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"THE SENSE OF AN ENDING": UTOPIA IN THE ANTHROPOCENE[1]

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Abstract: Ulrich Beck, in his article, "Climate for Change" of 2010, suggested that in the face of "climate breakdown" (George Monbiot), "something historically new can emerge, namely a cosmopolitan vision in which people see themselves … as part of an endangered world …". This paper will reflect on the possibility and impossibility of utopianism in the Anthropocene and ask the question if utopia is possible in the Anthropocene? It will take into consideration recent debates around utopia and the Anthropocene and look at four literary examples from Germany, Norway, England and the US.

Keywords: Anthropocene, utopia, cosmopolitics, cosmopoetics

In 1965, a time marred by end time events such as Auschwitz, Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Frank Kermode reflected on time and eschatological thinking in literature in his lecture series "The Long Perspectives". In these, he suggested that all literature is in some sense apocalyptical, grafting order onto our essentially human experiences of death but also (man-made) destruction and extinction. Eschaton scenarios that can be found in different cultures and religions across the world have offered model paradigms to "make tolerable one's moment between beginning and end" by promising cosmologies of transformation and redemption (Kermode 1967: 2). This paradigm has continued in what Kermode calls, "concord fictions", attempting to "unite beginning and end and endow the interval between them with meaning" (Kermode 1967: 190). Those writers writing from and about "the middest" then are required to negotiate the immanence and imminence of the impending apocalypse,

> And although for us the End has perhaps lost its naive imminence, its shadow still lies on the crises of our fictions; we may speak of it as immanent (Kermode 1967: 6).

Thus, according to Kermode, apocalyptic fictions create meaning, create new myths about life "in the middest".

The utopian scholar Frederic Jameson has developed Kermode's eschaton into a space that could be filled by utopian desire. "[T]he end of the world", Jameson argues, "may simply be the cover for a very different

1 I thank Dan Lea and Lyman Tower Sargent for their helpful comments on this piece; and Susanne Grohs-von Reichenbach for the opportunity to try some of these ideas at the *LitBox* in Munich, 2018.

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and more properly Utopian wish-fulfilment" – thus, the apocalypse can hold a seed of hope (Jameson 2007: 199)[2]. And whilst the historical paradigm of the apocalypse assumes that "the End is pretty near […]; time discredits it" (Kermode 1967: 8). In this sense, concord fictions are valuable – despite the immanent and imminent threat of apocalypse. Life "in the middest" becomes important to anticipate, to imagine and to possibly help to create another world. This utopian desire ensures that being "in the middest" is not living death but being imbued with hope and life, with knowledge and experience. The potential for political transformation lies in the utopian desire to immanentise the eschaton – in some sense, create prefigurative utopias.

Drawing on the literary critic Ottmar Ette, Hans Ulrich Seeber has understood these fictions as "literature of knowledge for living" (*Lebenswissenschaft*, Seeber 2017: 1-2). According to Seeber, it is particularly utopian fiction that carries, conveys and assembles the knowledge of experience, of living together (*Zusammenlebenswissen)*, and of survival as society and species (*Überlebenswissen*).[3]

In our period of the Anthropocene, another end time, the usefulness of utopian thought and desire has become an issue again. Narratives of the destruction of Planet Earth are abundant, ranging from extinction narratives in the vein of Mary Shelley's *The Last Man*, post-human and post-nature dystopias, Young Adult Dystopias, the New Weird, climate change fiction, and literatures of, what I would call, ecological mourning.[4] We seemed to have arrived at the terminus of "time's arrow", the end time of human life as we know it, and this time, time might not discredit the apocalyptic projection (Gould). Is therefore utopian desire futile and in fact, illusory, creating merely "a supposedly happy, harmonious, and non-conflictual space" that serves "to soothe and mollify, to entertain, to invent history and to cultivate nostalgia from some mythical past, to perpetuate the fetish of commodity culture rather than to critique it" (Harvey 2000: 166-167)?

I suggest that recent literary responses indicate a cosmopolitical response to the Anthropocene, "an openness towards multiple (yet differentiated) beings that are affected by our political choices or actions" (Hamilton 2017: 592). This response is therefore underscored by a new critical stance but also, by a new literary aesthetics that shape contemporary utopian fictions. These responses might not be enough to change and save mankind but they indicate possibilities of a future.

