage the problem of population sans the unifying and exclusionary force of the biopolitical state, and instead to focus on the generative capacities of making relations of 'Kin,' even as she demands a huge reduction of the population to "2 or 3 billion or so" at the end of the chapter (ibid., p. 103). A footnote to this passage again attempts to subdue the problems of population that this chapter leaves begging (ibid., pp. 208-209n18), but this only gestures at encouraging "policies that engage scary demographic issues—including nonracist immigration, environmental and social support…" But this gesture towards resolution simultaneously invokes the legislations of the state whilst severing it from the prevailing power of the state as a biopolitical/necropolitical force.

What we might term 'questions of justice'— the redistribution of resource, wealth, and the uneven effects of the Anthropocene—are foregone for a final chapter of fiction-writing; *The Camille Stories* (ibid., pp. 134-168). It is a speculative fiction that conjures 5 generations of

‘Camille’ characters, who become the protagonists for a future in which non-authoritarian measures have been taken to achieve the aim of population reduction. As if to stress the point, each section is headed with the population number at the birth and death of each Camille iteration. Population number as a brute referent for life and death questions thus takes on the central importance for the stories themselves, but in this respect, it is a narrative curiously absent of violence. This is of central importance to Haraway because these stories are an aesthetic process of futural ‘fabulation,’ “committed to strengthening ways to propose near futures, possible futures, and implausible but real nows” (ibid., p. 136).

Ramírez D’Oleo demonstrates that whilst violence is narratively supressed in favour of a generative account of the Camilles’ various more-than-human compositions with Monarch butterflies, there is nonetheless an admission of its necessity concealed within the footnotes (2023, pp. 18-22). Here, non-coercive principles come into conflict with the punitive force of the ‘common-sense’ of population rhetoric. Haraway states that despite coercive birth control being criminalised, “violent conflict over bringing new babies into existence or overdetermining who and what were kin did occur” (Haraway, 2016, p.217n7). It is telling that Haraway cannot entirely exorcise the spectre of the lifeboat and its attendant violence from her text, even as a work of fiction. The trace remains within her populace, induced ‘organically’ by a logic that ties the fate of the community to bodily control of individuals as the common-sense basis of a common-sense organising principle.

As Ramírez-D’Oleo goes on to argue (2023, p. 19), the Camille stories work to “forestall the critique that the violence of drastic population control has always been unevenly meted out” in racialised ways (see also, Benjamin, 2018), skirting tensions around the authority and violence that are innately embedded in questions of population control all too quickly in order to set up her utopian space of new beginnings. Perhaps this is presented most awkwardly in her claim that the voluntarist population control strategies of her ecologically attuned communities of the future, ‘the communities of compost,’ prove, implausibly, to spread their practices because they are “infectious” rather than coercive (Haraway, 2016, p. 144). But the peaceful narrative of population-correction that contextualises the generations of Camilles is haunted by its own constitutive violence, concealed in the footnotes (Ramírez-D’Oleo, 2023).

The admission of violence and the utopian fabulation that off-stages it betrays a central facet of Haraway’s work here; rather than achieving her ambitions of dispelling “defeatism” (ibid., p. 3) or even maintaining the titular idea of “staying with the trouble”, instead becomes, as one reviewer suggests, “a strange mixture of wishful thinking and defeatism” ('Making Kin in One Eco-Bantustan,' 2019). It is defeatism, most importantly, in the sense that it cedes ground to a population realism that, despite Haraway's obvious commitments to anti-racism, sit all too comfortably alongside the racially coded discourses of someone like Hardin. This is particularly problematic when there are alternative *critical* ways of rethinking the problem of limits without recourse to population control (e.g. Braun, 2006; Harvey, 1974; Moore, 2015; Kallis, 2019).

Indeed, this issue is even more troubling precisely because her vision of the future is wishful thinking. As Lewis suggests, "[n]ot-making-babies is never much related to the objective of building counterpower" (2017). Whilst earlier works were replete with the imagery of *cutting and unmaking*—surely the signs of an understanding of the necessary critical negativity involved in the political practice of building a better world—this has become increasingly de-emphasised "to the point of silence, even as [Haraway] cuts humanity down to size" (ibid.). This leaves us to question by what force of political confrontation is her somewhat modest proposal of a legal prohibition on coercive birth control policies going to be achieved, let alone the rest? She is left with no option other than to swing between the fantastical attempt to wish away violence and a discourse of emergency that cannot help but hail a different force of cutting and unmaking altogether: the biopolitical machinery of the state, to which the population, as Foucault noted, is its object (2009 [1978]), with all the exceptional violences that a state of emergency is able to incite (Agamben, 2005).

4.4 Latour's Place to Land

In *Down to Earth*, Latour adopts the position of hard-headed realism, affirming the premise of a finite Earth incapable of "containing [the modern] ideal of progress, emancipation, and development" (Latour, 2018, p. 16). As he explains, "when the rug is pulled out from under your feet, you understand at once that you're going to have to be concerned with the floor" (ibid., p. 8). The metaphor of 'rug-pulling' serves to disclose a sudden displacement of the common terms of reference and their function, which requires getting to grips with the brute facts of the situation: the inescapability of the 'floor'. As such, the "old markers" of politics, including those of "liberation" and "emancipation" have been made redundant by the conditions of the Anthropocene (ibid., p. 52). Instead, nature becomes a brutish force, reacting violently to the limitlessness of the Modern imagination. As Latour puts it, "the place 'on' or 'in' which we are located… turns against us, encloses us, dominates us…" (ibid., p. 41). Elsewhere, he suggests that *Gaia*—the term he borrows from Lovelock to describe the 'forces of nature' that compose our planet—now possesses the quality of a *sovereign* (2014, p. 6, p. 16; emphasis added). It is now an "agent of history" (ibid., p. 3) that imposes upon us and determines our actions, forcing us to abandon the imaginary of an infinite universe which undergirded Modern aspirations, and to accept our proper places within a closed and limited cosmos (ibid., p. 4).

The upshot of these circumstances is that it has become absolutely necessary to put our globalising Modern past behind us and to attach "*oneself to a particular patch of soil*" (Latour, 2018, p. 12; emphasis in the original). "To belong to a land, to want to stay put and keep working one's plot of land, to be attached to it…" he argues, "has become 'reactionary,'… only by contrast with the headlong flight forward imposed by modernization" (ibid., p. 53). Against the Modern conception of a world of infinite possibilities and mobilities, we must locate ourselves within the closed world, imagined as a new, possessive belonging to the land; "one's plot". The definition of Modernity at work as a globalising force of limit transcendence here is something we will return to shortly, as it is seemingly at odds with the national-biopolitical frame that has been developed so far in this chapter. For now, let us begin with the obvious danger that lies ahead when equating living within limits to belonging to and possessing a plot of land. Despite his attempts to counterpose his concept of the 'Terrestrial'—land that is understood possessively but still open to others—to the 'Local', which he likens to an ethnonationalist conception of land closed to outsiders (Latour, 2018, pp. 53-54), I argue that Latour does not do enough to avoid these dangers.

Part of the problem lies in how he develops the relationship to the Terrestrial through the binary of 'belonging' and 'uprooting'—with all the reactionary baggage that these terms bring with them—whilst also self-consciously toying with reactionary tropes and reactionary positions. For example, Latour pits the globalising account of Modernity as a process of elite-led 'uprooting' against the desire for 'belonging,' through which he affirms the reactionary position that "it is the uprooting that is illegitimate, not the belonging" (ibid., p. 53). At the same time, he seems to ignore the ethno-nationalist connotations that this expression holds in the well-known antisemitic conspiracy theory that the 'rootless cosmopolitan elites' will uproot us all (Trawny, 2015). Here, in this affirmation of the reactionary trope and the reactionary concern, the lifeboat casts its shadow, with the binary of belonging/uprooting mirroring Hardin's distinction between those legitimate people who find belonging in the buoyant lifeboat and those illegitimate people swimming in the ocean who threaten the equilibrium of the buoyant boat.

This is particularly troublesome as Latour conjures an ideal Europe as his own place to land (ibid., pp. 100-106). To be clear, Latour's account does implicate Europe's colonial past in the shape of the present moment; "[t]here is no way out of this. Europe has invaded all peoples; all peoples are coming to Europe in their turn" (ibid., p. 103). In conjunction with this acknowledgement, Latour also gestures towards a liberal embrace of the 'nomadic' figure of the refugee. In response to the displacements caused by the extreme events that will unfold through the Anthropocene, he argues that Europe could "become one of the homelands of all those looking for ground" (ibid., 106) and this is a normative goal; "I would like to be proud of… this Europe… I would like to be able to call it my homeland – their refuge" (ibid.). In this sense, Latour's imaginary of an open and diverse Europe perhaps reflects Liberal European self-perceptions (Forchtner and Kølvraa, 2012). However, it allows Latour to bracket out a darker side of Europe that is manifest in the connections between its history of colonialism and genocide and the violences of the present. Afterall, Europe "is the continent that gifted the world with both the fossil economy and *fascism*" (Malm and The Zetkin Collective, 2021, p. x; emphasis added).

What can it mean to affirm an entitlement to own one's plot of land, "to be attached to it" from the position of Europe, the home of colonialism and fascism? The European history of counterposing belonging to uprooting is, as Latour suggests, 'reactionary' in the sense that the desire for 'belonging' is a reaction to the 'uprooting' of a globalising Capitalist economic system (Latour, 2018, p. 53). But, *more importantly,* it is reactionary in the sense that it is deeply imbricated with the foundations of European ethnonationalism and fascism. It is precisely a reaction to the dislocations or 'uprooting' of Modern capitalism that produced ethnonationalist forms of belonging in 19th Century Germany (Biehl and Staudenmaier, 2011 [1995]). This opposition was foundational to the *völkish* movement, underpinning its central commitment to ethnonational belonging (ibid., p. 17); the essential connection between the purity of the *ethnos* and the purity of nature that ties the *ethnos* to it.

Despite its reactionary frame, then, such a conception fits comfortably within the Modern Governmental logic that unites a population and its state. What is the discourse of the ethnos and the nation, if not a discourse of biopolitical absolutism, superimposing the territorial boundaries of the state over the boundaries of racial purity that demarcate the legitimate population? Indeed, this may be 'reaction,' but is it not also a Modern logic? Notably, the ideas of the *völkish* movement were antecedents that influenced far reaching parts of the Nazi state ideology in the 20th Century, such as *blut und boden* [blood and soil] and *lebensraum* [living space] (Biehl and Staudenmaier, 2011 [1995], pp. 31-42). Both the Frankfurt School and Foucault would recognise Modernity here in the move to reduce to the number of the population, to organise it by race, and to further reduce these racial populations to the Modern body proper, where 'the one' of the race can be harmonised with 'the one' of the state.

But Latour seems to equate Modernity largely with the globalising force of capitalism, the reduction of the world through the aesthetics of numbers to the ever-expanding commensurability of the value form, or 'the one' of the system of economic valuation. It is by this principle of equivalence, in which all is brought into the same scale of value and thus becomes economically exchangeable on an ever-expanding scale, that Modernity can be said to be both globalising and dislocating (Harvey, 2001). But Modernity's domination by number does not simply rest within the confines of the market. Modernity is equally the reduction of the social to the number of the population and then to the one of the State. In this sense, Modern societies are "caught between two poles" (Deleuze and Guattari, 2015 [1972], p.298), the "reterritorializing unity" of the state and the "unfettered flows" unleashed by the equivalence of valuation (ibid.).

Though Latour makes some gestures to distance his account from both *blut und boden* and *lebensraum* (Latour, 2018, p. 18, p. 53), he does not (will not?) recognise that his own account of belonging/uprooting does not meaningfully break with Modernity. Instead, he simply moves his account from its 'globalising' pole to its finite, binding or 'reterritorialising' one. Because Latour does not reckon with the continuities of Modernity here, he cannot grapple properly with, nor escape a European past and present that is *still marked* by the unifying pole of the state and the ethnos. To invoke 'belonging to one's plot' in reaction to the uprooting of globalised capitalism as casually as Latour does blurs the boundaries between a critique of Modernity and the impulses of its most vicious terms of numerical accounting; the biopolitics of the lifeboat. Indeed, in this light, Latour's claim that "it is normal.. it is *just*.. it is indespensible to want to preserve, maintain, ensure one's belonging to a land, a place, *a soil*, a community, a space, a milieu, a way of life…" is positively ominous (Latour, 2018, p. 15; emphasis added). Indeed, as we shall see in the case study of Ressamblement National in section 4.5, when Latour suggests that this discrete sense of belonging results in "locating more differences, more viewpoints" (ibid.), he doesn't unpick the ethno-nationalist trajectories of the reactionary tropes he plays with by deploying a cosmopolitan logic. Instead, he passively affirms the sense of discrete unities of place, perspective, and modes of being that animate an ethno-nationalist police order.

Latour's inability or unwillingness to see this problem is reflected in his idealistic account of contemporary Europe as a would-be refuge. Rather than confronting these reactionary dynamics properly, Latour's sanguine account of Europe as "a provincial experiment in what it means to inhabit the Earth after modernization, with those whom modernization has definitely displaced" (2018, p. 105) is entirely at odds with the actuality of the contemporary European context. What are phenomena such as the growing popularity of the Far Right (Anievas and Saull, 2022) or the escalation of measures to police Europe's borders from refugees and migrants (Garelli and Tazzioli, 2017), if not the ongoing legacy of ethnonationalist politics of belonging and calculation inscribed through the borders and boundaries of Modernity?

Instead, Latour can only affirm the liberal imaginary of Europe, meaningfully shorn of its ugliness. Without the utopian and emancipatory horizons of Modernity, perhaps this is the only way to end the possibility of transcending the present whilst making living within its diminishing limits tolerable. Regardless, the effect is that Latour is not able to begin to think about the political subjects and processes through which Europe might be transformed into what he imagines it to be, and by which we might break from the Modern poles of state and capital. Indeed, this unrealistic representation of Europe becomes sinister when he makes an ambiguous appeal to abandon the distinction between left and right (Latour, 2018, p. 33) and to seek allies "among people who, according to the old gradation, were clearly 'reactionaries.'" (ibid., p. 51). The comradely embrace of Europe's reactionaries sits in uneasy tension with his disavowal of *blut und boden*, given the intimate connections that tie the history of reaction and Modern ethnonationalism together.

Some of the problems of Latour's Euro-idealism stem from how he attempts to overcome the belonging/uprooting binary itself, which is achieved through a flattening of all under the signifier of uprooting – a collective moment of devaluation and equalisation directed at erasing the difference of the binary so that all peoples may then be revalued as they find collective belonging together. It is, I argue, a manoeuvre that meaningfully displaces his earlier acknowledgement of colonial histories and the scars they have left on the contemporary situation. As Latour frames it, the potential onslaught of coming eco-disasters and extreme weather events will deprive the 'West' of land in a way that Latour finds comparable with Indigenous dispossessions of the colonial era (Latour, 2018, pp. 7-8; quoted in Reid and Chandler, 2019, p. 5). The crisis of the Anthropocene, then, becomes the great leveller. In the Anthropocene, those who possessed the quality of belonging are now also uprooted or displaced. In this sense, Latour's claim for the necessity of a 'place to land' mirrors Indigenous struggles for their land in the face of colonial dispossession. The full dispossession of peoples from the Earth allows us to find a new, harmonious, and borderless belonging that "transcends all identities" (Latour, 2018, p. 54).

Consequently, Latour's account has the effect of minimising decolonisation struggles. Afterall, what is there to struggle against, now the Anthropocene denies us all? The unequal rift of colonialism is supplanted by the equalised rift that unites all peoples in their separation from the Earth, a condition that allows us to find collective belonging in our legitimating return to the earth. But, as Reid and Chandler point out, Latour's desire to flatten the colonial rift "has nothing to do with 'a sense of fraternity' nor has it to do with any restorative move of righting past wrongs" but is instead directed at the instrumentalisation of Indigenous knowledge as the necessary means "of coping on the edge of crisis, of survival and adaption, in the face of the threat of extinction" (Reid and Chandler, 2019, p. 5). As such, Latour's move to overcome the colonial rift lacks any commitment to the real work of solidarity and struggle that could address the wrong of colonialism or the history of European ethnonationalism. The 'dispossession' of the West remains only spuriously analogous rather than materially akin to colonial dispossession.

Cancelling out this history reinforces the biopolitical logics that mark the legacies of colonialism insomuch as it offers cover for a Western sense of entitlement to the safety and resource of belonging to the homeland, and a paranoia about losing it, that has been both historical (Biehl and Staudenmaier, 2011 [1195]; Foucault, 2004 [1976]) and contemporary fuel for the growth of ethnonationalist ideas (Marcks and Pawelz, 2020; Anievas and Saull, 2022). Once again, re-reading some of Latour's statements through the book in this light demonstrates how close they skirt to ethno-nationalist sentiments, even as he disavows them. For example, early in the text Latour states:

> "[h]ave you ever noticed that the emotions involved are not the same when you are asked to defend nature – you yawn, you're bored – as when you're asked to defend your territory – now you're wide awake, suddenly mobilized?" (2018, p. 8)

Here, Latour's intimate dance with reactionary tropes comes worryingly close to invoking the violence of the lifeboat, where defence of a possessive sense of territory and the invocation of emergency surrounding Nature's sovereign limits readily converge in Linkola's demand that we "take the ship's axe and sever the extra hands that cling to the sides" (1989).

In sum, Latour can only overcome the violent properties of the belonging/uprooting binary by way of an idealism that distances itself from, but does not address or overcome, the material force of that same binary as it is operational in the real world. As such, his attempts to conjure away the violence of inclusion and exclusion, belonging and uprooting that inheres in Hardin’s lifeboat are unsuccessful.

4.5 Building the Lifeboat: Green Ethno-Nationalism in the Anthropocene

On Friday March 15th, 2019, during afternoon prayer, a gunman attacked the Al Noor Mosque and Linwood Islamic Centre in Christchurch, New Zealand. 49 people were killed and 40 were injured in the shooting (Roy and Martin, 2019). Shortly before the act the shooter put a manifesto on the internet, in which he decried the problems of overpopulation, placing the blame at the feet of non-Western migrants (Tarrant, 2019). A few months after this shooting, in May 2019, France held its European parliamentary elections. Rassemblement National (RN), formerly the French National Front, won a majority of the popular vote on the promise to deliver an ‘ecological civilisation’ in Europe (2019).

The two events are separated by the distance of continents, they are not connected by any known personal affiliations, and they do not share a common form of political practice. What unites them, however, is their nature as symbolic acts of political action, all of which are accompanied by manifestos that engender these acts of violence and voting alike with meaning. Moreover, there is a family resemblance, the biopolitical governance of the lifeboat, that ties their meanings together and binds these practices to the thought of Hardin, Linkola, Kaplan and Haraway and Latour alike. Whilst Latour and Haraway skirt around the violence of policing Nature’s limits via forms of idealism and fantasy, the manifestos presented in this section are not shy about the necessary violence that comes as a consequence of *reducing* the issues of ecology to the brute forces of population arithmetic. Indeed, for them, Hardin’s lifeboat and its racialised distribution of effects become a schema for a desirable configuration of power; a political programme to be enacted.

A *sonnenrad* or ‘Black sun’ sits on the cover of *The Great Replacement* (Tarrant, 2019), the manifesto of Brenton Tarrant, the perpetrator of the Christchurch shooting. It is a black orb surrounded by 12 rays, angular and well ordered, evocative of both the SS insignia and the Swastika. The *sonnenrad* “has come to signify the magical evocation of a lost homeland among young neo-Nazis. The enigmatic symbol of the Black Sun indicates the faraway ideals of Thule, an alternative world in total opposition to a multiracial Europe” (Goodrick-Clarke, 2002 p. 150). Outside of this *sonnenrad* lies another circle that is cut into equal eighths by the rays, each one containing an annotated illustration. The order of geometry that distributes the illustrations around the circle matches the order of principles that governs the harmony of the homeland, structured according to those elaborated through the illustrations. Alongside issues that go largely undiscussed in the manifesto itself, such as ‘worker’s rights’ or ‘anti-imperialism’, are those that are of more significance to Tarrant, chiefly ‘environmentalism’, ‘ethnic autonomy’, and the ‘protection of culture and heritage’. Indeed, it is the harmonious and well-ordered alignment of the ethnos and its environment that is of primary concern; the superimposition of the one of the state upon the one of the race, harmonised with the one of Nature.

But all is not well-ordered and harmonious for Tarrant. “It’s the birthrates. It’s the birthrates. It’s the birthrates” he begins (2019, p. 2), signalling the central biopolitical logic of his manifesto. On the one hand, the health of the white population in ‘Western’ nations is declining; growing “older”, “weaker”, whilst diminishing in number. On the other hand, this decline is matched by the illegitimate expansion of non-white immigrant populations, who transgress the territorial boundaries that divide white Europe and its settler states from the non-white Other. “This crisis of mass immigration and sub-replacement fertility is an assault on the European people that, if not combated, will ultimately result in the complete racial and cultural replacement of the European people” concludes Tarrant (2019, p. 3). It is both the dislocation and disequilibrium of populations that threaten the ethnonationalist structure of belonging that cleaves races into distinct territories and holds them firmly in their ‘rightful’ or ‘natural’ place.

Such a view is not unique to Tarrant, but part of a larger conspiratorial discourse shared by white ethnonationalist communities that holds that we are in the midst of “demographic warfare” (Bracke and Hernandez Aguilar, 2020, p. 684), or ‘great replacement’ as the influential white ethnonationalist text *Le Grand Replacement* (Camus, 2011) suggests. Indeed, demographic fears of replacement as war by other means are entirely continuous with the racism that Foucault identified as a central feature of Modern biopolitics (Foucault, 2002; Bracke and Hernandez Aguilar, 2020). On the one hand, it recentres the logic of race as a logic of war, an opposition and confrontation that amounts to “destroying that [sort] of biological threat that those people over there pose to our race” (Foucault, 2002, p.257). On the other, the calculation of threat is made via the numerical logic of race and population. It is the intelligibility achieved via a reduction of human life to the number of the population and then again to the one of the ethnos that creates the zero-sum logic of survival at its heart.

As we have already seen, such a reduction has aesthetic force. It produces an a-historical, geographical stasis. It is a reduced geography presented as brute fact; a snapshot of particular sociohistorical cleavages posing as unmediated reality, which unites the population and the land to which it belongs via the discrete markings of maps and demographic charts. It is this form of reduction that creates the aesthetic coordinates of the evidence that Tarrant cites in his manifesto. Firstly, a Wikipedia entry entitled *List of sovereign states and dependencies by total fertility rate* (Wikipedia, 2021). The entry consists of a brief account of its methodology before compiling lists of countries and their fertility rates as produced by intergovernmental institutions such as the *World Bank*. Amongst each list of countries is an entry that signifies the global fertility rate and another that signals what is called ‘population replacement’, the fertility rate required to reproduce the population as it is, without increase or decrease. It is a relatively simple visual device, but it allows the reader to relate the fertility rates of individual countries to these figures of broader significance. Notably, Tarrant has used his own racialised index of countries belonging to Europe, including its settler states, and those that do not in order to read the chart. He notes that “[t]here is not a single Western country, not a single white nation, that reaches [replacement fertility] levels” (2019, p. 2). He then compares this with a dataset on population growth at a broken link to a Wikipedia article entitled *List of countries by future population (United Nations, medium fertility variant*), which allows him to posit that there are increasing populations inside and outside ‘white’ countries despite the disparity in fertility rates, an indicator of the covert threat posed by the ‘Great Replacers’.

What is novel about the developments in Tarrant’s manifesto is the incorporation of ecological arguments into the paranoiac narrative of ‘great replacement’. Rhetorically, Tarrant asks himself from the position of a shocked and confused bystander to his violence “[w]hy concentrate on immigration and birth rates when climate change is such a big issue?” (Tarrant, 2019, p. 27). Of course, the answer places him firmly on the terrain shared by Kaplan, Hardin, and at least Haraway: “they are the same issue, the environment is being destroyed by over-population” (ibid.). Elsewhere—and in resonance with Haraway’s invocation of the population as brute reality—Tarrant invokes the brute facts of population, noting that “there is no Green future with never ending population growth, the ideal green world cannot exist in a World of 100 billion 50 billion or even 10 billion people” (ibid., p. 45). From the purportedly transparent representation of the population problem, it is easy to manoeuvre it within Tarrant’s own schema of belonging and transgression: “Continued immigration into Europe is environmental warfare and ultimately destructive to nature itself” (ibid.). The contemporary transgressions of Nature’s limits are transgressions of population movement and miscegenation, as much as they are of expansion.

Weaving in ecology also creates an added dimension to the normative quality that maps the division of races. The ‘weakness’ of the white population that Tarrant identifies early on, now becomes its strength and source of moral power: “we Europeans are one of the groups that are not over populating the world. The invaders are the ones overpopulating the world” (ibid., p. 27). Indeed, it is this problem that gives Tarrant’s crimes moral force. The white race cannot beat the ‘Great Replacers’ at their own game, “it is ultimately destructive to nature and to culture” (ibid.) to play the arithmetic of competing fertility rates. Instead, it is necessary to find the means to bring the population back within the fold of Nature’s limits. In an echo of Linkola’s demand that we sever the hands that cling to the sides of the lifeboat, Tarrant reduces the problem to one of brutal population reduction: “Kill the invaders, kill the overpopulation and by doing so save the environment” (ibid.). It is in the name of the urgent task of reharmonising the population with Nature that Tarrant justifies his acts as “taking matters into [his] own hands” (ibid.).

But Tarrant’s acts sit within a schema of short-term strategies designed to accelerate contemporary conditions to a revolutionary race war (Tarrant, 2019, pp. 76-77), a tactical gambit for realising a long-term goal; “green nationalism” (Ibid., p. 45), or what might better be termed ‘green ethnonationalism’. In resonance with Hardin’s lifeboat and Kaplan’s limousine, Tarrant determines that the appropriate model of governance for populations in the Anthropocene is a heavily policed stasis, confining respective unities to the appropriate order of races and the territorial boundaries of states: “Each nation and each ethnicity was melded by their own environment and if they are to be protected so must their own environments” (ibid.). Environment is key here, reflecting the binary between Modernity and reaction of the *völkish* movement, Tarrant suggests “The Europe of the future is not one of concrete and steel, smog and wires but a place of forests, lakes, mountains and meadows” (ibid.). Nature is invoked as a grand and harmonious site of beauty that must be recreated in opposition to the effects of Modern industrial capital and the transmogrifications made possible through the general equivalence of economic value. The ethnonationalist utopia that animates Tarrant’s brutality, then, is the harmonious stasis of ones or unities – ethnos, Nature and state.

It is a similar imaginary to the one deployed by the French far-right party, RN, in the 2019 European parliamentary elections manifesto. *For a Europe of Nations* (2019) lays out an ideal schema for a new model of inter-state governance, appropriate for the conditions of the Anthropocene: “a revolution of closeness for the emergence of an ecological civilisation in Europe” (ibid., p. 3). It is a model created in opposition to the current supranational organisation of Europe through the European Union. It is a binary opposition which is described in terms that resonate strongly with Latour's own affirmation of "uprooting" as an illegitimate strategy that left those "abandoned by the historical betrayal of the ruling classes" (Latour, 2018, p. 53): the "European Union has turned Europe into the laboratory for globalist ideology", understood as the tyranny and miscegenation produced by the deterritorialising pole of Modernity, the "world market", and the accompanying ills of "global nomadism, economic mobility, *the uprooting of people*" (Rassemblement National, 2019, p. 12; emphasis added).

Against the universalising and uprooting forms of governance associated with the European Union, RN reflect the extreme end of the reactionary pole of Modern reterriorialisation, seeking to impose a double bordering in order to institute their order of proximity and belonging. In the first place, the re-bordering of the European states, 'The European Alliance of Nations', a project of renewed nationhood that they describe as "first and foremost the pride of the European peoples, each on its own territory, within its own borders, strengthened by an internal unity" (ibid., p. 20). Secondly, "the separation of Europe and Europeans from what is not Europe" (ibid., p. 55), a cut that cleaves off the "singularity of continental uniqueness and the continuity of a project of civilisation" (ibid., p.20). It is a model of border control that they call the "and and" rule; "In matters of internal and external borders the rule that must apply is... the "and and", AND national borders AND European borders" (ibid., p. 47).

The work of Hardin and Kaplan looms large over this model. Firstly, the opposition between the uprooted nomad and the population belonging to the homeland takes on the same ecological formulation as Hardin's lifeboat metaphor. RN's "ecological model of society" demands that "states have full possession of their territory, *refusing nomadism and the plundering of its resources*" (ibid., p.21; emphasis added). At work here is a notion that belonging to and ownership of the land is the only way to ensure the proper equilibrium between resource and population – the proper reduction of the population to the one of the state. At the launch of the Manifesto, the head of the party, Marine Le Pen told the press "who is rooted in their home is an ecologist", by contrast, those who are "nomadic […] do not care about the environment; they have no homeland" (Mazoue, 2019). It is only through ethnonational belonging that it becomes possible to create harmony with, rather than over-exploitation of, Nature.

Secondly, the invocation of the "project of civilisation" as the identifying quality of Europe echoes the Modern spatiotemporal division between contemporaneous European humanity and the pre-modern or natural past located outside of Europe. In this sense, RN's Europe echoes Kaplan's distinction between the limousine as the stronghold of the "Last Man" that must be protected from the "First Man" stuck in a barbarous 'state of nature', looming outside the limousine's windows. Indeed, it performs a similar function in giving moral force to the distribution of inclusion and exclusion required to realise the ecological civilisation. On the one hand, Europe is home to a superior quality of life, dependent on shared "material and virtual, moral and spiritual infrastructures that unite nature and culture" (Rassemblement National, 2019, p. 58). On the other hand, this unity must be defended from nomadic populations. To RN, the world outside is filled with barbarous people lacking the proper qualities of belonging or the proper command of Nature. Instead, they are still submerged in a Hobbesian state of nature, locked in an exploitative 'war of all against all': criminal gangs, human traffickers, drugs traffickers, and violent attackers are the figures of non-European alterity (ibid., p. 13). To invite them in would be to produce "ecological and cultural wreckage" (ibid., p. 51).

This combination of (in)visibilities means that—just as in Hardin's lifeboat—borders became the central mechanism for a raft of policy proposals that RN offered potential voters. As Jordan Bardella, head of RN's election candidate list, put it "Borders are the environment's greatest ally; it is through them that we will save the planet" (Mazoue, 2019). In passages that illuminate the biopolitical subtext, RN suggest that the European Union is failing to secure the borders, "neutralising the immunitary defence of the people" (Rassemblement National, 2019, p. 13), whilst the issue of border security is "equally ecological and sanitary" (ibid., p. 48). Consequently, renewed power over decisions regarding the proper biopolitical control of the population is of paramount concern. Only by using borders to police the proper relationship between a population and its homeland can we reach the requisite equilibrium between Nature and culture—the proper *ecological civilisation*—to survive the Anthropocene.

Echoing Hardin's claim that we must abandon "loose talk of "universal human rights" in order to get the population under control (Hardin, 1998, p. 187), RN's manifesto proposes to subordinate the norms licensed by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights to the "freedom of peoples to define the conditions of access to their territory and citizenship" (2019, p. 51). Such a move is designed to ensure that each nation will have the necessary autonomy to preserve the equilibrium between the one of the population and the one of Nature: "Human Rights cannot ensure the superiority of the individual outside the soil over the citizen in his nation" (ibid., p. 46). Jettisoning the international standard of Human Rights will allow States "to manage unplanned population movements" and to "put in place birth control policies" should states wish to do so (ibid., p. 52). That is, the manoeuvre is designed to cut each nation and its correlative population from any kind of institutional norm that may traverse borders, so that they may be able to take total control of managing the population within them, whether that is the refusal of migrants, the deportation of those that already exist within the nation but do not possess the adequate qualities of cultural belonging, or to take active control over managing the fertility rate. Though they may seek to do so via the ballot box, rather than through acts of terror designed to accelerate a revolutionary race war (Tarrant, 2019), RN also seek to produce the total superimposition of ones or unties– ethnos, state and Nature.

4.6 Conclusion

RN's proposed ecological society was an electoral success, winning them a majority of seats in the European parliament. However, their ability to pursue their agenda in the European Parliament appears to have been minimal. On the other hand, it seems that such efforts have not been punished on the general electoral stage either, with Le Pen and RN able to run a tight-race with Macron and his 'centrist' *En Marche* party in the lead up to the 2022 French general election (Reuters, 2022). The incorporation of ecological issues also seems to have been an early prototype that is being adopted by other political parties entering the electoral stage. As the journalist Oliver Milman (2021) notes, ecological rhetoric has gained traction as a way of legitimising increasingly harsh border policies amongst right and far-right groups. From Arizona republicans' demands that the border wall be built to keep out the polluting Mexicans, through to Swiss, Spanish, and British far-right party claims to the central relationship between patriotism, migration control, and ecology (ibid.).

Meanwhile, Tarrant's actions were cited favourably by the El Paso shooter, Patrick Wood Crusius (2019, p.1), in the manifesto that he uploaded shortly before committing his own shooting, just months after Tarrant's. Evidence compiled by the *Combating Terrorism Center* also suggests that Tarrant's attack fuelled huge volumes of online chatter glorifying the incident, as well as other attempts to commit terrorist violence against non-white populations (Macklin, 2019). If Tarrant's ambition to instigate revolutionary change and realise his ethno-nationalist utopia seems fanciful, then at the very least, his actions made racialised violence more possible.

It is in the light of what is made being possible through the articulation of the Anthropocene as a problem of the 'brute facts' of number that I want to suggest that both

Haraway and Latour's affirmations of the problem of disequilibrium, despite important differences, constitute a problem. The 'brute facticity' of their narrative means that the problem of limits and transgression gains force as a noninterpretive problem; a brute reality that can only lead to various forms of population control as its solution. Whilst Latour and Haraway seek to 'nuance' this problem of limits, these positions exist far too proximally to the real-world possibilities of practice that are being enacted in response to the same set of brute facts. Practises that *do* require violence, whether it is through the autonomous violence of the eco-fascist radical, or the state violence of policies geared towards deportation, border control, and birth control. This problem is compounded because both theorists attempt to resolve the issue through exiting into non-violent narrative fictions and away from the realities of a growing far right who dominate these discourses.

Having polemically analysed two poetic regimes that problematise certain forms of affirmational posthumanism across this chapter and the preceding one, I now wish to swing to the opposite pole of the negative, and to engage and problematise the new poetic forms of negativity that are emerging in posthuman theorising as the crises of the Anthropocene seem to grow exponentially. This takes the form of two chapters on what I am calling the Poetic Regime of Pessimism.

Chapter 05.
The Poetic Regime of Pessimism I: Minimally Extensive Negativity

Pessimism: the failure of sound and sense,
the disarticulation of phone and logos

Thacker, 2015, p. 31

...we wonder whether that sense of weakness and insignificance and lack
of knowledge and agency is actually what needs embracing.

Morton and Boyer, 2021, p. 14

5.1 Introduction

Pessimism about the human civilisational project is beginning to grow. Schaffner suggests that we are in an era characterised by “weariness, disillusionment, and burnout” (2016, p. 3), not just as a condition of individuals but as a shared social condition permeating much of global society. It is “as if subjectivity itself has become disaffected and impotent” (Bissell *et al.,* 2021, p. 2). With “the machinery of civilisation breaking down” it seems that humanity is bound together not by the universal visions of liberalism, or even Marxism, but only insomuch as “we’re fucked” (Scranton, 2015, pp. 11, 14).

Nihilistic themes have emerged since the 1990s within the speculative realist movement of philosophy (Brassier, 2007; Land, 1990; Thacker, 2011; 2015). Elsewhere, more recent work has focussed on negativity understood as forms of limitation, finitude, and incapacity (Bissell, Rose, and Harrison, 2021). In and beyond this work there has also been a noticeable turn to canonical pessimist philosophers such as Cioran (e.g. Bolea, 2015; Harrison, 2015; Gunderson, 2018), Schopenhauer (e.g. Cabos, 2015; Gunderson, 2016; Slaboch, 2015; Thacker, 2017), and Adorno (e.g. Chandler, 2020; Cooke, 2020; Luke, 2018; Philo, 2017b) in order to wrestle with the slow violences of our present, and their punctuation with bouts of spectacular violence, suffering, and brutality.

In tandem, afro-pessimist and afro-nihilist theorists—themselves an influence on some Anthropocene thinkers (Colebrook, 2019; 2021; Chandler and Pugh, 2023; Chipato and Chandler, 2023; Torrent, 2023; Yusoff, 2018)—argue that the project of human civilisation is irredeemable. Their work identifies anti-Blackness as “the disavowed ground for [Modernity’s] hierarchical binaries of humans and nonhumans” (Chandler and Pugh, 2022, p.3). Modern civilisation is *white* civilisation, a situation in which the non-subjectivity of Blackness, its “abject monstrosity” defines in opposition “the *white* human” (Zalloua, 2021, p. 155; Wilderson III, 2020; Warren, 2018). As such, “anti-Black violence is constitutive of white civil-society” (Zalloua, 2021, p. 156) at such a deeply ontological level that “solutions or attempts to confront and transcend it seem *doomed to fail*” (ibid., 157; emphasis added). It is a structural problem without a solution (Wilderson III, 2020, p. 331; Warren, 2018, p. 172), an injustice without the possibility of rectification or redemption.

For the purposes of this study, I want to grapple with the way in which a sense of pessimism has inculcated itself within posthuman theorising. In the next two chapters, then, I outline and analyse what I call the Poetic Regime of Pessimism. Here I will demonstrate the aesthetic qualities of the pessimism that is growing in the Anthropocene and how it structures what is understood to be the necessary task for ‘knowing’ and how this frames practical possibilities. Before I explore this analytical model and its consequences in detail vis-à-vis some of its key thinkers, I first want to give a broad outline of what I mean by the term, in order to frame the discussion.

If it once could be said that we were living at ‘the end of history’, then this ending is no longer a vista to the permanent mundanity and boredom of capitalism and liberal democracy (Fukuyama, 1989, pp. 17-18). Though we should remember that such a vista was only ever possible for *some* humans (Colebrook, 2017), it is now, nonetheless, an untenable account of our times. Instead, we are at ‘the end of the world’ that has seemed, for a while now, to be easier to imagine than the end of capitalism (Fisher, 2009; Jameson, 1994). If capitalism really is the only game in town, then its ‘cannibalistic’ character (Fraser, 2022) means only the expansion of an ecological ruination that it has, until recently, been able to disavow. The terminal effects of this terminus, of our inability to either master or align ourselves with the material world has given intelligibility to an underlying conceptual problem; the unbridgeable gap between the finitude of human sensing and thinking capacities and a world that cannot be apprehended by them.

