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Evolve or Die!

Enmeshment and Extinction in DC's *Animal Man*

Jason Wallin (Alberta)

»We were given paradise...and we turned it into an...abattoir«
– B'wana Beast (AM4.17.1)[1]

In the fall of 1987, British writer Grant Morrison was approached by a team of talent recruiters from DC Publishing with an unusual mission. In the wake of Alan Moore's successful work on *Swamp Thing* (2012) (with Stephen Bissette, John Totleben, and Rick Veitch) and *Watchmen* (1986) (with Dave Gibbons), DC began looking for new writers to resuscitate an untapped back catalogue of silver-age characters. In the front matter of the *Animal Man* (1991) trade paperback, Grant Morrison describes his fascination with Carmine Infantino's Animal Man, a character whose origins extend from issue #180 of *Strange Adventures* (1965), in which mild-mannered everyman Bernard ›Buddy‹ Baker gains the ability to harness the powers of animals after being exposed to radiation from a crashed alien spacecraft. Using his newfound abilities to overcome a cadre of escaped circus animals, Animal Man defeats an alien antagonist and is subsequently dubbed a hero in the local newspaper.

In reworking Animal Man for a new generation of readers, Morrison would delink the character from a hero ›above‹ animals by linking his narrative to issues of ethics and sustainability being advanced by the animal rights movement (see Singer 1987). For while a preponderance of superheroes popular from the comics ›Silver Age‹ onward were yet characterized as god-like beings situated above and beyond the material fetters of life (i.e. Superman, Supergirl, Legion of Superheroes), Animal Man rejoins with such materiality to demonstrate the horrors wrought upon it from the vantage of supremacy and exceptionalism of which many superheroes remain emblematic. Against this ethico-political backdrop, *Animal Man* would foment a critical speculation on human and animal relations and, further, would relaunch the character as a vehicle for exploring the complex entanglements of culture

and nature in an age marked by growing awareness for the degraded status of animal life. Throughout *Animal Man*, the occulted life of the nonhuman emerges in distinction to the ›normative‹ superhero mythos, which so often carries with it the ideal of human exceptionalism and the Enlightenment aspiration for supremacy that has wrought untold violence on both human and nonhuman life. This essay will attend to two versions of Animal Man, the first helmed by Grant Morrison from 1988–1989, and the second penned by Jeff Lemire and Scott Snyder from 2012–2014. Across these instances of the character, this essay will aim to consider the coinciding and diverging ways in which *Animal Man* catalyzes a confrontation with the status of nonhuman life in contemporary culture and the mutual fate we share with nonhuman others. In this vein, *Animal Man* founds a challenge to reimagine human and nonhuman relations as the present civilizational trajectory of unabated consumption and anthropocentrism risks the horrors of perpetual violence and extinction, with which we are already confronted as we enter the 6th mass extinction of life on the planet.

The analysis of *Animal Man* that this essay undertakes begins with Grant Morrison's run on the series from 1988–1989. It is in Morrison's work that *Animal Man* confronts the status of human and animal relations against such backdrops as the laboratory, zoo, and abbatoir – which in *Animal Man* often amount to the same thing. The relationship of human and animal explored in Morrison's *Animal Man* will be expanded in the article's second half, which draws upon Jeff Lemire and Scott Snyder's run on *Animal Man* from 2012–2014 as the series links the relationship of man and animal to the occult ecologies of the planet and the horror of ecocatastrophe. Across these instances, Animal Man figures as a character unique in its capacity to evoke the often neglected complexities of human and nonhuman relationality, and so too the ecological threat posed by the conceits of anthropocentrism (human-centered ideology) and the mounting threat of unabated consumption perpetrated by the forces of global capitalism.

›The Human Zoo‹: The Ecological Posthumanism of Animal Man

Grant Morrison's *Animal Man* (1988–1989) would reimagine the character's silver-age version as proximal to the world of animals from which his powers are relationally born. Unlike a majority of superheroes whose abilities are an ›intrinsic‹ property or ›internal‹ essence, Animal Man's power is conceived in relation to a ›morphogenic‹ field in which human and animal life are reciprocally imbricated. Issues #1–4 dramatize the ›transversal‹ relation between Animal Man and a host of creatures whose abilities he is able to temporarily ›absorb‹. Early in the series, for instance, Animal Man assumes such abilities as flight, strength, tracking, camouflage and regeneration by drawing upon the abilities of birds, elephants, bugs, dogs, chameleons and worms. Where myriad heroes reflect the

Enlightenment ideal of transcending the material world as its godly and beneficent protectors, Morrison's ›Animal Man‹ remains entwined with human and animal life in complex interrelationships (Jeffery 2016, 137). For what Morrison and pencillers Chas Truog and Doug Hazlewood ultimately reveal is the relation of human and nonhuman that is already present but peripheral to conscious human awareness. Where the modern superhero mythos often imagines the body as a site of obsessional control perfected through the rigors of training (Batman) and intensive willpower (Green Lantern), *Animal Man* surveys the affective extension of the body as an ecological matter. Herein, *Animal Man* explores an ecological posthumanism in which the body is imagined as both permeable and open in its relation with the inhuman (MacCormack 2013), a revelation emblematized by the current state of global pandemic. Counterposed to the image of the self-enclosed and armored body of the superhero, Animal Man gives expression to an exchange of potential becomings between the human and nonhuman, thus catalyzing the ›becoming-other‹ of the humanist subject as it is given regularity in the Enlightenment image of the human as being bounded and distinct from nonhuman others.

From the outset of his work on the series, Morrison articulates the difference of Animal Man from the super-hero trope in general, and in particular, aims throughout his run to challenge the Enlightenment ideal of the bounded and self-determining subject that dominates the superhero imaginary. As the Medieval ›Great Chain of Being‹ established an ontological order of life in which humans figured above animals and plants in hierarchical supremacy, the modern superhero galvanizes the conceit of transcendence, in which they often function as an analogy of human transcendence over an inferior world. That the superhero resoundingly appears human redoubles the presupposition and aspiration of such transcendence that has occupied the Western imagination since the Medieval period. It is in this vein that the pervasive Enlightenment presumption that human rationality ought to supplement the position of God is repeated in the contemporary popularity of an enhanced humanity born from technology (Iron Man, Cyborg), science (Spider-Man, Flash), ascetic self-determination (Batman, Green Lantern) and the dominion of mind over matter (Jean Grey). Herein, the figure of the superhero reifies the presupposition of human superiority and the vested interest of such superiority in the preservation of the human and its interests. Despite the difference that superheroes emblematize, such difference often remains ›all-too-human‹ for the manner in which it habitually centers human melodrama and meaning (Jefferey 2016). The preservation of such anthropocentric reactivity has distinctly ecological consequences. For instance, the ecological metanarrative of such popular superhero narratives as *Avengers: Endgame* (2019) insists that the interest of superhumans run corollary to human interest and continuation above the fate of the biosphere, which is today being pushed to the brink of its carrying capacity and ability to sustain life (Heinberg 2018; jagodzinski 2018).

