



For a new weird geography

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Abstract

The contemporary ecological condition is one of ‘global weirding’, a term coined to describe both anthropogenically changed worlds and the experience of dwelling within them. In this paper, we foreground New Weird fiction as a progressive literary style, distinct from its problematic roots, with conceptual import to human geography. Through attention to the New Weird’s treatment of difference, dis/orientation and ecological relation, these texts provoke geographers to foster a speculative ethics suited to a weirding world. In suggesting this ethical approach, this paper contributes to emerging debates in geography concerning ambivalence, disorientation and affirmation/negation.

Keywords

global weirding, new weird, literary geographies, science fiction, disorientation, ambivalence, acceptance

I Introduction

‘It was a feeling I often had when out in the wilderness: that things were not quite what they seemed’.

The Biologist in Jeff VanderMeer’s *Annihilation*

‘With every step the air grew heavier. A sense of wrongness, of fraught unease, as if long nails scraped the surface of the moon, raising the hackles of the soul’.

China Miéville, *Perdido Street Station*

Science fiction (SF) has attracted extensive attention from social theorists for its capacity to foster experimental thought and to challenge social injustices (e.g. Haraway, 2015, 2016b; Stengers, 2000). As Kitchin and Kneale (2001) note, SF enmeshes future imaginaries with present politics to demonstrate the malleability of social worlds. SF is thus an

‘exemplary venue for understanding how the production of literature and culture fits within the structure of societies in which it takes place’ (Carrington, 2016: 1). In this paper, we explore such politics through ‘New Weird’ fiction, an SF style gaining recent attention due to its aptness for interpreting, narrating and reimagining the contemporary socioecological condition (Lorimer, 2017; Robertson, 2018; Turnbull, 2021; Ulstein, 2017).

We follow geographers who glean theoretical and methodological insight from written texts. Literary geographies is a burgeoning geographical subdiscipline that engages diverse literary forms; including

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travel writing, journalism, novels, poetry and comics (see Brosseau, 2020; Hones, 2008, 2014; Jellis, 2021; Pocock, 1988; Saunders, 2010; Tally, 2020). Geographers engage written text and writing-as-practice to examine representations of place, mobility and landscape (Cresswell, 1993; Tuan, 1976, 1978; Wylie, 2007), and to imagine alternative modes of existence (Kitchin and Kneale, 2001). They have explored the spatiality of text itself as a material object (see Alexander, 2015), attended to the geographical imaginations of writers (Daniels and Rycroft, 1993; Harvey, 2005), examined how literature produces and consumes geographical knowledges (Brosseau, 1994; Sharp, 1994) and even experimented themselves with literary outputs (e.g. Cresswell, 2013, 2015, 2020; Lorimer and Fairfax-Cholmeley, 2020).

We take inspiration from scholars engaging SF empirically. Bahng (2017), for instance, reads Octavia Butler as a form of science studies, while others use prominent SF themes to develop new forms of social enquiry (e.g. De Freitas, 2017; De Freitas and Truman, 2020, 2021; Truman, 2019). Several natural scientists have turned to the 'radical, prefigurative potential of science fiction' for inspiration in their practice (Lorimer, 2017: 129). Yet the New Weird has received scant attention from geographers, which is surprising given its capacity to trouble problematic binaries, to radically emphasise other-than-human agencies, and its proximity to SF which inspires diverse geographical works (e.g. Ginn, 2015; Kitchin and Kneale, 2001; Kneale et al., 2001; Lorimer, 2017; Swanson et al., 2015; but see Greve and Zappe, 2019a). This is partly due to its generic ambiguity and its history as a 'pulpy' genre mostly overlooked by 'serious' critics. Nevertheless, Kneale's (2006, 2016, 2019) geographies of HP Lovecraft have begun this conversation, and political ecologists have turned to the Weird 'to develop new, experimental, proactive, playful and speculative approaches' to the overlapping crises of the Anthropocene (Huff and Nel, 2021, np; see Ulstein, 2017).

Environmental humanities scholarship (see Economides and Shackelford, 2021; Greve and Zappe, 2019a) further demonstrates the Weird's conceptual potential and its connection to

geographical thought (e.g. Kneale, 2006, 2016, 2019; Turnbull, 2021). As Ulstein (2021a, np) notes, 'the weird is a critical lens through which reactions to and ethics concerning human-induced ecological disasters may be better understood'. Our intention in this article is twofold: to introduce 'weirding' to geography; and to highlight weirding as something happening in the world, which New Weird literature offers theoretical tools for both comprehending and responding to. We focus on the writings of Jeff VanderMeer and China Miéville as they were intimately involved in definitional discussions of the New Weird (Robertson, 2018), and their novels *City of Saints and Madmen* (VanderMeer, 2001) and *Perdido Street Station* (Miéville, 2000) are considered founding texts. These authors were instrumental in bringing mainstream attention to the Weird, while facilitating its transition as a genre of short stories into the novel form (Noys and Murphy, 2016). However, we also understand the limited perspective they offer on a 'slippery genre' (Robertson, 2018). Indeed, as Dunning (2020; 46) writes, there is a 'dearth of attention paid to race or artists of colour in Weird criticism'. Similarly, Wicks (2018; 66) notes that, 'there has been little feminist critical gaze extended to Weird Fiction, particularly the New'. Therefore, alongside our focus on VanderMeer and Miéville, we highlight authors and critics who are redefining the Weird and pushing it in subversive directions.

VanderMeer and Miéville are insightful in their provision of theoretical tools for contemporary environmental politics (see Hendrickx, 2022). This is illustrated through their emphasis on an affective disposition of ambivalence in the face of weirding: of learning to relate to difference and socioecological change not as monstrous and horrific, but as both productive and unsettling. VanderMeer's stories dealing with a host of other-than-human beings, and Miéville's political approach towards difference, resonate with geographical scholarship. Again, we recognise the limitations of approaching weirding through these two authors, which reproduce privileged positions of whiteness and masculinity. Geographers will benefit from engaging contemporary writers who specifically decentralise white subjectivity in weird worlds, like Okorafor's (2010) *Who*

Fears Death, Jemisin's (2020) *The City We Became* or LaValle's (2016) *The Ballad of Black Tom* (see Carroll and Sperling, 2020; Death, 2021; Thieme, 2016).

Unlike the Weird's early iterations, which expressed horror towards 'that which does not belong', the New Weird contains a 'useful ambivalence' towards difference and change (Alder, 2020). By recasting the Anthropocene as an era of 'global weirding' (Friedman, 2010) – an epoch in which unearthly ecologies proliferate within the margins of capitalist development, the sixth mass extinction and ecological collapse – weirding illustrates the disorientation that, for some, has come to characterise this epoch. The way New Weird characters ambivalently accept disorientation, difference and change – often as their worlds collapse – offers geographers inspiration for thinking through the affective dimensions of living through socioecological crises. Specifically, weirding gives space for wider tensions in geography between approaches associated with affirmation and negation, offering avenues for thinking through and dislodging such tensions (Dekeyser and Jellis, 2021; Gandy and Jasper, 2017; Swyngedouw and Ernstson, 2018).

