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# A BESTIARY OF THE ANTHROPOCENE

An illustrated atlas of hybrid plants, animals, minerals, fungi,  
and other specimens

## EDITORS

Nicolas Nova & DISNOVATION.ORG

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**A BESTIARY OF THE ANTHROPOCENE** is an illustrated compilation of hybrid creatures of our time, equally inspired by medieval bestiaries and observations of our damaged planet. Designed as a field handbook, it aims at helping us observe, navigate, and orientate into the increasingly artificial fabric of the world. Plastiglomerates, surveillance robot dogs, fordites, artificial grass, antenna trees, Sars-Covid-2, decapitated mountains, drone-fighting eagles, standardised bananas... each of these specimens are symptomatic of the rapidly transforming “post-natural” era we live in. Often without us even noticing them, these creatures exponentially spread and co-exist with us.

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**A BESTIARY OF THE ANTHROPOCENE** seeks to capture this precise moment when the biosphere and technosphere merge and mesh into one new hybrid body. What happens when technologies and their unintended consequences become so ubiquitous that it is difficult to define what is “natural” or not? What does it mean to live in a hybrid environment made of organic and synthetic matter? What new specimens are currently populating our planet at the beginning of the 21st century?

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**INCLUDING** – 60 written observations on selected hybrid specimens & creatures – 11 long contributions, and original critical essays by leading experts – 100+ original handmade pointillist illustrations – [>Book Excerpt](#)

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## CONTRIBUTORS

Aliens in Green, Geoffrey C. Bowker, Benjamin H. Bratton, Pauline Briand, Pierre-Olivier Dittmar, Matthieu Duperrex, Michel Lussault, Nicolas Maigret, Alexandre Monnin, Nicolas Nova, The Center for Genomic Gastronomy, Anna Tsing

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## SPECIMENS

Chicken Bones, Glacial Erratics, Decapitated Mountaintops, Artificial Mountain, Fordite, Plastiglomerate, Trinitite, Coastal Tetrapod, Artificial Reefs, Urk/urkopplad, Afsluitdijk, Rock-Shaped Speaker, Nuclear Crater, Sea Skater, GM Aedes Aegypti, Plastic Eating Caterpillar, Homo Sapiens, Coal Mine Canaries, Lab Rat, Cannulated Cow, Goat/spider Silk, Animal Prosthetics, Trapped Hermit Crab, Strangled Turtles, Microplastic-saturated Animals, Cultured Meat, Ocean Sentinels, PigeonBlog, Crittercam, Military Dolphin, Drone-catching Eagles, Rat Bomb, Animal Decoy, DragonflEye, BigDog, Roomba, Tamagotchi, Square Watermelon, Hedgerows, Plantation Forests, Lawn Rolls, Green Walls, Cavendish Bananas, GTS 40-3-2, Plastic/wood Nest, Plastic Flowers, Artificial Turf, Barbed Wire, Antenna Tree, Black Mold, Radioactive Mushrooms, Legionella Pneumophila, Prions, Bacterial Superbugs, SARS-CoV-2, Pyrocumulonimbus Cloud, Artificial Snow, Contrails, Cloud Seeding, 5G

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Above: first computer bug discovered by Grace Hopper on Sep 9, 1947.



### A BESTIARY OF THE ANTHROPOCENE

PLASTIGLOMERATE

ILLUSTRATION BY [Name]



### PLASTIGLOMERATE

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Coined by a team made of a geologist, an oceanographer, and a scientist, the term "plastiglomerate" refers to a new kind of rock made of melted plastics, marine debris, bones, and wood combined into a single substance by heat. Such a kind of geological formation, neither stone, nor plastic, was recently found on Hawaiian beaches, possibly a terminal point in the worldwide circulation of garbage. Plastiglomerates can be seen as one of the many disturbing-yet-material markers of the Anthropocene, this new epoch viewed as the period during which human activity has been the dominant influence on the climate and the environment. Plastic is a century old but these peculiar Hawaiian rocks show that it can quickly be integrated with other matter through geological forces. They give us the impression that both consumer society and metamorphism can be combined to forge the relics of our industrial civilizations. Such process happens almost in real-time, compared to geological timeframes. Labeled as "plastiscrust" by geologists, a similar phenomenon has been observed in Madeira, where a coating of plastic particles, originated in the ocean, adhered directly onto rocks along the shoreline.

