..."Tis yet to determine where the fault lies that we understand not one another, the language of animals, Montaigne...

..."It strives for a kind of understanding, even when something cannot be understood, the weird, Ann & Jeff VanderMeer

I walked around in wonderment, licking shells, staring at algae on the rocks and laughing like a fool. Hours went by...

...I got lost in a small rock pool and saw layers of life emerge from the water. Tiny anemones, cushion stars with their gorgeous mosaic designs...

...the clenched fist of my mind had finally opened and it was pure joy; I was free and I was tripping hard...

Sea Change, Rosslynne

Weird Ecologies
WEIRD ECOLOGY REPRESENTS THE INTERSECTION BETWEEN RADICAL ECOLOGY AND WEIRD FICTION.

WEIRD ECOCLOGIES ARE FOUND ALONG BORDERS, MARGINS, GAPS AND GATEWAYS WHERE THE HUMAN WORLD MEETS THE WILD, IN SPILLAGES BETWEEN THE ANTHROPOCENE AND THE NON-HUMAN HORIZON BEYOND.

WEIRD ECOCLOGIES ARE NOT STATIC GEOGRAPHIES, BUT RATHER ACTIVE SPACES OF ENCOUNTER, PARTICIPATION, AND TRANSFORMATION.

USING LITTLE EQUIPMENT, AND HAVING DEVELOPED A RANGE OF LOW-FI TRACKING METHODS, THE FREE DIVERS HAVE FOUND AN EXPERIENCE BEYOND OBSERVATION AND CLOSER TO DIRECT ENCOUNTER.

BUILDING CROSS SPECIES KINSHIPS, THROUGH FAMILIARISATION AND RESPECT, THE SEA CHANGE PROJECT IS PRACTISING WHAT THEY CALL “LIVING SCIENCE”. WHERE SCIENTIFIC BREAKTHROUGHS IS ONLY A BYPRODUCT OF A GREATER GOAL OF RE-ENCHANTMENT WITH THE NATURAL WORLD.

IT MAY BE THE COLD WATERS, AND THE BREATH WORK REQUIRED ON A DIVE, THAT PRODUCE A POTENT NEUROCHEMICAL EFFECT.

OR IT MAY BE THE TOTAL, NEAR OBSESSIOINAL, IMMERSION IN THE ALIEN WILD OF THE KELP FOREST...

...BUT IT SEEMS BEING UNDER THE WATERS HAS CAUSED A PSYCHOLOGICAL, EVEN EXISTENTIAL, CHANGE IN THE FREE DIVERS, AT LEAST AS POWERFUL AND PROFOUND AS ANY PSYCHEDELIC TRIP.

DIFFICULT WEATHER, COLD WATERS, AND SWALLOWING KELP, MIGHT NOT SOUND LIKE THE PERFECT CONDITIONS FOR A DIVERS’ PARADISE. BUT PARTICIPANTS IN THE SEA CHANGE PROJECT WOULD BEG TO DIFFER.

IN THE GREAT AFRICAN SEA FOREST THIS TIGHT KNIT TEAM OF FREE DIVERS HAVE EMBRACED THE SURROUNDINGS AND OPENED A WORLD OF ASTONISHING BIODIVERSITY AND STRANGE BEAUTY.

THROUGH DALLY DIVES,DEDICATION, RITUAL, STORYTELLING AND A COMMUNITY THING, THEIR EFFORTS HAVE BEEN GREETED WITH REMARKABLE INSIGHTS.

AND THEN IT STARTS TO GET WEIRD...
THEM EXPERIENCE REPRESENTS SOMETHING OF AN ONTOLOGICAL SHIFT, WHERE A POSITIVIST SCIENTIFIC APPROACH IS LESS REDOLENT OF MEANING, AND WHERE THE BORDER SEPARATING THE HUMAN FROM THE ANIMAL HAVE BEGUN TO DISSOLVE.

AS CRAIG FOSTER, SEA CHANGE PROJECT MEMBER, PSYCHONAUT AND PIONEER OF UNDERSEA TRACKING, PUTS IT “WE ARE WILD BY NATURE, WILD BY BIRTH. IT’S THE WILDERNESS THAT MAKES US HUMAN, THAT EXCITES OUR BEING”

CONSIDERING ENCOUNTERS IN THE KELP FOREST, FOSTER TURNS HIS THOUGHTS TO ONE OF ITS MOST ENIGMATIC CREATURES “WHEN YOU LOOK AT THE OCTOPUS IT APPEARS TO BE COMPLETELY ALIEN BUT…”

…YOU ARE ACTUALLY LOOKING AT YOURSELF. YOU ARE WOVEN OF THE SAME FABRIC AS THAT OCTOPUS. EVEN THOUGH IT FIRST APPEARS SO DIFFERENT FROM YOU, YOU CAN MAKE A CONNECTION AND IT BRINGS YOU CLOSER TO ONENESS.


FOSTER’S OWN EXPERIENCE ECHOS TROPS OF WEIRD FICTION, Whilst ALSO POINTING TO THE ECOLOGICAL TURM IN MUCH RECENT WEIRD SCI-FI SUCH AS JEFF WANDERMEER’S SOUTHERN BEACH TRILOGY, AS WE SHALL SEE.
Concerned with borders, boundaries and the transgression of limits and liminal spaces, weird fiction presents a contested existential landscape.

