

# The Nightmare of Boundary Dissolution: Technological Writing, Cognitive Deconstruction, and Postethical Dilemmas in "Annihilation"

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**Abstract:** Jeff Vandermeer's "Annihilation" is one of the masterpieces of the new ghost story and a unique seedling of contemporary climate change novel genealogy. This book borrows the theme of the unknown and mysterious ecological region "The Shimmer" and shows an extreme scientific and technological catastrophe based on an extreme thinking experiment. From a theoretical point of view, the paper uses Timothy Morton's theory of "superobjects", Slavoj Žižek's "real world", and Rosi Braidotti's post-human theory to discuss how the natural force of the novel's unique technological writing in the narrative purposefully destroys the cognitive structure of human beings (including scientific rationality and linguistic representation). Letting the characters enter a post-ethical situation that cannot be measured by old ethics further proves that Zone X can be seen as a terrifying and grotesque epitome of modern civilization, a "terrifying ecology". After analysis, it is found that the novel uses the writing of ecological horror in Area X to point to the impact of superobjects such as climate change on the framework of modern people's understanding of the nature of the world, and even the disintegration of the behavioral principles followed by modern people - traditional ethics. Not only that, but this part also proposes the possibility of a new possible post-human ethics that can abandon human-centrism and coexist with the unknowable and uncontrollable.

**Keywords:** "Annihilation", Scientific and Technological Writing, Cognitive Deconstruction, Postethical Dilemma, Superobject, Real Realm, Post-Human Theory, Ecocriticism.

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## 1. Introduction

In the Anthropocene, climate change novels have become an important literary field to reflect on scientific and technological civilization, ecological crises, and human survival (Clark, 2015). Jeff Vandermeer's "Annihilation" and "Forsaken South" trilogy tells people in a technological thriller package that such a highly changed human being has undeniably entered an era dominated by forces that may have been previously dominated by forces other than technology. The writing of the "out-of-control" world brought about by "flashing" is actually the presentation of ecosystem mutations, and this anomaly causes the change and collapse of deeper cognitive and ethical views, which can reveal the fable of human fate in the era of climate change, and explain the reasons and significance of the emergence of "post-ethics" to a certain extent. This paper attempts to adopt the method of multidisciplinary theoretical observation, and discusses the metaphorical meaning and warning ideological connotation formed by the cognitive deconstruction caused by "flashing" and the post-ethical dilemma as the basis of scientific and technological fantasy based on the scientific and technological nature and humanistic attributes of human beings.

## 2. Scientific and Technological Writing: the "Flash" as a "Superobject" and its Embodied Consequences

### 2.1. The Flicker as a "Superobject": Theoretical Framework and Literary Presentation

Timothy Morton's concept of "superobject" helps us understand "flickering", he is referring to "something so distributed in space-time that it far exceeds the scale of humans": "sticky/persistent", "not existing in a little space or acting in a straight line but non-local or translatitudinal, the 'wave of space-time' appears in waves in the future and returns to the present again at each future moment afterwards; it does not move itself according to interference but interacts with ....." (Morton, 2013). : 1). In this sense, "flickering" is an obvious superobject that exists at different levels of time and space without physical boundaries or disintegration and knots, completely transcending the scale of human beings. As a special existence in the novel, the flash is a heterogeneous space that evolves and grows independently, and all other life forms that can invade and be transformed are their edible things, which makes the conceptual image of flashing a literary expression of superbody theory.

### 2.2. Scientific and Technological Non-human Initiative and Transformation Power

The sparkling technological nature is reflected in its unique non-anthropocentric agency and biomodification capabilities. This existence is not a tool or a technical product within the traditional category, but should be understood as a kind of

technological, natural entity with the ability to act autonomously. It can actively intervene in the basic structure of life forms and reconstruct the essence of living beings through the refraction and fusion of DNA. This transformation process is highly organic and permeable, and its operating logic completely transcends the traditional cognitive framework of human beings about technological functions.

