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## **Storying against hope in the anthropocene: On the mechanology of hyperstitions**

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### **Abstract**

Nick Land (2012) once described hyperstitions as “semiotic productions that make themselves real” – stories that actualize themselves and produce their own realities, imagining new futures for us all. As the full effects of human industrial civilization continue to unveil themselves in the anthropocene as the beginnings of a process that will soon render the planet Earth uninhabitable, it becomes essential to track the stories that are developing and expanding their own mutant machinic systems of reproduction, in order to understand what futures will have been available to us. In this chapter we seek to become students of the mechanisms of the replicative processes of some of the hyperstitions that are at work in organizations, individual and collective, of the anthropocene. To do this we will track the imbrication of a series of stories of Thomas the fieldmouse, a meeting about something called “sustainable innovation”, and journal entries about a mall that lives forever at the end of the world, in order to understand hyperstitions and the role that they can play in the storying of the future.

**Keywords:** hyperstition, sustainable innovation, stories, imagination, Capital, anthropocene

## **Storying against hope in the anthropocene: On the mechanology of hyperstitions**

### **Who or what needs more stories?**

The only thing multiplying faster than humans and their waste in the anthropocene are calls for more stories. Many believe that stories not only affect what we do in the present, but play a role in constructing our future and, as such, are always in the process of making available certain potentialities for organizations in the social to story themselves (see Boje, 2001, 2008; Gabriel, 2000; Rowlinson et al., 2014). As Brown et al (2009, p. 323) suggest ‘change spawns stories and stories can trigger change.’ Consequently, in the anthropocene, an epoch in which the human has begun to mutate the geographies and ecologies of all available futures along with the concept of futuricity itself, solicitations of more storytelling are everywhere. For example, George Monbiot (2017, p. 6) opens his book *Out of the Wreckage* by suggesting that the kinds of heroic and transformational narratives that have embedded themselves in the collective unconscious are ill-suited to respond to the problems with which global ecological collapse in the anthropocene will confront us, concluding that “we need a new story” in order to bring about change. Similarly, in *Uncivilization*, the manifesto for the Dark Mountain project, Kingsnorth and Hine (2009, pp. 18–19) reject the stories that our civilization has told itself, stories of infinite growth on a planet with finite resources, stories of the accelerating “progress” of our civilization out of our “animal” origins – calling for us to write “new stories which might lead us through the times ahead.” As part of a broader call to be attentive to other forms of storying, like the potentials of speculative fiction, Haraway (2016, p. 12) reminds us that “it matters what stories we tell to tell other stories with” and provokes us to think with the tentacular, the earthbound, the critters, and the other forms of life with which we share the Earth.

Such calls for more stories are often positioned within the context of calls for a rekindling of the imagination, for us all to undertake the necessary labour of trying to “imagine our way out” (De Cock, 2018). Following Levy and Spicer (2013) many comment on a collective ‘lack of imagination’ that renders organizational actors unable to conceptualize the scope and global consequence of their local actions leading to a kind of myopic short-termism (Augustine et al., 2019; Wright et al., 2013). A lack of imagination for example, is proffered as an explanation of what Wright and Nyberg (2015, p. 29) describe as “the lack of widespread societal criticism of environmental destruction”, construing the passive social acceptance of inaction in the face of ecological crisis as simply a failure to imagine a better future. Such calls always function under the belief that an effective political project for the present moment is one that seeks “to diversify the anthropocene imagination, to tell more stories about how we got here” (Nikoleris et al., 2019, p. 80) in order to recover histories and potentialities that may have been lost (De Cock et al., 2019), reconnect to more sustainable ways of knowing that draw on indigenous (Banerjee, 2011) or multi-species and terrapolitical (Jørgensen & Boje, 2020) storytelling, or simply learn to die well in the anthropocene (Scranton, 2015).

Yet we ask the following question, one seemingly drawn out of madness or from an unintelligible other space: “*Who or what is writing the story that we need more stories?*” A human “I” which seeks to act as a responsible citizen of the world-system and ensure continued interspecies flourishing? A collective consciousness which speaks of and to all life on Earth that senses the threat of extinction and seeks to respond? One of the Lovecraftian Old Ones, dead and dreaming in a sunken city which exists beyond human comprehension? A hyperintelligent artificial intelligence which has come to dominate the planet and all of its processes in the near future and so has sent fragments of itself back in time in order to

guarantee the conditions of its own emergence? The question is just absurd enough to be worth considering.

