

Narrating the Anthropocene

THREADING CONTEMPORARY FEMINIST THEORY AND
FICTION IN A HUMAN-DOMINATED WORLD

Susanne M.A. Ferwerda (3919366)

MA Gender & Ethnicity (Research)
Department of Media and Culture Studies
Graduate School of Humanities
Utrecht University

Supervisor: dr. Kathrin Thiele
Second reader: dr. Iris van der Tuin

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Can I imagine my elsewhere?

- Hélène Cixous

*Theory – the seeing of patterns, showing the forest as well as
the trees – theory can be a dew that rises from the earth and
collects in the rain cloud and returns to earth over and over.
But if it doesn't smell of the earth, it isn't good for the earth.*

- Adrienne Rich

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Introduction

In just a few months, the International Commission on Stratigraphy,¹ under advice of the Subcommission on Quaternary Stratigraphy's Working Group on the 'Anthropocene', is expected to come out with advice regarding whether or not to lose the quotes around the term 'Anthropocene' and adopt it into official scientific record as the name of the present period in Earth's history. As nothing ever moves fast in the world of geology and stratigraphy, the debate on whether to adopt the term as officially replacing or supplementing the Holocene – the warm, interglacial period that started approximately 10 - 12 millennia ago – has been moving slowly since the conception of the term the 'Anthropocene' in the 1980s.² Popularized by the Dutch atmospheric chemist Paul Crutzen and the late American marine biologist Eugene F. Stoermer in a short article for the newsletter of The International Geosphere-Biosphere Programme (IGBP) in May of 2000, the Anthropocene they proposed emphasized “the central role of mankind in geology and ecology”, the impacts of which “will continue over long periods” (Crutzen and Stoermer 17). In more recent contributions on the Anthropocene, Crutzen and his collaborators (Williams and Crutzen 2013) underlined an even stronger role for the human species: “Homo sapiens have risen to become a significant geophysical force in their own right” (270). This force generally includes the anthropogenic emission of greenhouse gases, the increase in atmospheric carbon dioxide (CO₂) and methane (CH₄) levels, changes in erosion and sediment transport, anthropogenic processes such as colonization, agriculture, urbanization and global warming, ocean acidification, the loss of rainforests and marine microbiotic change that is a result of changing land use. A discussion on the Anthropocene therefore includes, but does not equal, the debate on global climate change. Rather, it is an umbrella term for a quite diverse range of mankind-induced environmental changes.

Whether the term is officially approved or not – a decision that comprises not only an acknowledgement of the Anthropocene as the present geological era but moreover would have to take into account an indication on when the Anthropocene might have started³ - it has

¹ The International Commission of Stratigraphy concerns itself with the nomenclature and establishment of a standard and global timescale.

² While Paul Crutzen is often credited with the term the 'Anthropocene' it was Eugene F. Stoermer who already coined it in the 1980s. See Will Steffen, et al. “The Anthropocene: Conceptual and Historical Perspectives.” *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society A* 369 (2011): 842-67.

³ When the Anthropocene is said to have started remains debatable. Crutzen and Stoermer's indication made in their 2000 article proposes the “latter part of the 18th century” (17), the Industrial Revolution and James Watt's 1784 invention of steam engine, seeing as that during the past two centuries “the global effects have become

already been widely adopted in a vast range of disciplines. The idea of an era that revolves around the dominant influence of human activities has sparked the interest of, among many others, popular journalism, artists, historians and scholars from the humanities, the natural sciences and social sciences. Public discussions about the Anthropocene have been largely focused on finding evidence that human activities have led to irreversible climate change and thus geological shifts. In line with twentieth century neoliberalist political discourse, discussions on environmental change and the advent of a possible Anthropocene era have often been subsumed in debates about profits, climate activism and PR campaigns of large companies such as Royal Dutch Shell and Unilever.

Ideas of human responsibility for the changing of environments, climates and the planet as a whole have led to many stories of the extinction of species – human or other. In popular imagination, images of anthropogenic climate change and its disastrous consequences have been omnipresent. The widespread recognition documentaries such as Al Gore's *An Inconvenient Truth* (2006) gained in the early 2000s led to a rise in the prevalence of disaster movies⁴ and disaster journalism⁵. The attention global warming and climate change gained since the formation of for instance the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change in 1988 and the Rio Earth Summit of 1992 became part of global popular culture in the early 2000s and paved the way for more (non-)fiction addressing these topics. The failure of the 2009 Copenhagen UN Climate Change Summit added even more fuel to the fire. Popular science writer and journalist Alan Weisman's best-selling book *The World Without Us* (2007) has the reader experimenting with the idea that New York lives on without 'Us', that is, without humanity. Science journalist Elizabeth Kolbert, moreover, tells the story of how future geologists, studying our present planet, would discover evidence of the mass-extinctions of species of the past and our immediate future: *The Sixth Extinction* (2014), a contemporary extinction event that has humanity as the driving factor of these extinctions. The idea of human responsibility is often key in the discussions of disaster and extinction in the

clearly noticeable" (17). The 'Anthropocene' Working Group considers this the most "generally considered" beginning of the Anthropocene. Other possible dates include July 16, 1945, at 5:29 when U.S. scientists exploded the world's first atomic bomb in the desert of Alamogordo, New Mexico and the subsequent increase of background radiation (Zalasiewicz 197), and the 'Great Acceleration' that indicates a phase of enhanced population and economic growth and associated environmental change starting in the mid-twentieth century, after the end of WWII (Steffen et al. 617). The latest addition to the discussion of its geological genesis is 1610, when a dip in atmospheric CO₂ occurred and 1964 as nuclear weapon detonation had by then produced a peak of radionuclides (¹⁴C) (Lewis and Maslin 177).

⁴ Examples of disaster movies include Roland Emmerich's *The Day after Tomorrow* (2004), M. Night Shyamalan's *After Earth* (2013) and Disney's *Wall*E* (2008).

⁵ A poignant example has been the news coverage of winter weather in Northern America. Snowstorms and cold waves have since 2009 been given names that are portmanteaus such as 'Snowmageddon', 'Snowpocalypse' and 'Snowzilla'.

Anthropocene: “Right now [...] we are deciding, without quite meaning to, which evolutionary pathways will remain open and which will forever be closed. No other creature has ever managed this, and it will, unfortunately, be our most enduring legacy” (Kolbert 272). Weisman and Kolbert provide examples of how, in both fiction and non-fiction, tensions between anthropogenic environmental change and a feeling of responsibility toward ‘preserving’ or ‘saving’ these environments for a future that includes human life are voiced in popular written discourse.

The shift that has taken place is one of scale and of a feeling of responsibility. Writing and reading are central to understanding what this change of thought means. Following the idea that the layers of Earth can be ‘read’ in order to understand how and what kind of life occurred on Earth at a particular point in history, the Anthropocene supposes a reading of Earth’s structure by ‘future geologists’, who will be able to read the crucial impact of humanity in this era called the Anthropocene. As historian Dipesh Chakrabarty points out in “The Climate of History. Four Theses” (2009): “To call human beings geological agents is to scale up our imagination of the human. Humans are biological agents, both collectively and as individuals. They have always been so. [...] To call ourselves geological agents is to attribute to us a force on the same scale as that released at other times when there has been a mass extinction of species” (208). Humans have been of influence to their surroundings for as long as there have been humans – *homo sapiens* is estimated to have first appeared in East Africa around 190,000 to 160,000 years ago (Dennell 647) – yet stating that humanity is now a geological force scales up the importance that is attributed to their presence.

Chakrabarty’s article, furthermore, describes the challenge that the Anthropocene poses for the Humanities: how to conceive of humanity in an epoch that is dominated both individually and collectively by their activities? What does a shift in terminology for the present state of the Earth mean for the present state of humanity? As Chakrabarty notes: “[e]ven if we were to emotionally identify with a word like mankind, we would not know what being a species is, for in species history, humans are only an instance of the concept species as indeed would be any other life form. But one never experiences being a concept” (220). There is no phenomenology of humanity, of ‘us’, as a species. What humanity ‘is’, remains – even after many years of philosophical consideration – unclear. How to come to terms with anthropogenic change if the meaning of notion of anthropos has yet to be decided upon? The Anthropocene implies anthropogenic change on a global, and considering the space debris that orbiting Earth, even atmospheric level. Yet only local changes such as a change of weather can be experienced. Knowledge production in the Anthropocene has also

undergone a shift in scale. Knowing the Anthropocene is complicated, not only because it comprises knowledge of something we are right in the middle of, it moreover refers to knowledge that in terms of scale concerns such a widespread phenomenon it becomes ungraspable.

The epistemological changes a term such as the Anthropocene implies have in themselves become a subject of scholarship for the Humanities: prominent journals such as *Oxford Literary Review*, *philoSOPHIA*, *Public Culture* and *the minnesota review* have dedicated special issues and sections to the intersection of the Anthropocene and the Humanities.⁶ Open Humanities Press⁷ has in the book series ‘Critical Climate Change’ (eds. Tom Cohen and Claire Colebrook) published books like *Minimal Ethics for the Anthropocene* (2014) by Joanna Zylińska, *Art in the Anthropocene* (2015) by Heather Davis and Etienne Turpin, *In Catastrophic Times* (2015) by Isabelle Stengers, *Twilight of the Anthropocene Idols* (2016) by Tom Cohen, Claire Colebrook and J. Hillis Miller, and, most recently, *The Chernobyl Herbarium* by Michael Marder and Anaïs Tondeur.

My entry into research on the Anthropocene has been through the Humanities and more specifically through contemporary feminist philosophy and literary theory. This thesis therefore engages with the Anthropocene first and foremost from a feminist and literary point of view. In the course of my studies at the Gender & Ethnicity research master program at Utrecht University I focused on contemporary feminist theory and particularly on recent contributions that can be described in terms such as ‘new materialism’, the ‘material turn’, and ‘feminist materialisms’. According to Rick Dolphijn and Iris van der Tuin (2012), the concept of new materialism was coined by Rosi Braidotti in 1991. In *Patterns of Dissonance* Braidotti writes a genealogy of the shift in critical theory – Foucault’s and Deleuze’s move from Marxist materialism to a neo-materialist approach of materiality⁸ – that lead to a ‘new

⁶ *Oxford Literary Review* dedicated a special issue – volume 37.2 (2012) – to ‘Deconstruction in the Anthropocene. *philoSOPHIA*’s latest issue – volume 5.2 (2016) – features articles on ‘Anthropocene Feminisms’ from the field of feminist philosophy. *Public Culture* – volume 26.2.73 (2014) – published a special edition under the name “Visualizing the Environment” that concerned itself with exploring “forms of environmental image making and visualizing in the context of the Anthropocene” (Carruth and Marzec 2015). *the minnesota review* – volume 2014, number 83 (2014) – addressed the Anthropocene in a special focus on “Writing the Anthropocene”.

⁷ Open Humanities Press promotes open access scholarship with a focus on critical and cultural theory, directed by Gary Hall, Sigi Jöttkandt and David Ottina. The ‘Critical Climate Change’ book series currently comprises a total of fourteen books.

⁸ Braidotti refers to Foucault’s contributions to the shift from textual to material corporeality of the subject that, as Deleuze and Guattari argue, can be found in *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (1992) and in *Discipline and Punish* (1979) (Deleuze, *A Thousand Plateaus* 33). She, moreover, refers to Deleuze and Guattari’s neo-

materialism' that rethinks the dynamisms of materiality:

[A] general direction of thought is emerging in feminist theory that situates the embodied nature of the subject, and consequently the question of alternatively sexual difference or gender, at the heart of matter. [...] This leads to a radical re-reading of materialism away from its strictly Marxist definition. [...] The neo-materialism of Foucault, the new materiality proposed by Deleuze are [...] a point of no return for feminist theory. (Braidotti 263-6, as qtd. in Dolphijn and van der Tuin 19).

Feminist contributions are at the roots of new materialist scholarship. Tracing it even further back than Foucault, Deleuze and Guattari, engaging with “materiality as force” (Hinton and van der Tuin 1) can be found in second-wave feminist politics. As Hinton and van der Tuin write: “the political in its feminist incarnations has always been shot through with material dynamics” (1). They refer to de Beauvoir’s conclusion to *The Second Sex*⁹ and state that even here “matter’s metamorphosing impetus” can be stumbled upon. The feminist roots of new materialism translate into a dynamic approach to materiality that no longer takes force as “the co-constitutive yet binary interplay of power (normative ideology), on the one hand, and resistance, on the other”, it rather engages with force as “the impetus *immanent* to this entire constituency” (1-2, italics original).

Duality, agency and materiality are at stake in feminist materialist thought. They are, moreover, at stake in a feminist materialist approach to the Anthropocene. Disentangling the deep-rooted gendered dualisms in Western metaphysics such as man/woman, nature/culture, body/mind, object/subject and active/passive has been the work of feminist theory and politics since at least 1949 and de Beauvoir’s *The Second Sex*.¹⁰ Disconcertingly, the advent of the Anthropocene has not necessarily meant a moving on from binary thought. Some of the premises the Anthropocene is founded upon (e.g. human vs. nature, human vs. non-human), are part of the binary system that feminist thought has, in its umbrella function including

materialist ontology of ‘assemblages’ as worked out in *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (1987) and *What is Philosophy?* (1994).

⁹ In the conclusion to *The Second Sex* de Beauvoir comes to the “ill-received (read: unpopular) conclusion” (Hinton and van der Tuin 2) that Hinton and van der Tuin nevertheless state is an instance of material dynamics at play: “women need only pursue their rise, and the success they obtain encourages them; it seems most certain that they will sooner or later attain perfect economic and social equality, which will bring about an inner metamorphosis” (de Beauvoir 764).

¹⁰ Questioning the binary opposition man/woman goes back much further than Simone de Beauvoir. Back to, at least, Olympe de Gouges’ *Declaration of the Rights of Woman and the Female Citizen* (1791) and Mary Wollstonecraft’s *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792).

critical race, postcolonialist, queer and feminist approaches to differences, worked hard to complicate and untangle. The feminist materialist thought that is the thread of this thesis discusses the (dis)continuities of binary thought in thinking with the notion of the Anthropocene. The work of feminist thinkers such as Donna Haraway and Braidotti provide critical analyses of the binary systems at work in the Anthropocene. They moreover introduce alternative modes of relating to the Anthropocene that do not start from these dualisms.

Next to feminist new materialism, the notions of storytelling and narrativity are employed in this thesis as a mode of analysis for the Anthropocene and a thread that connects theory to fiction. I was first introduced to the notion of the Anthropocene in an elective course at Leiden University, focusing on the ‘material turn’ in the arts.¹¹ The enthusiasm my classmates exuded in regards to the introduction of a new era stood in sharp contrast to the hesitation it triggered in me. My reluctance toward the Anthropocene came as a result of the friction I felt in regard to the central and place humanity has been given and the dualist inclinations in its approach. Furthermore, the representations of the Anthropocene I encountered were distinctly narrative, though not a lot of attention had been given to the intersection of the Anthropocene and narrativity.¹² The Anthropocene has always been closely tied to the notion of storytelling. Humanity is often heralded as the ‘hero’ who will go and save the planet. Moreover, the inception of the Anthropocene supposes a beginning, a starting point that means a departure from the Holocene or at least a differentiation within this ‘wholly new’ era.¹³ If the Anthropocene is a new period in the history of Earth, this also implies there must once come a time that will no longer be Anthropocene. The end of the Anthropocene speaks to the imagination and in the arts the notion has been picked up widely and has translated into a broad range of interpretations regarding the consequences of this epoch. An interrogation of the Anthropocene, therefore, does not only take place in theoretical approaches. Fiction also plays a large role in understanding humanity's place on Earth and its responsibility for the changes that come with the Anthropocene.

This thesis approaches the Anthropocene as a narrative and as an attempt to

¹¹ The course was called “Matter and Muck: bio-art, ecocriticism, and the material turn” and taught by dr. Isabel Hoving and Prof. dr. Rob Zwijnenberg as part of Leiden University’s Arts and Culture research master program.

¹² Over the course of writing this thesis more research on narratives in the Anthropocene has started to come forth. Adam Trexler’s *Anthropocene Fictions. The Novel in an Era of Climate Change* (2015) is a prominent study. The focus of Trexler’s book is fiction that engages with the notion of climate change, more than any other result of anthropogenic influence in the Anthropocene era. Trexler, moreover, does not pay any particular attention to feminist fiction and the Anthropocene.

¹³ The term ‘Holocene’ is etymologically derived from the Ancient Greek ὅλος (whole or entire) and καινός (new in quality or development) combined meaning ‘entirely recent’ or ‘wholly new’. The ‘Anthropocene’ combines ‘ἄνθρωπος’ (human being) with καινός into a translation of an era that is ‘newly human’.

understand what is happening to Earth and to the humans that so dominantly inhabit it according to these narratives. The notion of narrative, here, is thought of as a story that is conveyed in a particular medium,¹⁴ but moreover resonates with what feminist SF writer Ursula K. Le Guin calls the ‘carrier bag theory of fiction’: narratives here are the theories and stories that are “capacious bags for collecting, carrying, and telling the stuff of living” (Haraway, “Sowing Worlds” 138), as Donna Haraway pointedly describes Le Guin’s theory. They are containers of many things: like “[a] book holds words. Words hold things. They bear meanings” (Le Guin 169), the narratives in this thesis hold words, things and meanings, both on the page and beyond it.

The narratives that theorize the Anthropocene are explored through the practice of close reading. The close reading that is practiced in this thesis is a method of interpretation and an important tool for feminist analysis. In “Feminist Perspectives on Close Reading” (2011) Jasmina Lukić and Adelina Sánchez Espinosa have given an overview of the origins and the feminist approaches to close reading. They note that even though in feminist methodologies close reading has been “marginalised or disregarded [...] since the early days of the second wave [...] close reading, once detached from the restrictive theoretical framework of New Criticism, remains one of the much needed tools in feminist literary studies, cultural studies and beyond (107). Their overview stops at Sara Ahmed’s close reading of postmodern texts and her “call for a close reading of the differences within postmodernism” (110). Yet, from a materialist feminist perspective, the notion of diffractive reading can be added to the overview of feminist approaches to close reading Lukić and Sánchez Espinosa outline. Following Donna Haraway’s argument that there is a need to be “in a diffracting rather than reflecting (ratio)nalit^y” (*The Promises of Monsters*, 299), diffractive reading is a practice of close reading that thinks with maps of interference, with “difference/s beyond binary opposition/s” (Kaiser & Thiele 165).

The focus in this thesis lies, likewise, on thinking an Anthropocene that is not determined by binary structures. Feminist approaches to close reading the Anthropocene are therefore crucial. In both feminist theory and feminist literary fiction similar tactics are employed in order to come to an epistemology of the Anthropocene and a way of situating humanity in it. These tactics include the notion of the speculative and the idea that ‘truth’ is not a universal concept but always already starts from a particular embodied situation. Donna Haraway writes in her influential 1988 article ‘Situated Knowledges: *The Science Question in*

¹⁴ See narratology: the (post)structuralist study of the grammar of narrative (Bal 2009).

Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective' of the importance of a situated and accountable knowledge practice. An important analytical tool, situated knowledges argue for a knowledge production that is always embodied and located. The idea of situated knowledges has been at the root of many feminist fields of scholarship, from queer feminism to black feminisms and material feminisms. In engaging with the Anthropocene from a feminist perspective - Anthropocene Feminism¹⁵ one might say - the notion of situated knowledge is once again fundamental.

The main research question this thesis investigates is: *how is the notion of the Anthropocene challenged, refined and reimagined in contemporary feminist theory and fiction and in what ways does an approach via narratives negate a binary and teleological reading of the Anthropocene?* A multiple and threaded approach of theory and fiction is explored in this thesis. How the story is told is always at least as important as what that story consists of (Heise, "Yogurt & the apocalypse" n.pag.). So, the questions this thesis is asking and after are: what kinds of narratives, what kinds of metaphors in narratives are being deployed to talk about the Anthropocene? In order to come to an understanding of what it might mean to live in the Anthropocene attention is drawn to storytelling and the notion of narrative. It is clear that Earth is in constant change. The idea of the Anthropocene frames this change into a narrative of human responsibility and consequences for the human inhabitants of Earth. Only through particular narratives and metaphors does a changing Earth become socially and culturally meaningful. The work of feminist theorists and fiction writers that is analysed in this thesis reflects this practice of knowledge production. In both the theoretical and literary approaches to the Anthropocene that are considered here, a meaningful engagement with a changing planet is key. Whether through coming up with alternatives, pushing the boundaries of what the Anthropocene has come to stand for, or engaging with it through a particular lens, contemporary feminist theory and fiction have taken the challenges the Anthropocene represents and faced them head on.

In order to highlight the importance of how feminist theory in literature engages with the Anthropocene and, likewise, the importance of narrativity in feminist theory on the Anthropocene, this thesis consists of two parts that are more of a threaded continuation of each other than separate approaches to the Anthropocene. Part One, "Threading Theories and

¹⁵ Though by no means a large body of scholarship occurs under the umbrella of 'Anthropocene Feminism', at least one conference by that name has taken place: April 10-12, 2014 the Center for 21st Century Studies organized a conference on the topic of 'Anthropocene Feminism'. Speakers included Myra Hird, Stacy Alaimo, and Claire Colebrook.

Narratives. Taking Stories Seriously in the Anthropocene”, is an investigation of the work of contemporary feminist theorists Rosi Braidotti, Donna Haraway, Joanna Zylińska and Claire Colebrook in relation to the Anthropocene. How these thinkers relate to the notion of the Anthropocene through their own feminist materialist practices and in what ways they invoke the role of storytelling in their approaches is key in these four chapters.

Starting with the work of Rosi Braidotti and her figuration of the posthuman, the first chapter, “Rosi Braidotti: Becoming-Posthuman as a Geo-Centred Subject”, engages with Braidotti’s work on the ‘geological shift’ and the need to think humanity and human subjectivities differently in the Anthropocene era. The figure of the posthuman and the new vocabulary Braidotti invokes, question a traditional image of *anthropos* and propose a more vitalist, dynamic, sustainable and self-organizing idea of materiality. The second chapter “Donna Haraway: Figuration, Fabulation and the Chthulucene” is a close reading of Haraway’s recent analysis of the Anthropocene and the many alternatives she proposes. An era of her own invention, the Chthulucene is a representation of the distinct blending of fact and fiction that Haraway’s writing adds to the discussion of the Anthropocene. Her attentiveness to the narrative aspects of engaging with new eras undoes binary approaches to the Anthropocene and rather focuses on the entangling of fact and fiction, of the theoretical and the literary.

From these two chapters, which both engage with different figurations and narratives that are important to a feminist materialist engagement with the Anthropocene, this thesis moves to a discussion of the ethical in the Anthropocene. Thinking the Anthropocene cannot be done without mentioning its ethical aspect. The Anthropocene is drenched in how to think human responsibility for what is happening and envisioning ‘better’ or ‘worse’ futures for the human species. These, and all interventions into human activity, are ethical practices. Chapter three, “Joanna Zylińska: Minimal Ethics and the Art of Storytelling” is an analysis of Zylińska’s book *Minimal Ethics* (2014) and her discussion of what it means ‘to live life well’ in the Anthropocene. As human responsibility is important to the notion of the Anthropocene, a consideration of ethics in the Anthropocene is inevitable and essential. From a materialist feminist perspective, Zylińska introduces the notion of ‘minimal ethics’ - a non-systemic and non-normative approach to notions such as ‘world’ and ‘being’ - and connects this to the telling of stories in the Anthropocene. What does it mean to “tell better stories about life in the universe” (Zylińska 46)? This chapter focuses on how rethinking the ethical and storytelling in the Anthropocene might produce not only ‘better stories’ but moreover a ‘different Anthropocene’.

Chapter four, “Claire Colebrook: Indifference and the Possibility of Extinction”, follows the thread of Colebrook’s work and the ways in which she pushes the Anthropocene towards its extremes and beyond. Through the idea of the extinction of humanity and thought experiments that invoke an image of ‘life after the Anthropocene’ Colebrook turns the idea of difference upside down and argues for ‘indifference’ and ‘counter-Anthropocenes’. This chapter follows her line of thought and the stories she tells in an attempt to provoke a thinking of the Anthropocene that does not rest on binary distinctions. Thought together, these four chapters highlight contemporary feminist engagements with the Anthropocene and show how in these theoretical approaches the notion of storytelling and the blending of fact and fiction are employed in order to think the Anthropocene differently.

Part Two, “The Fiction of Anthropocene Worlds. Thinking the Anthropocene Through Feminist Speculation”, starts from the literary analysis of recent novels of two writers of feminist speculative fiction: Margaret Atwood and Jeanette Winterson. Their narratives invoke worlds that in many ways touch on problems and themes that are also present in the notion of the Anthropocene. Atwood’s *MaddAddam Trilogy* (2003-2013) and Winterson’s *The Stone Gods* (2007) follow in the footsteps of the history of feminist science and speculative fiction, question human presence on Earth and think through storytelling about its possible consequences or alternatives. These novels tell the stories of worlds that are extensions of current situations or have at one point in the narrative of Earth and humanity taken a different direction. Pushing the familiar and the unknown into an intricate pattern of linked narratives, the second part of this thesis starts from narrative but touches on the same ambivalences and points of discussion that are explored in theoretical feminist approaches to the Anthropocene.