In contrast to the transcendent status of the superhero, Animal Man is ›always-already‹ enmeshed with the biosphere. Distinct from the bounded being of the superhero whose identity and power is intrinsically located, Animal Man is in a process of becoming in the open (or transversal) space *between* man and animal. Morrison attends to this queer relationship throughout his run on the series, and, in a notable scene in which Animal Man appears on a national talk show, he is ridiculed by the show's host, who mockingly refers to him as ›the human zoo‹ (AM1.18.1–7). Here, Animal Man's public humiliation dramatizes the cheapened status of the animal as it has become reformatted into the circuits of consumptive leisure and quasi-domestication that thinkers like Jason Moore and Ray Patel (2019) have identified as an indexical expression of advanced capitalism.

Ontological Dilations of Animal Man: It's a Jungle Out There!

Morrison's Animal Man is born in resemblance to Deleuze and Guattari's (1987) concept of ›becoming-animal‹. As Deleuze and Guattari conceptualize in *A Thousand Plateaus*, ›becoming-animal‹ entails the ›transversal‹ or heterogeneous exchange of nonhuman potentials on behalf of creating a world disidentified from the world ›in general‹, or rather that image of the world and our worldly relations born from anthropocentrism and its presumption that the world is ultimately ›for-us‹ (Thacker 2015). ›Becoming-animal‹ herein marks the creation of an alliance with the inhuman and ›demonic‹ nuptials bridging human and animal worlds. Such modes of alliance are for Deleuze and Guattari (1987) corollaries of becoming in that they rupture establishment thinking that everywhere seeks to claim the identity of being within the metrics of human-centered ideology (251). Demonic alliance, or rather the alliance between the human and nonhuman, is the expression of a minoritarian revolt that for Deleuze and Guattari exists at the fringe of central institutions and that might figure in the preparation of a people-yet-to-come, which is to say a people for whom there is no representational model (250). The forces of becoming that Deleuze and Guattari summon through the alliance of human and nonhuman figures informs the concept of ›becoming-animal‹, which in part suggest a mode of becoming as it is made to pass through the intensities, singular worlds, and powers of the nonhuman. Such ›animal-becomings‹ are articulated throughout the *Animal Man* series, and not simply in terms of Buddy's ›resemblance‹ to the animals with whom he shares his power. Rather, Animal Man's becoming is given expression through Baker's expanding reality and sensitivity to the ›world‹ of animals. As Morrison and Truog illustrate in a brief but nuanced sequence from Animal Man Issue #1 entitled *The Human Zoo*, Animal Man experiences the expansion of the ›ahuman‹ sensorium as he absorbs the olfactory capabilities of a dog. In this exchange, Animal Man becomes imminently sensitive to the smell of water in underground pipes, of drying paint

Fig. 1: Animal Man's ›ahuman‹ sensorium (AM1, 18).

on an office wall, and of emotion itself (AM2.9.1–6). Throughout his run on the book, Morrison juxtaposes such potent ›animal-becomings‹ to the banality of bourgeois suburbanism (AM1. 18. 1–2). Here (Fig. 1), the suburban backdrop of Animal Man is significant not only as an index of control and mastery over nature reformatted in the aesthetic forms of manicured lawns, the neatly ordered boundaries of white picket fences, and curation of household plants, but of the all-too-human preoccupations of bourgeois life that suggest the world's givenness to a single species.

Bearing witness to the cultural ambivalence toward the fate of animal life, Morrison's Animal Man commits to vegetarianism. In an innovation of the superhero comics genre, the opening pages of the seminal *Coyote Gospel* focus on the domestic life of Bernhard ›Buddy‹ Baker and his existential crisis regarding the consumption of animals (AM5. 6–8.1–17). Morrison dramatizes the tension of Buddy's choice to eschew the consumption of animals, first in an argument with his wife and then his neighbour-cum-agent, who contends that Buddy's turn to vegetarianism will be unsympathetically received by the public. Significantly, Morrison's development of Animal Man is made to intersect directly with the field of animal ethics. Putting aside Morrison's problematic rendering of the animal according to its ›use-value‹

or status as standing reserve for Animal Man, Morrison dramatizes both Bernard's concern for animal exploitation and the existential tensions such concern produces. dos Santos Rodrigues and da Cruz e Zica (2018) cogently note that the change in Buddy's existential practices figured in his turn to vegetarianism combats ›the speciesist practices in his daily life‹ and further, marks a move toward the abolition of animal consumption and manipulation by science, agriculture, sport hunting and trapping (77). Such contexts are evoked throughout Morrison's *Animal Man*, which dramatizes the oppression of animals within the laboratory, in their forced significance to the desire of man, and in their reformatting as the objects of leisure and sport. Such concern for the rights of animals would manifest in Morrison's own life, and in the course of his work on *Animal Man*, Morrison would convert to vegetarianism and forge alliances with the Animal Liberation Front (Morrison 1991).

From the Garden of Paradise to the Hell of the Abattoir

The ›ecological‹ nature of Animal Man's powers function as a fulcrum for a broader examination of the animal's status in contemporary culture. As dos Santos Rodrigues and da Cruz e Zica (2018) write, »[t]he struggle for animal rights makes *Animal Man* a megaphone for the construction of environmental ideas, and in the plot we have hard attacks on the way humans impact other living beings« (82). Morrison's work on *Animal Man* develops a nuanced commentary on the cultural hatred of animals by revealing how the dispensation of nonhuman life and death is as much entwined with the repugnant superiority of ›patriarchal masculinity‹ as the aspiration of control that inheres in the cold rationalism of scientific research and experimentation on animals (Pedersen 2019). The problem of patriarchal masculin-

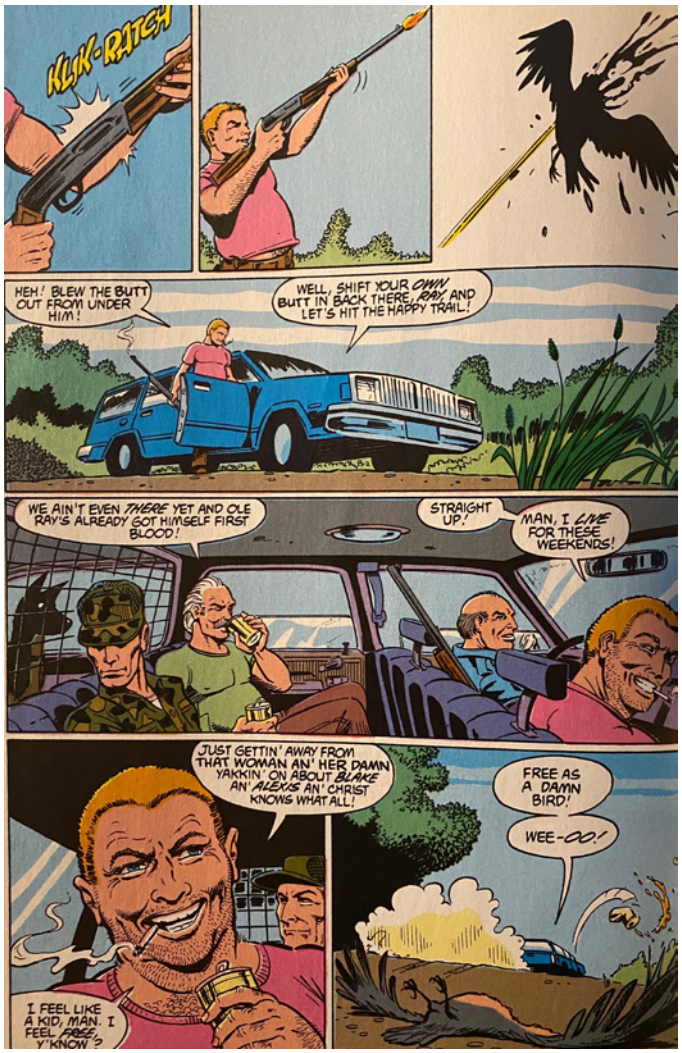

Fig. 2: Patriarchal masculinity and the cultural hatred of animals (AM1, 21).