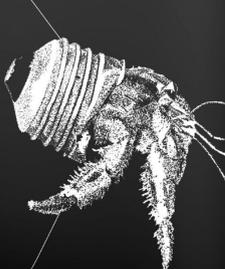
To some extent, plastiglomerate is the visible manifestation of a phenomenon that exists at a much smaller level almost everywhere on this planet: the integration of micro-plastic particles in our environment, in the food we eat, in the water we drink, and eventually in our bodies. This is why plastiglomerate embodies the general condition of our world, a hybrid of synthetic polymers and organic compounds.

4. Ottaviano, Patricia, "What's Hotter, and Why?", *Science*, 2014.  
 5. "Anthropogenic Marine Sediment in the Future Rock Record," *Geology*, 2014.  
 6. "How Hot is the Anthropocene?", *Science*, 2014.  
 7. "The Anthropocene: A New Geological Epoch," *Science*, 2014.  
 8. "The Anthropocene: A New Geological Epoch," *Science*, 2014.  
 9. "The Anthropocene: A New Geological Epoch," *Science*, 2014.

### A BESTIARY OF THE ANTHROPOCENE

TRAPPED HERMIT CRAB

ILLUSTRATION BY [Name]



### TRAPPED HERMIT CRAB

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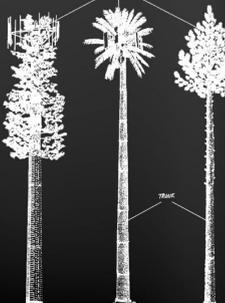
Hermit crabs are crustaceans with spirally curved abdomens that are protected from predators by a shelled empty seashell carried by the animal, into which its whole body can retract. Since suitable intact shells are sometimes a limited resource, vigorous competition often occurs among them. Not used by plastic, hermit crabs can consume debris—bottle caps, straws, caps, loose—washed up on beaches and seashores with sea shells and crawl into it, causing them to frequently get stuck and never to detach. This dramatic situation is worsened by the fact that when one crab dies, it emits a signal alerting others there is a new shell available for them. This chain reaction sends scores of crabs to come scurrying across the island and fall into the plastic trap, killing thousands of them in some years. While this situation was only documented in the Cocos (Keeling) Islands in the Indian Ocean and Henderson Island in the South Pacific, it is likely to be an issue anywhere hermit crabs live alongside plastic rubbish.

14. "Hermit Crabs, Paul, Peter, Steve, Shoko, and Alexander," *Journal of Invertebrate Biology*, 2017.

### A BESTIARY OF THE ANTHROPOCENE

ANTENNA TREE

ILLUSTRATION BY [Name]



### ANTENNA TREE

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The ubiquitous presence of cell phone towers in urban and rural landscapes has led to protests against their visual character (perceived as ugly by the people living nearby) and the electromagnetic waves around them. A side effect of our society's craving for uninterrupted connectivity, the design and building of phone towers are now influenced by various strategies. One of them consists in the use of camouflage techniques, and obviously, the "natural" metaphor plays an important role here. Along with green carpets and synthetic lawns, mobile phone towers disguised as trees are perhaps the most common example of the nature/technology landmark nowadays. Designed in order to make telecom infrastructures less visible and offensive to people living around them—a tactic also employed for oil rigs—such kind of concealment was first proposed by South African engineers in the mid 1990s. Noting the analogy between palm trees and phone masts, the team, commissioned by Vodacom to solve this visual pollution, decided to give them a sylvan character by adding glass fiber trunks and plastic leaves to the small pole silhouettes of the existing antennas.

Palm trees, like oil rigs camouflaged as palm trees, can be seen as a very pragmatic and quite socially accepted form of nature/technology integration. As pointed out by Rick Miller and Ted Kane<sup>21</sup>: "The result is the camouflaged cell phone tower, the by-product of the only position available to communities who oppose cell phone towers, that is to demand their invisibility. Hiding its presence from public view, the ubiquitous cell phone tower camouflaged as a palm tree becomes an appropriate icon for the private infrastructural network of our day." After a few years of their existence, it is interesting to observe how wildlife behaviours around these structures have evolved in unexpected ways, looking so real that birds built nests in them, and elephants use them as scratching posts.

21. Miller, Rick, and Ted Kane, 2009, "Mobile Phone, Cell, Structure," *The Infrastructural City: Intersecting Ecologies*, Los Angeles, Berkeley: Actar.



## V. KINGDOM OF MISCELLANEOUS

"Since the Second World War, the planet has gradually become a life-sized laboratory. The previous model of the 'factory planet' has given way to the 'laboratory planet'. The planet has been captured, transformed into capital and put to work becoming a stranger to itself in the process, or being managed like any other innovative company. We are the laboratory subjects, but can we somehow regain possession of this immense, anonymous machine that has now taken on a momentum of its own? Can we change the destiny and the choices of this laboratory?"

