

# Posthuman New York: Ground Zero of the Anthropocene

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Forget “homeland security.” Time itself has changed. We know catastrophes are coming, and we know they’ll take us by surprise.<sup>1</sup>

The figure of the environment shifts: from the harmony of a natural balance to a churning seed-bed of crisis in the perpetual making. . . . It expressed nothing so much as the normality of a generalized crisis environment so encompassing in its endemic threat-form as to connect, across the spectrum, the polar extremes of war and the weather.<sup>2</sup>

## The ground zero of extinction

In the decade following the attacks of 11 September 2001, a number of mass media images depicting the destruction of New York City displayed the vulnerability of human life not to the specter of terrorism, but instead to the violence of a planetary environmental catastrophe caused by carbon emissions. One of the zero decade’s highest-grossing Hollywood films, Roland Emmerich’s *The Day After Tomorrow*, envisions a climate-driven disruption of the Gulf Stream bringing a new ice age that engulfs New York – along with most of the temperate Global North – in a quick-freezing layer of permafrost.<sup>3</sup> The film portrays the mass migration of the remaining human inhabitants of the United States southward across the Mexican border to warmer climes. In contrast to xenophobic narratives of a settler-colonial United States endangered and engulfed by immigrants and terrorists, the film envisions the New York cityscape as the site of the blowback of the imperial carbon economy. The settler North succumbs to the effects of its own carbon-fueled excesses, transforming U.S. settlers into climate refugees. Emmerich’s film thus reflects how emergent forms of environmental speculation in visual culture create platforms for imagining how planetary environmental processes threaten to upend visions of modernity

and humanity based on current geopolitical configurations of fossil fuel capitalism.

This chapter explores the politics of form, place, and animality in twenty-first century speculative images of climate disaster in New York and beyond.<sup>4</sup> While popular speculations of climate disaster reflect a heightened political urgency that attempts to use visions of crisis to generate political affects that disrupt the ecological violence of the carbon economy, the emerging environmental speculations are also remarkable for the subtle ways in which they universalize human responsibility for climate disaster and mask violences of colonialism that created the settler landscapes they depict as vulnerable. Like popular public representations of the 9/11 attacks in U.S. media, visions of the climate-driven destruction of New York appear to instantiate a hierarchy of violence and a politics of place that reveal the settler provinciality of public discourses of security. This chapter attempts to work through such aesthetic and political problems through a crossing between interdisciplinary approaches of species studies, the Anthropocene humanities, and postcolonial critiques of security in order to make sense of some of the emerging affective and visual dynamics of neoliberal climate representation. In the pages that follow, I pose questions about the recent deployment of the term “Anthropocene” to describe human geophysical agency and explore reasons why both artists and humanities scholars appear to be turning to a strong concept of the human as species at the very moment they envision a posthuman future in environmental art, journalism, and critical theory.

Concurrently, this chapter explores animality in visions of posthuman New York in order to understand why the extinction of nonhuman species has not been a central concern of the field of “animal studies.” While there are exceptions to this trend,<sup>5</sup> it is my sense that the relative lack of discussion of climate change within animal studies may reveal something about the field’s scales of analysis and forms of ethical engagement, which tend to preclude analyzing human-animal relations through economic and ecological networking. Dominant animal theories tend to abstract interspecies embodiments from ecological entanglement and industrial conditions of biocapitalism in order to situate an ethical recognition of some nonhuman species (often vertebrate mammals); as such, the mass violence of climate- and development-driven species extinction has largely remained out of the purview of emerging animal studies. In contrast, this chapter will attempt to articulate a materialist and decolonial critique of emerging forms of climate speculation, attending along the way to the aesthetic and political significance of animality and place. In sum, I argue that speculations of climate-driven extinction

in contemporary literature and visual culture operate as postcolonial fantasies of a universal human precarity, fantasies that are coming under increasing duress as transborder risk migration, indigenous and Southern environmental activisms, and persistent forms of ecological resilience challenge totalizing environmental visions of the human.

### Worlds without us

Climate speculation – particularly among artists and intellectuals in the overconsuming postindustrial states of the North – imagines the future extinction of humans marked by the hollowing out of the cityscape and the resurgence of other species, flora and fauna exhibiting resilient capacities and a transcendence of the terran landscape through airborne, underground, and underwater mobilities. Ice, heat, water, toxins, and invasive species – as slow-moving geophysical and biological risks – have in turn replaced airplanes, bombs, and collapsing buildings – images of geopolitical emergency – as the pre-eminent threat to humanity in twenty-first century depictions of New York. I am interested in the curious form and content of such projections, as well as in their uncanny representation of interspecies intimacies.