ity is evoked early in Morrison's *Animal Man* (Fig. 2), where it is given expression through the violent actions of white, male hunters (AM1. 21. 1–7). Yet further, Morrison foments a critique of patriarchal masculinity through the very figure of Animal Man, whose becoming-animal posits a mode of escape from the highly patterned identity and performativity of the masculine subject.

Morrison forces an encounter with both patriarchal masculinity and cool rationalism from the outset of Issue #1 (*The Human Zoo*) by creating a parallel narrative between the violent machinations of sport hunters and the indifference of STAR lab's chief scientist to the suffering of nonhumans. In contrast to the ontological relationality by which Animal Man is granted his powers, Morrison draws the reader into a world where the ontological division of human and animal life is reified through the brutality and violence of human culture. Against the compartmentalization of human and animal worlds, Brian Bolland's covers for Morrison's run on Animal Man prominently feature the suffering of animal life by focusing on primate faces in states of pain, distress, and mutilation. The covers of issues #2 (*Life in the Concrete Jungle*) and #3 (*The Nature of the Beast*) force the reader's encounter with the horrors of primate imprisonment and experimental vivisection. dos Santos Rodrigues and da Cruz e Zica (2018) further elaborate that Brian Bolland's cover for Animal Man #17 was conceived in explicit reference ›to [a] study conducted by the University of California Riverside‹ in which the eyes of a baby monkey were stitched closed as part of a laboratory experiment (76). Here, *Animal Man* confronts the viewer with the horrors of animal abuse obfuscated under the supposedly benign banner of scientific inquiry. Bolland's highly affective images of animal mutilation and distress collapse the vicarious distance with which we often view the suffering of others. Bolland renders the primate face in visceral and prominent detail so as to force an encounter with the torment of animals normalized under the auspices of cultural progress.

The pencils of Chas Truog redouble the horror of animal suffering through the traumatized deuteragonist ›The White God‹ (a.k.a B'wana Beast or The Beast), whose telepathic helmet channels the cries of STAR labs' fated laboratory primates and that of his abducted gorilla companion, ›Djuba‹ (AM3.1.1–9). Where Animal Man's connection to the morphogenic field appears effortless and uncomplicated, The White God is driven mad by the telepathic bond he shares with the otherwise disregarded suffering of his animal kin[2] (AM1.9.1–11). Chas Truog's pencils depict the maddening descent of ›The White God‹ beset by the cries of imprisoned animals, as it is through his telepathic bond with animal life that he encounters the degraded world of the animal submitted to the perverse and hidden machinations of human culture (Fig. 3). Herein, Morrison's ›White God‹ stands in contrast to the transcendent image of God made to resemble the face of the human, for B'wana Beast's telepathic helmet not only gestures to an alliance with animality by marrying human and animal heads, but to an ecological order in which human and animal live together in non-hierarchical distinction. ›The White God‹ lives atop the snowy peaks of Mount Kilimanjaro alongside the Gorilla Djuba, and in the

portrayal of their mutual and equal relationship, Morrison gestures at the deconstruction of the eschatological ›Chain of Being‹ that has since the Medieval period informed the hierarchical ordering of life and the presupposition of human exceptionalism (AM3.18.1–3). For, ultimately, what Morrison imagines at the pinnacle of Kilimanjaro is the mutual kinship, the non-speciest and non-normative nuptials of Djuba and ›The White God‹.

Fig. 3: The suffering of animal kin (AM1, 9).

Morrison amplifies his commentary on the degraded status of the animal through a poignant encounter between Superman and Animal Man in which the Man of Steel responds to a human cry for help thousands of miles away while wholly ignorant of the cries of murdered and vivisected animals beneath his feet (AM2.11–12.1–13). Herein, Morrison redoubles an indifference to the fate of animals, where despite ›Superman's‹ superior moral character and potential to act in the world, he fails to recognize the horror of animal abuse and experimentation that everywhere surrounds him. Where Superman figures as an expression of transcendent man, or of man's ultimate representation, he remains ›all-too-human‹ for his focus on the plight of man before all species. As Superman flies to the rescue of a failing plane over Port Townsend, Morrison makes explicit reference to the R.E.M song ›Superman‹. Morrison's reference is significant in that the opening lyrics of the song declare that »I am Superman and I know what's happening«, producing a stark commentary on the speciesist ignorance of animal abuse regarding which Superman appears either unaware or unconcerned (Zekley/Bottler 1986).

Jesus Christ Pose: The Coyote Gospel

Morrison's exploration of the animal's fate within human culture finds its pinnacle in Issue #5, *The Coyote Gospel*. The issue tells the story of cartoon character ›Crafty Coyote‹, who rises in opposition to the violence and degrading imaginary of his artist creators. In a unique instance of breaking the ›fourth wall‹, ›Crafty‹ petitions his creator to cease the horrific vio-

lence perpetrated against the animals of his cartoon world (Fig. 4), who are continually set on one another in brutal and denigrating scenarios of bodily humiliation (AM5.18–19.1–12). Pencillers Chas Truog and Doug Hazlewood capture ›Crafty's‹ garish cartoon world profuse with hyperbolic animal violence perpetrated by animals, drawing a direct reference to the aesthetic and affective approach of such Warner Bros. Productions as *Looney Tunes* and the Hanna-Barbera produced *Tom and Jerry Show*. By breaking the fourth wall and revealing the artist's hand in fashioning ›Crafty's‹ world, Morrison exposes both the latent anthropocentrism and anthropomorphism of the animal's reformatting under culture. Where in anthropocentrism the animal is relegated to the inferior position of humanity's other, its difference is annexed and drawn into forced resemblance with the human via anthropomorphism. Dramatizing the artist-creator as a god-like being ›above and beyond‹ the brute world of the animal, Morrison and pencillers Truog and Hazlewood hyperbolize the anthropocentric conceit of human transcendence and control over the material world below. Notably, Morrison, Truog and Hazlewood imagine ›Crafty's‹ creator as a white ›God‹ superior to the chaotic barbarism of the world beneath them.

Fig. 4: Cartoon violence (AM5, 18–19).