2 On Jameson and the apocalyptic, see also Roland Boer, Chapter 2.

3 At the same time, this knowledge is not expressed naively and untheorized but as Menke has argued, through a critical lens. See Menke.

4 Paul Kingsnorth, *Confessions of a Recovering Environmentalist* (2017), T.C. Boyle's, *A Friend of the Earth* (2000), Richard Powers, *The Overstory* (2018).

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"We're fucked. The only question is how soon and how badly"
(Scranton 2015: 16)

To ask about utopianism in the Anthropocene opens not one but two Pandora's boxes. The first one, the Anthropocene is a contested and widely debated concept (Ellis 2018). It describes a new epoch in Earth's geological history which underscores the acknowledgment of the impact of humans on the planet's evolution. Whilst the term had been in use since the 1930s, it was further developed in the 1980s by the ecologist Eugen F. Stoermer and introduced into current usage by atmospheric chemist Paul Crutzen. In 2000, Crutzen and Stoermer published a joint article in the *International Geosphere-Biosphere Programme Newsletter* where they proposed that given

> major and still growing impacts of human activities on earth and atmosphere, and at all, including global, scales, it seems to us more than appropriate to emphasize the central role of mankind in geology and ecology by proposing to use the term "anthropocene" for the current geological epoch. The impacts of current human activities will continue over long periods (Crutzen and Stoermer 2000: 17).[5]

The actual onset of the Anthropocene is a point of discussion. Crutzen and Stoermer concede that it would be possible to place the significant impact of humans onto the world origins back several millennia with the beginnings of agricultural cultivation and the domestication of crops in the Neolithic Age.[6] What makes the focus on the eighteenth century and the Industrial Revolution so compelling is the "Great Acceleration" where the impact of human activity has increased drastically, if not exponentially. Others identify the nuclear age as the veritable Anthropocene, or 1492 as the year when European colonialism impacted on the two hemispheres.[7] Jason Moore therefore coined the term "capitalocene" to argue that the history of capitalism is capitalism-in-nature (Moore 2015). Imperialism/colonialism and the appropriation of nature, work, food, energy, and the state into a complex and sophisticated "web of life" defines the epoch as not a historical/geological/evolutionary but a capitalogenic one (Moore and Patel 2018). McKenzie Wark concurs with the critique that the term Anthropocene is too anthropocentric and overlooks the "web of life" – the entanglement of nature and labour in capitalism (Wark 2016). The French philosopher Bernard Stiegler equally deplores the nihilism, indeed the banality of the Anthropocene which distracts from taking responsibility and action,

5 Another term to highlight human impact on biodiversity is the Homogenocene. See Samways.

6 See also Weisman.

7 See also Lewis and Maslin.

> Anthropocene is constantly invaded by discussions, treated as banal, about the end of the human adventure and the dereliction and abandonment to which all these protentions are most likely heading – discussions that are all generally conducted in the mode of chatter (*Gerede*) (Stiegler 2018: 36).

Critics of the concept of the Anthropocene also indicate that the label somewhat universalises the roots of human impact, if not wide-ranging destruction on the planet. Miéville rightly questions the aspect of universal responsibility. "The very term Anthropocene", he writes, "which gives with one hand, insisting on human drivers of ecological shift, misleads with its implied 'We' " (Miéville). The current ecological crisis is therefore a result of a specific set of actions taken by a specific section of the human population within the capitalogenic "web of life" – actions that are determined by the search of ever-increasing profit. This is an important point as we have different responses from indigenous populations and subaltern countries where the specificity of the climate destruction actions is addressed. "So", probes Miéville, "we start with the non-totality of the 'we'. From there not only can we see the task but we can return to our utopias, to better honor the best of them" (Miéville).[8]

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"We should utopia as hard as we can" (Miéville)