In the New Weird's explicit challenging of 'Old Weird' literary forms, the Weird unsettles classification, 'leaking out' from generic confinement (Freeman, 2017; Guran, 2011; Luckhurst, 2017; Noys, 2016; Sperling, 2020). So, what exactly do we mean by 'the Weird'? The weird has been described as an affect (Miéville, 2011a); an inflection, a tone or mood (Luckhurst, 2017); a mode (Hollinger, 2014); a montage (Fisher, 2016); and an atmosphere (Mathieson, 2019) of discord and discomfort (Pursall, 2021). Morton (2016) traces the etymological roots of 'weird' to the Old Norse word, 'urth,' meaning twisted, in a loop. From Shakespeare's 'wyrd sisters' in *Macbeth*, the weird is also associated with fate, future, strangeness and the unknown. Indeed, it is a tricky concept to define. Yet awkwardness, inexplicability and puzzlement need not be the weakness of a conceptual approach (Gerlach and Jellis, 2015). The Weird's slipperiness is not to be lamented, but rather to be experimented with. Fisher's (2016) understanding of the weird is generative for geographers. For Fisher (2016; 10), the

weird conjures a sense of wrongness; gesturing towards 'that which does not belong' in given spatial or temporal contexts. However it is the affective responses to the out of place and time espoused by the New Weird that we believe geographers could gain from. This article, therefore, marks our attempt to allow the weird to leak into geographical scholarship.

Our argument develops as follows. Section II on 'difference' traces contemporary developments in Weird fiction which radically critique and subvert its racist history. Section III explores the condition of 'global weirding' and forwards 'dis/orientation' as a conceptual and analytical provocation. Section IV's emphasis on 'relation' asks what geographers can learn from the novel ecologies of New Weird fiction, finding ethico-political potential in its treatment of difference. Section V proposes 'acceptance' as a productive means of negotiating broader tensions between affirmation and negation in geographical thought. In section VI we conclude by offering reflections on the potentials of a New Weird geography.

II The Weird from Old to New: Difference

Weirding is a confrontation of difference. How difference has been framed, received and politically mobilised, however, varies historically in both literature and geographical scholarship. The Weird's racist roots have been subverted by its contemporary iterations, mirroring movements in geography to explicitly undo the discipline's foundations as a tool of imperial power (see Driver, 2001). We thus begin by tracing thematic changes from 'Old Weird' to 'New Weird' (see Noys and Murphy, 2016; Ulstein, 2019b), engaging with the social, political and ideological contexts that shape literary worlds.

Weird fiction emerged from ghost stories and gothic horror around the turn of the 20th Century (Alder, 2020; Joshi, 2003; Mayer, 2018; Noys and Murphy, 2016), yet its influences can be traced through the writings of Mary Shelley and as far back as Dante (Mayer, 2018). For Fisher (2016; 16), though, 'any discussion of weird fiction must begin with Lovecraft', who is commonly understood to have popularised the term 'weird fiction'. Lovecraft

defined Weird fiction as ‘a literature of cosmic fear’ that creates an ‘atmosphere of breathless and unexplainable dread of outer, unknown forces’ (Lovecraft, 1939, np). Lovecraft’s ‘cosmic fear’ was of the absolute Other: the unnatural, unearthly and despicable. Yet Lovecraft’s Other was constructed through race and his repulsion towards genetic hybridity (Joshi, 2015; Mayer, 2016; Sperling, 2020; Loos, 2021). Simply put, he was a eugenicist (Lovett-Graff, 1997) – an ‘obsessive racist’ (Houellebecq, 2019) – whose writing has been described as ‘genotypic horror’ (Frye, 2006).

Joshi (2018) documents Lovecraft’s self-definition as an ‘indifferentist’. Lovecraft found meaninglessness in life and death, signalling an indifference towards reality itself. Indifference, though, implies a lack of care, empathy or concern. But Lovecraft was far from indifferent. His targeted racism was mobilised by fears and insecurities caused very much by *difference*. We highlight here the importance of distinguishing between Lovecraft’s *apparent* indifference – his theoretical approach to reality celebrated by several scholars – and his personal and political response to what he perceived as the purposelessness of life (see Houellebecq, 2019; Johnson, 2016; Kneale, 2019). As we enter the ‘Age of Lovecraft’ (Sederholm and Weinstock, 2016), we must remain cognisant of how racism pervades his work and the genre he inaugurated (see Ulstein, 2019a; Woodward, 2020; Loos, 2021). As Sperling (2017c, np) questions, ‘what does it mean that out of prejudice, fear and a hatred of otherness was born a literary tradition that has particular merit in the contemporary moment?’

Weird fiction’s racism is not limited to Lovecraft himself. As Derie (2021a) shows, other key influencers of weird fiction, such as Clark Ashton Smith and Robert E. Howard, harboured antisemitic worldviews. Racism in Weird fiction is not merely an issue of individual authors, but of the genre itself. As Dunning (2020; 57) suggests, the Weird can be read as a genre that is ‘co-constitutive with racist discourses of otherness and the time/space alienation(s) that blackness engenders’. As we shift attention to the New Weird to ‘stay with Lovecraft’s trouble’ (Loos, 2021) while subverting it, we do not suggest it is universally good. Indeed, there are examples of

New Weird writing, and SF more broadly, that fail to challenge the racism or misogyny in historical fantasy (Bahng, 2017; De Freitas and Truman, 2021). Robert Saunders (2019) details how B. Catling’s *Vorhh* Trilogy reproduces racist and colonial views of the African continent. Yet many SF works subvert racist representations of Africa. Nnedi Okorafor’s *Lagoon* (2014), *The Shadow Speaker* (2007) and *Who Fears Death* (2010), for example, are all SF works which ‘explore the idea of a truly postcolonial Africa, free from neocolonial bonds’ (Burnett 2016; 133). Okorafor mobilises post-apocalyptic narratives in conjunction with Igbo cosmology to speculate new forms of postcolonial imagination (see Whyte, 2018).

Lovecraft’s racism is present throughout his fictive works and personal correspondence (Derie, 2021a). This has recently been critiqued in the HBO series *Lovecraft Country*, which can be understood alongside a vast literature of anti-colonial SF which subverts the racialised tropes of Lovecraft’s writing. Elizabeth Bear’s *Shoggoths in Bloom* (2008) and Ruthanna Emrys’ *The Litany of Earth* (2014) are two examples of contemporary weird fiction that do so (Loos, 2021). For Loos (2021), fictional works and associated scholarship must critically engage Lovecraft’s legacy, confronting his racism, classism and misogyny, not just dismissing it as ‘of its time’. LaValle’s (2016) *The Ballad of Black Tom*, which rewrites Lovecraft’s *The Horror at Red Hook* from the perspective of a Black man, is an example that does so. Similarly, Johnson’s (2016) *The Dream-Quest of Vellitt Boe* rewrites Lovecraft’s *The Dream-Quest of Unknown Kadath* from a woman’s perspective. Sammons and Rios’ (2016) *Heroes of Red Hook* also presents a collection of eighteen cosmic horror stories, each revisiting Lovecraft’s works from a position of marginalisation, stigmatisation and disadvantage.

‘The Black Weird’ is an emerging genre encompassing ‘elements of Afro-surrealism, Afro-pessimism, and the [New] Weird’ (Dunning, 2020; 45). Black SF and Afrofuturism are relevant here, including the works of Nalo Hopkinson, Octavia Butler and Nnedi Okorafor (see Carrington, 2016; Hopkinson, 2004; Schalk, 2018; Womack, 2013). The Black Weird is premised on decentring the white

subject from narratives, and in doing so centring perspectives that locate uncanniness, the Other, and weirdness in white racism itself (Dunning, 2020). It is also committed to a form of speculation that is not 'bound up with notions of evolution or progress' (Dunning, 2020; 57). The geographical subdiscipline of Black Geographies (e.g. Allen et al., 2019; Bledsoe and Wright, 2019; Eaves, 2017; Hawthorne, 2019; Hirsch and Jones, 2021; Moulton, 2022; Noxolo, 2022; Puttick and Murrey, 2020) is well-placed to examine this genre.

