Annihilating the Cartesian Divide: Finding the Inhuman in

*Annihilation* by Jeff Vandermeer

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Abstract

As posthumanist discourse attempts reposition the human as one of many subjects in relation to ecologies and other inhuman agencies, doing away with a Cartesian human exceptionalism is one of the key problems. From Haraway’s naturecultures, positing human culture as one of many, to Colebrook’s discussions of inhuman agencies, what ‘the human’ means to us is the heart of this theoretical field. In this paper I engage with theories within the discourse and posit them against a dialogue with Annihilation by Jeff Vandermeer, as well as with the ideas of George Bataille on how the human separated herself from other animals and in doing so created what we call Humanity. The aim is to find inhuman agencies and bring to light how they act upon the human, but also how perceiving the inhuman is, as Bataille writes, closed to us. What we find through a process and concept of annihilation of Humanity with the human, brought forth from a reading of the Biologist’s relation to the lighthouse and the tower in the novel, is that even though we may be able to perceive the inhuman, we might be always already anthropocentric in this perception. I suggest a reversal of Haraway’s term; culturenatures, as a way to understand this anthropocentric perception, in that just as our culture is borne from nature, other naturecultures are closed to us.

Keywords: Annihilation; Bataille; Colebrook; Descartes; inhuman; natureculture; posthumanism
annihilation noun

\[\text{an-\,ni-\,hi-\,la\,-\,tion} \quad | \quad \text{ə-\,nī-\,ə-\,lā\,-\,shən} \\]

plural annihilations

1 : the state or fact of being completely destroyed or obliterated : the act of annihilating something or the state of being annihilated

2 physics : the combination of a particle and its antiparticle (such as an electron and a positron) that results in the subsequent total conversion of the particles into energy

Since Descartes, humanity has arguably worlded itself around (or in between) the dichotomy of Nature and Culture. What these concepts mean, however, is variable and often intangible. Culture, on one hand, is that which is created through the human which other animals are supposedly incapable of in different modes which can be summarized as artefacts or texts. Nature, on the other hand, is all else - defined in human text as ranging from the parochially subjugatable to the unaffectedly sublime. In these texts, humanity itself lives on the borderline of these two worlds, belonging to Culture only insofar as it worlds Culture as distinct from Nature. Nature, as a concept, is vast and potentially undefinable and acts, arguably, as a linguistic divider between human life and non-human, inhuman and geological agencies. This Cartesian divide, as we know, has come into question following advancements in the cognitive sciences, where the human mind becomes more equal to those of other animals. Hence, as Claire Colebrook writes, “no longer do we enslave ourselves to the notion of the autonomous, disembodied, affectless and world divorced subject,” (“Images” 20) or in other words, the validity Cartesianism as a worlding philosophy of that which we call (or have called) nature comes into question. The Cartesian divide in the broad sense might refer to the mind-body problem and hence the separation between the human and the inhuman (that is, all that is contained within the world as worlded by the human). For the purpose of this

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1 https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/annihilation
paper, I will primarily consider that latter separation; the philosophical removal of the human from the world, that is, the dividing of the human into what we might call Humanity, or its project of culture (in which this inhuman worlding is contained) from the nature (or ecology) of which she, as all life, belongs.