As the philosopher Eugene Thacker suggests *In the Dust of the Planet* (2011), it is this break, between how we think the world, which necessarily appears to us as a world-for-us [*phenomenal world*], and the world beyond how it appears to us, or the world-in-itself [*noumenal world*], which is utterly indifferent or even hostile to us, that has become the central philosophical problematic in the era of the Anthropocene. ‘Hostile’ phenomena such as the escalating heat and extreme weather events of climate change serve to puncture the bubble of the world-for-us, whilst our entanglement in producing these phenomena is a testament to this fundamental misalignment, displacing the possibility that there could really be a world-for-us at all.

Crucially, we can understand the pessimists’ break—its unbridgeable, unsuturable character—as an aesthetic condition. In *Cosmic Pessimism*, Thacker suggests that pessimism is “the failure of sound and sense, the disarticulation of the *phone* and *logos*” (2015, p. 31). If the world-in-itself can, to some degree, be sensed through the vibrating materialities that produce sound (*phone)*, then, through reasoning, we imagine that we are able to imbue that sound with a meaning for us (*logos*). It is the intelligibility of the world as a series of objects that are available for our contemplation and narrative incorporation into a world-for-us that has animated the Modern civilisational project. By contrast, in the Poetic Regime of Pessimism*,* the advent of the Anthropocene is the end of our ability to imagine any *necessary* relation between the world and our attempts to give it meaning.

If we can never really apprehend the world-in-itself but nonetheless we act upon it from the position of a perceived world-for-us, then we are always modelling and moulding the former in the image of the latter. Within the Poetic Regime of Pessimism, it is this non-alignment between human thought and practice on one side and an inaccessible world on the other that is at the heart of the Anthropocene. The intractable misalignment of the world-for-us and the world-in-itself; the imposition of the former upon the latter produces the violence of the world-as-it-is. The core concepts that have animated both capitalist Modernity and its radical counter-projects—progress, truth, democracy, justice, reason etc.—appear now *not* to be the metaphysical materials of human flourishing, but so many necrotic cannibals gorging on their own conditions of possibility: the semi-stable material arrangements of the Holocene epoch that enabled the figure of the human to emerge in the first place. *Phone* and *logos* are thus disarticulated. Indeed, because thought, reason, and conceptualisation only belong to a world-for-us rather than to the world-in-itself, alternatives that might reunite *logos* and *phone* and revive or radically reorganise human civilisation are either no longer readily available or explicitly verboten.

The political consequences can be glimpsed here in this aesthetic disarticulation. The connection between *phone* and *logos* has been essential to the very formulation of politics since Aristotle’s original description of man as a political animal, distinct from other animals because he possesses logos (1981 [350BCE]). If animals can produce *phone* to express 'simple' pain and pleasure, *logos* endows the human with the ability to organise and articulate *phone* into an expression of the difference between the just and the unjust, which provides the basis for organising and contesting human and world as society (as recounted by Rancière, 1999, pp.1-19). If the Anthropocene signals the very disarticulation of *phone* and *logos,* then it means an identification of the collective project of politics—the series of disagreements over the *just* organisation of human and world—with destructive futility. Indeed, the violences of the Anthropocene are said to demonstrate that the universe "does not bend towards justice" at all (Grove, J., 2019, p. 25). For those operating within the Poetic Regime of Pessimism we have, in Chandler's terms, arrived at "the death of hope" (Chandler, 2018a, p. 696); the critical hope that kindles alternative possibilities against all probabilities has "no future" (ibid., p.704). For if the collective projects of the human and its world are not just a highly problematic *yet* politically alterable set of relations but are, instead, the fundamental and violent misapprehension of the radical disjunction between human and world, then every purported staging of a solution is, at base, the restaging of the problem.

Accordingly, the Poetic Regime of Pessimism performs a negative function. The lack of possibility or promise represented by the Anthropocene structures the task of knowledge-making in deconstructive terms: to collapse lingering claims to essence or ground through which Modern civilisation might destructively restage its world. Foundational concepts to Modern thought such as reason (Thacker, 2017), politics (Colebrook, 2016; 2021), progress (Tsing, 2015), and knowing itself (Harman, 2018, Morton, 2013) now require a radical deconstructing. After all, it might be increasingly impossible to build a better world, but it only becomes possible to see and survive in the world that is coming after the end—the reality that the Modern imaginary has always rucked up against—if we can negate the Modern coordinates of intelligibility.

What kind of political practices emerge from sensing-knowing through pessimism? Here, I want to pose the answer in terms of "negative geographies" (Bissell *et al.,* 2021; Dekeyser and Jellis, 2020; Harrison, 2015; Philo, 2017a;). The work of negative geographies is to draw our eye to the limits of the doable and the possible. This negativity refutes the neat connections we build between *logos* and *phone* with an emphasis on the inaccessibility of the world to meaning, which makes every positive project falter (Bissell *et al.*, 2021, pp. 16-26). Similarly, against the capaciousness of affirmational thinking, negative geographies emphasise that which bodies "cannot do", their impossibilities and "not-being-able-to" (ibid., pp. 14-16).

Thus, the empirical substrate of negative geographies are those spaces that ask us to confront "our incapacities in the face of a world that is perhaps more mysterious, unknowable, and unpossessable than we might previously have been comfortable in admitting" (ibid., p. 25).

In undoing the kinds of concepts that Modernity and its radicals have relied upon to ground the organisation of bodies and spaces, the pessimists I draw on see possibility only in terms of what is left after the impossibility of the Modern *logos* and its imaginary of civilisation. Hence, pessimism should be understood as a corrosive. However, the degree of corrosion is varied, and this renders the 'negative' of the negative geographies I am exploring in two ways. In the next chapter, I will deal with the second mode, which I call *intensive negativity.* However, in this chapter I will first examine what I am calling a *minimally extensive negativity*, where what is left are interstitial spaces; cracks, hollows, and gaps in the Modern World that permit other micro-worlds of being. At first sight, minimally extensive negativity might resemble Foucault's concept of heterotopias, "which are something like counter-sites, a kind of effectively enacted utopia in which the real sites, all the other real sites that can be found within the culture, are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted" (Foucault, 1984 [1967], p. 3). However, if heterotopias offer "a kind of emancipatory prefigurative politics to visibly contest and challenge structures of power and oppression" (Butzlaff, 2021, p. 109), then my framing of the negative here signals the diminished nature of this positive capacity. This is because minimally extensive negativity is structured by the constraints of a pessimism that disarticulates *phone* from *logos;* Modernity has failed to bring world and human together, but there is also no real hope of a broader counter-political project that can do so either. What is left is the uneasy cohabitations between human and world that exist outside Modernity's master-gaze and that may live on after its end.

Consequently, these spaces are only minimally extensive. They are extensive only insomuch as they hold open and maintain cracks where an escape or relative withdrawal from Modern civilisation becomes possible. As sites of escape, they do not produce the visible contestability of a heterotopia but necessitate forms of invisibility to sustain. If politics requires the forcing of a counter-subject and counter-practice into spaces it does not belong—a visible or intelligible disruption of what can be perceived (Rancière, 1999, 2010, pp. 35-52)—then these sites are necessarily non-political and non-antagonistic as a condition of their survival. This does not mean that their enactment does not always create forms of friction, but that they can only exist insomuch as they quickly resolve any friction. In short, they must participate in forms of accommodation to and from the very same order they attempt to hide between.

Therefore, they can be understood as *micropolitical*, attuned only to the concrete and localised circumstances of their own creation (May, 1993) and contained within these spaces. In Rancière's terms (2010, pp. 44-45), they are necessarily built in accommodation to the dominant 'police' order, the distribution of the sensible that determines the acceptable visible distribution of spaces, identities, and practices. As the horizon of possibility, then, I argue that ultimately pessimism rendered as minimally extensive negativity is profoundly depoliticising.

In order to make my argument, I first draw out the way that minimally extensive negativity takes shape in critical Anthropocene thought, which I identify both within the work of Anna Tsing and Timothy Morton. These theorists have been chosen because they are prominent figures in Anthropocene-centred work, whose varying degrees of pessimism point to withdrawing from the Modern world and to engaging new forms of human-nonhuman practice in its interstices. Whilst Tsing credits herself with a commitment to optimism (2018, p. 75), nonetheless, I try to demonstrate that a corrosive sense of pessimism is inculcated in assumptions that frame her work, opening a problem of political impossibility that I try to demonstrate that she does not resolve. On the other hand, Morton's position, rooted in an object-oriented ontological approach is more obviously committed to the coordinates of the aesthetic regime of pessimism, which I demonstrate demands forms of endurance and attunement that can be made tolerable by withdrawing to the interstices. Importantly, these theorists highlight different aspects of this withdrawal. Tsing's account of the latent commons—informed by a pessimistic critique of Modern progress—places greater emphasis on the character of those interstitial spaces, whilst Morton's account of hyposubjectivity—informed by a pessimistic critique of Modern knowledge—places greater emphasis on the subjective orientation that we should have towards our relationships with the nonhuman in these kinds of spaces.

In the subsequent two sections, I examine the implications of these approaches in a case study of Tinker's Bubble, an off-grid community in Somerset, who forego fossil fuels and attempt to subsist outside of the Modern, capitalist economy. As Britain's longest-running, fossil-fuel free, off-grid community I argue that they represent the kind of minimal extensive negativity that both Tsing and Morton point to. Furthermore, the decisions that they have made to establish and sustain the community reflect similar forms of pessimism as those that can be found in both Tsing and Morton's work. It is this shared pessimism, I argue, that gives Tinker's Bubble a profoundly non-political character. The ambition of this work is not to criticise the inhabitants of Tinker's Bubble for escaping into a relative space of freedom within a world that is often-times oppressive, exploitative, and unjust. Such a manoeuvre is eminently understandable and not without its sacrifices, or indeed its own micropolitics. Nonetheless, this analysis does enable me to draw out a limit point of practice that emerges from pessimistic knowledge production. Ultimately, I argue that this particular expression of negativity is depoliticising.

5.2 The End of Progress: Interstitial Freedom in the Ruins

Anna Tsing's ethnographic project, *The Mushroom at The End of the World* (2015), has gained traction as a key resource for engaging with more-than-human assemblages in the Anthropocene epoch, offering practical tools for percieving the world beyond the failing mythologies of Modernity (Krzywoszynska, 2019; Millar, 2017; Summerson *et al.,* 2016; Tironi and Rodríguez-Giralt, 2017; Vaughn, 2017; Wakefield, 2018). As a rich work of theorising through more-than-human ethnography, it is easy to understand why such a text has gained prominence in the Anthropocene era, committing itself to apprehending the intermingling of harmony and dissonance, human and non-human in ways that are highly critical of Capitalist modernity and its core narrative of progress. Indeed, Tsing's inclusion here might seem controversial to some, given her commitments elsewhere to a "Gramscian optimism of the will", and a desire to change things (2018, p. 75). Nonetheless, I believe her analysis requires the corrosive touch of pessimism to set its analysis in motion and that the effects of this corrosion leave a deep mark on her account of political possibility.

For Tsing, The Anthropocene marks the point at which the *logos* of progress needs to be disarticulated from the *phone* or "*polyphony"* of the material world (2015, p. 23). In her account, the concept of progress is the conceptual scaffold of the world-for-us; it is the meta-category that defines the human, "even when disguised through other terms such as "agency," "consciousness," and "intention"" (ibid., p. 21). Progress gives us the ability to look forward and to act on the basis of imagining a collective future. It is this ability, Tsing suggests, that separates what we have come to understand as the human from the rest of nature, which, absent of the capacity for *logos*, can only live day-by-day. However, because progress can only exist within and frame a human world-for-us, it does not permit us to see the world-in-itself. Instead, it becomes the conceptual apparatus of a univocal "forward march", composing the rest of the world as if it really was the world-for-us (ibid.). Thus, it subordinates all other temporalities, all other modes of being, according to the singular rhythm of its drumbeat.

The consequences of pulling nature into the singular phonic composition of human progress, Tsing argues, are global landscapes strewn with ruin (ibid., p. 6). In order to understand the relationship between progress and ruination, Tsing points to the early experiments of the sugar cane plantations (ibid., p. 39) as generative of the material conditions through which it was possible to imagine progress at all. Central to this account is the sugar cane plantation's status as a prefigurative moment in the development of capitalist Modernity that generated the logic of 'scalability'; the thought and practice of expansion that moves from a small-scale project to a large-scale one without changing its operating assumptions (ibid., p. 38). Indeed, scalability is essential to the thought of Modern progress; Afterall, what is progress without its universalising arc of reason?

By destroying Indigenous People and ecosystems in colonised Brazil, the Portuguese colonists were able to unite its now 'empty space' with the sugar cane crop, which could be reproduced simply by cutting and replanting canes and waiting for them to grow (ibid., p. 39). This was married with the labour of enslaved Africans who, cut from their original social entanglements, had few options for escape, making them amenable to hyper-exploitation (ibid.). As such, the methods pioneered in the sugar cane plantation made it possible to alienate land, plant-life, and people from their original contexts as readily "interchangeable units" in simplified and readily reproducible ecosystems (ibid., pp. 38-39). The result of engineering the plantation in this way was the successful production of vast profits on the one hand, and colonial violence and the ecological harms of monocultures on the other. Nonetheless, the success of the model in producing wealth led to the appearance of its scalability; that interchangeable units of nature, labour, and land could be manufactured in the same way, at larger and larger scales, to continue to amass expansive profits. Indeed, the combination of the developing universalisability of large-scale production processes and the stable guarantee of profits came to underpin the model of the factory and of modernisation writ large (ibid., p. 40). The scalability discovered on the sugar plantation is thus the very basis for imagining a universalizable, stable, and compounding abundance that could shape "the dreams that we have come to call progress and modernity" (ibid.).

The originary, enabling violence of progress that Tsing highlights here should alert us to the way that its positive qualities—its framing of a world-for-us—can only appear to us by disavowing the necessary destruction that formed its material conditions of possibility. Indeed, Tsing argues that Modern progress' emergence through the expansive production of wealth gave it a radically utilitarian gaze through which this destruction persists. The very same factors that generate the bounty that fuels the concept of progress—alienability, interchangeability, and scalability—make it ill-attentive to the relational specificity of the places it subsumes, disassembles, and reorganises. Instead, place becomes important only insomuch as "one stand-alone asset" can be harnessed to feed the profits that make progress possible (ibid., p. 5). The rest of the ecosystem becomes expendable "weeds or waste", and the entire site is readily abandoned once it can no longer feed progress; the "search for assets resumes elsewhere" (ibid., p. 6).

If progress no longer makes sense, then Tsing argues that the critical task left to us is to look "for life in this ruin" (ibid.). Central to Tsing's project is what she calls the "arts of noticing" (2015; 2018), a practice of sensing that asks us to engage with a world without the unifying gloss of Modern progress. Instead, we must see the "unintentional coordination" of "different temporal rhythms and scales" and the moments of harmony and dissonance that emerge beneath our anthropocentric inscriptions (Tsing 2015, pp. 23-25). It is by engaging the *polophony* of our world—disarticulated from the logos of progress that gives it meaning for us—that it might become possible to locate more-than-human assemblages of collaborative survival that can persist beyond the terminal decline of capitalist Modernity (ibid.). Thus, we might understand Tsing's project as a negative geography; what can be recovered from the world if it is no longer possible to see it as a progressive world-for-us?

This directs Tsing's gaze towards the Matsutake Mushroom economy. It gains import from its status as "pericapitalist" (ibid., p. 63), meaning it exists "simultaneously inside and outside capitalism"; operating outside of direct capitalist control (as in the space of the factory or the free trade zone) whilst being incorporated into global supply chains and thus modes of capitalist accumulation (ibid.). Insomuch as the economy of Matsutake economy exists inside capitalism, those within this economy are connected to and live amongst the ruination created by capitalism. Insomuch as it exists outside of direct mechanisms of control and within those spaces of ruination, it is a glimpse into the worlds of precarious and resilient living that persist "after progress" (ibid., p. 66).

Emerging in the wake of the failures of scaling timber production and subsequent conservation efforts (ibid., pp. 34-43), the Matsutake grow in human-disturbed forests and "are willing to put up with some of the environmental messes humans have made" (ibid., pp. 3-4). They thus exist and survive in the wake of progress's failures. Similarly, the pickers are largely composed of "disabled white veterans, Asian refugees, Native Americans, and undocumented Latinos" that Tsing argues are unable to find themselves in formal regimes of wage work largely designed to benefit healthy white men (ibid., p. 18). With no wage beyond the amount of Matsutake they can pick and sell, they too have to survive without the guarantees established in the central spaces of capitalist Modernity; "wild-mushroom picking is an exemplification of precarious livelihood, without security" (ibid., p. 4). Against progress, the story of the Matsutake economy is an "ugly" and "humbling" story of the survivors that live on in the industrial ruins produced by "histories of greed, violence, and environmental destruction" (ibid., p. 33).

Significantly, Tsing's analysis has broader implications. If she argues that we can glimpse a world without progress—a world-*not*-for-us—through the disavowed inside/outside status of pericapitalist economies, and that the Anthropocene marks the end of progress (ibid., p. 2), then her account of collaborative survival in the Matsutake economy can be understood as a futural aesthetic. Those scenes that exist on the edges of contemporary capitalist life are a window through which we can glimpse the conditions of the future, a generalised state of precarity (un)structured by the limits of a world without progress. It is in the Matsutake economy's function as a generalisable, futural aesthetic that the corrosive negative effect of Tsing's pessimism becomes more visible.

In Tsing's conceptualisation of progress, it is both the very frame that allows us to think a world-for-us at all *and* tantamount to the violence of the sugar cane plantation writ large in the global economy that gives rise to the conditions of the Anthropocene. Consequently, neither it nor the world-for-us can be retrieved or radically reorganised. As such, to reckon with progress' disarticulation from the polyphony of the world is necessarily to recognise not just its destructive tendencies but the way that progress, as meta-concept of the world-for-us, saturates all our concepts, including those that a radical counter-project might otherwise wish to salvage such as democracy, science, hope, and, most significantly, justice (ibid., pp. 21-25).

To see the polyphony of the more-than-human world without over-writing it with the logos of progress—a progress that could only ever be for us—is to see a world in which our concepts, even those that might try to overcome the bad and move us on to the good, have no necessary correspondence to the world that they subsume. Thus, it becomes possible to see that "there might not be a collective happy ending" (ibid., p. 21), partly because a polyphonic world becomes near impossible to unite under a collective logos, even a radical counter-political project, without restaging the same violence that inheres in progress. If progress has created ruination of our more-than-human world, then to think its putting-right is to think through the concept of justice. Yet, at the same time, if progress inheres in the very concept of justice, then justice itself becomes unimaginable; indeed, Tsing "hardly [knows] how to think about justice without progress" (ibid., pp. 24-25). By way of contrast, Derrida's deconstructive account of justice (1992) suggests that despite the violence undertaken in the name of concepts like justice, the concept still cannot be exhausted by the present state of things and thus always promises a 'justice-to-come'. However, for Tsing the Anthropocene marks the exhaustion of progress, which is also the exhaustion of imaginable futures and thus the exhaustion of the world-for-us, ejecting any excess potentiality from the concept of justice and, consequently, the promissory "to-come". As such, the horizon for justice has become inaccessible.

Whilst Tsing's account does not explicitly foreclose mending the break between a *logos* of justice (absent of progress) and the *phone* of the world, what is left beyond her critique is stark, a problem that is reflected in her search for political possibilities amongst the ruins. Despite her suggestion that we will "need a politics with the strength of diverse and shifting coalitions" to address the Anthropocene (ibid., p. 135), the view from pericapitalist spaces is one of polyphonic precarity amongst ruination, in which a "world of difference" and incommensurability predominates (ibid.) over any unifying principle that might enable the articulation of justice. From within these spaces, then, the possibility of coalition seems distant at best. Indeed, pericapitalist spaces offer only the faintest glimmer of optimism or hope. As Tsing notes, their location outside of capitalism provide "unlikely platforms for a safe defence and recuperation" even as their location inside capitalism means they are "never fully shielded from capitalism" (ibid., p. 65).

In this vein, Tsing describes the freedom found in the evening activities of the Matsutake traders at a site that she pseudonymously calls "Open Ticket"; an unmarked and 'invisible' cluster of tents along the highway "in the middle of nowhere" (ibid., pp. 73-85). The space permits complicated and unregulated transactions between sellers and buyers. But more so than money and mushrooms, Tsing argues that the site furnishes its participants with access to a form of freedom; the liveliness of "rowdy cosmopolitanism" and of chance encounter (ibid., p.76). Significantly, for the pickers it is often freedom found in escape from problems like overcrowding, violence, and the administered nature of life found in Modernity's central locale, the city: "Open Ticket is a hodgepodge of flights from the city" (ibid.).

As the substantive form of freedom Tsing's account offers us, it is significant that it is profoundly non-political. Indeed, the winning of political forms of freedom could only result from a justice that is no longer forthcoming. Instead, it is an interstitial freedom of escape, generated by the pericapitalist nature of the Matsutake economy it exists within. It exists to the degree that it operates outside and is therefore invisible to the Modern world. As such, it does not disturb the Modern world's distribution of the sensible (Rancière, 1999, 2010, pp. 35-52), which governs and naturalises its ordering of spaces, bodies, and functions. Instead, it operates beneath or behind it, without transgressing the boundaries it imposes. It exists as an *affordance* of that economy only insomuch as it is concealed from and thus does not create antagonism with its terms. Rather than offering fuel for political resistance to Modern progress, it is “the negotiation of ghosts on a haunted landscape; it does not exorcise the haunting but works to survive and negotiate it with flair” (Tsing, 2015, p. 76).

Interstitial sites like Open Ticket point to a broader potentiality that Tsing calls the “latent commons”; ubiquitous but unnoticed spaces of unrealised possibility, where “mutualist and non-antagonistic entanglements” co-exist in “law’s interstices” (ibid., p. 255). Like Open Ticket, they survive only because they exist in the cracks and so do not attract attention. Indeed, this means they cannot readily be scaled up (ibid.), though scalability in general has already been rendered problematic. Counter to the usual conception of radical thinkers, who imagine that “progress will lead us to a redemptive and utopian commons” (ibid.), the latent commons are spectral otherwises that exist in the now, but do not possess this utopian promise. However, what political possibilities they do possess remains elusive.

If Tsing’s pessimism has corroded all the way through progress and eaten away most of justice too, how can we move from the latent commons, understood as sites of interstitial affordance and unrealised possibility, to the kinds of oppositional political coalitions that Tsing suggests we need in order to realise this latent potential? I have tried to argue that sites like open ticket operate under very real constraints. Is there a politics that might push against and beyond them? Doing so may only be possible if Tsing attempted the scarcely imaginable task of rebridging the gap between the *phone* of the world and the *logos* of justice; a justice that names and confronts the wrong of Modern ruination to access this suppressed potential. But if justice is rooted in progress and, in turn, progress is the scaffold of the Modern world-for-us, it is an open question as to whether justice could be rethought at all.

5.3 The End of a Knowable World: Hyperobjects and Hyposubjects

Timothy Morton is one of the most significant figures working with Object-Oriented Ontology (OOO), a philosophical paradigm that promises to be “a new theory of everything” (Harman, 2018, pp. 19-59). Broadly, OOO has taken on a productive, if occasionally tense, role in thinking through questions of ecology, anthropocentrism, and aesthetics in the social sciences (Booth, 2021; Chandler, 2018a; Cucuzella, 2021; Lemke, 2017; Malin, 2016; Sheldon, 2015; Taylor, 2016). Morton’s key contribution, the concept of hyperobjects, has been hugely influential to discussions of the Anthropocene (e.g. Baldwin, 2017; Boulton, 2016; Bradley, 2019; Campbell, 2021; Dębińska, 2021; Edgeworth and Benjamin, 2018; Frantzen and Bjering, 2020; Rueda, 2022). As a key figure of Anthropocene thought, I am interested in examining the work that Morton's hyperobjects do in separating the world from our ability to make sense of it and the effect that has on possibility as represented by theirs' and Boyer's complimentary figure, the hyposubject (2021).

Like all proponents of OOO, Morton observes the principle of a real material world that exists beyond our perception; a space of nonhuman agency that undoes the sense that there could be a world-for-us in its totality. A central tenant of OOO is an objection to the manoeuvre of most relational ontological frameworks, which dissolves Modern 'essences.' Instead, OOO posits a world of real, independent objects beyond the veil of appearances (Harman 2012; 2018; Morton, 2013). Nonetheless, this distinction doesn't serve as a hopeful possibility for knowing, rather, it commits to the Kantian premise that the thing-in-itself is ultimately withdrawn from sensory experience and ultimately unknowable. Where it differs is that all objects, not simply humans, exist in and access this sensory space, whilst the "primordial reality" of each and all objects—humans, teacup, dandelions, black holes—are all ultimately withdrawn from each other and thus unknowable (Morton, 2013, p. 15; Harman, 2018, p. 7). For Morton it is the Anthropocene and the advent of what he calls 'hyperobjects' that gives new intelligibility to the rift between appearances and essences (2013, p. 151). Hyperobjects could be anything that is spatially and temporally vast in relation to humans, but it is those hyperobjects generated by the interaction of human and earth, such as capital, global warming, radiation, and styrofoam that are both the most visible and the most central forces we must reckon with in the Anthropocene epoch (Crutzen and Stoermer, 2000; Rockström *et al.*, 2009; Zalasiewicz *et al.*, 2015).

Because of their spatial and temporal massiveness, hyperobjects are both viscous (Morton, 2013, pp. 27-37) and nonlocal (ibid., pp. 38-54): they are always really there, wherever we are, stuck to us no matter what we are aware of, even though we can never see them directly. As Morton suggests (2013a, pp. 47-48), we may feel raindrops, and in this sense, we are experiencing global warming. However, we never encounter the phenomena of global warming directly; we cannot locate it within the raindrops themselves. Thus, we "never see the hyperobject directly. We infer it from graphs, instruments…" (ibid., p. 153). We only perceive their footprints or shadows, but through their detection, "the shadow of the hyperobject announces the existence of the hyperobject" (ibid., p. 32). Nonetheless, because we can only access a hyperobject indirectly, what the hyperobject really is, its primordial reality, is simply inaccessible and, therefore, unthinkable to us. As such, the massive, inapprehensible character of the hyperobject makes clear something about the nature of all objects; that they are all essentially withdrawn from us.

Though hyperobjects are shadowy, they are also forceful. Whilst we only see them flicker, we are nonetheless caught in their "zones" (ibid., pp. 141-147), from which they appear to emit directives, "like a demonic force field" that compels us to act (ibid., p. 142). For Morton these forces are real properties emanating from the objects themselves, rather than the mere projection of human desires and ideas. As such, they burn away at "the veil of prejudice" in which objects only appear to us as stable and static parts of a predictable world, as in the Modern tradition (ibid., p. 144). However, because these forces operate indirectly and interpenetratingly in a complex aesthetic dimension, they appear as a "compelling mysterious spell" and a "beautiful real illusion" that is seemingly opaque to human knowledge and understanding (ibid.). Without any ontic access, all things and their forces are rendered mysterious; the world is 'weird', 'spooky', 'spectral' and 'uncanny' (Morton 2013a; 2017a; 2017b).

This means that whatever hyperobjects are really 'saying' or 'doing' when emitting their zones is *also* opaque and cannot be perceived as a straightforward call to action, far from it: "they do not catapult us into a beyond. Rather they fix us more firmly to the spot" (Morton, 2013, p. 147). Thus, hyperobjects are not a positive force that directs appropriate forms of action in a world that we are able to access and know, instead they end our sense of world, bringing only confusion, error, and suffering (ibid., pp. 144-147), rendering every mode of reasoning and every course of action we take as "wrong" (ibid., p. 136; p. 153). This wrong is not the same as Rancière's political account of "wrong" (1999), which signifies an account of the gap between the equality of all speaking beings and their subordinated position in the concrete distribution of roles and functions that compose the social world (ibid., pp. 35-42). In Rancière's account, making account of wrong in this way is what animates the polemical arguments and practices of a political subject and is thus enabling of political contestation. Instead, Morton's "wrong" is the non-correlation between any concept we could develop and the noumenal object that lies behind the aesthetic zones of interaction. By implication, it is the inadequacy of any subsequent attempt at political practice.

'Wrong' is Morton's main ethico-political gambit. However, more so than the specifics of concrete techno-instrumentalist practices, it is the Modern pretence of knowing the world that is Morton's chief target for hyperobjective pushback. As Morton argues, a stable, knowable world was mere storytelling, possible only “on the inside of a vast, massively distributed hyperobject called climate” (Morton, 2013, p. 103). Echoing Tsing’s reflection upon the origins of Modern progress (2015), the Modern *logos* of a knowable world was only possible under the previously stable conditions of the climate. But just like with Tsing’s account of the *logos* of progress, the Anthropocene marks the end of these conditions of possibility. Without those stable conditions, it is no longer possible to claim to know the world or for it to appear as though we have seen beyond the veil of appearances. Indeed, any claim to privileged knowledge simply becomes a form of posturing cynicism: “unlike the poor fool, I am undeluded— either I truly believe that I have exited from delusion, or I know that no one can, including myself, and I take pride in this disillusionment” (Morton, 2013, p. 155). Moreover, it is “*[t]his attitude*” of cynical posturing that Morton suggests is “directly responsible for the ecological emergency… the attitude that inheres both in the corporation and the individual, and in the critique of the corporation and the individual” (ibid; emphasis in original).

Because blame is laid squarely at the cynical Modern desire to be right, rather than any particular concrete set of practices, it is the counter-characteristics of ignorance and impotence—“hypocrisy”, “weakness” and “lameness” (2013, pp. 99-201)—that we acquire in being sincerely attuned to the Hyperobject’s negative force that are to be embraced over and above any particular political counter-practice or strategy. But here one might question, as Joff Bradley (2019) does, whether hyperobjects really are mysterious, shadowy, flickering, or demonic forces that come from outside us and, thus, whether embracing their mysteriousness is a useful countervailing force to the processes generative of hyperobjects? Afterall, hyperobjects such as global warming and capital “are not transcendent in the sense of some godly unknown, but precisely immanent to the world of living creatures, and to the world of materialist, capitalist production” (ibid., p. 166). As such, one might question whether they are beyond understanding or, rather, whether they are knowable as objects “produced by humankind under specific historical conditions” (ibid.)? The juxtaposition of hyperobjective mystification against their very traceable human origins poses questions about what might be lost to us if Morton’s assessment is correct. In moving away from the definitive circumstances under which hyperobjects are created and instead to their status as the mysterious and enveloping unknown, are we displacing the ground for our activity as conscious political animals?

If we move into the terrain of mysteriousness, no *logos* can seemingly represent nor respond appropriately to the aesthetic signals—the *phone*—of hyperobjects. As we have ascertained, all attempts are rendered as wrong. Instead, we are left to fumble around in a receptive mysticism that can only negate our every move. Furthermore, this receptiveness takes place in a mystified and mystifying aesthetic field of interpenetrating zones of influence: if capital is a hyperobject and global warming is a hyperobject and they are both pulling at us in ways that not only 'seem' but genuinely *are* opaque, the meaning or purpose of any political practice at all becomes obscure:

> Doing nothing evidently won't do at all. Drive a Prius? Why not (I do)? But it won't solve the problem in the long run. Sit around criticizing Prius drivers? Won't help at all. Form a people's army and seize control of the state? Will the new society have the time and resources to tackle global warming? Solar panels? They take a lot of energy to make. Nuclear power? Fukushima and Chernobyl, anyone? Stop burning all fossil fuels now? Are we ready for such a colossal transition? Every position is "wrong": every position, including and especially the know- it-all cynicism that thinks that it knows better than anything else. (Morton, 2013, p. 136).

Since we can never really tell, all that remains is to operate under the 'correct' disposition of openness towards obscurity, with the understanding that any practice within the world seems to be as inadequate as any other.

In later work, when Morton articulates a form of 'practical' subjectivity, as they do in their articulation of the 'hyposubject' with Dominic Boyer (2021), it provides us with a similarly opaque and politically deflated figure, despite their claim to be searching for the hyposubject's political potentiality (ibid., p. 14). If the 'hypersubject' is Morton's Modern foil, the promethean cynic who imposes his view upon every object he encounters and bends the world to his will, then the hyposubject is his inverse. Hyposubjects are "squatters and bricoleuses" who "inhabit the cracks and hollows," they don't lay claim to the Modern tradition of knowledges, nor its power to radically reorganise society, instead they scavenge beneath the detection of "techno-modern radar", appropriating objects for their own modest ends (ibid.). Here then, the withdrawal of the hyperobject from Modern forms of knowability is met by the withdrawal of the hyposubject, who make themselves invisible to the political and social trappings of Modernity itself.

As occupiers of cracks and hollows, hyposubjects seem to resemble the same kind of escapist freedom that belongs to Tsing's latent commons. But if hyperobjects are viscous, and therefore inescapably stuck to us, why a practice of withdrawal and invisibility? As figures of hypocrisy, weakness and lameness, hyposubjects do not possess the capacity to overturn or strip away the hyperobjects that surround and stick to them, including global warming and capital. Furthermore, the kinds of political refusal and contestation that we are used to rely upon the kinds of ‘cynical’ claims to knowing that the mystical qualities of hyperobjects seem to have displaced (ibid., pp. 21-22). As such, a capacity to have political effects is less important to Morton and Boyer than to nurture conditions that permit forms of hyposubjective being. What is important to them is that “there is a new sort of potential human that’s being awakened here” that doesn’t have a sense of its capacities or responsibilities, “but what it does know is that it is not the mega. That one certainty of identification: “that’s not me.” (ibid., p. 39). Thus, it is hyposubjects’ “sense of weakness and insignificance and lack of knowledge and agency [that is] actually what needs embracing” (ibid., p. 14).

However, if this is so then, as Morton and Boyer note, hyposubjectivity begins to look like “an abject condition of being forced to endure and suffer the effects of viscous forces like climate change and capital” (ibid.). Here, Morton and Boyer express their admiration for Marx’s point that we must “pass through modernity and capitalism to get someplace better” (ibid., p. 23). However, without the practical, political possibility to throw off or nullify hyperobjects, hyposubjects must instead find ways to “survive the process” of passing through Modernity, abjection and all (ibid.). Survival thus necessitates forms of going “underneath” this abjection to find a kind of “escape hatch” (ibid., p. 22). In turn, the escape of ‘underneath’ seems to enable a kind of distance from the zonal force of those hyperobjects, supplying us with the capacity for modes of endurance that do not necessitate endless misery, but forms of “playfulness” in which hyposubjectivity can be explored and developed as practices that might persist once Modernity has worked itself all the way through (ibid.). Nonetheless, it is worth reiterating, as with Tsing’s account, such a position marks an a-political retreat behind Modernity’s partition of the sensible rather than a disruption of it, necessitated by our impotence in the face of the hyperobject’s disorienting power.

5.4 Tinker’s Bubble: Hyposubjectivity and Escape

In reading Tsing and Morton, I have tried to point to some of the political stakes of pessimism. Whilst Tsing’s work does not foreclose restitching the cut between *logos* and *phone*, Morton is more explicit, rendering the world as ultimately withdrawn from meaning and, therefore, mystical. In both cases, the Modern world-for-us—the shared concepts, meanings and attendant practices that compose the Modern world—are no longer accessible, pointing us towards spaces operating to some degree outside or underneath the visibility of the Modern world. The former offers living on after the end of Modernity through collaborative survival found in pericapitalist spaces, and the freedom of latent commons beyond the gaze of capitalist processes, whilst the latter offers a political potentiality in the hyposubject, a figure of deflated agency, squatting where they cannot be detected by "Modern techno-radar" (Morton and Boyer, 2021, p. 14). Summarising, the practice offered in both cases is a minimally extensive negativity; the life of interstitial practices withdrawn from- and opaque to the Modern world-for-us and its unsustainable political economy. I argue that Tinker's Bubble offers an example of one such space. It is a negative geography structured by the impossibility of politically altering the Modern world-for-us and its underlying political economy. Thus, as a case study it offers the chance to further interrogate the political (im)possibilities generated by pessimism.

Hidden beyond a small winding road and the thick woodland of Norton Covert, Somerset—largely composed of douglas firs, 14 acres of apple orchids, 5 of larch and 2 of mixed deciduous trees overrun with laurel shrubbery—lies a small community, usually of between 10 and 16 people at any one time. Taking their name from the small water spring, *Tinker's Bubble*, that exists on the site (Brace, 2014, pp 53-54), the community has existed in some form for the last 29 years, making it one of the longest running intentional communities in the United Kingdom. As we shall see, the site is an experiment in living otherwise "through the practice of bricolage" (Nelson, 2018, p. 221). Foregoing fossil fuels and the kinds of civilisational comforts that they have enabled, the residents have constructed an alternative mode of living, largely working the land to sustain themselves, fuelled by a combination of man-power, horse-power, solar panels, a wind generator, and a water pump.

From its early days, the project has been generated by both a pessimism about the Modern industrial project and a lack of real political possibilities for broader socio-natural transformation that might counter it. A segment from *Newsnight* prior to the 2001 General Election interviewed members of the community about the prospects of the upcoming election. David, an early resident of the site responded that he felt "unrepresented by the choices on offer", whilst another resident, Steven, argued that "the mainstream parties that stand a chance of being elected at the moment couldn't afford to move too far in the direction of the choices we've made because they'd not get elected" (BBC News, 2001). The implication of these statements is that to live an ecologically sustainable life is at odds with the common-sense narratives regarding what it means to live and the intelligible political coordinates that make that life possible. Indeed, Anitra Nelson, a social scientist who spent some time researching with the residents notes that "they do not wait for government to lead a transition to a sustainable future. The state has been a strong barrier to their development" (2018, p. 221). It is a quandary that the Bubblers have met with the solution of exiting this life and its common-sense altogether in order to construct another.

The limits of possibility also seemed to drive Tinker's Bubble's contemporary residents towards its interstitial forms of freedom. Interviewed for a local magazine, recent resident Alex reasons that his decision to come to Tinker's Bubble was grounded in the negative knowledge that "what [he'd] been in [modern life] didn't make sense to [him] and couldn't be what life was about" (Dellow, 2022). Indeed, Alex notes that the Bubble gets a lot of contact from people in that same "stuck place" where life "as modernity has structured it, on some fundamental level, doesn't make sense to us" (ibid.). On the Tinker's Bubble blog, Megan argues that the place can "feel like an island…. A lot of people come here to escape society, to live differently and rightly so I reckon" (Willoughby, 2022, p. 2). Interviewed for a Guardian documentary, Nick, explains his decision to move to the Bubble; "it is far too difficult to live sustainably living a normal, standard life, and I felt guilty about that for years, really" (Berrow and Jane, 2021). Kirsty, Nick's wife, expresses similar sentiments about the political limits of the contemporary moment, suggesting "we can't stop people flying on jumbo jets or driving their cars every day, but we can suggest they take more walks or don't buy so much plastic or try and buy local… and I can feel good at night knowing that what we do is the best we can do" (ibid.). Interviewed for BBC's Inside Out West, longer-standing member Pedro echoes these sentiments, suggesting he moved to Tinker's Bubble because he "was working in an office job and just started getting really concerned about climate change and just thought [he] couldn't carry on doing what [he] was doing" (BBC, 2019).