The second Pandora's box opens up the debate about the definitions of utopia and utopianism. My focus here is on the manifestations and possibilities of utopia in the Anthropocene. Let it therefore suffice to say that I concur with Lyman Tower Sargent that utopianism is a multi-dimensional form of "social dreaming", and utopias, "described in considerable detail and normally located in time and space that the author intended a contemporaneous reader to view as considerably better than the society in which that reader lived" (Sargent 1994: 9). In his article "The Three Faces of Utopianism Revisited", Sargent argues that utopianism expresses itself in three ways: literature, social/political theory and intentional communities and activism. The latter manifestation has recently attracted particular attention as a form of praxis-orientated utopianism which takes its cue from Ernst Bloch's concrete utopianism. Dinerstein suggests that a

> [c]oncrete utopia offers a critique of society that transforms hope from an emotion into a political problem for capital, for it drives people outwards, forwards, in the opposite direction, towards an encounter with their own humanity and against hopelessness, hunger and fear (Dinerstein 2017).[9]

8 See also Hickman.

9 See also Dinerstein 2015. A slightly different understanding of realist and pragmatic utopianism is put forward by Wright and also McKenna.

Michael Robertson has underscored and expanded the idea of concrete utopia into what he calls, "lived utopianism", either in intentional communities or "living out some portion of a transformed future in the here and now" in different ways. (Robertson 2018: 251).[10] Similarly, anarchist thought has long adopted the concept of prefiguration as a form of utopian pragmatism and transformative politics aimed now particularly at the neo-liberal capitalist superstructures that have even infiltrated and colonised utopian thinking.[11] What has happened is, as Michael Winter suggests, "Utopians do not dream anymore. In the affluent society of the modern Industrial West, Utopian Dreams have degenerated into advertising slogans" (Winter 1993: 300). Therefore, China Miéville goes so far to suggest that "utopia has its limits: utopia can be toxic",

> Utopias are necessary. But not only are they insufficient: they can, in some iterations, be part of the ideology of the system, the bad totality that organises us, warms the skies, and condemns millions to peonage on garbage screen (Miéville).[12]

In this train of thought, the radical potential of utopia (and dystopia) is at best reduced to a mere means of socio-political critique that can be answered with concrete political reforms, at worst abused as political spin and ideology.[13]

Whilst the end of utopia has been declared on different occasions, after 1945, 1968 and again after 1989, it is not surprising that in 2019, we are asking again, if and indeed how we can imagine a post-capitalist, post peak-oil, post-industrial, post-nature if not post-human global society that is better than the society we are living in. The twentieth century saw a dystopian turn where societies are depicted "as considerably worse than the society in which that reader lived in" along the spectrum of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and *Brave New World* (Sargent 1994: 9).[14] Is it harder to imagine a better future than a worse one?[15]

In his article, "In Defense of Utopia", Sargent acknowledges these trappings, but calls for a utopia that seeks to "improve the human lot not by repression but by enhancement, and as long as we do not aim for perfection or eliminate the possibility of change, such utopias can stand up to the all-too-prevalent dystopias of the present" (Sargent 2006: 15).

10 A good example is for instance http://livingutopia.org.

11 See Kinna, see also Graeber. The German philosopher Richard David Precht equally invests in technology and promotes a self-determined life in a future digital society: a utopia for the digital age.

12 See also Sargent 2005, 2013 on utopia and ideology.

13 On the former, see Bregman, and Manton.

14 David Graeber has explored utopian dreams of bureaucratic order and state interventionism under the guise of order and transparency in his *The Utopia of Rules: On Technology, Stupidity and the Secret Joys of Bureaucracy* (2015).

15 See Klein, Wallace-Wells, Franzen.

Sargent references Camus' "relative utopia" that calls for an ethical and pragmatic commitment to ameliorate human suffering on a global and political scale:

> My conviction is that it is no longer reasonable to hope that we can save everything, but we can at least hope to save the bodies in order to keep open the possibility of a future (Camus 2006: 261).

In a world where "the future seems to have collapsed into the present", how does utopian thought, if at all, manifests itself (Garforth 2017: 99)?