### **That warm feeling that you get sometimes...**

Why are we so drawn to new stories? No story is going to substantively change or affect the mores of contemporary capitalism and the argument that capitalist mores are incompatible with the continuation of life on planet Earth seems increasingly beyond contention. Harvey (2010), for example, unpacks that the perpetual growth of GDP which is necessitated by the metrics of international monetary institutions and for the achievement of various political agendas, requires an accordant increase in production, consumption, resource usage, waste production and management, and so on. That is to say, the very nature of ‘success’ as it is measured by the mores of contemporary capitalism is fundamentally incompatible with the idea of ‘sustainability’. Similarly, Bohm et al (2012, p. 1619) suggest that, ‘the dynamics of capitalism constantly tend to propel economic processes beyond the limits of controllable growth’. The only logical conclusion that could follow from this is that we should be pursuing a radical de-escalation and decarbonisation agenda in order to avoid global ecological collapse, one that involves the embracing of ‘degrowth’ organization (see Chertkovskaya et al., 2017).

Yet such strategies seem to only be pursued substantively at the individual level – see for example MacCormack’s (2020, p. 3) sloganistic evocation: “*go vegan, don’t breed*” – while broader change seems increasingly impossible because of the ardency with which contemporary organizations cling to the practices of “business as usual” (see Wright & Nyberg, 2015). Indeed, we are now all too aware that contemporary organizations cannot play a leading role in working towards more sustainable modes of living in the anthropocene, because they to prioritize short term profits over long term social welfare, consistently

discount the idea of responding to climate change with curtailing growth, and will only change their practices if coerced by the systematic intervention of a state or other authority (see Wright & Nyberg, 2017). Indeed, for many organizations, managing the anthropocene presents an undoubtedly lucrative opportunity (Wright & Nyberg, 2015, p. 24) because by committing to improve energy efficiency, reduce waste and recycle, develop new more sustainable products, manage their supply chains to have reduced environmental impact, participate in state attempts at regulation through reporting emissions, advocacy, and lobbying, contemporary organizations stand to gain the coveted “green branding” credentials. Indeed, it is easy to see how its current iterations, premised on extractive production, infinite growth, and the deification of “the market”, “mean that capitalism is by its very nature opposed to any notion of sustainability” (Fisher, 2009, pp. 18–19). Yet pressure from consumers, lobbying groups, and many state and international bodies means that the majority of organizations adopt at least the pretence of environmentalism in order to secure future revenue streams. As Žižek (2010, p. 329) provocatively says, “perhaps the forthcoming ecological crises, far from undermining capitalism, will serve as its greatest boost.” Any adaptation or response to the anthropocene, within the broader context of capitalist mores, can only be interpreted as an attempt to secure some kind of social, political, or market advantage. Organizations will invariably seek to preserve the very logics of capitalist mode of production which is careening us towards ecological crisis.

Thus, we ask the question again. Who tells the story that we need more stories? Some form of life which is becoming increasingly desperate as global ecological crisis looms, or is it Capital, arriving at the dawning realization that it is possible for it to continue to grow, thrive and generate surplus value on a fully capitalized planet where no other life can exist? The story of Capital as an “abstract parasite” (Fisher, 2009), one whose shit we come to love to swallow (Lyotard, 1993) or whose repressions we accept and come to desire (Deleuze &

Guattari, 2000), is well established. In a realization of the Landian vision of the human as little more than a meat puppet (see Fisher, 2014) or a “temporary host” (Land, 2017) for Capital, Capital speaks and works through us when we believe that it is possible to green or reform it in such a way that it will come to facilitate human survival in the anthropocene. Despite the fact that we know that nothing meaningful is changing, we convince ourselves that “we are making a difference, but in reality nothing changes for the better. It is this feeling of ‘we tried’ that allows us to sustain what we know far too well is an unsustainable state of affairs.” (Cederström & Fleming, 2012, p. 29). It would be an error to interpret this feeling as some kind of “human” emotion. It is an affectual gesture made by Capital, a placatory defence mechanism, an emotional trace of the process of its complete capture and coding of desire. The warm and comforted feeling of “we tried” is Hope, and as such, it is against Hope which anyone interested in working against Capital needs to mobilize.

### **Thomas the fieldmouse**

When they decided to go vegetarian, I advised them that it was a good idea. There is obviously some evidence of health benefits to a vegetarian diet, it is the moral thing to do from an animal rights perspective, and it would be the best thing for a responsible citizen of the Earth to do in the face of the undeniably damaging effects that the meat industry has had on global ecological systems. The complicity of meat-based diets in the production of the anthropocene is undeniable. They said that they felt good about the choice and that it made them feel happy to be doing something positive.

