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Eco-Narratology and Contemporary American Fiction

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ECO-NARRATOLOGY AND CONTEMPORARY AMERICAN FICTION

by

Kyle T. Henrichs

A Dissertation Submitted in
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ABSTRACT
ECO-NARRATOLOGY AND CONTEMPORARY AMERICAN FICTION

by

Kyle T. Henrichs

The University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, 2021
Under the Supervision of Professor Richard Grusin

In this dissertation, I analyze contemporary American novels via ecocritical and narratological reading strategies to highlight how novelists approach environmental crises through various narrative strategies. The novels I analyze allow me to provide several instances where contemporary American novelists explore environmental crisis with narrative. I argue that the formal, structural choices contemporary American novelists make depend on the environmental problems they portray. Furthermore, I argue that each novel uses, to one degree or another, realist aesthetics—but makes a marked departure from realism to address environmental concerns. These novels show us how we got to where we are environmentally, but they also suggest through innovative narrative strategies how we might become more aware of our own conventions. I use narratology as a method of inquiry because the conventions of thinking are embedded in the conventions of storytelling and attending closely to the conventions of storytelling can thus open up new ways of thinking about our roles in environmental crisis. I draw on several traditions of scholars trying to rethink cultural products' relationship to the environment and those who explore the conventions of narrative.

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Introduction

Cultural critics need more insight into the ramifications of current and oncoming environmental crises. American novelists since the mid-1990s have approached the subject of environmental crisis in various ways, both thematically and formally. Their approaches responded to the rise of the environmental justice movement and the widespread acceptance of the reality of climate change since the first assessment reports of the World Meteorological Organization's Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change.¹ How do contemporary authors use narrative strategies to address ecological disasters? While the novel has traditionally been associated with dramatizing human concerns using realist aesthetics, contemporary American novelists have frequently abandoned realism to address new environmental problems.² My dissertation examines how four American novelists have sought to make the novel formally adequate to the difficult task of narrating environmental crisis. The novelists I examine—Jonathan Franzen, Lydia Millet, David Foster Wallace, and Karen Tei Yamashita—show how environmental crisis requires experimental narrative strategies that attend closely to nonhuman concerns.

¹ See, for example, Evan Dara. *The Lost Scrapbook: A Novel*. FC2, 1995. Percival Everett. *Watershed: A Novel*. Graywolf, 1996., Linda Hogan. *Power: A Novel*. W.W. Norton & Co., 1998., Peter Matthiessen. *Shadow Country*. Modern Library, 2008., Jesmyn Ward. *Salvage the Bones A Novel*. Bloomsbury, 2011., Barbara Kingsolver. *Flight Behavior: A Novel*. Harper, 2012., Ruth Ozeki. *A Tale for the Time Being: A Novel*. Viking, 2013., Richard Powers. *The Overstory*. W.W. Norton & Co., 2018.

² While the vast majority of novels published in the last three centuries use realist aesthetics to portray humans and their concerns, a few examples include the following: Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*, Samuel Richardson's *Pamela; or, Virtue Rewarded*, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's *The Sorrows of Young Werther*, Jane Austen's *Emma*, Charles Dickens's *Great Expectations*, Mark Twain's *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, Richard Wright's *Native Son*, Amy Tan's *The Joy Luck Club*, and Donna Tartt's *The Goldfinch*. On the development of the novel as a form used to portray human concerns, see Ian Watt. *The Rise of the Novel: Studies in Defoe, Richardson and Fielding*. Chatto & Windus, 1957.

In my dissertation, I argue that the formal, structural choices contemporary American novelists make depend on the environmental problems they portray. These authors rely on rules for reading, codes they inherited from typical reading conventions—and then break or deviate from these codes in trying to look at environmental problems from a new perspective.³ I use econarratology (the combined foci of ecocriticism’s emphasis on the influence of environment and narratology’s attention to structure) to explore how these four contemporary American fiction writers use experimental narrative practices to respond to environmental concerns.⁴ Erin James notes that, though narrative theory was once considered “primarily a descriptive, noninterpretive mode of reading inspired by a structural focus on the text alone,” it is increasingly useful for understanding “the world beyond the text” (14). The novel form developed historically to chronicle humans and their concerns, yet novels are useful for understanding the role of the nonhuman in our time of environmental crisis.⁵ While the authors I look at in my project are concerned with very different ecological disasters, and their narrative choices vary greatly as well, what they share is deliberate narrative code-breaking and a concern for environmental problems.