In *Annihilation* by Jeff VanderMeer, the Cartesian divide is blurred and mutated, and the relationship between human and non-human life becomes problematized. The novel follows a group of scientists who are tasked with venturing into a zone called Area X, a place where ecologies on both micro- and macro scales are not necessarily disrupted but acting in ways in which we might not expect them to. The narrator - named only by her profession, ‘the Biologist’ - is on the team as expert on ecological systems, and it is through her trained eyes that we are able to read the zone as familiar but uncanny. For the Biologist, who has studied and found beauty in several strange ecosystems in her fieldwork and personal experiences (43, 107), here finds life which for her defies explanation. Through the eyes and narrative of the Biologist, we see a boar which is tormented by something which she cannot rationally explain (16), an organic structure where words made from fungi grow on walls (23-25) and dolphins with human eyes (97). In the beginning of the narrative, these observations seem to frighten the Biologist as much as they do the rest of the team of scientists, but following an involuntary inhalation of spores from the words growing in the organic structure which she calls ‘the tower,’ she slowly begins to see a beauty in Area X. It is from this inhalation of organic words that much of the theory of this paper is borne; through the agency of this inhuman text (suggesting in itself a deconstruction of the Cartesian divide between the thinking and text-producing human and the object of nature) upon the object of the Biologist’s body (offering a deconstructive aspect of the Cartesian subject in that the Biologist has an objectifiable aspect upon which inhuman agencies can act) does she begin to undergo and observe a process of annihilation of this divide. I use the term annihilation here as both something which the Biologist finally physically undergoes as well as a concept to think through. That is to say, that through her experience in Area X, we see the Biologist - both as object and as subject - undergo a process which does not divide those two human aspects, nor suggests them as being part of an inherent duality, but rather that they are *one and the same*. In other words, we see through the Biologist’s experience how the Cartesian subject becomes annihilated with her bodily object - conceptually and literally.
This paper offers a reading of the harrowing yet beautiful mingling of that which we call nature with human culture. Of special interest is the allegorical suggestion of similarity between the lighthouse as container of cultural text or information, and the tunnel as container of organic or natural text or information, and how the Biologist’s reading of both locations equally as towers guides us to reconsider our own perception of the Cartesian divide. That is, contained within the lighthouse, the destination of the expedition, are stored “hundreds of journals” (105) written by previous expeditions which have ventured into this queer ecological zone. Or, for our purposes, the lighthouse, a place which is supposed to guide, illuminate and warn, is the resting grounds of texts produced by expeditions which have failed to conquer or understand the ecology of the area around it. Of further interest is the fact that by hiding the texts underneath the guiding light of the lighthouse, everything in Area X but those texts are prone to be illuminated. The tunnel, on the other hand, becomes a location which, arguably, acts in opposition to the lighthouse. That is, the tunnel seems to have been created by organical means, carved directly downwards in a spiral and, it is suggested, may actually be a living organism itself, at places giving off bioluminescence. Here we also find text, only it is, according to the Biologist, text which is made up of living organisms growing on the walls of the tunnel. What we find, then, is two places of illumination (both literally in the forms of bioluminescence and the torch of the lighthouse, and figuratively in the form of texts), one which spirals down into the ground and the other up from the ground, and yet to the Biologist, unlike all others in the expedition, the tunnel seems to be, just like the lighthouse is, a tower. I will speak more of what this reading by the Biologist of her environment might suggest for annihilating the Cartesian divide later in this essay.

Claire Colebrook has described this divide, in the face of advancements in the cognitive sciences, as a momentary “accidental lapse” in the humans understanding of her relation to the rest of the ecologies she is part of (“Images” 14). No matter how momentary or accidental, however, the notion is evidently part of the ideals of (western) civilization where that which is called ‘Nature’ is seen as resources to be used almost regardless of their place in an ecology. Here we can draw a direct line to the Cartesian divide between the subject (traditionally the human) and the object (everything else), as well as Abrahamic religious doctrines2 as writing an ontology where culture is hegemonically and hierarchically seen as

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2 Consider the Biblical verse in which God grants Nature to Adam; “‘Behold, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is on the surface of all the earth, and every tree which has fruit yielding seed; it shall be food.
the master over that which is worlded as belonging to the taxonomy of nature. In this essay I will use two terms which are sometimes used interchangeably within posthumanist discourse to speak of the taxonomic separation of the human from the rest of that which we call nature; non-human and inhuman. For my purposes, I will take ‘non-human’ to refer specifically to forms of (non-human) organic life (mainly other animals), whereas ‘inhuman’ will be taken to mean, much more broadly, agencies, (human, geological and ecological) subjects, (human, non-human life and (potentially) ecological systems) and objects (bodies, geologies and the inanimate).3 Showing the inhuman, then, is also the aim of the essay; is it possible to think of the human as object among others, subject among others, and, if so, can we perceive an inhuman and annihilated relationship between the objectifiability and the subjectifiability of the human despite ourselves being human? In order to answer this highly human question, I will read the Cartesian divide through the pure animality of the monstrous body in Bataille, the human/Man (or Dasein) separation in Colebrooks analysis of Heidegger and finally through the immanently polluting life in Colebrook. Annihilation, we will see, excellently shows these converging concepts, and will be used as a funnel for the further annihilation the Cartesian object/subject dichotomy.