Invoking the complete destruction of human settlement in New York, painter Alexis Rockman's mural *Manifest Destiny*<sup>6</sup> depicts an urban disasterscape 3,000 years into the future. Displayed in the Brooklyn Museum in 2004, the mural portrays a New York swamped by a global warming-induced sea level rise (Figure 2.1). Playfully titling his painting after the myth of the divinely ordained Westward movement of settler colonization, Rockman draws inspiration from the landscape tradition of the nineteenth-century Hudson River School, which romanticized the American wilderness as a pastoral setting ripe for settler appropriation. One element of this tradition's wonder at the landscape, however, configures the power of destruction and processes of decay as emergent to both nature and empire. Rockman revises Hudson River artists' visions of uncanny, destructive landscapes. In Thomas Cole's *The Course of Empire* (1833–6), human settlement ultimately disrupts the pastoral peace of nature in the vision of the rise and fall of the Roman imperium. Alternatively, Albert Bierstadt's *Storm in the Rocky Mountains* (1866) envisions nature itself as the source of destructive power as the dark clouds of a forming storm threaten to disrupt the idyllic mountain landscape. Rockman applies such visions of development and climate as ecological forces to a brightly hued Brooklyn waterfront that is submerged and decaying, overtaken by the sea, tropical ocean vegetation, and circling birds above.

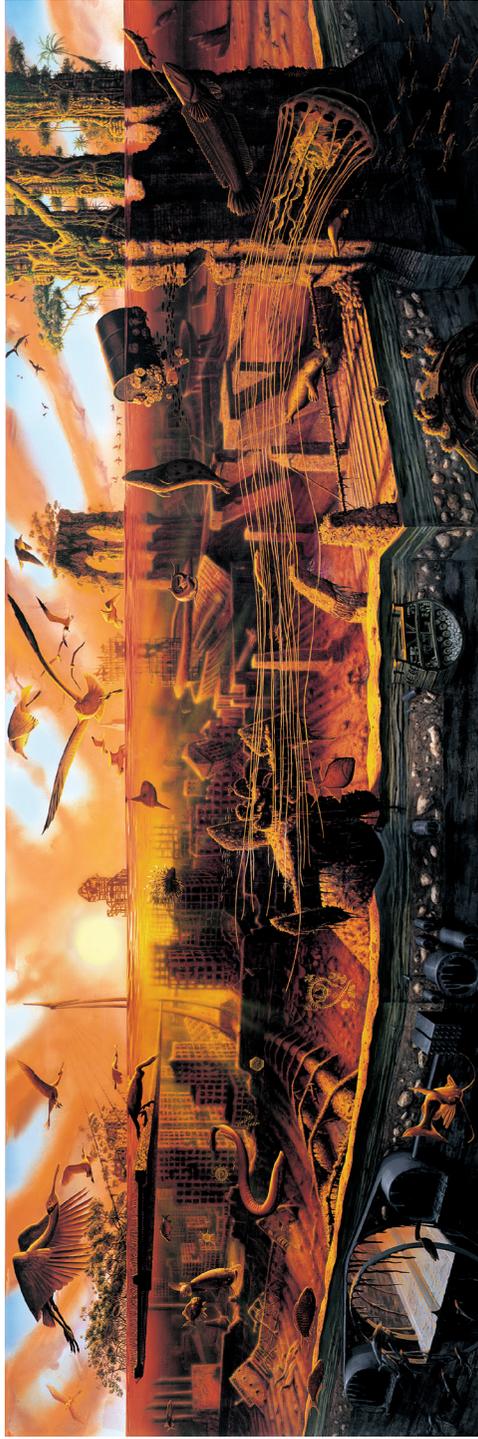


Figure 2.1 Alexis Rockman, *Manifest Destiny*, 2004, oil on wood, 96 x 288 in. (Courtesy of the artist.)