Despite this burgeoning collection of works, much current scholarship on the Weird remains 'phallogocentric', relying 'on Lovecraft's Weird tale ideal as a sufficient definition of the genre' (Wicks, 2018; 166; but see Sperling, 2016a, 2016b, 2017a, 2017b). 'Beginning with Lovecraft', however, requires scholars to go beyond him. Bobby Derie's blog, *Deep Cuts in a Lovecraftian Vein*, highlights lesser-known weird authors, stories and protagonists; especially those focussing on themes of sex (see Derie, 2014), gender (Litherland, 2022; see also Knouf, 2020), sexuality (Bradway, 2020; Derie, 2021b), (dis)ability (Kirshenblatt, 2022; Smith, 2022) and race (Derie, 2021c).¹ In drawing attention to subversions of Lovecraft's tales by 'minor voices' (Wicks, 2018) throughout this article, we highlight the Weird's multiplicity, and what weirding can do to geographical concepts.

Weirding 'now echoes through popular culture', (Noys, 2016; 250) evident in the emergence of cinema's 'Greek Weird Wave' (Papanikolaou, 2020), the American Weird (Greve and Zappe, 2020), the Woke Weird (Shapiro, 2020), the Finnish Weird (Leinonen, 2017), the Black Weird (Dunning, 2020), as well as weird nature documentaries (see Ulstein, 2021b). Sperling (2017b; 159) has even issued a call for 'a Newer, a Next Weird' to keep apace with the rapidly changing nature of experience thus far in the 21st century. Lovecraft's Cthulhu Mythos has been adapted into board games, musicals, video games and more, and can now be considered a collaborative world-building endeavour (Bear, 2009). As such, it is important to highlight authors rebuilding the Mythos in inclusive and progressive ways (e.g. Lavalley, 2016; HBO's *Lovecraft Country*). Problematically, there has also been a reactionary upsurge in

Lovecraft's popularity amongst white nationalist, 'alt-right' communities (Loos, 2021), making it critical to draw attention to the abhorrent ideology of Lovecraft whilst subverting his narratives. The SF community has been active in initiating such conversations. Upon receiving the 2015 World Fantasy Award trophy – a bust of Lovecraft – Okorafor discussed with Miéville (Okorafor 2011b), Vandermeer and Steve Barnes (Okorafor 2011a) the best way to approach Lovecraft's racism. Okorafor and Miéville concluded that confronting Lovecraft's racism, first, and moving beyond it, was the most political and progressive route (Loos, 2021). Their conversation eventually led to the replacement of the WFA trophy.

The New Weird is a radically multiple genre. New Weird writing, however, does have several common stylistic and thematic motifs useful for weirding geography. For VanderMeer and VanderMeer (2011, xv), the New Weird is effective at 'entertaining monsters while not always seeing them as monstrous', comparable to Latour's (2012) call to 'love your monsters'. Otherness in New Weird fiction is not to be feared, but rather approached with care and respect. Indeed, it is a blend of fascination and estrangement which gives the New Weird a tendency towards an open, sympathetic and progressive politics (Robertson, 2018; see also Smith, 2001). As such, the New Weird encourages the 'destabilisation of normative orders, both literary and sociopolitical' (Noys, 2016; 231), and is an explicit response to contemporary socioecological catastrophes that shape Anthropocene anxieties.

The weird, moreover, has a rich yet implicit relationship with geographical research – especially to more-than-human geographies. Donna Haraway's work, which has been imported into human geography, occupies this conceptual space. In *Staying with the Trouble*, Haraway (2016b) subverts Lovecraft's racism and misogyny with the aim of fostering kinship and care in what she terms the 'Chthulucene': an intentional misspelling of Lovecraft's tentacled monster, Cthulhu. By drawing weird ecologies and SF into the conceptual lexicon, Haraway encourages geographers to engage with the inherent '(non)relation' involved in encounters with Otherness (Wilson and Anderson, 2020).

Moreover, Lovecraft's work has profoundly influenced the tradition of object-oriented ontology (e.g. Harman, 2012). Geographers engaging conceptual iterations of OOO are thus influenced by the weird (e.g. Ash and Simpson, 2016, 2019; McCormack, 2017). OOO, however, has been criticised for not doing enough to 'stay with Lovecraft's trouble', and has been accused of sidestepping the explicit racism in his work (Loos, 2021). In contrast, Yusoff (2019a, 2019b) draws on SF that accounts for troubling histories. Yusoff engages Jemisin's (2015, 2016, 2017) *Broken Earth*, an SF trilogy which explores histories of colonial dispossession, the unequal impact of climatic change, and the proliferation of 'alien' ecologies. Yusoff puts SF to work, unsettling the apocalyptic teleology which underpins the so-called Anthropocene, while critiquing the racialised histories of geologic extractivism.

The New Weird resonates with contemporary geographical thought through its attunement to conditions of ecological degradation and expanded subjectivity (Miéville, 2008). Many prominent New Weird authors draw playfully from the natural sciences and make reference to 'various natural phenomena we perceive as weird' (Bradić, 2020; 2). In the following, we explicate how the concepts provoked in New Weird literature and criticism are instructive for geographers. VanderMeer implicitly critiques anthropogenic ecological collapse, based on landscapes inspired by the real world. St Mark's National Wildlife Refuge in Florida, for instance, inspired the setting for his best-selling *Southern Reach Trilogy* (2014a; 2014b; 2014c), and his attention to nature has seen him labelled the 'weird Thoreau' (Rothman, 2015). VanderMeer's writing addresses biotechnology, ecological collapse and hybridity. His characters often exhibit ambivalence in collapsing worlds, providing the foundation for, but not the necessity of, hope in 'broken places' (VanderMeer, 2017a).

Miéville similarly resists 'cruel optimism' (Berlant, 2011) through dwelling with ambivalence. Whilst he mobilises Lovecraftian tropes – of hybrid monsters (Miéville, 2000, 2002, 2004, 2011b), ruptures or breaks in reality (Miéville, 2016) and the incomprehensibility of excess, estrangement or

chaos – he subverts Lovecraft's racism and renders the Weird political (see Lanzendörfer, 2020; Shapiro, 2020). As a Marxist, Miéville is explicitly engaged in radical praxis (Miéville, 2005, 2019). In 2001, he ran for UK parliament as a candidate for the Socialist Alliance, a now disbanded left-wing political party. His weird is 'an expression of upheaval and crisis' (Miéville, 2009; 513 in Ulstein, 2021a). Miéville explains how the hybrid more-than-human landscapes which inhabit his work are crafted explicitly to illuminate the operation of racial, economic and patriarchal oppression (Gordon, 2003).

Both authors, we suggest, stay with Lovecraft's trouble, and when brought together, offer provocative lessons for how to live through global weirding. Herein, we examine the import of the New Weird for geographers concerned with the contemporary socioecological condition.

III Global weirding: Dis/orientation

The term 'global weirding' has been proposed to describe the contemporary socioecological condition often called the Anthropocene (Friedman, 2010);² a period imbued with ecological anxieties and often experienced as a 'dis/orientation'. Dis/orientation occurs when things drastically change, causing worlds to appear out-of-joint with normative spacetimes. Our use of the slash, following Luckhurst (2017), pertains to the tension we would like to hold in place: to feel disoriented, but also in the process of re-orientation. We do not cast dis/orientation as an inherently progressive affective condition, nor consider dis/orientation alone a viable political tool (see Almas, 2016). Instead, it is tentative, cautious, unstable, yet imbued with potential (Bissell and Gorman-Murray, 2019). A dis/orientated state is open to becoming, to encountering difference, and to 'feeling differently in a non-deterministic way' (Ruez and Cockayne, 2021; 102).