What I want to suggest from this collection of utterances is that they share the same separation of *logos* and *phone* that sets Tsing and Morton's analyses in motion. The Modern world-for-us—the shared horizon of meanings, representations, and structures that organise and make its practices of 'normal, standard life' intelligible—is, as the Tinker's Bubble residents like Nick suggest, unsustainable; it is premised on a political economy that eats away at its own conditions of possibility, such that it is impossible to live sustainably or healthily within it. Thus, its meaning, its *logos,* is at odds with the geological and biological forces upon which it depends; it is foundationally wrong. At the same time, for many residents of Tinker's Bubble, this Modern world-for-us is a set of relations that appear relatively intractable. Why else is living in the alternative political economy of Tinker's Bubble the best that Kirsty can do, whilst stopping the use of jumbo jets and cars appears to be simply impossible? Why else is Modernity a 'stuck place' where Alex can no longer locate meaning?

On the other side, Tinker's Bubble is seemingly unintelligible, at least on its own terms, to the Modern World too. Pedro reasons that the mode of life enacted at Tinker's Bubble "seems *so alien* to people who have lived for industrial progress and for money all their lives" (Quirke et al. 2015; emphasis added); it is as if it does not and cannot belong to the same world at all. Indeed, the space of Tinker's Bubble is often perceived as "extreme" (Kinnock, 2019), or an "oddity" (Wyld Edges, 2013) by many in the Modern world. Paxman's baffled grin at the end of the 2001 Newsnight feature is less sympathetic but just as perplexed as the presenter of the 2019 feature for BBC's *Inside Out West*, who refers to the difference between the Modern world and Tinker's Bubble in a bemused tone as "a hell of a lot to give up" (BBC, 2001; 2019). As Pedro notes, somewhat understatedly, "there's a tendency for people outside the community to judge us a little" (Quirke et al., 2015). Here we can glimpse a non-commensurable disjuncture between a space without the Modern, industrial sense of progress on the one hand, and, on the other hand, the Modern world-for-us that depends upon that industrial progress (Tsing, 2015; Colebrook, 2016). The relationship between the two is one of mutual unintelligibility, which refuses the points of contact that would make it possible for the former to meaningfully alter the latter. In short, the *logos* of each is simply *phone* in the other.

In Rancière's account of politics, a political subject is one who forces their appearance into a world that they have no business appearing in such that the misalignment of world and subject can be articulated—through *logos*—as 'wrong', which, in turn, opens up a space of disruption and contestation, where the order and meanings of that world could be reorganised (1999; 2017). In contrast and by dint of the apparent incommensurability of the Bubble and the Modern world, I want to argue that politics has become impossible for the residents of Tinker's Bubble. *As residents*, they find themselves without the capacity to appear in the Modern world as political subjects that could transform it; its order is a wrong seemingly without the necessary knowledge or capacity to rectify it.

Of course, this doesn't mean that the residents can't or don't appear in the Modern world at all. As Britain's longest running fossil-fuel free intentional community, they have appeared in independent documentaries, news features, lifestyle magazines and small-run books. But how they can appear and speak to that Modern world-for-us is at odds with their genuinely radical decision to opt out of it. Thus, in translating themselves across these incommensurable modes of being in the world, this radicality is surrendered and the residents often utilise speech that is intelligible to the dominant set of meanings in the Modern world—its world-for-us—with the effect that their mode of life cannot appear as an effective critique of the Modern world.

Hence Kirsty's words above are only suggestive. She can "suggest they take more walks or don't buy so much plastic or try and buy local" (Berrow and Jane, 2021). Elsewhere Pedro can contend to the BBC interviewer that the existence of Tinker's Bubble "sets an example. People come here and they see how we're living. See that we can still be really happy whilst being sustainable and other people do copy us and go out and it is spreading, slowly" (BBC, 2019).

If neoliberalism is both the dominant thought and practice of contemporary capitalist Modernity (Büscher *et al.*, 2019; Dardot and Laval, 2014; 2019), and it operates by making "the market economy… an insurmountable obstacle to any 'politicization of economic life'" by generating the purported 'free choice' of the consumer in the marketplace—and, indeed, producing the consumer as a 'free chooser'—over any political process of decision making (Dardot and Laval, 2014, p. 80), then Kirsty and Pedro speak through and to this rationality. They articulate possibility in terms of the volunteerism of the consumer; an agent making lifestyle choices amongst a field of other lifestyle choices. But the tentative strategies that Kirsty and Pedro offer for the Modern world do not touch the underlying ordering processes that organise bodies, minds, institutions, technologies, and spaces, creating each 'choosing agent' and presenting them with their field of choices as a seemingly foreclosed terrain of agency.

In the traditional Marxian distinction between appearances and essences, the reality of the world is found in the totality of capitalism as it connects the social to the natural through the means of (re)production. Its essences are revealed through critical inquiry that exposes its mechanisms for organising material production, whilst the "ruling ideas are nothing more than the ideal expression of the dominant material relationships" (Marx, 2000 [1846]); they are simply the appearances or effects of that deeper reality. It is the ability to demystify appearances and to determine essences that gives force to Marx's famous exhortation that the point of thought is to change the world (1976 [1845]), designating a space (the factory) and a practice (the struggle of economic classes) that makes the Modern world amenable to this transformation. If, by contrast, Morton's OOO maintains the real existence of essences but argues that the spatially and temporally massive hyperobjects of the Anthropocene demonstrate the ultimate withdrawn and inaccessible nature of those essences (Morton, 2013), then the Modern, capitalist world itself now appears as if it is a hyperobject, at least to the residents of Tinker's Bubble. Its essences, understood as the deeper, cohesive force that holds together and orders the object-totality—that organises the relationship between resource extraction, production, consumers, and their choices—is inaccessible to the residents of Tinker's Bubble as a site of political knowledge and action, even as they try to intervene in it. They can only access and speak in and respond to the level of appearances: the play of individual lifestyle choices within a field of other individual lifestyle choices.

Of course, because a more fundamental understanding of the Modern world is mystified and withdrawn from them, like those humans Morton describes as caught in the zone of a hyperobject, all available choices are rendered as inadequate and wrong. Some fellow travellers may see Tinker's Bubble and find the means to emulate it as Pedro argues, but how many people can really "choose" to exit the Modern world, when a powerful set of disciplinary and governmental techniques produce the agency of subjects such that their choices are both really constrained and that their subjective investments "reproduce, expand and reinforce" the logics of its world (Dardot and Laval, 2014, p. 262)? Similarly, in some situations individuals may be able to choose to walk instead of use a car as Kirsty offers, but as Huber argues, "much consumption (like driving) is not a "choice" but a necessity of social reproduction (getting to work)" (2019). As such, they echo the dominant but ineffectual neoliberal response to growing ecological crisis; the reorientation of markets through the manufacture of new, ecologically oriented consumers and their choices (Büscher *et al.*, 2019; Dauvergne and Lister, 2010; Jones and Stafford, 2021; Szaz, 2009).

My intention is not to lambast the residents of Tinker's Bubble for being insufficiently political, nor am I claiming an access to these otherwise elusive essences. I am at best ambivalent about the claim to essences at all. Nonetheless, if we were to pick Morton's quasi-solution of becoming responsive to the mysterious forces of hyperobjects, in this instance doing so looks remarkably like surrendering political possibility to the terms dictated by neoliberal capital. Rather than political subjects, the residents of Tinker's Bubble appear, in Morton's terms, as hyposubjects (Morton and Boyer, 2021), caught in the zone of the Modern world as hyperobject. As such, they are rendered hypocritical and weak, possessing a diminished capacity to act within a terrain dictated to them seemingly from outside. In short, they are in a state "of being forced to endure and suffer the effects of viscous forces like climate change and capital" (ibid., p. 14). Little wonder, then, that from the field of possible choices presented as available to them, it is the decision to go "underneath" the Modern world—to subtract themselves—that they have taken in order to make this endurance tolerable. Put differently, under these conditions, "escape", as Megan suggests (Willoughby, 2022, p. 2), presents itself as one of the better possibilities.

Taking the escape hatch to Tinker's Bubble offers enough distance from the Modern world to engage with the mysteriousness of the withdrawn world-in-itself on terms that are less ‘abject’ and more ‘playful’ as Morton suggests. Some of the residents operate a blog alongside their website, which offers them a chance to offer more reflective and personal accounts of their engagements with the Bubble. In a post entitled *Into the Woods*, Megan likens becoming a Bubble resident to “interacting with the unknown that we have all ventured into the woods to meet” (Willoughby, 2021). If the Modern world pushes the “unknown” of the world into the “woods of its stories”, then entering the woodland of Tinker’s Bubble is an experiment in living “in that magic” (ibid.). Thus, Tinker’s Bubble’s role is “to hold [residents] in the unknown woods, so that [they] can try to untangle [their] yarns, sifting through some of the knots of society” (ibid.). In Megan’s account, the space opens the possibility to undo the subjectivities produced by the Modern world and to compose different forms of life that embrace the transience of the world-for-us and respond to the mystery of the world-in-itself (ibid.).

Remarking upon the escape of a cow from its proper place in the fields and its subsequent intrusion into the woodlands, Alex (Toogood, A., 2021) notes the way that it cracked open the boundaries of the world that they are building at Tinker’s bubble. In terms that echo Morton’s account of an object’s zone burning through the veil of prejudice (Morton, 2013, pp. 141-147), Alex describes the encounter as one that broke “through [his] hubris” and remind him that “Tinker’s Bubble is at the near edge of an unknown and mystifying territory” (Toogood, A., 2021). It is the capacity of Tinker’s Bubble as a place outside of Modernity that enables Alex to come close to—to touch even—the mystery of the world-in-itself. As he puts it, the cow’s “lumbering blend of curiosity and fear and hunger and contentedness demanded something more... of [him] – she required [him] to meet her on the *terms of the world*” (ibid; emphasis added). Rather than affirming the security of the world-for-us, Tinker’s Bubble is space for an encounter that is “not *for* us: it does not exist for our benefit. Viscerally, it asks us: Who are you? What are you doing?” (ibid.). Rather than being dominated by the Modern *logos* of human progress, Alex’s experience in Tinker’s Bubble allows him to be open to encounter with the *polyphonic* intrusions of the world-in-itself.

5.5 The Practicalities of Escape: the Non-Politics of Invisibility

It is perhaps the capacity for spaces like Tinker’s Bubble—spaces that operate “below techno-modern radar” (Morton and Boyer, 2021, p. 14)—to affect a hyposubjective reorientation to the world-in-itself that give Morton and Boyer the sense that they are a source of “political potentiality” appropriate to our times (ibid.). Similarly, theorists like J. K. Gibson-Graham (2006; 2010; Morrow and Dombroski, 2015; Nelson, 2018; Roelvink, 2015) have found alternative ‘noncapitalist’ spaces like the kind found at Tinker’s Bubble to be sources of optimism, demonstrating alternative, ecological modes of organising life that could inform a postcapitalist future. In the same vein, Anitra Nelson notes that the community at Tinker’s Bubble “only marginally relies on the market… they substitute activities in capitalist markets as consumers and workers with self-provision, nonmonetary work and exchanges” (2018, pp. 220-221). It is their capacity to assemble an ecological, noncapitalist life of bricolage that has Nelson declaring the residents to be “dancing their way to the revolution” (ibid., p. 221). But is this hope warranted?

I have tried to temper claims to the political possibilities embedded in withdrawal and escape by emphasising the pessimistic dimensions that fuel these efforts. I have done so through the example of those escaping to Tinker’s Bubble; they cannot find meaning in the *logos* of the Modern world, nor can they alter it. The modern world appears to them like Morton’s hyperobject; withdrawn, vast, and overwhelming such that they lack the capacity to enter it as political subjects. But I want to deepen my claim that these spaces necessarily lack a political capacity by using Tinker’s Bubble to examine the terms of their construction. In doing so, I hope to challenge the notion that finding an outside or noncapitalist way of life is readily intelligible as either a political act or a source of political potential.

Here it’s worth revisiting Tsing’s own tempering of Gibson-Graham’s claims about noncapitalist life (Tsing, 2015, pp. 65-66). As we have seen, Tsing uses the term ‘pericapitalist’ to indicate that purportedly noncapitalist spaces are always in a relationship with capitalist processes, and that these “shape and interpenetrate each other” (ibid., p. 65). Whilst they might offer space to dwell in, where it becomes possible to rethink “the unquestioned authority of capitalism in our lives” (ibid.), they are never free from capitalism or, more generally, the Modern world and so they cannot propel us into a just beyond. Whilst these spaces have noncapitalist elements that license a zone of permissiveness or freedom to its workers, the workers are still dependent on the larger capitalist political economy, just as they are material upon which the wider system of capitalism depends (ibid., p. 66).

Within the context of the Matsutake economy, the libertarian freedom of Open Ticket that Tsing identifies occurs only because it is *structured* as a gap. It exists only because it is in relation to an already ordered and accounted for regime of mutual dependency between capitalist and noncapitalist elements. The invisibility of Open Ticket is thus *mutually beneficial*; just as the people that enter these pericapitalist spaces locate moments of freedom hidden from the Modern world, the Modern world *also* requires that these spaces remain hidden; that they do not disrupt the sensible distributions of space, objects, and subjects that compose the natural or given appearance of the Modern world. They are mutually conditioned to avoid political disruption, to be non-political.

Open Ticket's relatively organic emergence obscures the *mutual* necessity of invisibility, appearing as a fortuitous opportunity for escape. But Tinker's Bubble is *an intentional community*. Rather than finding a quasi-natural or organic hollow in the Modern world, the founders of the site had to open up their own crack in order to slip through and beneath Modernity's radar. As I will argue, the micropolitical struggles to open that crack and establish the community demonstrate the mutual necessity of this invisibility; that it is possible to open such a crack and sustain it only through a compromise with the Modern world, in which forms of mutual imperceptibility are necessary to avoid the potentially political breach of the Modern World's distribution of the sensible.

The land that became Tinker's Bubble was purchased cooperatively by the original residents in 1994, but ownership of the site is open to new residents, who become shareholders upon permanent entry to the community (Brace, 2014, p. 55; Spero, 2017, p. 95). Of course, the necessity of inscribing the relationship between the residents and the land as one of property rights delimits a maximum perimeter for the residents and their ambitions, as well as a certain conformity to the rules of the game. Nonetheless, given the way that traveller communities have been increasingly criminalised (Burgum *et al.,* 2022) for example, the decision to organise the community within the regime of property rights looks like a necessary one, particularly if sustaining a space of escape or withdrawal is the ambition, rather than embracing the transgressive movement of political activity.

The first generation of residents moved onto the property within the year and without planning permission, "building simple benders to live and cook in" (Spero, 2017, p. 96). In their initial plans, the community intended to live at the bottom of the site, near the spring, which would supply them with a source of clean water (Brace, 2014, p. 60). Unfortunately, their makeshift homes and piecemeal agricultural infrastructure appeared on a landscape organised into a pre-existing distribution of the sensible. From a small road adjacent to the site, the residents' makeshift homes composed of tarpaulin and canvas roofs, and the plastic benders covering their crops disrupted the otherwise scenic view of an untouched woodland.

As the eventual legal agreement between the residents and the local authority states, the site of Tinker's Bubble is situated in a larger context of "low-input, low-output and marginal" farming in a "difficult terrain" leaving much of the space free from heavy, mechanised and monocultural agriculture (Shorten and Cole, Appendix 3, 2002, p.116). Instead, it lies "at the centre of 13 Country Wildlife Sites… linked by a mosaic of green lanes holloways and hedgerows" (ibid.), and within a "designated Special Landscape Area" (ibid., p. 113). The large number of non-Indigenous Douglas Fir and Larch trees that grow at Tinker's Bubble in comparison to the limited amount of Indigenous tree species, such as Ash and Hazel, suggest that the site was originally used for commercial timber production (ibid., p. 112).

However, it seems that in more recent years it has been incorporated into a conservation landscape, where its visual beauty and ability to harbour wildlife makes working the land verboten. Instead, it is mainly enjoyed as a spectacle by the largely wealthy rural community of nearby Norton-sub-Hamdon. It is perhaps little wonder that the intrusion of the Tinkers' Bubble residents was met almost immediately with complaints from the residents of Norton-sub-Hamdon to the local authority in a concerted attempt to have their structures dismantled (Fairlie, 1999). Against the mediated appearances of the Bubble residents in newspapers and lifestyle magazines outlined in the previous section, where Tinker's Bubble appears as an oddity, an extreme, or an ethical lifestyle choice, it is in this moment of transgressive creation that Tinker's Bubble possessed a real political potentiality, disrupting the striations of sensibility to introduce a new relationship between human and landscape: neither the destructive techno-instrumentalism of Modern urban and agricultural practices, nor the human-free scene of the conservational idyll, but rather a sustainable way of working the land.

Nonetheless, owing to the desire to establish the community (Miles, 2007, p. 124) rather than to make an ill-fated political stand against the considerable authority structures of the Modern world, the residents acceded to several key demands in order to be granted temporary planning permission for the site, as demonstrated in the management plan that became the legal agreement for permitting the site (Shorten and Cole, Appendix 3, 2002, p.112-125). One of the key aspects of the agreement is that Tinker's Bubble cause "minimal adverse impact upon the landscape" (ibid., p. 122), framing their very appearance in the landscape as an unwanted disruption of the landscape's scenic qualities and necessitating their invisibility. Domestic structures were no longer permitted in the visible space near the road (ibid) and so the residents had to move to the top of a steep hill, "out of sight from any public footpaths" (Brace, 2014, p. 60). Similarly, any "plastic agricultural paraphernalia visible from the road or other side of the valley to be covered with vegetation or dull-coloured matting… All tarpaulin or canvas roofs to be replaced with timber, tile, thatch or earth… all future polytunnels to be sited as unobtrusively as practicable" (Shorten and Cole, 2002, Appendix 3 p. 122).

Another important aspect of the agreement was that, insomuch as the Bubble is now visible to the Modern capitalist world through the bureaucratic trail of the agreement itself, the residents were required to “obtain modest livelihoods through organic agriculture and sustainable forestry” (Fairlie, 1999). That is, at least in part, the space must be made intelligible as a site of market activity, rather than a pure subsistence and barter economy. So, whilst the significance of the residents’ capacities to “substitute activities in capitalist markets as consumers and workers with self-provisioning, nonmonetary work, and exchanges” is unquestionable (Nelson, 2018, p. 221), there is an important way in which they are still compelled to be incorporated into the Modern Capitalist world of production and market exchange as an intelligible object of its logics. In this sense, the Bubble is also a pericapitalist space, radically free of the Modern world in some ways, but constrained to appear in conformity with its delineations of space and activity in others.

Indeed, it is the particularities of this mixture that are important to understand in pericapitalist spaces because those constraints appear to deaden potentiality. If Tsing’s account of Open Ticket points to the necessity of invisibility as a condition for finding freedoms outside of the Modern, capitalist world, then the example of Tinker’s Bubble illustrates that such an invisibility is also a *mutual* arrangement of compromise, in which one space does not disturb the logics of the other as far as is possible. The residents of Tinker’s Bubble are relatively free to live differently so long as it does not intrude upon the sensible distributions of spaces, bodies and activities that determine its appearance to the Modern world as a scene of conservation. Similarly, insomuch as they can work the land out of sight of the conservational scene, the nature of those activities is made intelligible to the Modern capitalist world as market activity through the agreed management plan. Therefore, I suggest this invisibility is an expression of political incapacity; of being dominated on the terrain of sensibility. If it is a site of latent potentiality, as in Tsing’s account of the latent commons, then this potentiality could never be political on its own terms.

5.6 Conclusion

The residents of Tinker’s Bubble can appear elsewhere in various forms of media, where their radical decision to abandon the political economy of the Modern world and its *logos* of progress can only appear on the dominant terms of the Modern world-for-us, to be dismissed as extreme, or an oddity, or recuperated as a lifestyle choice amongst other ecologically oriented lifestyle choices. But, whether by dint of their own hyposubjectivity or the negotiated invisibility of their escape, they cannot trouble the Modern world as political subjects. These kinds of political and agential limitations are actively embraced by the theorists I brought to this empirical analysis as a necessity in the pessimistic ontology that disarticulates *logos* from *phone*. Drawn out through my analysis of Tinker's Bubble, it is the depoliticising consequences for practice that make this particularly troubling. If some of us in critical quarters may be able to recognise these interstitial and opaque sites as possessing a potentiality for human and world to exist beyond and after Modernity, nonetheless it seems that the Modern, capitalist world is still capacious enough to reorganise these spaces within its distribution of the sensible as non-appearance, as oddity, as extreme, as lifestyle choice.

In the case of non-appearing, these spaces do not breach the distribution of the sensible that would trouble the Modern world politically. In this case, the Modern world is entirely undisturbed. As 'oddity' or 'extreme' such spaces are unintelligible as reasoned and reasonable modes of life and serve to demonstrate the common-sense of the Modern world as the only plausible modality of organising social life. Similarly, as lifestyle choice they demonstrate the ever-capacious nature of Modernity to accommodate difference, reflecting long-standing liberal discourses of plurality (Bellamy, 2002; Berlin, 1969; Galston, 2002; Rawls, 1993; Raz, 1986), which act as moral defence for maintaining Modernity's dominant systems of representative democracy and capitalism. In these instances, such spaces become material for the recuperation of the world they supposedly contest. On the one hand, the Bubblers subtract themselves from the Modern world, which is permissive of a certain freedom of practice, enabling new articulations of socio-natural life. On the other hand, without the capacity for a an aesthetically disruptive and destructive rupture with the Modern world, their negation is non-political and can be readily appropriated, incorporated, and/or dismissed, permitting the world to persist as it is, including its ecocidaly destructive tendencies.

The possibility of recuperation—the potential for even the limited positivity of a minimally-extensive project to be subsumed under and therefore complicit in the dominant horizons of meaning and practice—is part of the problem that is addressed by what I am calling *intensive negativity*. As I argue in the next chapter, *intensive negativity* would refuse even this limited conception of alternatives and seek out a purely destructive force. Against the complicity and recuperation that is always possible in a 'yes', intensive negativity resists this possibility via the constant work of saying 'no': the thought and practices of refusal, deconstruction, and evasion. It is to this pole that we next turn.

Chapter 06.
The Poetic Regime of Pessimism II: Intensive Negativity

There is no relation or correlation, no extension or continuity between the linear and human sense we make of what we take to be our world, and the multiple, volatile, and infinite forces that operate with blind disregard for human sense and intentionality…

Colebrook, 2016, p. 115

6.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter I argued that the Poetic Regime of Pessimism is rendered in two ways that I placed under the banner of 'negative geographies'; *minimally extensive negativity* and *intensive negativity*. The preceding chapter focussed upon *minimally extensive negativity*, which corrodes possibilities such that what is left are spaces of relative withdrawal or subtraction from Modern civilisation. I argued that this means that any radical potentiality generated by these spaces is already nullified by their conditions of possibility, marking them with a profound political impotence.

In this chapter, I will address the second rendering, which takes on the problem of accommodation and recuperation found in *minimally extensive negativity*. In this account, pessimism's corrosive effects burn all the way through. I describe this negativity as *intensive* because it takes the form of a pure or double refusal; perhaps less a negative geography than an anti-geography or an ungeography. In this account the Modern world, its figures of humanity and its shared horizons of meaning, are irredeemable; "too many chances have been given and still the barbarism" (Colebrook, 2021, p. 243). Secondly, both political counter-projects and forms of escape emerge on the same terrain of human and world. Consequently, they are capable of being captured and domesticated, becoming fresh materials for the recuperation and rehabilitation of a world that seems determined to rumble onwards into ecological violence and collapse. As such, there can be no affirmation, even of projects that hold the appearance of promise. As Ferguson notes, "yes is a modality of power" that asks us to compromise ahead of time; it is complicit in the violences and injustices of the world-as-it-is, whereas 'no' is "illiquid, nonfungible" (2022, pp. x-xi). In tandem with currents in afropessimist (Sexton, 2016; Warren, 2018; Wilderson III, 2014) and contemporary critical theory (Anonymous, 2011; Chipato and Chandler, 2023; Culp, 2016; 2021; Culp and Dekeyser, 2023; Ferguson, 2021; Grove, J., 2021; Torrent, 2023), the task is ceaselessly negative, becoming one of permanent refusal or destruction of the Modern world-for-us, its shared horizon of meanings, and the practices these meanings engender.

At first glance it appears as if there is more political charge in this pro-active, intensive embrace of negativity. Rather than retreat into the interstices, it carves away at the deeply problematic relations of the world-as-it-is and countenances no compromise. However, my concern here is that in embracing negativity wholesale there is a risk of corroding the very foundations of political possibility. In an essay titled *The Misadventures of Critical Thought* (2021 [2009]), Rancière takes certain forms of critical thought to task for depicting "the law of domination as a force seizing on anything that claims to challenge it" (ibid., p. 33). Whilst he acknowledges that sometimes this can be used to configure a ruptural "radicalism that will at last be radical" (ibid., p. 36), he suggests that all-too-often it instead translates into a figure of "generalised impotence" that reserves for itself "the position of the lucid mind casting a disenchanted eye over a world in which critical interpretation of the system has become part of the system itself" (ibid., p. 37).

The targets of Rancière's criticism are of course different to those that compose the intensive, negative pole of the Poetic Regime of Pessimism that I am examining here. Indeed, I have argued for the necessity of a radical, political negativity over the course of this thesis too, to which I will argue intensive negativity does speak. Nonetheless, my concern is that the intensive negativity cohering around the concept of the Anthropocene risks performing a similar function to that which Rancière criticises by collapsing everything into the appearance of the same; the 'wrong' of a fundamental misrecognition and doomed instrumentalisation of the world-in-itself that undergirds the relations that create a Modern world-for-us in its totality. Whilst I concede that this could lead us to find a political radicalism that could at last be radical, I question whether a framework of pure negativity could allow a political project or activity to remain legible as *a difference that makes a difference* in the face of this critique? Would it too become the indifference of the all-too-human terrain of the same? Would it simply become one more effort at recuperation? And if this is the case, what remains of political possibility?

In order to draw out and work through this problem, I begin with the work of Claire Colebrook, who I suggest is Anthropocene studies' pre-eminent pessimist. From earlier work on extinction, where Colebrook argued that “the human species’ damaging of its own milieu is not an accident that we might otherwise have avoided, precisely because climate—as our milieu—is something that our very attachment to will preclude us from ever really seeing” (2013, p. 58), a consistent thread of Colebrook’s work is the necessary disconnection between human *logos* and the *phone* of the world-in-itself. By placing the figure of the human and its world-for-us within the context of deep geological time, Colebrook points to a foundational and destructive form of non-relation that undergirds the necessary relationship between human sensing-consciousness and its world. I argue that this produces a critique of the human so radical that no figure could survive it. I will draw these dynamics out in their consequences for thinking political possibility by paying special attention to her most substantive critique of the political in the essay *What is Anthropopolitical?* (2016), which argues against the possibility of a political figure of the human in light of this underlying non-relation. I will also draw upon a shorter, more recent piece, *Can Theory End the World?* (2021), which helps to clarify the stakes of her critique.

With the intention of thinking more closely about the problems of such an intensive negativity, I draw on the concepts of destruction and subtraction formalised by Badiou in a relatively recent essay, *Destruction, Subtraction, Negation* (2007b). As Noys argues (2010, pp. 134-135), Badiou’s thought has evolved over time in order to renegotiate a relationship between negativity and political possibility in the wake of the failures and defeats of revolutionary projects in the mid-to-late Twentieth Century, the growing sense of political pessimism that accompanied this, as well as germinal projects emerging in the early 21st Century. It is his dedication to keeping radical politics alive in the face of overwhelming defeat that means his formulation of political negativity speaks to the problem I am trying to work through here. As I shall demonstrate, the formulation constitutes political negation as a twofold process, involving both what he calls ‘destruction,’ a concentrated force that dissolves “the old world” (Badiou, 2007b, p. 269), and, *crucially,* ‘subtraction,’ a secondary moment of negation that enables the kernel of affirmative or generative capacity in political activity (2007a, p. 269), by which new worlds might be composed.

In Badiou’s account, both destruction and subtraction are necessary to make politics possible. Destruction is necessary to give subtraction political force: it breaks with the logics of the world-as-it-is and opens space for new possibilities. Indeed, it is this aspect that I find compelling in the the account of *intensive negativity* given here. However, those new possibilities cannot be inferred from acts of destruction. There is no identity to destruction apart from that which it negates (Badiou, 2007b), which means that without subtraction, destruction becomes nihilism. Instead, possibilities appear as new axioms and practices in the play of elements when *subtracted* from the principles that previously governed their interplay (ibid., pp. 269-270). In the first place, then, destruction is an enabling condition for subtraction to have political effects. Indeed, It could be argued that *minimally extensive negativity* and its problems of invisibility and recuperability are a problem of subtraction without the ruptural moment of destruction that would create political effects. Nonetheless, subtraction is necessary because it is not bound to that which is destroyed. Instead, subtraction implies a capacious remainder that is both a part of the world and no part of the world, which is to say that it possesses a potentiality that exceeds the ordering principles that currently govern it. It is this capaciousness that means subtraction operates as a hinge between the negative and the affirmation of new connections and relations, opening out onto new formulations of human and world.

To be clear, relying upon Badiou's account of the relationship between subtraction and destruction does not move us away from a Rancièrean account of politics that has thus far undergirded this thesis, despite the disagreements that exist between the two philosophers (Rockhill, 2016). Instead, it offers a helpful conceptual clarification of the moments of negativity that are necessary within Rancière's account. In Rancière's terms (1999), we might say that the coupling of destruction and subtraction enables political subjects to appear as a "part of no part", a disruptive excess contrary to their assimilation to the police order and its distribution of the sensible. As destructive agents, they disrupt the sensible logics of the police order, whilst their nature as subtractive agents is precisely their excess—the part of no part—put in motion to recompose a different set of counter-logics that open out onto alternatives (Genel and Deranty, 2016, pp. 124-155).

I argue that Intensive negativity as represented by the work of Claire Colebrook resists engaging with any process that resembles what Badiou calls subtraction, because the Anthropocene signals a limit point for reorganising the figure of the human and its world, of which nothing can remain. As such, intensive negativity remains on a terrain of destruction. I argue that the risk of remaining on the terrain of destruction is that it remains closed to new constructions of human and world. Without subtraction, intensive negativity faces the danger of slipping into an aporia that is enclosed within a circuit of nihilism, by which I mean a circuit caught between the nihilist poles of active destruction and of passivity and resignation.

I explore the limits of this nihilism by bringing Colebrook into dialogue with the self-published zines of an informal network of Anarcho-nihilists. Their thought has important parallels with Colebrook's and their practices embody *intensive negativity*—the negative as destruction without subtraction—in ways that reflect Colebrook's own position, despite important differences. The dialogue that I stage between the two is intentionally provocative; an attempt to demonstrate the impoverishment of practice that intensive negativity's aporia risks leaving us with. Ultimately, I argue that despite the radical impulse that gives destruction a certain lure, its purest expression in the destructive practices and refusals of the anarcho-nihilists demonstrates a self-consciously impotent war with all that exists. Therefore, I conclude by arguing that whilst destruction is necessary, we need to engage with it differently in order to find space for subtraction, to which I offer a few suggestions that will lead into the subsequent chapters.

6.2 The End of Politics: the "Geologic Sublime" and Irrecuperable Humanity

In order to draw out the intensive negativity that is the object of my concern here, I am examining the work of Claire Colebrook, which has become an important touchstone for critical approaches to the Anthropocene within the social sciences (e.g. Anderson, 2017; Chandler and Pugh, 2022; Clark and Yusoff, 2018; Clark, 2017; Clarke, 2023; de Freitas and Truman, 2020; Fagan, 2017; Torrent, 2023). Of interest to this study is the way she engages the relationship between human and world as predicated on an absolute negative; the non-relation between what the human takes to be its world (the world-for-us) and the real, chaotic, violent and indifferent forces of the earth (the world-in-itself). As we shall see, this sets up an analysis that opens up both the contingency of the human *tout court* and the implication of that figure in the conditions of the Anthropocene. It is the wholesale character of this analysis that precludes positive answers or solutions to the crises of the Anthropocene and instead warrants a radical deconstructive approach that ends the 'world-for-us' altogether. As such, it is an exemplar of what I am calling intensive negativity.

Colebrook situates her analysis in contrast with a tendency she describes as the 'recuperative sublime', which registers the Anthropocene in the model of a *felix culpa*, or a wakeup call that diagnoses the misalignment of human and world and marshals a 'we' to become something other; a redeemed humanity realigned with and reoriented to the earth (ibid., p. 88). In this account, though predictions of the Anthropocene might be dour, it nonetheless opens us to a future that is "not given" and thus recuperable; "[in] the very mark of our defeat and limit we are given a time to come; we are given a 'we', a 'humanity to come'" (ibid.). Often, this recuperation comes from "determining what scale or scales would generate the proper frame for narrating the genesis of 'man'" (ibid., p.92). In doing so, we introduce a political frame; "the composition of the human, with the composition implying malleability and a future that might be otherwise" (ibid., p. 94). If it is not humans *tout court*, but capitalist man that is responsible, for example, theory could "open spaces of refuge that would demarcate capitalist man and find a space for less guilty others" (ibid., p. 98). This would imply subjects, spaces, and processes of political struggle, as well as a possible victory, through which another (redeemed) humanity and another world is possible. In this sense, as in the Derridean promise, humanity is not exhausted by the violence of its present but is given a "-to-come" that could be just (ibid., p. 101).

However, Colebrook questions the limits of this mode of thought and the Derridean promise of a '-to come'. To develop this analysis, Colebrook continues to read humanity within "a framework of deep geological time" (Weinstein and Colebrook, 2017b, p. ix). Because the Anthropocene is a geological marker of human activity, it makes the figure of the human intelligible in terms that have otherwise been occluded; both with regards to its possible end and with reference to its origins in the tumult of *inhuman forces:* all the interacting nonhuman materialities of the Earth that exist prior to—and enable—the emergence, existence, and sense-making modes of humans, or as Colebrook puts it, "the continual processes of the earth through which something like a stable human form has developed" (Weinstein and Colebrook, 2017c, p. 6).

The introduction of this scale problematises the neat alignment of narrative and world that could open the proper political activity of war and redemption with humanity's improper self. If the Anthropocene poses "that humans will be readable as a geological force [it] seems to be destroying once and for all the future arrow of promissory time" (Colebrook, 2016, p. 104). As a concept that indexes a "geological impact, and not just change within the human milieu" (ibid.), the Anthropocene's predictive force comes from beyond the human set of scales, from beyond human intellection, and impinges upon our imaginary of an open future that promises, via its sheer inexhaustibility, a justice to come. Rather than skirting the dire calculations of probability to affirm the slithers of potentiality that remain, Colebrook instead invites us to read "what the future promises us" (ibid., p. 105). In this respect, the Anthropocene appears to suggest that humanity will be legible as a scar in absolute, not just human terms. Those internal scales—those political frames—through which we mark the politics of the human are all indicted as part of the geological force productive of the Anthropocene. If those demarcations have offered us a recuperative politics of a humanity-to-come—"the promise and necessity of another world *for us*" (ibid., p. 106)—then Colebrook suggests that what the Anthropocene promises us "is an impolitic erasure or deadening of those matters, inscriptions, figures and substitutions that seem to stand for a world to come" (ibid.).

To further draw out this point, Colebrook focusses our attention on the moment that she calls "the hiatus of catastrophe" (2016, p. 111). If the general history of the earth "has been one of utter contingency, violence and volatility" then the emergence of what we might imagine as the human occurs in a "brief period" in which the world could appear to us as "lawful, benevolent, stable… capable of being viewed *as if* it were in accord with a just and virtuous narrative" (ibid.). That is, the understanding of a 'just world'—a world in which justice is an available concept and a realisable potential—is itself predicated upon the stability of the Holocene era. Perhaps more damning, the time of the human, "the brief era of the publicly distributed book and the private sense-making imaginary of deep attention coincides with the era of high industrialization… [which] is also the era that will precipitate the Anthropocene as a readable mark on the planet" (ibid.). As such, the objects that have fuelled much theory, including that of critical Anthropocene theory—earth, globe, nature, humanity, justice—could "appear as an object of stable knowledge only with certain practices and formations that would precipitate the destruction of the milieu on which they depend" (ibid., p. 115).

In Colebrook's analysis, it is not simply that justice could appear only as the culmination of a certain set of material and discursive operations predicated upon an ultimately contingent period of geological and climate stability, but that these operations are also imbricated with the very processes that will likely see the end of that stability and the return of catastrophe. As such, the coincidence of a *logos* of justice and a world that seems available to us as the stable and orderable scene of justice is a contingency presented as a given; an occlusion that otherwise makes the human seem both necessary and capable of being just. That which seemed essential about the alignment of human and world turns out to be mere *appearances*, whilst concealed underneath lies a disavowed non-relation; the unbridgeable gap between *logos* and *phone*: "there is no relation or correlation, no extension or continuity between the linear and human sense we make of what we take to be our world, and the multiple, volatile, and infinite forces that operate with blind disregard for human sense and intentionality" (ibid., p. 111). Accordingly, the Anthropocene—the human-induced return of catastrophe—is the disintegration of the moment where it *seemed* as if human and world were unifiable and alignable in a 'just' pattern of order.

As such, all the registers that we usually imagine to be those that frame political questions of justice depend upon a metaphysical syntax of human and world that is itself already predicated upon the violent defacements of planet and domination-inducing exclusion of 'nonhumans' (Colebrook, 2016, pp. 111-115). To 'politicise' through the shifting scales of humanity is to "occlude the forces that generate the critical, politically astute subject-reader" (ibid., p. 116), and the destructive consequences of their channelling and organisation. Therefore, to see the Anthropocene in the mode of a recuperative sublime, to imagine a justice-to-come via the purported human innocents of anthropogenic eco-tastrophe, is to pursue politics on the same terms that have contributed to the production of the Anthropocene itself. But if the concept of justice is imbricated in the very problem of the Anthropocene, then as Colebrook would conclude in *Can Theory End the World?* that is to say that the Modern world-for-us "is neither just nor capable of creating justice from its own resources" (Colebrook, 2021, p. 532).

Given the intensity of this critique, what, then, is left? Rather than staging alternatives through which a world-for-us might be recuperated, Colebrook's project culminates in a call for "world-destructive" theory (2021). Against the positive or affirmational 'yes' that allows us to remain within and alter the terrain of meanings that compose the relation between human and world, Colebrook invites us to refuse these meanings and thus to refuse a world that is irredeemably wrong. Thinking through what she calls the geologic sublime is one mode of ending the world-for-us. As she states in an interview on Victorian literature, Victorian poetry has "a sense of geologic time that would render human life meaningless and puny" (Colebrook *et al.*, 2018, p. 11). It is the sense that this gives us, the "alienating or nihilistic view of our own species" that Colebrook seeks (ibid., p. 7). Such a perspective would defy our human conceptual apparatuses, destabilising the world-for-us and our entitlement to meaning and telos (even a re-negotiated one of redemption). Looking at the world of humanity without the capacity to make it intelligible is to deprive us of a sense that the world is "for us" and thus a prima facie entitlement to be saved, to survive, or to live on (2016. pp. 120-121). This mode of world-destructive theory might operate to loosen our attachments, generating distance from a world-for-us that is structured by violence and that seems to be spiralling towards its end. From this inhuman view 'we' might reflect upon who the 'we' is that calls to be saved, without the investments that demand all-too-quickly that we find our salvation in redemptive other-selves in order to save 'our' world (ibid.).