This dissertation is composed of four chapters, in addition to this introduction, with each body chapter focused on a close reading of a single novel (albeit with reference as appropriate to

³ For more on structuralist codes, see Roland Barthes, *S/Z: An Essay*. Trans. Richard Miller. Hill and Wang, 1974. Pp. 10-11 and Seymour Chatman, *Story and Discourse: Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film*, Cornell UP, 1978. Pp. 24.

⁴ Erin James describes “econarratology” as follows in *The Storyworld Accord: Econarratology and Postcolonial Narratives*: “I see econarratology as pairing ecocriticism’s interest in the relationship between literature and the physical environment with narratology’s focus on the literary structures and devices by which writers compose narratives. Econarratology studies the storyworlds that readers simulate and transport themselves to when reading narratives, the correlations between such textual, imaginative worlds and the physical, extratextual world, and the potential of the reading process to foster awareness and understanding for different environmental imaginations and experiences.” Pp. xv.

⁵ On the anthropocentric development of the novel and narrativized discourse more generally, see Amitav Ghosh, *The Great Derangement: Climate Change and the Unthinkable*. U. of Chicago P., 2016 and David Herman, *Narratology Beyond the Human: Storytelling and Animal Life*. Oxford UP, 2018.

other novels that address issues similar to those brought up by the novel under discussion). In choosing primary texts, I selected literary novels that explore different aspects of environmental crisis and employ a variety of narrative strategies to do so.⁶ While several critics have chosen a particular environmental problem to write about, such projects necessarily limit their scope and the connections they can make between seemingly disparate environmental problems.⁷ The first two novels I address, *Freedom* (2010) by Jonathan Franzen and *How the Dead Dream* (2008) by Lydia Millet are realist novels, but they incorporate strategies not generally regarded as realist at critical junctures when realism is not adequate to make the points about environmentalism that the authors want to make. In *Freedom*, Jonathan Franzen addresses the destruction of the coal industry and the decreasing migratory songbird population with a realist aesthetic inflected with frequent metafictional reflections on the inability of the novel to productively address environmental problems. In *How the Dead Dream*, Lydia Millet addresses the radical distinction between humans and animals (and the subsequent disparity in the values of their lives) with the story of a man who acts in an increasingly unrealistic fashion as the narrator eventually ceases to make a distinction between the human and the nonhuman. The final two novels I address, *Infinite Jest* (1996) by David Foster Wallace and *Tropic of Orange* (1997) by Karen Tei Yamashita are less invested in realist aesthetics and more overtly experimental in their narrative strategies. In *Infinite Jest*, Wallace addresses the environmental injustice of dumping toxic waste near disenfranchised communities by contrasting first-hand accounts with a description of an art

⁶ Amitav Ghosh notes that few writers of literary fiction have chosen to address climate change directly. I will discuss his argument in more detail in my chapter on David Foster Wallace's *Infinite Jest*. While my study is not restricted to novels that explore climate change, Ghosh's argument could be extended to almost any environmental crisis.

⁷ See, for instance, Paula Anca Farca on the water crisis, John Blair Gamber on waste, and Adam Trexler on climate change, Paula Anca Farca. *Making Waves: Water in Contemporary Literature and Film*. U. of Nevada P., 2019., Gamber, John Blair. *Positive Pollutions and Cultural Toxins: Waste and Contamination in Contemporary U.S. Ethnic Literatures*. U of Nebraska P, 2012., Trexler, Adam. *Anthropocene Fictions: The Novel in a Time of Climate Change*. U. of Virginia P., 2015.

object that problematically represents this history of environmental injustice. Wallace's novel attends closely to the unbelievable-yet-true quality of environmental disaster. In *Tropic of Orange*, Yamashita comments on climate change with elements of magic realism, dispersing the novel's center of attention with several characters whose stories are all narrated in distinct styles. Her novel presents a formal corollary for the ways human experiences of space and time are altered by climate change. Each of these novels asks readers to engage in a particular way at the outset but then asks readers to engage with them in an entirely different way when narrating environmental crisis. The environmental content in each novel occasions a particular experimental approach or departure from realism.