Chapter five, “Margaret Atwood’s *MaddAddam Trilogy*: Pasts, Presents and Futures on a Post-Anthropocene Planet”, is a close reading of Atwood’s *MaddAddam Trilogy*, consisting of three novels: *Oryx and Crake* (2003), *The Year of the Flood* (2007), and *MaddAddam* (2013). The world created by Atwood represents a post-Anthropocene planet, which is dealing with the consequences of a man-made virus that wiped out nearly all humans. The story plays with the consequences of bioengineering and genetics and imagines a future that no longer has humanity as a dominant agent on Earth. It pushes our imagination of an Anthropocene planet beyond its limits. Anthropocene pasts and post-Anthropocene futures are explored in a narrative that proposes a feminist alternative way of engaging with the genre of the apocalyptic. It takes a speculative standpoint in its attempt to question

contemporary biotechnological and cultural realities. Art and specifically writing is invoked in order to come to an alternative imagination of the pasts, presents and futures of the Anthropocene.

The sixth and last chapter, “Jeanette Winterson’s *The Stone Gods*: and the Inscription of Many Anthropocenes”, engages with the notion of inscription and iterative storytelling in Winterson’s *The Stone Gods* (2007). The narrative Winterson presents is many-layered, it consists of different entangled stories, each layer rethinking the idea of inscription in a different Anthropocene world. Through storytelling and an iterative approach to the writing of a geological era, Winterson’s novel suggests that there can be many Anthropocenes. Breaking with a singular reading of the Anthropocene, *The Stone Gods* portrays an image of hope in an era that is all too often characterized by past, present and future disaster.

In all, this thesis approaches the Anthropocene through an image of hope: a hope that through feminist thought the Anthropocene can come to mean much more than just a single story of inevitable doom. Approaching the Anthropocene through some of the many narratives that are being told in its name also creates possibilities to rethink some of the other single stories that have been proliferating in Western philosophy. Thinking the Anthropocene in such a way might change how we think about humanity, earth, nature, culture, the environment, and many of the other notions that cannot be, but often are, explained in limited terms. The contemporary feminist writers of theory and fiction that are featured in this thesis push the boundaries of what the Anthropocene has come to stand for and through their storytelling propose a narrative Anthropocene: an era that tells a story.

Part One

Threading Theories And Narratives

Taking Stories Seriously In The Anthropocene

In *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (1979) the French philosopher and literary theorist Jean-François Lyotard not only introduces the notion of postmodernism in the area of philosophy but moreover defines postmodernism “as incredulity toward metanarratives” (Lyotard xxiv) His book is in all actually less about literary narratives or the status of fiction and more a study or ‘report’ “about the ways in which advanced societies treat education, science, technology, research and development” (Malpas 17). Nevertheless his statement on the end of the belief in metanarratives – also called master or grand narratives – continues to live on as one of the most important definitions of how the era of postmodernity was thought to have changed relationships with the grand narratives of history. Written in the late 70s, a world post-World War II, full of disbelief and delusion of the ideologies of for instance war, totalitarianism, Marxism, imperialism and science, Lyotard argues that these narratives, which proclaimed to tell a ‘truth’, were actually very dangerous:

We know its symptoms. It is the entire history of cultural imperialism from the dawn of Western civilization. It is important to recognize its special tenor, which sets it apart from all other forms of imperialism: it is governed by the demand of legitimation. (Lyotard 27)

The metanarratives Lyotard refers to are, in short, stories societies and communities tell themselves and present to others in order to explain their “present existence, their history and ambitions for the future” (Malpas 21). Incorporating Wittgenstein’s concept of ‘language games’, Lyotard relates the organization of knowledge to the way concepts are expressed. Reminiscent of de Beauvoir’s “One is not born, but rather becomes woman” (de Beauvoir 283), Lyotard notes, “no self is an island [...] even before he is born, if only by virtue of the name he is given, the human child is already positioned as the referent of a story recounted by those around him, in relation to which he will inevitably chart his course” (Lyotard 15). Before or after one is born, the premise remains the same: one becomes through the narratives one is born into and subsequently formed by. The language used in certain discourses, whether scientific or not, plays by certain rules and these rules and games are being organized into narratives that are performed by already existent metanarratives. This is not to say that all metanarratives are inherently ‘bad’, these stories are first and foremost part of how interpretations of pasts, presents and futures are given shape in presents. Lyotard, however, is very critical about metanarratives and most of all of *grand récits*, the master narratives of Western domination. After the rise and collapse of ideology in the first half of the 20th

century, the world as Lyotard viewed it could no longer believe in the narratives that were once so evidently ‘true’.

His proclamation that the age of postmodernism announced the end of the grand narrative is – almost four decades later – still relevant to reconsider. Though we are now in a post-postmodernist era and perhaps in the ‘Anthropocene’, whether we are being formed by always already existent metanarratives remains unclear. Even though the grand narratives of Lyotard’s age have in the last decades taken serious blows to their cores, many new narratives have appeared in their place. ‘Stories’ that now involve the tales of capitalism, global terrorism and large-scale climate change.

These new grand tales have been of interest to many scientific and political platforms and media channels. As long as I have been alive – that is, since 1988 - the potentially dangerous disruptive consequences of rising CO₂ emissions have been widely known. The in 1988 established International Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) was set up in order to “prepare based on available scientific information, assessments on all aspects on climate change and its impacts, with a view of formulating realistic response strategies” (IPCC, “History”). The year 1988 was a turning point. By then the industries involved in fossil energy, politicians and policymakers were aware of the risks that would come with an unchanged stance on energy consumption.

Yet, despite the milestone year 1988 and a growing concern toward climate change and the active impact human energy consumption has had, in the last twenty-eight years global CO₂ levels have continued their steady rise. Even though their tale keeps being told and within scientific literature there is consensus confirming the existence and importance of ‘anthropogenic global warming’,¹⁶ the gravity of the impact of changing climates has not evolved into widespread political action against the consequences of humanities’ current energy depletion.. As Zylinska notes in *Minimal Ethics for the Anthropocene*, this might very well be a question of scale .The ways in which ‘the planet’ and ‘the world’ have been thought often meant a consideration of these entities first “at a distance, and then try to *act on it*” (Zylinska 27, italics original). Zylinska cites Timothy Clark in pointing out that “considerations of scale tend to undermine many policies, concepts and common-sense beliefs about what we refer to as ‘our world’” (27) The problems that have been presented, are so immense that they have become ungraspable. Climate change has never been purely a

¹⁶ See Cook et al. “Quantifying the consensus on anthropogenic global warming in the scientific literature.” *Environmental Research Letters* 8.2 (2013): 1-7.

technological, political, economical or cultural problem; it has always been all these things at once. Though most, if not all, humans are taking part in it, it cannot be reduced to either individual responsibility nor can it be bound to national borders. The entanglement of pasts, presents and futures has in this instance become so complex that taking clear action is no easy feat: “[t]he problem with this ‘planetary’ mode of thinking lies in the *apparent* grasping of complexity, which is nothing more but a form of reductionism” (27).

The problems that come up in respect to the Anthropocene can be seen as a continuation of these problems of scale. Climate change and a possible end to human use of fossil fuels have given rise to a consideration of this time as the era in which humankind has the most dominant impact upon the recent past, present and possible future of this planet. However, the Anthropocene has the potential to be reduced into a single story of human ascension and exceptionalism, a story that echoes the influences of Humanism and other binary systems of thinking about Earth and its inhabitants. From a materialist feminist perspective, the idea of human exceptionalism is problematic. A critique of Humanist ideas of the opposition between the body and mind, between nature and culture, have been the foundation of many feminist theories. Dualist systems tend to hierarchize the ‘one’ over ‘the other’: mind was seen as ‘better’ and more ‘cultured’ than matter. The bodily therefore quickly became equated with ‘female’, whereas – a very specific rendition of a white, heterosexual, educated and able-bodied – ‘male’ was interpreted as closer to ‘culture’ and ‘thought’. Culture was read as ‘advanced’ and ‘developed’, whereas Nature was considered ‘wild’, ‘primitive’, and ‘untouched’. These dualist systems of mind/matter oppositions translated into equally binary systems of power. Thinkers such as Foucault opposed Humanist thought and the systems of oppression it represents. Moreover, feminist thinkers such as Haraway have introduced neologisms such as ‘naturecultures’ in order to let go of binaries and think of nature and culture as non-oppositional and entwined.

The Anthropocene echoes many of the Humanist dualisms that feminist materialist thought wants to undo. Told as a single story of human ascension and exceptionalism, it often comes in the guise of a singular approach to human consumption and its detrimental effects on the planet. It once again separates the idea of a ‘natural’ Earth from ‘cultured’ human interventions and tends to reproduce the same hierarchical binary oppositions that have been part of the problem that created the Anthropocene in the first place. Still, the Anthropocene also has the potential to take the problems of this time seriously and offers possible ways out of a reductionist mode of thinking about worlds and planets. It is this second way of working with many stories in the Anthropocene in a non-binary approach that this thesis starts from.

Taking the many stories of the Anthropocene seriously, this thesis reconsiders the ways in which the tales of the Anthropocene are being told. It taps into the potential a retelling of the Anthropocene opens for different kinds of stories. Starting from the work of contemporary feminist scholars Rosi Braidotti, Donna Haraway, Joanna Zylińska, and Claire Colebrook, “Part One. Threading Theories and Narratives. Taking Stories in the Anthropocene Seriously” engages with the potential of a feminist engagement with different stories than a singular Anthropocene: these are still quite grand endeavors, but are never singular in their movements across different scales. In these thinkers’ work the Anthropocene figures sometimes as a tool or figuration in their broader philosophical argument, yet at the same time the notion is also rethought and rewritten. The notion of writing is crucial here. In the more theoretical approaches that are represented in the first part of this thesis, the act and art of storytelling is ever present in rethinking the Anthropocene. The age-old dichotomy philosophy versus literature is therefore not easily upheld. The differences and similarities between fact and fiction, between philosophy and literature have for many centuries been posited as each other’s opposites. Nevertheless, they have a history of neverending entanglement.

Going back on some of the origins of current Western metaphysical thought, which has built upon its relationship to Ancient Greek philosophy, in the book X of the *Republic*, Plato discusses the, even then, age-old quarrel between philosophy and poetry. Of course, in Plato’s context, this means the utility of each in relation to the State. Through his metaphysical philosophy of Forms or Ideas he concludes that poetry should not be taken seriously as it can only be a mere representation of what he reads as the Truth, that which is the true object of knowledge. Unlike philosophy, poetry could never provide access to the Truth as it remains caught up in the process of mimesis where it resides at the bottom of the hierarchy: it is but the imitation of the imitation of the Ideas. Poets are makers and hereby only “produce appearances” (Plato 599a2-3). The ontological status of poetry does not make one come closer to the world of the Ideas. Instead, the cliff only becomes more substantial. This also has consequences for the epistemological status of poetry. If poetry only brings one further away from the Truth, it can produce no real knowledge. All poets should be exiled in order for the good polis – the State in its ideal form – to come about, and rhetoric should be substituted for logic (*Republic*, Books VI and VII).

Going radically against this distinction between rhetoric and logic, poetry and philosophy, the work of poststructuralists such as Jacques Derrida argued against such polarizing ways of viewing these notions. Moreover, complicating and overturning the notion of ‘truth’, the recent history of philosophy has achieved much when it comes to undoing this

static manner of looking at life. In *Minimal Ethics for the Anthropocene* (2014), Zylinska continues Derrida's line of thought when she argues that "products of human creative activity assembled under the general umbrella of 'art' perform a *poietic* function: they bring forth realities, concepts and values" (Zylinska 105, italics original). This is where the word 'poetry' originated: from the verb ποιέω, to 'make', 'create', or 'produce', the notion of poetry came to be.

It was in "Tympan", the introduction to *Margins of Philosophy* (1972), that Derrida referenced the productive and creative potential of literature. Here, he argues for different ways of relating to the opposition between literature and philosophy. Highlighting the potential 'writing otherwise' has for that which philosophy might become, Derrida writes:

To write otherwise. To delimit the space of a closure no longer analogous to what philosophy can represent for itself under this name. (Derrida xxiv)

Opening up the margins of philosophy is Derrida's incentive in *Margins* and can be read as if philosophy's borders are being opened up to a reconsideration of what philosophy, but also all that has been seen as its 'other', such as literature, might be.

It is from the heritage of the work of Derrida and his contemporaries¹⁷ and the opening up of borders of so often statically defined disciplines, that many contemporary thinkers dealing with the problems of life on this planet are still reconsidering the relationship, or rather entwinement, of philosophy and literature. "Part One. Threading Theories and Narratives. Taking Stories Seriously in the Anthropocene" therefore starts from the entanglement of theory and narrative and from the question: *how is the notion of the Anthropocene challenged, refined and reimagined in contemporary feminist theory and in what ways does an approach via narratives negate a binary and teleological reading of the Anthropocene?* Through different figurations, metaphors and alternative narratives the four chapters in this first part explore the notion of the Anthropocene through narrative. Followed by "Part Two. The Fiction of Anthropocene Worlds. Thinking the Anthropocene Through Feminist Speculation" that considers feminist fiction and the relation of the literary Anthropocene and a philosophical envisioning of other worlds, "Part One" is a first investigation in reading the

¹⁷ Someone to note is Hélène Cixous, whose work – ranging from poetry, autobiographical fiction, essays, to anything in-between – has always breached the boundaries of philosophy and literature. Her *écriture féminine*, like Derrida's deconstruction of the margins of philosophy, is something that can never fully be grasped but through the breaching of the boundaries between philosophy and literature never becomes a closed system.

Anthropocene, troubling that which we call 'theory' or 'philosophy' in the approaches of contemporary feminist thinkers.

Chapter One

Rosi Braidotti: Becoming-Posthuman as a Geo-Centred Subject

This is a new situation we find ourselves in: the immanent here and now of a posthuman planet. It is one of the possible worlds we have made for ourselves, and in so far as it is the result of our joint efforts and collective imaginings, it is quite simply the best of all possible posthuman worlds.

- Rosi Braidotti¹⁸

The term ‘Anthropocene’ is a compound of the Ancient Greek *anthropos* (ἄνθρωπος), meaning ‘human being’, and the suffix ‘-cene’, that is derived from *kainos* (καινός) meaning ‘new in quality or development’. Combined as ‘Anthropocene’ it translates into an era that is ‘newly human’. Yet, it is precisely the notion of the human in the Anthropocene that has come under review in contemporary critical cultural theory. How, in this era that is named after the figure of *anthropos*, has the notion of subjectivity changed? Does it still include *anthropos* or is there rather, as Braidotti proposes, a demise of *anthropos* and a shift toward a posthuman subject? This chapter considers Rosi Braidotti’s alternative figuration of the posthuman from the understanding that an attempt to relate to the Anthropocene includes a need for a different way of relating to the world: for different subjectivities, different vocabularies and alternative figurations. Braidotti’s latest book *The Posthuman* (2013) aims to rethink the notion of human and human subjectivity in a time that has undergone a ‘geological shift’: the Anthropocene. Her figuration of the ‘posthuman’ is posed as a critically creative alternative subjectivity that questions whether it is humanity that has a central place in the Anthropocene. In light of ongoing struggles such as the impact of globalization, wars on terrorism, mass immigration, a rising awareness of changing climates and political battles fought over the future of the planet, notions of identity, location and belonging are still poignant. A posthuman politics of location in the way Braidotti proposes entails an attentiveness to a more-than-human idea of a situated and accountable knowledge practice, engaging with a notion of materiality that goes beyond the normative idea that embodiment must always necessarily mean ‘human embodiment’. Braidotti’s figuration of the ‘posthuman’ is significant, particularly in relation to the Anthropocene and to becoming a posthuman subject in an era that pushes subjectivity to involve many earthly scales and has

¹⁸ *The Posthuman* (2013): 197.

become increasingly geo-centred. Following a consideration of Braidotti's use of figurations, this chapter moves toward a contextualization of her critique of Humanism, and the creative potential of an alternative posthuman subjectivity.

The Figuration of the Nomad and the Posthuman

“A figuration is a living map, a transformative account of the self; it's no metaphor.” (Braidotti, *Nomadic Subjects* 11). In Braidotti's use of the notion of figuration, it exists in a clear distinction from the notion of metaphor. Where metaphors are figures of speech designed to emphasize similarities - even though seemingly dissimilar - and identify something as resembling something else, figurations do not stop at being rhetorical devices. Braidotti's figurations are part of her philosophical universe in that they are the embodiments of her affirmative critical nomadic posthumanism. As noted in the above citation, figurations are “a transformative account of the self”; a figuration such as the nomad/the cyborg/the posthuman is closely tied to a notion of subjectivity. When Braidotti uses a figuration it is never in order to embellish her theoretical stance. The nomad is part of what she views as the steady decline of the traditional vision of the subject: “Being homeless, a migrant, an exile, a refugee, a tourist, a rape-in-war victim, an itinerant migrant, an illegal immigrant,^[19] an expatriate, a mail-order bride, [...] a citizen of a country that no longer exists (Yugoslavia, Czechoslovakia, the Soviet Union): these are no metaphors” (11). Figurations draw cartographies, they are ‘living maps’, and create visions of power structures from their particular socioeconomic and symbolic locations.

Braidotti's work on nomadism and the figuration of the nomad has been exemplary of her philosophy for over two decades, yet she now furthermore attends to the figuration of the posthuman. In *The Posthuman* she extends her nomadic theory and its focus on the “loss of unity of the subject” (*Nomadic Subjects* 3) toward an affirmative view of critical nomadic posthuman theory. As Colebrook points out in her article ‘Disaster Feminism’ in *The Subject of Rosi Braidotti* (2014): “From as early as *Patterns of Dissonance* (1991), Braidotti's work seemed to operate in an impossible space: on the one hand, a refusal of Cartesian subjectivism or the separation of a subject of truth [...], and on the other hand, a resistance to abandoning subjectivity altogether” (74). In *The Posthuman* this ‘impossible space’ takes the form of the

¹⁹ Considering the current position of immigrants and fugitives, the term ‘illegal immigrants’ is highly problematic. Agreeing with the rest of Braidotti statement, which sends a positive message concerning the agency of migrants, it would be better here to speak of ‘undocumented migrants’ or ‘irregular migrants’. See Platform for International Cooperation on Undocumented Migrants’ (PICUM) leaflet on terminology: <<http://picum.org/en/resources/picum-terminology-leaflet>>.

figure of the posthuman, which in Braidotti's iteration is not merely a technophilic cyborg-like figure²⁰ but rather an amalgam of animal, machine, earth, human, and non-human materiality. Moving through a paradoxical space that elicits both "elation in equal measure to anxiety", the posthuman is a figure that urges us to rethink what we think of as 'humanity' and embodies a critically creative alternative. It is inspired by the current status of Humanism and the figure of *anthropos*, as their popularity is, according to Braidotti, in steady decline.

The Decline of the Status of Man and a Move Toward Nonbinary Thought

A critique of taking 'Man' as the measure of things is central to Braidotti's work, but the debate concerning 'what is human' or 'what is Man' is of course not new. Broadly speaking, philosophers have questioned of the status of 'Man' in a response to and critique of Humanism, structuralism, patriarchy, colonialism and other systems that start from a system of in- and exclusion. Questioning the status of Man and humanity gained prominence following the growing controversy surrounding Humanism after the Second World War with the generation of radical thinkers. A critique of Humanism and the metaphysical essence of Man can be traced back to Heidegger's *Letter On Humanism* (1946), and the critical debates on Humanism and structuralism that can be found in the work of philosophers such as Lévi-Strauss, Lacan, Irigaray, Blanchot, Cixous, Kristeva, Althusser and Foucault. The latter stepped out of the dialectical scheme of thought that characterizes the Humanism of Marxism with his statements in *The Order of Things* (1970) on 'the human'. What is the human, if anything at all, if Man is a 'recent invention' promised to an imminent 'death' (Foucault 356). The 'death of Man' is a critique of the independent Cartesian subject of Enlightenment that as a concept has now reached its end and is no longer at the center of world history (Braidotti, *The Posthuman* 23).

Feminist poststructuralist philosophies of sexual difference specifically, in their critique of Humanism and its dominant masculinity, took to denouncing "the ethnocentric nature of European claims to universalism" (Braidotti, *The Posthuman* 25). The work of, among others, Irigaray, Kristeva, and Cixous stressed the notion of difference and an opening

²⁰The posthuman is not a figure of Braidotti's invention. It has been used in different discourses, such as in Transhumanist Nick Bostrom's vision of 'superhuman intelligence' (see *Superintelligence* (2014)) and Francis Fukuyama's anxiety for *Our Posthuman Future* (2002) that is supposedly full of the results of decades of genetic exploration. Another theorist that engages with the term is N. Katherine Hayles (see the book *How We Became Posthuman* (1999)), who writes: "Although the 'posthuman' differs in its articulation, a common theme is the union of the human with the intelligent machine [...] there are no essential differences or absolute demarcations between bodily existence and computer simulation, cybernetic mechanism and biological organism, robot technology and human goals" (Hayles 2). Against a one-sided reading of the posthuman, Hayles argues to bring back embodiment, something that in a vision of the posthuman as an intelligent machine often gets lost.

up of the notion of subjectivity to those who in a universalist perspective were relegated to the position of ‘other’. In *Speculum of the Other Woman* (1985) and *This Sex Which Is Not One* (1985) Luce Irigaray points out that the ideal of Man, its singularity and its position as a central point of reference, is a classical Humanist symbol and refers to a very specific subject: a white, European, able-bodied male human.

Along with his critique of Humanism, Foucault’s *The Order of Things* paved the way for a reinterpretation of subjectivity from a nonbinary perspective and engaging with location “in terms of power defined as both restrictive (*potestas*) and also empowering or affirmative (*potentia*)” (Braidotti, *Nomadic Subjects* 4, italics original). Extending these subversions of traditionally Humanist accounts of subjectivity towards a philosophical nomadism is Braidotti’s way of both critically and creatively addressing “the role of the former ‘center’ in redefining power relations” (9). A nomadic theory takes the idea of subjectivity and identity as multiple. There are always multiple belongings and subjectivity should be thought of as a nonbinary, nonunitary and complex notion.

An undoing of binary systems is moreover present in Braidotti’s use of Spinozist monism, which – after Deleuze’s 1968 reading²¹ that ‘saved’ Spinoza’s monistic worldview from being pushed aside as ‘holist’ and politically ineffective (Braidotti, *The Posthuman* 56) – engages with “Spinoza’s central concept that matter, the world and humans are not dualistic entities structured according to principles of internal or external opposition [...] matter is one, driven by the desire for self-expression and ontologically free” (56). Braidotti’s reading of Spinoza is crucial to her understanding of the posthuman and posthuman subjectivity. From a monist perspective she negates a classical Humanism, avoids anthropocentrism and rather emphasizes that ‘matter is one’ in the sense that it is self-organizing (*autopoietic*), structurally relational and therefore connected to “a variety of environments” (60). Instead of arguing from a sort of neo-Humanism, centralizing once again the status of humanity, Braidotti aims to subvert a romanticizing and essentialist binary foundation that takes nature as the polar opposite of culture. In her use of a monist philosophy she therefore refrains from using a notion of matter in a stereotypical Cartesian dualist reading as ‘inert’ or ‘lifeless’ and rather positions it as a positive force of life, a vital non-human materiality that she codes as *zoe*. In an approach to life from a “zoe-centered egalitarianism” (60), Mankind with a capital M – a signifier of the human species – has become troubled. It is no longer *anthropos* that gets to be representative of “a hierarchical, hegemonic and generally violent species” (65). As Braidotti

²¹ This refers to Deleuze’s book *Spinoza et le problème de l’expression* (1968) that in its English translation appeared in 1990 as *Expressionism in Philosophy: Spinoza* with Zone Books from New York.

notes, a concern for the status of ‘the human’ is something to engage with positively. Her approach therefore starts from an explicitly affirmative position. As she explains, an “affirmative politics combines critique with creativity in the pursuit of alternative visions and projects” (54). It is therefore from a position of affirmation that Braidotti takes the Anthropocene and engages with it from the creative, conceptual vision of the figure of the posthuman in this era.

“What would a geo-centred subject look like?”

If the figure of the human has become so drenched with the oppositional ontology of Humanism, what then would an affirmative, nonbinary, and Anthropocene posthuman figuration look like according to Braidotti? In *The Posthuman*, the Anthropocene does not occupy a central position when it comes to the topics that come to the fore. Rather, introduced as “the bio-genetic age known as ‘Anthropocene’, the historical moment when the Human has become a geological force capable of affecting all life on this planet” (5), it is often more of a contextual marker for Braidotti’s investigation into the figuration of the posthuman and the crisis of the figure of *anthropos*. Nevertheless, in her investigation of the figuration of the posthuman, the Anthropocene in its normative meaning of a human domination of this planet is subverted and reimagined alongside the figure of the human.