We live on a placid island of ignorance in the midst of black seas of infinity.

The work of H.P. Lovecraft, a progenitor of the genre, often involves incursions in human space from the outside. Both concretely, as in the Big-Horror of the Shadow over Innsmouth, and abstractly.

Slugs, tentacles, ooze, shriek. Gelatinous beings, eldritch abominations and curious bodily mutations figure prominently in the mad carnival of weird fiction.

Since its rise in the pulp magazines of the 1920s, weird fiction has often contained ideas too vast for its own narrative framework. With concepts spilling and spilling from author to author, work to work, with shared geographies, archaeologies and mythologies spanning literary tradition.

As in the colour out of space, where a new colour invades the known spectrum, warping the world around it, in Lovecraft the weird signifies an attack on human logics, both harmful and terrifying.

The Lovecraftian weird, wildly entertaining as it may be, is just one type of weird, processed through a particular lens. The weird often reduced to a stand in for the fears of a white, hetero-normative, and misogynist psychopathology.

But the weird exceeds its orbit...
In Roadside Picnic, the novel by the Strugatsky Bros., zones of strange activity have emerged across the globe in the wake of alien visitation.

The zones are a bizarre landscape of shifting geographies and contradiction, a hybrid of material composites and the psychology of those who travel through them.

In Roadside Picnic the weird strays from the traditions of the genre, presenting alterity as ultimately something of a gift, ambivalent as it may be, to the human world.

Vandermeer complicates the nature-in-revolt narrative by mixing body horror with moral ambivalence, skewing the human narrative in favour of a more complex ecological mystery.

Humankind structures, such as the lighthouse, are co-opted by the weird; the human world is consistently marginalised through metaphor.

Themes of geographic metamorphosis, transformation, and alterity are further explored through an ecological lens in the Jeff Vandermeer novel Annihilation, where a mysterious zone of weird ecological happenings is explored.

Even the novel’s narrator is unimpressed by the human world, commenting, “Fun for me was sneaking off to peer into a tidal pool, to grasp the intricacies of the creatures that lived there.”

Where lies the strangest rhythm?

At one point it appears as though the ecosystem itself is attempting to communicate using language it has extracted from its human victims.

This is perhaps the ultimate reversal of the novel, where it is nature, for once, exploiting mankind.

The weird in Vandermeer signifies a broadening of storytelling potential, a move beyond the anthropocentrism of earlier weird fiction.

This story telling potential is something figured in the work of Donna Haraway, who calls this wider focus “tentacular.”

Sustenance for me was tied to ecosystem and habitat... the sudden realization of the interconnectivity of living things.”
TENTACULAR THINKING, TENTACULAR STORYTELLING, LIKE WEIRD ECOLOGY, IS A WAY OF EMBRACING ECOLOGICAL ALTERITY.

THE NON-HUMAN CONTEXT IS A WAY OF EXPLORING NEW AND RECIPROCAL KINGDOMS IN THE NATURAL WORLD, A MEANS OF RE-ENCHANTING OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH NATURE.

WITH THIS IN MIND, IT SHOULDN'T BE A SURPRISE THAT THE DIVERS OF SEA CHANGE PROJECT REFER TO THEMSELVES AS STORYTELLERS, NOT SIMPLY BECAUSE THEY BRING BACK STORIES FROM THE SEA FOREST, BUT BECAUSE OUT-THERE THEY ARE RETRACING OUR STORY.

PIPPA SHWILICH, FILM MAKER AND FREE DIVER, EXPLAINS OUR GOAL IS TO CREATE AN EMOTIONAL CONNECTION BETWEEN THE VIEWER AND THE NATURAL WORLD.'

CRAIG FOSTER GOES ON 'WE'VE BROKEN THE STRING TO THE WILD...'

"...IT IS MY JOB TO TRY TO FIX SOME OF THOSE STRINGS, TO BUILD A PATHWAY BACK TO THE WILD, THE WILD IN OUR HEARTS, THE WILD IN OUR MINDS..."

WEIRD ECOLOGY IS A WAY TO THINK ABOUT NATURE, A WAY TO FRAME THE STORIES WE TELL ABOUT IT, A WAY OF CONSCIOUS THE WORLD BEYOND THE ANTHROPOCENTRIC FOCUS OF EXTRACTION AND RESOURCE.

"...I'M HUNTING WILDERNESS, I'M HUNTING MY DEEP ANCESTORS AND I'M HUNTING THE SECRET LIVES OF THESE MAGNIFICENT NON-HUMAN PEOPLE, I'M SEARCHING FOR THE WONDERS THAT LIES IN ALL THESE THINGS..."

OUT BEYOND THE SHORELINE, OR UNDER THE NEAREST LOG, A WORLD OF STRANGE AND WEIRD POSSIBILITIES EXISTS, AT ONCE FAR REMOVED FROM OUR EVERYDAY EXPERIENCE, BUT PERHAPS ALL THE MORE INTERESTING AND MORE NOURISHING FOR IT.