To begin with understanding how we (that is, Humanity) think of nature, I would like to suggest a reversal of one of Haraway’s terms (2003); naturecultures. For Haraway, human culture is not one which is borne from a division between nature and culture, but rather one which is borne out of nature. The human is one animal which has evolved naturally alongside - and together with - other animals, both biologically and culturally. Culture is also, then, not something which is exceptional to the human, as in the dogs of Haraway who have not only their own ‘cultural connection’ with the human but also a culture of their own. We can also, following this, think of many forms of non-human life which produce culture; the pack societies of wolves, birds of paradise collecting vibrant feathers as a mating ritual and pufferfish which create art on the seafloor sand are all, arguably, forms of non-human cultures. I am not suggesting that naturecultures do not exist, on the contrary do I accept them as true in full. The concept is helpful to think with when dealing with the Cartesian problem, but like Haraway’s dogs, I would also like to reiterate that naturecultures are not simply to

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3 See Colebrooks discussion on inhuman ‘text’ in ‘Extinct Theory,’ page 34 in particular.
think with, but actual ecological-cultural systems. Where Haraway focuses on naturecultures as something sociocultural which emerges from a given species in nature, however, I would like to offer a reversal of the term which takes into account the anthropocentrism which we are locked into; culturenatures. What I mean to suggest by this is that we are locked into a state of seeing nature not as it is but as being always already worlded by the natureculture we are part of; by being Humanity (as opposed to simply human), the world is always a collection of entities which we read, rather than see as it is. And, granted, it may be that no natureculture is able to perceive the world in a ‘true’ way (that is, perhaps all animals are, in their naturecultures, locked into naturecultural readings of their world) and to suggest so would be not only an anthropocentrism (in that we would apply another worlding onto a natureculture which we are unable to perceive the world through) but also a therioprimitivist idealism where we presume the animal to be somehow greater than us. In this, then, I am not following Haraway in suggesting for culturenatures to be something that exists apart from a concept to think through. Instead, it is precisely that; a theoretical tool for annihilating the Cartesian subject (the cultural Humanity) with the object (the natural body of the animal or organism).

For instance, to begin our project of annihilation consider the following passage from the novel;

* A swimming pool. A rocky bay. An empty lot. A tower. A lighthouse. These things are real and not real. They exist and they do not exist. I remake them in my mind with every new thought, every remembered detail, and each time they are slightly different. Sometimes they are camouflage or disguises. Sometimes they are something more truthful. (189)

This passage comes after the Biologist has gone through her own physical annihilation in her body passing through the Crawler. What is suggested here is the fact that how we understand locations, environments, ecologies is always already *worlded* understandings. Sometimes they are camouflage, that is, the human produces nature as a cultural project in order to have hegemony, to benefit Empire or some other form of organic imperialism whereas other times they are “something more truthful.” “More truthful” here can be read in two ways; both more truthful than that of the camouflage or disguise; that is, more truthful than our hegemonic worlding, yet still part of our culturenature. But we can also read this part of the passage as
suggesting that outside of our culture/nature they are more truthful than we are able to perceive. We are always already partaking in the project of culture and thus unable to think outside of our nature/cultural limitations. An environment, an ecology, a geology, even a nature/cultural structure, is always more truthful than we are able to perceive. The “sometimes” in this passage is not a matter of ‘times of consideration’ for the Biologist or the human; but rather a ‘sometimes’ in terms of modes of ontology, held by different forms of life. In this regard, when Heidegger said that animals were poor in world, what he actually highlighted was that the human is, perhaps, truly unable to perceive the world as it is. We, perhaps unlike non-human animals, are perpetually locked into a state of worlding which we can never leave behind. Or, as Colebrook writes on Heidegger; “The problem with humanism, for Heidegger, is not that it defines ‘man’ as a special or privileged being, but that it still defines man as a being. Man is not a being or thing, and he is certainly not a foundational being that would enable us to explain all other beings.” (“Time” 117) “Man,” as in Humanity, is a construct which has worlded itself as a being with the capacity for theory, when in reality, for Colebrook, the body of the human is entirely separate from the theory which it is able to produce. This is where we come back to the Cartesian problem; by considering the human as being exceptional from other animals in the mind-body question, Humanity is also worlding itself as a non-worlding subject. That is, by thinking of itself as foundation, as exceptional and, as opposed to other animals, capable of reading, the very concept of thinking of the world as being one which the human has created for itself and through itself, is imperceivable. Or; the human has worlded itself as a non-worlded subject amongst non-worlding living objects.