In contrast to the Hudson River artists, who often produced landscapes unsettled by human and animal species and thus ripe for the Westward march of colonialism, Rockman gives nonhuman animals a central role in the imagined ecological formation of posthuman New York. Animality plays a central role in Rockman's *Manifest Destiny*, which depicts pelicans, jellyfish, and cetaceans who appear in their future-evolved guises to return to prehistoric, prehuman biological form. A common technique in Rockman's oeuvre, the out-of-time appearance of prehistoric animals indicates both the possibility that biotechnologies may repopulate extinct bodies and the potential that posthuman evolutionary processes will (re)generate curious bodily capacities to serve the needs of adaptation to an environment of extinction. Birds and ocean creatures in Rockman's work thus appear as particularly capacious feeders in a world where species must be able to traverse land, sea, and air borders in order to survive.

As such, Rockman repeatedly makes stark visual dividing lines between different ecologies and temporalities of disaster central to his aesthetic processes. Imagining a future without humans, Rockman's use of ecological dividing lines suggests that extinction presses the painterly gaze to multiply perspective and shift dimensions or effect-times in order to speculate on changing forms of species and landscapes. In *Manifest Destiny*, this horizon line is formed by the border separating the water from the air across the center of the image. Above, birds of prey circle the carbon haze-filled sky; below, sea creatures populate the submerged landscape of the Brooklyn waterfront, feeding in hollowed-out structures of the built landscape as they are surveilled by the birds above. In an earlier work, *Central Park* (1997–8),<sup>7</sup> Rockman depicts the iconic city park space divided vertically through the center by a line dividing two dimensions of the climatic future. In one, permafrost envelops the city, while in another, tropical vegetation and birds overtake urban skyscrapers emptied of human occupants.<sup>8</sup> Formally, Rockman's visual technique of ecological dividing lines is a departure from the detached, romantic visions of sublime landscape; ecologies generate a variety of possibilities for the form of bodies, which allows a speculative multiplication of possible lifeworlds. Nonetheless, Rockman's wondrous gaze into the future of life and planet echoes the work of Cole, whose vision of ruins premised on the decline of Rome in *The Course of Empire* displays a profound colonial nostalgia linked with the romantic, pastoral view of landscape.

Rockman's vision of human depopulation and the nonhuman reclamation of ecological space echoes similar speculative experiments in narrating the *longue durée* of environmental agency in the landscape. In the realm of nonfiction writing, Alan Weisman's speculative journalism

imagines what it would mean for the New York cityscape if climate change brought about the extinction of humans. In his acclaimed book *The World Without Us*, Weisman imagines a posthuman cityscape in the shadow of 9/11:

The breathtaking, swift collapse of the World Trade Center towers suggested more to us about their attackers than about mortal vulnerabilities that could doom our entire infrastructure. . . . The time it would take nature to rid itself of what urbanity has wrought may be less than we might expect.<sup>9</sup>

Weisman sweeps through select geophysical histories of the city's settler-colonial rise and its imagined postcolonial fall. Beginning with the nineteenth-century razing of the hillscape for which the indigenous Lenape named the island Mannahatta, Weisman recalls the infilling of land that expanded the island, artificially producing the nationalized "ground zero" of present-day Lower Manhattan. He then turns to the future, speculating on a number of transformations that would occur in the absence of human management, life-processes, and domination of other species: the drowning of the New York subway, corroding buildings, the separation of the George Washington Bridge, the obliteration of cockroaches in the absence of artificial heating, the mass predation of garbage-starved rats, the overtaking of roadways by invasive *Ailanthus* trees. Like Rockman's *Manifest Destiny*, then, Weisman's vision of the environmental extinction of humanity occasions a deep-temporal echo between the destruction of indigenous lifeways during the colonization of North America and the new-imperial destruction of the land with the carbon-driven post-1945 "great acceleration" of neoliberal capital. Eventually for Weisman, as the atmosphere stabilizes following human extinction, New York suffers either an engulfment of coastal areas by rising seas or a return of the glaciers that covered Mannahatta at the end of the Pleistocene ice age.

Like Rockman's revision of the settler landscape tradition, Weisman's journalism registers both a deep-seated fear of the vulnerability of carbon-fueled American empire and a contrasting postcolonial fantasy of justice: the dream of the end of man's empire over nature, and a liberation of thought and politics to love what Weisman, along with Eugene Thacker,<sup>10</sup> calls the world-without-us. In contrast to European post-Marxists such as Slavoj Žižek and Jean Baudrillard, who announced "the death of the real" when nineteen al-Qaeda hijackers attacked symbols of U.S. hegemony and transnational capital on 9/11,<sup>11</sup> I argue that recent environmental speculation infuses the spectacle of destruction with the force of accumulated environmental agency, attenuating the apparent unreality of apocalypse with visions of the deep history

of the Earth; the metamorphosis of bodies; and the cryptic ecological agency of the human.