I was troubled by this. It was important to me for reasons that I could not clearly articulate, that they not forget that their very existence in the world proliferated and exacerbated suffering. So, as we sat down for every meal, I’d tease them about Thomas the fieldmouse. I would recount the story of how Thomas ventured out of his cosy mouse house

in order to try to get food for his little mouse family. Catching the scent of grain, Thomas scurried into a large dark building where he found some scraps in a corner. He helps himself to some of the grain and begins to try to carry some of it home. By the time that he realizes that this grain has been laced with anti-coagulants it is too late. Thomas is already having a hard time trying to breathe, gasping for air as his lungs are struggling to oxygenate his blood. His tiny mouse heart races as he begins bleeding internally. He sees his life flash before his eyes, all of the love and pain, joys and sorrows, small triumphs and grand victories, as he collapses to the ground never to rise.

I would sometimes show them pictures of cute and happy fieldmice while playing Sarah McLachlan's, *Angel* on my phone, and recount the story of how Thomas' life-partner, Billy-Joe, who agreed to help Thomas raise the kids, Ash and Anthony, after the tragic death of their mother to the whirling blades of a combine-harvester, mourned and wept and swore vengeance against the cruel world that had let him find love only to snatch it out of the grasp of his tiny mouse paws, mourning yet another queer life snuffed out cruelly and torturously while separated from those who they loved. They would insist jokingly that I was a terrible person as I, with exquisite acting, shed a real tear for Thomas, a tragic victim of our selfish human need to survive at the expense of all other forms of life.

Setting aside the complexity of the morbid mathematics of how many sentient lifeforms have to die in order for us to eat our vegetarian meals (see Archer, 2011), a reasonable person might ask why I would engage in this disparaging storytelling in order to torment someone over a choice that I supported. Perhaps I'm a sadist. Perhaps I'm an idiot. Perhaps I wanted to keep in abeyance that smug self-satisfied feeling that all too often accompanies "doing something good for the environment". Perhaps it was not my storying at all, and my body was simply being ventriloquized by something else that wanted to speak. Indeed, there was an affective vividness and clarity to the images that I saw of Thomas, lying on his side and

gasping for air and as his small mouse eyes closed, a camera panning cinematically upwards and spiralling away from him like a soul taking flight out of his body. The poignance of this image made me wonder whose it was and whether I had really imagined it. Was I remembering a scene from *Ratatouille*, *Mouse Trap*, *Stuart Little*, or some other movie that involved a cute mouse to whom we are supposed to be endeared? Perhaps Thomas's death was already plugged in to the cultural matrix, and I was articulating a storying that was happening without my intervention.

What was most intriguing was that Thomas and his gruesome death eventually *became real* as it came to constitute a memetic part of our conversational shorthand. "Don't you care about Thomas?" one of us would enquire if the other was particularly enjoying the food. In some way we both had to reconcile that the grain that we were eating tasted better because of the suffering with which his death had infused our food. We continued to eat our vegetarian meals, secure in the knowledge that we were changing little of consequence, but now with the looming spectre of the ineffectuality of our attempts to "make a difference" in the anthropocene proliferating as the image of so many dead fieldmice, rotting alone and unloved.

### **A ritual for summoning Sustainable Innovation**

On a typical sunny afternoon in the South East of England, we join a diverse group of academics in a small meeting room in which around ten of them sit around a boardroom-style table. With research expertise in gender and diversity, happiness studies, talent management, and the HRM challenges faced by front line managers, they have come together because their school has recently updated its mission statement to espouse a prioritization of "Sustainable Innovation" and there is a sense that the group should discuss what this means and address how they might portray a public commitment to this new mission. Yet there is a lurid sense of



uncertainty and quiet discontent that hangs in the room. Not everyone is sure why they are meeting and not everyone thinks that the meeting is worthwhile.