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"to keep open the possibility of a future"

Lisa Garforth has suggested that responses to the immanent and imminent ecological collapse and human extinction have been two-fold: "mitigation" and "adaptation" (Garforth 2017: 98). We either are using technology, be it digital, bio-, or geo-engineering, to mitigate the worst effects on humanity and survive post-collapse, or rehabilitate our relationship with the earth.[16] The latter response is premised on an ontological change of mind (Deep Ecology) that draws on Deep Time to challenge human exceptionalism and furthermore, contests the capitalist "web of life" that sees Earth as mere raw materials. Demos calls this the "eco-Soterian" response – an essentially neo-pastoral response that appropriates pre-industrial and indigenous life styles and "ecosophies" to return back to "nature".[17] "[A]s if the rift is made whole", mocks Wark, "when a privileged few shop at the farmer's market for artisanal cheese" (Wark 2016: xv).[18]

A new response needs to be launched. Stiegler proposes a "hypercritique" that too will fill the "theoretical vacuums and legal vacuums in every quarter" caused by the disruption and global collapse (Stiegler 2018: 205).[19] If man, "in becoming Anthropocenic, becomes not a wolf to man, but the enemy of 'humanity' and life in general", a new epistemology would generate and embrace "different visions of an endurable future" (Stiegler 2018: 84; Wark 2016: xix).[20] Wark also responds with a plea for

16 On a digital utopia, see Precht. In *The Neganthropocene* Stiegler, also proposes a different employment of technologies wrenched out of the claws of capitalism that facilitates and enables a true planetary *res publica*, and lives based on cooperation and care, and collective intelligence.

17 Demos, Chapter 2.

18 An additional response coming from a more pragmatic camp is acceptance and preparation for a better post-collapse society.

19 Bruno Latour also offers a new manifesto of critique, "An Attempt at a 'Compositionist Manifesto'".

20 The reference is to Hobbes here.

a new critical perspective – one that, like Miéville, Stiegler and Moore, is located in the pragmatic and philosophical. Wark acknowledges that in the "web of life" (Moore 2015), labour is one of the core nodes, an indicator for capitalist base and superstructure. A "labor perspective" draws on speculative fiction to develop new radical knowledge systems from below and from the human/non-human hybrid. What unites these responses is the understanding of the urgency of a cosmopolitical interconnectivity, hybridity and new literary forms ("meta-utopias") in order to "keep open the possibility of a future" (Wark 2016: 201).[21]

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"apocatopia, utopalypse" (Miéville)

In 1960, commenting in a similar *Endzeit* spirit to Kermode, Cioran announced that

> [t]oday, reconciled with the terrible, we are seeing a contamination of utopia by apocalypse: the heralded "new earth" increasingly assumes the aspect of a new Hell. […] The two genres, utopian and apocalyptic, which once seemed so dissimilar to us, interpenetrate, rub off on each other, to form a third, wonderfully apt to reflect on the kind of reality that threatens us and to which we shall nonetheless assent with a correct and disabused yes (Cioran 1998: 98).

I have identified a new cosmopolitical stance in responses to the Anthropocene. How would this stance be creatively mediated? What is this new genre, the "apocatopia" or the "utopalypse"? And can it "stand up to the all-too-prevalent dystopias of the present" or do we merely surrender, as Cioran suggests, with a "correct and disabused yes" (Sargent 2006: 15)?[22]

If literature is a "literature of knowledge for living" (*Lebenswissenschaft*), for survival and living together, new narratives and new literary forms are needed for the Anthropocene.[23] Adam Trexler suggests in his *Anthropocene Fictions: The Novel in a Time of Climate Change* (2015), that there are no unifying formal features in new fictions such as cli-fi. But, new narratives such as utopias and dystopias have to adopt different narrative strategies and poetic forms (even "cosmopoetics") and, most importantly, develop a new form of realism. Dystopias and utopias that precede the Anthropocene were prophetic, telling us that "it is not too late to change" (Sargent 2006: 14). New speculative fictions have to be "post-cautionary" and anti-prophetic,

21 See Mitchell, and McIntyre-Mill. The urgency of the utopia of caring (Stiegler) is also expressed in Rebecca Solnit's "disaster utopia". George Monbiot calls the new politics, a "politics of belonging" and sees new utopianism as "redemption narratives" (Monbiot 2017).