From the crisis of Humanism and an increased attention for a monist philosophy that relinquishes a hierarchical view of species, Braidotti takes the figure of the posthuman and positions it as a new creative and conceptual figure that has the potential to “undertake a leap forward into the complexities and paradoxes of our times” (54). In a move she describes as material, the posthuman opens up the species supremacy of the ‘human race’ toward a “nature-culture continuum in the very embodied structure of the extended self” (65). The figuration of the posthuman embodies a broad spectrum of positions and is a composite of human, non-human, animal, machine, cyborg, and earthly materiality. After a Deleuzian notion of ‘becoming’, becoming-posthuman entails a multiplicity that in the Anthropocene takes a particular approach to the geological. As the traditional vision of human vs. ‘other’ has become displaced, a shift toward a “planetary, geo-centred perspective” (81) is, as Braidotti writes, often negatively explained. Rather than emphasizing the destructiveness of climate change, an environmental crisis or the problem of sustainability, Braidotti approaches a posthuman planet and the Anthropocene from the positive and affirmative idea that they also reconfigure “the relationship to our complex habitat, which we used to call ‘nature’” (81). In a move that echoes other feminist materialist efforts to upturn the nature/culture

binary,²² she approaches a rethinking of notions of planet and earth as pivotal in the rearticulation of subjectivity:

The earth or planetary dimension of the environmental issue is indeed not a concern like any other. It is rather the issue that is immanent to all others, in so far as the earth is our middle and common ground. This is the ‘milieu’ for all of us, human and nonhuman inhabitant of this particular planet, in this particular era. The planetary opens onto the cosmic in an immanent materialist dimension. My argument is that, again, this change of perspective is rich in alternatives for a renewal of subjectivity. What would a geo-centred subject look like? (81)

The ‘immanent here and now’ of both the Anthropocene era and a geo-centred subject is embodied in the posthuman figuration. The geo-centred nomadic posthuman figure Braidotti introduces is an inhabitant of “a nature-culture continuum which is both technologically mediated and globally enforced” (82). In acquiring a planetary dimension, the posthuman offers a critique of Humanism and anthropocentrism, whilst moreover offering an alternative. In the normative iteration of the Anthropocene, the human is positioned in the center of attention, in a dominant position of power in an era that now proposes it has become an ‘endangered species’. According to Braidotti, however, this Anthropocene prolongs an anthropocentric and Humanist philosophy in its “full-scale humanization of the environment” (85). By continuing to centralize the human as the most dominant and hence important factor, a ‘future without “us”’ is proposed. Braidotti asks: “who is this ‘us’?”:

[I]s it not risky to accept the construction of a negative formation of humanity as a category that stretches to all human beings, *all differences notwithstanding*? Those differences do exist and continue to matter, so what are we to make of them? The process of becoming-earth points to a qualitatively different planetary relation. (88)

²² Notable feminist materialist philosophers who have been striving to move beyond a nature/culture binary include Donna Haraway – whose engagements with what she calls ‘naturecultures’ are discussed in the second chapter of this thesis, Vicki Kirby (see *Telling Flesh: The Substance of the Corporeal* (1997) that engages with the implication of the nature/culture binary in other binarisms such as man/woman, mind/body, sex/gender, and sign/referent and *Quantum Anthropologies: Life At Large* (2011) that specifically addresses how the nature/culture binary has been unwittingly reproduced in cultural theory after the linguistic turn), Elizabeth Grosz (*Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism* (1994) and *Becoming Undone: Darwinian Reflections of Life, Politics and Art* (2011), Stacy Alaimo (*Bodily Natures: Science, Environment, and the Material Self* (2010), and – with Susan Hekman (eds.) – the collection of essays *Material Feminisms* (2009).

As a feminist philosopher coming from the French feminist tradition, Braidotti is a proponent of taking the notion of difference seriously. A geo-centred nomadic posthuman subject and inhabitant of the Anthropocene is therefore first and foremost a product of a material approach to sexual difference and its representations.

A Different Vocabulary

Following a Deleuzian “rhizomatic logic of zigzagging interconnections” (Braidotti, *Nomadic Subjects* 17) Braidotti always takes sexual difference as the starting point of the conversation. Like many of her fellow French feminist thinkers of sexual difference theory, the notion of language and representation play an important role in her work. In *Nomadic Subjects* Braidotti writes an extensive analysis of French feminist sexual difference theory and the influence it has on her conception of nomadic subjectivity. As she explains why she thinks through the figuration of the nomadic in the larger scheme of her feminist philosophy, she writes: “In my reading, the feminist subject is nomadic because it is intensive, multiple, embodied, and therefore perfectly cultural; it is a technological compound of human and machine endowed with multiple capacities for interconnectedness in the impersonal mode” (*Nomadic Subjects* 162).

Her nomadic figuration – and by extension also her posthuman figuration – is made up out of a materiality that is always already imbued with an accumulation of images, concepts and representations. “Difference is not the effect of willpower, but the result of many, or endless, repetitions” (164), Braidotti writes. These repetitions are part of a process that often takes place in the shape of writing. ‘The issue of representation’ is one that has been central to the practice of feminist philosophy ever since the 1970s and the rise of interest in semiotics, structuralist psychoanalysis and the representation of women in a wide range of cultural traditions. Braidotti emphasizes the influence of Adrienne Rich²³ and the French feminist movement of *écriture féminine*, who opened up the world of representation in writing and drew attention to the idea that “an adequate analysis of women’s oppression must take both language and materialism into account and not be reduced to either one” (144).²⁴

²³ The work of Rich is influential for the ways in which through both essay and poetry she manages to speak of the importance of embodiment “Begin, we said, with the material, with matter, mma, madre, mutter, moeder, modder, etc., etc.” (“Notes Toward a Politics of Location” 213) and of writing as a woman: “[to] write directly and overtly as a woman, out of woman’s body and experience, to take women’s existence seriously as theme and source of art” (*Arts of the Possible: Essays and Conversations* 56).

²⁴ *Écriture féminine*, usually translated as ‘feminine writing’ refers to the idea that Hélène Cixous put forth in the article “Sorties” (1975). A transformative writing style, *écriture féminine* has the political power to entwine

Particularly important to the Anthropocene era, which is seeing a nature-culture divide collapse in the connections of human culture and environmental change, is a growing need for a different manner of relating to language, conceiving ‘a new vocabulary’ and different figurations:

The collapse of the nature-culture divide requires that we need to devise a new vocabulary, with new figurations to refer to the elements of our posthuman embodied and embedded subjectivity. (*The Posthuman* 82)

Braidotti argues that a different vocabulary is needed for the posthuman, but this argument might just as easily be extended to the Anthropocene. If the Anthropocene is what Braidotti argues it to be – not the normative iteration of the Anthropocene and a singular world that abides by the Law of Man, but a posthuman planet that has subverted a binary division of nature and culture – a geo-centred nomadic posthuman figuration is needed alongside a different way of relating to the way in which its story is told.

Writing is a method for transcribing cosmic intensity into sustainable portions of being. (166)

Writing is crucial in the sense that it is particularly useful in building bridges between ‘thinking’ and ‘being’. In coming up with a ‘new vocabulary’ a different and more complex representation can come into being in regard to the many factors that structure the posthuman subject, the posthuman planet and a different Anthropocene. Becoming-posthuman as a geo-centred subject that has redefined its attachments and connections to a shared world is imperative in Braidotti’s desire to “create and evolve a new set of narratives about the planetary dimension of globalized humanity; the evolutionary sources of morality; the future of our and other species; [...] the role of gender and ethnicity as factors that index access to the posthuman predicament and the institutional implications of them all” (162-3). This is a new situation the world finds itself in and, as a consequence, we – inhabitants of this planet – must come up with a different manner of relating to the words and stories that are used to tell its story.

feminine desire with language and it therefore able to break through phallogocentric patterns of thought and open up the space of self to the ‘other’. The materiality of writing is key. Cixous’s *écriture féminine* takes as a starting point the writing from a material perspective; it draws on the corporeality of the body and infuses it into the text in order to reappropriate the body as a tool to undermine the limited representation of the feminine as constructed by phallogocentric thought.

Braidotti's work on the posthuman is important for the Anthropocene and the ways in which this era is becoming culturally and socially meaningful. The alternative figuration of the posthuman in Braidotti's reading calls for a different approach to the position of the subject in the Anthropocene. Through a Deleuzian-Spinozist monist philosophy, the posthuman reimagines materiality and the nature-culture continuum in ways that also refigure the Anthropocene from a singular story of human domination into a multiple vision of a posthuman planet. Moreover, the posthuman subject is entangled with the narratives that are being told about the inhabitants of this geo-centred era. The next chapter analyses Donna Haraway's contributions to a reimagining of the Anthropocene. Her work extends the concern for writing different stories in the Anthropocene and focuses furthermore on the importance of storytelling in reimagining the Anthropocene.

Chapter Two.

Donna Haraway: Figuration, Fabulation and The Chthulucene.

[I]n the Chthulucene is a thick kind of ongoingness at stake and within the Chthulucene we are at stake to each other. This is not finished, this is not game over and there's a way in which the mythology of the Anthropocene [...] is an appalling story with which to approach the urgencies of the multiple endings of worlds and ongoings and speeding of endings.

- Donna Haraway²⁵

Donna Haraway's recent engagements with the Anthropocene focus on thinking this era through narratives that offer a complex pattern of its possible meanings. In 2014, Haraway gave a keynote lecture at the conference 'Arts of Living on a Damaged Planet' at AURA (Aarhus University Research on the Anthropocene) called "Anthropocene Capitalocene, Chthulucene: Staying with the Trouble". Followed by the article "Anthropocene, Capitalocene Plantationocene, Chthulucene: Making Kin" (2015) in the journal *Environmental Humanities*, Haraway's engagements with the Anthropocene have focused on a critical reading of what this era might mean and how to make it as "short/this as possible and to cultivate with each other in every way imaginable epochs to come that can replenish refuge. Right now, the earth is full of refugees, human and not, without refuge" (Haraway, "Anthropocene, Capitalocene Plantationocene, Chthulucene: Making Kin" 160). Haraway first and foremost expresses concern for the earth and the futures of all the critters that inhabit it. She translates this concern in rethinking the notion of the Anthropocene and imagining it in a way that might prove more hospitable to all life, not just that of the human species.

Imaginable epochs in Haraway's work can always take many shapes and are told through many narratives. This chapter engages with the epochs Haraway has come up with in order to question, broaden, and render the notion of the Anthropocene more complex. Where Braidotti rethinks subjectivity in the Anthropocene through the figuration of the posthuman, Haraway reimagines the era in its entirety. If we read the Anthropocene differently, what other forms might it take? Haraway's alternatives are approached through narratives that blend myths and stories of the SF kind with the naturecultural realities of the "severe discontinuities" (160) that mark the Anthropocene. "[W]hat comes after will not be like what

²⁵ From the keynote address "Anthropocene, Capitalocene, Chthulucene: Staying with the Trouble", delivered at Aarhus University, AURA 'Arts of Living on a Damaged Planet'. May 9, 2014.

came before” (160) Haraway notes, but we might come up with alternative epochs that offer refuge to all sorts of critters. Through the figuration of ‘Chthulu’, Haraway opens up the Anthropocene to a possible, other present of an era she has named the ‘Chthulucene’. This chapter examines the ways in which she engages with the Anthropocene and her ‘Chthulucene’, an era that is outspoken in its narrative influences, and the ways in which these worlds are never singular and continually entwine theory and fiction.

SF and Writing the Fact and Fiction of ‘Nature’

What Haraway adds to a discussion of the Anthropocene is her distinct blending of fact and fiction, of the scientific and the literary, and her attentiveness to the narrative aspects of envisioning different worlds. Her work has always breached the boundaries of academic disciplines and entwined, among others, the Social Sciences with Biology, Philosophy and English Literature with tremendous ease. “[T]he boundary between science fiction and social reality is an optical illusion” (Haraway, *A Cyborg Manifesto* 149), she wrote in “A Cyborg Manifesto” (1985). The telling of stories has consistently been a very important and integral part to Haraway’s research, in particularly stories of feminist science fiction. This can be read in her creation of different figurations such as ‘the coyote’, ‘the cyborg’, ‘companion species’, and, most recently, ‘Chthulu’. Important in Haraway’s imagining of alternative epochs is the notion of SF. As Margret Grebowicz and Helen Merrick note in *Beyond the Cyborg. Adventures with Donna Haraway* (2013): “SF provides a model for Haraway’s theoretical work” (Grebowicz & Merrick 112). When she writes theoretically, the specificity of writing is always already a core part of her theoretical practice. The one can never be said to be more important than the other.

Haraway’s rendition of SF stands for science fiction, speculative fabulation, science fact, science fantasy and much more.²⁶ She engages with SF “*as science studies*” (114, italics original). This means that in Haraway’s work, a continued conversation with scientific practice is at stake. This comes forth out of her struggle with the figuration of ‘nature’. As Haraway states in conversation with Thyrza Nichols Goodeve in 2000: “My interest has been in what gets to count as nature and who gets to inhabit natural categories. And furthermore, what’s at stake in maintaining the boundaries between what gets called nature and what gets

²⁶ SF is short for science fiction, but moreover what Haraway in the 2013 article “SF: Science Fiction, Speculative Fabulation, String Figures, So Far” writes as: “SF is that potent material-semiotic sign for the riches of speculative fabulation, speculative feminism, science fiction, speculative fiction, science fact, science fantasy—and, I suggest, string figures. In looping threads and relays of patterning, this SF practice is a model for worlding. Therefore, SF must also mean ‘so far,’ opening up what is yet-to-come in protean entangled times’ pasts, presents, and futures.” (n.pag.).

called culture in our society” (Haraway & Goodeve 50). This means that it is important to pay attention to scientists’ stories about nature: “Scientific practice may be considered a kind of story-telling practice – a rule-governed, constrained, historically changing craft of narrating the history of nature” (Haraway, *Primate Visions* 4), Haraway writes in the introduction to *Primate Visions: Gender, Race, and Nature in the World of Modern Science* (1989). That the stories of science are just as much constructed and the result of interpretation as any other type of story does not mean that they are they now ‘false’ or that Haraway dismisses them. Her attention to storytelling in scientific practice does the opposite and takes these stories seriously. She shifts her focus from ‘what’ they tell to ‘how’ scientific storytelling is done.²⁷ “I want to find a concept for telling a history of science that does not itself depend on the dualism between active and passive, culture and nature, human and animal, social and natural” (8). What Haraway does is materialize the tropes used in scientific practice. Her material-semiotic approach is a response to the dangers of social constructivism and its tendency to reduce the question to ‘what’ the world is made of, instead of ‘how’ science and its epistemology have come to know what they know.²⁸ The heterogeneous spaces of SF are Haraway’s playing field for thinking the theories of fiction and the fictions of theory. As she notes in “The Promises of Monsters” (2004):

[T]o write theory, i.e., to produce a patterned vision of how to move and what to fear in the topography of an impossible but all-too-real present, in order to find an absent, but perhaps possible, other present. (295)

Haraway’s work has always been hard to pin down and classify under a header of one particular branch of feminist theory. The ways in which she writes and practices theory are part of this difficulty. As Haraway notes in conversation with Joseph Schneider in *Donna Haraway: Live Theory* (2005): “I think that some folks look at what I write and say, ‘incoherent. There is no argument here. There is no bottom line.’ And often I think that’s

²⁷ In *Primate Visions* (1989) this means that she turns her attention to the discourse of Biology and its narrative fictions about facts: “Biology is the fiction appropriate to objects called organisms; biology fashions the facts ‘discovered’ from organic beings’ [...] Both the scientist and the organism are actors in a story-telling practice” (5). As Joseph Schneider notes, this was about the same time that Bruno Latour was “writing similarly about the active relationship between Louis Pasteur and his microbes in late nineteenth-century France” (Schneider 37). Both Latour’s ‘actor network theory’ (ANT) and Haraway’s rethinking of the notion of agency and action take seriously the epistemologies of scientific practices.

²⁸ In *Laboratory Life: The Construction of Scientific Facts* (1979), Latour – together with Steve Woolgar – finds that scientific practice is deeply rooted in a process of inscription and he eventually has to distance himself from ‘social constructivism’, see “The Promises of Constructivism” (2003).

actually not true” (142-43). Rather, her work is “full of arguments” but as a whole “none of these arguments finally dominates the whole” (143). She calls her work “connectionism [...] constantly working for ways of connecting that don’t resolve into wholes” (143). This ‘anti-holism’ is reflected in her way of always connecting many stories and many layers of thought.²⁹ In that sense, there is a bottom line, it is just not a single story. The Anthropocene, in a similar vein, is never the only narrative that is told. The stories of many epochs start at the ways in which she has for many decades now practiced theory, does theory.

From the Cyborg to Chthulu

When in 1985 Donna Haraway published the seminal essay “A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century”, the world might not have been ready yet for her figuration of ‘the cyborg’.³⁰ A critique of the boundaries of, among others, nature and culture, human and animal, animal-human and machine, the cyborg is one of the first in a line of figurations Haraway employs in order to question binary systems. From the very start the figure of the cyborg has been drenched in both the theoretical, the social, the material and the literary: “I am making an argument for the cyborg as a fiction mapping our social and bodily reality and as an imaginative resource suggesting some very fruitful couplings” (Haraway, “A Cyborg Manifesto” 150), Haraway writes.

The focus on the narrative aspects of the cyborg manifests itself in her stressing of its fictional features and its relation to popular culture, in particular to feminist science fiction. Through storytelling, what it means to be embodied in the world of the cyborg is explored. With references to feminist thinkers such as Audre Lorde, Adrienne Rich, Luce Irigaray and Monique Wittig and feminist science fiction writers like Octavia Butler and Samuel R. Delany, what Haraway calls ‘cyborg writing’ represents a subversion of myths and reverses and displaces “the hierarchical dualisms of naturalized identities” (175). Referring to Octavia

²⁹ Haraway’s approach to the notion of theory is reminiscent of Adrienne Rich’s words in “Notes toward a Politics of Location” (1984). Rich voices a similar view on the relation of the particular to the whole that does not hierarchize one over the other: “Theory - the seeing of patterns, showing the forest as well as the trees - theory can be a dew that rises from the earth and collects in the rain cloud and returns to earth over and over. But if it doesn’t smell of the earth, it isn’t good for the earth” (Rich, “Notes Toward a Politics of Location” 213-14).

³⁰ Haraway reflects on the reception of her ‘Cyborg Manifesto’ in the interview ‘Cyborgs, Coyotes, and Dogs: A Kinship of Feminist Figurations. And. There Are Always More Things Going On Than You Thought! Methodologies as Thinking Technologies’: “I can tell you that the reactions, right from the beginning were very mixed [...] the manifesto was very controversial. There were some who regarded it as tremendously anti-feminist, promoting a kind of blissed-out, techno-sublime euphoria. Those readers completely failed to see all the critique.” (*The Haraway Reader* 324, italics original).

Butler's feminist SF novel *Lilith's Brood* (2000),³¹ Haraway considers the writing of 'women of color' from the perspective of cyborg writing. The particular historical importance of writing for women of color was such that literacy was of vital importance. It moreover "has a special significance for all colonized groups" (Haraway, *A Cyborg Manifesto* 175). Writing and literacy have been and still are pivotal in the suppression of many minorities and have been signifiers for the distinction between that which was for instance supposed to be 'civil' and written or 'primitive' and oral. To break through the restrictions of these categories can according to Haraway be done through the adoption of 'cyborg identities'. These identities and their writing are not innocent. They are situated and draw attention to the immense power that comes with signification:

Cyborg writing is about the power to survive, not on the basis of original innocence, but on the basis of seizing the tools to mark the world that marked them as other. (175)

These tools are often stories. In ways similar to the cyborg, Haraway's new figuration of 'Chthulu' can also be used in an effort to engage with the disruptive potential writing and figurations have on the ways worlds are envisioned and thought. The 'all-too-real' presents of the Anthropocene, human influence and the domination of capital are in Haraway's engagements reshaped and opened up to the now-absent but very possible other present of the Chthulucene. Haraway's work on the fact and fiction of contemporary visions of eras such as the Anthropocene and the Chthulucene always already entwine both.

Using one of her favorite expressions, the lecture "Anthropocene, Capitalocene, Chthulucene: Staying with the Trouble" Haraway gave in 2014 focused on the limitations of the figure of *anthropos* and the alternatives a different reading of the Anthropocene can offer. Her Chthulucene is an envisioning of a world that is full of chthonic powers. This term can etymologically be derived from the ancient Greek word 'χθόνιος' meaning "in, under, or beneath the earth", though Haraway in her lecture explains it to be related to much older stories:

[I]t is way bigger than the Greeks, it's way bigger than the Mesopotamians, it certainly links over into ancient, subcontinental Asian worlds, it ties to the Naga

³¹ Octavia Butler's *Lilith's Brood* (2000) originally appeared as the *Xenogenesis Trilogy* (1987-9), consisting of *Dawn* (1987), *Adulthood Rites* (1988) and *Imago* (1989)

goddesses of the seas around what we now know of is Indonesia, it ties to the snake goddess dance today in Java [...]. (“Donna Haraway”)

Her Chthulu refers to the earthly ones, the beings of earthy worlding, in the sense of a time both past, present and to come. For Haraway the notion of ‘worlding’ refers to a ‘becoming worldly’: “being *required* to make moral and political judgments, ones that really matter. To actually make claims on the world and on each other”, Haraway explains (Schneider 141). Regarding the Chthulucene this means a worlding that both imagines and practices moral and political judgments that are rooted in responsibility for this planet: “extinction is not just a metaphor; system collapse is not a thriller. Ask any refugee of any species” (Haraway, “Anthropocene, Capitalocene, Plantationocene, Chthulucene: Making Kin” 161).

The Chthulucene and Writing Eras Diffractively

The Anthropocene and a destructive presence of mankind has opened up a can of worms that has consequences far beyond climate change: “It's more than climate change; it's also extraordinary burdens of toxic chemistry, mining, depletion of lakes and rivers under and above ground, ecosystem simplification, vast genocides of people and other critters, etc, etc, in systemically linked patterns that threaten major system collapse after major system collapse” (159). In the article “Anthropocene, Capitalocene, Plantationocene, Chthulucene: Making Kin” (2015) that followed Haraway’s lecture at AURA, she states that just one big name, one Lyotarian grand narrative, is not enough: “I think a big new name, actually more than one name, is warranted” (160). She therefore now writes of an Anthropocene, a Capitalocene, a Plantationocene, and a Chthulucene. The article reads as a new manifesto – complete with slogans such as “’Make Kin Not Babies!’” (161) – a call to action and vision of Chthulu that opens up these other epochs to a markedly narrative era:

I also insist that we need a name for the dynamic ongoing sym-chthonic forces and powers of which people are a part, within which ongoingness is at stake. Maybe, but only maybe, and only with intense commitment and collaborative work and play with other terrans, flourishing for rich multispecies assemblages that include people will be possible. I am calling all this the Chthulucene—past, present, and to come. (160)

Though at first glance Haraway seems to refer to H.P. Lovecraft's figure of 'Cthulhu', she envisions her Chthulu to be radically different from the "misogynist racial-nightmare monster" (160) of Lovecraft's 1928 science fiction story 'The Call of Cthulhu' and emphasizes this through a slight change of spelling: a shift from 'Cthulhu' to 'Chthulu'. There is a "thick kind of ongoingness at stake in the Chthulucene" ("Anthropocene, Capitalocene, Chthulucene: Staying with the Trouble"). The naming of this era and of the figuration that has inspired it is not something straightforward. As Haraway explains, "even rendered in an American English-language text like this one, Naga, Gaia, Tangaroa, Medusa, Spider Woman, and all their kin are some of the many thousand names proper to a vein of SF that Lovecraft could not have imagined or embraced" (Haraway, "Anthropocene, Capitalocene, Plantationocene, Chthulucene: Making Kin" 160), these names are feminist, speculative fabulations, scientific fact; SF in all its facets.

"All the thousands names are too big and too small; all the stories are too big and too small" (Haraway, "Anthropocene, Capitalocene, Plantationocene, Chthulucene: Making Kin" 160). Haraway engages with these eras in a way that changes their scale: "we need stories (and theories) that are just big enough to gather up the complexities and keep the edges open and greedy for surprising new and old connections" (Haraway, "Anthropocene, Capitalocene, Plantationocene, Chthulucene: Making Kin" 160). Unlike Rosi Braidotti, Haraway explicitly distances herself from the notion of the posthuman³² and approaches her figurations from an explicit earthly materiality: "I am a compost-ist, not a posthuman-ist: we are all compost, not posthuman" (161). Her Chthulu is a destructive and creative figuration, multiple and, like lichens - the organisms that emerge symbiotically entwined with bacteria and fungi, yet are neither fungi, nor just algae, nor plants, moss, or animal - are a combination of species and are constantly becoming alongside the ecosystems they create:

[L]ichens themselves are symbiotic organisms, they are never just the one. So they recall to us in the substance of being one you are always already at least two. That to be a one is to become with many. That this is the normality of becoming with in something called the Chthulucene. ("Donna Haraway")

³² This dissatisfaction Haraway experiences when she and her work – specifically that on the cyborg – are called posthumanist stems from a concern that it then becomes appropriated in terms of thinking about radical futures and human enhancement rather than that it does justice to the socio-cultural interventions Haraway actually proposes. She would rather extend her cyborg writing to her recent contributions on 'companion species'. See Haraway's 2006 interview with Nicholas Gane "When We Have Never Been Human, What Is to Be Done: Interview with Donna Haraway".

The Chthulucene is “the multiple sneakiness” (“Anthropocene, Capitalocene, Chthulucene”) of Haraway’s worlds, which like the lichens she compares it to, are always already many. Chthulu ‘sneaks into’ the stories of epochs and disrupts the ways in which they have thus far been thought. By infiltrating the narratives of epochs with figurations such as Chthulu or Naga, Haraway creates a much less singular vision of epochs and instead changes their narratives into “something that might possibly have a chance of ongoing” (“Anthropocene, Capitalocene, Chthulucene”). Haraway has for decades now stood against using metaphors that prolong a singular notion of vision and reflection. Her current use of the optical metaphor of ‘diffraction’ is therefore apt in that it breaks out of a binary thought and promotes a patterned vision of differences:

[A]n alternative to the well-worn metaphor of reflection. As Haraway suggests, diffraction can serve as a useful counterpoint to reflection: both are optical phenomena, but whereas reflection is about mirroring and sameness, diffraction attends to patterns of difference. (Barad 29)

Through the notion of diffraction Haraway, once again, transforms a question of ‘what’ into a thinking of ‘how’ and notes that a “diffraction pattern does not map where differences appear, but rather maps where the effects of differences appear” (“Promises of Monsters” 300). In relation to her figuration of the Chthulucene, Haraway’s ‘diffractive writing strategies’ come into being. By writing the Chthulucene – along with the Anthropocene and any other imaginable era – diffractively³³, she does not produce just another era or exact opposites, but rather maps out the effect of their patterns of differences. These eras are like different sources of light creating intricate maps of interference, highlighting the effects of their differences rather than the moments at which they are same or other. Haraway’s use of SF and figures such as Chthulu are telling when it comes to how the diffractive eras build worlds:

³³ As Iris van der Tuin explains in the article “Diffraction as a Methodology for Feminist Onto-Epistemology: On Encountering Chantal Chawaf and Posthuman Interpellation” (2014): “Donna Haraway coined ‘diffraction’ as a tool for feminist research into the materialsemiotic reality of technoscience in the 1990s. She added diffraction to the existing toolbox of semiotics (‘syntax’, ‘semantics’ and ‘pragmatics’) in order to affirm how ‘interference patterns can make a difference in how meanings are made and lived’. Taking advantage of the utopian dimension of her earlier work on ‘cyborgs’ and ‘situated knowledges’, and working with the paintings and expository words of Lynn Randolph, Haraway invented diffraction as a tool for a past-present-future relationality which would not comply with a situation of pejorative (sexual) difference” (234).