The New Weird provides a theoretical lens to comprehend global weirding; a process of environmental change in which change is heterogeneously distributed and experienced (Tsing et al., 2019). Global weirding remains cognisant of the racial striations that undergird contemporary environmental change. The Anthropocene is inescapably

racialised, ‘marked by the impacts of racial categorisation’, yet ‘at the same time is an emerging part of the production of race as an on-going structure of our lives’ (Baldwin and Erickson, 2020; 5). In this sense, the epoch most relevant for the New Weird may be the Plantationocene (Haraway, 2015), which centres colonialism, capitalism and enduring racial hierarchies. Fictive forms used to represent the Anthropocene often rely on harmful racial stereotypes whilst downplaying the effects of environmental catastrophe that are disproportionately experienced according to racist social hierarchies (Joo, 2020). Mabel Gergan and colleagues (2020; 93) have demonstrated how Anthropocene anxiety in film ‘uncomfortably reiterates a nature/human binary figured in racialised terms, at times serving as a proxy for deep-seated anxieties of racialised Others “taking over” the planet’. In drawing from the New Weird and its divergent approaches to difference and change, global weirding offers geographers a potential way of staying with and challenging the Anthropocene’s racialised underpinnings (cf. Brown and Kanouse, 2021; Davis and Todd, 2017; Yussuf, 2020).

Global weirding is both a process happening to the world, and an affective response to that process. In terms of process, it has been characterised as ‘biotic scramble’ (Waldman, 2009), entailing unprecedented ‘species combinations under new abiotic conditions’ (Hobbs et al., 2009; 602). While the contemporary biotic scramble is associated with changing weather patterns and globalisation routes, global weirding is also historical. Crosby (1986; 270) coined the term ‘portmanteau biota’ to refer to the organisms that Europeans transported to colonised lands. In many ways, global weirding is the result of plantation logics (see McKittrick, 2013), which resulted in the simplification of ecologies – termed ‘Anthropocene proliferation’ by Tsing (2017) – that are built on racist logics of immobility and ‘accumulation by immobilisation’ (Achtmich, 2021). The outcomes of this – climate crisis and ecological breakdown – are felt unequally across several socioeconomic lines including race and class. Global weirding is thus part of a long genealogy of colonial expansion. But Anthropocene proliferation and plantation logics do not always work; there have

always been sites of resistance, or ‘demonic grounds’ (McKittrick, 2006). Things can thus be out of place *within* the Anthropocene and plantation logics themselves. Global weirding cultivates an openness to these resistances and weird intrusions, which helps undo the plantation logic of simplification.

Global weirding thus acts as a subversive alternative to phrases like ‘global warming’ and ‘climate change’, which accommodate ‘denialist wordplay’ through subtly emphasising a degree of inevitability and predictability (Canavan and Hageman, 2016; 7). As Canavan and Hageman (2016; 8) note, in ‘postnormal times’, ‘we can no longer depend on the climatological patterns that up till now have more or less reliably structured our behaviours [...] as well as the life patterns of the plants and animals with which our coexistent surviving and thriving depends’. In the era of global weirding, nature is represented as unruly and untrustworthy, which is reflected in the rise of the literary and filmic genre eco-horror’ (The Economist, 2022).

Unruly ecological incidents include ‘freak’ weather events, the arrival of ‘alien’ species and increased instances of pandemic events (see Marshall et al., 2021). Global weirding also manifests more subtly, like through the early flowering of plants in temperate regions (Büntgen et al., 2022; see also (Dimick, 2018) on ‘environmental arrhythmias’). Fisher’s understanding of the weird as ‘perturbation’ is useful here. For Fisher (2016), the weird conjures a ‘sensation of wrongness’ concerning the location of things in time and space. Weirding unsettles spatiotemporal orderings (Greve and Zappe, 2019b). Such perturbations often engender ‘an overpowering sense that humanity is losing its (assumed) position of control over the physical world’ (Marshall et al., 2021; 3).

Alongside these events that happen in the world, global weirding also foregrounds the experiential *qualities* of natures out of place (Huff and Nel, 2020, 2021), which geographers have attended to in a variety of ways, notably in cultural geography’s ‘spectral turn’. For McCormack (2010; 642), spectrality foregrounds ‘that the experience of space and place is always haunted by a non-coincident spatiotemporality in which past and future participate simultaneously and in unpredictable ways’. Spectral

geographies has sought to elucidate the hauntings of absent-presences in ontology – or, *hauntology*, to use Derrida's (1993) neologism (see Frers, 2013; Searle, 2020; Wrigley, 2020; Wylie, 2007). There is an enduring interest with haunting, revenants, loss, absence and spectrality within cultural geography (Wylie, 2021). Yet, while these absences are evidently important in certain modes of human-nature relation (like conservation; see Searle, 2022), it is those agencies which become palpable and unsettling in their *presence* that capture our interest in this paper.

For Miéville (2008; 128), 'hauntology and the weird are two iterations of the same problematic': 'if we live in a haunted world—and we do—we live in a weird one'. Yet for Miéville, hauntology and the weird are markedly different: the weird is not about ghostly returns, but novel encounters and rupturing presences (Luckhurst, 2017). If hauntology is defined as the presence of absence (Derrida, 1993), the weird is constituted by 'the presence of that which does not belong' (Fisher, 2016; 61). It signals something which should not be: 'a weird entity or object is so strange that it makes us feel that it should not exist, or at least it should not exist here' (Fisher, 2016; 15).³

Kneale (2016; 52–53) notes that haunting is 'defined as the indeterminacy engendered by the experience of an absent presence', whereas weirding involves 'spatial hauntings' mediated 'between actors distant from each other in space or time'. If haunting traditionally describes time out-of-joint, weirding describes 'spacetimes out-of-joint'. Weird entities impinge into spacetimes or ecologies, which are often perceived as otherworldly or unearthly. Landscapes like the Chernobyl Exclusion Zone can be considered weird. Distant spacetimes of future extraterrestrial life are invoked at Chernobyl, as scientists make use of the radioactive landscape as an experimental testing ground for understanding how life will cope in outer space, invoking the unearthly *on Earth* (Turnbull, 2021). Yet we do not intend to posit (eerie) absence and (weird) presence as opposites. Indeed, they are allied concepts (Fisher, 2016), and future work might explore their similarities and differences empirically.

The New Weird, then, is an inherently geographical genre, concerned with transgressions of normative spatiotemporal orderings. While attention has been paid to 'weird temporalities' (Carroll and Sperling, 2020; Marder, 2021), a central contribution of this article is to offer geographical elaborations of weirding. There are several spatialities of the New Weird of interest to geographers. VanderMeer (2008) considers it an urban fiction. In several of VanderMeer and Miéville's stories, such as *City of Saints and Madmen* (VanderMeer, 2001) and *The City and the City* (Miéville, 2011b), the urban is a site of encounter with Otherness, where difference is produced and negotiated, resonating with urban geographical work on difference (e.g. Darling and Wilson, 2016; Valentine, 2013). For Wilson (2017a, 2017b), such encounters are about 'rupture and surprise', affects which the New Weird offers tools for dealing with. We return to how Miéville deploys the urban as a site of encounter with difference in Section V. In VanderMeer's work, cities are rendered more-than-human constellations, resonating with work in urban ecologies (e.g. Barua and Sinha, 2022).

