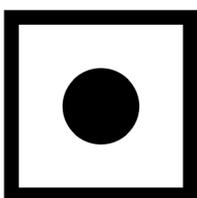


WEIRD SCIENCES AND THE SCIENCES OF THE WEIRD

part 2



The idea of the weird as an affective response to various anthropogenic and non-anthropogenic phenomena has spread across the disciplines throughout the last decade, pervading almost every area of human interest. Contemporary scholars such as Mark Fisher, Graham Harman, Timothy Morton and Donna Haraway, to name but a few, have paved the way for thinking about various natural and cultural phenomena through the lens of the weird, and established what we could name ‘weird studies,’ or, as indicated in the title of this special issue, ‘sciences of the weird,’ broadly understood.

This issue of *Pulse* is the second and last part of the series dedicated to the weird, and it includes eight articles marked by diverse approaches and focused on different media, but rooted in the same idea: that the world we live in has a way of estranging our sense of reality. For instance, the weird is inscribed in particular types of spaces, especially those that evoke a sense of spatio-temporal incongruity. With the rise of social media, this fascination brought to life an aesthetic trend dedicated to the paranormal and strange on Tumblr and Reddit. Precisely this set of problems is analysed in the opening article “Betwixt and Between: Zones as Liminal and Deterritorialized Spaces” by Peter Heft. With his focus on the notions of zone, threshold, liminality and deterritorialization, Heft lays the foundation for rethinking the relationship between “spaces of anomalousness” and eeriness. A different take on the interconnectedness between space and the weird can be found in Owen Marshall’s voyage through Utah as an important information-generating site, entitled

“From Proving Ground to Bumblehive: Touring Utah’s Weird Information Landscape.” According to Marshall, intricate relationships between the Mormon Church, genealogical databases such as FamilySearch and Ancestry.com, surveillance companies, Ku Klux Klan, and speculative fiction writer Orson Scott Card, reveal the weirdness in Utah’s information-collecting projects.

Over the last decade, there has been a profusion of theoretical research on the weird and popular culture, and their relation to natural sciences. This resulted in different approaches, of which two are presented in Steffan Jenkins’ article “The Weirdness of Hyperobjects.” Jenkins offers a comparative analysis of two substantially different thinkers: Timothy Morton and Mark Fisher. The choice is obvious given that the former is one of the most cited and productive ecological thinkers, and the latter one of the most influential cultural critics of our time. What both of these authors share is their interest in the various manifestations of the strange in popular culture. Therefore, the core of this comparison is Morton’s concept of the hyperobject and Fisher’s distinction of the weird and the eerie, in respect to aesthetics, ecology, and science in general.

Other articles focus on the weird across different arts and media, such as film, literature, comics and graphic novels. The authors analyse exciting works of film directors, writers and artists such as Charlie Kaufman, Richard Linklater, M. J. Harrison, Rob Guillory, Steve Gerber, or Alan Moore, while their approaches range from plant studies, speculative realism, to posthumanism and ecocriticism.

Claudio Murgia, for instance, in his article “The Weird as Contingency and Fate in the Empty Space Trilogy” traces Quentin Meillassoux’s notion of contingency and Fisher’s conception of fate in M. J. Harrison’s novels. Furthermore, an obvious link between the weird and the Other is signalled in Katya Krylova’s “Sentient Body: Re-liberation of Dissident Subjectivity through Skinship,” which explores the phenomena of haptic perception and subjective experience in oceanographic research through reading Stanislaw Lem’s *Solaris*. The topic of non-human subjectivity is further continued in David M. J. Carruthers’ article focused on plant life in Charlie Kaufman’s *Adaptation* and Richard Linklater’s *A Scanner Darkly*. Both films, the author argues, demonstrate “posthuman plant-thinking” and therefore challenge anthropocentric worldviews. A similar impulse for rethinking the weird potential of plants in popular culture is seen in Chris Wilhelm’s “Monster Comics, Wetlands, and the Weird: Steve Gerber’s Man-Thing and Alan Moore’s Swamp Thing,” and Dona Pursall’s “Growing the Living in the Land: Weird Ecology in Rob Guillory’s Comic *Farmhand*.” While the former draws attention to natural habitats such as swamps, wetlands and marshes as sites of an encounter with the weird, the latter stays within cultivated areas of human hubris in order to pinpoint a thin line between real-life bioengineering and science fiction.

In addition to the above-mentioned articles, this issue includes two contributions that blend science and art. The first one is an artist article on imagined disaster scenarios of the ASEAN cities accompanied by graphic illustrations made by Alan Marshall et al., entitled “Graphic Global Weirding Scenarios for ASEAN’s

Capital Cities,” and the second one is Oscar Salguero’s “A False Encounter: An Interspecies Martian Tale,” a visual essay on a fictional encounter between artificial intelligence and extra-terrestrial life. Both pieces rely on speculative approaches in order to envision possible future scenarios and comment on the current state of affairs.

Furthermore, the issue includes five book reviews of recent publications on the topics related to weird sciences, spanning cultural studies, literary theory, cinema, and philosophy. Sean Seeger guides us through *The American Weird: Concept and Medium* (2020), an edited volume by Julius Greve and Florian Zappe, which contains essays by well-established authors in the area of weird studies that zoom in on the American context of the weird. As a medium that has shown to be a fertile ground for weird aesthetics in recent years, film is extensively researched in William Brown and David H. Fleming’s book entitled *The Squid Cinema from Hell: Kinoteuthis Infernalis and the Emergence of Chthulumedía* (2020). According to the reviewer Joseph Jenner, the book not only covers the topic of the weird and its various manifestations in contemporary cinema, but also encapsulates weirdness in its formal qualities. John Sears reviews a brilliant study of the nineteenth-century sciences and British weird fiction, *Weird Fiction and Science at the Fin de Siècle* (2020) by Emily Alder. The importance of this book, as the reviewer argues, lies in its selection of authors—such as H. G. Wells and W. H. Hodgson—who have rarely been analysed in the context of weird fiction. Said Mentak reviews a work of literary theory, *The Value of Ecocriticism* (2019) by Timothy Clark, one of the most important books on ecocriticism in the recent years. Despite its focus on ecocriticism, Clark’s thoughts on the issue of scale are relevant for weird studies as well. Finally, Ben Woodard gives us a glimpse of Thomas Moynihan’s *Spinal Catastrophism* (2019), a book written in the genre of theory-fiction, which narrates a story about the relationship between natural history, human anatomy and trauma. As such, it is an indispensable part of weird studies.

Overall, the diversity of topics contained in this issue attests to the omnipresence of the weird. The articles show that the weird exists not only within the limits of generic conventions, but also in unexpected places that reveal the entanglements of sciences, technologies, politics, economy, and much more. We hope that this issue of *Pulse* will be successful in directing the readers’ attention to these diverse sites of the weird.

—Marijeta Bradić
Guest editor