### (Anthropo)scene of the crime

While the movement toward a speculative posthumanism appears at first glance to be a site of possibility for responding to climate change and a method of centering the vulnerability of animal life in the transborder routes of climate disaster, it also suggests a deep division in the international and class politics of species representation in the era of the so-called Anthropocene. The term “Anthropocene” proposes the establishment of a new geological era of Earth history (separate from the Holocene of the past 10,000 years) in which a phantasmic figure called “human” is the primary agent influencing the geophysical formation of the planet. Even as artists and activists begin to envision a far-off spectacular destruction of metropolitan empire, such seductive projections risk overshadowing the many colonial social, political, economic, and ecological violences that have formed the present time of extinction.<sup>12</sup> Furthermore, they replicate the erasure of indigenous presences from the landscape in order to abstract the collapse of settler ways of life as the broader undoing of “the human” and of life itself. This temporal shuffle of past and present in the name of the future thus makes it difficult to see the destruction of everyday life that is ongoing – in the present rather than the future tense – for the world’s poor, displaced, and indigenous populations, who in the first decade of the twenty-first century have been actively turned into “sinks” for the environmental and economic destruction of rising sea levels, increasing weather events, extinctions, resource inequity, and toxic pollution. From hurricane victims to dam, oil, and forest refugees to populations subjected to life-threatening diseases and toxic waste, the planetary present is a time of mass genocide and extinction even as emerging neoliberal forms of climate speculation (particularly among artists in the Global North) attempt to grasp the risks that today’s normal poses to the very future of life and planet.

The twenty-first century visions of ecocidal destruction that are permeating environmental art and literature are not limited to representations of New York and other hubs of global capital; in fact, they constitute an increasingly transnational sphere of speculation driven by mass-mediated images of disasters, accelerating impacts of anthropogenic waste, and growing transnational senses of insecurity in the reproduction of life itself. Emergent forms of environmental speculation increasingly dispense with romantic, pastoral landscapes of late

twentieth-century mainstream environmentalism in favor of deathly spectacle, gothic mutation, and the sublime terrors of the complexity of life – marking the circuitous paths and uncanny forms of habitation emerging within today’s environmental transformations. As artists and writers respond to climate change, species extinction, and sudden and spectacular calamities like Hurricane Katrina, the Indian Ocean tsunami, and the Fukushima Daiichi disaster, visions of apocalyptic destruction increasingly situate crisis within the deep time, interlinked space, and dimensional phase shifts of planetary intimacy and friction. Such representations converge with an emerging critical discourse in the Anthropocene humanities, which idealistically invokes the radical potential of recognizing human ontological embeddedness in life and planet for undoing anthropocentric forms of thought and settlement.<sup>13</sup>

Yet to invoke the human and its relation to nonhuman species in this particular speculative form – a form in which humanity is totalized by aggregating anthropogenic wastes and projecting them into a future spectacle of environmental harm – is a strategy that comes into collision with the politics of indigenous environmental activism, which have guided the international political discourse on climate at least since the 1992 Earth Summit in Rio.<sup>14</sup> For this reason, Jason Moore offers “capitalocene” as an alternative to the Anthropocene concept, arguing that “nature” cannot be abstracted from the histories that entangle forms of capitalist development with the social worlds crossing species that constitute what Moore calls “the web of life.”<sup>15</sup> Emerging in tension with visions of apocalyptic posthumanism that fold differently situated social and national groups into a vision of the human domination of nature, writings concerning weather disasters in the Global South insistently problematize the figure of “human” as totalized environmental agent. The 2010 Haiti earthquake, for example, is increasingly cited as both evidence of the international divisions of life and a site for speculating about the conjunction of economic and ecological precarities under neoliberalism. For geographer Arun Saldanha,

The ecology of global capitalism has for some four centuries been intrinsically *racist*, making white populations live longer and better at the expense of the toil and suffering of others. . . . the truly rational humanist response to such disasters is to prevent them, to change the economic structure making brown and black populations die in disproportionately large numbers where extreme weather, drought or earthquakes strike. As activists point out, places suffering most from climate change have contributed least to carbon emissions. The Anthropocene is in itself a racist biopolitical reality.<sup>16</sup>

There is much to unpack in this statement, which suggests that the capitalist system, rather than the life practices of humans in general,

constitutes the central conduit of ecological violence. To understand how capitalist accumulation and the “great acceleration” of carbon-fueled development generate specific racial effects might further require exploring the particular imperial nexus linking Euro-American arms and finance capital; West Asian oil; and East Asian manufacturing that ensures that the Gulf States and Japan have joined the overconsuming forces of carbon extraction through which a small minority of national populations consume outsize proportions of the total energy and materials colonized by contemporary capitalism.