Weird fiction is also often set in abandoned zones, islands or swamps (Kneale, 2006; Wilhelm, 2021), and places that humans have ruined or destroyed. VanderMeer (2017a) refers to weird landscapes as 'broken places', like interstitial marginalia and wastelands, which geographers have long been interested in (e.g. DeSilvey and Edensor, 2013; Edensor, 2005; Fredriksen, 2021; Jasper, 2020, 2021; Gandy, 2012, 2016). VanderMeer's *Area X* could be considered an emblematic weird landscape: a 'transitional' site, abandoned by humans due to the presence of a weird entity that permeates everything within the borders of the area. VanderMeer's zone teems with weird lifeforms that complicate borders between species and individuals. Importantly, the landscapes of weird fiction are imbued with great agency themselves, and are not merely the backdrop to the all-too-human plot.

In *Acceptance*, Vandermeer's (2014c; 187) third novel of the *Southern Reach Trilogy*, a series of scientific teams sent to examine Area X 'came back disorientated, damaged, or not at all'. Within Area X, there is a palpable sense that 'whatever will disorient

and destabilize lies below you... around a corner, beyond the horizon' (Vandermeer, 2014c; 69). The landscape repeats itself in spatiotemporal loops, confusing the characters who continually feel out of place. Weird spacetimes scramble senses, making it seem that the apparently 'fixed laws' of Nature 'have become un-fixed, the compass spinning wildly' (VanderMeer, 2016, np). The qualities of inhabiting spacetimes out-of-joint lead to experiences of 'no longer find[ing] ourselves capable of believing in the innocence of the sensual world that surrounds us' (Tabas, 2015; 16). As VanderMeer (2016, np) suggests, 'so many of the effects of this era are felt in and under the skin, as well as in the subconscious'. For Thacker (2011; 1), this makes the contemporary world 'increasingly unthinkable'. Like Morton's (2013) 'hyperobjects', the weirding of bodies, landscapes and ecologies is palpably present, yet its causes remain absent from practices of knowing. For Morton (2012), the current era can be described as the 'Age of Asymmetry'. Global weirding thus involves a pervasive feeling of out-of-placeness; of dis/orientation.

Disorientation has been subject to recent critical analysis (e.g. Harbin, 2016; Martin and Rosello, 2016). For Bissell and Gorman-Murray (2019; 707), 'disorientation is a productive geographical concept'. They associate disorientation with feelings of incomprehension, confusion and disintegration, often as a response to 'embodied encounters with unfamiliar others or experiences in unfamiliar places' (Bissell and Gorman-Murray, 2019; 708). These affects are in a different key to those more affirmative affects that have been the prevailing focus of vitalism-inspired cultural geographies (see Anderson and Harrison, 2010; Dekeyser and Jellis, 2021; Harrison, 2007, 2011; Romanillos, 2015). To be disoriented involves disruptions of a secure sense of place and belonging (Wylie, 2021). It can 'shatter one's sense of confidence in the ground or one's belief that the ground on which we reside can support the actions that make a life feel liveable' (Ahmed, 2006; 157). It entails a focus on moments when 'bodies lose their orienting relations to other bodies, to actions, and to situations' (Bissell and Gorman-Murray, 2019; 707). It involves hesitation and indecisiveness (Harrison, 2011) – an impasse.

For Massey (1992), globalisation regularly induces feelings of disorientation. Indeed, feelings of 'ordinary insecurity' (Bondi, 2014), 'a loss of bodily capacity to know others; to know how to proceed; and to know how to hold a situation together' are symptomatic of late capitalism (Bissell and Gorman-Murray, 2019; 708). Disorientation, therefore, inaugurates ethical responsibilities 'to create social conditions hospitable to those who are disoriented' (Harbin, 2016; 155 in Bissell and Gorman-Murray, 2019), to reorient towards socially just worlds.

This is precisely the point made by Vandermeer (2014c) in *Acceptance*. *Acceptance's* protagonist documents her response to getting lost in Area X, which involves embracing dis/orientation and adjusting in tentative, cautious ways to a weirding world. We find this trope of VanderMeer's New Weird fiction useful for approaching global weirding. While global weirding signals spacetimes out-of-joint, his New Weird approaches such instances not with horror and repulsion, but with openness, allowing for the possible emergence of more ethically oriented relations. Dis/orientation captures this process: as the undoing of connections and relations, which simultaneously affords opportunities for forging new ones and building new, more socially and ecologically just worlds.

IV Weird ecologies: Relation

Weirding has the capacity to alter modes of attention, changing the way humans relate to and position themselves within ecological assemblages. It foregrounds ecological oddities that unsettle assumptions about bodies, individuality and life, and poses questions regarding geographical approaches to relationality (see Jones, 2009). Weirdness is relative, made through relations, and thus differs from subject to subject, from group to group. Here, we address the overspill between fictive worlds and differentiated processes of global weirding.

New Weird fiction troubles the borders between bodies, 'thresholds' between worlds and prominent binaries of inside/outside, single/multiple and life/death (Fisher, 2016). As such, weird ecologies are often considered monstrous; yet monstrosity is a construction shaped by epistemic practice (Lorimer

and Driessen, 2013), meaning weirdness is perceived differently across space and time. The monstrosity purported by the New Weird engenders novel forms of relationality with nonhumans, which, following Haraway (2016), requires an active mode of relating to the Other: a mode which dwells with and embraces that which perturbs, impinges and unsettles. But this is not a recourse to Lovecraftian notions of relationality which underpin the work of Graham Harman and his OOO. As Loos (2021; 114) suggests, this risks reproducing racist structures of relation and correlationalism: 'An object-oriented approach to Lovecraft's racism reiterates Lovecraft's own biopolitical project'. Instead, the mode of relation speculated here is one of attention, rather than 'withdrawal'. One must be attentive to the histories of racism and misogyny which underpin weird ecologies, and the genre of the New Weird itself. For geographers, this means staying with the troubles of our own discipline.

What Western thought has traditionally conceived of as inanimate objects are often recognised as possessors of subjectivity in SF and the New Weird. But Indigenous cosmologies have done so long before the invention of the geographical discipline. Indeed, several theoretical frameworks – notably actor-network theory (e.g. Latour, 2005) and new materialisms (e.g. Bennet, 2001, 2009) – have examined object agency often without reference to the cosmologies that inform them (TallBear, 2017). The notion that objects with agency/subjectivity are weird, then, is not a novel suggestion (see Todd, 2016; Vivieros de Castro, 2014). Nevertheless, the approach to monstrous agencies that the New Weird cultivates offers provocations for geographical thought.

Animals, plants, fungi, microbes and a host of hybrids crawl amidst the pages of New Weird fiction, from VanderMeer's *Borne* (2017) to Steph Swainston's *The Modern World* (2007). These weird creatures are often chimeras – hybrids that trouble categorisations of species, bodies and individuals (see Friese, 2010). It is the New Weird's acceptance of border crossings that provides an ethics suitable for global weirding. Take, for instance, VanderMeer's novella, *The Strange Bird* (2017b). The feathers of an English-speaking genetically

engineered bird-human chimera are turned into a cloak by a rogue synthetic biologist. The cloak contains the consciousness of the creature who continues to think and feel its feathers, complicating the boundaries between life and death, and the locus of consciousness. Such instances challenge the 'strict boundaries of human and nonhuman bodies and objects, life and non-life' (Sperling, 2017a; 10).