Morrison, Truog and Hazlewood represent the animal in the image of ›all-too-human‹ conflict and bloodlust, wherein the difference of the animal is disappeared into the ›agon‹ of the arena. Truog's pencils represent the animal's world as a cartoonish yet brutal arena of interminable conflict in which animal death is not simply made hilarious, but rendered wholly inconsequential. For as Morrison illustrates, death is undone by the hand of the artist-God whose act of salvation is chained to the animal's interminable condemnation to death. Morrison, Truog and Hazlewood's depiction of the animal is submitted to the desire of its human overlords, under which the animal and its fate are imagined as a matter of amusement and enjoyment. Morrison's *Coyote Gospel* herein articulates what Italian political theorist Giorgio Agamben (2004) dubs the ›anthropological machine‹. For Agamben, the anthropological machine refers to the ways in which the ontological and political division of human and nonhuman life is established and reified (90). Truog's illustrative reference to the cartoon animals of *Looney Tunes* suggests how cultural violence against animals becomes legitimized and rendered normative. The repetitive cycle of animal death and resurrection showcased via the issue's overt reference to Chuck Jones' *The Roadrunner Show* articulates how we culturally legitimate violence against animals while imagining ourselves above and outside the consequence of such cruelty.

However compelling Morrison's commentary on the representation of animality under the hand of the human might be, the brilliance of *The Coyote Gospel* pertains to its dramatization of ›Crafty‹ Coyote's sacrifice on behalf of his animal kin, saving them from the brutality of eternal war. Trespassing upon the plane of the transcendent, ›Crafty‹ confronts the cruel machinations of his artist-creator, striking a bargain in which the coyote sacrifices itself to save its kin from the interminable repetition of their destruction. Condemned to the ›Real‹ world, ›Crafty‹ is submitted to a fate resembling that of his cartoon world as he is run down by a transport truck, crushed under a mountain landslide, and shot in the head. In a key image of ›Crafty's‹ condemnation to the ›real world‹, Truog and Hazlewood depict ›Crafty's‹ carcass splayed on a rock and pecked by vultures, eliciting an analogue to the punishment of Prometheus having similarly risen against the self-imposed supremacy of Gods. And as with the punishment of Prometheus, ›Crafty‹ is continually submitted to eternal punishment before the indifferent hand of his creator, who intervenes but to apply color to the blood that pools beneath the coyote's body.

The brilliance of Morrison's work on *The Coyote Gospel* extends from the parallel it draws between the figure of ›Crafty‹ coyote and the Promethean challenge he issues to the transcendent order of human exceptionalism. Yet further, *The Coyote Gospel* draws an oblique link between ›Crafty‹ and Jesus, for ultimately, it is through the coyote's sacrifice that his zoomorphic world is delivered from its eternal submission to the anthropomorphic violence of humankind. Where his kin are continually subjected to representational debasement, Crafty confronts his oppressor to petition for peace and grace. Accepting his plea with a caveat, ›Crafty's‹ crea-

tor pronounces that he »must spend eternity in the hell above« and that while he »[bears] the suffering of the world, I [God] will make peace among the beasts« (AM5.20.2). ›Crafty‹ is herein made to resemble Jesus Christ in an ironic subversion of the salvation mytheme. That is, ›Crafty's‹ sacrifice leads not to the salvation of man, or the image of ›man-after-man‹, but to the freedom of animals from their overdetermination in the imaginal world of humans. More profound to the deconstruction of the Christian salvation narrative is the ›Gospel‹ of ›Crafty‹ itself. The scripture that ›Crafty‹ carries, and which presumably details his message of peace, leads not to the elevation of human consciousness, but instead becomes lost to the ignorance of human life for whom ›Crafty's‹ indigenous language appears as an unintelligible system of alien marks and symbols. The Western mytheme of sacrifice and salvation is herein deferred in the *Coyote Gospel*, where the sacrifice of ›Crafty‹ coyote occurs without salvation, intimating both the interminable state of violence against animals, but so too the ways in which the salvation mytheme is withheld from nonhumans, who are condemned to repeat the event of animal sacrifice upon which the emergence of culture is founded.

Morrison's run on Animal Man focuses on two aspects of the relationship between humans and animals. One the one hand, Morrison dramatizes that humans and animals are born in a relationship of opposition and negation and, on the other, that human and nonhuman life are wed in symbolic and material fate. To these contrasting ontological commitments, Morrison supplements a political dimension nascently resembling Giorgio Agamben's (1998) analysis of life in *Homo Sacer*. Agamben traces from antiquity the division of life into two forms, that of political man (*bios*) accorded legal right and of raw life (*zoë*) submissibile to death under the order of the *polis* (103). Morrison's run on *Animal Man* finds this ontological division at every level of the world, from the denigration of the animal world to the exploration of human life denied the sovereign right of self-determination and fated to the judgment of those accorded political power. On the side of *zoë*, Morrison links the characters of Ellen (Bernard's wife) and Maxine Baker (Bernard's daughter), who are beset by a group of white male hunters, one of whom attempts to rape Ellen. The scene both evokes and potentially reproduces the relegation of women, children and animals to the side of *zoë*, a contention long established in the field of critical posthumanism and critical animal studies, which demonstrate how the ontological division of life has historically maintained the privileged centrality of ›Man‹ as the metric by which life is accorded its meaning and value (Wolfe, 1999; Fudge, 2008).

Splinter Species: DC's The New 52 Animal Man

The ontological and political relation of human and animal given expression in Morrison's *Animal Man* are expanded further in Jeff Lemire, Scott Snyder and Travel Foreman's run on DC's *The New 52 Animal Man*. Launched in 2011, DC's *The New 52* marked the company's

attempt to relaunch its universe through the creation of 52 new series including the reintroduction of *Animal Man*. *The New 52 Animal Man* opens with a broader understanding of Animal Man's powers and their relationship to the ›morphogenic‹ field. While the ›morphogenic‹ field through which Animal Man's powers are drawn feature only nascently in Morrison and Truog's work on the series, Lemire and Foreman orient *The New 52 Animal Man* to the complex modes of becoming threatened by encroaching forces of annihilation. Where Morrison's run on *Animal Man* imagines the morphogenic field as a zone of transmission between Buddy and the animal, its conceptualization largely maintains the distinction of entities by imagining the directed flow of power from the animal to Buddy Baker. This conceptualization of the morphogenic field is radicalized in Lemire and Snyder's work on the series, which not only expands the scope of morphogenesis by introducing the life of plants and process of decay alongside animality, but imagines the material transformation of Animal Man's body as an effect of such morphogenesis (Fig. 5). Here, Foreman's unsettling drawings capture the transversal relationship between Buddy Baker and the morphogenic field of living beings referred to throughout the series as ›the Red‹. While Chas Truog's imagining of Animal Man from 1988-1989 only began to explore the unsettled or vital multiplicity of Buddy's body, Foreman's illustrations for Lemire and Snyder's run on the series more potently imagine the ›open‹ relationship between Animal Man and his immanent animal-becomings. Foreman dramatizes the messy and confused relation of Animal Man and the myriad life forms with whom he is morphologically linked, periodically illustrating the hero's body as a horrifying flux of meat, teeth, claws, fur, and organs (AM52.1.3.21). This difference in illustration is significant, for where Truog maintained Animal Man as a bounded body

Fig. 5: Vital multiplicity (New 52 AM 1, 3).

distinguished from the multiplicity of life forms within the morphogenic field, Foreman depicts Animal Man as a ›porous body‹ or, in Deleuze and Guattari's (1987) terms, a ›Body without Organs‹ (the experimental body distinct from its coded representation) disidentified from its ›standard‹ human referent and opened to the weird materiality of life. Through Foreman's illustrations, man and animal are reconstituted in a confused mixture of affects and intensities (Fig. 6) that break from both the presumption of ontological distinction and so too from the presupposition that the human constitutes an exceptional species ›above and beyond‹ other life-forms (AM52.2.20–21.1–2).