Nonetheless, Saldanha’s apt diagnosis of climate change as a racialized biopolitical crisis resonates with Junot Díaz’s framing of the question in terms of capital and prior histories of colonial extermination and slavery. In his essay “Apocalypse,” written in conjunction with the apocalyptic short story “Monstro,” Díaz writes:

This is what Haiti is both victim and symbol of – this new, rapacious stage of capitalism. A cannibal stage where, in order to power the explosion of the super-rich and the ultra-rich, middle classes are being forced to fail, working classes are being re-proletarianized, and the poorest are being pushed beyond the grim limits of subsistence . . . perfect targets for any “natural disaster” that just happens to wander by. It is, I suspect, not an accident of history that the island that gave us the plantation “big bang” that put our world on the road to this moment in the capitalist project would also be the first to warn us of the zombie stage of capitalism, where entire nations are being rendered through economic alchemy into the not-quite-alive.<sup>17</sup>

Díaz’s essay offers a different kind of temporal shift that contrasts with Rockman’s and Weisman’s work of climate speculation. By shifting between the plantation formation of settler colonialism in the Americas to the present configurations of zombie neoliberalism, Díaz charts a settler ecological temporality that intervenes in the seamless production of the human as universal environmental agent. The geophysical trope he uses to describe the rise of the colonial plantation economy – the “big bang” – echoes the seismic disruption of the Haiti earthquake, obliterating prior social relations and ways of life as it instantiates new and destructive relationalities. Troping colonialism and slavery not as events but instead as the very instantiation of temporality, Díaz invests the political, economic, and ecological processes of colonial capitalism with geophysical force. This could be viewed as a reversal of the settler vision of the posthuman future – rather than abstracting the human as ecological agent, Díaz imparts to colonialism a vision of its biosocial force and its potential for fracturing the category of the human. This confirms the assessment of Mary Louise Pratt, following James Ferguson, that the transformation by neoliberal capitalism of large populations into human

surplus of the capitalist order is generating crises of futurity and visions of millenarian apocalypse; such crises seem to invoke a universal human but actually reflect a submerged scene of inequality and violence.<sup>18</sup>

While the coming environmental crises are likely to first affect those humans and nonhumans already in the most precarious social and ecological positions,<sup>19</sup> visions of the destruction of New York most often privilege dominant settler-colonial understandings of landscapes and systems, in the process advertising apocalyptic fears of the fall of settler societies and the waste-producing capitalist relations upon which they stake life. This is one reason that New York – the seat of world financial capital since World War I, occupying Lenape land – remains such a potent site for the imagination of ecological apocalypse. In a rhetorical move that Jodi Byrd terms “the transit of empire,”<sup>20</sup> the figure of an always already vanishing native is transmuted into a figure of precarity that can be deployed to justify the securitization of settler empire. Alongside the spectacles of emergent destruction exists an everyday state of denial and politics as usual, evidenced by national elites’ post-Kyoto global impasse over action to rein in the excesses of the carbon economy. While environmental speculation opens up many different ways of thinking about and living with the ongoing planetary changes that humans and other species are collectively experiencing, I pay particular attention to how visions of disaster reveal a set of governing logics and an economy of hope invested in maintaining the current geophysical and biological parameters for life as we know it. Put differently, while it is necessary to oppose the massive forms of destruction created by the world carbon economy and various forms of industrial pollution associated with it, the publicization of environmental risk by environmentalists can easily collude with governing logics that exacerbate the postcolonial political divisions of North and South and rich and poor as they accommodate environmental violence and emerging politics of species into speculative risk media. This is why it is as necessary to pay attention to the politics of species representation as it is to simply find more creative ways to publicize the environmental destruction and the science that helps us explain it. There is an urgent need in the early twenty-first century for a robust critique of the investment in carbon economies by the world system of nation-states, one that furthermore accounts for the mass forms of ecocidal violence and the unequal subsidization of Northern life by the extractive carbon economy.