As Sperling (2016a) suggests, weird bodies are porous and constantly mixing with each other and the world around them (see Alaimo, 2010). Engaging Irigaray's (2016) *Through Vegetal Being*, Sperling argues that vegetal spores throughout VanderMeer's *Southern Reach Trilogy* dissolve boundaries between humans and nonhumans and produce a form of 'weird embodiment [which] works with expanded, nonhuman conceptualisations of queerness' (Sperling, 2020 see also Endersby, 2016; MacCormack, 2019; Sandilands, 2014).

The embracing of 'contamination' – prominent in VanderMeer's work – links the New Weird 'to modes of embodiment specific to the environmental conditions of the twenty-first century' (Sperling, 2016a; 30). Take, for instance, the 'mutant ecologies' inaugurated by the US nuclear tests in New Mexico, where long-lasting radioactive contaminants could potentially cause biological effects into the distant future (Masco, 2004, 2006; Turnbull, 2021). Bodies of all kinds were 'timestamped' by radiation following nuclear experimentation in the 20th century (Alexis-Martin and Davis, 2017): there is no 'uncontaminated' place (Shotwell, 2016). Weird ecologies contain 'things', 'beings' or 'agencies' which lie 'beyond standard perception, cognition and experience' (Fisher, 2016; 8), like radiation, which feeds into their dis/orienting quality.

Weird ecologies thus give rise to weirded subjects. Trigg's (2014) 'unhuman phenomenology' offers useful insights into how subjectivity relates to, and emerges within weird ecologies (Trigg, 2014). For Trigg (2014), subjectivity does not happen 'out there' nor 'in us'. Indeed, as Fisher (2016; 8) notes, '[t]here is no inside except as a folding of the outside [...] I am an other, and I always was'. Similarly, Karen Barad calls for readers to wake up 'to the inhuman that therefore we are' (Barad 2012; 217–8 in Johnson, 2016; 60; see Clark and Yusoff, 2017).

Subjectivity itself, from this perspective, is inherently weird; a constant twist and turn between inside/outside, present/absent, here/there, I/not I (Morton, 2016). As Hepach (2021; 12), argues ‘one cannot disentangle the human from the non-human without destroying the very pattern that shows our inherent intertwinement with that which is other/more-than-/non-human’. Any attempt to do away with the subject, does not afford greater access to the non-human world, as certain post-phenomenologists and object-oriented ontologists argue. Instead, it is through the body that the nonhuman world becomes perceptible. Weirded subjects, then, are cognisant of the ‘horror of the body’ (Trigg, 2014; 20) – that the body is both human and unhuman – but they are not fearful of, nor appalled by, the impossibility of ‘purity’ implied therein (see Shotwell, 2016). Weird subjects are thoroughly situated, embodied and multiple.

New Weird fiction draws inspiration from the nonhuman world and the scientific practice which studies it. New Weird authors craft stories illustrated with instances of what Bradić (2019) calls, ‘weird biology’: the ‘various nonhuman organisms that challenge our knowledge of the world’. The natural world is rife with scenes one could associate with weird fiction. Bradić cites cephalopods, slime mould, ferns, vines, mosses and other tentacled creatures as examples, but emphasises the ‘mind controlling parasite’, *Toxoplasma gondii*, which is linked to psychosis in humans and other vertebrates (Mortensen et al., 2007). Weird biology, however, does not necessarily invoke horror, but is often associated with a sense of fascination and estrangement (see Suvin, 1972).

In geography, cephalopods and jellyfish have received attention for their ‘profoundly weird’ status, as they ‘bring into relief the other-worldly character of the world that we inhabit’ (Johnson, 2016; 60). Inspired by these creatures, Haraway (2016b) forwards ‘tentacular thought’ as a way of feeling, trying, living and dying well within multispecies communities (see also Despret, 2021; Rozelle, 2021). Tentacularity is a recurring motif throughout the New Weird as well, central to VanderMeer’s *Borne* (2017c), which focuses on a tentacled shape-shifting creature living in a dystopia overrun by

biotechnology, and Miéville’s *Kraken* (2010) centred around a squid-worshipping cult and the end of the world. Scientists, too, have long been fascinated by tentacled creatures (Thacker, 2019). Their ability to change colour, expressing emotions visibly through their bodies, and their distributed sense of self all contribute to their alienness, or their ‘immense foreignness’ (Baer, 2017). As such, many writers have claimed that octopuses are the closest opportunity we have to encountering intelligent aliens on earth (McKenna, 1991; Srinivasan, 2017; Godfrey-Smith, 2016).

It is not only radical otherworldliness that counts as weird, though; weird creatures are those which exist in places they ostensibly should not. The presence of fungus within the wreckage of the Chernobyl nuclear power plant, for example, troubles ideas concerning where life can survive and flourish (Turnbull, 2021).

For Bradić (2020; 1) weird science ‘produces knowledge which can significantly disrupt our sense of reality and of our place within it’. Weird scientific practice, then, inaugurates dis/orientation. As shown by Hones (2002), scientific knowledges can cause ‘radical disorientation’ and inspire the creation of SF worlds. It is the response to dis/orientation that we find useful in New Weird fiction. VanderMeer’s *Annihilation* actively immerses ‘readers into worlds where more-than-human sympathy and posthuman ecologies are part of the fabric of reality’ (De Freitas and Truman, 2021; 530). The New Weird can indeed foster ‘an ecological cosmic sympathy between human and nonhuman’, allowing ‘scholars to think creatively about new kinds of inquiry in the Anthropocene’ (De Freitas and Truman, 2021; 524). Moreover, these SF worlds make their way back into science. For instance, researchers at the University of British Columbia recently named symbionts – prominent protagonists of weird fiction (Bradshaw, 2020; Clark and Hird, 2018) – inhabiting the guts of termites after Lovecraft’s monster: *Cthulu macrofasciculumque* and *Cthylla microfasciculumque* (James et al., 2013).

Weird ecologies, therefore, entail natures out-of-joint in time and space – forcing reconsiderations of the frameworks previously used to make sense of the world – but they also ‘enweird’ ontology itself to

generate novel forms of subjectivity (Miéville, 2008). Such ontologies show we have never been modern (Latour, 1991), we have never been human (Haraway, 1991): we have always been weird. How, then, might geographers respond to these novel worlds, and accommodate a ‘speculative ethics’ appropriate for this era of global weirding (Gerlach, 2020; Puig De la Bellacasa, 2017)?

V Embracing the weird: Acceptance

Like *The Southern Reach*’s changing landscape, weird ecologies evoke the sense that transformation is inevitable. They offer glimpses of ethics appropriate for an era of ecocide, extinction and planetary violence; one where, as Gerlach (2017, 2020) suggests, unquestioned hope is ignorant, and as Neyrat (2017, 2019) argues, pessimism runs the risk of inspiring nihilism. New Weird authors neither celebrate nor fear the emergence of weird ecologies. VanderMeer, for example, refuses both hope and pessimism. He rejects an ‘empty endorsement’ of relation to instead ‘pursue the complex frictions of violent naturecultures’ (De Freitas and Truman, 2021; 525), giving form to the question ‘what comes after entanglement?’ (Giraud, 2019). What happens, then, when geographers take seriously the ‘shock that the encounter with the outside produces’ without disgust or horror (Fisher, 2016; 26), whilst still taking seriously the abilities of monsters ‘to warn and to bite’ (Holloway, 2017; 21)? In encountering the perturbing inhumanity of the planetary (Clark, 2010), or the apocalyptic realities of the extinction crisis, how might we avoid reactionary responses that make recourse to logics rooted in binary geographies of exclusion or Lovecraft’s fear?