Against the anthropocentric conceit of mastery and control that marks Renaissance humanism, Volume 1 of *The New 52 Animal Man* prominently figures and transgresses the limits of the human imagination in its exploration of a vastly different ontological register. Herein, Lemire explores the ›mangle‹ of life-forms that subtend familiar orders of human relation and signification as Foreman's pencils draw the reader into a bizarre world that disorients sense by fomenting a hallucinogenic realism in defiance of the regime of human representation (Jackson 2013). In a haunting image that foreshadows the messy ontology surveyed throughout the series, Foreman disorganizes the face of Animal Man, whose powers cause him to bleed uncontrollably from his facial orifices as labyrinthine networks of veins and arteries transpire upon his flesh. Foreman's disintegration of the body through the transgression of its bounded borders and mapping of inhuman forces upon the flesh is remarkable for its critique of the human as a distinct order of being. Against this presupposition, Foreman illustrates the occulted ontological ground of ›the Red‹ as a material vitalism subtending all life. Further, Foreman's horrific illustrations survey the representational corruption of the ›face of Man‹ as a metric and primary reference for life (AM52. 2.1.1), breaking from the orthodox face of ›European Man‹ through leakage, distortion and rupture that reveal a non-coded ›meat-head‹ (AM52.1.4.19) beneath. It is via this ›meat head‹ or experimental ›canvas‹ that

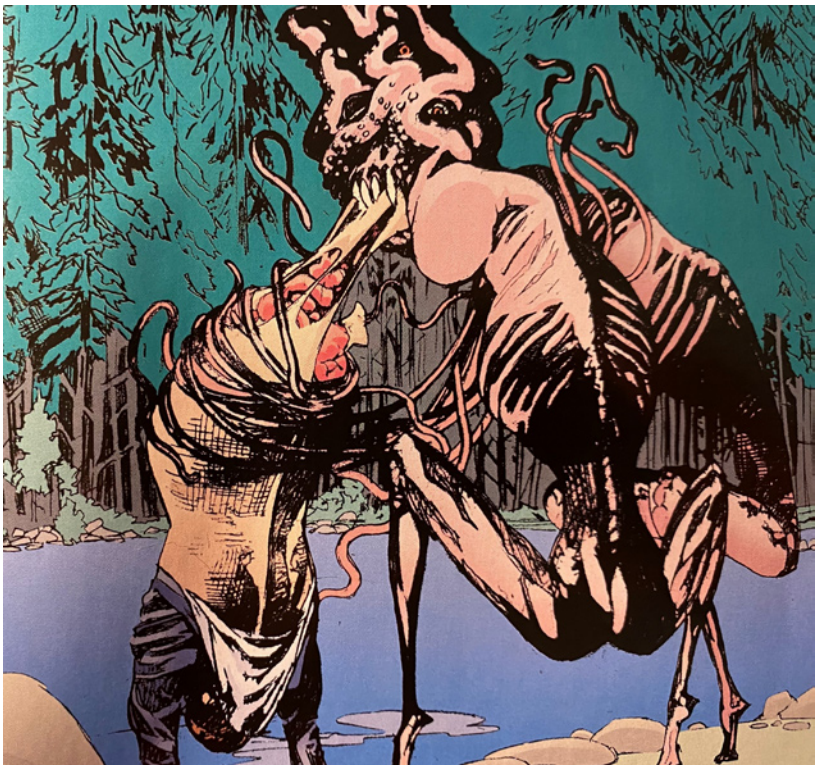

Fig. 6: Weird materiality of life (New 52 AM 2, 20–21).

Foreman surveys the potential mixture of human and non-human intensities paralleled in the artistic explorations of Francis Bacon. For as Deleuze (1981) writes, Bacon's artistic experimentation explored the confused ›zone of indiscernibility‹ between the human and inhuman so as to reveal their coupling as bodies of flesh and meat (19–22).

We Don't Need Another Hero

Animal Man constitutes a unique speculation on non-normative Being and, concomitantly, a critique of ›human being‹ as it coincides with the presuppositions of superiority and exceptionalism that linger in speciesism. For not only does *Animal Man* speculate on a zone of indefinition between the human and animal, but in so doing, on the collapse of normative heroism as it frequently situates the hero at the center of events. The assumption that Animal Man is the protagonist of Lemire and Foreman's series is thwarted in Volume 1, where it is revealed that Maxine and not Buddy is the true avatar of ›the Red‹. This development is significant for two key reasons. First, it breaks from the presumption that the world is the charge of ›mankind‹, and so too that the fate of the world hinges upon ›man‹ as a privileged subject and actor. Second, that Buddy Baker is not conceived as the central protagonist of *Animal Man* dramatizes the ›inheritance‹ of the Earth by a new generation sensitive to the damaged status of life on the planet. As Maxine reveals to Buddy, ›the Red‹ is contaminated by forces of perversion and destruction that the Ancient Animal totems of ›the Red‹ call ›the Rot‹. Merging with the collective consciousness of ›the Red‹ by assembling with its sinuous, bloody tendrils, the history of Man's relation to life and death is revealed to Maxine and Buddy. Through a series of flashbacks (Fig. 7), Foreman's pencils capture the turn from man's equality with animals to man's corruption by power, wherein the pact of human and animal fate is violently broken. Erected in place of human/animal equality is the thanatotic desire for death.

Fig. 7: The rupture of human-animal interrelation (New 52 AM 4, 10–11).

The memory-image (Deleuze, 2003, 34) that Foreman conjures captures a series of human-animal kinships – a human running alongside antelope, the companion relationship of human and elephant, aboriginal hunters killing a deer – followed by the abominable transformation of man into the perverted insectile and archaic parasites of ›the Rot‹ (Deleuze, 2003). The symbolic rupture of human-animal interrelation is paralleled in Foreman's pencils, which accentuate the birth of an abominable horror vested in the control and corruption of life (AM52.4.10–11.1–2) through the severed pact of man and animal. The drawings illustrate that the founding of man's desire for dominion is perpetrated through his escape from human-animal enmeshment. As man rips away his material relations, Forman illustrates, a new regime of horror is set in motion. Lemire and Snyder explore this caveat throughout *Animal Man*, wherein the violent eschewal of man's entwinement with matter is commensurate with death and ruination.