The Biologist offers us, through her own annihilation, several instances where we see that her subjectivity and objectivity are neither a duality nor a binarity, but that they are implicit to each other and that, in extension, culture and nature share a similar relationship. In considering the Cartesian divide, the object/subject and nature/culture binaries are closely linked, and our project of annihilating one must necessarily deal with the other. For example, as mentioned earlier, the very annihilation of the Biologist begins with her inhalation of the biological words found inside the tunnel/tower (23), a process which offers a reading which annihilates both dichotomies. What I mean by this is that, first, culture and nature becomes questioned as dichotomous in that we here find text—information and, significantly, culture
—readable as such by humans, produced by something which is non-human. The text in the
tower suggests a natureculture which directly readable as such, not through any worlding, but
in and of itself. Secondly, the object/subject of the Biologist becomes blurred in that she
through this non-human agency upon her, she begins to find that her subjectivity—her
potential for rational thought, agentiality and her perception of the world—is disrupted and
mutated by an outside organism acting upon her body (that is, the object which she not only
inhabits, but also then necessarily is). Following this ingestion—this direct biopsychological
symbiosis with another natureculture—do we see the supposed binaries become gradually
less dichotomous. A while after her annihilation begins, the Biologist, whether she recognizes
it or not, begins to have sensory reactions to Area X which differ from what she is used to,
seeing raindrops as “perfect liquid diamonds” and being able to smell the sea despite being
miles away from it (74). She thinks or feels in reaction to this that everything in her life
before entering Area X appeared as a dream and that none of it mattered any more (75), or,
after having her nature/culture and object/subject dichotomies start to be annihilated with
each other, does she realize precisely that her previous understanding of the nature she has
studied has been through the lense of Humanity’s culturenature. The symbiosis with a
non-human culturenature, one which otherwise be hidden from us, awakens her to herself
being a naturecultural objectsubject.

To further think of the notion of the objectsubject, I would here like to invoke
Bataille, whom I later will read against Colebrook. For Bataille, Humanity created itself as
Humanity—subject and separate from objectifiability—in an act of removing itself from its
own animality (Bataille 1993 61-78). This project of deanimalization of the human was for
him carried out through the advent of labour and in the creation of what he called the profane,
which I discuss further down in this paper. From this, we can follow Bataille’s identification
of the fact that disgust towards bodily functions (Ibid. 70)—that which he calls the monstrous
aspect of the body—comes from the fact that this reanimilazes us in its reminder that
Humanity is a natureculture which is sprung from the pure animality of the human. Being
animal has been a revulsion against which we have created an (ontologically Cartesian)
divide for the purpose of worlding ourselves as beings which are subjects among beings
which are objects. In Annihilation, each character is known only by their profession, or, their
culturally taxonomical mode of labour, their own participation in their self-creation as
Humanity against the animal. The Biologist, however in her state of annihilation (again, literally and conceptually an annihilation of the subject with the object) seems to begin to leave her own culture/nature behind. Consider the moment when she comes back from the lighthouse only to be confronted by the Surveyor; the Surveyor has noticed that the Biologist has been changing and her culturally trained instinct for trusting the Biologist makes her ask for the Biologist's name (146). “You’ve come back and you’re not human anymore,” she says, and to the Surveyor, hearing the Biologist say her own name would reinforce for her that she still is what she calls human. As in Bataille, then, we can here see that humanity as we think of it has very little to do with the body, with the animal-which-is-human, but is something which is created against animality. By naming herself, by proving herself to be the Cartesian subject which we read as Humanity, and only then, would the Surveyor be able to rid herself of the uncanniness of being approached by the human as animal. The Biologist-in-annihilation, however, does not see how this matters and says “I’m as human as you,” and “This [symbiosis] is a natural thing.” (144) Receiving no reply, she thinks to herself that to the Surveyor, still locked into a dichotomous state of being subject and culture in opposition to object and nature, that “I was a demon, a devil, something she couldn’t understand or had chosen not to.” (145) Here we see these dichotomous states of the nature/culture of the human acting in opposition to each other, and in the Surveyor, how Humanity creates itself as against its own animality, which the Biologist is approaching without resigning her own subjectivity.