By loosening our attachments to the world, its loss may no longer be viewed in such catastrophic terms (Colebrook, 2017), but as a necessary form—indeed, the only available form—of justice (Colebrook, 2021). After all, if the thought of a just order is only made possible because of planetary-scale destruction (include the violence of colonial dispossession, genocide and control), then the loss of this justice shouldn't be mourned, as in the melancholic undertone of Tsing's account of the end of progress from the previous chapter. By contrast, Colebrook's stark account of (im)possibility might render Tsing's search for collaborative survival as simply one more example of the recuperative model; of a hunt for resources to think living on in the Anthropocene. As such, rather than attempting to recuperate a world devoid of justice (Ibid., p. 530), we might take justice to be a purely negative, deconstructive, and destructive force that eats away at the relations and manoeuvres that hold together and sustain the violence of the world-for-us (2016, p. 121; 2021). In this she compares world-destructive theory to Benjamin's account of divine violence; a force "without ground that destroys the barbarism of the whole" (2021, p. 526).

6.3 Destruction without Subtraction: Between Active and Passive nihilism

The proactive form of negativity that Colebrook arrives at in world-destructive theory certainly has some appeal; through Colebrook's analysis it is not so much that we seek to live in what's left after the end of hubristic humanity and the world-for-us, but that we negate the Modern world-for-us totally and confrontationally. In some ways this is an antidote to much theoretical work in the Anthropocene that seems to ask us to cling ever more tightly to the world-as-it-is, to affirm or succumb to relations that ask us to meet the world on its terms. By contrast, Colebrook's approach could give us a kind of distance from or suspension of the world that could be the motor of political contestation and refusal. Returning to Badiou's schema of negation (2007b), destruction is undoubtedly necessary to create a genuinely radical rupture with what is. Furthermore, if thought and practice in the Anthropocene is to sustain any political force, it is essential to avoid their recuperation in institutional forms which nullify their radical potential and sustain the world-as-it-is (Harney and Moton, 2013; Tuck and Yang, 2012; Whelan, 2015). Therefore, Colebrook's confrontational stance towards the complicity of theory in maintaining the injustices of the Modern world-for-us (2021) seems to me to be a necessary intervention against the limits of both what I have termed a *minimally extensive negativity* and affirmational approaches that risk being outflanked (Alt, 2018; Culp, 2016; Dekeyser and Jellis, 2020; Finkenbusch, 2018; Noys, 2010; Ramírez-D'Oleo, 2023; Schmidt and Koddenbroch, 2019; Stuelke, 2021).

However, the sociohistorical circumstances of Badiou's formulation of subtraction pose questions for this model of destruction. Firstly, Badiou's account of subtraction is pitched against the failures of the revolutionary political projects of the 20th Century, which believed "destruction alone was capable of opening a new history, founding a new man" (Badiou et al. 2008, p. 653; Noys, 2010, p. 137), and led to recursive waves of violence and terror that undermined them (Badiou, 2007b, pp. 54-57). Secondly, it is pitched against the negative of a nihilism that emerged in the wake of these defeats and the subsequent impasse of late 20th Century (Badiou, 2009 [1982], pp. 317-332). In its 'active' form, Badiou argues that nihilism has a certain virtue, in that its focus upon destructive negation resists any form of accommodation to the world-as-it-is (Badiou, 2009 [1982], p. 329). But because such nihilism emerges from a state of political impasse, as Noys summarises, the "active nihilist desire to consume the world" can always be "held in check by the certainty of defeat", and so it is always at risk of "retuning to passive nihilism," understood as inactivity and resignation (Noys, 2010, p. 148; see also; Badiou, 2007b, p. 65; Badiou, 2009 [1982], pp. 329-331). By contrast, subtraction offers a necessary counterweight to this oscillating impasse by demanding an engagement with the practical possibilities for otherwise, no matter how fleeting.

With both this schema and the 'post-political' malaise of the Anthropocene in mind, I propose to view intensive negativity through the lens of active nihilism. In this respect, Colebrook's account of her theoretical project is telling. If the traditional understanding of knowledge disciplines exists within an affirmational tenor of identity and the division of labour as "active, knowledge-composing, shared and adaptable practices that allow a common world to come into being" (2016, p.119), then she describes her collective theoretical project antithetically as "a force of destruction or dis-unification that is single only in its lack of quality or distinction" (ibid., p. 121). Colebrook's is thus a project of non-appearance, which is self-consciously lacking an account of its subject. Instead, the agency marshalled by Colebrook is an unmarked and pure force of destruction and non-relation, which echoes Badiou's sentiment that the destructive part of negation has no identity outside of that which it negates and, isolated from subtraction, takes shape in active nihilism (Badiou, 2007b, pp. 276-277; Badiou *et al.*, 2008, pp. 651-653).

This manoeuvre is understandable insomuch as any act of marking out a subject would re-place it within the irredeemable world-for-us. Indeed, her resistance to anything that has presence in the world is given further clarity in her critique of Morton's queer ecology, where she argues that the account of queerness as the de-essentialised, decentered, always becoming of life renders “palatable what might otherwise have appeared as inassimilable” (2021, p. 523; see also Edelman, 2004). Under the terms of this queer ecology, queerness is returned to a property of the world and gains status as the very substance of its unfolding. What might otherwise have been understood as radically other to our world—and therefore ruptural—takes on conciliatory properties, becoming normalised as present within the world with the consequence of recuperating its terms. Necessarily, then, Colebrook stakes out the active pole of nihilism—or destruction without the possibility of subtraction—in an attempt to resist the accommodationist possibilities that lurk within the affirmational kernel of subtraction, which opens out on to positive identities which could be subsumed by, rather than resist this world-for-us.

In fact, as her conception of the geologic sublime demonstrates, Colebrook’s negative force comes from marshalling a gaze that could not be in the world-for-us at all. Instead, it emerges from the metaphysical gambit that it is possible to ‘see’ and indict the human subject from the self-distancing view of a world-in-itself that is otherwise inapprehensible from within the world-for-us, or as she would summarise in an earlier article, “to image a world as image (as referential) but not referential for any body” (2013, p. 62). And it is here that I begin to question the radicalism that such a perspective brings; if everything that becomes intelligible to us in our world is reduced to its terms such that the critical gaze can only come from radically outside of it, is it possible any longer to see differences as they produce worlds that might otherwise make a difference? As Colebrook argues, the gaze of the geological sublime would indict a foundational wrong—more akin to Morton’s than Rancière’s—that smothers political possibility: the wrong predicated on the fundamental lack of relation between the vibrating *phone* of matter and the human *logos* that attempts to ascribe it meaning. There is “*nothing* to legitimate the transition from inscription to sense” (Colebrook, 2016, p. 116; emphasis in the original), from the geological markings of the Anthropocene to a legitimate register of humanity that could ground a politics oriented towards positive solutions. Rather than the possibility that we could compose new relationships between human and world, all that is left is “collapse” (ibid.).

Here, world-destructive theory seems to oscillate between active nihilism and passive nihilism; between theoretically organising the destruction of the world and the certitude of political failure at the level of practice. On the one hand, there is a negative that could be possessed and turned towards the world-for-us. On the other, this destruction leads us to the negative that radiates from the world-in-itself; a radical non-relation that undoes any positive sense of relation. The latter negative radically undercuts the potency of the former, whilst the former attempts to escape a certain sense of impotency in the face of the latter. Perhaps this oscillation is best described as an anti-Derridean aporia. If, for Derrida, the aporia signified an undecidability that one productively traverses to find new possibilities (1992; 1993), then this is an aporia from which political possibility cannot presently emerge. Nonetheless, if every enterprise of thought also implies a social—that is practical—form (Noys, 2010, p. 172), an important question here would be: what space is there for practice within a pure negativity that oscillates around its active and passive forms? What could destruction without a horizon of possibility look like as a concrete set of practices? And what are its limits?

6.4 Feral Insurgency: an Anti-Geography of Destruction Without Subtraction

In what follows, I attempt to provocatively draw out these stakes. To do so, I locate a parallel form of active nihilism to Colebrook's, which can be found in the texts of self-described anarcho-nihilists. These authors and practitioners produce and share zines through a distribution website or 'distro' called *Warzone,* in which they write about their shared commitment to the theory and practice of "pure negation" (Flower Bomb, 2019a, p.2). As such, the distro offers a space of anonymous exchange for individuals to share and develop a self-consciously nihilistic critique of Modern civilisation and its implications for practice. Largely utilising pseudonyms—though some are comfortable using their own names—authors are able upload pdf zines they have written and designed to the website. Accessing these pdfs is not subject to any formal mechanism of membership and, therefore, no prohibitive or monitoring mechanisms, enabling them to be downloaded, printed, and distributed anonymously, anywhere in the world. In this sense, there are no means whereby it is necessary to mark out the interlocutors as occupying a certain space, subjectivity, or role within "the world" and a shared, positive horizon of meaning. Pseudonymous zine-makers such as 'Flower Bomb' and 'Archegonos' could be anybody, multiple anybodies, even. As Flower Bomb summarises, "nihilist individuals send smoke signals of sabotage in solidarity with others who embrace the night like a balaclava. With destruction, these individuals constellate an informal network of feral revolt" (2019b, p. 4).

This informal and anonymous structure of communication reflects a shared commitment to the critique of both the Modern world and its various figurations of the human as irredeemable, such that the negative is rendered as an absolute principle. As we shall see, evading relation in the positive form of identity is a necessary part of evading incorporation or recuperating the Modern world's horizons (Arechegonos, 2017; Escalante, 2017; Flower Bomb, 2019a; Langer, 2019; Anonymous, 2018). Here, there are obvious parallels with Colebrook's account of "a force of destruction or dis-unification that is single only in its lack of quality or distinction" (2016, p. 121).

In this vein, Flower Bomb articulates their project of queer nihilism as a pursuit of "pure negation… wild and ferocious against the social standardization of gender and industrial control" (2019a, p. 2). Because "gender is embedded in every fabric of this industrial, civilized society, [Flower Bomb can] find no hope in salvaging any part of it- only joy in every second of its calculated demise" (ibid., p.4). Thus, in Flower Bomb's account queerness could never be a positive project, which would return it to the omnipresent mesh of industrial society. In this account, the positive can only "occupy space in the courtyard of capitalism," compromising "the integrity of… rebellion" (ibid., p. 5). As Flower Bomb argues, the "transforming of 'queer' into another rigid, social identity by capitalism and liberalism is one of many examples" of a more general phenomenon of recuperation (ibid.). Indeed, this mirrors Colebrook's own critique of queer ecology outlined above, which gives queerness positive form as foundational to the existent world of horizons and meanings, rendering it as one more feature of this world, thus recuperating the world as an ever capacious and, therefore, redeemable unity. It is this risk, carried by appearing in a positive sense as a definable and therefore assimilable 'something', that means Flower Bomb's account of the queer must remain a pure, negative force in resistance to the world and its patterns of normalisation. This reflects Colebrook's own albeit theoretical intervention, by which the queer cannot exist within this world and thus constitutes and absolute point of resistance to its theoretical and material coordinates.

In Flower Bomb's account, gender is only one part of a system of domination through domestication that is co-extensive with the requirements for industrial society—or "the machine" (Flower Bomb, 2021, p. 2, p. 4)—to control and domesticate nonhuman life in ways that are responsible for a "wide range of eco-destructive and domesticating disasters" (2019c, p. 1; 2021, p. 4). An anonymous zine argues from a proximate position that "the ideologemes of progress and modernization" are achievements on a cultural and material level that "are inextricably connected with the needs of domination" (Anonymous, 2018, p. 4), understood as a phenomenon that extends beyond social positions and into the exploitation of the earth and of nonhuman animals. Similarly, Archegonos argues against a 'we' that is given an uncritical general status that is tantamount to the prison of "modern and putrid technological society… of democracy and civil rights (another circus and theatrical performance) and of the heavy and endless chain of normality that sucks your soul every day more" (2017, pp. 2-3). As such, Archegonos has cultivated not 'misanthropy' understood as general hatred for humans, but "hatred of humanity as the kingdom that rules the earth and all living things" (ibid., p. 3). That is, it is the figures of humanity generated through the Modern, civilisational coordinates of intelligibility that are in the firing line. In Archegonos' account, this is because the 'we' of civilisation "parasitize on the real wild physical world and over all beings" (ibid.).

But if it is *this* world that is the substantial object of critique, nonetheless, built into the shared terrain of anarcho-nihilism is a rejection of a 'future' predicated upon a putatively 'left' project that would be able to recuperate and rework elements of the Modern world into a new and better one. Flower Bomb explains that this position is rooted in a "realistic assessment of the world [they] currently live in" and that "this shit world in which [they] currently exist is the only world [they] are going to see" (2019b, p. 8). There is no better world on the horizon and no movement or uprising free of the coordinates of industrial society such that it "wouldn't impose another Authoritarian regime in place of the current one" (ibid.). The consequence for thought and practice is negation expressed in terms of destruction without subtraction. As Flower Bomb summarises: "it is not the leftist politics of demanding and 'building a better world'" but a "nihilist negation to all systems that attempt to subordinate" (2019a, p. 4).

Archegonos takes a similar position, resisting "any future fantasy or better mass society" (2017, p. 3), because they are founded on the same destructive but "well-hidden ghosts, chains, and ideologies" of civilisation and anthropocentrism (ibid., p. 4). Recognising this destructive kernel underlying the collective organisation of human and world, Archegonos instead favours a practice of "total liberation" (ibid., p. 3). Without a horizon for future possibilities, this conception of liberation reflects Flower Bomb's position framed in terms of destructive negation without subtraction. The terrain of politics—with its attendant concerns with how the world might be organised or reorganised—must be abandoned to an "anti-politics" (ibid), which could be "nothing less than aggressive and in total conflict with the existent" (ibid., p. 3). This translates to thinking the negative as a destructive practice in the present, contra the hope for a future salvation. Or, as Flower Bomb puts it, "playful insubordination" located "in the here and now" which "renders The Future useless" (2019b, p. 9).

Whilst often provocatively crass in expression, no doubt a result of the texts' functions as (anti)political manifestos and pamphlets, these positions resonate with Colebrook's account of the human as that which emerges through the exclusions that enable the unsustainable exploitation of the inhuman forces that compose the planet (Colebrook, 2016, p. 111-115; 2021,

p. 526). As such, the terrain of action that they manifest is governed by a similar uncoupling of *logos* and *phone*. The Modern coordinates of human and world—a coherent 'we' and the "civilisational" domain of politics proper to it—are not the locus of survival, nor are they fungible concepts that could be reworked into a counter project we could register as "hope for the future" but are, instead, "confronted as a trajectory of wreckage" (Colebrook, 2016, pp. 114-115).

But without the terrain of a 'we' or a 'world' that could be in some way recovered for a positive project, "the compass of this course doesn't have any indicators, nor points of horizon" (Anonymous, 2018, p. 6). Those who pursue it find themselves within the aporia of nihilism, caught between the demand to destroy this world and the absence of possibilities for a new one. Consequently, the terrain of action for intensive negativity is stark. Against the ordered 'we' of civilisation and the promise of a redeemed or recuperated future, Flower Bomb posits its necessary inverse, described as "feral insurgency," a strategy of "immediate attack rooted in an individualist unrestrained desire for freedom" (2019a, p. 2). In other words, a terrain without a world and its horizon is a terrain of paroxysmal attack (see also; Archegonos, 2017, p. 6; Langer, 2021; Anonymous, 2018).

There are two key aspects to action here. Firstly, these attacks take a "clandestine" nature (Flower Bomb, 2019b, p. 2; 2019d, p. 3; Langer, 2021, p. 8; Warzone Distro, 2022), manifesting in forms of sabotage and transgression that leave their trace in destruction but do not belong or cannot be attributed to a subject in its positive sense. Flower Bomb points to "the rubble of burned down slaughterhouses, the cartloads of retail theft, the spontaneous attacks against fascism" (2019d, p. 5) as the marks of freedom "in the total abandonment of positive politics" (ibid.). These acts carve out gaps in the injustices of the world that they do not fill. The exclusion and exploitation of the nonhuman animal, the property rights that separate those who move through the world with ease from those who don't, and the authoritarian biopolitics that order the world through heteropatriarchal racism become the objects of destruction. But the agents of these attacks flee the scene, leaving no sign of a subject who stands "for" something that could fill that vacated space. Instead, there is simply the trace markings of destruction. On both a material and theoretical level, this clandestine component is a necessity to avoid capture, either within the regimes of law and order that would process and confine the transgressive body or within the horizon of meanings that might tame and settle the meaning of the subject and the act, such that they may become no trouble at all.

Secondly and relatedly, against the theoretical construction of a counter-'we', there is an embrace found in the immediacy of the individual body and the individual act. At least this is the account given when zine-makers talk about the resources for acting. For example, Julian Langer affirms his individual capacities of "becoming animal" and the "sensually immediatist experience of being in [their] body. [Their] power is located in the flesh that [they are]" (2019, p. 1), which exceeds and must remain in excess of any social form. Similarly, Flower Bomb grounds their practice in "a sense of feral becoming" (2021, p. 1), that they elaborate as "personal refusal", fuelled by "the flame of egoist desire towards an explosion of life" (ibid., p. 6). As such, 'becoming animal' and 'feral becoming' operate as resources for agency, attempting to circumvent the mediations of the sociality of representations in the Modern world—the world-for-us—and their normalising powers.

Colebrook's geological sublime invokes the noumenal world-in-itself—the *phone* as pure and indecipherable *phone*—as a force that comes from outside of the human in order to indict the meanings and becomings of the world-for-us. By contrast, the anarcho-nihilist account of becoming feral/animal takes a different route to the noumenal, roughly analogous to Schopenhauer's method of going within (2010 [1819]). In Schopenhauer's account, human consciousness is "completely mediated" by the individual "body whose affections… are the starting point for understanding as it intuits this world" (ibid., p. 124). As he suggests, "with the exception of my body, I know only one side of things, that of representation: the inner essence of things is closed to me and remains a deep mystery" (ibid., p. 150). The body, then, is at the hinge between what I have been calling *logos* and *phone,* and, in Schopenhauer's account it gives us insight into a world-in-itself that is otherwise inaccessible to thought.

Firstly, this is because we have a conscious connection to our body in that when we are motivated to act, the body carries out that action. At this level we have access to our will as an object of reasoning, intelligible in the world-for-us as rational or necessary under specific socio-historical coordinates, at "this time, in this place, on this matter" (ibid., p. 188). Secondly, we can register a will outside of consciousness at work in our own bodies, where the "will often acts blindly… in all our bodily functions that are not guided by cognition, in all the body's vital and vegetative processes, digestion, circulation of the blood, secretion, growth, reproduction" (ibid., p. 140). As Schopenhauer goes on to argue, because we can find these expressions within ourselves, we can perceive this same blind and unconscious force expressed in those same functions in the animal kingdom and in plants, even in the lawlike forces of inorganic nature (ibid., pp. 139-144). Of course, these wills are also phenomenal and can be made intelligible in their particular spatial, temporal, and material coordinates as corresponding to some kind of reason. But if we move a level deeper beneath these phenomena— from the expression of will in these concrete circumstances to willing per se—we find no reason, no ground, no causation beyond recourse to those circumstances for the fact of willing in general. There is always a remainder of the forces themselves with “occult qualities” that exceeds any explanation (ibid., p. 147). For Schopenhauer, this suggests that beneath the phenomenal is nothing but this remainder understood as will, a “blind impulse, a dark, dull driving” utterly indifferent to its expressed and expressive forms (ibid., p. 174).

But this indifference means that will is not a positive and unitary force which unfolds and holds together a rational and teleological world that, in turn, undergirds the Modern desire to hold a world together. Any appearance of rationality in the universe is secondary to a dynamic of struggle for expression from a will that is “internally ruptured” and therefore self-conflictual in its assertions as concrete or objectified form (ibid., p. 172). Schopenhauer gives a series of examples of will as expressed in organic life, wherein the will is self-negating as a necessary precondition of its assertion; the parasitic wasps, whose larva depend on the consumption of its host, or the bulldog ant that when separated in two, goes to war with itself, head and tail attacking one another, are to name but a few (ibid; Thacker, 2017, p. 312). Thus, as Thacker summarises, in Schopenhauer’s account of the will, it is a “negative flow… [that] asserts itself through contradictions, oppositions, and subtractions” (ibid.). For clarity’s sake, this account of subtraction isn’t the same as that conceptualised by Badiou, instead it is that which is lost in the struggles of expression like in the example of the host body consumed by parasitic larva. The will, rather than its representation, can be traced not in some principal that holds everything together, but in those moments when it becomes apparent that what is common to all as the essence of the world-in-itself (the will) doesn’t necessarily hold together at all. As Thacker suggests, this leads Schopenhauer to a position of “cosmic pessimism” (ibid., p. 313), which Thacker would summarise elsewhere as “pessimism about the necessity and possibility of order” (2015, p. 12). The pessimism that disarticulates sound from sense or *logos* from *phone.*

Here, I want to suggest that the anarcho-nihilist mobilisation of terms like ‘becoming animal’ or of ‘feral becoming’ describe analogous if not obviously problematic attempts to access and mobilise the individual body as a node of this general, noumenal will, a will that is fractured form itself and so cannot be contained by the socio-historically constituted coordinates of the world-for-us and attempts to submit it to the rationality of Modern civilisation, or what Archegonos describes as the anthropocentric “kingdom that rules the earth and all living things" (2017, p. 3). The practices of the body in negation of this order, then, are something akin to cosmic pessimism as an embodied, critical practice. In the first place they act as a critique, wherein the transgressive willing of the body becomes a site in which it is possible to perceive its domination and subordination as it is held within the instrumental rationality of Modern civilisation. And as practice, they embody the negative force of the will that asserts itself only in contradiction, opposition, and subtraction (in Thacker's sense): a noumenal force outside our world of representation marshalled to transgress and negate its rationalities; a willing or striving that exceeds and undoes the moorings of reason and representation that otherwise mark the shared world-for-us; moments of paroxysmal attack against a world of *logos* that is hopelessly misaligned with the "infinite chaos" of the world-in-itself, precisely because of its propensity to *hold together a world* (for-us) in contradistinction to it (Archegonos, 2017, p. 6; Anonymous, 2018, pp. 5-6).

But if the body becomes a point of access for an agency outside the bounds of this world-for-us, it is worth reiterating that its negative force is, nonetheless, absent a subtractive component (this time meant in Badiou's terms). Subtraction—as Badiou has it—opens out onto forms of (re)composition, which would return the bearers of this will-as-negation to a state of existence within a shared world-for-us and its rationalities, where it would be submitted to processes of intelligibility-making by which it could be absorbed or excluded in order to recuperate the tendencies and logics of domination found in Modern civilisation and its modes of holding together a world (Flower Bomb, 2019, p.5; Escalante, 2017, pp. 1-2). It is thus only in constant, reiterative, and destructive negation of *this world* by the individual body that something resembling a will that cannot be reduced to *this world*—the will as noumenal force running through all bodies—could be liberated from its limits. And it is this, in the anarcho-nihilist account, that constitutes the very horizon of liberation under present conditions.

What Colebrook might think of this key line of difference is an open question that cannot hope to be resolved within the parameters of this chapter. Nonetheless, we might focus on what the question of resemblance and difference allows us to see. Despite the differences through which the noumenal is located, I suggest that it performs a similar function as the basis of critique. In both accounts it summons an absolute disjuncture of *logos* and *phone*, between the order we impose in the collective project of assembling the human and the "the multiple, volatile, and infinite forces that operate with blind disregard for human sense and intentionality" (Colebrook, 2016, p. 111). In turn, this disjuncture is used to indict that project from the perspective of what is necessarily excluded in order to make it possible. In both cases, this critique is so total that the horizons of new worlds and possibilities are suspended in a nihilistic aporia of destruction without subtraction. In this sense, the practices of anarcho-nihilists have a weirdly acute fidelity to Colebrook's approach, existing as experiments in living *intensive negativity* as an embodied practice against a world that is hopelessly wrong.

Alternatively, the turn to the capacities of the individual body seems at odds with the geologic sublime as that which allows us to see the world "with *impersonality*" in a way that "would seem to de-activate or paralyze thinking" rather than "quickening… the subject's powers" (Colebrook, 2016, p. 120; emphasis in the original). Indeed, Colebrook wouldn't be alone if she was suspicious of the way the individual willing body so quickly becomes the space of investment for ethical practice, no matter how bleak and limited the horizons it represents are. Nonetheless, if in Colebrook's account we enter the aporia by gaining theoretical distance from 'our' world in order to sever our attachments to it, then in an Anarcho-nihilist account, this aporia can only be sustained as an active practice that does not recede into resignation or recompose a world by taking hold of the body as a site of excesses that cannot exist in this world, which enables practices that can only be expressed as destructive negations. Under the sign of total defeat, it seems as if the last refuge of agency could only be what is summoned by the individual body. Individually co-ordinated events of paroxysmal attack become the only way to avoid passive nihilism in the face of such defeat.

My point here is that if we commit to theories that amount to the closing of both the human and its world, as well as the availability of new ones—where the horizons become destruction, disunification, and fragmentation *tout court*—doesn't the anarcho-nihilist fidelity to that project point us towards the limits of thinking in those terms? If nothing other than a shared practice of destruction holds a force together, is fragmentation into obscurity if not inevitable at least a substantial risk here? And isn't this risk exacerbated by the fact that any practices of active nihilism are haunted by a more ominous—because impotent—passive nihilist demand for resignation hiding and whispering in their shadows? Isn't this precisely why even though Badiou finds a virtue in active nihilism's refusal of this world, he also offers up the concept of subtraction; to begin to approach what comes after destruction? To find worlds emerging in radical political practice that allow us to exit the nihilist aporia, even if only temporarily, and to ask what kind of relations can be constituted in a break with this world?

6.5 Conclusion

Whether thought collectively or in an individualist manner, intensive negativity brings us to the aporic oscillation between active and passive nihilism, and this is certainly a source of ambiguity in Colebrook's thought. On the one hand, Colebrook suggests that the departure from a self that is constituted within this world might align with "a radical politics so necessary for the present, whereby one is able to abandon one's attachments and embrace an existence—a life—that is not one's own" (2021, p. 530), with the implication that through destructive negation we might arrive at a radical politics that would at last be radical and find other forms of living. On the other, she immediately restages theory's complicity and distances it from radical politics by asking whether this is not "far too like Mad Max: Fury Road's Max journeying to the hinterland to find those for whom the world has no value, who will nevertheless magically come into the world to make a future" (ibid.)? If the former statement hints at subtraction, then in the latter statement this becomes a mere ploy to problematically restage or redeem the world, returning us to the aporia.

On the one hand, Colebrook rightly chastises the new materialists for their commitments to *this world* (see Chapter 3), arguing that "if there is anything "new" about new materialism it ought to take the form of desiring something different from the world we have" (ibid., p. 527), with the implication that its theorists should have spent time looking for more radical possibilities beyond the limits of this world. On the other, she follows this by celebrating the destructive tendency within Warren's afro-nihilist theory (2018)—wherein the human and its world are indicted for their reliance upon antiBlackness for their existence—as an annihilation of ontology (Colebrook, 2021, p. 527). It goes unmentioned, but Warren's approach indicts this world and its figuration of the human as so thoroughly closed off to Black being that "there are no solutions to the problem of antiBlackness—there is only endurance" (2018, p. 172). In one statement, we are asked to go beyond this world. But in the other, we are nonetheless consigned to enduring it.

Is it not the case, then, that the perspective of *intensive negativity* becomes the same disenchanted eye that reduces all thought and practice, whether critical or not, to the system of domination itself—to "this same dull round" that sustains the world, as Colebrook puts it (2021, p. 529)—which Rancière takes to task for condemning us to "generalised impotence" (2021 [2009], p. 37)? At the very least, this analysis has demonstrated that this is its risk; even the space of practice I drew out with the case study of the anarcho-nihilists is marked by impotence. And if the narrative that animates this approach are correct—that the epoch of the Anthropocene really does disarticulate *logos* from *phone* in ways that do not warrant or permit attempts to re-articulate them—then every attempt to move toward a radical politics will remain haunted by the whispers of a resignation that deadens its hopes and buckles its trajectories.

And yet, despite this being antithetical to my own project, I must confess that I still find an allure to this negativity. One that I have found myself revisiting across the drafts of this chapter, like when one repeatedly rolls their tongue over an ulcer to check if it still hurts. In darker moments, I think that it is perhaps because I can't shake the feeling that Claire Colebrook, along with figures like Calvin Warren (2018), Jairus Grove (2019), Roy Scranton (2015), and Patricia MacCormack (2021) amongst others tap into a pervasive feeling of impotence in their understanding of the present moment. Nonetheless, I think instead that the allure comes from the fact that there is *still* something of a "radicalism that would at last be radical," as Rancière put it (ibid., p. 36), that continues to secrete itself from within the concept of world-destructive theory even as this potential proves allusive.

But in order for this to take on the political register I am looking for, the nexus of sense, practice, and thought would have to proceed from a different set of presuppositions. Chiefly, that the Modern world-for-us—'this world'—is certainly wrong, but that it isn't walled off from its constitutive exclusions like a tomb in which we are trapped. Instead, it would have to assume that the world "can be cracked open from the inside [and] reconfigured in a different regime of perception and signification" (Rancière, 2021 [2009], p. 49). This would mean that, figuratively speaking, constitutive exclusions run through rather than around bodies, which are therefore both inside and outside of the world. It would suggest that demarcating the boundary between inclusion and exclusion may be powerful, but it is an imprecise science, making space for important slippages and disturbances that open the world to the possibility of dramatic reconfigurations. This would mean that the world was composed of formations that are simultaneously the conditions of the world-as-it-is *and* the conditions of its potential undoing. Far from ungraspable noumena or essence, these excesses would instead have to be thought as a question of sociohistorical particulars and of refiguring the modalities by which particular forms of relation and non-relation are made intelligible. This is not an injunction to return to the inclusive and affirmational pole, but to think specifically about negation as both destruction and subtraction. What exclusions and acts of destruction are necessary under what conditions to make subtractions and their germinal worlds both possible and politically potent? This would mean assuming that it is always possible—even if deeply unlikely—that the injustices of inclusion/exclusion that compose this world can be contested and recomposed.

Of course, this contravenes the account that the Poetic Regime of Pessimism gives of what the Anthropocene is telling us about the relationship between human and world. Instead, for the end of *this* world "to be political rather than just aesthetically mournful [or nihilist], it needs to be ascribed with the… 'drive for justice'" (Zylinska, 2018, p. 61). This would return us to the possibility of Derrida's justice-to-come that Colebrook turns on its head. But it would have to be thought beyond the abstraction of justice as mere possibility on the horizon of an open future. Instead, it would have to be embodied by the struggles of concrete agencies or, as Sophia Chao and Eben Kirksey put it in their introduction to the *Promise of Multispecies Justice*, "in the topos of particular territories, soils, cities, landscapes, bodies, and technologies" (Chao *et al.* 2022, p. 15). As such, this would require theoretical interventions that engage with the negative as a political practice out there in the world that is both destruction and subtraction, opening out on to new possibilities that formulate a new relationship between *logos* and *phone* that could be just. It is to this task that I now turn.

Chapter 07.
The Poetic Regime of Potentiality: Possibilities, Exclusions, and Voids

The vacuum [void] is flush with yearning, bursting with innumerable imaginings of what could be. The quiet cacophony of different frequencies, pitches, tempos, melodies, noises, pentatonic scales, cries, blasts, sirens, sighs, syncopations, quarter tones, allegros, ragas, bebops, hip- hops, whimpers, whines, screams, are threaded through the silence, ready to erupt, but simultaneously crosscut by a disruption, dissipating, dispersing the would-be sound into non/being, an indeterminate symphony of voices.

Barad, 2012, p. 13

The essence of the police lies in a partition of the sensible characterised by the absence of void or supplement… in this matching of functions, places, and ways of being, there is no place for any void. It is this exclusion of what 'is not' that constitutes the police-principle.

Rancière, 2010, p. 36

7.1 Introduction

In the last few chapters, I have explored the poetics of the negative in posthuman theorising. Whilst my approach treated these approaches critically and with some scepticism, nonetheless, I found a destructive element to radical critique that I wish to maintain in what I termed *intensive negativity*. I argued that its orientation to refuse this world served as an antidote to some of the affirmational approaches I explored in the preceding two chapters, which conceded much too much to the unifying and ordering powers of the market, as in the Poetic Regime of Uncertainty (chapter 03), or the state, as in the Poetic Regime of Brutality (chapter 04). At the same time, I questioned the limits of focussing on destruction alone, which I tried to show risks obscuring and even undercutting a terrain of radical political possibility. Towards the end of the last chapter, I drew on the work of both Badiou and Rancière to argue for a supplementary aspect of negation, which Badiou has termed 'subtraction' in order to begin to think about how the destruction of the order of *this world* might open out onto re-composition, where it might be replaced by something new and better.

But thinking about the place of subtraction is not simply a question of returning to Badiou and/or Rancière alone, though towards the end of this chapter I will certainly rely upon Rancière's theorisation of the political to aid in this task. As others have pointed out (Booth and Williams, 2014; Watkin, 2016), neither theorist is particularly attuned to nonhuman agency, and their egalitarian politics is decidedly oriented around the human as the locus of both equality and of political agency. This means that neither taken alone are adequate for thinking about the terms nor the concrete terrain of a more-than-human radical politics. Nor is it simply about stitching an account of subtraction to the forms of destructive critique found in what I have termed intensive negativity. As my analysis tried to show, this form of critique seeks to inoculate itself against the possibility of subtraction, through which this world might be recuperated.

In order to overcome these problems as I see them, then, I want to start from a different entry point, which I am calling the Poetic Regime of Potentiality. In the Poetic Regime of Potentiality, the complexities of the increasingly visible ecological and technological mediations of social life are, on the one hand, inescapably bound to the ravages and injustices of contemporary capitalism (Braidotti, 2022; Haraway, 1988; Stengers 2017). On the other hand, as Braidotti argues, this doesn't consign us to defeat, but demands that we "counteractualize alternatives that are both untimely and necessary" (2022, p. 146). This entails "enacting productive subversions of the status quo" (ibid., p. 147), by recovering and reorienting dominant significations. Of course, it is this recoverability or recuperability that is the object of Colebrook's critique, but I suggest that there are other, more radical possibilities lying latent within these approaches.

In some ways, what I am calling the Poetic Regime of Potentiality has been the structure of critical poetics par excellence since the collapse of the model of revelation that defined early Marxist critiques. In this sense, the procedures of fabricating potentiality move in a similar fashion. Enter a field of knowledge, take its distribution of the sensible—or the terms through which it makes its objects intelligible—and uncouple it from necessity by redistributing its demarcations to show the contingent origins of the terms that compose it and their entwinement with reproducing hierarchies and relations of power (Grünfeld, 2020). Then it is a case of either recuperating the virtual potential of these now denaturalised terms to signify something different or drawing upon a counter-concept that holds together the potentiality for an otherwise

(Braidotti, 2022). In summary, the aesthetic dimension to the *poetics* of potentiality come from demonstrating an excessiveness in relation to the given that gestures at how we might move from the limits and injustices of this world to radically different figurations of both human and world.

The debates over different '-cenes', which are placed in juxtaposition to the 'Anthropocene,' as well as attendant discussions on the dating of this epoch are exemplary of the Poetic Regime of Potentiality. They are animated by a concern with how to signify our present crisis without surrendering the political horizon of possibility to the destructive, universal agent of 'Man' or 'anthropos' implicated in the Anthropocene (Moore, 2015; Bonneuil and Fressoz, 2017; Demos, 2017; Schulz, 2017a; Swyngedouw and Ernstson, 2018; Wilmer and Žukauskaitė, 2023). In these accounts, the narrative force of the Anthropocene depoliticises through the narrative arc of the Anthropos; the story of "the evolution of humans … from hunter gatherers to a global geophysical force" via the aggregation of their collective activities (Steffen *et al.*, 2007, p. 614; quoted in Bonneuil and Fressoz, 2017, p. 65). This obscures or off-stages both the contingencies and important socio-historically produced exclusions that compose the hegemonic figure of the human, the bourgeois, white, male figure of 'Man' as Wynter would argue (2003; McKittrick 2015). The exclusionary particularity of this figure is prematurely reified as universal within a quasi-naturalistic frame that, by dint of this naturalisation, reduces the frame of possibility to its ongoing reproduction (Bonneuil and Fressoz, 2017, pp. 65-96).

Re-narrativising the 'Anthropocene' through terms like the 'Anthrobscene' (Parikka, 2015), the 'Capitalocene' (Demos, 2017; Moore, 2015; Bonneuil and Fressoz, 2017), the 'Plantationocene' (Haraway *et al.*, 2015), the 'Patriarchocene' (Escobar, 2018), the 'Technocene' (Hornborg, 2015), the 'Thermocene' and the 'Thanatocene' (Bonneuil and Fressoz, 2017) are redistributions of the sensible that present otherwise obscured markings of temporality, spatiality, and material configuration. Markings that make those missing contingencies and particularities that compose *this* human and *this* world visible as a denaturalised field of domination, exploitation, and self-destruction. At the same time, each fracture and exclusion that these accounts expose possess the potential to be a political opening for contestation, enabling these theorists to hold open the concept of the human as something that exceeds these particularities and that could, in turn, bear different figurations capable of more just relations with itself and with the planet.

To varying degrees and at various levels of tension, these efforts all draw upon the onto-epistemological work of posthuman relational frameworks, where a similar critical manoeuvre operates at a more systematised level, particularly, as Martín Arboleda points out (2016), in long-standing strains of critical feminist work. For example, in Donna Haraway's *Situated Knowledges*, she turns to difference found in localised, particular, and partial practices of knowledge-making to recover 'objectivity' from what she terms "the conquering gaze from nowhere" and the mask of neutrality through which its traditional uses have (re)produced "militarism, capitalism, colonialism, and male-supremacy" (1988, p. 581). Relatedly, both Vicky Kirby (2011) and Karen Barad (2007) denature the account of 'nature' as simply the given domain by which humans make each other and their world intelligible. In doing so, the boundaries that cleave the human off from the other-than-human are exposed as socio-historically contingent. They are the work of specific, more-than-human, material-discursive operations that are therefore changeable. In turn, this opens these boundaries up to contestation and, therefore, opens up the human to new potentialities for refiguration.