For Fisher (2016; 16), the weird involves an ‘encounter with the outside’, whereby the interior becomes ontologically exposed, open, contingent. Alder (2020; 13), provides a possible way to avoid Lovecraftian horror or fear by instead deploying ‘useful ambivalence’ as a specific orientation to weird encounters. Ambivalence has gained traction in recent geographical debate (Berlant, 2018; Gerlach, 2017; Moss et al., 2018; Ruez and Cockayne, 2021; Wilkinson and Ortega-Alcazar, 2019). Wylie (2021; 227) notes that geographers

face difficulties when accounting for affects and phenomena of ‘negatives, nons-, and absences [...] precisely because any action, description, or reference that brings them into light, into visibility, itself negates their particularity, their specific manner of not-being’. Ambivalence has been promoted as a means of dislodging this purported tension ‘without privileging either positive or negative feelings in advance’ (Ruez and Cockayne, 2021; 102; see also Dekeyser and Jellis, 2021; Gandy and Jasper, 2017; Linz and Secor, 2021; Romanillos, 2015; Swyngedouw and Ernstson, 2018; Murray, 2020).

Ambivalence plays out in VanderMeer’s *Southern Reach Trilogy*. The Biologist relinquishes any resistance to the landscape, which warps and engulfs her body, accepting her mutability and synthesis with the weird landscape. After encountering a strange, ‘moaning creature’, she reflects that:

I should have felt something. I should have been moved or disgusted by this encounter. Yet after [...] my annihilation [...] I felt nothing. No emotion at all, not even simple, common pity, despite this raw expression of trauma, some agony beyond comprehension (Vandermeer, 2014; 162)

The Biologist, here, ‘is ambivalent in relation to transformation and what it might entail’ (Garforth and Iossifidis, 2020; 18; see Rose, 2018). She reflects upon her ambivalence towards a futurity devoid of humanity: ‘I can no longer say with conviction that this is a bad thing’ (VanderMeer, 2014; 192). It is precisely such an ‘approach’, which might make encountering weirdness generative rather than regressive. Following Linz and Secor (2021; 111), the Biologist’s approach is an ‘ambivalent orientation’ to weird spacetimes: ‘one that is elbow deep in the disconcerting irresolvability of complexity’. Reflecting on the encounter, she asks: ‘I was unlucky—or was I lucky?’ (VanderMeer, 2014; 17). Inflected by the weird, then, geographers might attend in greater detail to ‘not what renders [life] lively, but what cuts away at that life, to the point of, including and maybe beyond death’ (Philo, 2017; 258). The New Weird often deals with ‘notions of irreparable change; with entities and subjects that are in the process of “becoming-other”’, and as such, offers

useful insights into dealing with the realities of global weirding (Garforth and Iossifidis, 2020; 18).

Geographers have tended to the dis/orienting fabric of everyday life, from haunted houses (Lipman, 2014) to uncanny urban formations (Pile, 2005). But how does an ambivalent approach avoid slipping into a ‘disinterested’ or ‘indifferent’ nihilism? To what extent is ambivalence an appropriate ethical orientation (Wilkinson and Lim, 2021)? How might we ensure that encountering the weird does not produce a neo-Lovecraftian reactivity which entrenches binaries? Doreen Massey writes, ‘those who today worry about a sense of disorientation and a loss of control must once have felt they knew exactly where they were, and that they *had* control’ (Massey, 1994; 165, emphasis in original; Bissell and Gorman-Murray, 2019). This signals the power dynamics inherent to being dis/oriented, which for some may be less a shocking state and more an enduring norm. This resonates with work in queer and crip studies (e.g. Chen, 2012; McKuer and Berube, 2006), which emphasises the impossibility of a universal subject. As Ahmed (2006; 158) suggests, dis/orientation does not possess an inherently radical or transformational potential: ‘bodies that experience disorientation can be defensive’.

We do not, therefore, position ‘the disoriented subject as the privileged site of new knowledge, dissident pleasure or social critique’ (Martin and Rosello, 2016; 1). Nevertheless, dis/orientation may be fruitful for social enquiry (Bissell and Gorman-Murray, 2019). The *Southern Reach Trilogy* illustrates the power of accepting one’s own finitude in weird ecologies. But in the context of unequal power relations in global weirding, acceptance does not do enough. Accepting the dissolution of the human subject, being open to the end of times, does nothing to contest the subtending histories of exclusion, dispossession and expropriation which underpin the era of global weirding (Ernstson and Swyngedouw, 2018). It risks erring too far onto the side of affirmation, failing to recognise, for example, that the ‘end times’ have already happened for many people, including Indigenous Peoples whose lands, livelihoods and lives were, and continue to be, decimated by colonisation (Whyte, 2018). What is required, then, is to focus on cultivating acceptance and openness to the outside. Acceptance is a critical

orientation with which to approach altering worlds and ‘non-deterministic difference’ (Ruez and Cockayne, 2021).

Miéville’s writing is instructive here. It is explicitly political (Bould and Miéville, 2009; Miéville, 2019), and influenced by close readings of Marx (Miéville, 2002). Miéville explicitly identifies the place of monsters, spectres and vampires within the pages of *Capital* – just as Derrida did in *Spectres of Marx* (1993). In doing so, the dis/orienting spatio-temporalities of capitalist life are brought to the fore by Miéville, who emphasises the subtending social inequalities that subtend capitalist relations. Rendle (2020; 6) reads the New Weird to critique neoliberalism as inhuman, arguing that the genre is ‘ideally suited to exploring alternatives to presupposed ideological systems’. Such positioning is reflected by Fisher’s (2016; 11) claim that capitalism’s agency in everyday life is ‘eerie’, a concept and affect closely allied to the weird: capital is ‘conjured out of nothing’ yet ‘exerts more influence than any substantial entity’. (Shaviro, 2002; 285) argues the vampire metaphor commonly used to define capital is ‘overly cosy and comforting’. Instead, he suggests, capital ‘must be figured as something absolutely inhuman and unrecognisable’, citing Miéville’s *slake-moths* – predatory monsters who feed on human dreams – as a more apt metaphor.

Miéville’s novels are populated by human-nonhuman relations within capitalist ruins (Gordon, 2003). *Perdido Street Station*’s (2000) protagonist, human scientist Isaac Dan der Grimnebulin, encounters the urban landscapes of New Crobuzon populated by chimeras such as slake-moths. Their hybridity is presented as matter-of-fact, mundane, unremarkable; and Isaac approaches the city’s weird ecologies with an open ambivalence. Yet unlike the Biologist in *Acceptance*, Isaac’s openness to that which exceeds him exists alongside a commitment to expose unequal power relations. Through Isaac, Miéville examines intersecting questions of race, class and species.

This becomes apparent in Isaac’s relationship with his partner, Lin, who is Khepri – an insect-like humanoid species. Despite their intimacy, Isaac’s encounters with Lin expose histories of racialisation and sexualisation which continue to operate.

Miéville illuminates wider systems of marginalisation which underpin New Crobuzon (Gordon, 2003). Miéville's weird encounters avoid recourse to reactive politics and, as such, his writings allow geographers to 'inhabit this undecidable impasse [between affirmation and negation] while engaging with the difference and politics that already exists within affirmative and reparative projects' (Ruez and Cockayne, 2021; 93). This is akin to what N.K. Jemisin (2018) suggests in the SF short story *The Ones Who Stay and Fight*, a reply to Ursula Le Guin's (1973) *The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas* (see Schmidt, 2022). In Le Guin's tale, the utopian city Omelas gains its prosperity as a result of all suffering and misfortune being directed towards one child, who must suffer on behalf of everyone else. Le Guin sets the story up between those who stay in Omelas and those who choose to leave. Jemisin, on the other hand, refuses this binary choice, focussing on those who *stay* and *fight*.