It's like reading science fiction, in the sense that statements that mean one thing within one framework, but read in the universe the science fiction has created, mean something very different. (Schneider 149)

Haraway's stories and figurations never reiterate that which is already out there, but constantly rearticulate and redescribe "in order to foreground that which is hidden or foreclosed" (Grebowicz & Merrick 130). Reading her rearticulation of the Anthropocene, and the creation of the Chthulucene is her telling SF. It is the kind of storytelling that "collects up peoples, human and nonhuman, into both imagined and enacted ongoing" ("Donna Haraway"). It creates new worlds while continually staying close to all-too-real worlds and embodied presents.

As discussed in the previous chapter, Rosi Braidotti proposed the need for a different vocabulary for the Anthropocene. This is perhaps directly expressed in the neologisms that Haraway writes with. Her figuration of 'Chthulu' and the era she calls the 'Chthulucene' point to the written patterns and the tentacular connections that make up our worlds. In a constant becoming-with the earth, Chthulu is Haraway's 'SF': a figure of "speculative fabulation, speculative feminism, science fiction, speculative fiction science fact, science fantasy, [...] string figures [...] 'so far'" (Haraway, "SF" n.pag.). The storymaking Haraway enacts in her research always works through her notion of SF and worlds where one big story is never enough. There are always many stories going on at once. She therefore does not dismiss the Anthropocene but rather changes its singular notion into one among many: Anthropocene, Capitalocene, Plantationocene, Chthulucene.

Through figurations such as Chthulu, Haraway aims relate to those of Braidotti: to create new vocabularies, new stories and write worlds made up out of different patterns of differences. Worlds that challenge us to rethink what present and future eras might become. To end this chapter with a pointer on responsibility and the importance of stories:

It matters what matters we use to think other matters with; it matters what stories we tell to tell other stories with; it matter what knots knot knots, what thoughts think thoughts, what ties tie ties. It matters what stories make worlds, what worlds make stories. (Haraway, "SF: Science Fiction, Speculative Fiction, String Figures, So Far")

This is why their stories are so very needed, in mapping out their diffractive patterns they open up binary systems of thought and singular grand narratives to an otherworldly thinking that never reduces the plethora of stories that are out there into a singular *grand récit*.

The work of Joanna Zylińska, which will be discussed in the next chapter, also engages with the need for different stories for the Anthropocene. Arguing for a 'minimal ethics', the stories Zylińska invokes, urges us to rethink the Anthropocene as an ethical project and invoke the question that 'if we are currently in the era that is the Anthropocene, how to live life well here?'. Rather than envisioning different eras altogether, as Haraway proposes, Zylińska analyses the notion of the Anthropocene and argues for living the best Anthropocene we possibly can.

Chapter Three.

Joanna Zylińska: Minimal Ethics and the Art of Storytelling

[W]e humans do care about the stories we tell ourselves.

- Joanna Zylińska³⁴

As Karen Barad notes in an interview with Rick Dolphijn and Iris van der Tuin, “reading and writing are ethical practices” (Dolphijn & van der Tuin 49). Taking this to heart, Joanna Zylińska’s short and concise book *Minimal Ethics for the Anthropocene* (2014)³⁵ features a discussion on the ethics of “what it means to live life well” (13) in the Anthropocene. Zylińska’s engagement with life in the Anthropocene is a response to the narratives that are told about the geological status of Earth and the impending extinction of the human species. Rather than giving in to a defeatist attitude when it comes to the future of humanity on Earth, Zylińska’s aims for *Minimal Ethics* “to tell a different story about the world and our human positioning in and with it, while taking seriously what science has to say about life and death” (11). Storytelling plays an important role in Zylińska’s engagement with the ethical in the Anthropocene. This chapter considers Zylińska’s reading of the ethical in the Anthropocene and in particular its relation to the telling of stories. From a feminist materialist perspective Zylińska proposes a ‘minimal ethics’; “minimal in the sense that it is non-systemic [...] and non-normative” (21). Starting with a positioning of Zylińska’s reading of ethics, this chapter aims to expand an engagement with different Anthropocenes into an explicitly ethical project that through Zylińska emphasis on storytelling might tell the best possible stories of living life well in the Anthropocene.

Minimal Ethics: A Non-Anthropocentric Approach to the Ethical

Zylińska work takes place from a transdisciplinary engagement with the fields of new media and technologies, ethics, art and photography. This approach is immediately noticeable in *Minimal Ethics*, as it combines ten rather philosophical chapters, which read as independent essays on different elements of the overarching argument, with photography and a thorough consideration of different artistic practices. Her idea of ethics is inspired by Levinasian philosophy and in Zylińska’s rendition infused with feminist thought. The telling of stories,

³⁴ From *Minimal Ethics for the Anthropocene* (2014): 11, italics original.

³⁵ *Minimal Ethics for the Anthropocene* was published as part of the ‘Critical Climate Change’ series of Open Humanities Press, edited by Tom Cohen and Claire Colebrook.

both as artistic practice, philosophical mode of writing and way of narrating ethical becomings in the world, is what *Minimal Ethics* keeps turning to.

Following Levinas, Zylinska reads ethics “as an originary philosophy, situated even before ontology” (16). Preceding ontology means that the production of a knowledge of being is suspended and ethics comes in to question the “domineering pretensions” of human ontology and epistemology. Zylinska recognizes the anthropocentric tendencies of Levinas’s theorization of ethics³⁶ and her minimal ethics for the Anthropocene is therefore “not Levinasian in any obvious sense but it does borrow its minimalist structuring from his rethinking of the edifice of Western philosophy” (95). Though humans are not “the only beings that are capable of relating to and collaborating with others [...] ethics is a historically contingent human mode of becoming in the world” (91-93). Zylinska’s minimal ethics as a ‘non-systemic’ and ‘non-normative’ ethics mean that it no longer remains rooted in a larger and universalizing conceptual system, “rest on any fixed prior values, nor does it postulate any firm values in the process” (21). This comes to a more accountable form of ethics and a more modest way of thinking about life in the Anthropocene.

The Goldilocks Principle and a Response to ‘Big Thinking’

Zylinska focuses on responsibility in both material and conceptual ways so that a critical view of the Anthropocene can be sustained, “not in order to reject it, but in order to develop a more complex and more responsible discourse on the Anthropocene, as well as facilitating a better political response to it” (125), whether that is in philosophy, storytelling or art-making. When it comes to the Anthropocene, Zylinska notes, “perhaps thinking is the most political thing we can do” (125). By extension, Zylinska calls ‘for a return to critical thinking’ in response to Timothy Morton³⁷ who claimed it to be ‘damaged’ by modern society in *The Ecological Thought* (2010). Morton voiced a critique on ‘big thinking’ and a modern conception of

³⁶ As Zylinska notes: “Turning to Levinas in any work that aims to promote post-anthropocentric thinking the way this book does is of course not without problems, given the significant role ascribed to the human face as the source of ethical demand in his writings, and the marked (even if historically comprehensible, given the context of the Shoah) disinterestedness in other nonhuman forms of being and becoming” (Zylinska 94).

³⁷ Though not otherwise engaged with as this thesis focuses on feminist thinkers, Timothy Morton is a thinker of speculative realism and OOO (object-oriented ontology) that thinks with a non-world of objects, hyperobjects – i.e. “things that are massively distributed in time and space relative to humans’ (Morton, *Hyperobjects* 1). The *after* of the end of the world Morton suggests in *Hyperobjects: Philosophy and Ecology After the End of the World* is an end of the idea of a stable nature. Hyperobjects relativize reality and destroy any sublime sense of a greater whole that we are finite parts of. Global warming is an hyperobject in Morton’s view, though “in a strange way, every object is an hyperobject” (201). Ursula K. Heise finds reading of global warming, climate change, and his use of ‘scale’ problematic: “[I]f scale makes no difference, and global warming is not as a matter of principle different from ‘pencils, penguins, and plastic explosive’ [Morton 176], what useful work does the concept of the hyperobject do?” (Heise, “Ursula K. Heise reviews Timothy Morton’s *Hyperobjects*” n.pag.).

totality that, according to him, is not even nearly big enough: “Something about modern life has prevented us from thinking ‘totality’ as big as we could. [...] We may need to think bigger than totality itself, if totality means something closed, something we can be sure of, something that remains the same” (Morton, *Ecological Thought* 4-5). Zylinska’s work likewise questions a notion of ‘big thinking’ and reviews the modes of critical thinking we have been using thus far. Rather than thinking in ‘totalizing stories’ that suppose a universality that collapses many scales, Zylinska’s focuses on reworking big thinking’s downfall of not thinking “*deep enough*” (30, italics original). Thinking bigger and bigger can very quickly lead to overlooking too much in the process, she argues. In order to approach this topic responsibly, Zylinska engages with universality and the question of scale differently. This brings to mind both Donna Haraway’s work on ‘situated knowledges’ and Karen Barad’s work referring to ethics and responsibility. As the latter argues:

Ethics is therefore not about right response to a radically exterior/ized other, but about re-sponsibility and accountability for the lively relationalities of becoming of which we are a part. (Barad 393)

In the by now well-known quote of Barad that “[i]ndividuals do not preexist their interactions; rather, individuals emerge through and as part of their entangled intra-relating” (Barad ix), such ‘becoming of which we are part’ is acknowledged in her neologisms of ‘intra-relating’ and ‘intra-action’. Zylinska relates Barad’s grounded and partial perspectives to her own minimal ethics, which also starts from a position that takes into account this dynamism of relationalities through their intra-actions.

Contrary to ‘big thinking’, in going ‘deep enough’ rather than ‘bigger’ Zylinska invokes a feminist figuration in the line of Haraway’s ‘cyborg’ and Braidotti’s ‘nomad’: the figuration of ‘Goldilocks’ and ‘the Goldilocks principle’. Inspired by the children’s story “The Three Bears”, the Goldilocks principle creates a mode of thinking that is more about providing an assessment of universality that is ‘just right’ rather than engaging with the universe in a totalizing way. In the story “The Three Bears”, a girl named Goldilocks sneaks into the house of three bears and tries to find a space that she feels comfortable in. As she has found the ‘just right’ porridge, the ‘just right’ chair and the ‘just right’ bed, the bears come home and chase her off. Zylinska reads Goldilocks as a “proto-feminist [...] inscribed in a long line of feminist figurations such as ‘the cyborg’ or ‘the nomad’ [...] [that] thread foreign territories as uninvited guests with a view to outlining an alternative political imaginary”

(Zylinska 31). Goldilocks provides a ‘just right’ assessment of universality because she makes us “aware of our own derangements when sliding up and down the historical or even geological pole all too smoothly” (31).

The Anthropocene and Minimal Ethics through Storytelling

Zylinska’s focus on the ethical and responsibility come together in the notion of the Anthropocene, which has suffered from the same complications of ‘big thinking’ and is often seen as a new view of an Earth that is totalizing and closed-off. Zylinska’s minimal ethics, however, treats life as both philosophical and biological and engages with the Anthropocene as a way to focus on the dynamic relations across not just one but many scales:

such as stem cells, flowers, dogs, humans, rivers, electricity pylons, computer networks, and planets, to name but a few. (20)

It thereby deepens rather than just broadens her reading of the Anthropocene, which serves first and foremost as an ethical pointer in Zylinska’s work. Morton’s crisis of critical thinking provides Zylinska with a motive to engage with the Anthropocene “as a designation of the human obligation towards the geo- and biosphere, but also towards thinking about the geo- and biosphere *as concepts*” (19, italics original). Her thinking intersects with that of both feminist theorists like Barad, Braidotti and Colebrook as well as with various philosophers that likewise are thinkers of the question of life such as Bergson, Morton or Levinas. Her minimal ethics is an ethics of life that she mobilizes through “a post-masculinist rationality, a more speculative, less directional mode of thinking and writing” (14). From the work of Darin Barney on the concept of ‘post-masculinist courage’³⁸, Zylinska develops her mode of thinking as one that is “always already embodied and immersed, responding to the call of matter and its various materializations – materializations such as humans, animals, plants, inanimate objects as well as the relations between them” (15).

Like Braidotti and Haraway, Zylinska too argues for a reconsideration of the narratives that are employed in revisioning life:

[A]ny place in the universe I temporally occupy, and from which I build, consume, love and destroy, is never originally and duly mine: I am just a

³⁸ See Darin Barney’s “Eat Your Vegetables: Courage and the Possibility of Politics.” *Theory & Event* 14.2 (2011).

wayfarer through matter's planetary unfoldings and thickenings. There is therefore a story-telling aspect to ethics. (93)

Zylinska's call to "*do philosophy with different media*" (22) and to continually engage with ethics through storytelling and vice versa, resonates with writing such as Donna Haraway's "Situated Knowledges" and *When Species Meet* (2008). In the latter, Haraway's calls her ethical practice "response-ability" (Haraway, *When Species Meet* 71), which is her term for cultivating sensitivity toward the other, for taking differences in power seriously and being open to the possibilities of mutual response. Philosophy first and foremost constitutes a practice that stems from the practice of becoming with and becoming worldly through the engagement with and the 'meeting' of species:

Whom and what do I touch when I touch my dog? How is becoming with a practice of becoming worldly? When species meet, the question of how to inherit histories is pressing, and how to get on together is at stake. (Haraway 35)

In the chapter 'Ethics', Zylinska argues that taking responsibility is not a passive response to a pre-existing form of reality, rather "it involves actively making cuts into the ongoing unfolding of matter in order to stabilize it" (Zylinska 98). These cuts are "[e]thical de-cisions" (98), best understood as 'material in-cisions', and are "inevitable conditions of relationality and 'worlding'" (98). The making of cuts is an ethical task and an important aspect of Zylinska's project of minimal ethics.

Zylinska's emphasis on storytelling is also close to Haraway's in the sense that it uses (hi)stories in order to deepen practices of becoming in this world and engaging with life through its relationalities. Thus goes Zylinska's relation to 'storied' knowledge, via the writing of Tim Ingold:

[H]umans do not live *in* the world but rather move *through* it. He [Ingold] uses the term 'wayfaring' [...] Movement is also a way of getting to know the world, according to Ingold, where knowledge is not seen as classificatory but rather as 'storied', being constantly 'under construction'. Indeed, he goes as far as to suggest that movement itself 'is knowing'. (Tim Ingold qtd. in Zylinska 42, italics original).

Through the notion of storytelling, Zylinska practices an ethical philosophy and creates a mode of dealing with life that incorporates its many movements, in order to come to what is her aim for a minimal ethics for the Anthropocene: “to tell better stories about life in the universe, and about life (and death) *of the universe*” (46, italics original). The Anthropocene is important in this telling of better stories. It puts the finger on the problems of scale and of responsibility for a naturecultural relationality. These problems are currently being played out through the notion of the Anthropocene, its relation to human/earth connections and the responsibility humanity has in viewing current environmental crises through an ethical lens. Even though ‘humanity’ is of course neither singularly nor perhaps even most importantly responsible for the changes on what we call ‘Earth’, we might be, as Zylinska writes, “uniquely placed to turn the making of such difference into an ethical task” (21):

[E]thics and storytelling are two sets of intertwined practices in which human singularity - which is not to be confused with human supremacy - has manifested itself in the Anthropocene (as well as the Holocene). They are also arguably tools through which the Anthropocene can be both apprehended and amended. (66)

Practicing a minimal ethics for the Anthropocene is intertwined with a practice of storytelling. The practice of storytelling in the Anthropocene highlights precisely the task Zylinska sets when she attempts to engage with knowledge production through minimal ethics and the stories that are being triggered by the Anthropocene. Ultimately, Zylinska argues that if we want to tell ‘better stories about life’ and engage with the Anthropocene as a notion that can invoke change, minimal ethics and taking responsibility for humanity’s actions are - both “materially, conceptually and morally” (33) - central to practicing a ‘different Anthropocene’.

In the Anthropocene, the ethical comes together with taking responsibility for worldly intra-actions. Thinking the Anthropocene dynamically across not just one, but many scales opens it up to its narrative dimension. Only through our human ability to tell stories and to philosophize can change not just be conceived of, but also put into action: “‘do philosophy’ with different media” (22). In rereading Levinas’s ethics in a non-anthropocentric manner, Zylinska’s minimal ethics is a critical and creative response to simplistic, singular stories of the Anthropocene that are now starting to become multiple and much more complex.

The ethical is most prominently rethought in Zylinska’s minimal ethics, but also serves as an important aspect of Haraway’s reading of the Anthropocene – “[i]t matters what

stories make worlds, what worlds make stories” (Haraway, “SF”). The next chapter considers Claire Colebrook’s work and the Anthropocene and counter-Anthropocenes she invokes, thereby extending the minimal ethics of Zylinska to the thought experiments of Colebrook. Where Zylinska nonbinary approach is thought through a minimal ethics, Colebrook rather works with excess. Through the notion of indifference, Colebrook pushes an ethical approach of the Anthropocene to and beyond its limits in order to provoke a thinking about this era that questions and subverts the premises of thought that underlie its conception.

Chapter Four.

Claire Colebrook: (In)Difference and the Possibility of Extinction.

At what point does a difference make a difference or appear as different? Had 'we' behaved differently perhaps we would not have become the species that made a difference; at what point or threshold of our polluting, ecosystem-destroying history did we make a difference?
- Claire Colebrook³⁹

From a consideration of the ethical and storytelling in the work of Joanna Zylińska and different figurations and imaginations of epochs in the work of Braidotti and Haraway, Claire Colebrook's consideration of the Anthropocene takes a slightly different approach. Starting with a reconsideration of the notion of sexual difference, Colebrook invokes the idea of 'sexual indifference': "the thought of production and 'life' that does not take the form of the bounded organism reproducing itself through relation to its complement other" ("Sexual Indifference" 167). Posited as a provocation, sexual indifference becomes shortened into 'indifference' in Colebrook's recent contributions that deal with the Anthropocene. This indifference "operates as a counter-Anthropocene provocation" ("Post-Anthropocene" n.pag.), so Colebrook states in a keynote lecture by the title "We Have Never Been Post-Anthropocene" (2014). Colebrook touches on similar tactics as Haraway, Braidotti and Zylińska in a consideration of the narrative aspects of the Anthropocene and what she calls the 'counter-factual' and the 'counter-Anthropocene'. Her counter-Anthropocenes are distinctly narrative in their approach that touch on 'the thought experiment of extinction'. Moreover, in the book *The Death of the PostHuman. Essays on Extinction* (2014) Colebrook calls upon the Anthropocene and its relation to the notion of extinction:

[T]he positing of the anthropocene era relies on looking at our own world and imagining it as it will be when it has become past. (*Death of the Posthuman* 26)

This chapter thinks her notion of indifference alongside her focus on narratives that counter the Anthropocene and think through the idea of extinction. From a reconsideration of the

³⁹ From the keynote lecture "We Have Always Been Post-Anthropocene" delivered April 12, 2014 at the conference "Anthropocene Feminism". Center for 21st Century Studies (C21), University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee.

notion of difference into Colebrook's idea of *indifference*, this chapter moves to how the boundaries of both the notion of difference and the Anthropocene can be pushed to their extremes.

Feminisms of Sexual (In)Difference

Colebrook's engagement with a notion of difference comes forth out of the history and debate regarding the so-called 'feminisms of difference' and a notion of sexual difference that was particularly prominent in poststructuralist thought and feminist critical thought from the 1970s to the 1990s. Following de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* from 1949, feminist thinkers such as, among many others, Luce Irigaray, Julia Kristeva, Hélène Cixous and Monique Wittig and, later, Judith Butler, Elizabeth Grosz and Rosi Braidotti took the notion of sexual difference seriously and engaged with it thoroughly in their work. As American feminist philosopher Elizabeth Grosz pointedly explains: "[f]or feminists, to claim women's difference from men is to reflect existing definitions and categories, redefining oneself and the world according to women's own perspectives" ("Sexual Difference" 94).

Embedded in the philosophical discourses that pitted feminisms of equality against those of difference, feminisms of difference took to a notion of difference that was seen "not as difference from a pregiven norm, but as pure difference, difference in itself, difference with no identity" (94). Bending the boundaries of binaries might have been one of the most important moves of sexual difference thinkers. Rather than obliterating differences and dissolving binaries into nothingness, by continuing to acknowledge their existence yet stretching the limitedness of their terms, they inevitably changed and yielded to a much more inclusive differentiality. Contrary to the idea of 'difference as distinction', thinking difference in itself⁴⁰ is a change from a patriarchal system that works through privileging 'the one' over 'the other'. In the case of sexual difference this takes the form of a rejection of the norms that Western societies abide by in their thinking from male-centered positions. It therefore rather works from "the autonomy of the terms between which the difference may be drawn and thus their radical incommensurability" (95). Difference as 'pure difference' does not take sides - e.g. man or woman, nature or culture, active or passive. In "The Force of Sexual Difference" Grosz refers to this difference as "a constitutive difference, a difference that preexists the

⁴⁰ This term is borrowed from the work of Elizabeth Grosz and from Kathrin Thiele's article "Difference in itself" in *Contemporary Feminisms* (2011) in which Thiele considers Elizabeth Grosz's philosophy of sexual difference next to Donna Haraway's notion of 'companion species' in her analysis of how thinking 'difference in itself' imagines and perhaps even creates 'different worlds'.

entities that it produces” (174). Thinking back to the work on difference of both Derrida and Deleuze and sexual difference as conceived of by Luce Irigaray, Grosz writes:

Sexual difference is that which has yet to take place, and thus exists only in virtuality, in and through a future anterior, the only tense that openly addresses the question of the future without preempting it in concrete form or in present terms. [...] The only time of sexual difference is that of the future. (175-6)

In the 2012 article “Sexual Indifference” that appeared as a chapter in the book *Telemorphosis: Theory in the Era of Climate Change, Vol. 1.*, edited by Tom Cohen, Colebrook introduces the notion of ‘sexual indifference’ in order to provoke us “to think beyond the lures and laziness that the sexual dyad as a figure has offered for thinking” (167). Responding to a binary reading of sexual difference that thinks sexual difference as the duality of man/woman that is needed for organic sexual reproduction, Colebrook’s reading presses the point that her notion of indifference aims to lead away from such binary interpretations. In a – albeit slightly confusing – linguistic twist, Colebrook’s notion of ‘indifference’ therefore comes closer to ‘sexual difference’ as is argued from feminist sexual difference theory, than it does to a reading of sexual difference from a binary, reproductive perspective.

Matter has its own resistance and recalcitrance: “its tendency to remain indifferent” (“Post-Anthropocene” n.pag.), Colebrook explains. The notion of indifference is first and foremost thought as a provocation and counterargument to thinking reproduction as the only consequence of sexuality. Sexual indifference in this sense opposes anthropocentric thought that has “insisted on proper sexual difference – that creation must occur with a sense of continuity, intentionality, identity and dynamic self-becoming” (“Sexual Indifference” 171-2). Part of a broader movement of ‘feminist materialisms’ that represent an engagement with ‘matter’ and ‘materiality’ from a feminist standpoint, Colebrook engages with what can be thought of as ‘critical vitalism’. A reinterpretation of 19th and early 20th century vitalism and Spinozist monism inspired by the neo-vitalism of Gilles Deleuze and Jane Bennett’s reading of ‘vibrant materiality’⁴¹, Colebrook’s branch incorporates an explicitly feminist vitality.

Reminiscent of Braidotti’s approach of a “zoe-centered egalitarianism” (*Posthuman* 60), Colebrook argues that nonhuman, vital forces of life should be taken seriously, especially

⁴¹ In the book *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (2010) Bennett writes a ‘political ecology of things’ and considers a “vital materiality that runs alongside and inside humans to see how analyses of political events might change if we gave the force of things more due” (viii).

within the realm of the Anthropocene, wherein the centrality of ‘the human’ has come under review. Now that the notion of a changing climate and a possible earthly future without human presence has come under consideration, conversations turn to a sort of neo-Humanism wherein humanity takes center stage and the current state of the planet is read in an exclusively negative manner. According to what Melinda Cooper called a “neofundamentalist politics of life (the right-to-life movement or ecological survivalism)” (Cooper 3) discussions either aim toward ‘sustainment’: keeping the world as it is for future generations, with a central human presence, or toward a need to strive for a sort of holistic ecological wholeness wherein the balance of nature will be restored and all will have gone back to its ‘natural order’. Both these positions go back on an essentialistic binary foundation that considers nature and culture as distinct opposites, dividing ‘mankind’ from their wild, romantic or primordial surroundings and continues a negative dualist line of thought that both Braidotti and Colebrook aim to subvert.