Reading Bataille through Heidegger, Allan Stoekl suggests that what a Bataillean reading of the human/Humanity division offers us is an understanding of the human as, while worlding itself as subject among objects, also always already objectifies both its body and its worlding self (Stoekl 132, 139). What this by extension means for our understanding of the Cartesian divide is that, yes, the human has an agency in and of being a subject, but she is also an object upon which other subjects can perform agentially (as, for example, seen in the agency of the nature/culture of the tunnel upon the Biologist). It would also mean, following advancements in the cognitive sciences which have shown that non-human animals are capable of feeling emotion and pain, and new biological observations showing that trees and plants communicate with each other, that if we in a Bataillean-through-Heideggerian understanding think of the human as both object and subject (that is, as an object/subject...
without duality or opposition), may be forced to think of all inhuman agencies as potentially possessing both aspects as well. We are at once bodies-in-ecology, being agential objects, and worlding-in-ecology, subjects with agency performed against other objectsubjects.

What Stoekl misses throughout his rereading of Bataille’s monstrous body from a contemporary perspective of living through the current climate crisis and anthropogenic mass extinction event, however, is that in recognizing the monstrous objectifiability of our own bodies, that must also necessarily “humanize” (if such a concept even has any meaning in this inhuman reading of the human) other forms of life. Where Stoekl ends his analysis at suggesting that a Bataillean reading of the inhuman human means that we can read the human body and the human self as raw material (Stoekl 139), he misses the fact that this means that other psycho-organic base materialisms must be reread. If the animal which we call the human and Humanity now, through Bataille and Heidegger, can finally be read as inhuman material while retaining objectsubjectivity, then other non-human animals must necessarily be reread to make room for this distinction. Consider, for example, Haraway’s rewriting of a non-hierarchical companion relationship between human and non-human animalities and their evolutionary agencies upon each other (Haraway 2003), Alaimo’s symbiotic agencies between a human activist and a redwood tree (Alaimo loc 530) and Derrida’s meeting of the gaze of his cat (Derrida 2002). In all of these observations, amongst others, we can read the inhuman as being capable of having agency not only upon the human but perhaps more crucially, that the human is able to be an object of other, inhuman, agencies. Following Haraway, even Heidegger’s “Man” is necessarily readable as a potential receiving object towards non-human agencies, for example in the instance of “Dogkind” as an evolutionary (and thus, arguably, societal) agent upon the human. In Bataille, then, and this is where Stoekl’s reading falls short, an objectified human body which retains its potential for subjectivity must necessarily highlight the subjectifiability of Cartesian objects. That is, agents; human, non-human and inhuman, possessing both the monstrous capacity for being objects upon which other agencies act, while retaining the capability of being agents upon other objectsubjects.

Bataille too came close to this annihilation of the subject with the object into objectsubject when he suggested a reversal of the notions of the sacred and the profane. For Bataille, the profane is that which is created by Humanity and which it positions itself in
relation to the pure animality from whence it came, and the sacred world against which we strive. He writes that “Nothing, as a matter of fact, is more closed to us than this animal life from which we are descended,” (1992, 20) suggesting that pure animality, that is the human as bodily object, is closed to us in that we created ourselves as Humanity. This was for Bataille done by the invention of the tool (Ibid. 27-28) as it gave the human sovereignty over its world; it removed itself from immanence in its ability to create and master other objects. This is the profane, for Bataille; the cultural existence of Humanity which has removed itself from its pure animality while it further posits itself against the sacred world, which in turn is informed by pure animality. He writes that the immanence of pure animality, Humanity now in the realm of the profane, “offered man all the fascination of the sacred world, as against the poverty of the profane tool.” (Ibid 35) For our purposes, I would suggest that we can use this to conceive of an annihilation of the object with the subject as it gives us an explanation for how the division came to be to begin with. The Cartesian divide was borne out of Humanity creating itself against its pure animality, and in effect it also came to see itself as sovereign, like that of the sacred. In Bataille, however, we also see precisely how the divide is one which is created, which is profane, but at the same time as of the human and Humanity as separate things (pure animality as opposed to the profane world) which can be read as our own self-conceptions of objects and subjects. That he speaks of this human-as-object as at once sacred, monstrous and as waste (as well as creator of waste), I believe can be best understood by reading him through Colebrook when she suggests that