## The human of precarious futures

In the speculative vision of human extinction, we may lose the complexity of animality and place in environmental representation. Neoliberal visions of universal human extinction in the North coalesce in a figure I have begun to call *the human of precarious futures*. This speculative vision of a dying humanity finds itself most at home in a reversal of the colonizing meme of traditional science fiction.<sup>21</sup> Whereas science fiction traditionally recycles the settler-myths of manifest destiny as fictions of benevolent exploration, the emergent figure I am describing envisions the receding human as swamped by an insurgent and impure nature, literalizing invasive nonhuman species, the toxic excrement of human society, and the emboldened force of nonhuman species and the planet as the rising “wretched of the earth.”<sup>22</sup> Paradoxically, this speculation of a reverse colonization recenters settler bodies in the blowback of a contaminated nature, rendering environmental vision characteristically anthropocentric and ethnocentric even as it troubles visions of the human as planetary sovereign.

Despite the work that Marxist, feminist, queer, critical-race, and post-colonial theories have done to unravel liberal mythologies of human universality and progress, the turn to an Anthropocene humanities appears to be instituting a new universalist vision of human species-being. In his already classic essay “The Climate of History: Four Theses,” Dipesh Chakrabarty argues that scientific thinking about climate change both “appeal[s] to our sense of human universals while challenging at the same time our capacity for historical understanding.”<sup>23</sup> In particular, Chakrabarty claims that chemist Paul Crutzen’s attempt to periodize Earth time since the rise of industrial capital as “the Anthropocene” – namely, the period in which human environmental agency became the guiding force in the geophysical formation of earth – shatters a long-standing Enlightenment distinction between human and natural history. Chakrabarty reads the Marxist globalization literature alongside the climate change literature and attempts to reconcile the widely divergent takes on the human that frame these two accounts of destructive capitalist industrialism. Chakrabarty’s conclusion is that, in contradistinction to the impulses of some Marxist and postcolonial critiques of globalization, it is necessary to engage with the forms of species-thinking that a geophysical history of the human illuminates. There is an environmental agency that enables the existence of humanity, acting as a prior condition to capitalism and colonialism because it is a prior condition of humanity itself:

Why think in terms of species . . . ? Why could not the narrative of capitalism – and hence its critique – be sufficient as a framework for interrogating the history of climate change and understanding its consequences? . . . We have slid into a state of things that forces on us a recognition of some of the parametric (that is, boundary) conditions for the existence of institutions central to our idea of modernity and the meanings we derive from them. . . . [The agricultural revolution] was made possible by certain changes in the amount of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere, a certain stability of the climate, and a degree of warming of the planet that followed the end of the Ice Age (the Pleistocene era) – things over which human beings had no control. . . . In other words, whatever our socioeconomic and technological choices, whatever the rights we wish to celebrate as our freedom, we cannot afford to destabilize conditions (such as the temperature zone in which the planet exists) that work like boundary parameters of human existence. These parameters are independent of capitalism or socialism. They have been stable for much longer than the histories of these institutions and have allowed human beings to become the dominant species on earth. Unfortunately, we have now ourselves become a geological agent disturbing these parametric conditions needed for our own existence.<sup>24</sup>

What does it mean that Chakrabarty posits “parametric conditions” for human existence? He specifies that the climatic conditions that allowed large-scale agriculture are the common condition for the existence of humans. However, the general difficulty with which peasant agriculturalists attempt to survive persistent weather fluctuations and price instability in the present places pressure on Chakrabarty’s argument, demonstrating that physical vulnerability is not equally shared and is as dependent on economic factors as it is on climate. What does it mean to posit that “human beings are the dominant species on earth” after Chakrabarty’s own earlier writing in *Provincializing Europe* documented the failed attempts of the discipline of history to integrate all bodies speciated as human into a unity?<sup>25</sup> While the idea of human domination is often taken for granted in animal studies and environmental humanities, it is in tension with feminist science studies works that attempt to break down the independence of the human body, to think about how microbiomes, food, and commodities persistently reproduce anthropomorphized bodies through interspecies relation. Saldanha furthermore argues passionately that carbon privilege has been geographically and racially concentrated. Yet perhaps like the image of the destruction of the New York cityscape – itself recycled countless times before and after 9/11 in U.S. popular culture – there is something seductive about thinking the human as a universal. Perhaps the rise of the Anthropocene humanities reveals not just a recognition of ecological crisis, but also a failure to adequately grapple with neoliberal forms of crisis thinking and a sense of exhaustion among humanists who are tired

of having to attend seriously to questions of difference “internal” to the anthropomorphized human.