Benoît Charbonnel & Bureau d'études, 2016, "The Laboratory Planet."

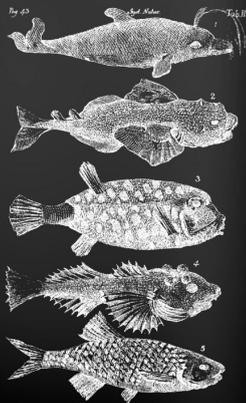




# ON CLASSIFICATION

## (WHAT KIND OF NOVUM ORGANUM WOULD IT BE?)

—MATTHIEU DUPERREX



advent of our new geological era whose underlying driving forces appear to defy it being contained as a System of Nature, results in the Ozonum itself being disrupted, the large-scale natural organization of the Holocene is giving way to the emergence of curious phenomena and accidents. The very act of coupling specimens from the Anthropocene, therefore, becomes less a question of systemic organization, rather a relational ecology which responds, as Aristotle writes on the genealogy of monsters, to an "accidental necessity."

Curiosity obliges such as the Botany do not include the epigenetic octopus which covertly relate such and such entities to one another. You won't have any inkling beforehand, however, you will gain a more precise picture by creating your own matchings of monsters with one another. And for good reason, given that these hitherto unheard of relationships between disparate objects produce new narratives and frameworks of classification that disrupt the distinctions between kingdoms, taxa or species. Stratigraphers are still debating on which rock, sediment or artefact should become the marker (geological time boundary) of this new geological age, and are almost certain that this techno-fossil will only constitute convincing evidence thereof in the eyes of a future investigator-collector if we project ourselves mentally into a time when the human species will have disappeared. With geology itself becoming a prospective science and an alter history of species of the Holocene, it is little wonder that we turn to monsters and miracles to bear witness to our current existence as humans. At the start of *We Have Never Been Modern*, Bruno Latour looks through the pages of a major national daily to demonstrate the futility of the separation between humans and non-humans. Les mirabilia that comprise *A History of the Anthropocene* in turn challenge the "rationalization" of the ontologies of Nature and Culture that Modernity proposes... at the risk of the most haphazard connections.

The small city of Centreville in the United States, located in the state of Illinois—and more precisely in the county of Saline-Clark—has been the scene of calls for help from some of its inhabitants, eventually escalating into protest. This territory has experienced a slow corrosion of its living conditions that have now reached unprecedented proportions. Over the course of several decades, some sites of this region have, in various ways, become quite hostile to life. Reports abound describing the ill that the inhabitants of Centreville, among the poorest people in the United States, are burdened with: floors that crumble and collapse taking the walls of the houses with them; sewage that is no longer carried away, recurrent flooding, stubborn mould and unbearable odours. The city has all the makings of a territory of nightmares, sheltering an evil that is at once endemic, pervasive and invisible.

It thus takes on almost Lovecraftian accents, as found for instance in *The Colour out of Space*, when describing it. In this short story, a meteorite crashes on a piece of land thereafter described as the "Blasted Heath", blighting it and poisoning all the living beings residing nearby, the plants as well as the animals. But the Lovcraft of this sad tale would have to be resisted along the lines drawn by contemporary authors such as Matt Ruff (*Lovercraft Country*) or Victor Laville (*The Ballad of Black Tom*), whose horrific tales make one sensitive to the terror felt by the black populations subjected to racism, slavery and lynching—a reflection of a history of racial inequalities afflicting the USA. The majority of Centreville's population is African American.

The city is a self-cannibalizing territory, unable to discharge its wastewater outside. Reports filed on location over recent months showed residences flushing their toilets and witnesses outside watching the appearance of excrement in the garden seconds later. The wife of a man with diabetes testifies during a reportage that a few years earlier she wrapped a garbage bag around her husband's foot, which had to be amputated, in protest if from the bacteria carried by the sewage flooding their home. His whole leg had to be amputated some time later.



# ON PLANETARY INDIGESTION

## (STEP INTO OUR O.F.F.I.C.E.)

—THE CENTER FOR GENOMIC GASTRONOMY

WE HAVE ALWAYS BEEN BIO-HACKERS



The bird that kills the hunter. The pig that kills the pork butcher. Les miroirs renversés, 1825, de la fabrique de Rotterdam.

# ON TEMPORALITIES

## (TOWARDS A GESTALT SWITCH)

—GEOFFREY C. BOWKER

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