The Red Kingdom

Against the thanatotic drive of ›the Rot‹, the ecology of ›the Red‹ developed throughout *The New 52 Animal Man* has resonance with the mythopoetic birth of life as it is articulated in the second chapter of Genesis. For as the book of Genesis details, both man and animal are born from a clod of red earth (*adamah*). Like a number of origin myths, Hebrew cosmology imagines the ›consanguinity of living creatures‹, or rather, the shared capacity of man and animal to bleed (Menely/Ronda, 69–70). The mutual relation of consanguinity is surveyed throughout Foreman's artwork, wherein the threatened status of ›the Red‹, its ›primordial vividness‹ of the Red, is redoubled in the bleeding face of Animal Man (Fig. 8), which gives expression to the occulted relationality disappeared through the distinction of man and animal in Renaissance thought and the ›dematerialization‹ of the animal as a commodity within capitalism (AM52.1.4.10). Menely and Ronda articulate through the work of political economist Bernard Mandeville the way the consanguinity of man and animal is broken within capitalism, where the ›constitutive brutality of society‹ becomes obfuscated in the abattoir (70). As Mandeville shows in the *Fable of the Bees* (1714), the finitude humans share with animals becomes obfuscated within the structure of early capitalism, where people who might otherwise refuse the consumption of ritually sacrificed animals partake without remorse in the consumption of their ›bloodless flesh‹ (cited in Menely/Ronda 2013, 70). As Menely and Ronda argue, the commodification of the animal is perpetrated through the ›cultural work of absolution‹ wherein the bloody corporeality of the animal is disappeared and severed from the pact of consanguinity that ontologically binds human and animal life. It is this very division of man and animal that constitutes a central preoccupation of *Animal Man*, which returns to the forefront of its narrative both the problem of man's ontological division from animals, and so too consanguinity as a marker of the mutual fate and bloodied vitality shared by man and animal.

Fig. 8: : Mutual relations of consanguinity (New 52 AM 1, 4).

Lemire's narrative constitutes an analogue to the ecological challenges of the contemporary moment, where the forces of life, and in particular the lives of animals and other inhumans, are condemned to death under the thanatotic drive of ›Man‹. Through the ontological division of life and the repudiation of our mutual fate with non-human beings, Lemire dramatizes the rise of a fatal order that spreads throughout ›the Red‹ as a cancerous metastasis that everywhere consumes and annexes the living. Here, Lemire parallels the transformation of life perpetrated under the conditions of industrialization and capitalism, whereupon life becomes reformatted as value. The horror of this scenario is developed throughout a growing body of ›Anthropocene‹ research (see jagodzinski 2019), and, further, in Jason Moore's (2015, 2017a, 2017b) analysis of life's status within the ›Capitalocene‹. Moore argues that the world becomes subject to a processual ›cheapening‹ that occurs along seven fronts, foremost of which is the processual cheapening of nature[3] (Patel & Moore, 2018, 44) annexed into the pulsional motors of capital and capital exchange value. The cheapening of nature can be evidenced in our contemporary relationships to animals and other non-human others as they are genetically manipulated, grown for maximum profitability and slaughtered in the tens of billions (Patel & Moore 2018). The consumptive force of ›the Rot‹ is redoubled throughout Foreman's illustrations, where its myriad forms are marked by abyssal maws, horrid teeth, and devouring tendrils. Further still, Foreman captures the parasitic function of ›the Rot‹, which not only inhabits its host through processes of infection and contamination but consumes its host from within, leaving in its wake a mutilated husk of flesh and meat hollowed from the inside.

Lemire, Snyder and Foreman conceptualize ›the Rot‹ as a figure of consumption that everywhere seeks to overcode and control life, paralleling in this way the expansive and destruc-

tive powers of capitalist-driven climate change and the motors of interminable consumption that fuel it. Like the contemporary moment in which the machinations of capitalism produce hitherto unprecedented problems for life on the planet, the scale of such issues vex Buddy, who worries about his ability to deal with the far reaching and ubiquitous expansion of ›the Rot‹. »But this is all so -- big«, Animal Man frets, »I'm just a guy from San Diego with animal powers. What the hell am I supposed to do?« (AM52.4.12.1). Lemire seemingly signals here a general civilizational resignation in the face of capital's widespread and unceasing manipulation of biological life at a planetary scale, which beyond the enslavement of human and animal life has perpetuated the conditions for the 6th mass extinction of life on the planet catalyzed by biodiversity loss, deforestation, the creation of ecological ›dead zones‹, and the unabated consumption of humans circuited in desire and habit to the motors of capitalist overconsumption (De Vos et. al. 2014).

The Green Kingdom

The encroachment of ›the Rot‹ featured in the opening volume of *The New 52 Animal Man* threatens not only ›the Red‹ but imperils also the order of ›the Green‹, or rather the vast plant ecologies of the planet. Lemire and Foreman herein articulate ›the Rot‹ as a threat against the entirety of planetary life, reflecting in this manner the interconnected status of the planet in this contemporary era of climatological change (McKibben 2010). Animal Man's crossover in Scott Snyder, Jeff Lemire, and Yanick Paquette's (2013) *Swamp Thing* explores the imbricated fate of both plant and animal life beset by the encroaching death-drive of the ›the Rot‹. Importantly, the material interrelation developed in *Swamp Thing* founds a messy image of life through which the reader is oriented to the fact of our entanglement within all manner of living beings, and not simply those that resemble human orders of evolution or behavior. The idea of entanglement figures large in the influential work of Karen Barad, where it functions not simply to describe the connection between things, but the interrelation of which entities always-already consist. Things do not exist as bounded entities, Barad (2007) argues, but in openness to subjects, objects, and other entangled kin (ix). Paquette's pencils dramatize the entanglement of things throughout *Swamp Thing* Volume 3, the opening of which (Fig. 9) features a beleaguered Buddy Baker seeking out the allegiance of Alec Holland (Swamp Thing). By ›thinking-with‹ vegetal matter digesting in the stomach of a thrush becoming digested within the body of an alligator, Paquette captures the complex interrelation of materiality through which Buddy is able to find his vegetal ally. It is in this image of dense entanglement that Lemire and Snyder give expression to the mutual becoming of entities beyond the myth of bounded individualism under which superhero fiction often labors.