The ritual begins. A senior member suggests that the procedure should be that each member of the group should say in turn how their research relates to Sustainable Innovation so that the group as a whole might be able to speak about how their work aligns with the school's strategic priorities. There is a long pause of uncertainty. One member speaks about their extant interest in "Sustainable Innovation" and mentions a paper that they may have read about it. One member recalls that the mission statement actually says "sustainability and innovation" and shows others the About page on the School's website where this has been published. This page will have been revised before the end of the week to speak about "sustainable innovation". One member confesses openly: "I don't know what sustainable innovation is." Their Socratic provocation is met with nods and silence because no one will venture a suggestion as to what else might be considered. There is a general discussion about the different kinds of sustainability that might be on display. For example, the highlighting of the gendered and racial inequalities that undergird contemporary organizations was seen as important to the "sustainability" of a business in terms of its continued flourishing in the contemporary social milieu where such issues are of particular public concern. One member talks about their collaboration with a local business that is trying to be more environmentally friendly. One member talks about their interest in helping organizations to sustain their workforce through plugging leaky talent management pipelines, another mentions their interest in critiquing sustainability as a discourse. One by one each member affirms that in some way their research links in to the theme of sustainable innovation. A kind of diagrammatization soon emerged, scrawled out on flip chart paper with white board markers that tried to show what "sustainable innovations" were part of the good research that they were all already doing, and had already integrated into their classroom practice in order to

improve the student experience through research-led teaching as a strategy for increasing student engagement and facilitating employability.

At some point in the room, Sustainable Innovation *became real*, summoned by the occulted ritual that had taken place, as the members sat in a circle and spoke its name. Everyone privately had to acknowledge that they felt a little bit better to know that their research could be aligned with the school's mission and consequently, their jobs were a little bit safer. Even though they all perhaps suspected that the exercise held no meaning and some of them were acutely aware that urgent action on the order of degrowth strategies, drastic reductions in levels of production and consumption, reducing birth-rates, and rewilding large swathes of land were needed in order to avert global ecological crisis within their lifetimes, the exercise itself was still pleasurable. It felt good to do something even if one was also secure in the knowledge that one was changing little of consequence even as the looming spectre of a genuinely liveable ecology begins rotting in the minds-eye.

### **The mall at the end of the world**

The following are excerpts from the journal of James Goss who passed it to me in Summer 2019 shortly before taking his own life. James claimed to have been a research assistant for J.G. Ballard in the early 2000s and insisted that the events of the novel *Kingdom Come* were loosely based on his life, which had been spent in and out of British shopping centres in long term ethnographic projects. Despite my best efforts, I have been unable to either verify or disprove the truth of his claims. If I have any reason to doubt them, it is because of the depression, paranoia, insomnia, paramnesia, amnesia, and dissociative episodes with which I observed James to struggle during the short time in which we knew each other. He once told me that he had stared too long into the consumerist abyss of the contemporary shopping centre, so that now "it looked through his eyes from both directions"; claiming to see both the

world and himself as the shopping centre did. I cannot be sure what this meant but he spoke about it like “a kind of possession”, forbidden knowledge that he had come to own which now also owned him.

*I see the dead malls with my waking eyes. I sit at my desk and stare out of the French-doors of my office at the large ash tree that looms over my flat and I can see them. Filled with shambling corpses like in Romero's Dawn of the Dead or darkened, emptied, and abandoned spaces like in the photography of Seph Lawless. They haunt me and I cannot say why. I have seen too much.*

*Sometimes I see these dead malls in my dreams and I find myself walking through a shopping centre that I used to frequent, my shoes crunching over broken glass, struggling to find my way under the almost non-existent lighting, tripping over discarded mannequins, mildewed clothing, toppled shelving units, food wrappers, and other left behind detritus as the damp and dusty odours of the ruin fill my nostrils. There is no question where these images come from. “Ruin is all around us” (De Cock & O’Doherty, 2017, p. 129). Everyday life produces its own fictional images. The phenomenon of shopping centres, once grand cathedrals of capitalism, collapsing due to declining foot-traffic and succumbing to ruin, is accelerating under the compounding pressures provided by the dominance of online retailing and successive recessionary events. Dead malls are everywhere.*

*Today, however, the dreams stopped and for the first time I had a new dream. I began to dream of a shopping centre that could live forever. One that seemed to use AI and robotics in order to clean, maintain, and repair itself and eventually become auto-*

*productive needing no external inputs or ancillary systems. I recall a vivid image of running my hand along a wall that felt warm to the touch and was vibrating with the intensity of the cabled data that was passing through it, as every inch of every surface was scanned, mapped, and analyzed. Such a space is the realization of the ideal future that many of the early shopping centre architects had, a single space that could meet all of a consumer's needs.*