22 In the case of meek acceptance, we need to turn to the increasing numbers of survivalist groups and manuals.

23 See the manifesto for a politics of life, Weber and Kurt.

> The question is: are cautionary tales still useful? Or should we authors write stories that are already […] post-cautionary? Stories that take the catastrophe for granted, and try to figure out how people could go on and live and find a new sense of community after the world we know has fallen down? (Wu Ming I, Hine et.al. 2013: 3)

The writer Kim Stanley Robinson has been very insistent on a "good Anthropocene" and on the usefulness of utopia even in the doomed Anthropocene. Whilst, to his mind, dystopia has fulfilled its task, a new form of "anti-anti-utopia", needs to be developed. "Dystopia has done its job", Robinson argues, "it's old news now, perhaps it's self-indulgence to stay stuck in that place any more. Next thought: utopia" (Robinson 2018). But, utopia has to change fundamentally too, in form and essence – Robinson encourages us to develop a new, post-cautionary utopia which dedicates itself to "keep imagining that things could get better, and furthermore to imagine how they might get better" (Robinson).

In the following I would like to turn briefly to recent examples of some of these post-cautionary tales that offer their positions on the human/post-human/trans-human, the Anthropocene, on what is and what might come after. Recent work on the topic has particularly focused on Kim Stanley Robinson.[24] The case studies for this essay are from the Anglo-American, German and Scandinavian literatures – literatures that therefore stretch from the centre to the semi-peripheral world system.[25]

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> If the world was about to end was there anything she should be doing? She was getting married in nine days, she was doing a studio visit for an artist who made fruitful annihilating porcelain sculptures out of bodies that were morphing into flowers and flowers that were morphing into bodies. […] She might as well do that as anything else, […] she might as well continue with her small and cultivated life, pick the dahlias, stake the ones that had fallen down, she'd always known whatever it was wasn't going to last for long (Laing 2018: 43).

In Kim Stanley Robinson's *Science in the Capital* (2004-2008) novels, the present and the future, utopia and dystopia are mapped onto each other. "… [u]topianism is channelled into an expanded present moment of process where multiple futures constantly emerge. […] They produce new possibilities for passivity and accommodation but also for action and change" (Garforth 2017: 118).[26] Roger Luckhurst labels this new realism as proleptic, "a modelling of the present day tilted five minutes into the

24 See Tressler, Garforth.

25 See Milner and Burgmann.

26 The Trilogy was revised as *Green Earth: The Science in the Capital Series* (London: Harper Voyager, 2015), with an "Introduction" to the volume by the author in which he explains the reasons for the changes in the trilogy. I thank Tower Sargent for reminding me of this.

future", where there is "no break between the present and a future, utopia or dystopia" (Luckhurst 2009: 172; Garforth 2017: 118).

A variation on proleptic realism for fiction in the Anthropocene is, what Ashley Selbey has called, "first impact fiction" by authors such as Barbara Kingsolver and Amy Brady herself. First impact fiction traces the effects of climate in minute detail, describing "the here-and-now, in worlds that aren't speculative or futuristic at all, but rather unnervingly familiar"– fictions "in the middest" (Jones 2017). It embeds within it what I would call the 'domestic turn' – the move away from futuristic scenarios to visions of depictions of the present day that highlight the clear cause-and-effect loops of the Anthropocene.[27]

The Norwegian writer Maja Lunde published her popular *Bienes historie* (*The History of Bees: A Novel*) in 2015, the first in the *Climate Quartet*. Lunde brings in the domestic into the fold – conflating the past, present and future in interlinked narratives that show the effect of species extinction and its effect globally and on individuals – in this case, the bee. The novel is in some ways speculative and establishes a clear cause-and-effect link between the domestic and the global, between work and the capitalogenic "web of life". It is written from the standpoint of Deep Time, from a viewpoint of the extinction of insects and ultimately, and as a direct causation of this "great thinning" of species, the extinction of mankind (McCarthy 2016). In Lunde's narrative, the lives of William, a British biologist in the mid-1800s, George, a farmer in the contemporary US Midwest, and Tao, a young Chinese mother in a bee-less 2098 are interlinked by complex cause-and-effect relations,

> The bees here had disappeared back in the 1980s, long before The Collapse; pesticides had done away with them. A few years later, when the pesticides were no longer in use, the bees returned, but by then hand pollination had already been implemented. The results were better, even though an incredible number of people, an incredible number of hands were required. And so, when The Collapse came, my district had a competitive edge. It had paid off to be the ones who polluted the most. We were a pioneer nation in pollution and so we became a pioneer nation in pollination. A paradox had saved us (Lunde 2015: 1-2).