Through delicate literary representation, Van der Meer depicts how flashing can completely disable a range of human technology detection devices, including compasses, radio signal reception and image recording devices. This narrative strategy not only concretely presents the encounter between superobjects and human technological civilization, but also profoundly reveals the cognitive and practical limitations of the latter in the face of the former. It is particularly noteworthy that the space-time structure inside the flicker shows fundamental distortions and anomalies. In this way, the author not only constructs a mystical story atmosphere, but also further metaphorically poses fundamental doubts and challenges to the existing cognitive paradigm of human beings.

### **2.3. The "Embodiment" of Scientific and Technological Consequences**

Van der Meer presents the horror of technology through human physical experience in his works, creating a very shocking "embodied" narrative. Spore invasion, genetic contamination, and confusion of species boundaries have made the human body a cognitive subject, shaped into an objective field of technology and objects in a world changed by technological forces. The novel has a large number of human plant-like bodies, flowering antlers, shark-toothed crocodiles and other hybrid forms, which is a dialectical expression of the instinctive nature produced by the ecological crisis of the human body, symbolizing that the ecological damage suffered by the human body also represents the destruction of the ecology itself, in addition to the destruction, it also reflects that the actual ecological crisis is changing the identity of the human body itself. This embodied technological horror makes the ecological crisis no longer an isolated external world thing or event, but can directly point to the existence of human beings themselves, which is an internalized threat to human material life, which is also the uniqueness of Van der Meer's novels that distinguish them from many science fiction novels of the same type. (Thacker,2011)

## **3. Cognitive Deconstruction: The Collapse of the Fortress of Reason and the Crisis of Linguistic Representation**

### **3.1. The Invasion of the "Real World" and the Collapse of Scientific Reason**

Slavoj Žižek's "Real Realm" is an important theoretical observation of understanding and interpreting the impact of flashing on people's cognition. The "real" refers to those prescriptive realities that do not conform to the discipline of language, logic, or scientific systems (Žižek, 2006:26), and the flash is a visual depiction of such a realworld, causing a direct impact and destruction on the human cognitive system. The scientific rationality represented by the expedition team

has lost all its methodologies after entering the X area, all existing instruments have failed, and various errors have been generated, and even the law of cause and effect cannot be established, indicating that this scientific "meta" tool has also become a useless superstition. In particular, the formation of living writing under the tower is a strange phenomenon that is anti-scientific reason, completely violating the causal law of scientific reason, and is the fact that the real world has entered the symbolic order in the real world. However, when psychologists try to suppress something with the help of hypnosis or some control methods, they also tell people that this is absolutely impossible, because in the face of absolute unknown, everything that reason does is nothing more than the last trace of resistance.

### **3.2. The Failure of Linguistic Representation and the Collapse of the Symbolic Order**

When biologists try to describe the scene inside the tower with words and phrases composed of living fungi that are constantly replicating and changing, language has fallen into a fundamental crisis of representation. Because they are not static symbols, but constantly growing, constantly self-replicating beings that refuse to be contained and solidified by fixed semantics. The same is true of the image of the "creeper", who constantly shouts "Help!" But this phrase is disconnected from its semantics, and the sound has become a pure external shell of sound, referring to the complete destruction of human communication and discourse functions. The "creeper" is the failure of the language representation written by VanderMeer, because in the eyes of human beings, the so-called "absolute other" it represents destroys the ability of human beings to use language, making it impossible for people to present the "absolute other" in one sentence. Human understanding of the world is already in a state of collapse (Robertson, 2017).

### **3.3. The Emergence and Deepening of Ontological Insecurity**

The most fundamental result is the loss of ontological security, so that the characters not only do not know where they are, but also do not know who they are; And this ontological confusion is most evident in the biologist - she sees her blood glowing, and realizes that she is a member of the sparkle, and human beings in the traditional sense can no longer be established. Through delicate psychological descriptions of characters, the novel portrays the fear and confusion caused by the characters' unknowable and uncontrollable superobject encounters, and depicts the insecurity that has never been seen in the ontology of the characters. At the same time, the deep narrative continues to accumulate and strengthen the ontological insecurity, and deepens this psychological truth, making an excellent annotation of the real state of human beings under the ecological crisis. At the same time, Van der Meer uses deep psychological narrative methods to allow readers to experience the crisis of human existence (state of existence) caused by cognitive deconstruction.