To live and inhabit is to be parasitic, to pollute, to alter the clima, to effect an inclination that cannot be remedied or mitigated by some return or retrieval of the proper. (Colebrook “Posthuman Humanities” 180).

She does not specifically make the distinction between life as object or subject, but following Bataille-through-Heidegger, perhaps it is not necessary. What she does is, where Bataille speaks more specifically about the monstrous or beastial in realizing that the human is objectifiable and a producer of waste (that is, a base material which pollutes), is offer a debeastialization of other forms of life. Life (not metaphysically, but in its base materiality) to Colebrook is an inherently destructive force which, regardless of its shape or form, lives to

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4 For Bataille, immanence is being in the world as “water in water.” It is a continuity which can be read as atranscendental and simply existing in the world without reading or worlding it. See Theory of Religion 17-25.
survive, and to survive one must destroy other forms of life and pollute its environments. What Bataille offers our understanding of this life-as-pollution and the Cartesian problem, is precisely in his sanctifying of waste. What I mean by that is that where Colebrook can read as reductive in her reevaluation of the worth of “Man,” Bataille allows us to think of the human - the base, monstrous, bestial animal body of the human/Humanity - as sacred amongst other equally sacred objectsubjects (in that pure animality is what informs the sacred). In Annihilation we can think of the Biologist’s final encounter with the Crawler (180-181) as showing us this transition through the monstrous, into the monstrous. Here the Biologist is quite literally delving into a place of inhuman text and illumination, only to be faced with the monstrous body of the Crawler which she finds herself unable to perceive (177). Only by passing through the Crawler, by experiencing, essentially, the dissolution or annihilation of both her psyche and her body, only to be reformed, is she later able to see the being as it is (185-186). By becoming truly body-in-ecology, being faced with her own sacred monstrosity through the Crawler, does she become a non-worlding objectsubject. That it is after this encounter that she stops writing her journal, that she stops worlding Area X in order to live inside it, further suggests both the Heideggerian inability of “Man” to not be worlding, the Bataillean human as objectifiable and that now that the Biologist has annihilated her subjectivity with her objectivity, does she accept herself as body-in-ecology.

What we get, then, again thinking of the Heideggerian problem of “man as being,” is that “Man” is a naturecultural creation or phenomenon amongst many other animal naturecultures. What thinking through the concept of culturenatures offers us is that the very concept of nature, worlded by man as objects readable only by the human subject, as a naturecultural product. That is, the natureculture of the human has created (or worlded) a culturenature through which non-human subjects are read (in a Cartesian worldview, however, as objects without culture and agency). To further build on this notion of a culturenature which we are locked into thinking through, we can think of Agamben’s discussion of the human in Linnaeus’ Systema naturae, where Agamben suggests that on one hand, homo sapiens rightfully was placed in the realm of primates (Agamben 25), but on the other, is unlike primates completely without distinction. He writes, “man is the animal that must recognize itself as human to be human” as his only (implied) characteristic (Agamben 26), and in his wording evokes Bataille-through-Heidegger; Man, as in Heidegger, is the
monstrous body of the human worlding itself as a-monstrous, as in Bataille. Agamben further posits that *homo sapiens*, Humanity rather than the animal which we call human, is “a machine or device for producing the recognition of the human,” (Agamben 26) and, following Bataille, also necessarily is a project which beastializes the animal in order to separate Humanity from the animal (Bataille “Accursed” 74; “Sacrifice” 211). While we are able, as in Alaimo, to identify other naturecultures next to our own, we also are unable to read other organisms’ culturenatures as we, as in Colebrook, are non-foundational (non-)beings. It is precisely the non-foundational aspect of our being which locks us into reading the world as culturenatural; we are always worlding, and Nature, as an object (or a series of objects) which is distinct from the human, is a hegemonic cultural project. Or; the natureculture which we call Humanity, (still distinct from the Agambenian zoë or Bataillean pure animality of the human) in an act of worlding, creates a culturenature through which it worlds its environments and ecologies.