Responding to environmental crisis is also a problem for critics in the humanities. This project is inspired by the rise of the environmental humanities, which has made the study of cultural and literary texts central to the study of ecology.⁸ In the last few decades, work in the environmental humanities has sought to transcend the outmoded gap between the sciences and the humanities. Ecocritics like Lawrence Buell, for instance, show how literature played a central role in shaping human attitudes about nonhuman nature.⁹ Buell notes that ecocriticism has developed through several waves, including "first-wave" ecocriticism, which was particularly concerned with nature writing and conservation and "second-wave" ecocriticism, which was more concerned with the environmental justice movement.¹⁰ James suggests that ecocriticism is now in its third wave, which is particularly concerned with transnationalism and anthropocene discourse (8). The Anthropocene has become an indispensable category for critics

⁸ For more on the development of the environmental humanities, see Deborah Bird Rose, Thom van Dooren, Matthew Chrulew, Stuart Cooke, Matthew Kearnes, Emily O'Gorman; "Thinking Through the Environment, Unsettling the Humanities." *Environmental Humanities* 1 May 2012; 1 (1): 1–5.

⁹ Lawrence Buell, *The Environmental Imagination: Thoreau, Nature Writing, and the Formation of American Culture*. Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, England: Harvard University Press, 1995.

¹⁰ Lawrence Buell. *The Future of Environmental Criticism: Environmental Crisis and Literary Imagination*. Wiley-Blackwell, 2005.

seeking to periodize literature in an age of climate change.¹¹ Nonhuman theory, influenced by Bruno Latour, has helped ecocritics to question the conventional distinctions between mind and body, subject and object, nature and culture.¹²

While novels that explore themes of environmental disaster are not necessarily specific to the last thirty years, the contemporary American econovel is notable for its experimentation with narration. Attempts to develop narrative strategies appropriate to climate change, environmental injustice, and decreased biodiversity overlap with the waning of the postmodern as an aesthetic category and a hermeneutic, as well as the coincident rise of the environmental humanities.¹³ Experimental narration helps us to re-think nonhuman nature outside the framework of an older humanism while better understanding the historical specificity of humanist values. The virtue of experimental narration is that it defamiliarizes attitudes and processes readers might otherwise take for granted, encouraging them to reexamine humanist assumptions about the nonhuman world (Herman 2).

Ongoing and urgent conversations in ecocriticism and narrative theory have developed new, productive ways of looking at narratives, and my dissertation seeks to demonstrate how contemporary novels complicate older structuralist models of narratology. Gérard Genette and other structuralist narratologists have sought to codify the moves that happen in narratives and to classify the ways in which narratives treat space, time, and perspective.¹⁴ Much narration in contemporary American fiction, however, defies structural and conventional models and—in so doing—defies how readers are conditioned to think about space, time, the body, and nonhuman

¹¹ See, for instance, Adam Trexler. *Anthropocene Fictions: The Novel in a Time of Climate Change*. U. of Virginia P., 2015 and Richard Grusin, editor. *Anthropocene Feminism*. University of Minnesota Press, 2017

¹² See Bruno Latour. *We Have Never Been Modern*, Harvard UP, 1993 and Richard Grusin, editor. *The Nonhuman Turn*. University of Minnesota Press, 2015.

¹³ On the waning of postmodernism, see Jeremy Green. *Late Postmodernism: American Fiction at the Millennium*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2005.