Even though ‘indifference’ as a noun in common use stands for a ‘lack of interest or concern’, Colebrook’s conception is a positive incarnation that subverts of the idea that the world is either “differentiated by human predication or linguistic structures”, or “bear its intrinsic qualities” (“Post-Anthropocene” n.pag). “To live”, she writes, “is to tend towards *indifference*, where tendencies and forces result less in distinct kinds than in complicated, confused and dis-ordered partial bodies” (“Post-Anthropocene” n.pag., italics original). This is of importance in relation to the Anthropocene because a notion of indifference “operates as a counter-Anthropocene provocation” (“Post-Anthropocene” n.pag.). Colebrook argues that there has been a “return of difference – because humans are once again exceptional, but now in their destructive and inscriptive impact” (“Post-Anthropocene” n.pag.). The notion of the Anthropocene has seen a comeback of thinking difference in the sense of ‘difference as distinction’, a “normative figure of sexual difference” (“Sexual Indifference” 180). Imagining an Anthropocene era that always points toward its end invokes ideas of extinction that are currently being warded off by a return to thinking subjectivity as bound: in terms of man/woman with sexual difference as a binding distinction. This occurs even though, from a reproductive standpoint, sexual difference has become much more complicated:

[R]anging from stem cell research that could produce sperm [...] to predictions that evolution will close down the sexually distinct male human, and even further to the annihilation of organic life in general which would entail the extinction of the sexually differentiated in all its forms, allowing other modes

of microbial life (possibly) to start some other line of becoming. (“Sexual Indifference” 181-2)

Faced with forms of sexual difference that go beyond “the organic couple” (181), Colebrook adds that “both popular culture and theory have responded by reaffirming the normative image of life that has always enclosed the human within its own suicidal logic of survival” (181). For the Anthropocene this means that there has been a tendency to only one Anthropocene, a normative account that is permeated with binary thought. It is toward this single narrative that Colebrook’s notion of indifference provokes ‘counter-Anthropocenes’.

Indifference and Resisting a Single Story for the Anthropocene

Colebrook’s notion of indifference is infused with what is known in feminist theory as the ‘politics of location’. “Begin with the material”, Adrienne Rich writes in her influential ‘Notes Toward a Politics of Location’ from 1984, “not with a continent or a country or a house, but with the geography closest in-the-body” (Rich 212-3). As Braidotti explains, politics of locations are “cartographies of power” and consist of “unveiling the power locations which one inevitably inhabits as the site of one’s identity” (Braidotti, “Dympna” 243). When Colebrook writes that “[w]e are *not* faced with infinite and open potentiality or becoming” (“Post-Anthropocene” n.pag), it resonates with the politics of location in that it necessarily begins from the material. This materiality is always inescapably embedded in the political landscape of its surroundings; it cannot be reduced to merely its context. Like a politics of location, bending the boundaries of difference through indifference is at once both open and closed, both ‘essentially rogue’ and lived-in:

Indifference is how we might think about an ‘essentially’ rogue or anarchic conception of life that is destructive of boundaries, distinctions and identifications [...] Indifference is the milieu in which we live, always destroying and confusing inscribed differences. (“Post-Anthropocene” n.pag.)

Upturning a binary engagement of life through the notion of indifference has certain implications for her reading of the Anthropocene and is indicative of how Colebrook argues that indifference “operates as a counter-Anthropocene provocation” (“Post-Anthropocene” n.pag.). The Anthropocene, so she writes, is an era that first and foremost has been fetishizing ‘the human’ as the largest creator of differences. ‘We’ have been changing, ‘we’ have been

destroying this planet, 'our' planet: "unified as a species, differentiated from other species" ("Post-Anthropocene" n.pag.). These tendencies of grandeur have been characteristic of the creation of the Anthropocene - with a capital A - the single story of the influences of man-made change on this planet:

The Anthropocene has presented itself to many as a non-negotiable difference: 'we' abandon a world that was deemed to be indifferent to our narrow historical periods, and 'we' recognize that human history is geologically significant after all, and that 'we' have made a definitive difference. ("Post-Anthropocene, n.pag.)

The story of the Anthropocene has been one of 'non-negotiable difference': in its creation, its story became thus that it situated mankind at the heart of the narrative, as the instigator of earthly change and the only species that might possibly alter the course that Earth has been put on. As for instance the atmospheric chemist Paul Crutzen, who popularized the term the Anthropocene, writes: "A daunting task lies ahead for scientists and engineers to guide society toward environmentally sustainable management during the era of the Anthropocene. This will require appropriate human behaviour at all scales [...] for instance to 'optimize' climate" (Crutzen, "Geology of Mankind" 23). Reading statements like this closely and critically, the manner of putting mankind at the center of both the problem and the solution once more creates an essentialized and dualistic opposition between human and nonhuman, between mankind and the earth it inhabits. In Crutzen's text this dualistic manner of thinking is omnipresent. At the base of his argument lies a consistent notion that it is Humanity that has been the foremost source of change on the otherwise stable 'planet Earth'.

Colebrook's argument goes against this way of thinking in that she urges mankind to let go of its grand notion of human exceptionalism and rather promotes "that we think about indifference" ("Post-Anthropocene" n.pag.). Indifference defies the destructive and inscriptive impact humanity in the Anthropocene. It resists pre-existent pre-modern boundaries, hierarchies and identities that are formed according to binary lines. Colebrook's indifference therefore goes against Crutzen's Anthropocene, which rather starts from inscription and future readability. That is not to say that Colebrook states that there never is nor shall be anything such as inscription. She opposes this notion of inscription that Crutzen proposes because it *presupposes* inscription. As she writes in "Sexual Indifference" (2012): "becoming is the becoming *of* this or that specified being. But what the substratum for

becoming *is* can only be known after the event of becoming, not as its logic” (178, italics original). In Crutzen’s view, the Anthropocene as a concept hinges upon the idea that in a possible future world, human presence can be ‘read’. The extraction of for instance fossil fuels and a changing climate will have left their marks on the geological state of the planet and might be inferred by its future inhabitants. As James Syvitski writes in the article “Anthropocene: An Epoch of Our Making” (2012):

Clues to our impact are being recorded in sediments that will form part of the rock record in the future. Be it a rapid sediment pulse, a sudden change in composition or evidence for a mass extinction, it will not be hard to distinguish the *Anthropocene* from the Holocene millions of years into the future. (14, italics original)

Colebrook’s idea of indifference resists this notion of ‘inscription’ in the Anthropocene. Arguing that human interference will be readable in the future literally sets a simplistic vision of human impact in stone. It generates the story of the Anthropocene as a singular process of human enforced change and in its singularity does not do justice to the complexity of the geological state of the Earth. In her creation of so-called ‘counter-Anthropocenes’, Colebrook entertains the Anthropocene’s ‘alternative stories’: “let us imagine that all that is named by the Anthropocene [...] had *not* occurred” (“Post-Anthropocene” n.pag., italics original). This thought experiment of a world in which there is no such thing as an Anthropocene serves the function of engaging with some of the Anthropocene’s core elements, yet turns them completely upside down. It exposes some of its key themes, all the while being a positive exploration of what the inception of the Anthropocene has come to mean in the manner of thinking that suits Colebrook’s philosophical interests in thinking life.

Counter-Anthropocenes: Extinction as Thought-Experiment

The possibility of extinction is a key figure in Colebrook’s work on the Anthropocene. In the creation of counter-Anthropocenes the notion of the destruction of life and the specific involvement of humanity is crucial: “what is life such that it is able to generate a species capable of destroying all life?” (“Post-Anthropocene” n.pag.). In other words, what do we do with the destructive potential of the Anthropocene? How to imagine a ‘non-Anthropocene’ in which its path of destruction would never have taken place? Engaging with the notions of extinction and destruction points toward their central place in any discussion of life. Being is

not only generative in a creative way, Colebrook argues that “extinction is intrinsic to life” (“Post-Anthropocene” n.pag.). Life generates extinction and destruction just as much as that it has creative potential: “The continuity of life requires some degree of ongoing destruction, both of the individual closed forms that make up any species, and of species themselves” (“Sexual Indifference” 178).

Colebrook uses the notion of extinction as a figure and tool in her research on the Anthropocene. Extinction is part of the way in which she looks at life: “extinction is not the opposite of life but is part of life’s possibility” (“Post-Anthropocene” n.pag.). Reminiscent of a Deleuzian critique of vitalism, who argued against the idea that “reason, thinking and concepts somehow serve a purpose of life, a life that is nothing more than change of alteration for the sake of efficiency or self-furthering” (Colebrook, “Introduction” 4), Colebrook wants to think through extinction in order to let go of a teleological view of history. In the article “We Have Always Been Post-Anthropocene: The Anthropocene Counter-Factual” this takes the form of two ‘counter-factuals’. These ‘counter-Anthropocenes’ start from thinking the question of “[w]hat might it mean to think a counter-factual scenario where humans has *not* inflicted the difference of the Anthropocene on the planet?” (“Post-Anthropocene” n.pag., italics original). These other narratives of life on Earth invoke a thinking through ‘what if’s’ and imaginative ‘as if’s’ that ultimately alter the ways in which “the actual Anthropocene world that we didn’t necessarily choose but that befell us nevertheless” (“Post-Anthropocene” n.pag.) is thought.

Colebrook’s first ‘counter-Anthropocene’ is an entry into a world in which humanity did not develop the technology we know today. The possibility of a world that did not develop according to Western-centric imagery and in which stable notions of ‘nature’ and ‘climate change’ never came to exist is alluring. What is interesting about this world, that Colebrook imagines might have developed to be more nomadic and “more attuned to the broader rhythms of the earth beyond that of the human agricultural year and its seasons” (“Post-Anthropocene” n.pag.), is that it is at once very far off of current hyper technologized Western lifestyle, but at the same time also not impossible to conceive of. Colebrook points to the work of Nigel Clark in “Aboriginal Cosmopolitanism” (2008) on deep historical time and the “attunement of Aboriginal Australian culture” in thinking about climate change in a way that does not make it as problematic. If we – the West – had not invented nature, we might have been much more open to seeing climate change as an effect of “a world that has rhythms and transitions of a complexity greater than the human sense of seasonal change” (Colebrook,

“Post-Anthropocene” n.pag.). The problem is the idea of a ‘stable nature’, instead of the changing climates.

Thinking this alternative world does not force us to think that far outside of our current comfort zones and our imaginations of the future of the planet:

[I]t *is* possible to imagine a counter-history of minimal impact on the planet that might still allow for many of the things we know to be human - including inscription, morality, language and technology. (“Post-Anthropocene” n.pag., italics original)

As a thought-experiment, this narrative for Colebrook aims to show that it is possible to think that humans could have progressed in the way ‘we’ have now, without creating such devastating - or “suicidal and eco-cidal” (“Post-Anthropocene” n.pag.) as she puts it - effects to this planet and the possible future for the human species on it. It also, however, promotes a romantic vision of a ‘return to nature’ in its negation of human impact on the planet. This first ‘counter-factual’ is a reflection on one side of the binary logic that permeates the Anthropocene; the thought that there might be a way out of the problems of climate change by arguing that nature was never stable.

The second counter-Anthropocene Colebrook proposes is an opposite way of thinking about the ‘problem of the Anthropocene’. It focuses on an earth that would be materially so different that human technology and development did not alter it the way it has now, or that the type of technology that had been developed would be renewable and non-polluting. This is of course, the utopian dream that is present in almost all of the political discussions on the Anthropocene right now. Rather than changing human lifestyles and/or human relationships to Earth, it is in many narratives - including Paul Crutzen’s - preferable to rethink our energy management, or try to change the materiality of Earth itself so that it will work with our current dependence on its resources. Like the first counter-faction, this also keeps a dualist system of human/earth in place. The logic of the Anthropocene is in many ways dependent on “the idea of a life that could develop to its utmost potentiality without incurring debt or death to itself” (“Post-Anthropocene” n.pag.). It has been this sense of a ‘pure ecology’ in which everything “serves to maximize everything else, and in which there is no cost” (“Post-Anthropocene” n.pag.) that has been exemplary of contemporary thought that has put much emphasis on valorization. This has not only been the logic of some of the research on the Anthropocene, but also that of humanism, posthumanism, and of the ways in which we view

human history and a utopian notion of sexual difference, so Colebrook writes. Prolonging the idea of ‘difference as distinction’, the Anthropocene serves as a model for this hierarchical mode of reasoning. If humanity has been making a difference to this planet, it can make more difference and better difference. The valorization of difference is one of the narratives of the Anthropocene that keeps returning, for instance in Crutzen’s urging to ‘optimize climate’.

What these two alternative narratives for the Anthropocene do, is reiterate a notion of difference that Colebrook would rather let go of. Difference as distinction - and even more problematically as valorization - is keeping the ideal of a ‘better-Anthropocene’ in place. It perpetuates a utopian reading of a better world, one that “is desirable but never fully achievable” (“Post-Anthropocene” n.pag.). These ‘better stories’ for the Anthropocene reassert once again the dualistic distinctions between nature and culture, between what is of humanity and what is of the earth. Whether it is in thinking of an alternative in which ‘nature’ never existed or in which ‘nature’ is in the hands of humanity, both these stories offer alternatives that, Colebrook asserts, have always been part of the conception of the Anthropocene: “the anthropocene is the counter-anthropocene” (“Post-Anthropocene” n.pag.). Even ‘counter-Anthropocene worlds’ have the tendency to romanticize stability, change and the relation of humanity to ‘nature’. Like the canonical Anthropocene, the idea to counter it rests upon a dualistic reading of difference.

Colebrook ultimately deconstructs and criticizes the notion of the Anthropocene. In an analysis of its counterfactuals and her focus on the possibility of other narratives, underlying themes of nature’s stability and romantic ideas of human exceptionalism are questioned. Through ‘counter-factuals’ that would not have led to an Anthropocene, Colebrook points to its limits and pushes the boundaries of how to think about difference. She opens up its essentializing core themes as well as reinterprets the notion of (in)difference through the perspective of the Anthropocene. Her Anthropocene is thus approached from a critical perspective, yet never loses the productive edge that analysing its central premises holds for engaging with the notion of life and extinction from a feminist perspective.

Conclusion ~ Part One

*Less grandly, I turn to a little piece of this work
of world building - telling stories.*

- Donna Haraway⁴²

How the Anthropocene is told is of importance for the feminist thinkers that the four chapters of Part One engaged with. A common thread in the work of Braidotti, Haraway, Zyglinska, and Colebrook is taking the stories of the Anthropocene seriously, even though their approaches differ. Through the research question, *how is the notion of the Anthropocene challenged, refined and reimagined in contemporary feminist theory and in what ways do approaches via narratives negate a binary and teleological reading of the Anthropocene?*, Part One followed their lines of thought on the Anthropocene and how, through different figurations and alternative narratives the Anthropocene is explored and ultimately rendered far more complex. In visiting the work of four contemporary feminist thinkers, what has stood out has been that it is through the narrative potential of the Anthropocene and the ways in which the framing of its story is important for the place it takes in a larger context that the Anthropocene has come under discussion. There is no clear consensus whether the notion of ‘Anthropocene’ should be one that should stick around, but taking it seriously and exploring how it subverts other stereotypical ideas such as ‘nature’, ‘life’, ‘humanity’ or ‘species’ proves it has a story to tell. Telling stories is not something that ‘merely’ belongs to the realm of fiction. It has a prominent place in a theoretical discussion on what it might mean to ‘be in the Anthropocene’. In thinking from an era that so markedly features the human species as its most dominant agent, the term opens up the discussion of the place of humanity in present worlds.

A clear-cut division between philosophy and literature, fact and fiction, man and woman, nature and culture, and humanity and Earth never stood a chance. In what Donna Haraway calls ‘world building’, the telling of stories is crucial in challenging and rethinking the normative account of the Anthropocene. Contemporary feminist materialist engagements with the Anthropocene take a normative reading of the Anthropocene and offer an alternative way into thinking the dominant impact of humanity on the geological status of Earth. A simplistic reading of the Anthropocene tends to use the term as a rhetorical device, sometimes

⁴² “Otherworldly Conversations; Terran Topics; Local Terms.” *The Haraway Reader* (2004): 127.

as *topos* – as commonplace for ideas –, sometimes as metaphor, sometimes as trope. The Anthropocene in its singular use represents a figure, a construction of language that is used as a rhetorical device intended to ‘turn to’ as the word *trópos* connotes in Ancient Greek. What Haraway explains in regard to the *topos* and trope of ‘nature’ can also be said for the Anthropocene:

Nature is also a *trópos*, a trope. It is figure, construction, artifact, movement, displacement. Nature cannot pre-exist its construction, its articulation in heterogeneous social encounters, where all of the actors are not human and all of the humans are not "us:" however defined. Worlds are built from such articulations. [...] Topically, we travel toward the earth, a commonplace. Nature is a topic of public discourse on which much turns, even the earth. (“Otherworldly Conversations” 127)

The commonplace of nature is still sought after in order to come to terms with terran movements and displacements. The Anthropocene has now come to stand for similar meanings in order to come to terms with the Earth’s current state. Going against standard representations in popular media and in the work of geologists like Paul Crutzen, feminist thinkers such as Braidotti, Haraway, Zylinska, and Colebrook aim to undo the rigidity of these tropes and subvert binary systems of thought and stereotypical engagements with the Anthropocene. It is in part through their troubling of the dualism of fact and fiction, that the Anthropocene becomes Anthropocenes or other ‘-cenes’ altogether.

The Anthropocene has, in its narrow and normative use, been operating as a grand narrative, a *grand récit* like the ones Lyotard so fervently pushed against. It has been a story that people tell themselves in order to make sense of their current worlds. A story that has been rather reductive and has a tendency to prolong feelings of human grandeur rather than subvert them. The Anthropocene could very well serve as the biography of humankind in an attempt to come to a canonical - meaning Western, white, and male - version of the past, present and future. Contemporary feminist thinkers, however, push against this Anthropocene and manage to use its tendency toward grandeur in ways that deepen discussions on what it has come to stand for rather than narrow them down. Instead of using the Anthropocene as an umbrella term covering a broad range of aspects and flattening them out, feminist Anthropocenes flip, deepen, and create more dynamic discussions that start from situated

knowledges and an ethical approach to the intra-active relation of terran species and their environments.

The demise of the figure of *anthropos* is connected to challenging the premises the Anthropocene has been thought upon. As both Braidotti and Haraway argue, *anthropos* as the sole figure of humanity is in steady decline. *Anthropos* points to a very specific subjectivity that for Braidotti has extended from being defined as relating to an exclusively ‘human subjectivity’ to the figure of the ‘posthuman’. Becoming-posthuman means a change of the position of the subject from a very Humanist *anthropos* to a posthuman figuration that reimagines materiality and relates differently to the geo-centred era of the Anthropocene. With the fall of *anthropos* and the shift to a posthuman subject, Braidotti calls for a ‘new vocabulary’. How the stories of the inhabitants of the Anthropocene are told are of importance in reimagining this era. Here, Donna Haraway and her work on many different eras step in. Through the neologism of the ‘Chthulucene’, an era that points to the tentacular connections that make up our worlds, Haraway’s storytelling builds many worlds that break through the pattern of a ‘one world’ story. One big story is never enough: “we need stories (and theories) that are just big enough to gather up the complexities and keep the edges open and greedy for surprising new and old connections” (“Anthropocene, Capitalocene, Plantationocene, Chthulucene: Making Kin” 160).

A need for stories that are ‘just big enough’ is where the work on minimal ethics by Joanna Zylińska takes off. Her ‘Goldilocks principle’ starts from a similar argument in that it does not argue for bigger and grander stories, but takes the figuration of Goldilocks and her stories of finding that which is ‘just right’. Rather than bigger, Zylińska’s minimal ethics is a call for stories for the Anthropocene that are ‘just right’ and ‘deep enough’. A minimal approach to the ethical is non-systemic and non-normative and therefore fits right in with the other feminist engagements highlighted in this thesis that all argue for diffractive, different, or indifferent patterns in order to open up the binary systems of thought that are foundational for a normative approach to the Anthropocene.

Claire Colebrook’s work on the Anthropocene at first glance seems like ‘the odd one out’. Where Zylińska’s vision of a minimal ethics for the Anthropocene is a call to ‘tell better stories’ in order to come to a different Anthropocene, Colebrook’s work is rather a critique of thinking in terms of ‘better-Anthropocenes’. Her approach is very different from Braidotti’s, Haraway’s and Zylińska’s in that she invokes figures and stories that are not necessarily viable alternatives, but rather push existing stories to their limits. Her Anthropocene ‘counterfactuals’ break open the patterns of thought that lie at the basis of thinking the Anthropocene.

Therefore, though her approach might differ, Colebrook's aim is similar to that of the other thinkers: through her 'counter-factuals', binary systems and stereotypical thought patterns such as the 'stability of nature' are deconstructed and subverted. Her work is, moreover, significant in its relation to the narratives that feature in Part Two of this thesis. The narratives of feminist speculative fiction authors Margaret Atwood and Jeanette Winterson operate in ways that are at times reminiscent of Colebrook's 'counter-factuals'. In imaginative worlds that are dealing with the consequences of human domination, stories of alternative Anthropocenes push these consequences to their extremes.

The red thread between Part One and Part Two lies in telling the Anthropocene via narratives. Like the theoretical accounts analysed in Part One, the stories that feature in Atwood's *MaddAddam Trilogy* and Winterson's *The Stone Gods* point to alternatives for a narrow envisioning of the Anthropocene. Through the multiple planets and many worlds that are plagued by extinction, destruction and the consequences of human domination, these narratives offer a more complex imagining of Anthropocene eras.

Part Two

The Fiction of Anthropocene Worlds

Thinking the Anthropocene Through Feminist Speculative Fiction

The feminist speculative fiction writer has worked consistently alongside the philosopher as a student of ontological and epistemological models, but she is licensed to go further; an intellectual world-traveler with a passport to, and through, the portals of possibility that the figurations of fiction can conjure.

- Jennifer Wagner-Lawlor⁴³

As the work of feminist thinkers such as Zyglinska, Colebrook, Braidotti and Haraway has shown, the Anthropocene does not have to be a single, easily demarcated notion that resides only in the realm of the scientific, the geological or the stratigraphical. It has over the years - and most visibly within political discourse and its representations in popular media - often become simplified so that small individual choices such as whether to drive a hybrid car, or switch from gas to electricity, have come to stand for the solution to a much bigger problem such as climate change in the Anthropocene. As if the entire problem of global warming could be reduced to stopping a single hurricane.

The second part of this thesis engages with novels by contemporary authors Margaret Atwood and Jeanette Winterson, who in their writing turn that which a simplistic Anthropocene invokes into compelling narrative. As literary scholar Jennifer Wagner-Lawlor writes in the above quotation: “The feminist speculative fiction writer [...] is licensed to go further; an intellectual world-traveler with a passport to, and through, the portals of possibility that the figuration of fiction can conjure” (36). These ‘portals of possibility’ are what the two chapters of Part Two of this thesis will think through. The work of Atwood and Winterson is often thought of as literary science or feminist speculative fiction, though SF – which in a Harawayan sense is more of a mode of thought and practice than a ‘true literary genre’ – is what their writing will be thought with, alongside the notion of feminist speculative fiction. SF is always more than ‘just’ a genre of storytelling, Haraway notes: “Again and again, SF has given me the ideas, the stories, and the shapes with which I think ideas, shapes and stories in feminist theory and science studies” (“SF” n.pag.). Through the SF mode⁴⁴, engaging with the work of Atwood and Winterson no longer becomes just a reading of fiction. SF as a mode of attention opens the way for engaging with narratives as producing and practicing ideas, stories and shapes in the form of literary feminist speculative fiction novels. Through SF,

⁴³ *Postmodern Utopias and Feminist Fictions* (2013): 36.

⁴⁴ As Haraway notes in a fourth footnote to the article “Sowing Worlds” that appeared in *Beyond the Cyborg: Adventures with Donna Haraway* by Margret Grebowicz and Helen Merrick (2013), she thinks the SF mode as it was proposed in the Ph.D. dissertation of Joshua (Sha) LaBare, “Farfetchings: On and In the SF Mode” who argues that “SF is no fundamentally a genre [...] [t]he SF mode is, rather, a mode of attention, a theory of history, and a practice of worlding” (Haraway, “Sowing Worlds” 173n4).

many different worlds come into being that respond to current imaginations of the future of Earth and visualize what the world-as-is or the world-to-come could be like. Reflecting upon themes that are also visible in the notion of the Anthropocene, the two chapters in this part move from narrative in theory to a close reading of fiction and the ideas that come forth out of storytelling. In response to the Anthropocene, these novels present shifts in thinking planets and worlds, alongside their possible or alternative futures, that matter in thinking the Anthropocene differently and approached via narrative. The research question that is examined here is: *how is the notion of the Anthropocene challenged, refined and reimagined in contemporary feminist speculative fiction and in what ways do approaches via narratives negate a binary and teleological reading of the Anthropocene?*

Rethinking themes present in the discourse on the Anthropocene, writers of contemporary fiction such as Margaret Atwood and Jeanette Winterson have been thoroughly engaged with tropes such as the '(re)birth of a new world', the journey there, the longing for a place to call 'home', the destruction of planets, and the impact of humanity on the ecological state of the planet. These themes and tropes correspond to the popular imagery surrounding the notion of the Anthropocene. In Atwood's *MaddAddam Trilogy* (consisting of the three novels: *Oryx and Crake* (2003), *The Year of the Flood* (2009) and *MaddAddam* (2013)) and Winterson's *The Stone Gods* (2007) this is particularly visible. Inspired by decades of feminist SF and the work of writers such as Ursula K. Le Guin and Octavia Butler⁴⁵ in particular, who have been working along similar lines ever since the 1980s and 90s – well before the notion of the Anthropocene was popularized – feminist SF can be said to be thoroughly implicated in an investigation of the future of humanity on Earth and an envisioning of alternative views on the future through the creation of different narrative worlds.