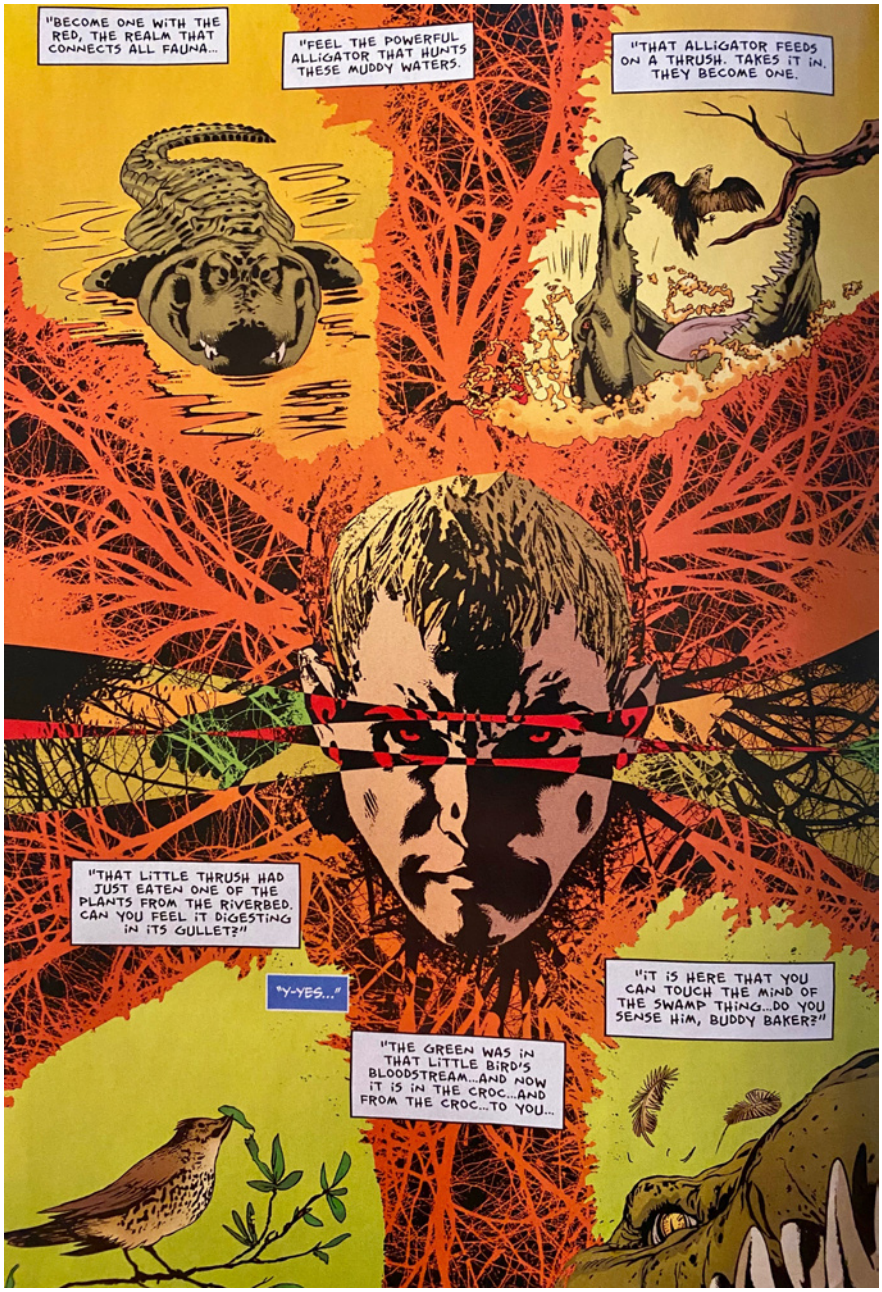

Fig. 9: Entanglement (New 52 AM 3).

The messy ontological relation of the plant's becoming-thrush-alligator-compass featured in Paquette's illustrations evokes what Donna Haraway has dubbed the ›Chthulucene‹, or rather, the imbricated mangle of ›sym-chthonic‹ and ›multi-species assemblages‹ in perpetual, mortal becoming (160). Scott Snyder, Yanick Paquette, Jeff Lemire and Travel Foreman give salience to this multi-species ontology across *Animal Man* and *Swamp Thing*, wherein they counterpose to the nihilistic forces of ›the Rot‹ the alliance of weird non-standard, non-humans including Animal Man, Swamp Thing, Man-Bat-Girl, and

Frankenstein's Monster, amongst others. Such strange alliances parallel Haraway's entreaty that the ›Chthulucene‹ ought to entail an assemblage of weird forces to ›reconstitute refuges‹, recuperate bio-cultural-political-zoomorphic possibilities, and ›make kin‹ (160–161). Both Lemire and Snyder explore how such kinship does not simply resemble the image of human or superhuman alliance, as is the predominant case in a majority of superhero fiction. Rather, in a manner that rejoins to the thinking of posthuman scholar Cary Wolfe (2010), the kinship imagined throughout ›Animal Man‹ and ›Swamp Thing‹ articulates that »the human and the non- or anti- or ahuman do not exist in fundamentally discrete ontological registers but – quite the contrary – inhabit the same post-ontological space in mutual relations of imbrication and instability« (219).

Swamp Thought

Throughout the 20th century, ›the Green‹ has become a cliché signifier of environmentalism and environmental hope imagined from the vantage of human privilege (Nardizzi, 2013, 216). As Nardizzi conjectures, the fantasy of planetary equilibrium advanced through such machinations as the corporate ›greenwashing‹ agenda are »actually a ›vague‹«, »wildly optimistic«, and »deluded« »pipe dream« of »›green pastures‹ that capitalism has generated to sustain its own development« (217). Lemire and Snyder attempt to rethink ›the Green‹ along a trajectory distinct from the domesticated order of plants aestheticized through bucolic images of nature and their ›bourgeois‹ expression in the form of lawns and gardens. In distinction to the dramatization of plant life submitted to the order of man, ›the Green‹ of Snyder and Lemire's *Swamp Thing* finds its analogue in the excessive and chaotic vegetal ecology of the swamp. Here, the Green ecology figured in Snyder's *Swamp Thing* breaks from the conceit of anthropocentrism to return to the imbricated relation of man and plant that the project of humanism has long sought to overcome (Keetley 2016). The enmeshment of man and plant finds expression not only in the body of Swamp Thing as the mangled vegetal-becoming of Alec Holland, but, further, in man's ultimate fate as a nutrient for plant life, or rather its destiny of becoming ›flesh to food‹, as horror theorist Dawn Keetley (2016) succinctly avers (1). The swamp that emblematizes ›the Green‹ is hence significant in that it already imagines the messy enmeshment of animals and plants, and so, too, the interrelation of death and life where the decaying material of the swamp becomes a catalyst for life's renewal. As Swamp Thing articulates in *Rotworld Volume 3*, ›the Rot‹ is not, in itself, antithetical to life, but, rather, is a constitutive condition for life's perpetuation. The compost-ontology (cf. Haraway 2015) of the swamp evokes multi-species entanglement within processes of becoming born from decay, renewal, and reconstitution.