### Insurgent life, posthuman blowback

Weisman’s vision of plant and animal forms slowly overtaking the post-human New York cityscape has aesthetic resonances with some recent depictions of Southern ecological disasters, wherein life forms regenerate in spaces of contamination. One difference in such representations – such as Díaz’s short story “Monstro” depicting a climate-driven zombie apocalypse in Haiti<sup>26</sup> – is that depictions of regeneration in the South often include the regeneration of human form in the space of apocalypse. By foregrounding debility as a condition of living through ecological crisis, such speculations situate the environmental force of capitalism as entangled with many animal species including unequal groups of humans.

One case in point involves the aesthetic strategies used by activists and artists to represent the precarious ecologies of Bhopal, India following that city’s experience of a toxic gas leak by the U.S.-based Union Carbide Corporation. On 2 December 1984, that company’s chemical plant in Bhopal became the site of the world’s most toxic and deadly industrial disaster. Indian managers supervised directly by the U.S. office had cut corners on standard safety measures in the days leading up to the accident. After machinery used to produce agricultural pesticides for India’s green revolution failed to properly ventilate, an explosion occurred in the middle of the night that sent a toxic plume of methyl isocyanate gas over the surrounding shantytowns of Bhopal. Gas exposure directly affected over half a million humans and seeped into the air, water, and sediment, killing plant and animal species at varied scales and speeds. One piece of a broader neoliberal strategy of the Indian National Congress, carried out in cooperation with big U.S. chemical and agricultural corporations and championed by the development community, Union Carbide’s chemical inputs into Indian agriculture powerfully demonstrated their environmental costs. Some 4,000 humans died immediately, with another 8,000 dying from exposure in the next two weeks. As gas and other contaminated matter leached into the environment, hundreds of thousands more would ingest poison, developing cancers, respiratory and gastrointestinal diseases, and other ailments more slowly. In the process, the Bhopal disaster would split the temporality of ecocide: the spectacle of the explosion and instantaneous death (affecting thousands of humans) rocked a city overnight

while the deeper effects of the chemical devastation (affecting hundreds of thousands of humans and unknown animal populations) permeated through bodies at slower rates through more mysterious routes. In addition to the spectacle of an environment out of control, there was a more insidious violence, a *slow violence* that Rob Nixon describes as central to understanding the emerging environmental poetics and politics of the poor.<sup>27</sup>

Bhopal has occasioned both an active environmental justice movement and a wide array of environmental representations that grasp both the violence of environmental destruction and the curious and circuitous routes of ecological entanglement and intimacy. Navigating a toxic environment like that of Bhopal reveals the ways in which the animal bodies we call “humans” encounter unexpected forms of life when anthropogenic waste transforms environments. In contrast to the works of Rockman and Weisman, Indra Sinha’s loosely fictionalized novel of life after the Bhopal disaster, *Animal’s People*, focuses intensely on national, bodily, and economic differences that circulate around the site of environmental disaster and ecocidal mass death.<sup>28</sup> The narrative follows the disabled and animalized protagonist named Animal, walking on all fours, through a local campaign against the American multinational responsible for the destruction. Telling his story to a foreign journalist, Animal moves in and out of dreams, fantasies, and forms of social repression that follow him through the economically and environmentally depressed town.

Early on in the narrative, Animal explores the ruins of the pesticide plant. He notes that despite leached chemicals’ continued extermination of insects and other small animals, sandalwood, caraway, dogs, and birds are overtaking the hollowed-out structures of the buildings, the pipes and foundations cracked by creeping tree roots.<sup>29</sup> With some bodies exterminated, others living in differentiated conditions of disability and slow death, and still others capitalizing on the spaces deserted by the dead, mass death extinguishes some particular *lives* without ending *Life* as a broader ecological process; Life remains resilient, insurgent against apocalyptic landscape. The narration of the resurgence of life at the site of the abandoned factory entangles Animal – whose name reflects how environmentally produced disability threatens capitalist processes of anthropomorphism – with those very species repopulating the site of disaster. On all fours, Animal creeps among the emerging species outside the stigmatizing gaze of the “human” occupants of the city who seek justice on behalf of the community but who are unable to grasp the affective life of disaster that Animal experiences as a disabled subject transiting the urban crisis ecology. In the reshuffling of species

and bodies, environmental disasters disperse crisis time into everyday time, reordering the form of Life. Even in the most toxic of environments, there are bodies poised to fill in destruction. Any assumption that humans exist outside of ecological relations, and outside of the forms of regeneration that produce new futures out of carbon violences, bumps up against the reality of creatures that absorb the interspecies force of disaster.