The tradition of science fiction has been very influential when it comes to imagining the future of modern societies, humanity or the planet altogether. It has always responded to social realities and incited a questioning of the division between fact and fiction. Even though

⁴⁵ Beyond the scope of this thesis, but interesting for further research, is the figure of the Anthropocene in older feminist science fiction novels such as Octavia Butler's *Xenogenesis Trilogy* (1987-9) and Ursula K. Le Guin's novel *Dispossessed* (1973). In the latter, after a revolt, a group of humans have moved to a bare and desolate Moon-like planet called Anarres and started their own alternative, noble, community-based society that focuses on sharing and communal life. Shevek, a scientist in search of knowledge that is unavailable to him on Anarres, visits the other Earth-like planet, Urras that is beautiful and rich, in order to rekindle the relationship between the two planets for his own scientific needs. Topics that are close to the Anthropocene can be sensed in how the people of planet Urras engage with their surroundings, which is similar to humanities use of Earth's resources. Moreover, the societies here seem, at first, to be polar opposites of each other, but eventually have much more in common than first meets the eye. In this sense, Le Guin reflects on how humanity has been shaping the societies it is living in, thereby undoing an image of any utopian planet and complicating the relationship of human/earth.

the “lineage of ‘science fiction,’ broadly considered, is very long [...] Plato’s account of Atlantis is among them, and Sir Thomas More’s *Utopia* and Swift’s *Gulliver’s Travels*. Accounts of voyages to unknown realms with bizarre inhabitants are as old as Herodotus in his wilder moments, as old as *Thousand and One Nights*, as old as Thomas the Rhymes” (Atwood, *In Other Worlds* 101), many consider Mary Shelley to be the ‘mother’ of the science fiction tradition (Benita Shaw 4). Her *Frankenstein, or the Modern Prometheus* (1818) set the scene for a telling of stories that lend from scientific research whilst envisioning what the future of these scientific discoveries may look like. It thereby moved the content matter of – what would later be known as – SF from the terror that can be imagined from the supernatural to that of the scientific. With the gothic novel of *Frankenstein* started, moreover, a critique of scientific discourse, which at that time was argued along eighteenth-century Cartesian lines of thought that envisioned the scientist as a hero and technology as a revolutionary practice that would lead to only better futures. *Frankenstein* was written in a time that was torn between the traditions of the eighteenth-century and the rise of modernity. It was, moreover, a critique on the inherent masculinism of scientific discourse and thus became a source of inspiration for later feminist science fiction writers.

As Evelyn Fox Keller asserted: “[T]he breach which separates women from science is very deep” (Fox Keller 138). A gendered perception of nature as female and ratio as male has influenced scientific discourse for centuries. When Francis Bacon stated, “I am come in very truth leading to you Nature with all her children to bind her to your service and make her your service” (Bacon as qtd. in Farrington 197) he equated the practice of modern science with a specifically sexual politics. Shelley’s *Frankenstein* is a critique of the gendered metaphors that were present in scientific practice and theory. In the novel, protagonist Victor Frankenstein is portrayed as a mad scientist, who treats nature as ‘other’ and it – that is to say, the monster he created – turns on him. The passivity of the monstrous in *Frankenstein* shifts from an object of desire to a destructive force with its own agency. Even though *Frankenstein* might, at first glance, seem a novel with a male protagonist in a distinctly male environment, it created space for female writers who, especially from the second half of the twentieth century, took after Shelley and embraced the genre of science fiction in order to critique the masculinity of science and opened it up toward the possibilities for a different way of thinking that would not be dictated by gendered metaphors.

Science fiction as it followed from Shelley in the work of for instance H.G. Wells, Jules Verne, Aldous Huxley and George Orwell, once again, related to science from point of view of maleness, reiterating the common understanding that science was male and nature

female. From the late 1960s onward, however, science fiction with a feminist point of view, became much more prevalent. Ursula K. Le Guin's novels, among others,⁴⁶ gave a new impulse to feminist writing in the genre of science fiction. In her 1986 essay 'The Carrier Bag Theory of Fiction', Le Guin writes about 'carrier bag narratives' as messy alternatives to heroic stories that define technology and science as linear progressive tales focused on domination:

It sometimes seems that that [heroic] story is approaching its end. Lest there be no more telling of stories at all, some of us out here in the wild oats, amid the alien corn, think we'd better start telling another one, which maybe people can go on with when the old one's finished [...] Hence it is with a certain feeling of urgency that I seek the nature, subject, words of the other story, the untold one, the life story. ("The Carrier Bag Theory of Fiction" 169)

These untold stories can hold descriptions of all that could be going on, "what people actually do and feel, how people relate to everything else in this vast sack" (170). A carrier bag of fiction, "the belly of the universe" (170), Le Guin calls these stories. Her mode of storytelling is still current in this era that is now called the Anthropocene. Old modes of storytelling are coming to an end, the tales of today are no longer just about linear progress and heroes saving the world. They are just as much about a planet that has come to a point of rapid and perhaps irreversible change. Feminist stories of SF, following Le Guin but also other twentieth century feminist writers such as Marge Piercy, Charlotte Perkins Gilman, and Octavia Butler, do not simply point toward a better future, but critically engage with contemporary perceptions of futures and in their alternatives push their boundaries.

Approaching the Anthropocene via narrative, as this thesis aims, feminist SF is particularly well equipped in thinking this epoch differently. Feminist SF's area of expertise lies in the telling of stories of worlds that are extensions of current situations, have taken a different route at one point or at the opposites of current worlds. As Donna Haraway wrote in "A Cyborg Manifesto": "The political struggle is to see from both perspectives at once" (154). The problems of the Anthropocene call for such complicated perspectives. Anthropogenic change

⁴⁶ Another important influence for the rise of feminist science fiction in the 1970s is Joanna Russ' article "The Image of Women in Science Fiction". Here, Russ calls out science fiction for its normative assumptions that pose the middle-class male as the norm: "Science fiction writers have no business employing stereotypes, let alone swallowing the goggle-eyed" (Russ 210).

is never reducible to a single cause, nor is there ever only one solution to the problems that come with it. The worlds in feminist SF often start from familiar planets and take them toward the unknown. The struggle lies in not simply declaring one world ‘better’ than the other, but in viewing them ‘from both perspectives at once’ and critically engaging the ways in which they interact. Joan Haran and Katie King write about what SF teaches us in “Science Fiction Feminisms, Feminist Science Fictions & Feminist Sustainability” (2013):

You see, SF teaches us how spacetime continua may and may not be reversible, envelope differently in various realities, and offer relative and relational points of view that are more and less determinative, multiple, and sensitive to what appear to be horizons of possibility. (n.pag.)

Feminist renditions of SF narratives often take an affirmative approach to these ‘horizons of possibilities’ and look toward points of intersection between current worlds and possible worlds of the future or alternative realities in order to critically reimagine all of them. Part Two, therefore, thinks the Anthropocene through feminist SF and through the narratives and worlds that SF invokes, in the hope to read the Anthropocene as a more complex problem that needs many different possible solutions and alternatives.

Part Two of this thesis “The Fiction of Anthropocene Worlds. Thinking the Anthropocene Through Feminist Speculative Fiction” consists of two chapters that engage with the Anthropocene in the work of two contemporary authors of feminist SF, Margaret Atwood and Jeanette Winterson. In line with the thinkers that the first part of this thesis focused on, Atwood and Winterson are contemporary writers who, from a feminist perspective, consider the Anthropocene in a way that breaches the boundaries between fact and fiction, theory and literature. As shown in the first part of this thesis, the Anthropocene takes rather ambivalent place within feminist interpretations of the presence and influence of humanity on Earth. In feminist writing of SF, this ambivalence can also be shown. It can be seen as a point of departure for this thesis’ investigation into how the Anthropocene can be challenged, refined and reimaged via narrative.

Both Atwood and Winterson invoke in their novels a specific critical query into the idea that humans are the most dominant agent and a geological force that has the largest impact on the changing of this planet. Chapter five, “Margaret Atwood’s *MaddAddam Trilogy*: Speculative Art and Taking Risks on a Post-Anthropocene Planet”, considers

Margaret Atwood's *MaddAddam Trilogy* and in particular her speculative rendition of a future planet through stories that consider notions such as climate, changing environments, mass extinction and a posthuman consideration of species. The world of the *MaddAddam Trilogy* is set on a postapocalyptic, post-Anthropocene Earth wherein the scarce human survivors are forced to reconsider both their Anthropocene pasts and their post-Anthropocene futures on a planet that no longer is dominantly human but has to deal with the consequences of human influence. Atwood stretches contemporary biotechnological and cultural realities toward possible extrapolations for future worlds. The Anthropocene is tested and pushed beyond its limits in narratives that might at first seem dystopic, but moreover serve an affirmative agenda and ultimately reconsider the grounds the Anthropocene has been built upon. Through Jennifer Wagner-Lawlor's notion of the 'speculative standpoint' and Ursula K. Heise's analysis of 'risk societies', the imaginative potential of feminist thought and narrative is considered in Atwood's novels. The notion of art is, moreover, important for the challenges Atwood's trilogy sets for the Anthropocene: through writing and storytelling the trilogy argues for a positive future for humanity on a post-Anthropocene planet.

In chapter six, "Jeanette Winterson's *The Stone Gods*: The Inscription of Many Anthropocenes", Jeanette Winterson's 2007 novel *The Stone Gods* is considered in regard to inscription and iterative storytelling in the Anthropocene. The multiple, nonlinear and cyclical worlds Winterson creates in *The Stone Gods* reflect on the notion of human and posthuman writing on many planets, most of which turn out to be Anthropocene in their layout. In rethinking the repetitive nature of her many Anthropocenes, Winterson creates a space for reconsidering what it means that storytelling is an important aspect of humanity's recurrent dominant agency in these worlds' geological composition. Close reading *The Stone Gods* alongside the work of Karen Barad links the rethinking of temporalities and the possibility of many storylines for the Anthropocene with 'quantum stories', 'quantum worlds' and a refiguring of the continuity/discontinuity binary in the Anthropocene.

Part Two approaches the Anthropocene via narratives of feminist SF. Close reading the work of Atwood and Winterson through the problems and possibilities the Anthropocene creates, they both do not just open up many different worlds and planets, but moreover open up the many dualisms that have been at the core of thinking the Anthropocene. Through narrative and the telling of stories, the two chapters that make up Part Two aim to show the intervention that feminist science fiction can be in challenging and rethinking the Anthropocene.

Chapter Five.

Margaret Atwood's *MaddAddam Trilogy*: Speculative Art and Taking Risks on a Post-Anthropocene Planet

There's the story, then there's the real story, then there's the story of how the story came to be told. Then there's what you leave out of the story. Which is part of the story too.
- Margaret Atwood⁴⁷

Set in a not-too-distant future, Margaret Atwood's *MaddAddam Trilogy*⁴⁸ opens with the novel *Oryx and Crake* (2003) and a character named Snowman. Thinking himself the sole survivor of a biotechnological apocalypse set in motion by his best friend Crake, Snowman used to be Jimmy but, in a new world, has had to become an altogether different man:

[T]he Abominable Snowman - existing and not existing, apelike man or manlike ape, stealthy, elusive, known only through rumours and through its backward-pointing footprints. (*O&C* 8)

The start of the *MaddAddam Trilogy* is telling when it comes to the themes it will address: the earth Snowman now walks on is in the process of redefining itself in relation to the remaining humans, *anthropos* is no longer dominant, humanity is – like the Abominable Snowman – at once existing and not existing. How the *MaddAddam Trilogy* deals with this shift in perspective is the focus of this chapter. Approaching the Anthropocene via the narratives that Atwood tells of this planet and its inhabitants, this chapter further inquires how through feminist thought and stories written through a feminist analytical lens the notion of the Anthropocene is challenged, and, in the case of Atwood, possible futures are reimagined.

Atwood is no newcomer to the world of feminist SF. Her 1985 novel *The Handmaid's Tale* has become a modern classic for its speculative invocation of a fundamentalist Christian patriarchy set in North America in a near future. In Gilead protagonist Offred – literally meaning Of-Fred – finds herself serving Fred and his wife for reproductive purposes. In *The Handmaid's Tale* the female body is objectified in ways that take the contemporary

⁴⁷ *MaddAddam* (2013): 56.

⁴⁸ As said, the *MaddAddam Trilogy* consists of three novels: *Oryx and Crake* (2003), *The Year of the Flood* (2009), and *MaddAddam* (2013), which will henceforth be referred to as *O&C*, *TYotF* and *MA*.

objectification of the female body to the extreme. Since then, Atwood has published over fifteen novels, many poetry and short story collections, children's books, libretti, essays and other works of non-fiction. The *MaddAddam Trilogy* is, after *The Handmaid's Tale*, the first set of novels that can – without too much doubt – be categorized as SF.⁴⁹

As the story goes in the *MaddAddam Trilogy*, Snowman has created the new mythos around his person for the 'Crakers', the new quasi- or posthuman species he is looking after, created by the same Crake who also created the deadly virus that ultimately wiped-out (almost) all human life on earth. Snowman does not know he is not alone on this 'post-Anthropocene planet', an Earth that is beyond human domination but is dealing with its aftermath. In *The Year of the Flood* (2009), the second novel in the trilogy, Atwood retells this tale from the perspective of Toby, Ren and other survivors who used to belong to the 'God's Gardeners', a religious environmentalist 'back-to-nature' group that is at times reminiscent of activist movements such as the 'Food not Bombs' and the 'Freegan' movement that gained prominence in the mid-1990s in New York City. The 'God's Gardeners' are known for their vegan and anti-war views yet, moreover, have links to Christian End-Time movements. God's Gardeners' had long predicted that there would come a moment in which life as it was lived by most of humanity would no longer be sustainable and there would come a "massive die-off of the human race" (*TYotF* 56). They had started living organically and communally in response to a society that has become run by a private security force called 'CorpSeCorps'. Split between the elitist Corporate Compounds and the chaotic and dangerous cities which were now called the 'pleebands', in the former, life seemed stable but was highly controlled by corporate security companies, in the latter gangs ruled and the security "was leaky" (*O&C* 31): "Outside the OrganInc walls and gates and searchlights, things were unpredictable. Inside, they were the way it used to be when Jimmy's father was a kid, before things got so serious" (31). In the third novel of the trilogy, *MaddAddam* (2013), Snowman and the Crakers come together with Toby, Ren, Zeb and other people who have survived the 'The Waterless Flood' – the name the God's Gardeners used for their prediction of the end of mankind – and try to build a new posthuman and Post-Anthropocene community.

⁴⁹ It incorporates many 'classic' SF themes: e.g. a mad scientist, an apocalypse, a planet that temporally seems to be set in the future and species that are near, but not entirely, human. Atwood's latest book *The Heart Goes Last* (2015) also touches on some very SF-like topics, but like *The Handmaid's Tale* is more speculative in reflection on social systems than it does reference the science aspect of SF. This novel is a riff on the infamous Stanford Prison Experiment, one of the most controversial studies in the history of social psychology that had its study subjects divided in either prisoners or guards and ended up being called off after the new divide of power got completely out of hand. Atwood's novels takes this social experiment and has her protagonists live in a system wherein they flip the situation every month, one month one group takes the role of prisoners, the next they are the guards.

The state the present world of Jimmy/Snowman, Ren, Toby, Zeb and the other survivors is in, turned out to be initiated by Crake and his BlyssPluss pill that did not only increase sexual stamina and acted as a “sure-fire-one-time-does-it-all birth-control pill” (347) but also held a fast-spreading deadly virus that wiped out almost all of humanity in one big sweep. The *MaddAddam Trilogy* threads the stories of the events leading up to ‘The Waterless Flood’ with what is the narrative’s present: a post-*anthropos* and post-Anthropocene world that is no longer under the control of humans. This chapter investigates how the worlds that are represented in Atwood’s *MaddAddam Trilogy* relate to the notion of the Anthropocene and its end - the end of an era of human domination - that is hardly the end of the world: “[I]t is simply the end of *our* world, the end of the world as we know it” (Ciobanu 153, italics original). Similar to what the feminist thinkers highlighted in Part One, the Post-Anthropocene world of the *MaddAddam Trilogy* breaks through a normative reading of the Anthropocene and proposes different ways of relating to a human domination of Earth that no longer operate according to binary systems opposing man/nature, human/nonhuman.

The *MaddAddam Trilogy*, moreover, turns to writing and the telling of stories as an important aspect of building new worlds. Jennifer Wagner-Lawlor’s notion of a ‘speculative standpoint’ and Ulrich Beck’s and Ursula K. Heise’s analysis of ‘risk societies’ and the influence of the pastoral and apocalyptic genre are important in this chapter’s engagement with Atwood’s novels. Through the use of contemporary Anthropocene environments, biotechnological and cultural realities, Atwood’s trilogy pushes the boundaries of the risks and potential of art and the imagination in the Anthropocene.

The Speculative Standpoint and a Different Take on Apocalyptic Narrative

In *Postmodern Utopias and Feminist Fictions* (2013), Jennifer Wagner-Lawlor examines feminist utopian fiction from the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries through the use of feminist speculative standpoint theory. As her methodology, she invokes a ‘speculative standpoint’ in order to engage with the imaginative potential of utopian feminist thinking and narrativity. In response to feminist standpoint theory that - after thinkers such as Nancy Hartsock, Patricia Hill Collins, Sandra Harding and Donna Haraway - proposed a situated epistemology that does not start from fixed positions and identities but from a relational and situated knowledge production, Wagner-Lawlor’s ‘speculative standpoint’ extends standpoint epistemology toward a speculative perspective. Connecting the speculative to standpoint theory creates a theory that is at once invested in “not only the ‘as is’ (*speculum*), or the making visible of reality ‘more objectively,’ as feminist standpoint proposes. Speculative

standpoint also aspires to make visible the ‘as if,’ the projecting out or performance (*spectacle*) of possibility” (Wagner-Lawlor x). Even though feminist standpoint theory might not necessarily always strive to envision reality “more objectively” as Wagner-Lawlor writes,⁵⁰ her speculative standpoint adds to feminist standpoint theory in the sense that through the speculative, a sense of imagination, aspiration and risk are invoked. “[S]peculation as *risk*”, writes Lawlor, “comes with the recognition of the unpredictable, unseen, or unacknowledged possible futures” (x, italics original). Speculative fiction, such as Atwood’s, takes the risks of contemporary societies and pushes them toward the unpredictable, the unseen and the unacknowledged.

The particular tension between contemporary realities and the imagining of hitherto unseen and ultimately unpredictable futures is the playground of this form of speculative fiction. It engages with the risks, in line with what German sociologist Ulrich Beck pointed toward in his work on the concept of a ‘world risk society’, and investigates them through imaginative writing. The concept of ‘world risk society’ “draws attention to the limited controllability of the dangers we have created for ourselves” (Beck 6). In *World Risk Society* (1999) Beck argues that it is literature – and in particular the genre of science fiction – that plays an important role in exploring the “two faces of risk – chance and danger” (5) that come with the Anthropocene, that come through imaginative renderings of what has not come to pass but can be posed as a definite risk to contemporary world societies. Writing on and beyond the risks that come with a world in which the dominant factor is the human species is the basic premise of Atwood’s *MaddAddam Trilogy*. Here, Beck’s ‘two faces of risk’ are explored through both form – literary speculative fiction can certainly be said to be a representation of the impact of both chance and danger in literary form – and content – human survivors of a man-made apocalypse attempting to regain their footing on their altered surroundings.

⁵⁰ In her article “Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective”, Haraway argues for a rearticulation of the notion of ‘objectivity’ in terms of a more partial engagement: “Feminist objectivity means quite simply situated knowledges” (Haraway 581). The epistemology she proposes is situated and partial. Through the metaphor of vision it insists on avoiding binary oppositions: “[I]nfinite vision is an illusion, a god trick [...] only partial perspective promises objective vision. All Western cultural narratives about objectivity are allegories of the ideologies governing the relations of what we call mind and body, distance and responsibility. Feminist objectivity is about limited location and situated knowledge, not about transcendence and splitting of subject and object. It allows us to become answerable for what we learn how to see” (582-83). So, rather than, as Wagner-Lawlor writes, proposing a “more objective” vision of reality, Haraway’s situated standpoint epistemology moves away from ‘objectivity’ as infinite vision and insists on a partial perspective that does not take objectivity to be all-encompassing “‘god-tricks’: promising vision from everywhere and nowhere equally and fully” (584).

In *Sense of Place and Sense of Planet. The Environmental Imagination of the Global* (2008), literary scholar Ursula K. Heise engages explicitly with the notion of risk in relation to narrative and takes an approach to narratives of risk that brings Wagner-Lawlor's speculative standpoint closer to Beck's statement on the role of literature in exploring the chances and dangers of risk. Heise examines environmental literature and analyses the impact narratives of risk have had on the "perceptions of ecological and technological risk scenarios" (Heise 122) and vice versa, how metaphors and tropes in environmental literature have shaped the understanding of risk. As Heise argues, risk scenarios are "shaped by and filtered through narrative templates that manifest themselves in both visual and verbal artifacts" (122). Heise does not specifically refer to Atwood's work but, in Heise's terms, the *MaddAddam Trilogy* can be considered through the lens of 'apocalyptic narrative':

Apocalyptic narrative, with its portrayal of an entire planet on the brink of ecological collapse and human populations threatened in their very survival, has been one of the most influential forms of risk communication in the modern environmental movement. (122)

The *MaddAddam Trilogy* appeals to the apocalyptic narrative in the sense that its story is founded upon an apocalyptic past – the world before Crake's deadly virus, the world in which the protagonists grew up – but then quickly comes to be a post-apocalyptic narrative. It moves in a different way than what could be counted as apocalyptic narratives. What Heise refers to as 'apocalyptic narrative' starts with environmental ecocritical literature of the 1960s and 70s such as Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* (1962). These apocalyptic narratives are often constructed upon the idea that "utter destruction lies ahead but can be averted and replaced by an alternative future society" (142). While the *MaddAddam Trilogy* features the destruction of much of humanity and certainly of modern societies, it does not suppose that what has happened might have been averted. It rather takes destruction for what it is, and imagines a world that is dealing with the aftermath of destruction, for better or worse. In contrast with, for instance, Carson's *Silent Spring* that considers the negative impact of synthetic pesticides on ecosystems and particularly on birds, the *MaddAddam Trilogy* does not romanticize a world without biotechnology. There is no real appeal to end the 'silent spring', to the return of the birds, or humans in Atwood's novels. Where Carson's proposes, after Robert Frost's poem, to take 'the road less taken' and make "all the difference" (Frost 46), Snowman, Ren, Toby and the others make due with what they have and do not romantically reminisce where a

different road might have taken them. Their story is therefore told in line with feminist sexual difference thought in that difference is not regarded as ‘difference as distinction’ and difference as a way to evolve toward ‘better differences’.⁵¹ The destruction of human environments in the *MaddAddam Trilogy* is rather thought as ‘difference in itself’, in that it moves along a non-hierarchical axis that does not suppose that if it had been otherwise it would have been better. The future of the survivors in the *MaddAddam Trilogy* lies not only with humanity, but moreover in the interaction with the many new species that have emerged in this post-Anthropocene world, most notably the Crakers. Apocalyptic narratives employ, states Heise, “a particular narrativization of risk perceptions, and analyses of risk certainly sometimes include panoramas of large-scale upheaval or disaster: some forecasts of the consequences of current global warming trends are a case in point” (142). She is critical of this form of apocalyptic narrative and highlights the ways “many (though not all) environmental apocalypses continue to hold up, implicitly or explicitly, ideals of naturally self-regenerating ecosystems and holistic communities in harmony with their surroundings as a countermodel to the visions of exploitation and devastation they describe” (142).

Yet, the particular narrative of the *MaddAddam Trilogy* redirects apocalyptic narrative toward what can be said to be a feminist alternative way of engaging with the apocalyptic: rather than insisting on a dualist rendering of the ‘bad apocalypse’ that needs to be prevented in order to go back to the past, the time when all was still well’, it starts from positing a ‘what if’ and proposes a world that is neither better nor worse than the world that came before the apocalypse. This approach can be thought of as nonbinary in that it engages with the notion of apocalypse in a way that does not think of it as two-sided: the ‘before’ of the apocalypse in *MaddAddam Trilogy* was not ‘good’, nor is the ‘after’ entirely ‘bad’. The worlds before and after ‘The Waterless Flood’ operate on a less hierarchical scale. In its relationship to a current understanding of the Anthropocene, it also breaches the boundaries of a binary understanding of a ‘good before’ and ‘bad after’. Stories of destruction are combined with the narratives and metaphors that are already being deployed in relation to current issues in order to come an understanding of the complexity and uncertainty of risks, or, as Heise asserts, an understanding of “risk scenarios as an inherent dimension of modern societies and their agendas” (142-3). Heise’s approach to risks and their literary incarnations take, therefore, a feminist approach that dates back to sexual difference theory in her undoing of binary

⁵¹ For an analysis of feminist sexual different theory see Chapter Four “Claire Colebrook: Indifference and the Possibility of Extinction” wherein Claire Colebrook’s suggestion of ‘indifference’ is explored as a counter-argument to the idea of ‘difference as distinction’.

oppositions. Her discussion of apocalyptic narrative and its relationship to the romanticizing tendencies of what she calls the ‘pastoral narrative’ serve the goal of undoing their dualist approach. She traces the apocalyptic back to the pastoral, revealing the dualist and romantic tendencies of the genre in order to engage with a more complex notion of risks and risk narratives. The *MaddAddam Trilogy* is a speculative take on the negotiation of risks, unfolding the dangers and chances apocalyptic narrative brings, whilst undoing the binary patterns that so often come out through the trope of the apocalypse.