So, when we consider the goal of the excursion into Area X, finding the lighthouse, together with what they find in the tunnel/tower, we are offered a new reading of these naturecultural/culturenatural worlds. For one; even at the onset of the trip, before they know what they will find at their destination, the goal of the journey being a lighthouse is highly suggestive in terms of allegory. That is, that which the team are trying to make their way to is an artificial structure created by humans with the sole purpose of guiding humans. The lighthouse is also, however, a place which illuminates, literally so, but also suggesting the possibility of an allegorical state of illumination for the team in particular when they finally arrive. And, indeed, what the Biologist finds, that is the uncountable amount of journals - written texts - is illuminating. In this scene, the Biologist comes to realize that she has been lied to about how many expeditions have gone in before them, but also what has happened to them. However, the Biologist does not learn anything essential about Area X, its environment or its ecology, rather, all she finds is several instances of previous human inability to read this mutable location as it is. Significant to the allegory of illumination, also, is the fact that by having hid all these human accounts of the area underneath the torch of the lighthouse, essentially everything but those are now prone to be illuminated. To come back to the concept of culturenatures, we can think of this situation or place as illuminating for us the fact that human readings of their environments are always already worlded readings. As soon as the
journals were written, they had already undergone the cultural project of nature (that is, the human culture/nature); the environments around them were at once read and worlded by the non-foundational being which we call Humanity, and in doing so, became locked away from true illumination.

On the other side of the living dichotomy in Area X do we have the tunnel which the Biologist, as mentioned previously, reads as a tower and thus structurally equivalent to that of the lighthouse. The two structures share several features; structurally they are both cylindrical and spiraling (to the Biologist, both spiral upwards), they both contain actual text (as opposed to Colebrook’s inhuman non-textual texts), and just like the lighthouse, the tunnel/tower is a place of illumination. The tunnel, unlike the lighthouse, however, is suggested to be organic in nature, that is, non-artificial. Or, at the very least it is a structure which is created by non-human life (whether it actually is alive itself or not). The text in the tunnel is also one created entirely, we have to assume, without human agency. One could argue that if the Crawler is born out of the human that once was the keeper of the lighthouse, through the mutative agency of the ecology of Area X, that some human agency might remain in this creation. However, to make such an argument one must entirely separate, as in Heidegger, Humanity from the being. That is, that which writes on the walls of the tunnel is at most human in so far as it is its body, but it is bereft of its Dasein. The text on the wall, living, organic text, illuminated by its very own bioluminescence, at first appears to be nonsensical, yet uncannily familiar due to its readability. Before she goes through her own annihilation, the Biologist is unable to make sense of this human-inhuman text, as she is locked, as all of Humanity, in a state of worlding which does not allow for reading of the purely biological. That it is, her very coming in contact - physically symbiotic contact - with this living text which is what leads to her awakening/annihilation of her human/Humanity self, is highly suggestive to our understanding of the Cartesian problem. That is; by being subjected to an inhuman humanity, humanity as life but not being, does the Biologist begin to become a non-worlding human.