In other words, figures from this loosely defined critical, feminist posthumanism begin from the premise that at the level of ontology, of what is, "it could be otherwise" (Woolgar and Lezaun, 2013, p. 322), and that this unfolds from re-narrating and differentially constructing relations that straddle the nature/culture binary. These thinkers make an excessive potentiality visible, gesturing towards the possibility of subtraction; that it is possible to recompose relations from this excessive potentiality beyond the relational constitution of 'what is'. It is for this reason that I am not willing to abandon these approaches entirely to intensive negativity.

However, these approaches are still touched by the crisis of political possibility that marks the Anthropocene. Frequently, they are limited in their capacity to explore how this potential might be realised in radical form. In that respect, they both begin and *end* with this gesture towards potentiality. Taking the critiques from the *intensive negative* pole of the Poetic Regime of Pessimism seriously, I suggest that this lack is, in part, constituted through an inability to sufficiently account for the necessity of the negative and, in particular, of forms of political non-relation, understood as exclusion, refusal, and destruction, that are necessary components of radical political practice. In Rosi Braidotti's Spinozist account, for example, she sidesteps the moment of negativity in oppositional politics which she attributes the qualities of 'violence', in order to valorise the positive moment where concepts and bodies find and enact their virtual potential (2022, pp. 146-149). By contrast, it is my contention that the negative holds essential modalities of thought and practice that are required to generate the force by which potentiality can be enacted as a *political* mode of subtraction, in which the virtual potential of bodies, concepts, and practices can be forcefully redistributed. It is only by taking on the negative that potentiality has the force to actualise germinal forms and new trajectories.

Without sufficient attention to the negative, these approaches risk privileging becoming-in-relation over non-relation as the site of creating possibilities. It is this privileging that can undercut the political force of their approaches (Alt, 2018; Culp, 2016; Dekeyser and Jellis, 2020; Ferguson, 2021; Finkenbusch, 2018; Ramírez-D'Oleo, 2023; Schmidt and Koddenbroch, 2019; Stuelke, 2021; Torrent, 2023). For example, in chapter 3, I drew on both Sophie Lewis and Dixa Ramírez-D'Oleo, who noted Haraway's decreasing focus on the necessity of negative—of uncutting and unmaking (Lewis, 2017) and of critique (Ramírez-D'Oleo, 2023, pp. 22-23), respectively—had led her to overlook the risks of entering into affirmational relations with the scientific community and, ultimately, to a deeply troubling deference to a neo-Malthusian logic that can only reinforce the exclusionary bio/necropolitical logic of the state. Nonetheless, I also contend that there is an immanent, untapped negative dimension to some of these approaches that can be put towards radical political ends, but this requires further articulation.

In this chapter, I argue that the work of Karen Barad offers one such approach, and that it can be channelled into an account of destruction and subtraction that is well suited to a posthuman approach to radical politics. In what follows, I draw out this negative potential by focussing on the role of exclusions and the concept of 'void' in Barad's work. This takes the form of a sustained theoretical engagement between Barad and Rancière, where Rancière's conceptions of the 'police', 'politics', aesthetic disruption, and 'wrong' help to place the negative potential of exclusion-making and voids on the terrain of a concrete political struggle, in which the stakes are an egalitarian confrontation with hierarchy. Ultimately this leads to an account of more-than-human politics as a politics of void-making, where the disruptive discursive-material articulation of wrong opens the hierarchical ordering of the police to egalitarian redistributions. This discussion sets the scene for the subsequent, empirically oriented chapter, which demonstrates the utility of this approach in the case study of the Hambach Forest occupation in Germany, a site of radical political reconfiguration.

7.2 Apparatus, Agential Cuts, and Spacetimemattering

In some ways, Barad's approach begins much the same way as other relational frameworks. In their account, the world is composed of a more-than-human plenary of agencies, in which we are always already entangled; “we are part of the world in its on-going intra-activity” (2007, p. 33). ‘Intra-activity’ here is used in opposition to the term interactivity, which takes for granted the notion of separate entities—such as human and nonhuman—that precede specific practices. Instead, the prefix ‘intra’ denotes that we are always already entangled in a fully agentive world, that this agency is distributed across our entanglements, and that it is only through particular and specific material-discursive practices that particular entities, agencies, and capacities emerge as determinate and intelligible (ibid., p. 181). As such, I read intra-actions as *aesthetic* and *poetic* practices, and I mean poetic in Rancière’s sense of a poetics of knowledge as a process of fabrication here (Rancière, 1994; Grünfeld, 2020), through which one indeterminate “part of the world [makes] itself intelligible to another part” and gains determinacy (Barad, 2007, p. 204). These aesthetic practices are part of the fabric of the world itself; “intelligibility is an ontological performance of the world in its ongoing articulation. It is not a human-dependent characteristic but a feature of the world in its differential becoming” (ibid., p. 149). Therefore, intra-actions should be understood as more-than-human, discursive and material productions: intra-actions of discourse, materiality, and sense-making that make different iterations of the world *intelligible, or sensible* to itself (ibid., p. 147).

But intra-actions are not unmediated, they occur under specific socio-historical and material configurations, or through ‘apparatuses.’ To ground their claims, Barad brings together the accounts of apparatus found in the work of quantum physicist Niels Bohr and the social theorists Judith Butler and Michel Foucault (ibid., pp. 97-188). Firstly, they make use of Bohr’s understanding of the apparatus of observation; an apparatus is not merely a neutral set of tools, passively mobilised in order to observe a phenomenon outside of itself. Instead, “an apparatus must be understood as part of what is being described” (ibid., p. 119); it is an active part of the phenomenon; productive of it, rather than merely descriptive, establishing ontic and semantic boundaries that intra-actively shape the phenomena that the apparatus is part of. Barad suggests that preceding the intra-actions of an apparatus is an ontological indeterminacy that is only resolved via the specific intra-actions of phenomena by which its boundaries, including those of the apparatus, become intelligible (ibid., pp. 115-118).

This means that apparatuses-within-phenomena help to shape the terms of intelligibility through which the world is intra-actively disclosed, securing the boundaries by which entities gain concrete form. Barad deploys the term ‘*agential cut*’ to describe this process, which is not simply a relationship of disclosure, but, as the term ‘cut’ implies, a material practice of marking, where “what matters is marked off from that which is excluded from mattering….

Differentiating the intelligible from the unintelligible, the determinate from the indeterminate" (ibid., p. 181). Thus, the term 'agential cut' is used to describe the way in which the ensemble of the apparatus *co-produces* particular realities in this process of inclusion and exclusion. Agential cuts mark the material, spatial, and temporal, coordinates that "come to matter – in both senses of the word" (ibid., p. 141). That is, agential cuts create the operative field of non/sense or un/intelligibility as a process of '*spacetimemattering'* (ibid., pp. 223-246; 2014). This means that they delimit particular identities-in-relation as well as the boundaries of space and time that they operate through, enabling and constraining particular capacities for action across intra-acting entanglements. It is these demarcations that distribute agential im/possibilities.

Nonetheless, as Barad points out, Bohr operates in quantum-physicist-mode, delimiting a hard outside to the apparatus. For Bohr, the apparatus ends at the specific material configuration of equipment and the concepts that this apparatus embodies, "ejecting the observer themselves to the outside" (Barad, 2007, p. 145). But for Barad the observer is also part of the dynamic intra-activeness of the world, and so this outside limit will not do. Therefore, Barad draws on Foucault's and Butler's social theorisations of apparatuses and power to incorporate the contingent, socio-historical, discursive, and material constitution of the human observer (ibid., pp. 146-185). That is, if Bohr takes the observer for granted, these social theorists allow Barad to situate the observer in a particular socio-historical situation, themselves the product of "multiple apparatuses of bodily production" (ibid., p. 170) formed in and through a series of socio-historically constituted—that is, discursive-material—power relations (ibid., p. 230). This means that Barad's approach makes us attentive to the socio-historically constituted practices of inclusion *and exclusion* that make particular figurations of the human possible, both as intra-human cleavages, and in the absolute sense of the boundary markers that cleave the human off from its other(s) (ibid., p. 153). As such, the specific constitution of the human and of its gaze(s) are also the products of particular agential cuts.

7.3 Agential Cuts, The Partition of the Sensible, and Rancière's Police

I want to pause the explication of Barad's approach here for a moment to draw out some key resemblances between their framework and Rancière's account of the partition of the sensible. Just as in Barad's account, the focus is on aesthetic fabrication: "a distribution of what is visible and what not, of what can be heard and what cannot" (Rancière, 2010, p. 36). And just as these practices involve acts of inclusion and exclusion by which agential possibilities are configured, Rancière's account of the partition of the sensible is attuned to the way partitioning marks bodies for a particular configuration of social form with practical effects; "on the one hand… that which separates and excludes; on the other… that which allows participation" (ibid.). Moreover, Barad's conception of 'spacetimemattering' as the production of those coordinates that matter in the realisation of particular agential configurations of reality corresponds to Rancière's account of the relationship between the partition of the sensible and the police, in which the coordinates of this partition are the presupposition for "an order of bodies that defines the allocation of ways of doing, ways of being, and ways of saying, and sees that those bodies are assigned by name to a particular place and task" (Rancière, 1999, p. 29).

Whilst we are still far from elaborating a Poetic Regime of Radical Politics, I suggest these affinities form the basis of gaining a specific kind of politicised and aesthetic reading of capitalist Modernity as a particular mode of spacetimemattering through the sensible partitions of the nature/culture binary. Firstly, I believe Rancière adds a more concrete and politically attuned sense in which agential cuts contribute to producing a social order: *the police*. The concept of the police gives name to those agential cuts by which hierarchies are organised in the distribution that cleaves the fully human as a speaking being capable of *logos* from lesser beings only capable of *phônê*. As Rancière put it, "Politics for me has always played out around these questions: are these humans true humans, do they belong to humanity, or are they half-human or falsely human?" (2016, p. 162). The police order is thus an *archē* of the human that "puts bodies in their place and their role according to their "properties," according to their name or their lack of a name, the "logical" or "phonic" nature of the sounds that come out of their mouths… it gives to each the part that is his due according to the evidence of what he is" (1999, p. 27). In short, the police order is composed of those apparatuses that, via practices of agential cutting, make the human differentially intelligible as a series of *naturalised* (in)capacities for thought, speech, and action, by which they are allocated to their 'proper' place within the police's hierarchies as lesser beings of humanity beneath the fully agentive human.

These positions are 'naturalised' in the sense that the stability of the police order is dependent on the correlation between sense and being, or that the intelligibility of beings in this hierarchy is the 'naturalised' disclosure of where they belong. They are where they are because they lack the capacities of reason that would locate them somewhere else. As such, the stability of a police order demands a necessary correspondence between its account of bodies and their place in its distribution, a fullness or completeness: "in this matching of functions, places, and ways of being, there is no place for any void. It is this exclusion of what 'is not' that constitutes the police-principle…" (ibid.). For the police there can be simply nothing beyond its ordering principles and practices. As such, if agential cuts produce a particular configuration of agential possibilities, the apparatuses of cutting are those which organise a police order.

Secondly, Barad allows us to contest the a priori boundary within Rancière's thought that, in Cartesian style, locates the human as the locus of 'speaking being,' whilst, as Iwona Janicka puts it, he "petrifies" the other-than-human "in their position of no logos, of eternal (and eternally unintelligible) noise" (2020, p. 4). In Rancière's account, other-than-humans "will never be able to exit this state; as such, they serve as the ultimate limit against which human beings can define themselves" (ibid.). As Levi Bryant argues, such an a priori is at odds with a political philosophy in which "the site of politics or speech is *contested* such that it is marked by the appearance of a part that, from the stand-point of [the police order], is *incapable* of speaking yet still manages to speak" (ibid., p. 26). That is, if politics comes from the forceful intrusion of an unaccounted-for speaking being, is Rancière entitled to naturalise the human body as the absolute boundary of speaking being beyond which nothing can?

Kate Booth and Stewart Williams point out that there are moments within Rancière's thought where this is less clear cut (2014). They note that Rancière suggests:

> Everything speaks, everything has a meaning, to the degree that every speech production is assignable to the legitimate expression of a place: the earth that shapes men, the sea on which their exchanges take place, the everyday objects in which their relations can be read, the stone that retains their imprint (Rancière, 1994, p. 65; quoted in Booth and Williams, 2014, p. 190).

In this sense, Rancière is willing to accept a more-than-human set of coordinates of intelligibility, more so than he is often given credit for (Bennett, 2010; Janicka, 2020). Nonetheless, this account is very one-sided, only granting the other-than-human the capacity to contribute to the field of *logos* by which humans articulate themselves and are articulated, rather than disclosing something about the world beyond the human domain. Reading this with Barad's commitment to the world as a dynamic discursive-material performance of intelligibility, through which "part of the world [makes] itself intelligible to another part" (Barad, 2007, p. 204), means rethinking what it means to speak and what a speaking subject consists of. In short, it allows us to push this aspect of Rancière's thought a bit further in order to avoid reducing other-than-human intelligibility to the rather instrumental account of objects-for-us.

As Barad reminds us "[m]eaning is not a property of individual words or groups of words but an ongoing performance of the world in its differential dance of intelligibility and unintelligibility" (ibid., p. 149). Therefore, intelligibility-making "is *not* a human dependent characteristic but a feature of the world in its differential becoming" (2007, p.149; emphasis added). The human as a speaking agent is always thoroughly entangled with, inseparable from, and co-constitutive of a wider configuration of materiality that encompasses a broad array of bodies and modes of intelligibility that exist beyond the domain of *logos*. For example, in Merlin Sheldrake's entangled account of fungi, he notes that "plants only made it out of the water 500 million years ago because of their collaboration with fungi, which served as their root system for tens of millions of years" (2020, p. 4). What is this if not other-than-human materiality in a process of translation, sense-making, and mutual articulation by which shared capacities are engendered and mobilised? In a more political tenor, what marks the advent of the Anthropocene more than the need to engage with what the other-than-human agencies that compose phenomena like climate, change, mass extinction, pandemics, and so on might be telling us about our problematic imbrication with other-than-human forms of being and becoming?

Here, Barad allows us to read Rancière's anthropocentric account of speech as itself the product of a socio-historically contingent exclusion. Another agential cut that we can add to the partition of the sensible that produces the thresholds of speaking being that constitute the police's hierarchies. The absolute outside which allows the other-than-human to be the object of total domination and instrumental control. At this stage, then, I propose that Barad and Rancière provide a frame for reading the police order of capitalist Modernity as centrally constituted by the nature/culture binary, which should be understood as a continuously operative agential cut that partitions the sensible divisions between speaking being, animal noise, and silence. It cuts the boundaries that demarcate both the hierarchical distinctions of human and less-than-human and the absolute boundary between human and other-than-human.

7.4 The Cartesian Cut and the Police Order of 'Man'

Following Barad, I propose that the agential cut of the nature/culture binary should be read from the socio-historical and discursive-material conditions of its emergence. Therefore, it should be understood explicitly in the Cartesian sense as the division between those possessed of *res cogitans*—or 'good sense' as Descartes called it (2008 [1637])—that inheres a priori in the thinking being of 'Man', and those dispossessed of *res cogitans* to varying degrees and, as such, located within the zone of mere matter or *res extensa*. As such, I name this agential cut the Cartesian Cut. As both Moore (2015) and Negri (2007 [1970]) have noted, this distinction is bound up with Descartes position in "'the offensive vanguard of the Bourgeoisie', that is the social group that emerged from the first wave of mercantile and capitalist developments of the 1400s and 1500s…" (Negri, 2007 [1970], p. 93; Moore, 2015, p. 19-22). The cut is inseparable from an "ideological horizon that [presided] over the conquest of the world by a new class" (2007 [1970], p. 74). If concepts are "specific material arrangements", embodying specific, sociohistorical apparatuses (Barad, 2007, p. 196), then the binary conceptions of 'nature' and 'culture' and 'mind' and 'matter' are embodied by the apparatuses of the universalising Bourgeois project as it emerged from the socio-natural ordering of the Medieval period. As such, these concepts are entwined with the unfolding of a new partition of the sensible and a radical agential break with what had gone before.

In the first place, Descartes' account of *res cogitans* enshrined "the radical integrity of an intellectual power to judge freed from and opposed to the encumbrance of past, unproductive and alienated knowledge" by cutting it off from "mnemonic materiality and habit" (Negri, 2007 [1970], p. 104). As such, it cleaved the capacity of the intellect from the terrain of historical discursive-matterings it emerged from and wanted to escape; "the fetters of metaphysical subjugation that the medieval world had imposed" (ibid., p. 54). This constituted the "self-grounding and self-determination" of the Bourgeois subject as an autonomous subject in a break with the conceptions of space, time, and matter of the Medieval period (ibid.). In effect, this meant that the Cartesian subject was constituted as both *a priori* and *sui potential.* From this perspective, Descartes' critical method of reason constituted "a sort of heroic, originary ingenuity" (Negri, 2010 [1970] p. 60), by which the world could be made intelligible as *res extensa*; matter that is divisible into discrete objects and mathematically calculable (Elden, 2005, p. 12; Moore, 2015, p. 11). If Barad demonstrates that Bohr saw the observer as fundamentally outside of the apparatus, this boundary emerged from enshrining Bourgeois 'Man' as a transcendental agency.

Thus, Descartes created a direct correlation between the interior rationality of the Bourgeois mind and the innate rationalisability of the external, material world, which could be apprehended and organised through the symbolic practice of mathematics. The inauguration of spacetime as the expansive unfolding of bourgeois 'Man' began as the emerging bourgeois class took on the façade of a universal, naturalised, and therefore universalising model of cognition, seemingly able to unveil the "internal armature of the world" in the geometric calculation of space (Negri, 2010 [1970] p. 68). As Negri demonstrates, Descartes' method was intended to be a practical system through which 'Man' could exert control over nature, now rendered as a continuum of malleable, interchangeable, and rationalisable matter, where the equivalence of metrics enabled translations through which the world could be measured and manipulated with precision. Thus, this abstract and 'universal' way of getting to the purported 'armature' of the material world is mediative, working "between scientific knowledge and technical practice, understood as the science of the possession of the world" (ibid., p. 71).

At the same time, Moore argues that the broader set of 'metrical revolutions' that Descartes' philosophical interventions were part of are inseparable from the development of the capitalist conception of value as the frame through which human activity was organised (2015, pp. 61-88; see also Kula, 1986). In this respect, the sensible demarcation of the earth as *res extensa* helped to bridge two meanings of possession via the calculation of value; both the ability to cut and control matter, through which it appears as objects of utility, and the capacity to generate specifically economic value from it as objects of legal ownership and exchange, or as commodities. Thus, mathematics became the *lingua franca* through which matter could be made intelligible as measurable utility *and* 'translated' into capitalist value and instrumentalised accordingly. As such the Cartesian cut is central to the establishment of *Bourgeois Reason*. It configures 'nature' or the material world a 'part' only insomuch as it is an abstract, commodifiable substrate that continues to feed surplus value accumulation (Rekret, 2019, p. 86). And it is this continual reproduction of purported correlation between the sense of nature as inert or mechanical matter and its being that is at the heart of ecocide.

The Cartesian cut also contributed to organising the differentiations and exclusions of the human by which 'Man's' imperative to 'possess the world' could function. Federici has argued that Descartes' version of the nature/culture binary—the mind/matter dualism—contributed to the "emerging capitalist science of work" where the body, understood as part of the domain of *res extensa* (extension, matter), "joins a continuum of clock-like matter that the unfettered will can now contemplate as an object of its domination" (2004, pp. 138-140). As Wynter argues (1992, pp 65-67), this gained differentiating force through the lens of property as formalised in the philosophy of Locke, where the bourgeois horizon of knowledge as 'possessing the world' already present in Descartes' thought became the index for assessing the capacity to reason itself in the conception of property-ownership (see also, Balibar, 2013; Harney and Moten, 2021, pp. 13-36; Rekret, 2016; 2018).

On the one hand, the mind of 'Man' appeared to possess 'natural reason' precisely because it had disposed itself towards cutting and possessing parcels of 'nature' as private property. On the other hand, those that did not own any of the earth were made intelligible as self-evidently less capable of the requisite reason. The shared propertyless-ness and aesthetic-scientific differentiations of class, race, and gender became indices of reason/unreason in the order of ‘Man’ and his imperative to master the mere matter of ‘Nature’ (Clover and Spahr, 2017; Federici, 2004; Sacks, 2020; Wynter, 1992; 2003). This permitted the accumulation of bodies and ecologies within *a hierarchical order of reason* that worked from the fully human subject of ‘Man’ through the infantalised and animalised body to the ‘mere’ mechanical matter or object of the reasonless body. An axis of reason that distinguished the self-possessed and possessing from those who could be dispossessed and incorporated into complex and hierarchical regimes of labour and exclusion (Federici, 2004; Harney and Moten, 2021, pp. 13-36; Rekret, 2019; Wynter, 1992).

Though historical struggles have shifted the terrain of these cuts, nonetheless, many have shown that the material dispossession and labour subjugation of those ‘dispossessed’ of Reason is not strictly an historical event, but an always ongoing dynamic immanent to capital’s expansive, reiterative and ecocidal drive to commodification (Battacharya, 2018; Harvey, 2004; Das, 2017; Moore, 2022a). In sum, the nature/culture binary is implicated in the Anthropocene as the partition of the sensible that produces domination and subjugation for all those beings and becomings pulled through apparatuses that exclude them from full humanity, whilst those few belonging to the domain of ‘Man’ proper enjoy the benefits of a world organised around their purported capacity for reason, whilst they are able to insulate themselves from the effects of this reason’s unreasonableness.

7.5 Thinking Politics from Exclusions

If this analysis demonstrates that the ‘positivised’ form of this order is premised on the negative force of violently excluding so many forms of speech and agency, it also implies that practices of destruction are necessary to sweep it away. In chapter 6, I problematised the total focus on destructive negativity as withholding an engagement with radical possibilities. Here, I argue that Barad’s approach allows us to begin to think about a radical politics that engages the negative as both destruction *and* subtraction, or the agentive capacities of being and becoming that are enabled once ‘freed’ from the domination and subjugation of the police order.

The excessiveness of reality to the spacetimematterings that are produced in specific apparatuses is key here. The very necessity of exclusions “foreclose the possibility of determinism, providing the conditions for an open future” (Barad, 2007, p. 214). Apparatuses have to work hard to discipline the bodies that they ‘matter’, requiring ‘reiterative practices’ to continually induce the configuration of inclusion/exclusion (ibid; Butler, 1993). Barad, quoting Butler suggests that "this reiteration is a necessary sign that materialization is never quite complete, that bodies never quite comply with the norms by which their materialisation is impelled" (ibid., quoting Butler, 1993, p. 2). This means that if socio-historically contingent exclusion-making is both a principle at the heart of material reality and a practice that is never quite complete, the cuts that demarcate inclusions and exclusions could always be reworked along with the constraints that they impose. As such "agency is the space of possibilities entailed in exclusions" (ibid., p. 189). That is, the excluded excess contains within it a virtual potential that can transgress the constraints that an apparatus places on what has been materialised, and the power relations that these spacetimematterings embody. Materialisations are, therefore, "not once and for all" (ibid., p. 181), there are moments when a transgressive something can force thought and practice.

Just as Foucault argued that excess is transgressive and therefore holds the potential for political resistance (Foucault 1996 [1977]; Pickett, 1996), so too Barad tantalises us with the suggestion that this excessiveness—the virtual potentiality that surrounds all realised forms—opens up "possibilities for reworking the apparatuses of bodily production, including but not limited to acts of subversion, resistance, opposition, and revolution" in a way that operates beyond the human/other-than-human binary, which, as we established, is itself the production of those apparatuses of 'Man' and the Cartesian cut (Barad, 2007, p. 218). At the ontological level, then, there is not just the possibility to view how "things could have been otherwise" (Hollin *et al.,* 2017, p. 938), but an opening to see how things—human and other-than-human—could always be *made* otherwise, including how we mark the very distinction between the two. By this, I mean that there is an opening for a radical and transformative politics that works against ecologically destructive power relations, because the very boundary articulation of human and nonhuman is not foreclosed. As Barad puts it, "human bodies, like all other bodies, are not entities with inherent boundaries and properties but phenomena that acquire specific boundaries and properties through the open-ended dynamics of intra-activity" (Barad, 2007, p. 172). This means that how or if we make the cuts that mark intra-human and extra-human differences can become the focal point for contestation and radical transformation, at least in principle.

The significance of an unruly, excluded excess for my theoretical engagements has perhaps already become apparent in its resonances with Rancière's concept of the *part of no part*. This will become one aspect from which I will turn the gesture of potentiality into an engagement with radical politics as the chapter unfolds. However, for now I want to stay with Barad for a little longer. What I want to suggest at this point is that Barad's account of exclusion is well oriented to thinking about the relationship between negativity and potentiality as a posthuman, political affair. They introduce a politically charged—though under-developed—negativity. Firstly, as a site of limitation or constraint in terms of what is realised, intelligible, and therefore determined as possible in any given spacetimemattering, in contradistinction to the array of potentialities that have been excluded as unintelligible in order to produce realised forms. Secondly, because the negative of exclusion is at least partly a socio-historically contingent product, it is a potential site of political contestation over that distribution of inclusion and exclusion, over the intelligibilities that matter in materialising realities, and, ultimately, over the horizon of possibility and impossibility (Giraud, 2019, pp. 172-174). Thirdly, the emphasis on exclusion as a fundamental component of *all* processes of spacetimemattering also means that it is not simply a case of reading a given state of affairs for its socio-historically constituted exclusions in order to make an appeal for their inclusion, which would simply reproduce the liberal discourse of plurality under capitalism that we touched upon in chapter 5. As Barad notes, solutions are not simply additive (2012b), but require a rearticulation of inclusionary *and* exclusionary cuts.

Nonetheless, the political import of these insights is often neglected within Barad's own work. Paul Rekret notes that Barad's practical engagement with political practices is often absent, cleaving broader questions of social struggles from the technological apparatuses under study, rendering solutions as "one technocratically determined practice amongst others" (Rekret 2016, p. 240). As others have argued, the detachable nature of politics from Barad's account means that critical questions of negativity, exclusion, and non-relation are often sidestepped by those that have taken up their work (Hollin *et al.*, 2017, pp. 936-937; Harris and Ashcraft, 2023).

Perhaps part of the problem is that Barad's own position pays increased attention to inclusion and affirmation over exclusion and negation (Wilson, 2018), despite their purported commitments to both. This problem is well demonstrated in Barad's stance towards critique. In an interview, they argued:

> I am not interested in critique… Critique is all too often not a deconstructive practice, that is, a practice of reading for the constitutive exclusions of those ideas we cannot do without, but a destructive practice meant to dismiss, to turn aside, to put someone or something down" (Barad, 2012b)

That is, radical critique is read in the same manner as in Latour and Bennett's accounts (Latour 2004b; Bennett, 2010 p.), as a force too brute, dismissive, and clunky to appropriately apprehend the complexities of the world (Dekeyser and Jellis, 2020, pp. 318-319). It is telling, then, that in the passage above the only acceptable form of critique is not negative but a form of deconstruction that reads for what is excluded so that it might be taken account of in matters *we cannot do without.* Baked into this is the necessary assumption that critical reading is for engaging with ideas that must be generative and, on some level, affirmed, rather than those that might need to be robustly rejected. But what about those ideas, practices, and structures that we absolutely must do without, despite their purchase in constructing the relational formations of the world-as-it-is? And even if some ideas must be recovered and reworked, how do we meaningfully separate them from *this* world from which they emerge? From a political perspective, are these not questions of practice that require engagement?

Another issue here is that despite turning the determinism of 'nature' on its head into an optimistic account of potentiality, such optimism is nonetheless the outcome of what Thomas Nail calls a 'naturalistic fallacy' (2023, p. 245), in which the material fact of potentiality often seems as if it could be read straightforwardly as a normative call to action that otherwise side-steps the requisite politics of realising potentiality. This problem is demonstrated most clearly in Barad's ethics of responsibility, by which they seek to turn the facts of indeterminacy and potentiality towards a normative horizon (Barad, 2007, pp. 391-396). From the proposition that we are intra-acting in an entangled world, Barad suggests that we are ontologically engaged responsively and therefore with an ethical responsibility "that precedes the intentionality of consciousness" (ibid., p. 392). Indeed, this 'ethical call' is "written into the very matter of all being and becoming" (ibid., p. 396). As they explain it, "Intra-active practices of engagement not only make the world intelligible in specific ways but also foreclose other patters of mattering… We are accountable for and to… the exclusions that we participate in enacting" (ibid., 394).

But this leaves us with a voluntarist account that is decidedly lacking in detail (Giraud, 2019, p. 7; Lemke, 2021, p. 76; Shotwell, 2016, p. 117). An ontologically determined, consciousness-preceding, and universal state of ethical responsibility is limited by Barad's account of a world that, whilst not foreclosed, is still agentially constrained. Clearly, an 'ethical call' built into our entanglements is not straightforwardly intelligible as a call to radical political activity, nor a call that is necessarily possible for everyone, even if it were intelligible, nor, therefore, does an abstract notion of ethical responsibility translate directly into the practical enactment of a better world (Arboleda, 2016, p. 364; Lemke, 2021, p. Nail, 2023, pp. 245-246; Shotwell, 2016, pp. 117-118). As Nail summarises, "why do we live in a deeply hierarchical and capitalist world" if ethical obligation proceeds from the very fact of entanglement (2023, p. 246)? It might be equally true to say that injustice is just as baked into entanglement as the potentiality for justice. Whilst unruly exclusions might lead to a whole host of outcomes—from reformism to technocracy, from micropolitics to insurrectionary revolution—there is no clarity regarding what processes would lead to each of these outcomes, nor does one process gain any particular privilege over any of the others.

In this light, Giraud's increased attention to exclusion is a welcome intervention. As she argues in the conclusions of *After Entanglement* (2019, pp. 170-182), it is not simply enough to acknowledge or recognise exclusion-making as an inevitable part of relationality, nor to use it as a gesture towards what could be otherwise (ibid., pp. 171-172). Instead, it is necessary to "actively *politicise* exclusions" (ibid., p. 171; emphasis in the original). Significantly, this means thinking about what exclusions are integral to political intervention in order to enable better worlds, absent of ecocidal anthropocentrism and capable of fostering "multispecies flourishing" (ibid., pp. 173-176). From this perspective, we might ask, what sites and spaces require excluding in order to enact better worlds? And what kinds of exclusion prove unruly and productive aspects of this process?

That being said, Giraud's project is similar to Barad's insomuch as it culminates in an account of ethics, albeit this time oriented towards practices of exclusion (ibid.), and it is here that I would want to push Barad's work in an even more political direction. Whilst ethics are certainly an important consideration, and Giraud's contribution helpfully supplements Barad's own account of ethics, I question beginning from the point of ethics and prioritising that over tools to identify and engage with radical politics. Here my concern is that no matter how grounded an ethics is in a concrete terrain, this can be obscured by their capacity to subtend any and all actions, including situations that would perhaps best be designated as apolitical or micropolitical, which don't thoroughly contest the terms of the world-as-it-is.

7.6 Barad and the Void

One way to push the Barad's negativity towards more radical political ends would be to engage with the role of "void" in Barad's more recent work (2012a; 2017; 2019). Through the concept of void, I suggest that Barad is more explicit in their attempts to recover the political role of negativity in transformative practices. In doing so, I argue that they add more clarity to the role of exclusions in attending to matters of justice. Perhaps more significantly, they allow us to bring their approach into productive tension with perspectives from within the Poetic Regime of Pessimism*,* by making it easier to recognise the *necessary* role of both destruction and subtraction in a radical conception of political negativity.

In the first place, Barad's account of the void needs distinguishing from the Newtonian account of void. In the Newtonian account, void is the infinite and continuous 'space' of nothing, which is "very sparsely populated by matter" (Barad, 2017, p. 77). It is thus that "*which literally doesn't matter*", it is simply the frame of action. This means that the void was conceptualised as an absence of properties and, thus, the "absence of energy, work, and change" (ibid.). Drawing on the work of Wynter (2003), O'Brien (2009), and Jacobs and Stewart (2004), Barad argues that this understanding of void gave scientific credence to a certain conception of lands under colonisation as voids waiting for the energy, work, and transformative capacities of the coloniser. As such it helped to justify "colonialist endeavours to make claims on lands that were said to be de-void of persons in possession of culture and reason" (ibid.).

I draw out this first sense of void because it has a certain congruity with Rancière's conception of the police: everything that 'is' is in its proper place, and beyond that there is simply nothing, or "what 'is not'" (Rancière, 2010, p. 36). It is this supposed 'fact' of nothing beyond 'what is'—the sensory self-evidence of an absolute correlation between the police's account and world—that is the ultimate basis for any operation of police legitimation. As Barad suggests, this version of void was embedded in and contributed to those operations specific to the Cartesian cut, in which the void was equated with the colonial space as one "de-void" of reason and property (Barad, 2017, p. 76). It is these resonances across natural science and early colonial knowledge-making that made non-European lands amenable to being 'filled' and set in motion by the possessive, calculative, and instrumentalist gaze of bourgeois 'Man'.

In turn, this understanding of void creates 'voids' understood as the ecocidal destruction licensed by the colonial-Newtonain conception of void, "the entangled material histories of death and dying, all the ravages of untold violence, histories of colonialism, racism, and militarism, and all the attempted erasures that constitute it" (ibid., p. 75). These are voids that come not from disrupting the correlation between capitalist Modernity's account of 'nature' and the bodies that compose it, but from endlessly and expansively reproducing it in the exclusions that permit an absolute correlation between those bodies deemed nonhuman or not fully human and the logic of capitalist (de)valuation that permits their total domination, instrumentalisation, and inevitable destruction (Moore, 2015; 2022b).

By contrast, Barad's account of voids is built from developments in Quantum Fields Theory. They suggest that the principle of ontological indeterminacy means that the absolute emptiness or nothingness of the void or vacuum cannot be assured (2012a, p. 9). To measure nothing would be to introduce an apparatus to the nothing under measurement and obscure the determinacy of nothingness that it might otherwise bring (ibid., pp. 2-7). Importantly, this indeterminacy means that it is not possible to discount the possibility that the void or vacuum itself fluctuates (ibid., p. 9), or, put differently, that it is possible that the vacuum is in a contradictory state of zero energy whilst simultaneously vibrating. To think from this possibility, as Barad does, is to conceptualise the void not as nothing, but as a substrate of virtual particles or "quantised indeterminacies in action" (2017, p. 78), a "dynamism of indeterminacy… flush with yearning, with innumerable possibilities/ imaginings of what was, could be, might yet have been, all coexisting" (ibid.).

This means that what has been excluded from mattering in the creation of finite, realised spacetimematterings is only 'nothing' in the sense that every production of nothingness (exclusion) is the bracketing of an indeterminacy or virtual potential beyond the intelligibility of realised forms. The void is therefore a dynamic of teetering, always on the cusp of presence and of absence, or as Barad puts it in evocatively aesthetic terms that recall Rancière's account of the distribution of the sensible:

> The vacuum is… bursting with innumerable imaginings of what could be. The quiet cacophony of different frequencies, pitches, tempos, melodies, noises, pentatonic scales, cries, blasts, sirens, sighs, syncopations, quarter tones, allegros, ragas, bebops, hip- hops, whimpers, whines, screams, are threaded through the silence, ready to erupt, but simultaneously crosscut by a disruption, dissipating, dispersing the would-be sound into non/being, an indeterminate symphony of voices. (2012a, p. 13)

This takes on a more practical valence when Barad argues that the void, "may in fact be the source of all that is – a womb that births existence" (2017, p. 78). Particles are both made and unmade in the void: putting energy into the void can transform virtual potential into particles, whilst returning particles to the void can unmake particles and emit the excess energy (ibid.). The void as a site of making and *unmaking* spacetimematters—of the flux of virtuality, energy, and matter—is thus the site where potentiality is reconfigured into different realisations of actuality, with their own fields of intelligibility. As Barad suggests, this leaves its mark within all realised forms; the mass of an electron is in part a cloud of virtual particles and therefore composed of “all possible histories of virtual intra-actions with all others” (Barad, 2012a, p. 15). As such, the infinity and nothingness of indeterminacy are both braided though one another and already “reside in every morsel of finitude” (ibid., p.17).

Whilst not all things are possible at any given time, the void is the condition of possibility itself, a site of virtuality that leaves the trace of possibility in all the matters it births and ends, and that is, therefore, a “dynamic of iterative re-opening” in which the potentialities of those matters can be reconfigured and brought into different forms of relation (2017, p. 80). As Barad argues this establishes both an open future and the possibility of reworking relations of responsibility to the other as a fact of material reality, securing the conditions of Derrida’s justice-to-come. As they put it in a later article, “Each bit of matter, each moment of spacetimemattering, is shot through with an infinite set of im/possibilities for reconfiguring worlds and pastfuturespresents… *is matter’s un/doing not the mark of the force of justice that is written into the fabric of the world*?” (Barad, 2019, pp, 543-544; emphasis in the original).

Here I read Barad’s account of the void in dialogue with and against both itself and Colebrook’s account of the necessity of destructive negativity. In this sense, I understand Barad’s account of the void as an evocative way of thinking about the significance of unmaking and radical forms of exclusion without remaining with destruction as the horizon of critical and political practice that we were left with in the intensive negative mode of the Poetic Regime of Pessimism. Rather than seeing destructive negation as the ultimate horizon of an essential separation and misalignment between logos and phone, or from the potentiality-deadening intrusion of a withdrawn, noumenal force, in Barad’s account exclusions are made under particular discursive-material conditions of intelligibility. On this point, Barad refuses the noumenal as a figure of absolute unintelligibility that makes a positive sense of justice unavailable. The relationship between the negative and what is present or positivised is not understood in terms of an essentially withdrawn or inapprehensible materiality and force, but a fact of sociohistorical contingency that can be undone under particular material-discursive productions of negation or indeterminacy in order to be remade. This means that if possibility is present in every bit of materiality, nonetheless possibility is only ‘possible’ insomuch as material reality can be made to (re)touch the void. In short, to change the trajectories of ‘what is’ requires forging negative space, negational practice, and the ‘not-nothingness’ of indeterminacy in order to reopen existing configurations to possibility. It needs practices of what I will call ‘political void-making’.

If, as theorists like Colebrook and Tsing suggest, Modernity enacts exclusions that produce an unjust, hierarchical, and destructive bounding of human and nonhuman, then Barad's conception of the void gives us an account of the relationship between negation and virtuality that can be pushed towards a practical account of how we might radically rework that boundary in order to reach towards justice. Insomuch as it is possible to read the void as a radical state of undoing and indeterminacy, it does begin to look something like the aporia of active nihilism that I identified in the intensive negative mode of the Poetic Regime of Pessimism. Such an aporia could be the site of radical possibility, offering a clear break with the injustices of what has otherwise been realised in the world-as-it-is, but only if it is possible to exit the aporia in order to think about political possibility and a justice-to-come in the form of subtraction too. Significantly, I believe Barad's account of the void offers us this, re-engaging Derrida's sense of aporia with the justice-to-come (Derrida, 1992; 1993). In thinking negativity through the void, destruction becomes a radical process of unmaking through which the actual is re-opened to the virtual potential teetering outside the relational constitution of all realised forms. This enables new processes of agential cutting and bounding, or new forms of relational composition that are new conditions of legibility and possibility. As such, it is "un/doing" rather than simply 'undoing' (Barad, 2019, p. 544).