## 4. Post-ethical Dilemma: The Dissolution of Moral Coordinates and the Questioning of Post-human Ethics

### 4.1. The Failure of Traditional Ethics and the Emergence of Post-ethical Dilemmas

Based on the collapse of cognition, traditional ethics has lost its place in the world of novels. The "post-ethical dilemma", that is, a new ethical state without a clear moral right or wrong answer (Braidotti, 2013), is not due to the loss of ethics, but because of the invalidation of anthropocentric ethics, due to the new cognition brings unpredictable uncertainty problems, due to the expansion of superobject consciousness, the value of "human member" determines that it cannot represent any absolute value or correct way of behaving, when species boundaries dissolve, distinguish between human and non-human boundaries, Traditional ethical rulings have lost their authoritative standards. Van der Meer makes full use of the eco-humanist position of human beings themselves trying to cross the duality to effectively explore the prospect, and he shows readers that the team members who made difficult choices here are also real, flesh-and-blood people.

### 4.2. Responsibility Dilemma after Species Boundary Ablation

These are incredible ethical problems in novels, such as when a team member is alienated into a half-human and half-plant existence, is his survival a normal continuation of life? Is killing him for mercy also murder? For example, when a female replicant has her husband's memory and a conscience that has been extinguished, the relationship between the two is difficult to distinguish, and she chooses to use human emotional standards or non-human standards to make ethical judgments? These thorny questions reflect an important question that Vandermeer wants to ask readers, that is, "how to be a person" and "how to live", which is a very important philosophical proposition, but there are no shortcuts in Vandermeer's pen, she does not give the final answer to the question, but sets up thought-provoking ethical paradoxes in it, by calling on readers to make ethical choices, and experience the difficulties and entanglements of making moral choices in the post-human era (Haraway, 2016).

### 4.3. The Possibilities and Limitations of Post-human Ethics

The biologist's last choice is to actively welcome "annihilation", stay in the X region and merge with the flash, which is a radical operation for post-human ethics, which is also a "positive negation" (Braidotti, 2013, p.65), rather than becoming a life that does not want to face itself to a state of destruction. This is an abandonment of the possessiveness of the anthropocentric center, a gesture of wanting to give up a place for the non-human power to coexist in parallel and symbiosis with it. In the Anthropocene, is a universal new ethic worth creating, can concrete things be saved from the fragmentation of the earth? Can they be a byproduct of this group? Van der Meer's answer is still open-ended, which is a common digression ending for this type of novel, making the story extremely broad and speculative. The ethical concept

that transcends the individual and does not belong to the human is not treated in the same way as the anthropocentric value, so we can think that this ethical problem faces many problems, and its attempt to form another way of looking at the world and all things is not to control and dominate, but to focus more on symbiosis and acceptance (Bennett, 2010).

## 5. Conclusion

With the help of new technological writing methods and unique superobject imagery, the novel "Annihilation" shows people a technological development path led by technological alienation leading to cognitive deconstruction and finally to post-ethical dilemmas. Van der Meer does not propose a convenient and comfortable solution to people, but draws the reader into a state of uncertainty like the characters in the book, and forces the reader to further think about the fundamental question in the context of the Anthropocene: How should humans establish a new relationship with nature when traditional cognition or ethics no longer work?

Another highlight of the book is to reveal the changes in the foundation of human civilization brought about by this crisis, and to elaborate on a specific field - prophetic science as the carrier: the decline of scientific rationality, the failure of the representation mechanism of language, and the loss of the binding force of ethical norms, will bring about fundamental changes in the relationship between people. It is precisely based on these conditions that "Annihilation" shows another post-human philosophy of survival - abandoning the myth of domination and control, and committed to using uncertainty and unknowability to find a new way of coexistence.

The above insights are undoubtedly enlightening for us to think about the current ecological crisis, making people realize that climate change, superobjects and other problems pose not only technical challenges to people, but also a cognitive and even value problem.

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