Miéville's writing holds 'both difference as plurality and difference as unevenness in productive tension' (Ruez and Cockayne, 2021; 102). While creating worlds in which different entities and species intimately co-exist, Miéville remains attentive to how these differences are governed along hierarchical lines. As he stated in a 2010 interview, 'part of the appeal of the fantastic is taking ridiculous ideas very seriously and pretending they're not absurd'. This is an explicitly political act for Miéville, whose work has been described as 'postcolonial' due to its ability to expose and destabilise 'the compulsion of the human gaze to colonise its surroundings' (Ulstein, 2019a; 51). Miéville neither ignores nor justifies existing socioeconomic inequalities, and he actively grapples with the troublesome literary and generic legacies inherent in his writing. His work, therefore, can inspire geographers to embrace similar legacies in their own discipline. It is by 'refusing both total negation and absolute affirmation, refusing to deny everything or account for everything' (Rosen, 2020; 16), that geographers might build an ethics inspired by the weird.

VI Conclusion

Literary geographies highlight the role that texts offer geographers for imagining alternative futures and

conceptualising the contemporary socioecological condition (Anderson, 2020; Finch and Norrman, 2021). The ecologies which populate the pages of New Weird fiction offer a timely contribution to this debate as they capture the zeitgeist of contemporary anxieties towards the so-called Anthropocene. This, in part, explains the New Weird's recent surge in popularity. New Weird authors dwell in speculative worlds, and create opportunities for readers to fabricate their own. They approach weird ecologies with a useful ambivalence that unsettles taken-for-granted concepts and orientations. Our reading of the New Weird has looked to eschew purely ecocritical interpretations of fictive works; instead we wish to foreground the novels as contributions themselves to geographical thought; as manuals which can contribute, and do work, rather than simply being reflective of culture (Anderson, 2020).

In this article, we have turned to the New Weird to provide a conceptual toolkit for understanding the contemporary socioecological condition; one we reframe as a process of 'global weirding'. Global weirding points towards widespread, yet unevenly distributed and experienced, socioecological changes that are currently facing the planet. Yet it is more than just a descriptor of physical change; it also signals an affective and political response to living in an epoch of altering (or weirding) worlds. This allows for several key insights that advance and complement geographical thought concerning difference, dis/orientation, relation and acceptance.

First, our understanding of global weirding is informed by New Weird authors that subvert the racist, Lovecraftian legacies of the 'Old Weird'. The New Weird has been subject to much critical debate, and has been active in redefining itself to stay with its troubled past (Loos, 2021). Much is to be gained from this active rethinking and subverting of the literary canon – namely, a more open and inclusive writerly community, and stories that speak to differentially experienced worlds – which geographers should take on board in relation to our own disciplinary histories. Because the New Weird authors we highlight are politically and environmentally active, and are also active in challenging and subverting the racist legacies their genre inherits, global weirding becomes a heuristic for highlighting the troubling

social, economic and political systems that underpin the Anthropocene. There is no global weirding without histories of racism and misogyny, just like there is no Anthropocene without histories of colonialism. We highlight contemporary iterations of the weird, like the Black Weird (Dunning, 2020), as modes that expose the horrors of whiteness in society, and suggest there are critical overlaps with Black Geographies (Hawthorne, 2019; Hirsch and Jones, 2021; Noxolo, 2022) that future work in literary geographies should explore. In this sense, global weirding renders the current epoch of socio-environmental change inherently political, which the Anthropocene does not always do (Yusoff, 2017). In doing so, it is able to account for difference.

Second, and as such, the way many New Weird authors approach *difference* in their writing – be it an encounter with an Other, or drastic environmental change – does not revolve around horror or fear. Instead, they write with a useful ambivalence towards difference. They offer glimpses into what altered worlds might look like, giving geographers the opportunity to hack the present towards more socially just futures. Yet they do not uncritically celebrate boundary crossings and blurrings, and instead develop characters and storylines that prefigure what it means to live with the problems socio-ecological change and difference inaugurate. Indeed, the authors we highlight do not shy away from challenging situations or questions, neither erasing nor romanticising difference. This helps move past an impasse in strands of geographical thought concerning affirmation and negation. By prefiguring worlds in which weird encounters and ecologies are already present, they invoke a radically empirical ethics; one rooted in experience, one impossible to determine in advance (Gerlach, 2020).

Third, the affect with which global weirding is most often met is *dis/orientation*. This occurs due to arriving in the middle of things, without pre-determined means for making sense of global weirding. Our discussion of weird ecologies has shown that the weird presences invoked by global weirding – radical alterations to environments and ecosystems – are as jarring as absences associated with extinction and loss. Encounters with ‘natures out of place’ entail a dis/orientating response. But

dis/orientation also highlights ecological *relations* – to the world and to each other. Following Fisher (2016; 28), the weird ‘de-naturalises all worlds, by exposing their instability, their openness to the outside’. Even when dis/oriented, relations are still fundamental. Weird encounters force a generative empirical reengagement with the world (De Freitas and Truman, 2020); if things don’t make sense, if we are dis/oriented, it is often our concepts, methods, and ontologies that are inadequate. Like we attempt here in relation to the weird, we hope that dis/orientation can be a useful way for geographers to experiment with and generate concepts that account for the novelty of the contemporary socioecological condition.

Finally, *acceptance* emerges as a political and conceptual tool to approach a weirding world that cultivates a ‘radical openness’ to the outside, change and transition. A New Weird geography considers how new worlds emerge from the breakdown of old ones, without ignoring contingencies of the old. The subverted characters and plots of many New Weird stories ask readers to adjust to worlds governed by novel social and ecological rules and relations. For them to make sense, the reader must first accept something that doesn’t make sense in their own world. Here, readers – and New Weird characters themselves – are disoriented, while simultaneously forced to search for the orienting qualities of a weirded world; finding instances of political potential within the interstices of apocalypse. Indeed, weird perturbations can ‘unleash a utopian charge by revealing the necessity of both living with and confronting eco-social ruin, environmental injustice, white supremacy and capitalist exploitation’ (Garforth and Iossifidis, 2020; 19). Vandermeer’s Biologist and Miéville’s Isaac both approach weird ecologies with curiosity and openness. They do not fear change, but approach it with useful ambivalence. In doing so, they are able to accept new relations – relations that do not always make sense in the old world (or the reader’s world); relations that subvert the colonial, racist and misogynistic histories from which they emerge.

Weirding teaches us to stay with and subvert histories of racism and misogyny. To overlook its ethics, we conclude, would be a loss to the discipline

and attenuate the ability of geographers to analyse, conceptualise or indeed respond to radical alterations in landscapes and ecologies; to global weirding. Now, more than ever, geographers must be open to speculation, to being weirded, to a New Weird geography.

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Notes

1. <https://deepcuts.blog/>
2. The term was originally coined by environmentalist Hunter Lovins, ecologist and co-founder of the Rocky Mountains Institute.
3. Miéville (2008) introduces the concept of the abcanny to distinguish the weird from the uncanny, a concept it is regularly associated, or made synonymous, with. As Alexander Stachniak (2014, np) writes, '[w]hereas the Uncanny exists in relation to the past, the Abcanny suggests a particular future'. The abcanny, the weird, is

about novel and unexpected presences that radically alter future imaginaries. It is a perturbation of something completely novel into the present, which alters the future (including knowledge), rather than a resurfacing of something repressed but familiar from the past.

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