The History of Bees is less a cautionary tale, no prophecy but the description of how it is, where it went wrong and how it will get worse.

Another example of the domestic "first impact fiction" is Megan Hunter's *The End We Start From* (2017). The environmental catastrophe, a flood, is refracted through the first few months of a baby's life. The traditional elements of an apocalyptic narrative, the chaos, anarchy, seeking refuge, is replaced by sparse, poetic snippets weaving in mythology and cosmic stories into the musings of the narrator. It references particularly

27 I thank Leah Avery for inspirational discussions on this topic. On the domestic turn, see Marran.

the biblical story of the Flood and Noah's ark that continues parallel to the main narrative.[28] These narrative interspersions borrow from cosmopoetics to mediate between the local and the global, the individual and the social experience of climate destruction and the apocalypse. Cosmopoetics attempt to protect "against the premature closure of politics and politics against the premature closure of cosmos" with a multiplicity of styles, genres, expressions and poetics – in this case, myth and Biblical stories (Latour 2004: 454). It is particularly Noah whose story inspires critical and moral thinking, as Ellie Wiesel suggests, and possible redemption,

> I read and reread the story of Noah, and experience a joy and anguish which are not just my own… they vibrate with life and truth and thus compel us, who approach them, to enter their lives and search for truth... it sharpens our awareness; it enhances our consciousness (Wiesel 1991: 21).

In *The End We Start From*, the immediate impact of an environmental catastrophe is seen as an existential uprooting that might remain as permanent. So, new roots have to be found, new routines, new relationships and bonds – a new common world has to be assembled and re-assembled – socially and poetically – like Earth after the Flood. However, in opposition to the biblical Flood, the "sixth extinction" might be the final one without possibility of redemption or even survival (Kolbert 2014). The climate trauma underpinning *The End we Start From* is expressed in silences that oppose the often wordy, sensationalising language of other apocalyptic narratives or dystopias. The text reflects that trauma affects our capacity to speak, to express, to describe, even to comprehend.[29] The book brings the domestic, the essentially human experience of the apocalypse to the forefront, it stops with the child walking but it does not promise necessarily a better world after the collapse or even redemption.

> Our city is here, somewhere, but we are not.
> We are all untied, is the thing.
> Untethered, floating, drifting, all these things.
> And the end, the tether, the re-leash, is not in sight (Hunter 2017: 102).

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"Holocene Survivors" (Whyte 236)

If the term "Anthropocene" highlights the impact of human agency, we need to ask, which section of human society and under what conditions? As Amitav Ghosh's *Hungry Tide* (2004), but also some indigenous responses from North America, recognise,

> the hardships many Non Indigenous people dread most of the climate crisis are ones that Indigenous peoples have endured already due to different

28 See Milner et.al.

29 On trauma theory and climate destruction see, Kaplan, and Head.

> forms of colonialism: ecosystem collapse, species loss, economic crash, drastic relocation, and cultural disintegration (Whyte 2018: 236).[30]

At first sight, Louise Erdrich's latest book, *Future Home of the Living God* (2017) slots into the "futuro-utero-dystopias", such as PD James's *The Children of Men* (1992), Atwood's *Handmaid's Tale* (1985) and Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go* (2005, Freeman). These novels imagine the effects of environmental pollution on global fertility. In order to ensure species survival, controlled reproduction through the enslavement of fertile women creates totalitarian states and societies. *Future Home of the Living God* imagines a genetic devolution. Humans are devolving, not because they are deskilled and disenfranchised by robots and A.I. but because evolution is reversing and therefore endangering the (genetic) survival of mankind.

However, Erdrich adds to the genre an indigenous perspective. Her narrative weaves in the topic of reservation life, cross-cultural adoption and the "ecosophical" stereotyping of Native Americans.