While Haraway's (2015) ›Chthulucene‹ aims to recognize the crucial function of rot as a catalyst for the generative flourishing of life and index of the interrelation between living, rotting and reconstituting beings, ›the Rot‹ for Lemire and Snyder stems from ›Man's‹ disconnection from the entanglements of the world and the desire to arrest the diversity of ›things‹ through their submission to the ›Same‹. Where Haraway conceives rot as an emblem of the Chthulucene in which entities interrelate through processes of mutual decay and reconstitution, ›the Rot‹ in Lemire and Snyder's *Animal Man* functions as a threat to such difference and becoming. For Lemire and Snyder, the problem of ›the Rot‹ is not its alliance with the forces of death and ruination, but rather its separation from processes of renewal and diversity of which ›the Red‹ and ›the Green‹ are emblematic. The threat of ›the Rot‹ within *Animal Man* pertains to its dislocation from the complex material ›mangle‹ of things and its aspiration to halt the world in its image of perpetual death without renewal (Jackson 2013). In Volume 3 of *Swamp Thing*, for instance, Lemire, Snyder and artist Marco Rudy imagine a bleak future in which the abominable forces of ›the Rot‹ dominate the Earth (ST2, 17. 1–10). Rudy's pencils aptly capture the dystopian scene of Earthly annihilation in a single frame wherein Animal Man is confronted with the ruin of the San Diego Zoo and, by extension, with what Thacker (2010) dubs the ›world-without-us‹ (5). Animal bodies litter the scene of ›the Rot's‹ monochromatic post-Earth, in which the figure of a decapitated giraffe draped over a bloody car assumes a focal point as a revelatory feature of the panel (ST2.17.10). Yanick Paquette's dramatization of the ›Rotworld‹ in Volume 3 of *Animal Man* renders the city as an abominated necropolis in which even Superman has become an undead thrall of ›the Rot's‹ unabated ascension. Yet, even here, amidst the poisonous ruination of the Earth perpetrated by ›the Rot‹, Animal Man and Swamp Thing can faintly detect the trace of ›the Red‹ and the ›Green‹ and their link to a host of unlikely allies (including Poison Ivy, Beast Boy, Steel, and Black Orchid) who live on despite the encroaching doom of ›the Rot's‹ death-world. Earth's remaining heroes are no longer the protagonists of myth and legend, but those of a ›minor order‹ that yet challenge the dominating force of ›the Rot‹ and its cancerous metastasis of life (Deleuze & Guattari 1987, 232).

Evolve or Die!

What grows in the gutter of Lemire and Snyder's Animal Man is in part the recognition of an occulted realism subtending the ›given‹ world. Beyond the mere recognition of our messy ontological relations of which Animal Man and Swamp Thing are indexical is the attention given through the series to the threatened status of planetary life. Throughout *The New 52 Animal Man*, Lemire and Snyder detail the encroaching horror of ›the Rot‹ as a force of annexation that functions to overcode the ›Real‹ in its image of perpetual death with-

out end. This said, it is crucial that the desire of ›the Rot's‹ avatar, the mad scientist Anton Arcane, is oriented less to the extinction of life than the extinction of the messy, chaotic difference of ›the Red‹ and ›Green‹. Ultimately, the ›Rotworld‹ is not devoid of things but, rather, is populated by Arcane's enslaved abominations who monologically seek the assimilation of ›the Red‹ and ›Green‹ where they stubbornly persist. The enmeshed image of ›the Red‹ and ›the Green‹ developed by Lemire and Snyder is counterposed to the assimilative power of ›the Rot‹, and, in this manner, ›the Rot‹ bears relation to the threat of planetary life under advanced capitalism and its vehicles of consumptive proliferation. For while the vital enmeshment of red, green, and rotting ecologies are constitutive conditions of becoming in Haraway's (2015) ›Chthulucene‹, Snyder and Lemire speculate on an order of assimilation and decay cleaved from its ecological relations and reformatted as an ontological and metaphysical fascism. It is here that they produce an indirect relation between ›the Rot‹ and global capitalism. For like ›the Rot‹, capital functions via processes of virulence and annexation to reformat material relations along a new horizon of thought (i.e. money). ›The Rot‹ functions similarly in *Animal Man*, where it is imagined as a power that delinks life from its materiality by enforcing equivalence to the homogenizing horizon of deathly repetition. The implicit critique of global capitalism that Lemire and Snyder suggest via the colonial characterization of ›the Rot‹ extends to the threat of ecocatastrophe founded in the very desire for control and dominion it emblematizes. Divorced from its crucial function as a vector of deterritorialization or decay, Lemire and Snyder's ›Rot‹ becomes a dogmatic power in which the becoming of life is brutally reduced to its unchanging stabilization and termination in an image of the ›Same‹. Against the prismatic ecology of which ›the Red‹, ›the Green‹ and ›the Rot‹ are constitutive aspects, Snyder and Lemire conjecture on the horrific scenario of ontological despotism in which the entirety of life becomes implicated and nullified. Yet, even here, in the ›Real‹ of capitalist contagion and its birth of ecocatastrophe, ›the Red‹ and ›the Green‹ stubbornly persist, not only in the mixed composition of resistance heroes/heroines, but in the scarce survival of plant and animal life that yet escape the thanatotic clutches of perpetual death. Such images of persistence constitute an analogue to the subterranean revolutions that might yet emerge in resistance to the foreclosure of the future and mad insistence that there will be but *one* future.

Morrison, Snyder and Lemire's work on *Animal Man* forges an eco-critical encounter between the reader and those occulted ecologies that exist alongside the world as it is conceived ›for-us‹ (Thacker 2010, 5). Morrison's seminal run on *Animal Man* focuses on the degraded life of animals submitted to the anthropocentric conceit of man, and, further, the horror of nonhuman existence organized and subverted into human orders of meaning and sense. His *Animal Man* cogently surveys the hierarchical ontology of contemporary life in which animals constitute a cheapened life form, advancing in this manner a radical analysis that intersects with the field of critical animal studies for its dramatization of how the

animal's right to live is both advanced and denied according to its status for humans (Wolfe 2010; MacCormack 2013; Thacker 2010, 5). Throughout his run on *Animal Man*, Morrison reveals the hidden life of animals within the laboratory, wherein the animal body is brutally sacrificed on behalf of human preservation but without recognition of the animal's salvational status and the cost of such brutality for *all* life. Lemire and Snyder's work on Animal Man accelerates Morrison's narrative by surveying the complex ontological interrelation of life, and so too the threat posed by fascistic powers poised to annex and replace ontological difference with a single, dogmatic image of thought (Deleuze and Guattari 1987).

While published decades apart, both instantiations of *Animal Man* addressed in this essay squarely implicate the challenges of the present moment, on the one hand articulating the problem of the Anthropocene and its referent in anthropocentrism, and, on the other, the horror of the Capitalocene which everywhere seeks to parasitize the vital forces of planetary life. *Animal Man* is both a cautionary tale about the persistent and encroaching threat of human thought and behavior as it is a revelation of our mutual interrelation and fate. Crucially, the image of hope born from Morrison, Lemire and Snyder's *Animal Man* is no longer of a human order, but rather a post-human one that dramatizes the enmeshment of human culture in ›ecological process‹ and the allegiance of weird life counterposed to the forces of tyranny (Buell, 2013, 9). Conceived through the complex meshwork of human and nonhuman relations, the challenges dramatized in *Animal Man* seem as timely as ever, particularly as the Anthropocene era has reinvigorated conversations on the rights of animals, the complex ontological interrelation of nature and culture, and the persistent threat to life posed by the ostensible incontrovertibility of global capitalism.

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List of Figures

1] (AM4.17.1= Animal Man issue 4. page 17. panel number 1)

2] In Lemire and Snyder's *The New 52 Animal Man*, the suffering of animals becomes more thoroughly ›felt‹ by Buddy Baker, herein intensifying the affective relation of Buddy Baker and his animal kin dramatized in Morrison's run on the series.

3] For instance, Moore and Patel (2018) articulate that the worldwide slaughter of poultry exceeds over 60 billion birds a year.