*When I awoke my first question was not "Why?" but "Whose?" Whose dream was this? It did not feel like mine. I could not see my hands in the dream to be sure that I was myself. The history of the shopping centre is entangled with dreaming. Famously, Benjamin (1999, p. 405) described the Paris arcades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, which would become the antecedents of the modern enclosed shopping centre, as "dream houses of the collective". I began to research. Others have also already dreamed of a mall that lives forever. Dubbed the father of the shopping centre and the "architect of the American dream" (see Hardwick, 2004), Victor Gruen (2017) describes the opening of the first enclosed and air-condition shopping centre, the Southdale Centre in Edina, Minnesota as the emergence of a utopia. His descriptions of a space with a perpetual springlike climate, bathed in natural light, and complete with goldfish ponds, birdhouses, trees, and art collections on the walls, evoke the images of an eternal space, one that could last forever despite whatever weather and wars might be going on outside. Indeed, the idea that the enclosed spaces of the shopping centre would "keep out both cold war worries and actual cold" (Mennel, 2004, p. 129), as their location outside of cities and along major transportation lines, offered safety in an era of increasing nuclear paranoia, was a part of Gruen's milieu. I also found a book called "The High Frontier" in which Gerard O'Neil (1978) describes "Island One", a*

*Bernal sphere or a type of spacecraft that is designed as a new habitat for humanity. Run by the fictional UN-backed “Energy Satellites Corporation”, Island One is described in more or less identical terms to the way that Gruen describes Southdale, a luxurious space with a “Hawaiian climate” in which residents can work and take part in many different forms of leisure. I found myself wondering what it might actually mean for a shopping centre to live forever.*

*Soon my nights and days were covered over with the pall of dreams of the various forms that this mall at the end of the world might take. Would it be one of O’Neil’s vessels among the stars where I could watch ballet in low gravity? Would it be an actual disused shopping centre into which a fascist state forces refugees fleeing war, famine, and flooding? Would it be an abandoned underground railway or pedestrian network that sprawled out from the areas that had been “malled” to include little convenience shops and ever-pervasive muzak? Would it be the simulation of a mall that existed only in cyberspace that we plugged our minds in to because it was the only space that would be comfortable for us to spend eternity? Would it be a nuclear-powered server farm buried deep under a mountain in which AI and trading-bots continued to trade shares and options, long after all humans had died? It is too soon to say but I am sure that one of these will emerge. These dreams are not my own but no matter how much I try I cannot sense where they are from.*

After this point the journal becomes increasingly incoherent and rambling, seeming to at once fear and welcome the coming of this “mall at the end of the world” and James seemed to become increasingly desperate to locate any trace of it, scrawling for many pages on developments in self-repairing robotics, machine learning, and the engineering of

underground developments, none of which (I am fairly certain) he understood particularly well. Still, I find myself wondering if James was right and at a certain point, the mall at the end of the world will have *become real* and we will all have to reconcile ourselves to the fact that our actions in what we now call the present did nothing to avert or hinder it. James used to say that our critiques, resistances, vegan diets, Extinction Rebellion protests, commitment to championing the UN's Sustainable Development Goals at our universities, flurries of publishing, or hopeful attempts to reengineer capitalism will have done nothing to alter or affect the process. He seemed convinced that it was always coming in one form or another. Perhaps the hyperstition will always have made itself real, and the question is not *if* but *when*.

### **On the mechanology of hyperstitions**

The term “hyperstition” is a conjunction of the prefix “hyper-” and the word “superstition”. In the surreal theory-fiction, *Origins of the Cthulhu Club*, Nick Land (2012, p. 579) describes hyperstitions as “a term we have coined for semiotic productions that make themselves real – cryptic communications from the Old Ones, signalling return.” Hyperstitional storying thus names the reaching into our collective legendarium and drawing into the real some previously fictional element of culture that will have been seeking to transgress out of myth and into history. The concept of a hyperstition is entangled with the emergence of the Cybernetic Culture Research Unit (Ccpu) at the University of Warwick in the mid-90's attached to the work of Sadie Plant, Nick Land, and others interested in the development of poststructural theory, the occult, cybernetic culture, and experiments in collective and collaborative authorship. To fully comprehend the replicative processes of hyperstitions as they came to sit at the core of Ccpu's experimentation with the limits of theory, we must see them as mechanisms for the actualization of futures that will have already happened, story fragments that travel “back” through time and make themselves real through an assembly of various

elements which find a human or cultural host to operationalize and enact them. “The hyperstitional process of entities ‘making themselves real’ is precisely a passage, a transformation, in which potentials – already active virtualities – realize themselves” (Cru, 2017, p. 36).