The vision of insurgent nonhuman life like Weisman's or Rockman's posthuman New York may easily miss what exists elsewhere throughout Sinha's text: the existence of populations rendered debilitated surplus, who navigate and persist despite a necropolitical order that seeks their extinguishment. Sinha makes clear that it is possible to spatially and economically locate responsibility and redress for such slow violence, as activists in the novel attempt to bring to account the U.S. company responsible for the destruction. (Until his recent death, Union Carbide C.E.O. Warren Anderson continued to live in Long Island and Connecticut, not far from the setting of Rockman's *Manifest Destiny*, avoiding extradition to India.) Between visions, then, of the spectacular fall of Manhattan as global city, and the dispersed forms of death and debility erupting in the Bhopal slums, the emerging literature and visual culture of ecocide opens precarious life into uncertain futures. Such representations capture the diversity of temporalities and spatializations of ecological violence as they signal a new set of terms for a neoliberal politics of animal life. If the end of the Pleistocene era (the long, glacial period of Earth's geological history ending approximately 11,000 years ago) marked the beginning of a planet that could support a human diaspora and colonization of the majority of its landmass, the vision of coming ecocides signals an Earth that will be subject to mass adaptation rather than the wholesale extinction of Man. The emerging figures of human precarity are thus haunted by the deep inequalities that render the planetary form of life in constant states of flux and mutation.

## Notes

1. Hugh Raffles, *Insectopedia* (New York: Pantheon, 2010), 320.
2. Brian Massumi, "National Enterprise Emergency: Steps Toward an Ecology of Powers," *Theory, Culture, and Society*, 26: 6 (2009), 153–85, 154.
3. *The Day After Tomorrow*, film, directed by Roland Emmerich (U.S.A.: Lionsgate Films, 2004).
4. "Animality" becomes a useful keyword, as opposed to "animal" or "species," since it signifies both a figural racial form of dehumanization and a possibility of shared interspecies intimacies. See further Michael Lundblad,

- The Birth of the Jungle: Animality in Progressive-Era U.S. Literature and Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 12, 15–16; Zakiyyah Iman Jackson, “Animal: New Directions in the Theorization of Race and Posthumanism,” *Feminist Studies*, 39: 3 (2013), 669–85, 677–8.
5. I note in particular the work of ecofeminists including Donna Haraway, Val Plumwood, and Deborah Bird Rose, each of whom has explored post-colonial and indigenous critical discourses as well as problems of extinction and conservation.
  6. See <<http://alexisrockman.net/projects/american-icons>> (last accessed 21 November 2016).
  7. See <<http://alexisrockman.net/projects/future-evolution>> (last accessed 21 November 2016).
  8. Rockman’s *American Icons* series imagines such decay amidst a regenerating posthuman lifeworld in the depiction of many U.S. landmarks, including Disneyworld and the Hollywood sign.
  9. Alan Weisman, *The World Without Us* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2007), 21.
  10. Eugene Thacker, *In the Dust of This Planet: The Horror of Philosophy Vol. 1* (New York: Zero, 2011), 3.
  11. See Slavoj Žižek, *Welcome to the Desert of the Real* (London: Verso, 2002); Jean Baudrillard, “The Spirit of Terrorism,” *Le Monde*, 3 November 2011.
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22. This planetary riff on Frantz Fanon's famous appraisal of decolonial insurgency and nationalism is suggested by Leela Gandhi's invocation of Fanon in her work on cosmopolitan radicalism of the *fin-de-siècle*. In Gandhi's account of Indian and British political activity, the protection of nonhuman animal species became one invocation of "the wretched" alongside the homosexual and the colonized. See Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Richard Philcox (New York: Grove, 2004); Leela Gandhi, *Affective Communities: Anticolonial Thought, Fin-de-Siècle Radicalism, and the Politics of Friendship* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006).
  23. Dipesh Chakrabarty, "The Climate of History: Four Theses," *Critical Inquiry*, 35: 2 (2009), 197–222, 201.
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