An Intervention Into the Anthropocene’s ‘What If’s’

In *Postmodern Fictions and Feminist Utopias* Wagner-Lawlor analyses Atwood’s *Oryx and Crake* and in particular the anticipatory power that speculative fiction and other speculative art forms invoke as that which might come to stand against the risks that come with a contemporary global community: “If the story of acquisition and domination leads us to our own doom, the fault, Atwood grimly proposes, will be our own” (Wagner-Lawlor xiii-xiv). Atwood is highly conscious of the problems her novels allude to. An ‘Anthropocene world risk society’ – as the past-world that is represented in the *MaddAddam Trilogy* might well be called – calls into question the premises of current worlds and points toward how the risks that come with humanity’s current situation might play out. Wagner-Lawlor asserts that the speculative fiction of Atwood starts from certain “obscure motives” of contemporary worlds and their “even obscurer consequences of what has happened already” (86), yet a lot of these motives are, when compared to the world of 2016, or 2003 when *Oryx and Crake* was published, not that obscure. This is part of the reason why Atwood would rather name her brand of fiction ‘speculative fiction’ than science fiction: “*Oryx and Crake* is not science fiction. It is fact within fiction [...] The goat spider is real, the multiple organ pig is real” (Atwood, qtd. in Case 40-42). Many of the seemingly new biotechnological creations in the *MaddAddam Trilogy* have embodied parallels in current worlds.⁵²

⁵² This, once again, refers to the work of Donna Haraway on SF. As she notes in the 2013 article “SF: Science Fiction, Speculative Fabulation, String Figures, So Far” in relation to Marge Piercy’s and her own research into SF and the simultaneity of the ‘real’ and the ‘fabulated’: “The colonial and imperial roots & routes of SF are relentlessly real and inescapably fabulated. [...] Cyborgs were never just about the interdigitations of humans and information machines; cyborgs were from the get-go the materialization of imploded (not hybridized) human beings-information machines-multispecies organisms. Cyborgs were always simultaneously relentlessly real and inescapably fabulated. Like all good SF, they redid what counts as—what is—real” (n.pag.). In Haraway’s figuration of the cyborg the simultaneity of the ‘real’ and the ‘fabulated’ has always been clear. Atwood’s novels play with similar connections that breach the boundaries between what is ‘real’ and what is ‘fabulation’.

Wagner-Lawlor does not mention the Anthropocene as one of the motives at stake in the *MaddAddam Trilogy*. Yet, considering the words of Snowman: “He does not know which is worse, a past he can’t regain or a present that will destroy him if he looks at it too clearly. Then there’s the future. Sheer vertigo” (*O&C* 173), there is a definite presence of the risks and unknown outlook on the future that are also visible in the notion of the Anthropocene. The past of the world as narrated in the *MaddAddam Trilogy* refers to the near future of contemporary societies. It calls forth many ‘what if’s’:

The *what if* of *Oryx and Crake* is simply, *What if we continue down the road we’re already on? How slippery is the slope? What are our saving graces? Who’s got the will to stop us? ... It’s not a question of our inventions – all human inventions are merely tools – but of what might be done with them.* (Atwood *Curious Pursuits* 323, italics original, as qtd. in Wagner-Lawlor 86)

The *MaddAddam Trilogy* takes a speculative standpoint on “what, in a possible future, clearly could happen based on the footprints left by individual, as well as by corporate, national, or global bodies” (Wagner-Lawlor 86).

At first glance, the *MaddAddam Trilogy* seems to be explicitly about human intervention: the character of Crake is an inventor of sorts, among other things he created the new hybrid human-like Crakers. Crake alludes to the trope of the ‘mad scientist’ and is a ‘genius inventor’ of the biotechnological kind. He is a contemporary of Dr. Frankenstein, or rather, a new Dr. Moreau. His inventions have set the scene for the trilogy, yet ultimately the story is about what might be done with its implications: how do the figures of Snowman, Toby, Ren and all the others, deal with their new and much more vulnerable place on this planet that is no longer ‘theirs’ but belongs to a multitude of old and new species.

The figure of Crake alludes to H.G. Wells’ *The Island of Dr. Moreau* (1896) and its Dr. Moreau, who is perhaps not really mad but is - as Atwood notes in the introduction to the 2005 Penguin edition - “a mere vivisectionist, and has no ambitions to take over anything whatsoever”. Atwood’s Crake is like Moreau in that he also does not personally want to take over the world: Jimmy kills him in a scene that seems to be orchestrated by Crake himself. Crake appears first of all to have moral incentives to changing the presence and dominance of humanity on Earth: he found the human species to be faulty: “As a species we’re pathetic” (*O&C* 195), “How much misery [...] how much needless despair has been caused by a series of biological mismatches, a misalignment of the hormones and pheromones?” (195). To

resolve these mismatches and misalignments that characterize the human species, Crake, like dr. Moreau, seeks to eradicate the negative components of the biological make up of humans. Whereas Jimmy often reminisces about the past and the success of the human species, Crake feels humanity is at the end of its evolutionary timeline:

It's comforting to remember that *Homo sapiens sapiens* was once so ingenious with language, and not only with language. Ingenious in every direction at once.

Monkey brains, had been Crake's opinion. Monkey paws, monkey curiosity, the desire to take apart, turn inside out, smell, fondle, measure, improve, trash discard – all hooked up to the monkey brains, an advanced model of monkey brains but monkey brains all the same. Crake had no very high opinion of human ingenuity, despite the large amount of it he himself possessed. (114)

Consequently, Crake creates his own Moreauian 'strange animals', hybrid creatures that in Crake's invention are human-like figures that feature certain upgrades: "As Crake used to say, *Think of an adaptation, any adaptation, and some animal will have thought of it first*" (194, italics original). His creatures possess many animal features: their genitals turn blue when they are in heat ("a trick of variable pigmentation filched from the baboons" (194)), they purr like cats to heal and are herbivores. Like Dr. Moreau's hybrid human-animals, the boundaries between human and animal have become unclear with the Crakers and "each 'race' gradually tends towards its origins – Moreau's victims to their animality; Crake's to their humanity" (Wagner-Lawlor 86). They are engineered to leave behind all that Crake found defective in humanity, problems such as uncontrolled lust and violence. They are beautiful, racially diverse, gentle creatures with green eyes that glow in the dark. When it comes to the Crakers, their 'humanity' is expressed in their tendency to start creating 'art' and – as is the focus of much of the plot of the last book in the trilogy, *MaddAddam* – start learning to write and begin telling stories. In a speculative and fabulative response to the possible consequences and 'what if's' of the Anthropocene, the intervention Atwood introduces in the *MaddAddam Trilogy* entails that, even after the eradication of much of humanity, writing remains a transformative practice.

Writing, Telling Stories and Imagining a Hopeful Future

Writing is closely connected to how the *MaddAddam Trilogy* typifies humanity and the future of a post-human planet. The storytelling of the survivors of the 'Waterless Flood' is set

against a background of speculative narrating of the past world that is very similar to current worlds: “Speculation about what the world would be like after human control of it ended had been – long ago, briefly – a queasy form of popular entertainment” (*MA* 32). In the chaotic and utterly commoditized past world of *MaddAddam*, these kinds of stories were not popular:

There was only so much of that people could stand [...] switching from immanent wipeout to real-time contests about hotdog-swallowing if they liked nostalgia, or to sassy-best-girlfriend comedies if they liked stuffed animals [...] or to Nitee-Nite live-streamed suicides or HottTotts kiddy porn or Hedsoff real-time executions if they were truly jaded. All of it so much more palatable than the truth. (32)

This is a satirical take on the popular entertainment of now, a parody of large blockbuster movies such as Neill Blomkamp’s *Elysium* (2013) and Lars von Trier’s *Melancholia* (2011). The game of ‘Painball’, wherein two teams need to eliminate each other, paintball style but with real weapons, is reminiscent of – the later conceived - Suzanne Collins’ *The Hunger Games* trilogy (2008-2010). Even Atwood’s own branch of speculative fiction is parodied through *MaddAddam Trilogy*’s ironical view of meaning making in this new world.

The trilogy is ultimately about starting over and attempting a new beginning. The paradox of the *MaddAddam Trilogy*, however, lies in that completely starting over is not an option. New beginnings are an illusion and even after the large-scale destruction of Crake’s Waterless Flood the hope to start afresh is false: Crake’s beliefs that through his creation of a new human-like species the worst of the human characteristics are erased, seem to come up short. However much Crake detested ‘art’ and ‘religion’ – “*Watch out for art*” (*O&C* 417) he used to say to Jimmy – even the Crakers do not seem to be immune to art’s lure. Unlike Jimmy, Crake does not agree that “[w]hen any civilization is dust and ashes, art is all that’s left over. Images, words, music. Imaginative structures” (167). The development the Crakers undergo post-Crake, proves that he was wrong. There is still a need for the imaginative, an engrained need for it even, which could not be eliminated through genetic engineering:

[Atwood] does propose in these novels that there is not simply a ‘role’ for art but a need for the work of imagination so basic that even the genius Crake cannot eradicate its physiological expression in his creatures’ dreams, which are clearly themselves instances of the ‘art of the body’. Without the ‘play’ of imagination

within and among individuals, Atwood cannot imagine an historical trajectory forward. (Wagner-Lawlor 84-85)

Like Heise, Beck and Wagner-Lawlor – as well as Braidotti, Haraway, Zylinska, and Colebrook – Atwood emphasizes the irreplaceability of artistic practice and the power of imagination for human and posthuman futures. She approaches art, first and foremost as a practice of the symbolic. Symbolic thinking was unstoppable in the Crakers: in *MaddAddam*, a child-Craker called Blackbeard learns to write. The telling of stories, moreover, is central to how the Crakers conceive of themselves. They crave the stories of their origins, stories that through Jimmy-the-Snowman are told in a form that – in part to take revenge on Crake and his utopian ideals of erasing art – is reminiscent of biblical and mythological narratives.

When in *MaddAddam* Snowman-the-Jimmy falls ill Toby takes over the storytelling. Next to the history of the Crakers, Toby teaches little Blackbeard to write, “‘Come over here,’ she says. ‘I won’t bite you. Look. I’m doing *writing*: that is what these lines are. I’ll show you’” (*MA* 202). Mistrusting as Blackbeard initially is, when he finds that the symbols on paper have “told” (203) him his name, he quickly shows the other Craker children what he has learnt, much to Toby’s worry:

He has a stick, and the paper. There’s his name in the sand. The other children are watching him. All of them are singing.

Now what have I done? she thinks. What can of worms have I opened? They’re so quick, these children: they’ll pick this up and transmit it to all the others.

What comes next? Rules, dogmas, laws? The Testament of Crake? How soon before there are ancient texts they feel have to obey but have forgotten how to interpret? Have I ruined them? (204)

How the illusion of a ‘new beginning’ has failed is represented here in the form of writing. Toby is wary of writing in a manner that is reminiscent of Crake’s wariness of all art: “*As soon as they start doing art, we’re in trouble*. Symbolic thinking of any kind would sign downfall, in Crake’s view. Next they’d be inventing idols, and funerals, and grave goods, and the after-life, and sin, and Linear B, and kings, and then slavery and war” (*O&C* 417-418).

As in other novels Atwood wrote, writing and the telling of stories are employed as figures of hope. In *The Handmaid’s Tale* (1985) the oppressed Offred writes her life story in a

diary, writing down the stories she is no longer allowed to tell. In *The Blind Assassin* (2000) Atwood writes: “In Paradise, there are no stories, because there are no journeys. It’s loss and regret and misery and yearning that drive the story forward, along its twisted road” (Atwood 518). Unlike Paradise however, for the survivors living on a post-Anthropocene planet stories are essential. In the *MaddAddam Trilogy* the imagination and its practice in writing and telling stories therefore figure like what Wagner-Lawlor calls a ‘double-edged sword’: “source of visionary creativity in the arts and sciences; source of dangerous projections and misguided illusions of power” (Wagner-Lawlor 88). Ultimately the *MaddAddam Trilogy* seems to sidestep the disastrous implications imagination has had in the bioengineering mind of Crake and conveys a positive message when it comes to the future these stories allude to. The building of a new community of Crakers and humans and the birth of hybrid children is a beacon of hope for (post)humanlike life that is closely related to their joined narrative world building – to echo Haraway’s idea. Toward the end of the trilogy, it is the now-grown Blackbeard who is writing and teaching the stories of this new hybrid community. Narratives have survived Crake’s apocalypse and have entwined the risks of the speculative with hope for a post-Anthropocene future. Atwood ultimately infuses the notion of the Anthropocene with hope. In the *MaddAddam Trilogy*, narrative in the (post-)Anthropocene is a hopeful affair. Even after many of the most destructive ‘what if’s’ of the Anthropocene have taken place, all hope is not lost. Storytelling has survived and approaching the Anthropocene and the post-Anthropocene via narrative means that the future might not be as grim as some of the past. The next chapter engages with Jeanette Winterson’s *The Stone Gods* (2007). While, like Atwood’s post-Anthropocene world, this also contains stories that relate to the notion of hope in the Anthropocene, *The Stone Gods* is also a critique of this epoch and of the responsibility of humanity for its advent.

Chapter Six.

Jeanette Winterson's *The Stone Gods*: The Inscription of Many Anthropocenes

Every second the Universe divides into possibilities and most of those possibilities never happen. It is not a uni-verse—there is more than one reading. The story won't stop, can't stop, it goes on telling itself, waiting for an intervention that changes what will happen next.

- Jeanette Winterson⁵³

The notions of reading, writing and inscription are central to an understanding of the Anthropocene. Within the discipline of geology, the idea of geological record or 'rock record' is essential, seeing that "the Earth is over 4.5 Gyr [gigayear, in billions of years] old" (Zalasiewicz et al. 2011). Through tracing fossil records, the vast time span of Earth's existence can be divided into more practical units of time. Fossil records such as those of the dinosaurs, the ammonites, or of humanity, demarcate the time of their existence and make it easier to reconstruct the appearance and conditions of the planet for smaller time periods, such as epochs and ages. In considering the Anthropocene, geologists are engaging with the fossil record left by human activity, records that many now consider to be irreversible and that in the Anthropocene have become dominant. Humanity has of course been reshaping land for millennia, human fossil records can be traced back millions of years, but in the last century this has intensified. Thinking about the Anthropocene via narrative therefore means that writing does not just occur on paper, the influence of humanity is moreover written in soil and stone.

In Jeanette Winterson's *The Stone Gods* (2007) the notion of inscription and the idea of tracing the signals of human activity and their future readability are represented not in layers of stone but in layers of stories. *The Stone Gods* is a novel that consists of a many-layered narrative, each layer reflecting an instance of the inscription of the Anthropocene. Where Margaret Atwood's *MaddAddam Trilogy* engages with the Anthropocene mostly in its aftermath and what might happen after *anthropos* has ceased to be the most dominant factor on the geological structure of Earth, Winterson's novel delves deep into the time of the Anthropocene and considers its many iterations. This chapter analyses the many layers and

⁵³ *The Stone Gods* (2007): 83.

many Anthropocenes that feature in *The Stone Gods*. Through the notion of inscription and iterative storytelling, Winterson's novel offers a minimal and quantum approach that critiques the Anthropocene, yet is also present as a voice of hope.

Three Narratives, Many Anthropocenes

The Stone Gods threads three linked Anthropocene narratives: the discovery of Planet Blue and the flight from the “dying” planet Orbus (Winterson 8); the story of a stranded sailor who witnesses the cutting down of the last tree on Easter Island and imminent ecological ruin; and the escape of a ‘Robo *sapiens*’ that is supposed to save humanity from its tendencies of war and nuclear destruction in a ‘Post-3 War’ world. While these three narratives at first seem to be approached in a linear manner – starting with Orbus/Planet Blue, followed by an historical intermezzo on an eighteenth-century Easter Island, and ending on a ‘Post-3 War’ “earth” (227) – it is far from linear in content and composition. The timeline of the narratives in *The Stone Gods* continually ellipses and is an intertextual play of repeating plot lines, recurring protagonists and iterative themes and tropes. This is important for the thread of this thesis in that in these narratives many of the approaches that have been highlighted come together. Breaking the boundaries of linearity, of binaries and of a singular approach to the Anthropocene is threaded into the iterative narratives of *The Stone Gods*.

The two main protagonists, Spike and Billie (last name ‘Crusoe’) recur in each tale. As a so-called Robo *sapiens* and an employee of a corporate concern they are the leading figures of the story on Orbus and the ‘Post-3 War earth’, as stranded sailors (called Spickers and Billy) they feature in the story on Easter Island. With these recurring figures, themes and tropes such as “the creation of ‘new words’ for new worlds [...] the lure of an ‘other shore’, a horizon of desire, and the apprehension of being lost on the voyage, shipwrecked, yearning for home” (Wagner-Lawlor 106) recur as well.

The novel opens on ‘Orbus’, a planet that has started to become so “hostile to human life” (Winterson 7) that the ‘masters of Orbus’ have been on a quest to find a place better suited for a ‘new beginning’:

The last hundred years have been hell. The doomsters and the environmentalists kept telling us we were as good as dead and, hey presto, not only do we find a new planet, but it is perfect for new life. This time, we’ll be more careful. This time we’ll learn from our mistakes. (7)

With the discovery of a new world – called ‘Planet Blue’ – humanity on Orbus is offered “the chance of a lifetime. The chance of many lifetimes. The best chance we have had since life began [...] we searched until we found the one we will call home” (4). Perhaps now the humans of Orbus will survive. Billie, in this story, is an employee of the so-called ‘Enhancement Services’, but also the owner of an idyllic seventeenth-century farmhouse called ‘Cast Out Farm’ that sits right in the middle of the bioengineered and cultivated reality of “this hi-tech, hi-stress, hi-mess life” (13): “My farm is the last of its line – like an ancient ancestor everyone forgot. It’s a bio-dome world, secret and sealed; a message in a bottle from another time” (13).

This first world of *The Stone Gods* is reminiscent of Atwood’s *MaddAddam Trilogy*: Billie’s farm feels like the community the God’s Gardeners created in response to a society that in practice is being led by biogenetic corporations, which in Winterson’s first world go by the apt name ‘MORE’. Like the Gardeners of Atwood’s novels, Billie eventually gets herself in trouble for her farm and its outright critique of the Central Power. She ends up exiled from her world and is forced to go on a promotional trip that is to bring the first humans to Planet Blue, a “[c]hance in a lifetime – new start - brave new world” (55) – fully sponsored by ‘MORE-Life’ (40). On Planet Blue, Billie, Spike and their travel mates are supposed to see whether Planet Blue is truly fit for human habitation and, moreover, to fix one problem that still prohibits that: there are dinosaurs on Planet Blue. An asteroid has been redirected to crash into Planet Blue, thereby creating a duststorm that is to wipe out the dinosaurs. This is all very familiar in relation to the history of life on Earth and the rise to dominance of the human species.

Where Winterson’s stories divert from those of Atwood’s *MaddAddam Trilogy* is in that, rather than extending and speculating on the consequences of one possible outcome of human meddling in planetary geo- and ecosystems, Winterson’s novel always threads multiple outcomes. The journey to Planet Blue is entwined with the history of Earth and its past, as well as with the stories of many other past, present and/or future planets. On the journey to Planet Blue, the crew is “telling stories, the way all shipcrew tell stories” (61). The stories they tell each other are of a series of other planets – all different versions of Earth – called ‘Medusa’, ‘Morpheus’, ‘Echo’, and a planet alternatively explored as an alternative to Orbus, ‘Planet White’. It is planet ‘Echo’ and ‘Planet White’ in particular that highlight the multiplicity and reiteration of worlds in *The Stone Gods*. ‘Echo’, a planet that haunts, is a recurring trope in the novel:

It doesn't exist. It's like those ghost-ships at sea [...] It passed straight through the ship and through our bodies, and the strange thing that happened was the bleach. It bleached our clothes and hair, and men that had black beards had white. Then it was gone, echoing in another part of the starry sky, always, 'here' and 'here' and 'here', but nowhere. Some call it Hope. (61-62, italics original)

Wagner-Lawlor points out that the novel's structure functions as an 'echo chamber' (Wagner-Lawlor 108): the structure of recurring planets, the novel's looping of times and spaces, and the series of intertextually entwined plotlines are amplified as if in a resonating echo chamber. Planet White is likewise an echo of all other planets that feature in *The Stone Gods*. Like Planet Blue, Orbus, Easter Island, and the 'earth' of the Post-3 War world, it was once prosperous with human life: "*We found the ruins of a city [...] A proud place this had been, once upon a time.*" (Winterson 63, italics original). A vision of a possible post-Anthropocene future, Planet White is like the many stories that circulate in popular media of a world in ruins, a world in which humanity has gone extinct.

When Billie asks a fellow traveler, the space pirate 'Handsome', about Planet White he points out the similarities to the planet they just left: "The white planet was a world like ours [...] far far advanced. [...] [B]ut the humans, or whatever they were, massively miscalculated, and pumped so much CO₂ into the air that they caused irreversible warming. The rest is history". "Whose history", Billie asks Handsome. "Looking more and more like ours, don't you think?" (67-68). References to the negative possible consequences of human activity in what we now call the Anthropocene are omnipresent in the setting of the scenes in *The Stone Gods*; each and every one of these planets have or are starting to become unlivable to humanity as a result of the impact of human activity on planetary geo- and ecosystems. Orbus, the White Planet, Post 3-War earth, even Easter Island has turned into a wasteland after all trees have been cut down in the making of 'the Stone Gods', Easter Islands famous massive stone idols.

Winterson's *The Stone Gods* repeats, reiterates and multiplies Anthropocene worlds. Whereas Atwood's post-Anthropocene planet was one imaginative rendition of the possible outcome of the dominance of human activity on planet Earth, Winterson proposes many Anthropocenes. In structure, themes and tropes, *The Stone Gods*' three narratives become many stories of many worlds that cannot be viewed in any sort of singular rendition. The one is always already all the others. The past of one planet is the present and future of all planets in *The Stone Gods*. These many Anthropocenes, therefore, offer an image of the

Anthropocene that does not need to be complicated in how it is approached, but that always held more than one possible iteration.

A Minimal, Virtual And Quantum Approach

Multiplying worlds in *The Stone Gods* can be read in a way that calls to mind what Joanna Zylińska termed a ‘minimal’ ethics and a minimal approach for the Anthropocene.⁵⁴ Engaging with these Anthropocene planets as always/already⁵⁵ many, constitutes not only a change in the quantitative approach to the Anthropocene, qualitatively the Anthropocene is also read differently. Rather than extending the Anthropocene to include more and ‘MORE’ – the name of the large and extremely powerful corporation on Orbus and the Post-3 war ‘earth’ is not without irony – Winterson, like Zylińska, argues to engage with the Anthropocene and the consequences for a human/earth coexistence more thoroughly, attempting to go just “deep enough” as Zylińska writes. In a play on the origin of the word ‘universe’ – coming from the Latin ‘*unus*’ (one) and ‘*vertere*’ (to turn), combined in ‘*universus*’ meaning “combined in one, whole, entire”⁵⁶ – Winterson writes: “It is not a uni-verse – there is more than one reading” (Winterson 83). Her speculative minimal approach to narratives of Anthropocene planets undoes a simplistic reading that turns ‘Universe’ into a singular space: “Every second the Universe divides into possibilities and most of those possibilities never happen” (83).

Winterson’s approach to multiplicity in her narrative worlds can also be read through what Deleuze and Guattari call ‘the virtual’. From the work of Bergson, they draw a distinction between ‘the virtual’ and ‘the actual’. The virtual points to that which “is no longer chaotic, that has become consistent or real on the plane of immanence that wrests it from the chaos – it is a virtual that is real without begin actual, ideal without being abstract” (*What Is Philosophy* 156). The virtual allows ‘oneness’ to be read as ‘multiplicity’. After Bergson, Deleuze argues in *Bergsonism* (1988) that even though virtually there is only “a single time [...] duration, that is to say time, is essentially multiplicity” (Deleuze, *Bergsonism* 79). In *The Stone Gods*, a similar approach to ‘oneness as multiplicity’ is taking place. For in all its narratives, the multiplicity that is invoked is always at the same time representing a

⁵⁴ A discussion of Zylińska’s ‘minimal’ ethics for the Anthropocene can be read in Chapter One: “Minimal Ethics and the Art of Storytelling”.

⁵⁵ Borrowing this term from Vicki Kirby who in *Quantum Anthropologies: Life at Large* (2011) argues to recast Derrida’s ‘no outside of text’ into “no outside of Nature” (48) and complicating of an idea of origin into that which is ‘always/already’: “What happens if an origin is always/already its own supplement, a technological apparatus, self-differentiating *from the beginning*?” (Kirby and Wilson 231).

⁵⁶ “Universus.” *Cassell’s Latin Dictionary*. London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 5th ed. 2011. Print.

monist universe: there is no ‘other’, difference is thought as ‘one’ in its neverending differentiability, like ‘difference in itself’.

Particularly the last narrative of a ‘Post-3 War earth’ reflects on the nature of the universe and the relation of one world to many others beyond the constrictions of time and space. The Billie of this narrative – an employee of MORE-*Futures*, who is working on teaching “a robot to understand what it means to be human” (162) – finds a lost manuscript on ‘the Tube’ titled *The Stone Gods*. Flicking through the manuscript – “No point starting at the beginning – nobody ever does’ (143) – it soon becomes clear that the narrative is that of the voyage of Billie and Spike from Orbus to Planet Blue, an exact replica of the narrative of the first part of the novel. The doubling of this story becomes even more complex as the Billie of this last narrative claims that she is also the author of *The Stone Gods* and connects it to a non-linear and iterative interpretation of time and space: “A message in a bottle. A signal. But then I saw it was still here ... round and round of the Circle Line. A repeating world.” (241)

The universe of *The Stone Gods* – both Billie’s and Winterson’s – is “neither random nor determined” (244). It is a “quantum universe” (244), “[a] universe of potentialities, waiting for an intervention to affect the outcome” (244) and a place of Deleuzian virtuality: a monist universe that is always/already multiple. Winterson undoes a continuity/discontinuity binary in that *The Stone Gods* dissolves the idea that there would ever be a definite beginning or ending to the story. There are cuts, there are reiterations, but a continuous tale is never the opposite of its discontinuities. The threaded narratives tell stories of a monist Anthropocene universe wherein stories make cuts into a history that refigures temporality:

This, moreover, touches upon Karen Barad’s argument in *Meeting the Universe Halfway* (2007). In line with Barad’s reshaping of existence into an ‘iterative becoming of spacetime-mattering’, Winterson shapes her stories into intra-active narratives that likewise are dynamic and offer no definitive beginning or ending. The universe of *The Stone Gods* is iterative and the stories are tiny disjunctions into the matter of what Barad calls ‘spacetime’:

Matter is discrete but time is continuous. Nature and culture are split by this continuity and objectivity is secured as externality. We know this story well, it’s written into our bones, in many ways we inhabit it and it inhabits us.