The relationship between the tunnel/tower/lighthouse can then, again, be best understood by thinking of it in Bataillean terms. Consider the visual; two spiraling structures are posited against each other and with the human/Humanity of the Biologist acting and being acted upon between them. The two structures are, it is suggested, also physically linked with
each other in some mystical or transcendental way (180) and that in-annihilation, the Biologist, at the threshold of their connection feels like she is being watched by someone or something from the inside of the tower (181), as if her annihilation has set something free. What I would suggest is that the tunnel can be read and understood by Bataille’s idea of pure animality, and that it is so horrifying for the scientists shows us the uncanny and the monstrous in recognizing this inhuman, pure animality of ourselves. Crawler is human, we know at the end of the novel, but it is human without Humanity; that very thing which we, in Bataillean terms, have tried to negate in ourselves by the creation of the profane. The lighthouse stands as a mirror to the tunnel, and can be read as the profane; it is Humanity, the ivory tower from which we read and world, it is the negation of our pure animality from whence we create ourselves as Humanity. The lighthouse is the removal of our immanence with the world in the project of culturenature. Consider the following passage; “Imagine, too, that while the Tower makes and remakes the world inside the border, it also slowly sends its emissaries across that border in ever greater numbers, so that in tangled gardens and fallow fields its envoys begin their work.” (189) For the Biologist-in-annihilation, the lighthouse - Humanity and the project of culturenature - becomes the nexus for the worlding of nature as nature by Humanity. In her annihilation however, she begins to return to immanence with the world, and in doing so also becomes able to read the worlding of the lighthouse as worlding. The lighthouse - the act of worlding by Humanity - is a place which “makes and remakes the world,” or, Humanity is always already worlding nature and is unable to see it as it is and, further, it “sends its emissaries across that border,” spreading culturenature, conforming nature to it, cultivating nature and culture both to fit its reading and worlding.

The problem of doing away with Humanity as exceptional, foundational and subject amongst object, and rereading her as one objectsubjective body-in-ecology amongst others, is that we are in this step perpetually locked into accepting that any reading of the inhuman is an anthropocentrism, or as Bataille writes, “the correct way to speak of it can overtly only be poetic” (1992, 21). The Biologist, to us, in the end of the novel, also resigns to this; as her final act of annihilation - one which we outside of the world of the novel may be unable to reach - accepts that in order to become immanent with nature she must resign her worlding, and on this realization she ends her narrative. She effectively stops worlding Area X and finds that what she wants now that she has annihilated her subjectivity with her objectivity, is to
leave her Humanity behind. She feels - that is, she gives way to the inhuman impulses of her body’s biochemistry - that her husband, despite perhaps utterly transformed is still part of the pure natural (as opposed to culturesnatural) world, “in the eye of a dolphin, in the touch of an uprising of moss, anywhere and everywhere” (195). For Bataille, death was the final and most luxurious form of life in that it allowed for a kind of base material immanence with the world (Accursed 84, “Sacrifice” 210). In death, the body becomes a potential giver of life quite literally as the decay of the body serves as a part of an integral inhuman agency as it takes its place in becoming an inhuman body-in-ecology. Area X seems to work differently, and the husband may be not only immanent in theory but also in practice, literally with some aspect of him living “in the eye of a dolphin” or in some other uncanny (or not, for the Biologist-in-annihilation) form of death-into-life. In respect to the Biologist, we can read her entering this immanence without entering the realm of death in that she becomes immanent to Area X for us as she finishes her narrative, that is, as she stops worlding the ecology and becomes objectsubjectively part of it.

As mentioned previously, leaving our place in the world as always already worlding it may be impossible, and even thinking of non-human naturecultures and culturesnatures must necessarily be a form of anthropocentrism, even if it is one which does away with the anthropocentrism of human exceptionalism. What I mean by this is that, while Annihilation offers us a vehicle through which we can consider inhuman culturenatures, it does so specifically due to its material relation to the world - that is, as it is fiction. What it further shows us then is that the narrative of fiction allows us to perceive (or at least conceptually consider) the inhuman non-anthropocentrically where we outside of fiction and theory might not. When the Biologist in her final accounts of being in the process of annihilation says that the process “[...]has quelled the last ashes of the burning compulsion I had to know everything … anything … and in its place remains the knowledge that the brightness is not done with me,” (194) we can further read that with this resignation of anthropocentric worlding as a point of reading the world which we without physical annihilation are unable to leave, also comes a pleasure in realizing that there are things which can be learned from the inhuman despite our inability to not read them anthropocentrically. If we read “the brightness” as “the pleasure that comes with annihilating the subject with the object,” as the Biologist seems to think of it once she becomes used to its presence (83, 112, 146) then we
can imagine at the very least that there might be something to be learned from other culturenatures as long as we at least consider their possible existence.
Works Cited