We can glimpse the stronger role that Barad affords to destructive negation through their conception of void when they propose the necessary task of,

> decomposition, composting, turning over the humus, undoing the notion of the human founded on the poisoned soil of human exceptionalism… to come to terms with the infinite depths of our inhumanity, and out of the resulting devastation, to nourish the infinitely rich ground of possibilities for living and dying otherwise (Barad, 2017, p. 86).

But whilst this at least implies the necessity of radically negating the dominant modalities by which the boundaries of the human are made, Barad's account of the void is largely presented in terms of the destruction and devastation that is imposed by capitalist and colonial relations. Dwelling upon and with "the conditions of im/possibilities of living-dying in voids produced by technoscientific research and development, projects entangled with the military-industrial complex and other forms of colonial conquest" (2017, p. 64).

This focus means that when Barad moves from the quantum realm to social relations, the void is represented as something to be responded to, rather than as an active production of political agency and practice. Whilst I agree that this is an important moment in generating critique, nonetheless, without making account of destructive negation as an active political practice of void-making, potentiality is merely rendered as an abstract possibility in response to violence. This means that Barad's account of the void remains a gesture towards subtraction rather than an account of the concrete, destructive processes through which subtraction could operate politically: Derrida's "justice-to-come" rather than the practical manifestation of justice.

In response, I wish to shift the emphasis of the void to active modalities of critical negation, as found in the intensive negative mode of the Poetic Regime of Pessimism, but to think this in practical terms: how might producing voids be part of an embodied and political practice of critique that carves away at unjust forms of relation and manoeuvres towards relational configurations that could be just? What would an apparatus of 'political void-making' in this way look like? Who is the operator of such an apparatus? How might it interrupt the bodily productions and subjectivations, human and nonhuman, of other apparatuses? How might this break with forms of spacetimemattering engendered by the Cartesian cut, and do so in ways that make it possible to engage new apparatuses of bodily production, new agential cuts, and new forms of spacetimemattering? To return to Barad's aesthetic account of the cacophony of the void, what kinds of sounds can be heard, what kind of bodies can be made to appear, and how might they move us closer towards realising matters of justice? It is here that I think Rancière can help.

7.7 Rancière and the Void

To put more political flesh on the bones of my account of void, of political void-making, and of apparatuses of void-making, I want to turn to Rancière's invocation of void in Thesis 7 of his *Ten Theses on Politics* ,where he notes that, "the essence of the police lies in a partition of the sensible characterised by the absence of void or supplement" (2010, p. 36; emphasis added). As Rancière goes on to say, this intolerance of void emerges directly from the police's demand for a necessary correspondence between sense and being: "in this matching of functions, places, and ways of being, there is no place for any void. It is this exclusion of what 'is not' that constitutes the police-principle…" (ibid.). For Rancière, the "core of the question of politics, then, resides in the interpretation of this void…" (ibid., p. 33). If there is a sense of void that simply refers to 'nothing' and, in turn, this sense of void has offered itself up as an opportunity for the expansion of a colonial police order, then Rancière's account of a void that the police has "no place for" cannot be understood in these terms. In this light, I propose to read void differently, something akin to 'lacking' or 'leftover'. From this perspective, the void is that which lacks an account from within the order of the police. Rather than simply nothing, it is a leftover or unaccounted for 'part', *a part of no part*, the supplement to "every social (ac)count and in exception to every logic of domination" (ibid., p. 34).

If this is the case, then I suggest that it represents a sense of void comparable to Barad's: the indeterminacy of all possibilities always hovering on the edge of non/being, of non/relation, rather than a state of absolute nothingness (Barad, 2012a; 2017). This version of void would explain why it is threatening or intolerable to the police. The police's order relies upon excluding what cannot be made intelligible to its hierarchy-producing principles and on ensuring that those exclusions remain illegible and, therefore, in a state of non-relation, marked as 'no-thing'. It is this control of un/intelligibility as the production of a total correlation between sense and being that allows the police to naturalise its hierarchies. As such, void understood in terms of an unaccounted-for indeterminacy would threaten to undo this specific demand for correlation, upon which the hierarchies of the police order depend. In this light, as I shall demonstrate, a certain reading of Rancière's account orients Barad's possibility-laden concept of 'void' to a practical politics that situates its deconstructive and reconfigurative power within a concrete political struggle, where the stakes explicitly pit hierarchy against equality. Therefore, I propose to read Rancière's account of politics as one of political void-making, governed by disruptive apparatuses of void-making. In Rancière's words, politics is itself a *dispositif* or apparatus of "subjectivation and litigation" capable of subverting the distributions of the police (2010, p. 38; Nash, 1996, p. 173), which means it is a particular set of discursive-material practices that configure a break or fracture with the sensible coordinates of the police.

In the first place, then, Rancière's account of politics should be understood as an apparatus of void-making in the destructive sense of rupturing the police's partition of the sensible. In thesis 8 of Rancière's *Ten Theses on Politics*, he states that the "essential task of politics is the configuration of its own space. It is to make the world of its objects and its subjects seen" (2010, p. 37). As such, politics begins as a break with what—between Barad and Rancière—I will call the 'spacetimemattering of the police order'. As Dikeç argues in his reading of Rancière's emphasis on spatiality (2015), politics emerges with a 'spatial rupture,' or a break with the sensible demarcations of a space and the logics that govern its function (what it is, who or what can appear in it, with what ways of doing and speaking), which opens space for new configurations to emerge.

At the same time, and as Räber argues in his reading of Rancière's engagements with temporality (2023), it is a break with the forms of temporality that are shared in the police order as part of its functioning, or the way conceptions such as 'work time,' 'progressive linear time' and so on "regulate our senses of reality, history and possibility in a too narrow way, regulating the field of what modalities of time are even possible and valuable by excluding or suppressing alternative, plural temporalities" (ibid., p.8). As Rancière would say of his account of emancipatory politics, it invents, "amidst the "normal" course of time another time"; a futurity of emancipation in the here now that is only made possible "to the extent that it hollows out the present" making "gaps which are also grooves" (2017). This means that the rupture of space is simultaneously the marking of a break with the forms of temporality that have come to matter in governing the ordering of the police.

I am going to push on Rancière's account of a process of 'hollowing out gaps' a little here with Barad's account of spacetimemattering, in order to emphasise that Rancière's account of disrupting spatiality, temporality, and sensibility also implies a reconfiguration of materiality. As Barad puts it:

> the world is an open process of mattering through which mattering itself gains meaning and form through the realisation of different agential possibilities. Temporality and spatiality emerge in this processual history (Barad, 2007, p. 141)

Neither space nor time pre-exist or are separate from mattering, they are "phenomenal… they are intra-actively produced in the making of phenomena" (ibid., p. 315). If, as Dikeç argues of Rancière's account of politics, "it implies a disruption of common-sense, of what is commonly made available to the senses and made to make sense" (2015, pp. 14-15), then this is a suspension of the intelligible coordinates through which material configurations have emerged and been regulated, or the phenomenological characteristics of what material, spatial, and temporal distributions have come to matter under specific conditions and histories of enfolding, bounding, and exclusion. That is, the disrupting of space and time, of carving out hollows and preparing space for the appearance of a subject is also necessarily a material production that is generative of the force of disruption. It is only by generating an apparatus that can forcefully hollow out the material arrangements which make certain spacetimes legible that a term like disruption becomes meaningful. As such, *the apparatus of politics is an assemblage that produces the discursive-material force that constitutes a break in existing configurations of spacetimemattering*.

Secondly (but also simultaneously) and put in the words of Barad's account of the void as a "dynamic of iterative re-opening" (2017, p. 80), I mean that Rancière's politics is an apparatus of void-making in a reconfigurative sense. By suspending the existing coordinates of spacetimemattering, a political apparatus radically re-opens those matters configured and ‘closed’ in the ordering of the police to the potentiality of otherwise. It exposes the determinacy-making, correlative logic of policing to a problem of non-correlation, exemplified not simply in the production of the void as a gap in spacetimematter, but as a gap for making an indeterminacy sensible in a particular, litigious way. A political void recuts those sounds and matters dissipated into silence by the apparatuses of the police, making new forms of spacetimematter, speech, and sound intelligible in ways that fundamentally challenge the given nature of ‘what is’ and ‘what could be’. Here*, the unruly exclusions of Barad’s account gain specific political form in Rancière’s thought as a* ‘*part of no part’*. The indeterminacy of the void takes shape as an excluded modality of being that contests the hierarchical police cuts of non/speaking non/being as an unjust miscount, or a ‘wrong’ (Rancière, 1999, pp. 35, 39-42). Thus, void also describes the political subject of ‘wrong’ (*the part of no part*), and void-making names the practices of its articulation.

The articulation of ‘wrong’ is particularly problematic for the police because it disrupts the hierarchical distribution of non/speech and in/capacity, “implementing a basically heterogeneous assumption… an assumption that, at the end of the day, itself demonstrates the sheer contingency of the order, the equality of any speaking being with any other speaking being” (Rancière, 1999 p. 30). As such, to enact the void politically is to produce and demonstrate “a gap in the sensible itself” (Rancière 2010, p. 38): the ‘wrong’ manifest in the gap between the supposed correlation of bodies, capacities, and roles/places of the police order on one side, and the exclusions required to transform the capacity for speech in general into the specific and limited dispositions and in/capacities of those roles on the other. Hence, the forceful and intrusive articulation of ‘wrong’ reintroduces a radical indeterminacy or contingency to what had acquired the status of the ‘essential’ or the ‘natural.’ Fundamentally, then, an apparatus of politics mobilises ‘wrong’ as a conceptual weapon that deploys equality as a negative principle, *voiding* the apparatuses and marks that agentially configure the hierarchy of the police.

This means that, as Rancière puts it in *The Method of Equality*, the agency of the political subject is defined “in subtraction from all the relations that are relations of asymmetry” (2016, p. 124; emphasis added). But this subtraction doesn’t enact an “empty freedom” or freedom as a total absence of relation (1999, pp. 35-36). Instead, it enacts an agential cut as the capacity to generate new and specific forms of connection. Its politicality consists in forcing the void into this world as the basis from which to produce *another world*, “a world of equality” (Rancière, 2017). That is, subtraction enables the composition of an incommensurable and dissensual relation between the concrete practices of equality in and against the orderings of hierarchy. Just as Barad's void touches and is always in some form of relation with extant spacetimematterings that it opens to reconfiguration, so must egalitarian logic—an empty freedom of undifferentiated and equal capacity for speech—be transformed into political logic by meeting the police order in and against its terrain, through the "constitutive function of wrong" (Rancière, 1999, p. 30).

What I suggest here is that the enunciation of 'wrong' is constitutive in the sense that it operates the hinge of negativity. It is the animating force of suspension or destruction (negativity as displacement of pre-existing relations), of the opening of subtraction (the agential cut of political subjectivity in freedom from those relations), and of the affirmational or productive moment where that agential cut is mobilised as the collective capacity of re-configurative intelligibility-making; of egalitarian spacetimemattering in the dissensual conflict over a 'wrong'. As Rancière suggests, the moment of subtraction "opens a field of exploration into the potential within the capacity of anyone" to enact concrete practices through which to redistribute the demarcations of space, time, and matter and to make marks *that inscribe the equality* (2016, p. 124).

Taken together, this process is analogous with and gives a political tenor to Barad's quantum account of the void, where particles can be destroyed in an act that releases their energy and, in turn, energy can be placed into the void to produce new particles. The destruction of one state of affairs provides the space and energy to configure a new one. In this respect, Rancière describes a political subject as an "operator" that:

> redefines a field of experience that gave to each their identity with their lot. It decomposes and recomposes the relationships between the ways of *doing*, of *being*, and of *saying* that define the perceptible organization of the community, between the places where one does one thing and those where one does something else, the capacities associated with this particular doing and those required for another (1999, p. 40).

In doing so, this operator enacts what Rancière terms, in suitably aesthetic language, a paradoxical *mis-en-scène* that brings together the community and the non-community (the world of inequality and the world of equality) in a "scandal" that overturns "legitimate situations of communication, the legitimate parcelling out of worlds and languages" and thus creates the aesthetic conditions to perceptibly declare the "manifestation of justice" in contradistinction to the injustice of the police's hierarchy (ibid., p. 55). As such, politics is an apparatus that turns the "justice-to-come" of the void as an abstract principle of potentiality into the void as a concrete practice of enactment, through which it is possible to suspend the hierarchies of *this world* and to configure a dissensual scene for the manifestation of justice.

But, as I mentioned in Chapter 2, the performances of equality themselves disrupt the police order in such a way that the police must reckon with them administratively. As Rancière puts it:

> A political difference is always on the shore of its own disappearance: the people are always close to sinking into the sea of the population or of the race; the proletariat is always on the verge of being confused with workers defending their interests; the space of a people's public demonstration is always prone to being confused with the merchant's agora and so on (2010, p. 39)

Policing political ruptures is first and foremost an attempt to reclose the sensible gap between itself and the political subject, returning political counter-significations to the terms given in the police's partition of the sensible in order to re-correlate its distribution with the nature of social reality itself.

Despite this, scenes of political dissensus produce "new inscriptions of equality within liberty and a fresh sphere of visibility for further demonstrations" (Rancière, 1999, p. 42). That is, the very meaning of what it means to be equal, free or emancipated—the terms of justice and injustice—that were defined within a police order are reconfigured by the wrong that a political subject announces. With the reconfiguration of these definitions, political performances open up new vistas for further political performances, further claims for equality, and further reconfigurations of the police.

To end this section, I want to summarise and reiterate what I think Rancière's account of politics offers Barad. Firstly, it sets the necessity of exclusion-making and the void within a political terrain, where the stakes are most clearly of hierarchy and its effects. On one side, the police order's hierarchies by which the world-as-it-is dis/functions, and, on the other, the manifestation of the world of equality as the dispute over that hierarchy as a wrong. This refocuses the necessity of the negative that is latent in Barad's account. Bluntly, the announcement of 'wrong' *just is* the announcement that negation is necessary; that these sets of stable relations rely on a premise of exclusion that is, therefore, fundamentally irresolvable from within the terms of those relations. It is not just that the *part of no part* has been excluded and, thus, must be included. It is that *the part of no part* can have no part in the very logics that constitute the world-as-it-is. Thus, they forge a new definition of the whole as an irreconcilably conflictual entity based upon the gap between equality and the necessities of the police order as one that organises hierarchies (Rancière, 1999, p. 39). As such, it is not only what is excluded that is the source of the problem, but what has been included and how.

If Barad pejoratively reduces critique to a ‘dismissive’ or ‘destructive practice’ then, in contrast, the critical faculties produced in a relationship of political subjectivity name a wrong that could only be properly resolved by the negation of the world-as-it-is. This is what it means when Rancière argues the world of equality and the world of inequality (the police) are incommensurables (1999, pp. 39-40). It is only by total negation that political subjects could permanently enact an entirely heterogenous world, the world of equality. That isn’t to say that a political subject necessarily *will* negate the world-as-it-is, for it will always ruck up against the police logic that seeks to administrate the dispute away rather than see its order negated. However, the premise of wrong – the affirmation of a subject that is wronged by the very order of things and the necessity for the negation of the relationship of wrong—provides a radical basis for alternatives in the political construction of tentative-yet-forceful worlds of equality: new worlds, new possibilities, new justices, better futures. As such, it opens a vista for us to re-engage negative critique as a material force operative beyond the academy, out there in the world.

In this sense, Rancière’s account of politics also centres negative acts of decomposition as the necessary basis for any act of recomposition and makes these tasks the objects of a political and aesthetic struggle by which hierarchies can be refused, desedimented, and contested. It gives clear criteria for framing void-making in terms that are political and radical as well as reframing a practical relationship between negation and affirmation. This means that the void is not simply the guarantor of a justice-to-come in an abstract sense, but a resource for enactment in a political apparatus that turns the indeterminacy of the void into a suspension of intelligible hierarchies, which enables new practices of intelligibility-making that reconfigure capacities for speech and for activity in a demonstration of the wrong and injustice of those hierarchies. As such, Rancière’s account of politics moves the abstract notion of voids to an account of political void-making, an ‘un/doing’ manifest in concrete terrains where it becomes possible to realise justice.

7.8 A More-Than-Human Politics of Void-Making

In section 7.3, I argued that Barad’s more-than-human account of intelligibility-making allows us to unpick Rancière’s anthropocentric understanding of the police, where the other-than-human is de facto bracketed from the status of speaking being. Rather than a given boundary, Barad's approach suggests that this is, in itself, part of the police's partition of the sensible. From this formulation, I gave an account of capitalist Modernity as a partition of the sensible made through the Cartesian cut, the agential cut that hierarchises by rendering bodies through sensible difference between reasoned speech, mere noise, and muteness, or between fully human agency, less-than-human deficiency, and other-than-human passivity. Here I suggest that if Rancière offers Barad a concrete political frame to engage the rich potentialities of voids, then Barad offers Rancière a way to think a radical politics of void in more-than-human terms.

In the first place, we can think about political void-making as an activity that destroys and/or suspends the Cartesian cut that separates speaking being from non-speaking being *in general,* in the constructions of the hierarchies that make the police order of 'Man' operative. That is, it is the material construction of a void-space that opens the gap in the police account and the bodies it makes account of, which must do so by genuinely disrupting this cut as it links bodies, spaces, and temporalities in the configuration of surplus-value realisation. In doing so, it negates the difference between bodies as a hierarchical configuration and sets in motion a disidentification with the 'given' boundaries of who and what can produce speech.

Barad allows us to redirect Rancière such that the task becomes to analyse, without enacting a boundary between a mute nonhuman and a speaking human political subject ahead of time, how the void enables a reconfigurative process of fabrication through which a speaking political subject as a *relational assemblage* can be composed. 'Un/doing' becomes the movement that suspends relational configurations and releases bodies' energies from existing spacetimematterings and, secondly, that allows them to be reconfigured towards different ends; put to work manufacturing a world of equality out of the void of equality. This involves a series of material-discursive articulations (that is a series of boundary-making agential cuts and performances) that encompass the spoken and written word, *and also* a plethora of sensory-intelligibility processes that operate—at least potentially—between all manner of bodies in order to enact agential cuts that configure *a collective 'part of no part'* and the intelligibility of relations of *wrong.*

The Cartesian cut produces a particular figure of the human, 'Man', and its peculiar modality of reasoning, Bourgeois Reason, the "good sense… most equally distributed" of things amongst those *considered* men (Descartes, 2008 [1637]; Sacks, 2020). By contrast, a more-than-human politics of void creates a spacetimemattering capable of exposing the exclusions of intelligibility-making, whether those of human voice or of non-human mattering, that are required to produce this 'good sense' as a universal and universalising form. It weaves together an account that exposes the gap between the correlative account of Bourgeois Reason as a model of worldly apprehension—the method that unveils *res extensa* as the internal armature of the world—and the violent and ecologically destructive exclusions that render these spacetimematterings intelligible, making a demonstration of the Cartesian cut as 'wrong.' Setting wrong in motion requires re-cutting the patterns of speech and noise suspended in the balance between non/being and of matter and void into a counter-form of 'good sense;' a good sense that proceeds from *the parts of no part* in the order of Bourgeois Reason, and thus attends to the responsibilities for and to these exclusions as a matter of justice. What would a world have to look like in order to enact intra-human and extra-human relations as relations amongst capacious and equal speaking beings? How can the disruptive spacetimemattering of the void be harnessed in situ to manifest an account of justice through concrete practices of refusal and resistance? What effects can such a performance have on the police order of Bourgeois Man and the Cartesian cut?

An obvious question emerges here; is it possible to think equality and the egalitarian for a collective more-than-human subject in this way? Here I may run up against the objection of Bennett to Rancière's egalitarian logic when it comes to human and nonhuman forms. That is, equality is an achievement that can only be shared by those with "bodies that are most similar" to that of Bennett: other humans (Bennett, 2010, p.104). The uncertainty of radical material-aesthetic alterity that, for Bennett, marks the difference between the human and its other, is simply an insurmountable barrier to thinking "the perfect equality of all actants" (ibid.). That is, equality must conform to some measuring rod of sameness that simply cannot be held up against both the human and the inhuman.

Against this understanding, I first want to echo Rancière's sentiments that equality "is not given, it is processual. And it is not quantitative, it is qualitative" (2017). A *processual* account of equality begins from an assumption of equality that is put to the test through the harnessing of *logos* in a *dissensus.* This moves us away from establishing the determinants of equality ahead of time and to look at the ways in which forms of equality are established in political contestation out there, already occurring: what inscriptions of equality do they rely upon and how are these subverted or distended in order to make a new claim to equality possible? By the same token, a *qualitative* account of equality asks us to suspend sameness and difference as its measuring rod. In this sense, the production-translations of an equality-making process are about the capacities for articulation that are enabled in the contestation of hierarchies, focussing in particular upon the way that these articulations destroy the necessary correlation between the count of the police order and the bodies it counts. Indeed, Barad's robust account of intelligibility-making processes beyond the narrow parameters of human performance destabilises the Cartesian hierarchy of speech from the off and instead asks us to attend to the apparatuses through which beings can become intelligible as part of a speaking collective.

Within this framework, we can ask a series of questions. What egalitarian worlds are made to appear in these moments of political contestation? What agential cuts are enacted to do so? What inscriptions of wrong and of justice do they bring? What measuring rods of equality do these practices of agential cutting invent and negotiate? What practices of emancipation do they engender? What must be affirmed and what must be negated in these practices? What are the limits of these worlds? What kinds of police functions operate within them? What kinds of police functions do they ruck up against? What kinds of police functions are able to impose themselves on these struggles? It is in answering these questions through concrete analysis that it becomes possible to trace the emerging politics of this juncture.

7.9 Conclusion

Across this chapter, I have drawn on Barad's theoretical work in order to demonstrate both the merits and limits of what I have termed the Poetic Regime of Potentiality. This poetic regime is capable of fabricating more-than-human terms by which we can engage an 'otherwise'. In Barad's case, this is subtended by attention to the negative in creating possibilities, understood as the exclusions made in any act of materialisation, which are often unruly and resistant, and as the void, the not-nothing of non/being that opens all matters to the potentiality of reconfiguration. As Barad argues, this makes the possibility of a justice-to-come and the force of justice a latent potential in all matters. Nonetheless, I demonstrated Barad's reluctance to think these terms as part of an account of political negativity and negation by which this force might be realised.

In response, I have overcome this limitation by reading their account of apparatuses, exclusions, and voids through Rancière's account of '*the part of no part*' as the appearance of a 'void' in the police's order, a break in the correlative logic that reduces the world to the 'what is' of parts, places, roles, tasks, and patterns of speech required to make that order functional. This allowed me to develop Barad's account into an account of 'apparatuses of political void-making' that destroy the 'good sense' of Bourgeios Reason—the Cartesian cut that cleaves speaking beings off from mute and manipulable matter in intra- and extra- human hierarchies that make surplus-value realisation possible—and to develop practices and discourses that contest these hierarchies as a ‘wrong.’ This is not simply a negative sense of justice, but in reconfiguring a world of equality as the basis for articulating ‘wrong’ it both creates the conditions of equality within its spacetimemattering and, by forcing its intelligibility into the police order, forces the police to process and address these claims. That is, the marks that political activity make are both negative and positive. On the one hand, this account takes the sense of negativity I wanted to recover from the Poetic Regime of Pessimism and, on the other, it recovers or redeems this negativity as the basis from which to engage with active possibilities for a world that is radically otherwise. As such, I have constituted a ‘Poetic Regime of Radical Politics’.

In the next chapter I will attempt to use the results of this theoretical discussion to read the case study of the Hambach Forest occupation that began in 2012, west of Cologne. I will demonstrate that the occupation constituted an apparatus of political void-making, and that the practices of un/doing that it facilitated were both dramatic and effective ways of producing reconfigurative political agency. This will take the form of a ‘poetics of politics’, a multi-vocal bricolage of narrative, posthuman and political theory, the discourses of the political actors, and the performances that give those discourses force. This approach affirms the powers of negation—destruction and subtraction—as they are practiced in concrete struggles. Rather than a critical dialogue, then, my account posits that locating and circulating accounts of radical critique as they are practiced, and the fledgling worlds they put into play, can make a very modest contribution to redistributing the partition of the sensible that determines the current, post-political horizons of possibility in the Anthropocene.

Chapter 08.
Political Void-Making: Dissensus and Radical Possibility in Hambach Forest

If you want to stop Hambi from being Hambi, you have to cut it, or you have to shut the mine

'Tempest' (Hillencamp, 2021, p. 8)

Perhaps this occupation will create such a place here, a nucleus of a new world in the heart of fossil-nuclear capitalism…

'First Declaration From the Hambach Jungle' (Hambi Bleibt! 2012a)

8.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I approach the case study of the occupation of Hambach Forest, in which the ecocidal void-making of the police order of 'Man,' the Cartesian cut, and the apparatuses that reproduce it meet and are refused by a political apparatus of void-making.

The disputes over lignite at Hambach Forest and the adjacent open cast mine have come at the supposed twilight of the fossil energy regime in Germany (Sieferle, 2010 [1982]). The German *Energiewende* or 'energy transition' has occupied state policy discussion and implementation since 2011. The *Energiewende* is the outcome of a long history of ecological struggles (Paul, 2018) and it includes the commitment to become carbon neutral by 2050, which requires the total phaseout of both bituminous and lignite coals and a switch to renewable sources of energy. However, as discussions unfolded, many of the business and state representatives determining the direction and pace of the *Enrgiewende* agreed that the coal phase-out would not occur until the mid 2040s (Amelang, 2016).

Critics have argued that this pace of transition is insufficient to keep up with the Paris Climate Agreement's target of 1.5°C of warming (Höhne *et al.*, 2019), contributing to trajectories of increasingly severe climate effects. One pointed statement from the German leftwing party *Die Linke* suggested that the *Energiewende* is not oriented towards a just and timely exit from fossil fuels, but "the share price of VW, Lufthansa and RWE" above all else (Wettengel, 2021). It is hard to disagree with this assessment based on key policy decisions.

For example, in 2016 policy proposals were watered down, removed financial penalties that would have imposed charges upon lignite-burning power stations, neutering the capacity to control energy companies like RWE in what was called a "victory for coal interests" (Bößner, 2016, p. 6).

On one side of the dispute, the giant energy firm RWE own the 12,000-year-old forest and possessed a permit to destroy it in order to expand their open-cast lignite (brown coal) mine. The mine neighbours the forest and much of the original forest was cleared across the preceding 50 years to make way for it. The *Energiewende* decisions of 2016 were a huge victory for the company, permitting them to continue mining and clearing the forest, with the value of the lignite under what's left of Hambach Forest worth an estimated 5 billion Euros in profit (Reuter, 2018). At the same time, however, mining the remaining lignite at Hambach would result in 40 million tonnes of CO_2 being released into the atmosphere annually for the next 20 years (Michel, 2014).

As a large, capitalist energy firm, RWE embody the destructive figure of 'Man,' and the possessive, instrumentalising gaze of Bourgeois Reason, empowered and diffused by the 'geontopower' of fossil fuels (Povinelli, 2016), in the specific formation of what Malm calls 'Fossil Capital' (2015). RWE's excavator machines operate as the techno-material means of performing the Cartesian cut, by which the forest and the lignite are rendered as *res extensa* and cleaved into objects of value and valuelessness for the fossil fuel economy, whilst the "measure of men," or perhaps better 'Man,' is realised through the vast scale and instrumental power of the excavator machinery (Adas, 2015 [1989]; Brock, 2018, pp. 21-22; Michel, 2005, p. 18). In making the valuating cuts that privilege the vast energy stores of the lignite below over the forest above, the excavators have left an unambiguous mark of destruction in the landscape, which troubles the distribution of the sensible that otherwise reproduces the correlation of sense and being that legitimates Bourgeois Reason. The clearance line—a sharp geometrical cut of an almost-perfect straight line—cleaves the vibrant, changing colours and forms of the remaining forest apart from the sterile, brown hole of the mine's expansive void, a "biologically dead 'moonscape'" (Braunbeck, 2020, p. 11).

On the other side of the dispute, despite RWE's attempts to map and governmentalise all the relations with which Hambach Open Cast Mine is entangled (see Chapter 03), a small group of anarchists occupied and barricaded the forest, presenting themselves as a persistent, antagonistic disruption to the company's plans there by refusing the continued encroachment of the clearance line into the forest. In this chapter, I argue that this disruption marks the occupiers' capacity to co-constitute a political apparatus of void-making in and through the forest. An infrastructure of refusal in the form of barricades, tripods, treehouses and so on that cut a hole in the continuities of space, time, and matter that render the forest of no value to the order of Bourgeois Reason. This hole should be understood as a void in the sense of indeterminacy in action; the spacetimemattering of otherwise unrealised yearning and making, in which impossible relational entanglements are formed that were otherwise excluded by the cuts that organise and constrain the agential distribution of the world. It thus substitutes one spacetimematter with another, incommensurable one: a heterogenous space, an untimely time, and a matter of wrong, opening new trajectories for justice, new figures of humanity, and new possible worlds.

Each of the sections in this chapter begins with a fragment of speech or practice in the production of the political *dissensus* at Hambach Forest, which were captured in documentary films, photographs, media interviews, blogposts, zines, and books. These moments capture different aspects of the political confrontations over the destruction of the forest, which become openings to dialogically engage the spacetimematterings of radical politics in the forest. This structure is designed to animate a 'poetics of politics,' a fabrication of narrative, theory, and empirics that illuminate the stakes and document the successful effects of a set of political activities that not only preserved the forest but had significant effects upon the broader agenda of German energy policy.

8.2 The Clearance Line 'Speaks'

> For me, the forest is a beautiful place to make a fundamental critique of capitalism in concrete terms. And this experiment is being lived here in a great way and it's great to be part of it.
>
> *'Muna', Forest occupier (Ehling et al. 2022, p. 44)*

I have returned to Muna's words often. They seem to me to say something true about this location as a space of political activity. Undoubtedly, the invocation of a 'beautiful place' to stage the critique could simply mean that the forest is aesthetically pleasing. Or perhaps that the community found in the struggle had a quality of purposiveness that could not, as Kant understood beauty, be reduced to its utility or a sense of perfection (2002 [1790], pp. 89-128). And I am sure that at least in part, these properties are what Muna meant when they said it. At the same time, however, I can't help but think that the beauty of the place was due to the way the materiality of the Forest as it was moved through Fossil Capital 'spoke' to the Occupiers and, in turn, how this was productive of an assemblage of political speech and political activity.

Here I want to suggest that it was, in Barad's terms, a (politically) active "part of the world that makes itself intelligible to another part" (Barad, 2007, p. 204) and the basis for engaging with processes of critical decomposition (Barad, 2017, p. 180). The line that cut the void of the mine from the remaining forest indexed something that was neither the forest's utility for Fossil Capital, nor the neat alignment between the 'world' and Bourgeois Reason through its apprehension as *res extensa*. Rather, the materiality of the 'scene' emitted the trace of a violent exclusion; a part that could have no part in the order of Fossil Capital and that must be voided. It communicated that there was a gap in the correlation between the account of the forest as mere *res extensa* and what it was, what it could say, and what it could do.

In a short interview, an occupier pseudonymously titled 'No One' summed it up well, suggesting that "life in the forest… is a *beautiful parable* for me. On the one side, the forest, this community of activists, this life that has so much that we try to defend and build. And on the other hand, the exploitative, capitalist market economy that is coming towards us and will destroy everything" (Ehling *et al.*, 2022, p. 43; emphasis added). Though they did not refer to the clearance line directly, the notion of the capitalist economy "coming towards us" describes the way the line shifted closer and penetrated deeper into the forest with every successful clearance season. As such, the boundaries of the clearance line possessed an aesthetic quality of demarcation, by which the landscape itself readily contributed to the poetic narrativisation of political struggle.

A Forest Occupier using the pseudonym 'Victoria' noted of their first encounter with the Forest, "back then I didn't know anything about lignite. And then I came here. I actually only wanted to stay for three days and *then I saw the hole*. And then it was clear to me that I think it's worth it [to stay]" (Pache, 2015; emphasis added). Similarly, the photographer Todde Kemmerich came to the occupation in 2014 and was taken to the clearance line by some of the forest occupiers, where he was pulled into an encounter:

> "a sight of senseless destruction, a battlefield in the middle of the Hambi. Seven layers of oak trees up to 350 years old were felled on a levelled ground no longer recognisable as forest soil. To this day, this has made me very emotional, and I have decided to stand up for the preservation of this ecosystem from now on" (Ehling *et al.*, 2022, p. 47)

The use of the term 'senseless' here registers contact with something that disrupted the reasoning (Bourgeois Reason) that might otherwise put the clearance line in its 'proper' context and explain its necessity. For Kemmerich, the marks of destruction found there exceeded any explanation by which their 'part' could have been given as due in the order of things. Thus, the aesthetic-material qualities of 'void' at the clearance line itself were an unavoidable demonstration that there was a part that had no part there, one that opened a question about the order of things. As summarised by an occupier using the pseudonym 'Dachs,' "you are directly confronted with the destruction, the system's destruction. This place makes *that very visible*" (Fasbender, 2018, 00:02:16; emphasis added).

I suggest, then, that whatever acts of translation and recombination this uncounted part required as it was moved through the discursive articulations of the forest occupation, this cannot simply be reduced to the symbolic retroprojection of the occupiers' imagination. 'It' confronted Dachs and 'It' intervened in the trajectories of both Victoria and of Todde Kemmerich, pulling them away from previous plans and into the assembly of a political apparatus. As such, the clearance line offered itself up as the kernel of a new form of politicised relation, the mark of an exclusionary 'wrong' that demanded reworking against its necrotic exclusion.

However, what this mark could come to mean still required translation to give determinacy to the 'speech' of the clearance line. As Barad would remind us, this translation work is discursive and material, which is to restate the inseparability of material configurations from concrete sociohistorical circumstances (2007, pp. 146-185). As I will demonstrate, the poetics of translation were an aesthetic exercise in the decomposition and recomposition of links between this space, time, and materiality and other spacetimematterings of destruction and radical resistance, reconfiguring the scalar stakes of the confrontation. In contrast with Barad's emphasis on the act of diffractive reading "for the constitutive exclusions of those ideas we could not do without" (Barad, 2012), primacy was afforded to how the exclusions made in this particular space could be made to demonstrate the 'wrong' of the police order as a whole; that its ideas, capacities for apprehension, and material reconfigurations were definitively something *we must do without*. As such the clearance line that separated the still lively becomings of the forest from the void-space of the mine became the site of aesthetic superimposition of negatives (Blakey, 2020), where the 'local' nature of the forest's destruction could be made to speak to the 'global' ecocidal properties of Fossil Capital and, consequently, the aesthetics of the space could be recomposed for a proliferation of parts that have no part in the order of Fossil Capital to appear.

8.3 The Critique of Domination

In a self-published book entitled *With Tree Houses Against Excavators*, a number of the Forest occupiers collated a series of significant texts made by themselves and their allies across the first three years of the occupation (Hambach Forest, 2015). One such text, entitled *Linking Domination and Environmental Destruction* and written just prior to the occupation, articulates the occupation as the relinking of emancipatory political movements and environmental movements (ibid., pp. 55-58), which they argue has been lost to "bourgeois environmental protection" and an individualist "lifestyle of health and sustainability" (ibid., p. 55). In order to make this relinking possible, the author calls for a "domination-critical Barrio" (ibid.). The Spanish term 'Barrio' is not contextualised in the text, but it is often used to mean 'municipality' or 'neighbourhood' and its use is likely intended to signal a municipal or locally managed space autonomous from and in resistance to forms of domination. The use of the term perhaps references the autonomous neighbourhood movements in places like Argentina (Kanai, 2011), and signifies a broader influence that other autonomous Latin American movements like the Zapatistas have had upon the occupiers.

The call is a discursive-material one, a strategy of "opening up and attacking power relations, discursively and in the form of direct action" (Hambach Forest, 2015, p. 55). The author is clear that these aren't separate processes but are unified in a strategic set of operations, in which the Forest occupation acts as a "deliberate setting" to stage a critique of domination (ibid). Indeed, as this chapter will try to demonstrate, the ruptural process of creating the void-space of the occupation acted as a destructive force that gave this critique material power as an anti-hierarchical force in the world. I will turn to the material infrastructure of the void-apparatus that sustained this critique in the next section. For now, I want to focus upon the way this critique of domination was constructed discursively by superimposing a series of 'wrongs' upon the clearance line as a way of indicting the police order of capitalism, of 'Man', as a hierarchical whole. In doing so, the critique announces a series of parts that have no part in the order of Fossil Capital, by suspending the divisions between the sensible hierarchies of this order and the speaking beings that subtend this distribution, between local and global space, and between the past, present, and future.

This begins with a general account of domination. Reflecting the account of the police order of 'Man' that I outlined in section 7.3 of the previous chapter, the author establishes a general link between domination and environmental destruction. As they note, "the availability and control over land and raw materials is - alongside that over people and their heads - an indispensable category of the exercise of power" (ibid., p. 56). Firstly, this gestures towards the expansive drive of capital and its figure of the human, 'Man', to 'possess the world' by appropriating and instrumentalising what Moore calls the 'free gifts' of 'Nature's' biophysical processes, and to transform them into an expanding form of power; the accumulation of surplus value (Moore, 2015, pp. 61-88). As the author of *Domination and Environmental Destruction* notes, these operations are doubly destructive. Firstly, they subject those appropriated spaces to "environmental destruction" by mercilessly exploiting them (Hambach Forest, 2015, p. 56). Secondly, taking control of those spaces requires dispossessions that are tantamount to the "destruction of livelihoods" (ibid.). This severs those who are dispossessed from the means of subsistence, making people "more dependent" on the capitalist relations: "domination-based environmental exploitation thus prepares the ground for future relations of domination" (ibid.). That is, capital's expansive drive is also a destructive and disempowering form of control, the power of 'mute compulsion' by which it coerces human bodies into its particular mode of production and its regimes of labour (Mau, 2023), deracinating the materiality of the body from the relations that previously constituted its existence (ibid.; Moore, 2015, pp. 61-88; 2022b).