> My family had no special powers or connections with healing spirits or sacred animals. We weren't even poor. We were bourgeois. We owned a Superpumper. […] Who are the Potts to suddenly decide to be my parents? Worse, who are they to have destroyed the romantic imaginary Native parents I've invented from earliest childhood, the handsome ones with long, both-sided braids, who died in some vague and suitably spiritual Native way – perhaps fasting themselves to death or sundancing to heatstroke or plunging off a cliff for love or being carried off by thunderbirds (Erdrich 2018: 6-7)?

In the face of species extinction, the indigenous population, in this case, the Ojibwe, are invoked as Holocene survivors – survivors of colonialism that brought diseases, environmental destruction and ethnic extinction across the Globe,

> "Indians have been adapting since before 1492 so I guess we'll keep adapting."
>
> "But the world is going to pieces."
>
> "It is always going to pieces."
>
> "This is different."
>
> "It is always different. We'll adapt." (Erdrich 2018: 35)

Whyte has suggested, that "Indigenous people do not always share quite the same science fiction imaginaries of dystopian or apocalyptic futures when they confront the possibility of a climate crisis". Contemporary science fiction weaves in Indigenous myths as "counterfactual spaces" to the non-Indigenous Anthropocene, "We are always in dialogue with our ancestors as dystopianists and fantasizers" (Whyte 2018: 226,

30 Whyte referencing Callison. See also Amitav Ghosh's important book on climate change fiction.

238). Erdrich adds to the futuro-utero-dystopia the Indigenous point of view without however being exclusive or excluding. The book does not end on a hopeful note but on a redemptive and inclusive one – interconnectivity and kinship, "*Everything is penetrated with connectedness, penetrated with relatedness*" (Erdrich 2018: 325).[31]

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"Holocene resurgence" (Tsing)

A radical response to the Anthropocene is Donna Haraway's post-human vision of the "Chthulucene" that puts faith in the planet's ability to persist in the face of catastrophes and apocalypse through multispecies groupings that will ensure survival. The Chthulucene is the counter-point to the post-human Dark Ecology take on the survival of the human species, bioengineered, cloned or transformed into cyborgs. The assumption here is acceptance and a projection of post-collapse, post-nature visions onto the unknown future.

Dietmar Dath's *Die Abschaffung der Arten* (*The abolition of the Species*, 2008) experiments with a vision of a post-collapse, post-nature and post-human world. He imagines the near extinction of mankind. Its rule was short-lived and the new rulers of the world call the epoch of the humans, the age of boredom. Indeed, as the writer John Rember echoes,

> We have become a depressingly middle-aged and unfulfilled civilisation, as civilisations go. Time has caught up with us. Where once we were full of promise and intelligence and a lust for life, we are now sticking with the known and the comfortable (Rember 2013: 92).

If it is at all possible to imagine a utopia without humans, Dath takes a shot at it by creating a new and liberated world solely inhabited by flora and fauna, ruled by mammals. It is not a solely peaceful world, different kingdoms quarrel and compete in world dominance. The new societies try to learn from the collapse of human society by abolishing species *per se*. Bio-engineering creates new life forms, animals metamorphose into other animal species, at times on a daily basis, or, even, like the former lioness Mme Livienda, into a tree. Anything goes, "Lebt, als ob ihr auf einer neuen Erde lebtet, die einen neuen Himmel vorhat" (Dath 2008: 66).[32] Evolution becomes bio-engineering at will to survive and to survive better. Making kin, as Haraway suggests, with "more-than-human, other-than-human, inhuman, and human-as humus" is the best option forward in the face of extinction (Haraway 2015: 160). The few humans left in Dath's new world nevertheless remain conceited in their living death (Dath 2008: 19, 64).

31 Erdrich is referencing Hildegard von Bingen here.

32 "Live as if you are living on a new Earth that intends to create a new Heaven." (my translation).