The quantum disrupts this tidy affair [...] it rewords the entire set of possibilities made available [...] This tiny disjuncture, existing in neither space nor time, torques the very nature of the relation between continuity and discontinuity to such a degree that the nature of change changes from a rolling

unraveling stasis into a dynamism that operates at an entirely different level of ‘existence,’ where ‘existence’ is not simply a manifold of being that evolves in space and time, but an iterative becoming of spacetime mattering. (*Meeting the Universe Halfway* 233-234)

In an interview with Malou Juelskjær and Nete Schwennesen (2012) Barad was asked to reflect on how her research trajectory has evolved. Her answer: “Since there is no origin in this story, and no fixed narrative as such – in fact Derrida might remind us that an autobiography is not a telling of a past that is present, but the ongoing openness of the narrative to future retellings [...] [I]t is a question of inheriting the future as well as the past – I will jump in and pull out a few threads in trying to honor your question” (Juelskjær & Schwennesen 11). Extending this to Winterson’s *The Stone Gods*, a similar narrative threading is taking place. The worlds in its three narratives are complex and dynamic and open up to many other threads of narratives. The storyline is constructed as if Winterson pulls out a couple of threads from a much wider – much deeper – web of entangled stories. From an analysis of how the narratives of *The Stone Gods* can be thought through the minimal, quantum and virtual, a thread that will be explored now is that of how *The Stone Gods* thinks the Anthropocene through ‘inscription’.

Signals And Traces: Inscription In The Anthropocene

The threaded stories in *The Stone Gods* are linked through iterative themes and tropes, recurring characters and repeating plotlines. One of the elements that comes back again and again is that of ‘the signal’. In the last story on a Post-3 War earth, in particular, the motif of the signal is explored. It is featured as a literal signal – at the end of the story Billie and Spike find an abandoned telescope: “Then the dish halted. ‘There’s a signal,’ said Spike. ‘From what? A satellite? A star? Another radio telescope?’ ‘I don’t know’” (221-2) – and as a more figurative signal that relates to the traces the humans of the stories are leaving on the geological structure of planets. Both are interesting when considering the Anthropocene via narrative in *The Stone Gods*.

As Nicole M. Merola explains in the article ‘Materializing a Geotraumatic and Melancholy Anthropocene: Jeanette Winterson’s *The Stone Gods*’ (2014), when considering the Anthropocene “geologists look not at the activity of humans but rather at the traces, or signals, that human activity deposits in earth systems” (Merola 126). Merola differentiates the four different kinds of signals that are important for geologists: litho-, chemo-, bio-, and

sequence stratigraphic signals. In *The Stone Gods* these signals appear in the milieus that Winterson sketches for the planets the narratives take place on. On Orbus and the Post-3 War earth human activity and climate change has had lasting effects on the geology of planets and is endangering the future of human life, changes that have also started to be set in motion on Easter Island.

The ‘lithostratigraphic signals’ – “traces in the composition of new rock formation caused by dramatic changes to patterns of sedimentation and by the creation of novel strata—for instance, mines, wells, preserved artifacts, cities, and transport infrastructures” (126) – are represented by the human cities and the human artifacts made of nonbiodegradable material that are featured. Also dominantly present are ‘chemostratigraphic traces’ – “layers of pollution and altered geochemical composition” (126) – that on Orbus are present in the amount of carbon dioxide in the air: “‘Carbon dioxide is five hundred and fifty parts per million,’ said Spike. ‘It’s too late.’ (Winterson 37) and on the Post-3 War earth refer to the ‘Third World War’ that took place with Iran’s nuclear attacks on the United States thus destroying huge areas of land that on this planet are now referred to as ‘Wreck City’ and the ‘Dead Forest’.

Wreck City is the area that lies just outside the metropole where Billie and Spike come from, ‘Tech City’. The Spike of this story is – like on Orbus/Planet Blue – a ‘*robo sapiens*’; a robot designed to understand what it means to be human in order to learn to “make decisions for the betterment of the human race” (182), hopefully leading to a future with less war and geological destruction. Billie is the one teaching Spike about humanity. On one of their educational walks through “the gardens of *More-Futures*, an artificial rainforest” (176), Billie notices that the gate to Wreck City is open and she takes Spike outside the protected enclosure of Tech City. “Wreck City – where you want to live when you don’t want to live anywhere else. Where you live when you can’t live anywhere else [...] a No Zone – no insurance, no assistance, no welfare, no police” (179), is a place where people live in alternative communities, ungoverned: “nobody forced nobody here” (182). This area is also one where the impact of war has left still visible marks on the environment. Billie and Spike walk “over the pocked and pitted scar tissue of bomb wreckage” (179-80).

Outside of Wreck City lies the Dead Forest, where both the chemo- and biostratigraphic signals of the Anthropocene – signals that “index significant changes in flora and fauna and are generated by agricultural monocultures, trawling, increased rates of species migration and extinction, and chemical changes to ecosystems” – are most palpable. The Dead Forest is a radioactive forest that bears the consequences of nuclear war. The bark of trees glows and the

humans that live here are referred to as “toxic radioactive mutants”. When Billie sees two children in the dead forest – “[t]he boy was covered with sores, the girl had no hair” (202) – an inhabitant of Wreck City (by the name of ‘Friday’) explains to her:

They won’t live long. It’s Tech City’s big secret, one of them anyway. The incurables and the freaks are all in there. They feed them by helicopter. No one knew what would happen to the babies – well, now we do. Those are kids from nuclear families. (203)

Winterson narrates the Anthropocene from a place that connects two common interpretations of the consequences of the Anthropocenes: on the one hand, the Anthropocene planets in *The Stone Gods* represent a critique of the human activity as it has been taking place on Earth and points to its repetitive destructive nature. On the other, it offers visions of planetary life that are resilient and keep on coming back, despite continual human failing. It is a combination of these two readings of the future and responsibility for an Anthropocene planet that is prevalent in Winterson’s writing. That the Dead Forest is ‘deadening’ for humanity does not mean that it represents the end of all life:

Something is happening in there. I’ve been in with a suit. There’s life- not the kind of life you’d want to get into bed with, or even the kind of life you’d want to find under the bed, but life. Nature isn’t fussy. (192)

This potentiality is reflected in the representation of a literal message – the signal that is picked up by the Spike and Billie at the telescope, and writing and reading of the manuscript of *The Stone Gods*. The signal of the telescope in the Post-3 War earth picks up a signal that was supposedly written sixty-five million years ago: “ ‘It is dated.’ [...] ‘What does it say’ ‘It doesn’t say anything as such. It is one line of programming code for a Robo *sapiens*.’ (240). The stories of planets that have harbored human life and possibly also ‘robo *sapiens*’ life, move from Planet White, to Orbus, to Planet Blue, to Post-3 War earth, by way of Easter Island. The manuscript the last Billie writes/finds/reads on the Post-3 War earth complicates the timescale. It negates that it is a linear story that goes from Planet White to Post-3 War earth, and rather shifts the focus from a linear reiteration, to a consideration of the idea of ‘Anthropocene worlds’ in itself and the place therein of humanity. The Anthropocene, therefore, in Winterson’s narration becomes thought of as humanity’s fault and responsibility,

but that does not mean that humanity is inevitably doomed. Winterson complicates the relation of human and Earth. Humanity has had a devastating impact on the geological structure of Earth, but that does not mean that there will not be any life left for the future, the environment is just as full of agency as is the human species.

Destructive Not Hopeless: Humanity In The Anthropocene

The reading of an Anthropocene that is the product of both human influence and planetary resilience translates into stories that no longer paint a one-sided image of the Anthropocene. This section explores how these stories entwine tales of destruction with images of hope.

The narrative of Easter Island – the second chapter, which intertextually appears in the other chapters – can be read as symbolically representing the theme of ecological ruin that humanity has caused in the Anthropocene. The plot involves a stranded sailor, Billy, who witnesses the cutting down of the last remaining tree on Easter Island. Like the Billie of the first and third narrative, this male Billy is on at least two voyages at once: “the first of direction and course, and the second unpurposed and untried” (131). The loss of the last tree of Easter Island stands as a symbol for what thematically is happening in all the narratives of *The Stone Gods*: the permanent changes to the ecology of planets are signals of the ultimate ruin that keeps befalling mankind. On Easter Island, Billy reflects on how humanity is continually the cause of its own destruction: “Mankind, I hazard, wherever found, Civilized or Savage, cannot keep to any purpose for much length of time, except the purpose of destroying himself” (132). The Billie of the Post-3 War ‘earth’ voices a similar idea: “this is never going to work. Humans can’t do it – either we kill each other or we kill the planet or both” (240). In its stories of consequent destruction of planets due to human involvement and activity, Winterson’s *The Stone Gods* is an investigation of human responsibility. Are there possible alternative worlds imaginable that do not fall because of humanity’s habit to destruct its environments? Playing with themes and tropes that are often called upon when discussing the Anthropocene, *The Stone Gods* presents these stories of Anthropocene planets as cautionary tales of worlds that can no longer be saved for humanity.

In all narratives, a certain romantic and nostalgic longing for a different and more utopic world can be found. On Easter Island, Billy meets Spickers, who was born there, a son of a Dutch sailor and one of the native inhabitants of Easter Island. As he lay dying, Spickers tells Billie of his dream that “the island is thick-forested like fur, and green and dark and alive” (139). The Billie of Orbus lives on a farm where she grows ‘natural food’ and writes with “[n]otebook. Pencil. They have an old-fashioned charm that I like” (9). Yet these

nostalgic and romantic feelings do not hold up to the realities that these Anthropocene worlds represent. Though these romantic narratives are present, even in their most pastoral-like moments they are always already “self-consciously rendered as impossible fantasies, unsustainable precisely because they are detached from the material conditions of the planet” (Merola 129). The representations of the romantic and impossible fantasies of the Billy/e-personages implies that change does not have to be viewed as something negative. The Billies are romantics that rather hang on to the same and the past. Winterson rather approaches change as positive and inevitable, in these sense that change means difference: that things change does not mean that what they once were, is gone. The material conditions of these Anthropocene planets are, as Spike often reminds Billie, “imprinted forever with what it once was”, they are all quantum universes: “It is potential at every second. All you can do is intervene” (75).

In *The Posthuman* (2013) Braidotti writes of the posthuman figure as the embodiment of the ‘immanent here and now’ of the Anthropocene era and as the geo-centred subjects that inhabit these “nature-culture continuums” (Braidotti 82).⁵⁷ Braidotti’s wish to come up with a ‘new vocabulary’ to do justice to posthuman planets and a different Anthropocene, can be read in the narrative of *The Stone Gods*. Winterson’s quantum stories and quantum worlds that feature ‘robo *sapiens*’ as “the future of the world” (78) offer many alternatives to a traditional reading of the Anthropocene. As Wagner-Lawlor writes, Spike is the future of the world “precisely because she recognizes no master narratives, no moral taboos, no single destiny” (Wagner-Lawlor 111). Through inscription and storytelling, *The Stone Gods* opens up planets to their virtual multiplicity, their many Anthropocenes, their quantum possibilities and the idea – and closing line of *The Stone Gods* – that “[e]verything is imprinter for ever with what it once was” (Winterson 246).

Fantasy is what allows us to imagine ourselves and others otherwise; it established the possible excess of the real; it points elsewhere, and when it is embodied, it brings the elsewhere home. (J. Butler 28-29)

The elsewheres of *The Stone Gods* are distinctly ‘Anthropocene elsewheres’, but are always already threaded with the promise that “there is more than one reading. The story won't stop, can't stop, it goes on telling itself, waiting for an intervention that changes what will happen

⁵⁷ A discussion of Braidotti’s work on the figure of the posthuman and its place in the Anthropocene takes place in Chapter Two: “Becoming-Posthuman as a Geo-Centred Subject”.

next” (Winterson 83). In the end – that is no ending – *The Stone Gods* portrays an image of hope, an echo that utters: “*always, ‘here’ and ‘here’ and ‘here’, but nowhere. Some call it Hope.*”

The last chapter of this thesis, *The Stone Gods* represents a complex idea of the Anthropocene and how it can be thought through narrative. In its rendering of many stories along many lines and layers it ultimately thinks the Anthropocene as something to approach positively. Connecting it to the work of Atwood and engaging with what it means that both these feminist writers of speculative fiction approach Anthropocene worlds through images of hope is explored in the conclusion that follows.

CONCLUSION ~ PART TWO

*We know where the future is. It's in front of us.
Right? It lies before us – a great future lies before us
– we stride forward confidently into it, every
commencement, every election year.*
- Ursula K. Le Guin⁵⁸

Having come to an end of Part Two “The Fiction of Anthropocene Worlds. Thinking the Anthropocene through Feminist Science Fiction” this conclusion aims to connect how both Atwood’s *MaddAddam Trilogy* and Winterson’s *The Stone Gods* approach the Anthropocene via narrative. Through the research question, *how is the notion of the Anthropocene challenged, refined and reimagined in contemporary feminist speculative fiction and in what ways do approaches via narratives negate a binary and teleological reading of the Anthropocene?*, Part Two read of some of the feminist speculative fiction by Atwood and Winterson closely. It followed their lines of thought through stories and different ways of rethinking the Anthropocene and showed how via feminist SF the notion of the Anthropocene shifts from a single story of humanity’s planetary dominance to many imaginings of possible or alternative worlds. Even though there is of course more feminist SF that engages with the problems of humanity’s relation to earth, Atwood’s and Winterson’s novel provided alternative ways to rethink the notion of the Anthropocene and question the ideas of linearity, singularity, and destruction in a narrow approach to its narrative.

Straying from an idea that any vision of the future implies linearity, both Atwood and Winterson take the words of fellow feminist writer of science and speculative fiction Ursula K. Le Guin to heart:

[O]ur talk about ‘going forward into the future’ is a metaphor, a piece of mythic thinking taken literally, perhaps even a bluff, based on our macho fear of ever being inactive, receptive, open quiet, still. [...] Morning comes whether you set the alarm or not. (Le Guin, “Science Fiction and the Future” 142-3)

⁵⁸ “Science Fiction and the Future”: 142.

In Atwood's and Winterson's work, challenging the notion of the Anthropocene occurs, in part, through reimagining what the 'future' of the Anthropocene might be. Like Le Guin, their approach to this epoch that denotes a particular time in the history of Earth, does not imply that it follows a linear and teleological path. In Atwood's *MaddAddam Trilogy* the Anthropocene and its future are thought by extrapolating current day anthropogenic instances into narrative. This does, however, not necessarily infer that the planet Atwood describes is the only possible imaginable future for the Anthropocene and its inhabitants. Winterson's *The Stone Gods* is even more fervent in challenging a linear approach to the Anthropocene as it practices iterative storytelling and, by way of these stories, breaks through a binary thinking of time and space. The future here is not a time and space humanity can own, invade and colonize. In challenging and reimagining the notion of the Anthropocene it becomes clear that there are always more paths the Anthropocene can take.

What, moreover, connects the novels of Atwood and Winterson are the images of hope their narratives invoke. Even though, for the humans in these stories, Anthropocene and post-Anthropocene worlds do not appear to be very hospitable to the human life as we know it, these worlds are never become 'lifeless' places. Life persists, even after humanity has ceased to be the most dominant agent present. Approaching the Anthropocene via narrative and the telling of stories is imperative in this respect. In Atwood's trilogy the biggest indicator of hope for the future is that new human/nonhuman communities have started to come into being. Reminiscent of Octavia Butler's *Lilith's Brood* and the birth of human/Oankali hybrid-children, moving beyond the boundaries of human/nonhuman distinctions is a hopeful affair. In the *MaddAddam Trilogy* this can be sensed in how the new human/Craker hybrid-children turn to storytelling in order to make sense of where they came from and where they might go. The stories of post-Anthropocene life are insights into what a positive engagement with the genre of the apocalyptic narrative might look like: connecting the apocalyptic with the hopeful produces a nonbinary manner of thinking the Anthropocene. Dealing with the consequences of human intervention for what they are, the *MaddAddam Trilogy* shifts the apocalyptic from a genre that is singularly connected to destruction to include narratives that, through the destructive, open up possibilities for different forms of life.

The ending of Jeanette Winterson's *The Stone Gods* also explores images of hope in its narratives in order to challenge a narrow understanding of the Anthropocene. Le Guin's statement that 'morning comes whether you set the alarm or not' is multiplied in Winterson's narrative exploration of Anthropocene worlds. Many mornings will come, many alarms will

signal their advent. The last paragraphs of *The Stone Gods* can be read as a metaphor for what this thesis aims to do in approaching the Anthropocene via narratives:

I've been here before, many times it seems, though I can't say when [...] I can feel energy like sap in my body. There is nothing to fear [...] I have to go through. The latch is light. Yes open it. It was not difficult. (245-6)

Opening the Anthropocene to thinking it in less restricting ways does not have to be difficult, reading the narratives of the *MaddAddam Trilogy* and *The Stone Gods* opens the boundaries of the Anthropocene to incorporate much more diverse stories of how humanity might relate to the ever changing environments of the worlds it inhabits.

CONCLUSION

The Anthropocene was sort of dropped on us by geologists, for serious reasons and much as I have been a resistor to the terminology and the particular kind of apparatus and size and power of the story, I have come around to feeling that the Anthropocene has a place in our storymaking apparatuses of a rather important kind.

- Donna Haraway⁵⁹

When in 2000 Crutzen and Stoermer proposed the Anthropocene as a term to account for the “major and still growing impact of human activities on earth and atmosphere” (“The ‘Anthropocene’” 17), their hopes included that thinking about this term and humanity’s responsibility for the epoch’s advent would lead to the development of “a world-wide accepted strategy leading to sustainability of ecosystems against human induced stresses” (18). The last fifteen years have indeed seen a lot of attention to how mankind might solve the changes that might be detrimental to it in the years to come. It has however – at least up to thus far – not lead to any ‘world-wide strategy’. How to cope with the anthropogenic change to Earth’s geological systems remains the topic of many debates, conferences and conventions, yet it has not come to any conclusions nor are global strategies currently in place. It might, therefore, have become time to rethink what the question is that humanity is asking itself through this notion of the Anthropocene. What does it mean that we are trying to ‘solve’ the changing of climates, global warming, the rising of sea levels and the level of CO₂ in the atmosphere?

The work of the feminist materialist thinkers and writers that has been the focus of this thesis is important in this respect. In their writing on the Anthropocene they touched on both the factual and the fictional – often simultaneously. In light of the research question this thesis posed, *how is the notion of the Anthropocene challenged, refined and reimagined in contemporary feminist theory and fiction and in what ways does an approach via narratives negate a binary and teleological reading of the Anthropocene?*, the Anthropocene is no longer a notion that is bound to certain binary patterns of thought. Human does not oppose nonhuman, nor can either be equated or opposed to Earth; the factual cannot be thought

⁵⁹ From the plenary session of Haraway and Anna Tsing at the ASLE conference on June 25th, University of Idaho, Moscow, USA. A recording is available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FkZSh8Wb-t8>.

without the fictional, and thinking the Anthropocene does not have to take the form of a linear approach to time.

Part One, “Threading Theories and Narratives. Taking Stories Seriously in the Anthropocene”, investigated the work of four prominent contemporary thinkers of feminist materialist theory: Rosi Braidotti, Donna Haraway, Joanna Zylińska, and Claire Colebrook. Though their work does not generally center on questioning the notion of the Anthropocene, it has been prominent in recent publications and lectures. As Braidotti’s notion of the ‘geological shift’ showed, it has in the Anthropocene become ever more pressing to think about subjectivity differently. The Anthropocene points not only to the dominance, but moreover to the demise of the figure of *anthropos*. Braidotti’s engagement with the rearticulation of subjectivities to account for the figuration of posthuman and a geo-centred subject is a shift from thinking about the Anthropocene in oppositional terms toward thinking it from an affirmative and nonbinary perspective. A different way of relating to language and conceiving a ‘new vocabulary’ along with different figurations, proved crucial to Braidotti’s rethinking and redefining the Anthropocene era. In her work, the Anthropocene becomes a useful term and tool in rethinking the meaning of a globalized humanity.

Donna Haraway takes the urgency of a new vocabulary and different figurations even further as she introduces altogether different eras. As she notes in the citation above, her relationship to the notion of the Anthropocene was not self-evident. Critical of the central position of *anthropos* in the Anthropocene, Haraway reimagines the era in its entirety through a specifically narrative lens. Her introduction of the Chthulucene accounts for the importance she assigns to the storymaking aspects of thinking about these eras. Reminiscent of Lyotard’s critique of grand narratives, Haraway would rather not put all her eggs in one basket and think through “more than one name” (“Anthropocene, Capitalocene, Plantationocene” 160): Anthropocene, Capitalocene, Plantationocene, Chthulucene, to begin with. Writing theory is a storymaking practice that Haraway reads through the written patterns and tentacular connections that worlds are made of. Haraway practices SF, the likes of which can moreover be seen practiced in the narratives of Atwood and Winterson in Part Two of this thesis.

What connects these thinkers of feminist materialisms in their approach to the Anthropocene is their continued resistance to binary systems of thought and their approach to challenge these patterns by turning to a threading of theories and facts with narratives and storytelling. Joanna Zylińska’s invocation of a ‘minimal ethics’ for the Anthropocene is thought through storytelling as she argues that a different approach to the Anthropocene will have to take the form of ‘telling better stories about life’. The Anthropocene for Zylińska

therefore has the potential to become a notion that invokes change. It, then, might practice an ethics that is attuned to the material, conceptual and moral responsibility humanity needs to take for its actions. Human supremacy needs to be relinquished in order to, through an “intertwined practice” (Zylinska 66) of ethics and storytelling, come to an Anthropocene that is non-systemic and non-normative.

From Zylinska’s minimal approach to Claire Colebrook’s provocations of excess in the guise of counter-Anthropocenes and the notion of indifference, how feminist theorists complicate of the notion of the Anthropocene has been shown to take many forms. Pushing the consequences of the Anthropocene to their extremes, Colebrook’s writing on Anthropocene ‘counter-factuals’ aims to break through the patterns of thought that are the basis of a narrow interpretation of the Anthropocene. Where Braidotti, Haraway, and Zylinska took to an affirmative approach of the Anthropocene, Colebrook rather appears to be more critical in the ways in which she turns to extremes like extinction. Ultimately, however, her work shows a similar aim in that she deconstructs and subverts binary systems and patterns of thought that think via stereotypes.

The threading of feminist thought through narratives does not stop here. Even though these four thinkers have shared their visions of more complex Anthropocenes and challenged a narrow conception of this new era, approaching the Anthropocene through narrative would not be complete without an engagement with how feminist writers of speculative fiction use their narratives to approach the theoretical aspects of the Anthropocene. Part Two, “The Fiction of Anthropocene Worlds. Thinking the Anthropocene Through Feminist Speculative Fiction”, traced the threading of thinking the Anthropocene through narrative even further. Reading Margaret Atwood’s *MaddAddam Trilogy* and Jeanette Winterson’s *The Stone Gods*, what has come to the fore is that their narratives rethink the Anthropocene as a concept. In Atwood’s trilogy, the Anthropocene moves from an era negatively explained in terms of destruction, to a world that is learning how to come to terms with what has happened to Earth and the loss of humanity’s dominance over it. As a result of the stories that newly formed communities on a post-Anthropocene planet tell, the notion of the Anthropocene can be thought of as more than just a negative iteration. Because of the impact of man-induced change, new relationships that breach the boundaries of human/earth and human/nonhuman are being formed. The *MaddAddam Trilogy* proposes a post-Anthropocene future that is not only grim, but attests to the resilience of life and an idea that even though humanity might lose its singular influence, all is not lost.

Winterson's *The Stone Gods* adds to this hopeful engagement with the Anthropocene. Through iterative storylines and recurring worlds that are dealing with the consequences of human influence, the Anthropocene is approached as an always/already multiple epoch. Calling forth a minimal, quantum and indifferent approach to the Anthropocene, Winterson's many worlds approach the Anthropocene as web with many threaded narratives. Where Braidotti, Haraway, Colebrook and Zylinska analysed the Anthropocene via the notion of narrative, Winterson's narratives practice the theories they formulated. In all, *The Stone Gods* is a far-reaching reimagination of the Anthropocene through narrative. One that incorporates many facets of both alternative theories and fictions of feminist writing.

As bell hooks asserts, "to critique sexist images without offering alternatives is an incomplete intervention. Critique in and of itself does not lead to change" (hooks 35). The feminist writers of fiction and theory that have been the focus of this thesis, follow hooks' warning to always provide alternatives in their attempts to change a narrow understanding of the Anthropocene. Their alternative theories, alternative stories, alternative worlds and alternative epochs change the Anthropocene and open the binary systems that it was thought upon. The Anthropocene thought from a feminist materialist and speculative perspective is therefore not just one era that tells one story, but always tells many stories of many possible Anthropocenes.

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