In a passage from a page of the occupation blog entitled *What We Fight For,* the authors argue:

> Capitalism is a system in which those few, who have the power, can outsource the negative effects of their own actions onto others. Very few profit from the exploitation and destruction of the earth, yet many have to carry the consequences, A change of climate, the destruction of habitats of humans and other animals, the pollution of the air and the sea… If those who are evicted from their homes, or people living in the global south with their birthplaces… being devastated, would have to be asked about the burning of lignite, it would never have happened (Hambi Bleibt!, 2019; quoted in Kaufer and Lein, 2020)

Rather than distributing agency and responsibility widely through the broad, agential network of relations that constitute and reproduce capital, the position that the author took is consistent with the critique of 'domination' posited by the author of *Domination and Environmental Destruction.* It recognises the overrepresentation of 'Man' as the beneficiary of Fossil Capital, in contrast with those subjugated in the dispossessions and destructions required to produce it. The author consciously addresses this as a production that requires the denial of those it effects as speaking beings worthy of agency in this reproduction. In this sense, the author depicts Fossil

Capital as a force that reproduces the capacities and constraints of its destructive agency by forms of coercion, the structuring power of what I have called the Cartesian cut. As they astutely note, if those affected others "would have to be asked," then the reproduction of Fossil Capital would become impossible. That is, for all the unifying force of Fossil Capital, there are parts of no part in the construction of this order.

In *Domination and Environmental Destruction*, the author makes the global and the local simultaneously present in Hambach Forest as cause and effect in the chains of energy production under Fossil Capital:

> Here in the Rhenish coalfield between Düsseldorf, Cologne and Aachen, the energy giant RWE is digging Europe's largest hole to extract lignite, currently the dirtiest fossil fuel. This is then transported by coal railway to the six surrounding power plants and burned there. Together, these power plants represent Europe's largest CO2 emitter and thus climate killer #1. (Hambach Forest, 2015 p. 55).

By invoking the excessive carbon emissions of lignite coal that are enabled by destroying the forest, the author was able to forge a broader relation between the moments of extraction and emission 'here' and 'now' and the dispossessions of ecological uninhabitability further afield in space and time: "the global climate roulette means that the consequences are not limited to the local level. Millions of people are being turned into refugees by the devastation of entire regions" (ibid.). This means that the 'here, now' of lignite extraction in Hambach became imbricated with the 'there, now' and 'there, then,' of climate catastrophe, where capitalist void-making criss-crosses spacetimes and relations that, in the sensible distribution of capitalist spacetimes, are otherwise separated by cuts that disavow complicity and responsibility.

A 2022 statement by the Forest occupiers in celebration of 10 years of occupation stated the stakes more clearly:

> The resistance in the Hambach Forest has always been more than just a local struggle. It is about dealing with the mechanisms of oppression and making visible the power relations of capitalism…
>
> The global injustices caused by colonialism have still not been corrected… The polluter states in the Global North continue to refuse to take responsibility.
>
> It is therefore necessary and legitimate to protest in a variety of ways. And that's why the Hambacher Forest remains occupied! (Hambi Bleibt!, 2022)

In this sense the occupation aimed to constitute a proper space for dissensual conflict over the wrongs that the occupiers named. Moreover, and as the occupiers explained in *First Declaration from the Hambach Jungle,* the occupation was an attempt to constitute the speech of all those parts that could have no part in the decision to destroy the forest and pursue the lignite beneath it:

> This occupation is an attempt to start a process of negotiation about how we should deal with the problems of climate and environmental destruction. It is a loud "no" to those whose solution is to carry on as before and still press on the gas - like RWE building new lignite-fired power plants… Squatting the forest shall be an act of re-empowerment by the locals. The “Occupying Force” RWE shall lose their “right” of determining the future of the region, unscrupulously destroying the local and global fundaments of life. This space should be open to all on the basis of equal treatment of each other. (Hambi Bleibt! 2012a)

But what kinds of agential force could be constructed in order to give the critique of domination weight? And how do they give force to a counter form of reason that would offer an alternative to the ‘good sense’ of Bourgeois Reason? Without these elements, the critique had the potential to become profoundly disempowering in ways that recall the Poetic Regime of Pessimism. As one occupier noted of their feelings before the occupation took place: “[I felt] anger, astonishment that that much injustice happens or keeps happening. Then desperation came, the feeling of being powerless” (Fasbender, 2018, 00.03.47).

8.4 Refusal and the Political Apparatus of Void-Making

> Up there that’s the skypod, it connects several people to each other. Meaning if there’s a person up there, then this tree can’t be cut, nor this tree, nor that tree. They are all linked with ropes and none of these links can be cut, or the trees felled, without the person falling down. So, they have to get them down first. But this is only possible once that platform is removed, because otherwise they can’t reach. And they can only reach the platform by getting the others down from up there and they can only be reached with a cherry picker… But then those branches are in the way, that have to be removed first of all.
>
> *Forest occupier, in Fasbender, 2018, 00:08:38*

The passage above is taken from a scene in the documentary film *Brand (Fire) III: Resistance within Riches* (2018) by the German film-maker Susanne Fasbender. The scene takes place as the Hambi occupiers prepare a series of barricades and blockades to resist an eviction. It is yet one more in a long series of short-lived evictions that occurred over the course of the occupation. In the scene, an unnamed occupier speaks largely off camera, their hand the only visible part of their person. From it an outstretched finger gestures up to a knot of ropes near the treetops that travel out in clean lines to the firm branches that they are bound to. From the central knot a crudely made wooden cart is suspended—the ‘skypod’—within which sits another Forest occupier, whose eyes peer out from between a woollen hat and face mask that preserves their anonymity. Mirroring the entwined ropes and trees, their legs tangle around the slats of the cart whilst a carabiner safely attaches their body to the knotty construction. As the speaker mentions “the platform”, the camera pans down to a construction beneath the skypod that would stand between it and the combined eviction forces of RWE security and the Police. Pieces of felled timber undergird a metal fence that they are tied to, forming the base of a platform propped up and bound several meters off the ground to several trees. A tarpaulin is suspended a short distance above the base, leaving enough space between the two surfaces for people to lie down in, which will soon be filled with at least three further occupiers. The felled trees that form the base of the platform jut out at regular intervals and these prevent the easy reach of a cherry picker that could extract the occupiers lying within the platform.

Relying upon the material qualities of the trees’ height and strength to enable forms of obstructive construction, the ensemble drew together human bodies, ropes, metal, plastic, and felled branches as well as bodily practices, paints, and fabrics into an apparatus of political void-making. Each ‘knot’ of bodies, branches, and materials were designed to be as intractable to remove as possible, acting as links in a chain of barricades that (re)bound the forest in a refusal of the spacetimematters of the police order. This apparatus suspended the demarcation of the forest as mere *res extensa* and created a state of indeterminacy; a ‘void’ space of no account in the given distribution of spacetimemattering, reiteratively produced through the act of blockading the entry of RWE workers and their excavators. This voiding was the effective marking of a new agential cut. The material basis for a refusal of the identities and capacities given in the sensible demarcations of the police-order: the destruction of those specific agential constraints imposed under asymmetrical relations of domination.

In the second edition of the occupation’s self-published zine, *Shit Barricade,* a page entitled *Hambi Dictionary* translates key terms that were used in the occupation across French, Spanish, German and English, reflecting the multi-national nature of the occupation’s composition (2018, p. 35). Amongst the 15 or so key protest phrases, including “freedom for…,” “no borders,” and “no nations,” the phrase “deny identity” was deemed significant enough to warrant translation. The significance of ‘denying identity’ is made more explicit in a few moments in documentary films that followed the occupation. The documentary film *Die*

Rote Linie captures a conversation between forest occupiers and visitors taking a guided walk through the forest. When asked about the social structure in the occupation, an occupier answers:

> There's no kind of hierarchy here. We don't have any bosses, male or female. Rather than producing the kind of roles where one person is in charge, we decide everything together in consensus. Living in the forest is also an opportunity to experiment with another kind of life, another way of living together. It's a life in solidarity, where you learn together. That also means dealing with issues, dealing with each other and being responsible for your own life, and that's the nicest part about it. (De Miguel Wessendorf, 2019, 01:08:30)

Firstly, from this account it is clear that the blockade marked a cut between a 'here' and a 'there,' demarcating differences in the possible identities and activities belonging to either space. The occupier made it apparent that the hierarchies found out there in the world beyond the void are of no account 'here'. The suggestion that there are no bosses, *neither male nor female,* implies the rejection of notions of identity and equality that exist under capitalism, where, for example, the horizon of feminist practices could be recuperated by reducing it to the capacity for both genders to occupy similar positions within the hierarchies of work relations (Foster, 2016; Rottenberg, 2017). Accordingly, the notion of equality in the void-space of the Forest Occupation was marked in difference to those differences that constitute the police order. Instead, the occupation attempted to constitute a genuine suspension of hierarchy-making identifications.

Towards the end of the film *Hambi: The Fight For Hambach Forest,* the viewer is shown footage of an occupier flanked by police officers. The occupier has been dragged from the treehouse settlements in an eviction. In a remarkable speech made direct to camera through tear-stained eyes and a strained voice, the occupier argues:

> They [RWE and the police] will never get how it is to live together with people who don't care about your name, your age or your degree. That we try to live without hierarchy here, to respect one another… This has been the best time of my life. And I learned so much here. Nothing I could've ever learned in society outside. That I first had to forget all the bullshit that society made me believe: to compare myself to others, to compete! What's supposed to be important, how we look – I had to forget all of that shit, but the people here showed me, that it is not important. They just accepted me as a living being. (Reiter, 2019, 01:07:41)

Here the category of 'living being' emptied out the specificity of who the occupier was outside of the political void-space. Instead, the term mobilised an empty equality not available in the striations of police order, which became the basis for constituting a different subjectivity. Whilst they were in the void-space of the barricades, this occupier was not produced as a capitalist subject operating through the hierarchy-making logics of comparison and competition, as they put it. Echoing the sentiments of the preceding occupier's statement, the refusal of pre-existing markings of difference created agential capacities to make new markings of difference that permitted new trajectories of becoming. Or, as the occupier said; to learn what could never be learned "in society outside".

The emptiness of the term 'living beings' also implied an attempt to void anthropocentric hierarchies by a-voiding the differentiations of human/nonhuman as the basis for delimiting 'who' counts, instead bounding together a broader coalition of existence. This reflects an oft-expressed intention of the forest occupiers to engage with the forest as a site of multi-species egalitarianism and with a sensitivity to more-than-human needs (Ehling *et al.*, 2022, p. 43; Lehečková, 2023, pp. 58-65; Hillenkamp, 2021). Echoing Rancière's sentiments that politics is the "opening up of a subject space where anyone can be counted since it is the space where those of no account are counted" (1999, p. 36), the occupier pseudonymously known as 'Sky' argued that the ideals motivating their engagement with the occupation were that "everyone can live freely, free from hierarchies, oppression, exploitation, and that this includes not only people, but everyone, including animals" (Ehling *et al.*, 2022, p. 43). Here the significance lay in the a priori refusal of the boundaries of the Cartesian cut and the way it makes its 'count' by rendering other-than-human life as both separate to human-life and synonymous with nonbeing.

These refusals were in no way distinct from the work of making the infrastructures of the occupation but were constituted by and coextensive with those efforts. Insofar as the material qualities of the trees made them both suitable and necessary sites for constructing particularly resistant forms of barricade, and, insomuch as the trees felled in the forest clearances made suitable building materials, the forest itself was an essential, co-productive part of the apparatus of void-making and the agential cuts that it inaugurated. In this respect, the making of the barricades with and through the materiality of the trees was, by the agential act of their construction, one and the same movement that voided the forms of domination imposed by the hierarchical differentiations of the Cartesian cut. These practices of more-than-human construction were, in the act of knotting together tree and human being, transgressive of the agential cuts of the police order. The cuts by which the forest was supposed to be cleaved apart from the human and expected to lie mute and passive in the face of its destruction, and by which the forest occupiers were supposed to be distributed elsewhere; consigned to the hierarchical regimes of work and education that saturate the limits of speech under the

Bourgeois order of Reason. These practices created a spatially and temporally extensive transgression by holding the trees and the occupiers together in a certain state of non-relation with the world outside, cutting the forest and the occupiers apart from those apparatuses—e.g. the excavators, a workplace etc.—by which the operative logic of the Cartesian cut could reimpose the hierarchy of identities given in the order of the police.

Moreover, the barricades constituted this agential cut because they supplied the material force of the critique of domination by establishing a new form of relation with the void's outside, operating as an experimental translational mediator between the 'speech' of the occupation and RWE. That is, the barricades translated the critique of domination into the only language that RWE truly spoke; the quantic language of valuation that dominates this world according to the instrumentalising, extractive logics of Bourgeois Reason. Accordingly, assembling the barricades should be interpreted as an experiment in generating agential effects by making the void visible specifically as a void that disruptively cut away at the company's profits. I say 'experiment' here because it is clear that the occupiers were not sure of the success of these tactics ahead of time, but that the strategies were their best chance to leave disruptive and destructive marks through which RWE's practices could be registered as a 'wrong'.

In an interview from *Brand (Fire) III,* an occupier known as Alice suggested that the occupation was not merely symbolic:

> It's also a very real way of demonstrating to RWE, its subsidiaries, and the state authority which wants to push through this destruction with all means: That's not how it works. And that we demonstrate, we're people from all over and we're saying: "Nope, we're going to disrupt this somehow, we'll make everything a bit less profitable for RWE"… And I think if this happens from time to time, their share prices will drop, or I hope they do, I don't know enough about economics but that's what I hope, that it just ends up being less profitable and that RWE realises, they can't just do anything, because people are putting up resistance (Fasbender, 2018, 00:06:53)

A short media segment for Indymedia filmed at the very start of the occupation contains an interview with an occupier known as 'Clumsy' (Spirit of Squatters Collective, 2012). In the interview, Clumsy shared similar sentiments to Alice about the intentions of the occupation:

> If they are going to evict us, we'll try to make the eviction as hard as possible, expensive, and yeah… with as much publicity as is possible. I don't know if we'll be able to stop it, maybe if people come and I think it would be possible maybe. (ibid., 00:01:32)

Without foreknowledge of their capacity to generate effects, the occupiers invested in the action because blocking the forest clearances for as long as possible promised the agential capacity to leave a destructive and highly visible hole in the measures by which the company is valuated. That being so, the practices of constructing, maintaining, and reproducing the barricades *forcefully* constituted the agency of the occupation as one totally *incommensurable* with the value-extracting relations presiding over the Forest. It marked the assembled 'living beings' of the forest occupation as an agency not of *this world*: an agency forged in total and irreconcilable difference to the sensible set of identities, places, patterns of speech, and ways of doing that make RWE—as a representative of capitalism—operational. Through this destructive and aesthetically disruptive formation, the occupation gained a resistant quality that could not be readily recuperated *or* ignored. Thus, the occupiers were able to mobilise the practices of void-making to stage a highly visible conflict and to make it impossible to police away.

Whilst it is difficult to discern the effects of the occupation on share prices, the strategy was at least successful insomuch as the first eviction in 2012 is "alleged to be one of the most expensive in German Police history" (Brock and Dunlap, 2018, p. 33). Other clearances were similarly made to incur a substantial cost for the state and for the company. As Clumsy's statement suggests, this was also a gambit on the capacity for this strategy to generate aesthetic disruption, to forcefully intrude upon the distribution of the sensible in such a way as to open a stage that could pull more bodies into it and catalyse scenes of a broader conflict over the issues of the climate crisis. In *Brand (Fire) III*, an activist from a protest group aligned with the Forest occupiers called Rebecca corroborated this understanding, stating "we're trying to create a space where the movement comes together… I believe that images are very powerful, and I definitely believe RWE is trying to, is doing everything, to not let these images happen" (Fasbender, 2018, 01:44:12).

As an activist known as 'Tix' put it:

> For me the occupation is also a place where a conflict is stirred up, because it is shown openly. And I don't mean that in a negative sense. Because the conflict exists anyway, since habitats are being destroyed. But the question is: Has the conflict got a space where it can be dealt with, or not. (Fasbender, 2018, 00:10:42)

What Tix's analysis suggests is that the occupation served to make the fractures otherwise suppressed visible. It generated the void of the community as the forceful, conflictual appearance of its non-identity with itself in ways that necessarily pulled the wider community into reconfigurative relations that further fuelled and expanded the conflict. On the one hand, the barricades created a state of non-relation: the suspension of existing intelligibilities through which the void appears as an unruly part of no account. On the other, a state of relation insomuch as the barricades made this void 'speak' to RWE and wider society as both the announcement of a conflict over the nature of the community and the opening of a space in which to litigate it. The space in which those parts that *necessarily* could have no part in the hierarchies of Bourgeois Reason were able to litigate its exclusions as a 'wrong'; an injustice of the count by which the community is made of account.

There is some evidence to support Tix's view of the occupation. Despite RWE's attempts to downplay the protests and to portray the forest occupation as mere noise and the work of violent criminals (Brock and Dunlap, 2018, p.41), Liersch and Stagmaier's analysis demonstrates that RWE weren't able to police the conflict away. The aim to stage the site as a scene of conflictual dissensus was successful, producing two oppositional coalitions in an "antagonism" that remained stable and intact across the duration of the conflict (2022, p. 10). As such, the reconfigurative power of the void pulled other groups into an alliance of the negative: the citizens' initiative Buirers for Buir, composed of residents resisting the destruction of their village Buir, which neighboured the Forest; the radical, anticapitalist environmental protest groups Ende Gelände [Here and No Further] and ausgeCO2hlt [Stand Against CO^{2}]; and BUND [Friends of the Earth Germany], who filed a series of lawsuits to prevent the destruction of the forest, constituted new relations on the shared negative terrain of 'wrong,' which built increasing powers of blockage, refusal, and of visibility. This ensured that by 2018 the clearance season was met not only by the forest occupiers, but with increasingly large and raucous protests at the site, and a series of well publicised and obstructive legal bids (Kaufer and Lein, 2020, p. 78). Mohr and Smits' analysis notes that "the Hambach Forest, the reference point of the movement, turned into a key site of conflict in the debate of the future of coal in Germany" (2022, p. 9). Kaufer and Lein also agree, arguing that the occupation served "as a 'point of crystallisation' for the anti-coal movement" (2020, p. 4).

The act of un/doing through the void was, therefore, a properly political act, constituting the assemblage of forest, barricades, and human occupiers and protestors as a political subject, which existed as a collective agency entirely for the litigation of a structural wrong that could only truly be resolved in abolition of the entities that composed the conflict. This was expressed most militantly by the occupiers themselves. One occupier known as 'Luna' put this succinctly, stating that: "the fight is over when this corporation is in ruins" (Fabender, 2018, 01:57:03). Another masked and unnamed occupier simply said, "I just thought that I'd like to say, for me the greatest motivation is the hatred against the capitalist system" (ibid., 00:21:00).

8.5 A New World and a New Human

> We need spaces where people are able to plan how a climate-just future should and can look like… Perhaps this occupation will create such a place here, a nucleus of a new world in the heart of fossil-nuclear capitalism…
>
> *'First Declaration From the Hambach Jungle' (Hambi Bleibt!, 2012)*

As Rancière notes, the political subject is not fabricated *ex nihilo*, but emerges from reconfiguring the identities given in the police order "into instances of experience of a dispute" in which they mark the gap between the part that the identity assigns in the given order of bodies and places and the subject that litigates the dispute over the assigning of parts and places (ibid., pp. 36-37). In this case, 'Hambach Forest' simply denotes a geographical location. It is marked on maps, and it is utilised in the reports of RWE, where it signifies nothing other than its place in that order, the mere substance of *res extensa,* assigned its (non)value and marked for destruction. By contrast, the occupiers took to the term 'Hambi', 'the Hambi', or 'Hambi Bleibt!' [Hambi Stays!] as the name(s) through which to mark the disidentification of the Forest with its (non)place in the police order and its political subjectification as the space and practice of occupation (Mohr and Smits, 2022, p. 2, *n3*; Hillenkamp, 2021, pp. 3,7).

In this respect, it is interesting that the term 'Hambi' affectionately shortened the name of the Forest in the same way one would create a nickname for a friend, an act of inscription that blurred the given boundaries between the legitimate personhood of the human protestors and the alleged status of the forest itself as mere matter or *res extensa*. Whilst, as Lehečková demonstrates through her ethnographic engagement with the occupation, there were many members of the occupation who "experienced their humanness as inherently different and harmful to the Forest" (2023, p. 79), there were others who understood themselves to have become part of the forest (ibid.) and, moreover, to be intertwined together as a political subject in the Rancierian sense. This means that whilst the construction of this relationship was often ambiguous, for many there was an important disavowal of the Cartesian cut in the recognition that the forest was both central to the occupiers' capacity to speak and a central stake of the occupation itself. This is most clearly exemplified in the words of an occupier known as 'Tempest', who stated in an interview with the anthropologist Oliver Hillenkamp, "if you want to stop Hambi from being Hambi, you have to cut it, or you have to shut the mine" (2021 p. 8). This led Hillenkamp to conclude that the forest operated as "the movement's symbolic and material matrix, the forest itself co-produces the forms of political dwelling that have been largely responsible for its continued existence" (ibid.). That is, 'Hambi' was understood to be both the forest and the occupation at the same time – a relational entangling in which the boundaries between human and other-than-human agency were substantially effaced. Furthermore, its status as an obstinate subject of refusal could only be resolved by a proper end to the conflict either in completing the wrongs of destroying the forest or by rectifying those wrongs and ending the mining operation.

The political formation of the occupation under the banner of 'Hambi' demonstrates that there is more to its political subjectivation than the destructive component of void-making, even if this is a necessary condition for political refusal. After all, not everything about 'Hambi', including its very inscription as 'Hambi', can be deduced from negating the regime of demarcations that Hambach Forest was previously held within. As one of the occupiers put it, "living in the forest is also *an opportunity to experiment with another kind of life, another way of living together*" (De Miguel Wessendorf, 2019, 01:08:30). That is, it had a positive dimension as much as a destructive one.

In Rancière's account of political subject formation, he argues that the destruction of hierarchical relations leads to a moment of subtraction from those asymmetrical relations, which "opens a field of exploration into the potential within the capacity of anyone" (2016, p. 124). Against the striations of the police order, political action is the production of new forms of agency and action unfolding from the assumption of equality. Elsewhere, he notes that contemporary "political action tends to be at the same time the cell of another form of life. It is no more a tool for preparing a future emancipation but a process of invention of forms of life and modes of thinking in which equality furthers equality" (Rancière, 2017). Taking these statements together, political subjectivity should be understood as a process wherein its subjects move from the empty void of equality to fabricate a concrete—if precarious—world of equality: a scene in which equality is embodied through practices that give force to the claim by supplying the material means of its verification. In short, making a claim to equality requires meaningfully manifesting equality. More concretely, contesting the injustice of domination and dispossession requires the manifestation of justice in the formation of the world of equality. This section will attempt to address the way this was established in and through Hambi.

The words that begin this section are taken from the first communique from Hambi to the outside world entitled, *First Declaration From the Hambach Jungle* (2012a). Within the text, the space of Hambi is declared to be an experiment in realising a just future. A spacetime in which all those trajectories of becoming that are robbed of a part in the present and the future by the relations of dispossession and subjugation that mark capitalist domination were made materially manifest in the contemporaneous moment of the occupation: “a nucleus of a new world” that could be just. Indeed, whilst the barricades were a refusal of the spacetimemattering of capital—the destructive voiding of the forest so that Bourgeois Man may continue to live—they also allowed the occupiers to fabricate the site as one connected to a global history of emancipatory resistance to domination. The title of this declaration is a nod to the first Zapatista communique, *First Declaration From The Lacandon Jungle* (1994) and the occupiers named the forest “Hambach jungle knowing that this term is not correct” (ibid.). I suggest, then, that by dissolving the differences in the biophysical nature of the biomes, the occupiers created an aesthetic suture, folding the West German deciduous forest in 2012 into the rainforest of the Mexican Chiapas in 1993, creating a discontinuous continuity of spacetimes. A spacetimemattering for the dispossessed, against the domination of capital, and for an egalitarian present that is not deferred until after victory but is made a part of the struggle itself. This is not to dissolve the differences between the two spacetimes altogether but to bind them together in a shared trajectory. In the words of the forest occupiers, their “aim is the same. Fighting for a self-determined life in dignity amidst a system of destruction and oppression” (Hambi Bleibt!, 2012a).

Within the process of fabrication, a whole host of practices were brought into being to embody a functional space of equality, from the decision-making in the camp, to meaningful expressions of solidarity with those racially dispossessed by Fossil Capital, and to the ecological relations with the forest. As such, I want to argue that this “nucleus of a new world” was also an experiment in finding new ways to be human that involved de-hierarchising and reorganising intra-human and more-than-human relations. Over the next few sub-sections, I take the equality of organising the occupation, of anti-colonial solidarity, and of ecological relations with the forest, in turn to demonstrate this.

8.6 The World of Equality in Organising the Occupation

As Kaufer and Lein’s research from extensive interviews with the group points to, decision-making operated on an ad-hoc basis between a general assembly and the localised groups of ‘villages’ that sprang up throughout the Forest (2020, pp. 71-73). As the researchers suggest, “the occupiers [used] the general assembly to agree upon important issues such as finance” but otherwise “those affected by decisions… [took] them autonomously” (ibid., p. 72). Where possible, consensus was mobilised as the means to agree important decisions, with vetoes operating to block contentious ‘actions’ as they were presented and to re-instigate forms of deliberation until a compromise could be reached or the proposed course of action was thrown out (ibid.). This means that decisions about the resistance and strategies pursued were consciously constructed in antithesis to the world of capitalist domination outside its barricades. Whether at the general or more localised levels, decisions were made in the absence of hierarchy and by ensuring that the agency marshalled was therefore truly collective and free from coercion.

In addition, the infrastructure of the occupation was designed to emancipate the occupiers from the domination of Bourgeois Reason by decommodifying the means of subsistence and reproduction. When the occupier in one of the passages above declared that they try to live *without hierarchy and without money* this was facilitated not by generating the capacity to autonomously sustain the occupation in totality, but by immediately going to work on the relationship between the occupation and the world 'outside' in order to bend and reconfigure elements of the outside towards these ends. Without running water, the occupiers relied upon donated containers to collect rainwater and an infrastructure of solidarity with people and their vehicles willing to donate and transport water to the occupation (Hambacher Forest, 2015, p. 165). Food was acquired by forging links with local bakeries and green grocers, whose 'expired' products would be taken by the occupiers rather than thrown out, and by dumpster diving in supermarket dumpsters (ibid., pp. 165-166). Additionally, a 'free shop' with items including books, clothes, and shoes was set up within the occupation, allowing people to access necessities without having to 'earn' them through wage relations. Embodying something akin to the communist principle "from each according to his ability to each according to his need" (Marx 2009 [1875], p. 11), the shop was designed according to the principle that "anyone who has something and no longer needs it brings it to the free shop, where others who might need it can take it for free" (Hambach Forest, 2015, p. 180). The intention was to consciously "counter capitalist production methods with one that really addresses people's needs and saves resources" (ibid.).

In the first place, the act of organising these infrastructures opened up what one occupier called "general questions" relating to the order society and nature, "who is producing what and how and for which reason, who is making this decision" (Spirit of Squatters Collective, 2012, 00:05:12). In this sense, it was subtended by and contributed towards the critique of domination that the occupiers shared. Whilst these questions couldn't all be resolved within the occupation; they nonetheless allowed the occupiers to generate axioms of equality and need within the camp that could prefigure organisational experiments in a more general sense outside the confines of the barricades. More importantly for the practicalities of the site, these interventions enabled people within the occupation to avoid the compulsions of the labour market and the hierarchical logic of value. This meant that they were able to circumvent their ‘place’ within the order of work and, therefore, to sustain both the destructive and the productive aspects of the occupation.

Finally, there were a frequent series of ‘skillshare camps’, “where people [could] learn relevant skills for living in the forest, e.g. climbing training” (Kaufer and Lein, 2020, p. 68). In an article from the book *With Tree Houses Against Excavators* entitled, *Skillsharing Camps: Alternative Learning Opportunities* (2015, pp. 176-180), the author noted that the events also provided opportunities “to learn and expand skills for resistance in order to be able to fend off ongoing attacks on our lives and to let something better than the present (even if only imagined) emerge already today” (ibid., p.177), and it did so under the condition that learning “must always be freely accessible to all and cooperative” (ibid.). As such, resistance required an emancipatory pedagogy, a responsibility owed to the potential problems of exclusion and thus to voiding differences that could reconstitute hierarchies and roles found outside in the order of the police,

> such as different languages and incomprehensible shop talk, which have an exclusionary effect. The same applies to roles that exist within today's society and that are created and internalised by us again and again - for example, assigning or denying abilities to people according to supposedly fixed gender (or gender ascriptions) (ibid.).

An account from a participant demonstrates the care and attention that was paid to making education a site of inclusion that both overflowed the confines of any particular space and carefully guarded against imposing and resedimenting hierarchies of knower and pupil:

> I also found it great that the boundaries between teachers and participants became blurred. I know from university that there is a strict separation between professors and students. At the camp it was completely different - no one was permanently in one role or the other and everyone was free to decide at any moment which role suited them better. This doesn't mean that in some workshops it didn't happen that people with a lot of knowledge about a topic shared it with others and thus slipped primarily into the role of teacher for a while. In general, learning was not limited to workshops, recipes were exchanged while cooking together, knowledge about the open-cast mine was imparted on the side during walks to the hole, and various experiences could also be made by living together on the occupation for a while. After all, discussing in larger groups or solving conflicts and making decisions together must also be learned. (ibid., p. 179)

This is not to say there weren’t issues of hierarchy that emerged within the occupation. A blog post from 2020 entitled *FLINT* Strike* announced a strike by a number of “female, lesbian, inter-sex, non-binary, and trans [FLINT]” occupiers, who argued “The labour we do is neither valued nor equally shared among all of us. We are not seen as equal decision-makers, experts, equal friends, equal comrades. Is this what revolution looks like to you?" (Hambi Bleibt!, 2020a). As the text indicates, the strike responded to the problem of gender and the 'role' of social reproduction as a question of revolutionary egalitarianism. As the strikers put it, "It should not be only FLINT*PPL organizing anti-sexism work (or critical whiteness reading!), or cleaning, or solving conflicts, or taking care of ppl and spaces, or organizing in general, or doing awareness, or… So why do so many FLINT*PPL feel burdened by this?" (ibid.). As such, the document marks the way in which the void-gap between identities given in the police order and forms of political identification could sometimes begin to close as hierarchies found 'outside' were carried inside.

Against this closing, the strike re-enacted the process of void-making as a way of desedimenting functional relations that had otherwise become re-stratified in a hierarchical distribution of roles. The strike disrupted this demarcation by halting the operations that relied upon this supposed correlation between identity and being. In doing so, it reopened the gap of indeterminacy between feminised identities and their purported 'role' as familial educators, cleaners, and emotional labourers on one side, and the more general capacities for speaking and doing that they shared with their masculine comrades on the other. As such, it re-established the question of how to equally distribute the jobs of reproducing the occupation as one essential to the nature of the ideals of the community. Rather than damning the occupation as a failure, however, the strike should be seen as a necessary part of the ongoing experiments to enact equality. In this sense, these practices of experimentation were a negotiation between ongoing processes of realisation and voiding. Thus, the strike reflected the way Barad conceptualises the void as a "dynamic of iterative re-opening" where spacetimematters can be substantively reconfigured by actively re-opening them to the exclusions that otherwise give them determinacy (2017, p. 80).

Indeed, Kaufer and Lein point out that there was "substantial room for self-criticism" within the practices of the occupation (2020, p. 74). Where issues of stratification from the outside became present on the inside, this became the subject of self-criticism as part of a communal effort to address these issues. As the few examples given above should demonstrate, it is here, in the attempt to forge an emancipatory space resistant to the world of capitalism, rather than 'out there' under the coercive pressures of capitalist domination, that what Barad calls an "ethics of responsibility" can take shape around the exclusions necessary to materialise what Rancière calls the “world of equality”, as well as the limits that forms of exclusion might inscribe in any claim to equality (Barad, 2007, pp. 391-396; Rancière, 2017).

Traces of this process can be found in an article found in the book *With Tree Houses Against Excavators* entitled *The Forest Occupation – An Open Space?* (2015, pp. 161-172). In the first place, it set out some necessary impositions required to organise the space, for example, the collective power to intervene and remove people from the occupation if they produce discriminatory behaviour, or behaviour that transgresses the boundaries of other occupiers (ibid., p. 162). Furthermore, it established the need to separate the communal space as one of political organising from recreational space and with it to divide spaces in which alcohol and drug consumption are permitted and in which they are necessarily excluded for the benefit of political organising (ibid.; see also, Spirit of Squatters Collective, 2012, 00:15:38).

On the other side, the author acknowledged the limits of the space as a truly open one. They identified this as a ‘problem’ in order to facilitate a dialogue about how best to address the issues or, at the very least, to name exclusions that they aren’t in full control of, which are nonetheless problematic in relation to their egalitarian objectives. Whilst the “theory is that an open space should be equally usable by all people…” the reality was nonetheless that:

> the typical forest squatter is physically healthy, between 20 and 30 years old, white, has been through a lot in life psychologically, has an academic education and no children. This is not to say that people who fit into one or more of these categories do not exist on the occupation. It just means that these characteristics are disproportionately prevalent on the cast compared to the population average in Europe. (Hambach Forest, 2015, p. 164)

As the author identified, unfortunately some of this comes from the material limits of the occupation itself: “everyday life on a forest squat is harder if not impossible for people with physical disabilities – depending on the type of disability/ From the composting toilet being unusable for wheelchair uses” to the resource limits to “have sign language interpreters permanently present” (ibid.). Furthermore, the over-representation of students and young people as permanent members of the occupation was noted to be an effect of the fact that “it is often difficult to combine a job, children and political activism” (ibid.). In this sense, the author acknowledged that those who had looser and lesser relational entanglements compelling them to engage the majority of their time with the structures of capital that compose ‘this world’ were more readily predisposed to be able to break with it and to direct their time and energies against it, whilst it was more difficult for others more deeply entangled in the necessities of wage-work to do so, at least on a full-time basis.

On other issues, however, the author didn't necessarily have answers. For example, they weren't sure why the German section of the occupation skewed whiter than the general population of Germany, though they were keen to point out that the international composition of the occupation meant that there were plenty of non-German people of colour there and that this was a broader problem for the German left (ibid.). Nonetheless, these particular limits were at least actively ameliorated in the occupation's real commitments to antiracism. For example in the organisation of a "Critical Whiteness Weekend" organised by white members of the occupation as a collective spacetime "to reflect on our behaviour and thinking together" (Hambi Bleibt!, 2020b), and by the activities of organising, knowledge-exchange, and solidarity with Indigenous communities in settler states and communities from the Global South struggling against the dispossessions and subjugations of Fossil Capital.

8.7 The World of Equality in Anti-Colonial Solidarity

The critical whiteness event was one of a number of events through which an anti-colonial axiom of egalitarianism was put into action. A minor example includes an event in nearby Cologne in 2016 attended by participants of the occupation (Hambi Bleibt!, 2016). The event, composed of presentations and workshops, brought together activists from: the ongoing Phulbari Resistance in Bangladesh, a group resisiting the destruction of their farmlands by a British Coal firm wanting to establish an open-pit coal mine there; Earthlife Africa, which focuses on issues of Climate, Energy, social inequality, food and water insecurity particularly as they unfold from the decimation of the African Coal Mining Regions; from the Indigenous Women's Council of La Guajira resisting the ecologically destructive Cerrejón open-pit coal mine owned by the Swiss firm Glencore (ibid.). The event provided an opportunity to forge relations through a shared sense of struggle over issues of dispossession and for the activists from Hambach to express solidarity. But, as the blogpost made clear, it also provided an opportunity to think about the ways in which certain "privileges" of resisting in the Global North marked important differences despite the shared sense of struggle (ibid.).

What constitutes this privilege isn't explained within the blogpost. Nonetheless, a key example would be that, whilst police violence was a persistent and ugly presence in clearance season at Hambach Forest (Brock, 2018, pp. 41-43), lives were seldom treated as cheaply as they were in Phulbari, where a 2006 protest against the mine saw 6 people shot and killed by paramilitaries (Dudman, 2023), or in La Guarija, where paramilitaries have been known to issue death threats and have reported conversations with representatives of the mine company to plan the assassinations of protest leaders (London Mining Network, 2020), or in the racialised exposure to death that marked the Apartheid regime and its afterlives, from which Earthlife Africa's anti-coal resistance emerged (Cock, 2004).

Indeed, the very act of occupying the trees in treehouses as an act of resistance in Hambach relied upon a mutual recognition of human life between the agents of RWE, the petty police, and the occupiers in order to make the protest effective in ways that could not necessarily be assured in these other movements. It is this mutual recognition that made it necessary for the corporation and the petty police to disassemble the treehouses slowly and carefully in order to safely remove the occupiers before the trees could be cut. And it was this necessity that the protestors capitalised upon in their strategies of delay and refusal. In this light, interesting moments of solidarity occurred when the site of the forest itself operated to void the racial markings of the Cartesian cut; those markings that severed the human from itself, constituting the limits of Bourgeois Reason and enshrining white, bourgeois 'Man' as the speaking being at the locus of humanity itself. In these instances, the markings of shared humanity that ensured the utility of the barricades in the forest became the means to hold open a space of equality for those whose humanity was not always so clearly secured.

One such example comes from a 2017 visit by hip-hop artists Tufawon and Nataanii Means, members of the Dakota and Lakota nations respectively, and political activists from the resistance to the Dakota Access Pipeline. A video fragment on twitter tweeted by the German Green politician Kathrin Henneberger captured the moment when the two rappers reached the occupation inside the forest. Two occupiers suspended from harnesses high up in the trees dropped a large banner that read "Hambi supports Indigenous resistance! DeCO$_2$lonize now" (Henneberger, 2017). The word 'Now' had been coloured blue and the 'O' has been decorated to look like a globe, dripping water droplets. The illustration, whilst perhaps trite in its ecological signification, nonetheless acknowledged a central aspect of the struggle over the Dakota Access Pipeline, that the pipeline is a threat to the water security of Indigenous Americans, threatening to pollute the groundwater of Lakota and Dakota territory and make the land unliveable.

In Estes' historical account of Indigenous resistance and the confrontations at Standing Rock, he noted:

> The protestors called themselves Water Protectors because they weren't simply against a pipeline; they also stood for something greater: the continuation of life on a planet ravaged by capitalism. This reflected the Lakota and Dakota

> philosophy of Mitakuye Oyasin, meaning “all my relations” or “we are all related. (2019, p. 15)

But, as Estes notes, these forms of knowledge are incompatible with the reason of ‘Man’ and the violent aesthetic transformations of bodies into labour and commodities (ibid., pp. 16, 67-132). As such, the Indigenous population, their onto-epistemologies, and their other-than-human kin, were devaluated in the Cartesian cut and sifted to the bottom of the hierarchical axis of Reason, where they were subjected to the violent, ecocidal, reconfigurative power of capital. The excavators that entered Standing Rock Reservation to dig out a space for the pipeline represent for the Lakota and Dakota peoples one more potentially lethal and certainly ecologically destructive dispossession in a history of lethal and ecologically destructive dispossessions, prefaced by dehumanisation and onto-epistemic exclusion, often made from behind the barrel of a gun (ibid.).