In his biopunk dystopia, Dath experiments with the abolition of species as a metaphor for the abolition of different literary genres, languages and cultures. The cosmopolitical agenda to survive by "making kin" is somewhat marred by the novel's anthropocentric perspective. The utopia without humans functions like human society with the same flaws, quarrels and indeed language – to write a non-anthropocentric utopia, written from a flora/fauna perspective, proves impossible.[33]

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> "What are the revolutions of the globe which we inhabit, and the operations of the elements of which it is composed, compared with life?" (Shelley)

Matthew Schneider-Mayerson recently investigated the effectiveness of climate change fiction on contemporary readers. Perhaps unsurprisingly, he comes to the conclusion that cli-fi preaches to the converted. With novice readers, cli-fi can result in a cognitive dissonance that proves more counter-productive to transformatory thinking and meaningful changes in political outlooks. He suggests that "a clearer and stronger messaging about appropriate behavioural responses to climate change is urgently needed …" (Schneider-Mayerson 2018: 495). I suspect that the same goes for the readers of recent utopias and dystopias. Recently, the flurry of cli-fi, the re-emergence of the manifesto as a genre to ignite political activism, has been accompanied by "Green" theatre and performance art. Particularly the latter turns the need for kinship and interconnectivity into physical experiences, thus moving away from the often individualised reading experience to a more emotional and therefore transformatory group events.[34] Nevertheless, most of these artistic expressions remain anthropocentric.

More radical utopianism strives to decentre mankind from the universe and operates from the viewpoint of Deep Time to qualify the importance of humans in Earth's history. In this reading, the Anthropocene becomes a mere a boundary event (Haraway 2015: 160). A compelling representation of Deep Time has been put forward by the visual artist Rachel Sussmann, *A Selected History of the Spacetime Continuum* (2016).[35] Working with SpaceX, NASA, and CERN, Sussman developed a 100-foot long, handwritten timeline projecting the history of the universe, from its birth to its estimated death with the period of man's existence in the universe being a relatively short if consequential period.

Richard Powers' monumental tome, *The Overstory* (2018) taps into the same understanding of mankind's future. On the one hand, *The Overstory* is a thoughtful reflection on the futility of political/eco-activism – I

33 See Foster on trying to know the non-human.

34 See Angelaki.

35 http://www.rachelsussman.com/timeline.

called it ecological mourning earlier. On the other, the novel is a striking call for humility and a sense of proportion. Indeed, *The Overstory* ends, not with the extinction of mankind but with the reminder that other species, flora and fauna will survive, if possibly changed, and have lived for centuries amongst destruction, war and catastrophe. It is the trees that comment, like a Greek chorus, on the lives of the nine major characters who with very different backgrounds and backstories come together to as eco-protesters. Reminding us of recent research into the highly successful interconnectedness amongst trees as forms of caring and survival strategy, mankind's existence, even in the history of the universe, seems negligible in the face of the *Sequoiadendron giganteum* that is possibly 3000 years old.[36]

> The fires will come, despite all efforts, the blight and the windthrow and floods. Then the Earth will become another thing, and people will learn it all over again. The vaults of seed banks will be thrown open. Second growth will rush back in, supple, loud, and testing all possibilities. Webs of forest will swell with species shot through in shadow and dappled by new design. Each streak of color on the carpeted Earth will rebuild its pollinators. Fish will surge again up all the watersheds, stacking themselves as thick as cordwood through the rivers, thousands per mile. Once the real world ends. (Powers 2018:500)

We will have to die, as individuals and, most possibly, as a species. The question is how we fill the interval between the beginning and end – the "middest" – and give it meaning, even as trans-human or post-human beings in a post-nature, post-apocalyptic and post-human world?

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36 See Wohlleben.

----------and Eugene F. Stoermer, "The 'Anthropocene'". *International Geosphere-Biosphere Programme Newsletter.* 41 (May 2000): 17-18.
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Nikol Pol

"Ovo liči na kraj": Utopija u antropocenu

Rezime

Ulrik Bek je u svom radu "Climate for Change" iz 2010. godine nagovestio da bi u slučaju "klimatskog sloma" (George Monbiot), "moglo da se pojavi nešto istorijski novo, tj. kosmopolitska vizija u kojoj bi ljudi videli sebe … kao deo ugroženog sveta …". Ovaj rad preispituje mogućnosti i nemogućnosti utopizma u antropocenu i postavlja pitanje da li je utopija uopšte moguća u antropocenu. U njemu se razmatraju novije rasprave o utopiji i antropocenu i analiziraju četiri književna primera iz Nemačke, Norveške, Engleske i SAD.

Ključne reči: antropocen, utopija, kosmopolitika, kosmopoetika