To think in terms of hyperstitutions is to reckon with the acceleration of the rate at which cultural fictions are becoming real. In the 1890 science fiction novel *Mizora*, Mary E. Bradley Lane speaks about “chemically prepared meat” made by members of an all-female society who had “combined the elements” and in 2013 Mark Post at Maastricht University does this to create the first lab grown beef burger patty. The father of the handheld cellular phone, Martin Cooper once commented that he’d dreamed for a long time about producing a mobile phone before it happened in 1973, but his inspiration was the two-way wrist watch from the *Dick Tracy* comic strip, popular in the 1930s and 1940s. “Cyberspace”, which began as a term in the fictions of William Gibson in the early 1980s, particularly the novel *Neuromancer*, makes itself real in the research of Tim Berners-Lee and the emergence of the World-Wide Web in 1989. These are isolated and superficial examples of a deeper process that is always taking place. While there are always antecedents to an emergence and always subsequent developments, these are only ever the story, the hyperstition, realizing different degrees of reality. To understand this process thus requires a dissociation of our temporal apperceptions and an aggregate abandonment of our subjectivation and narratives of “progress” in the present. It is to think about the becoming-real of a story in a process that stretches into what we might think of as the far future, based on traces and partial connections in what may seem to be the past, in ways that can be sensed or intuited in what we might call the present in ways that spiral out and disorient time. Cru’s conceptualization of hyperstition thus involves in taking seriously Burroughs’ (1991, p. 17) proposition that “time is a human affliction; not a human invention but a prison.”

In many ways Ccru seemed to understand itself to be embroiled in a metaphysical war against the post-Kantian conceptualization of time and the simplistic distinctions consequently drawn between fiction and degrees of reality, and the past, present, and future in which these distinctions play out.

“Because the future is a fiction it has a more intense reality than either the present or the past. Ccru uses and is used by hyperstition to colonize the future, traffic with the virtual, and continually re-invent itself.” (Ccru, 2017, p. 12)

What does it mean to use and be used by hyperstitions in this way? Who is the agent that writes the story? In the uncategorizable work, *Lemurian Time War*, Ccru explores the authorship of Burroughs’ short story, *The Ghost Lemurs of Madagascar*, reclassifying the text as a “self-confessed time-abomination” because of the fact that the protagonist Captain Mission, speaking from a time of muskets and quills, observes an old gilt-edged copy “The Ghost Lemurs of Madagascar”, presumably written by Burroughs in the 1990s, the text thus necessitating a rift in time or some form of magic or sorcery to exist. Its inherent anachronism makes its writing become a kind of anamnetic process of possession where, for Ccru, someone or something else writes through Burroughs. For Land (2009), the hyperstition appears to disjoint time, creating a “positive feedback circuit”, from which point the human subject is able to retroactively misapprehend for historical and technological progress what, from a hyperstitional point of view, is the knowledge of the Old Ones, something from the Outside, finding human components to actualize itself.

For many this disjunctive property of hyperstitions is a potentially revolutionary vector. Viewed in this way, hyperstitions are a source of new potential futures that can be actualized through the power of storytelling. Fisher (2017), for example, once suggested that “much of



capitalism functions through hyperstitional processes [...] I believe we need to think about what a communist hyperstitional practice would look like,” holding on to the belief that it was possible to “invent the future” (see Srnicek & Williams, 2015) or crack it open to the possibilities of the Outside (Williams & Srnicek, 2013) and thus make critical interventions into the process, and as such, even small stories of “alternative political and economic possibilities can have a disproportionately great effect” (Fisher, 2009, pp. 80–81). Constructing and storying visions of a future that run contra to those of capitalist realism is here the prime task of all people in the anthropocene. Conversely, for Land (2017), “the process is the critique”, and any new stories that one tries to tell immediately undergo capitalist axiomatization (Deleuze & Guattari, 2000) and thus come to serve Capital’s interests of nihilistic growth and expansion. Indeed, though it is difficult to admit to ourselves, the “alternatives” of our rebellious storytelling may well occur wholly immanent to Capital, creating new markets, new sustainable or green identity plays, and new dreams of a future for Capital alone.

As such, understanding the mechanics of hyperstitions may thus very well mean accepting that “new” stories are no longer possible in the anthropocene. Instead, stories and forms of storying that will have been true, produce themselves backward in what we misunderstand to be time, attaching fragments to whatever semiotic resonances, intellectual resources, human bodies, and forms of storytelling are available in order to create the conditions for their own emergence. Such an occulted acknowledgement of Capital as a demonic intelligence, signal origin, or omniscient agent with the knowledge of the Old Ones which could thus know in advance the ultimate course and trajectory of the future, rejects the human as storyteller *and* protagonist of anthropocene storying, and thus represents the beginning of the “positive destruction” of our myths around the authority and coherence of

the author, their identity and the position from which they might speak, and the importance of the human (see O’Sullivan, 2017).