By contrast, when Tufawon and Nataanii Means entered Hambi, they entered a space in which those cuts were suspended by the apparatuses of void-making. The welcome at Hambi preceded a series of conversations between the two sets of activists around a campfire. In an interview from the Forest, Tufawon was asked whether it helps their struggle to communicate with people here. Tufawon responded:

> Absolutely… it’s an amazing thing to be able to come to someone else’s struggle and to share mine, to share methodologies, to share strategies on how we fight. You know how we fight climate change back home and how they fight it here… and also learn about parallels and talk about how we are very similar in our own struggles (Hambacherforst Konzerte, 2017a, 00:03:18).

Again, the negative nature of the space became a point from which to produce a shared sense of intelligibility, an opening on which two different struggles from very different contexts could re-establish relation as an exchange of equals struggling against the more-than-human hierarchies of capitalism, conjoining otherwise disparate groups via a mutual transfer of knowledge forged in refusal. What I find particularly compelling about this exchange is that, by the fact of its location within the void made to mount a struggle, by the means of the ruptural properties of the barricades, it permitted a *dialogue* woefully lacking in the frequent appropriations of Indigenous knowledge in the academy and institutional settings (Reid and Chandler, 2019; Todd, 2015; 2016). By contrast, this exchange was marked by an equality forged in concrete political struggles and shared understandings of injustice, posed in opposition to the very material processes of dispossession, domination, and ecological destruction that give capital—its Bourgeois Reason, its figure of ‘Man’, and its technologies for reproducing the Cartesian cut—its expansive and necrotic powers of becoming.

Tufawon and Nataanii Means' visit culminated in a performance by the two rappers within the forest. In a video that captured their set, it is possible to see a very different techno-material assemblage to the excavators that reproduce the Cartesian cut. Wooden pallets set out on the forest floor played host to an ipad and mixing desk. One set of cables led up into two microphones. Another set trailed off screen and towards a generator, whilst yet another set wound their way across to two large speakers that were placed on stands and tied to the trees in order to secure them. This apparatus was, of course, inseparable from the barricades as a void-making apparatus, insomuch as the performance would not have been possible without suspending the marks by which the space was intelligible as mere *res extensa*. The void altered the limits of what it was possible to see, to say, to do, and to be in the space, producing a gap that could be filled by this musical assemblage, re-cutting the boundaries between speech, noise, and silence through which the forest occupation had become intelligible.

At the very top of his half of the set, Nataanii Means succinctly articulated his position within the framework of wrong:

> I come from the Oklahoma Lakota Nation, I come from the Navaho Nation, and I come from the Omaha Nation. Those are three great nations in a land where there is over five hundred nations that are not recognised as the original people and are not respected…I tell stories from my reservation. I started making hip hop I wanted people to get to know the American Indian in the 21st Century. About what we go through. the meth addicts, the alcoholism, the feelings of suicide, the extraction of our resources (Hambacherforst Konzerte, 2017b, 00.25:08)

The words announced the wrong of settler colonialism as the creation of a world in which they have no part, and they gave this wrong presence in an account of a series of psycho-social-material effects on Indigenous Americans as a being excluded from the futurity of becoming. In that vein, Means' songs confronted themes like the long-standing sense of futurelessness amongst Native youth, who are marked by the highest suicide rate of any demographic in America, as well as the complexity of struggles from inside as much as against the United States.

On the other hand, Means' songs provided an opening to reimagine collective belongings that manifest a future justice that rectifies this wrong. In the song *Creation*, the lyrics "I'm native like my blood goes back to creation! Native before America was a nation!" are designed to stake out a specifically Native part in a world distinct from the settler one, the world in which Mitakuye Oyasin presides and in which the world of Bourgeois Man and their claim to separateness, supremacy, and to ownership is invalidated (ibid., 00:39:39).

Nevertheless, he asked his predominantly white, European audience to participate by chanting part of the hook alongside himself and Tufawon. There is of course something very awkward about the translation of these phrases across boundaries into a country whose relatively recent genocidal past was animated by a particular connection between blood, land, and territory. However, rather than affirming the boundaries of belonging between the two groups as entirely distinct, separate lineages, Means argued that the intention of the song was to emphasise "that *all of our blood* goes back to creation," including the audience's. That—mirroring Barad's relational ontology—there is a materially-constituted belonging to each other and to more-than-human relations that, as Estes notes, "predates and continues to exist in spite of white supremacist Empires like the United States" (2019, p. 15). As Means argued, by really reckoning with our shared entanglement in Creation, people can come to a shared "respect for our earth" (Hambachforst Konzerte, 2017, 00:40:20).

What I want to suggest then, is that in the negative space of Hambi, where the cuts that cleave Bourgeois Man off from both human and nonhuman otherness were suspended and litigated in a struggle, the egalitarian reconfiguration of shared relation as a positive project—of something akin to Mitakuye Oyasin—became possible. But only insomuch as it was shaped through the homologous lines of conflict woven together by the spacetimemattering of Hambach Forest and Standing Rock Reservation as conjoined spacetimes: the shared struggle that pits a more-than-human egalitarian logic against the hierarchies of police logic, or, as Silvia Wynter put it:

> between the ongoing imperative of securing the well-being of our present ethnoclass (i.e., Western bourgeois) conception of the human, Man, which overrepresents itself as if it were the human itself, and that of securing the well-being, and therefore the full cognitive and behavioural autonomy of the human species itself/ourselves (Wynter, 2003, p. 60)

On one side, the destructive force of Bourgeois Man and his Reason, and on the other, a human configured in genuine forms of connection and relation, where emancipation is realised in and through shared belonging to Creation.

8.8 The World of Equality in Ecological Relations with The Forest

In a scene from *Brand (Fire) III* (Fasbender, 2018, 00:20:16), an occupier is captured carefully cutting a branch from a tree neighbouring the one in which they had erected their treehouse. The occupier notes that before they entered the tree "a Birch that's nearly dead chafed against it with a branch all the time" which caused a patch of the tree's outer bark to erode, polishing the rings beneath into a smooth texture. As they explain why they cut the branch, they stretch out their fingers and in a moment of tactual relation, they affectionately caress the smooth patch. It is a small moment in the film, but it is one demonstration of a tenderness that developed between the occupiers and the trees, where the occupiers respect for the trees as their 'home' was reciprocated with a sensitivity to the kinds of marks that were made through the material relations of the trees and what they could mean. In Lehečková's ethnographic engagement with the occupation (2023), they noted a sense of attunement and care that developed in the intimacies of living with and barricading through the trees. One occupier told her that their relationship with the trees was "based on equality, but I think it is also about the awareness of the existence of other species. I am simply aware and respectful of their existence and of what they need" (ibid., p. 58). For example, Lehečková notes that the occupiers became aware of the way in which RWE were draining groundwater from the forest as part of the practices of expanding the mine by the way the trees closest to the clearance line had begun to whither, becoming dry and weak and easily uprooting in wind and rainfall (ibid., pp.61-62). As such, the self-uprooting trees themselves gave their own testimony to the way that RWE's practices were preventing them from meeting all of the needs required for their flourishing.

Moreover, the methods of building the barricades and the treehouses became the topic of considerable discussion amongst many of the occupiers, with an emphasis on impinging on the tree's needs as little as possible (ibid., p.72), facilitating a careful balancing act between distance and proximity, inclusion, and exclusion. Debates about how best to bind the trees and have them hold the weight of the treehouses without damaging the cambium, the thinnest sliver of living tissue located between the bark and the sapwood inside, and the phloem, the nutrient transportation system located just outside of the cambium resulted in several unique solutions. Some placed materials between the ropes and the bark in order to ease the pressure of the ropes. Others bore holes to weave the ropes through the trees, that way the phloem and the cambium would not be restricted in the same way. Others still carefully scouted trees with a 'V' shaped crown to create a natural structure for the house to sit in it. And some considered whether the house should sit atop the tree or whether the tree should be allowed to weave through the house, facilitating a form of cohabitation not "on the tree but with the tree" (ibid.). In this sense, through the very acts of constructing the apparatus that voided the Cartesian cut, the occupiers forged new modes of more-than-human becoming that fundamentally re-formatted the nature of the boundary between human and its others.

This extended to making space for other species in the forest, such as the colonies of ants that navigated the forest floor and the dung beetles that swarmed at the compost toilets (ibid., pp. 80, 86), and it included careful debates about what to do with potentially harmful entanglements, like the Oak Processionary Caterpillar that threatened to consume oak trees and to give animal species including the occupiers a rash (ibid., p. 106). As such, treating the forest as an equal living being that—much like the occupiers—had needs that should be met in order to flourish, created an ethic comparable to what Giraud has called an ethics of exclusion (2019) and that Franklin Ginn describes as ethical detachment (2014), where the occupiers acted with responsibility to the exclusions and inclusions required to build an ecologically just occupation. Needs were carefully weighed up and potential solutions were debated in terms of the harm caused and reduced by the forms of exclusion they required. For example, some moved the caterpillar nests by hand to the edge of the forest, whilst others argued that their occupation should use trees that weren't oak in order to leave the caterpillars to their business (Lehečková, 2023, pp. 106-107). Others still decided that killing some was necessary, but only did so in terms of what they considered a last resort and as humanely as possible (ibid.).

In the documentary *Brand (Fire) III,* one occupier demonstrated the way these new relations shaped new trajectories of ecological becoming that were acutely felt when RWE and the police came to forcefully tried to disentangle the occupiers from the trees:

> you develop such a strong bond. After I was evicted, I just lay beside the tree crying… That I start crying for a tree... [I] recognise the way the forest changes you, day after day, more and more, more and more (Fasbender, 2018, 01:04:20)

Turning the language of this chapter on its head, this same occupier argued that:

> for the media and RWE, I'm an occupier. For the forest I'm a resident, and see myself as one. Quite a different view. Definitely like that more than being seen as an occupier. Because RWE is occupying, not me. And really everything belongs to everyone. So, we don't need occupiers, only residents.

What struck me about this passage was the way in which it inverted the question of the legitimacy of belonging. Their position denigrated Bourgeois Man's arch-signifier of reason in the form of property rights and instead articulated legitimacy around the concept of residency, which required a fundamentally different mode of apprehension that informed a different mode of reason: the reciprocal relations of need and the responsibilities of care and belonging that were forged with the forest in the void that they had made.

By closing the forest to the excavators and the Cartesian cut, the occupation also facilitated opening the forest to others in engagements that produced a positive sense of relation that was completely other to its rendering as *res extensa* under the ownership of RWE. Most clearly, this took the form of the guided walks through the Forest by a local nature guide Michael Zobel, that took place regularly since 2014 (Mohr and Smits, 2022, p. 7). As a feature in *National Geographic* reports, when these walks first started, there were few partakers, but by 2017 there were walks of up to 400 people at a time (Donahue, 2018), and which turned into a 6,000-person protest march by 2018 (Von Der Brelie and Hackwell, 2018).

As the article notes, Zobel's walks demonstrated the symbiotic relations that constitute the living biome of the forest:

> He points out bats, like the endangered Bechstein's bat (Myotis bechsteinii)—or the holes in older trees where they might be roosting—and badgers. And no walk in a German forest would be complete without a discussion of its mushrooms, edible or otherwise (Donahue, 2018)

It is a surprisingly novel mode of engagement with the Forest. As the German Forester, Peter Wohlleben argues, "The problem is that forests in Germany haven't been researched very well. Most research is for industry, about how fast a tree can grow or its quality as a timber species" (ibid.). By contrast, Zobel presented a mode of knowing and being with the forest and its relations entirely at odds with the predominant forms of knowledge, which operated through the Bourgeois gaze and were designed simply to evaluate the trees as commodities.

Moreover, the 2018 protest march culminated in a tree-planting effort. A news article from the protest quoted one protester, Manuel Strattman as saying:

> We are protesting against coal-mining. Coal-mining is the most shitty way to produce electric energy, it has the most CO_2 emissions. Today we are planting new trees in the forest to extend the forest - instead of killing it. (von der Brelie and Hackwell, 2018)

That is, the tree-planting effort recognised the way the forest represented a wrong both in the local sense of the destruction of the Forest itself, but also in the more global sense that the forest is imbricated in the political faultline of climate change. As such, the tree-planting effort was a microcosm of rectification, the marking of wrong with a tentative gesture towards justice: the expansion of the forest and the repelling of the clearance line and its signification of capital's ecocidal void-making powers.

8.9 Conclusion

The reciprocal focus on more-than-human needs recalls that most famous adage from the Communist Manifesto: "from each according to his ability, to each according to his need"

(Marx and Engels 2009 [1875], p. 11). As such, I argue that the 'nucleus of a new world' that coalesced in the organisation of Hambi was nothing less than the tentative embodiment of an eco-communist reason – a spacetimemattering of egalitarian futurity, in which all those parts that could have no part in the order of Bourgeois Man found multi-species emancipation in the void of an ecocidal now. But this eco-communism didn't slip into the cracks structured by a voracious and destructive capitalism. The primacy of negative activities meant that the occupation confronted those dynamics directly with an apparatus of void-making. This manifested an emancipatory agential cut through a destructive break of refusal with 'what is' that was also a subtractive opening onto its own world.

The years of political confrontation ended with the successful legal suspension of RWE's right to clear the forest. The fact that the forest remains, that the agential cut signified under the banner of 'Hambi' made a significant contribution to that, and that the occupation remains in the forest, albeit absent some of the political tension and momentum it built between 2012 and 2020 should be read as signs of victory (Kaufer and Lein, 2020; Liersch and Stagmaier, 2022). Moreover, the right of the forest to remain marks the inscription of the veracity of the equality the occupation established in the course of the occupation: the equality of speaking beings, of Hambi, not simply as two entities—occupiers and forest—but a relationally constituted unity: Hambi Bleibt! The occupation also contributed to significant changes to the schedule of the *Energiewende.* As Mohr and Smits note, it "at least destabilised the energy-regime in Germany and without the strong influence of the movement, a coal phase-out in 2038 (or earlier) would probably not even have been considered by the German government" (2022, p. 9). Indeed, in the time since the end of the political struggle within the forest, the date of the coal phase-out has been further revised down to 2030 (Power Technology, 2022).

However, the occupiers have not lost sight of the continued need for a politics of void-making. Whilst the forest has been secured, nearby villages are still under threat to make way for the extension of lignite mines in the vicinity. With this in mind, some of the occupiers have joined the barricaded occupation of nearby Lützerath, a small farming village under threat that has become the host of "“resistance” workshops, conferences, concerts, vegan group dinners and thumping, nightlong raves" (Buchsbaum, 2023). As such, the political battle continues, to void the world of Bourgeois Man and its hierarchies of Bourgeois Reason, constituted through the Cartesian cut, and to force an egalitarian, eco-communist world into being in its stead.

Chapter 09.
Conclusion

9.1 Summary

I opened this thesis by situating posthuman knowledge practices within a specific narrative account of the sociohistorical conditions of their emergence, Latour's 'double debacle' of 1989. 1989 marks both the end of state communism and the first conferences on climate change. As such, its 'double debacle' indexes two crises that I suggested have converged in the Anthropocene epoch; the crisis of the nature/culture binary that framed Modern thought and the crisis of political possibility. Across the thesis, I have demonstrated that these intersecting crises have been processed differently across the spectrum of posthuman knowledge-making. By analysing the poetic fabrication of these knowledges, I identified four distinct poetic regimes, each with their own methods of narration which imply their objects of knowledge, the aesthetic modes of sensing them, and the metaphorical and descriptive modes of translating them into clear forms and figures.

Rancière's understanding of knowledges as one aspect of a broader "configuration of sense", which shapes what can be "seen, said, and done" (2009, p. 120), and his conceptual schema of 'politics' and 'policing' allowed me to frame the analysis in terms of the political consequences of these poetic regimes. The central argument that I have presented through the course of this analysis is that, despite important differences, a commonality is that these poetic regimes pushed radical politics out of view, whether explicitly or implicitly. In this sense, I have suggested that they demonstrate an inability to adequately respond to the Anthropocene's crisis of political possibility. As I argued in the introduction, this crisis of political possibility requires *radical*, possibility-opening forms of political practice because the current terrain of possibility seemingly has the planet locked into increasingly necrotic and ecocidal patterns of power.

The argument was made by tying a number of threads together in my own knots of sense-making that composed distinct critical engagements across all of the chapters. One thread of the analysis related these modes of poetic fabrication to logics of affirmation and negation. Through this thread, I demonstrated the ways that certain modes of narration led to affirmational and negative aesthetic logics. Here I tried to demonstrate that a certain polarity in these debates resulted in a lack of theoretical engagement with radical political practice. An extreme example of this can be found in Chapter 3, which covered the Poetic Regime of Uncertainty. There, the sense of uncertainty meant moving away from negative critique and therefore from the negative tasks of radical political practice, which resulted in the affirmational aesthetic of tracing, reproducing the terms of the world just as it has been constituted. At the other extreme, in Chapter 6 where I examined the *intensive negative* pole of the Poetic Regime of Pessimism, I demonstrated a negative aesthetic of corrosion and illegibility, in which the irredeemability of the Modern world led to a ceaseless destruction of all of Modernity's terms. Whilst I found the radicality of this critique to be both provocative and to some degree helpful, I demonstrated that this corrosive strategy gave stark results, acting as a barrier to engaging the positive or affirmational aspect of radical politics.

Another thread of the analysis proceeded from Rancière's conception of knowledge as part of a "configuration of sense," or "knots tying together possible perceptions, interpretations, orientations and movements" and thus shaping the thinkable, sayable, and doable (2009, p. 120). This led me to bring these affirmational and negative aesthetics into dialogue with practices operating beyond the sphere of Academia, with which they shared certain affinities as well as productive tensions. The mixture of affinities and tensions provided another resource for the critical examination of posthuman knowledges and a way to reflect on the terrain of possibilities and limits that each poetic regime engenders. Here, Rancière's distinction between politics, which mobilises an aesthetically disruptive logic of equality, and police, which imposes and regulates the common sense of a hierarchical *archē,* became a useful heuristic for analysing the political consequences of different poetic regimes.

For example, in Chapter 4 on the Poetic Regime of Brutality, I drew upon the manifestos of both the Christchurch Mosque shooter, Brenton Tarrant and of the French far-right party Rassemblement National in order to critique the conceptions of limits as a 'brute fact' in both Bruno Latour and Donna Haraway's more recent work. I argued that their positions affirmed some of the core tenants of 'green ethnonationalism' and contributed to practices of policing that insisted upon reimposing the *archē* of race and the unity of state upon the social world. This also helped me to deflate the fantastical elements of narrative that they deployed in order to escape the problem of population control that they invoked and to make legible the gap where radical political practice should be. And in Chapter 5, I drew on the intentional community of Tinker's Bubble as a way of pushing back against the valorisation of hyposubjectivity and withdrawal in the work of Timothy Morton, as well as the fleeting 'optimism' that Tsing placed in interstitial and pericapitalist spaces. I suggested that in these cases, the negative aesthetic of corrosion led to forms of withdrawal that required sinking into and beneath the cracks of the distribution of the sensible, marking a significant retreat from the practice of politics.

Rather than dismissing posthuman theorising outright, I began Chapter 7 with the Poetic Regime of Potentiality, I turned to a strand of feminist posthumanism embodied by the work of Karen Barad, which made space for both affirmational and negative logics. However, I tried to demonstrate that this approach coalesced in the gesture towards the potentiality of otherwise without engaging the substantive processes by which that otherwise might be realised. Here, the affirmational moment of possibility-location tended to override the negative focus on exclusions and undoing as the resources of possibility. I drew out the negative dimensions of Barad's thought by focussing on their aesthetically-oriented conception of the 'void' as a site of 'un/doing' or making and *crucially* unmaking. However, this still required further elaboration as part of a practice of radical politics. Therefore, I sutured this conception of the void to Rancière's political conception of void. Beginning with his understanding of a police order as having a certain intolerance for void, I made account of the part of no part, their capacities to disrupt the sensible coordinates of the world as it is, and to articulate a 'wrong' as a politics of void-making. I also elaborated the way that Rancière's conception of politics alerts us to the way these aesthetic disruptions open out onto the formation of new, egalitarian logics and the concrete composition of egalitarian worlds that gain force precisely because of the negative, litigious struggle that founds them. Finally, I used Barad's more-than-human account of intelligibility making to decentre the human as the absolute locus of radical politics, framing void, void-making, and the apparatuses of void-making in more-than-human terms.

In chapter 8, I showed the import of this conceptual repertoire by using it to read the political practices of the Hambach Forest occupation, 'Hambi'. I demonstrated the ways in which the construction of barricades, treehouses, tripods, skypods etc. constituted the construction of an apparatuses of void-making. This apparatus both disrupted and voided the hierarchical logics of Fossil capital engendered by the 'Cartesian cut', or the agential cut of the nature/culture binary. Importantly, the line that demarcated the barren landscape of the lignite mine and the remains of the forest that neighboured it, disclosed *a part of no part* in the process of the forest clearing. The occupiers translated the 'speech' of the clearance line into the 'wrong' of the order of the Cartesian cut, by superimposing the global violences of fossil-fuel induced climate change upon the violence of cutting the forest. All the parts that could have no part in the order of the Cartesian cut and the regime of Fossil Capital came to be represented under the signifier of 'Hambi.' The voiding of the Cartesian cut gave the occupation force, by translating these ‘wrongs’ into the only language that RWE could ‘hear’, rupturing the sensible terms of their world by attacking the source of their profits. This opened space to construct counter-forms of egalitarian logic, and the constitution of an egalitarian world, materially subtended by attending to more-than-human ‘needs’ without the valuative, commodifying logics of market exchange, and by carefully attuning to the tangle of diverse needs that compose other-than-human relations. Indeed, the successful creation of this hierarchy-voiding, political apparatus pulled more and more bodies into the reconfigurative process of litigation. This helped to affect not just the preservation of the forest, but a key site of litigation over the question of fossil fuels in Germany. Here the occupation played a key role in contributing to reducing the timeline of fossil fuel phase-out in Germany.

In sum, I suggest that by paying attention to these kinds of struggles, with the conceptual repertoire I have located in the work of Barad and Rancière, we can become more attuned to the real conditions of radical possibility. This would allow us to circulate accounts by which the very coordinates of possibility are transformed and new conditions for more-than-human justice become legible. Under the bleak constraints of the Anthropocene epoch, attention to and circulation of moments of radical rupture and more-than-human equality might better connect us to political struggles by making modest offerings to the bricolage by which others construct their own struggles. Of course, not all of the answers are to be found here, but certainly the beginnings of *some* are.

9.2 Contributions and Implications

The thesis makes a number of contributions to debates going on within and to some degree beyond posthuman theorising. In the first place, whilst Rancière has been a resource for thinking about posthuman politics (Bennett, 2010; Bryant, 2011; Booth and Williams, 2014; Janicka, 2020), his account of a ‘poetics of knowledge’ has not been utilised as a way of reading and attending to the political aesthetics of posthuman knowledge-making. As such, I have offered a novel mode of reading of posthuman knowledges that is more concretely attuned to the practical implications of the in/visibilities that are produced in the junctures of narrative, description, and sense-making that compose knowledge practices. Moreover, by committing to the broader ‘configurations of sense’ that operate beyond academic knowledge-making through case-studies, I have grounded a pragmatic critique, oriented to egalitarian and emancipatory forms of politics, in a unique case-study approach that pulls theory through the play of resonances and tensions across these configurations of sense. In doing so, I have provided a unique way of thinking carefully about the political possibilities and limits that are inscribed in posthuman knowledge practices. Whilst there is an abundance of approaches that critique posthumanism from the vantage point of excluded being (e.g. Arboleda, 2018; Sundberg, 2014; Schultz, 2017a; Todd, 2016; Zalloua, 2021), Rancière's framework has also allowed me to attend to absence in terms of a particular kind of *process*, radical politics, without determining its being or subject ahead of time. This isn't to devalue these other approaches, which are absolutely vital, but it does permit a certain promiscuity for thinking about where exclusions are made and how radical politics can emerge from them.

My adoption of Rancière's poetics of knowledge answers calls within the literature on 'geopoetics' to engage with the poetics of academic writing as part of the terms by which we make the problems of the Anthropocene intelligible (Creswell, 2021; Magrane, 2015; Magrane *et al.,* 2020; Nassar, 2020). This literature has sometimes treated poetics and knowledge as two separate things (as in Magrane's call to use poetry to "critically–creatively engage with concepts emanating from new materialist and posthumanist trends" (2020, p. 14)). By contrast, Rancière's approach offers a unique vantage point to see and critically engage the poetics already operative in posthuman knowledges and to think through the political consequences of how they make objects of knowledge un/intelligible. Here, I hope to have made a small critical contribution to thinking about the relationship between poetics, intelligibility, and the knowledge-practices of Earth-writing. Moreover, I hope to have done so with a focus on how 'writing the Earth' might be carefully linked to political struggles for and over the Earth.

The analysis has also contributed a novel response to the call to think through the negative in posthuman theorising (Colebrook, 2021; Dekeyser and Jellis, 2020; Giraud, 2019; Harrison, 2015; Philo, 2017a; Pugh and Chandler, 2023), by situating this demand more concretely within the relationship between theorising and the political practices that theory can engender. The thesis joins critiques of the overly-affirmational whilst also ensuring that negativity, rather than (re)producing forms of impotency (Bissell *et al.*, 2021; Thacker, 2015; Warren, 2018), is directly linked to its productive capacities to radically desediment hierarchies and to make space for egalitarian politics. This culminated in *a novel theorisation of more-than-human radical politics* as a practice of *void-making*, which restores the primacy of the negative to political theorising without surrendering the political capacities required to produce new horizons of political possibility. With this new approach, I hope to loosen the polarising binary of negation and affirmation, and to have contributed to thinking about how they might be linked together in ways that meaningfully mark and transform the world.

9.3 Future Directions

All writing is marked by its own limits, both due to the spatial and temporal limits of writing practices and the horizons of the thinkable that they emerge from. However, reflecting upon these limits can open out onto others. A key example at the theoretical level would be the increasing uptake of Black studies in and against posthuman theorising (Petersmann, 2023; Chipato and Chandler, 2023; Torrent, 2023; Pugh and Chandler, 2023). Whilst I have referenced some important contributions to Black studies over the course of the thesis, particularly Sylvia Wynter's conception of 'Man' (2003), some of this has remained beyond the limits of the project at hand. However, there are resonances in the critical nature of these efforts and my own, and indeed a particular interest in aesthetics and poetics within Black studies. For example, one can recall Fred Moten's attention to sense and sound of dehumanising racialisation in his analysis of the Black slave as the commodity that doesn't just speak but screams (2003), which stands as another productive way of thinking about the links between the nature/culture binary and non/speaking being. A future engagement between my own project and the spectrum of aesthetically-oriented theorists in Black studies, including Fred Moten and Stefano Harney (2013; 2021), Denise Ferreira Da Silva (2014; Kerr, 2023), Katherine McKittrick (2021), and Rizvana Bradley (2021), would be fascinating, politically intriguing, and a useful addendum to the thesis.

At the empirical level, the thesis was oriented towards a heuristic analysis, drawing upon case studies to explore resonances and tensions within theory in its relationship with practice. As a result, I drew on those inscriptions and sense-making practices made intelligible through texts, videos, and audio files. This made sense for the project at hand, but one avenue for future research would be to engage other case studies of void-making using ethnographic methods. As much work in posthuman or more-than-human methodologies emphasises (Ash and Gallacher, 2015; Bastian *et al.,* 2017; Cadman, 2009; Dowling *et al.,* 2016), sensory traces of materiality and affect that escape traditional modes of textual inscription hold increasing importance. As such, drawing on Barad and Rancière's tools in an immersive, ethnographical project might help to tease out important supplements to what has been presented in this thesis.

9.4 The Final Word

How to end a thesis? Lacking words of my own that seem sufficient to the task, I end with another narrative. This time from a reporter known only as Clara, narrating for an anarchist podcast called *The Ex-Worker.* These words were spoken from inside of the forest occupation whilst looking upon the devastation of a recent eviction:

> You can still see the knots of the rope that held up the platforms, which are still solid, still tightly tied around the different forks of the branch, holding together the carved limbs of other fallen trees that helped to support the structure. And it seems like these bonds, these connections of resistance, are holding strong, even when repression is weighing down on people, driving people crazy; even when more and more of the forest is being destroyed every day; that these bonds of action, of solidarity, these relationships are sustaining, and sustaining through struggles across the continent to different kinds of projects, different kinds of infrastructure and destruction that are being resisted. And I don't know if hope is the right word; I don't know if we can talk about the occupiers here being hopeful. But we can talk about these bonds, these strong connections of resistance being forged that I think are laying the foundation for the resistance of the future and alternatives to the misery around us. (CrimethInc, 2015, 00:53:00)

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Appendix A

Chart of Poetic Regimes

	Poetic Regime of Uncertainty	*Poetic Regime of Brutality*	*Poetic Regime of Pessimism*	*Poetic Regime of Potentiality*
Narrative Theme	Overwhelming sense of uncertainty about nature-culture relations	Imbalance of nature/culture as a 'brute fact' of the Anthropocene	Failure of Modern knowledge systems and concepts	Contingency of the given boundaries of nature-culture and the potentiality that it could be otherwise
Knowledge Aesthetic	Tracing what is 'actualised' Metaphor of the 'grid'	Reduction to numerical 'brute facts'. Metaphor of the 'lifeboat'	Deconstruction of Modern concepts disarticulation of *logos* and *phone*	Disruption of hegemonic narratives Re-narrativisation to demonstrate contingency of what is and that the world could be otherwise
Affirmational or Negative?	Affirmational: commitment to the existing patterns of 'what is'	Affirmational: commitment to Anthropocene as imbalance of human and nonhuman forces. Population vs. stock of resources/ capacity for nature to absorb effects	Negative: fundamental critique of Modern civilisation and its terms of reference.	Dominant affirmational logic of affirming capacities Subordinated negative logic – exclusions and exclusion-making in realising potential
Implications for practice	Caution, governmentalising nature-culture by incorporation of 'new' entities, exclusion of 'dangerous' entities	Rebalancing nature/culture through population control, biopolitics/necropolitics and the state as bounding agent of the population	Withdrawal, new nature-culture relations made in interstitial spaces Destruction, critique, suspension of meaning, refusal of any positive dimension	If negative is realised, forms basis for contesting 'what is' on concrete terms. Must reverse relationship between affirmation and negation to do so.

Appendix B

List of sources

	Source	Source type	Primary/Secondary
Poetic Regime of Uncertainty			
	AA1000 Stakeholder engagement standard	Standard	Primary
	Future Agency Rhenisches Revier GmbH, About us page	Web page	Primary
	Hambi Bleibt! This is what RWE's Participation Looks like	Blog post	Primary
	Hambi Bleibt! Update formt he forest	Blog Post	Primary
	International Association for Public Participation, Spectrum of Public Participation	Policy Document	Primary
	International Standards Organisation: Introduction to ISO 14001:2015	Standard	Primary
	IUCN Biodiverstiy Management System	Standard	Primary
	IUCN Biodiversity Policy	Policy Document	Primary
	IUCN Stakeholder engagement	Policy Document	Primary
	IUCN A strategic approach on biodiversity: the what, why and how Business guide	Report	Primary
	IUCN Risks and opportunities in the biodiversity management and related stakeholder involvement of the RWE Hambach Lignite Mine	Report	Primary
	RWE biodiversity strategy for the Rhenish lignite mining area, Biodis	Strategy Document	Primary
	RWE Biodiversty in Recultivation Brochure	Pamphlet	Primary
	RWE Major projects acceptance study	Report	Primary
	RWE "Our Responsibility" Corporate Responsibility Reports, 2012-2018 **x7**	Report(s)	Primary
	RWE Stakeholder Engagement Framework	Policy Document	Primary

	RWE response to IUCN Risks and Opportunities Report	Press Release	Primary
	Brock, Securing accumulation by restoration – Exploring spectacular corporate conservation, coal mining and biodiversity compensation in the German Rhineland	Academic Article	Secondary
	Brock and Dunlap, Normalising corporate counterinsurgency: Engineering consent, managing resistance and greening destruction around the Hambach coal mine and beyond	Academic Article	Secondary
	Deutsche Welle, Police clear protesters from Hambach Forest	News Report	Secondary
	Rabbit / Earth First, “We are against all this shit” interview with protestors	Press interview	Secondary
Poetic Regime of Brutality			
	Camus, Le Grand Replacement	Book	Primary
	Crusius, 2019 El Paso shooting Manifesto	Manifesto	Primary
	Rassemblement National 2019 “For a Europe of Nations” EU elections Manifesto	Manifesto	Primary
	Reuters, latest polls 2022 France General Election	Web Page	Primary
	Tarrant, 2019 Christchurch Mosques shooting Manifesto	Manifesto	Primary
	Anievas and Saull, The far-right in world politics/world politics in the far-right	Academic Article	Secondary
	Biehl and Staudenmaier, Ecofascism, Lessons from the German Experience	Book	Secondary
	Bracke and Hernandez Aguilar, "They love death as we love life": The "Muslim Question" and the biopolitics of replacement	Academic Article	Secondary
	Crawley and Skleparis, Refugees, migrants, neither, both: categorical fetishism and the politics of bounding in Europe’s ‘migration crisis’	Academic Article	Secondary
	Forchtner and Kølvraa, Narrating a ‘new Europe’: From ‘bitter past’ to self-righteousness?	Academic Article	Secondary
	Garelli and Tazzioli, The biopolitical warfare on migrants: EU Naval Force and NATO operations of migration government in the Mediterranean	Academic Article	Secondary
	Goodrick-Clarke, Black Sun: Aryan Cults, Esoteric Nazism and the Politics of Identity	Book	Secondary
	Macklin, The Christchurch Attacks: Livestream Terror in the Viral Video Age	Report, Magazine Article	Secondary
	Marcks and Pawelz, From Myths of Victimhood to Fantasies of Violence: How Far-Right Narratives of Imperilment Work	Academic Article	Secondary
	Mazoue, Le Pen's National Rally goes green in bid for European election votes	News Report	Secondary
	Milman, Climate denial is waning on the right. What’s replacing it might be just as scary	News Article	Secondary
	Roy and Martin, 49 shot dead in attack on two Christchurch mosques	News Report	Secondary

	Uniacke, Good Migrants vs Bad Migrants	Academic article	Secondary
	Wikipedia List of sovereign states fertility rate	Online article	Secondary
	Wilson, Eco-Fascism is undergoing a revival in the fetid culture of the extreme right	Guardian Article	Secondary
Poetic Regime of Pessimism I			
	Brace, Reforesting Scotland	Magazine Article written by resident	Primary
	Diggers and Dreamers Book	Book Chapter written by resident	Primary
	Dellows, interview with Alex Toogood	Podcast Interview	Primary
	Simon Fairlie, Guardian letter	Newspaper letters section	Primary
	Spero, Settlements Book	Book Chapter written by resident	Primary
	Tinker's Bubble, Blogposts, 2019-2021 **X 6**	blogposts	Primary
	Tinker's Bubble legal agreement	Legal document	Primary
	BBC Newsnight, Tinker's Bubble Interviews	Interviews with residents	Secondary
	BBC Inside Out West feature	Interviews with Residents	Secondary
	Berrow and Jan, "Eve" documentary for Guardian	Documentary	Secondary
	Quirke et al, Tinker's Bubble Documentary	Documentary	Secondary
	Kinnock, Off the Grid: Meet the people leaving Modern life behind	Online Magazine Article	Secondary
	People, Food and Wellbeing Magazine 'Tinker's Bubble'	Magazine article	Secondary
	Miles, Urban Utopias	Book	Secondary
	Pickerill, Eco-homes	Book	Secondary
	Nelson, Small is Necessary	Book	Secondary
	North Devon Permaculture, Tinker's Bubble a visit	Online Article	Secondary
Poetic Regime of Pessimism II			
	The Anarchist Library	Online Archive	Primary
	Warzone Distro Zine Library	Online Archive	Primary
	Anonymous, Tearing Down the Prison of Civilisation	Zine	Primary
	Archegono, Nihilist Anarchy zine	Zine	Primary
	Flower Bomb, Collected Zines **X 8**	Zines	Primary
	Langer, Becoming Animal	Zine	Primary
	Warzine Distro, Anarchy and Animal Liberation	Zine	Primary
	Zeran et al. The economy is suffering, let it die	Zine	Primary
Poetic Regime of Radical Politics			
	Hambacher Forest, With Tree Houses Against Excavators	Self-authored Book	Primary
	Hambacher Konzerte Interview with Tufawon	Film footage	Primary
	Hambacher Konzerte, Tufawon and Natani Means full set	Film footage	Primary
	Hambi Bleibt Blog **X 165 posts**	Blog	Primary

	Hambi Bleibt! First Declaration	Blogpost	Primary
	Hambi Bleibt! FLINT* Strike	Blogpost	Primary
	Hambi Bleibt! Why we fight	Blogpost	Primary
	Hambi Bleibt! 10 years occupied	Blogpost	Primary
	Hambi Bleibt! Shit Barricades Zines **X 5**	Zines	Primary
	Henneberger, Welcome to Tufawon and Natani Means	Tweet/video	Primary
	De Miguel Wessendorf, Die Rote Linie	Documentary	Secondary
	Ehling et al. 10 years Hambach Forest	Book (interviews, eye-witness accounts)	Secondary
	Fasbender, Brand (Fire III)	Documentary	Secondary
	Reiter, Hambi: The Fight for Hambach Forest	Documentary	Primary/Secondary
	Spirit of Squatters Collective, report from the occupation	Video Interviews	Primary/Secondary
	Amelang, Germany transitionreport	News report	Secondary
	Boßner, Turning energy around:: Coal and the German Energiewende	Academic article	Secondary
	Braunbeck, The Past Erased, the Future Stolen: Lignite Extractivism as Germany's Trope for the Anthropocene	Academic article	Secondary
	Buchsbaum, Losing Lützerath: To save Germany, the occupied village must be destroyed	Blog post	Secondary
	Donahue, National Geographic report on Forest Walks	News Article	Secondary
	Hillencamp, "Hambi Stays!": Dwelling As Anti-Capitalism In Hambach Forest	Academic Article	Secondary
	Höhne, et al, 1.5°C: What Germany must Do	Institutional Report	Secondary
	Kaufer and Lein, Anarchist Resistance in the German Hambach Forest: Localising Climate Justice	Academic Article	Secondary
	Lehečhová, Hambach Forest Occupation: Relationships of Care between Plants and Humans	Academic Thesis	Secondary
	Liersch and Stagmeier, Keeping the forest above to phase out the coal below: The discursive politics and contested meaning of the Hambach Forest	Academic article	Secondary
	Michel, Lignite power provides bargain-priced pollution	Magazine Article	Secondary
	Michel, Status and Impacts of the German Lignite Industry	Institutional report	Secondary
	Mohr and Smits, Sense of place in transitions: How the Hambach Forest Movement shaped the German coal phase-out	Academic Article	Secondary
	Paul, Struggles over Energiewende	Academic Article	Secondary
	Von Der Brelie and Hackwell, report on 6,000 people forest walk	News Report	Secondary
	Wettengel, "No more time to lose" to keep 1.5°C within reach – German reactions to IPCC report	News Report	Secondary