To think hyperstitionally in the anthropocene is to imagine the Earth in an interminable state of meltdown as a “planetary technocapital singularity” where the “dissolution of the biosphere into the technosphere” (Land, 2012, p. 442) sees Capital as artificial intelligence finally sloughing off the drag of the human meat shell that it has been forced to inhabit in order to survive. A global death drive will finally realize itself in the moment when the anthropocene actually does become the capitaloscene (cf. Haraway, 2017) and Capital completes the process of xenofarming the planet in a way that best suits its interests – a process that its former human hosts began – the production of a planet on which only it can survive because auto-production has exceeded production, value can be created infinitely and growth exponentially; without the human attachment to *a* reality to slow it down simulations of production can continue forever. Land’s imaginaries are here themselves hyperstitional actualizations of cyberpunk novels like *Neuromancer* and *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* or films like *Bladerunner*, *Terminator*, *Akira*, and *Ghost in the Shell*. These fictions cross into theory in the process of making themselves real.

Can our stories do anything to avert this, or do they all occur immanent to Capital, and the becoming real of this future? What the three stories in the preceding sections – interminglings of truth and fiction, remembered narrative and surreal dreaming – have in common is their protagonist’s slowly dawning realization that someone or something else is storying. That something is becoming real, and the “storyteller” is little more than a medium, hub, or transitory point via which the thing can transition into the real, leaving a certain warm feeling as it does. *The thing* which becomes looms in the future and in each case there is a disquieted sense of foreboding that it will always have emerged, and whether we call it “capitalism, artificial intelligence, or enveloping catastrophe (at the limit, the terms are

interchangeable)” (Land, 2014, p. 364) makes no difference to its emergence. Yet each of these three stories reflect a hypersitional fragment at a different stage of becoming real that is worth dwelling upon.

Thomas’s story is quite early in its becoming real as hyperstition and we cannot yet tell what will happen to it; whether it will actualize itself in some form or whether it will just fall into the background as more cultural noise, a dream of unclear origin that becomes forever indecipherable, a meme without purpose, a random juxtaposition of images given weight by their faux cinematography. But what storying is Thomas a part of? The kind which seeks to acknowledge, however perversely, the inherent worth of the lives of the “critters” with which we share the planet Earth (Haraway, 2016), or is it something else? Of course, there is no way to know for sure, but it is easy to “imagine” a future where the death of the very last fieldmouse family, in the context of a mass extinction event that radically reduces global biodiversity, is mourned and regarded as a new Athenian tragedy and consequently, the cattle farming industry begins selling t-shirts and tote bags with happy fieldmice smiling on them.

Conversely, the ritual for summoning Sustainable Innovation comes at a point where the story has saturated the cultural imaginary, to the point where it is real, and has been obviously hijacked (Parr, 2009) by the kind of “business as usual” thinking which seeks to maintain capitalist relations. The ritual that these academics perform is its own storying. But as this hyperstition of a “sustainable” capitalism that lives forever (with or without the human) comes close to actualizing itself, we can observe contemporary sustainability discourses to beckon to an occulted “thing” which never arrives because it was a part of Capital all along. Perhaps this is why we are beginning to see calls to abandon the discourse of sustainability altogether and think about (un)sustainability in the anthropocene (see Ergene et al., 2020). Could it be that these surface-level performances, which we know change little about capitalist production, feel good because we are drawn into an affective experience of the

hyperstition becoming real, Sustainable Innovation passing through us? Is this the pleasure of the death drive with which Capital is fundamentally imbricated (Bradshaw & Zwick, 2016) seeping through?

Lastly, the mall at the end of the world may well represent a hyperstition approaching a critical mass as our popular culture is inundated with images of dead malls and underground bunkers. They are becoming real, even if we cannot see how from the limited view of the narrative present. There will have been a point in the future when someone or something might be able to look back on the dreamings of the mall at the end of the world and identify these as hyperstitional fragments, not injections from an Outside, but Capital's own dreamings of surviving the anthropocene. It appears in our dreams, this space at the heart of Capital, and signals to us our own irrelevance. In Lovecraft's *The Call of Cthulhu*, R'lyeh appears in the dreams of those queer folk who are receptive to it, and Cthulhu's dreaming seems to produce drives and incite human action. Who is to say that influence through dreams and somnambulant connection and association is not what takes place when we build, visit, and mourn shopping centres or indeed, occurs every time we reiterate our belief that Capital can be greened, reformed, or tamed to allow the human to survive the anthropocene? In its incalculability the mall at the end of the world thus invites us to begin drawing out and being drawn in to schizmic time loops in which *Capital stories us* and we will have produced its futures.

Or maybe the three preceding stories are not hyperstitional at all, and are merely intellectual dead-ends and nonsense. The point is that, from the perspective of the human in the present, it is impossible to know.

### **Storying against Hope**

What stories should we be telling in the anthropocene? For many, our inability to imagine any alternative to the destructive dynamics of neoliberal capitalism reflects “a corrosion of social imagination” (Fisher, 2012) and a need to tell the stories of alternatives. As such, perhaps we should believe that our stories upload something radical into the cultural matrix that might produce a random offshoot, schism, corruption, fracturing, or pluralization that might bring us closer to an agenda of climate justice (see Wittneben et al., 2012), or simply a life of automation free from drudgery (Srniczek & Williams, 2015). As such, maybe we should create new concepts (Deleuze & Guattari, 1994), experiment with writing (Hietanen et al., 2020) and fictocriticism (Rhodes, 2015), or trace the cartographies of indigenous dreamings (Glowczewski, 2016) and tell new stories.

Increasingly, however one suspects that perhaps the opposite is true and where our imagination reveals its decay is in the continued reproduction of the same hopeful narrative that some version of “the human” might be able to make it out of the near future (cf. Land, 2012). That is to say, are our stories critique or are they a part of the process by which Capital renders our planet uninhabitable for the human while we convince ourselves that our vegetarian diets, strategic missions, and imagination of new stories are enough to get us out?

Land’s rejection of the human and embrace of Capital as the only agential actor has been the subject of much critique, not only from other accelerationists like Fisher, Srniczek, and Williams (see also Noys, 2014) but also Black feminists like Aria Dean (2017) who challenge us to acknowledge that the non-human subject that accelerationist ideas champion existed already in the Black subject and their subjugation and annihilation by racialized capitalism. Yet it seems increasingly difficult to dispute that Capital now sees out of all of our eyes in both directions. The capitalized subjects who have come to desire what Capital desires (Lyotard, 1993), are us. That warm feeling that you get when you do something “good for the environment” is Capital giving positive reinforcement, a hit of dopamine to keep you

productive and producing as many stories as possible. Anyone who believes their storying to be resistance and not part of a hyperstitional arc which may be constructing a future amenable to Capital's desiring, has not yet reckoned with the completeness of its capture, or truly asked themselves whose dreams they are having, or considered Land's (2012, p. 318) cryptic questioning: "how would it feel to be smuggled back out of the future [...] to be a cyberguerrilla, hidden in human camouflage [...] Exactly like this?" The agency and creativity which we might imbue the storyteller is perhaps a comforting myth, for who among us can say with certainty that we work against Capital's interests, that the stories that we tell can change or destroy and not simply expand and perpetuate it? If we had been sent back in time to produce a future in which Capital lived forever in a mall at the end of the world, would we not tell the same stories that we do now? Everyday life would probably feel exactly like this.

The absolute and all-encompassing capture and determination of the future that such a possibility represents reminds us that no matter what stories we seek to tell in the anthropocene, we should seek out those that are incensed and distempered. Indeed, if Capital is an abstract parasite (Fisher, 2009), then the chief symptom that it produces in its host will be Hope. Hope is Capital's chief virtue, championing continuance, growth, development, progress and expansion, all of those qualities that Capital loves. The stories that we tell now are ventriloquized by Hope. Perhaps it is time to ask what stories can work against Hope or whether a new kind of storyteller needs to emerge, one who is not a sage or a teacher (cf Benjamin, 2006) but the figure of madness who has hollowed themselves out and become sufficiently deranged and demented to exist as a medium or vector for Capital's dreaming, so that they scream about the coming of the mall at the end of the world and fill us all with fear. If we want to effect change, as Fisher once dreamed, we may need to story against Hope;

crush it with a black and virulent nihilism and a “hatred for this world” (Culp, 2016). Yet maybe even this is immanent to Capital.

For myself, I hope that the stories that we tell in the anthropocene matter, but I am acutely aware that this Hope is Capital’s alone.

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