¹⁴ Gerard Genette. *Narrative Discourse: An Essay on Method*. Trans. Jane A Lewin. Cornell UP, 1980.

nature.¹⁵ Recent narratologists have adapted their models to account for these newer experimental strategies. Brian Richardson, for example, has codified several experimental narrative strategies in *Unnatural Voices*, while Paul Dawson has explored the richness of traditional and unconventional uses of omniscience in contemporary fiction in his book *The Return of the Omniscient Narrator*.¹⁶ Dawson's examination of the omniscient narrator is useful for understanding Wallace's idiosyncratic use of omniscient narration in *Infinite Jest* and the two together ask us to consider several questions about narrative. Is narration ever *really* omniscient? If so, can it be omniscient even if it does not sound omniscient—that is, if the style of presentation aligns more closely with a character's voice than a traditional, "well-spoken" narrator?¹⁷ Can ekphrastic description function as narration? What is the relationship between such seemingly discrete concepts as narrator, narrative, and ecology?

Because the novels I examine in my dissertation explore very different environmental problems and do so with very different narrative strategies, they are not meant as representative cases, but—rather—as four different ways that American authors choose to address environmental crisis in the contemporary novel. Taken as a group, their virtue is in their difference, not in their representativeness. However, each of these novelists is engaging with the resurgence of realism in American literary fiction around the year 2000. As I see it, what is

¹⁵ For more on experimental narration in postmodern fiction, see Linda Hutcheon. *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction*. Routledge, 1988.

¹⁶ Brian Richardson. *Unnatural Voices: Extreme Narration in Modern and Contemporary Fiction*. Columbus: Ohio State UP, 2006 and Paul Dawson. *The Return of the Omniscient Narrator: Authorship and Authority in Twenty-First Century Fiction*. Columbus: The Ohio State UP, 2013.

¹⁷ A well-spoken narrator is "a narrator whose mode of expression is a standard (or even elegant) one and functions as a norm in terms of which the characters' modes of expression are situated" (105). Gerald Prince. *A Dictionary of Narratology*. Revised Ed. Lincoln: U. of Nebraska P., 2003. Narratologists often use the term "well-spoken" to refer to narrators who write in Standard English, as opposed to those who write in dialect or World Englishes. The term deserves more critique than it has gotten. For studies that distinguish a well-spoken narrator from a narrator who is notable for use of dialect, see James E. Caron. *Mark Twain, Unsanctified Newspaper Reporter*. Columbia: U. of Missouri P., 2008. Pg. 207 and Stephen M. Ross. *Fiction's Inexhaustible Voice: Speech and Writing in Faulkner*. Athens: U. of Georgia P., 1991.

unique about each novel I examine in this dissertation is the way that each novelist takes some problematic aspect of literary realism and works through it in a decidedly non-realist way. In *Freedom*, Franzen writes a mostly realist novel that is nonetheless replete with metafictional moments. Metafiction characterizes much postwar American fiction in the modernist/postmodernist tradition, and it is often regarded by critics as not realist because it draws special attention to its own artifice. The most navel-gazing of postmodern fiction does not really represent reality at all outside of representing the process of representation. Franzen writes a novel that is realist in many ways but metafictional when it comes to addressing environmental politics. The metafictional moments in the novel allow Franzen to reflect on the aesthetic and rhetorical problems associated with writing committed environmentalist fiction without having to actually negotiate those challenges. While moments involving environmentalism in his novel have a “meta” quality, Franzen’s dominant aesthetic is still realist.

Millet examines the rational humanist subject of realist fiction. The protagonist of *How the Dead Dream* is shown to be less and less rational as the novel progresses. Affect takes over where reason formerly reigned, and the representation of rational human thought becomes problematic in the novel. What starts as psychologically realist, coherent thought is warped by grief and personal growth. Eventually, the narrative cues that distinguish actants within the narrative fail to make clear distinctions between human actants and other kinds of beings. The gradual critique of the rational humanist subject serves to momentarily decenter the human as the focus of the novel. Doing so allows Millet to show readers the ways in which humans have constructed myths of human exceptionalism to rationalize violence against nonhumans.

Wallace addresses the realist quality of believability. His comic epic *Infinite Jest* seems to make few claims to realistic representation, but—within the diegesis—Wallace explores a

historical narrative that is both outrageous and true. His strange-but-true historical chronicle demonstrates how historical truth is embedded in aesthetic representation. More to my point about fiction and environmental catastrophe, Wallace's treatment of history's aesthetic embeddedness speaks to the unbelievable-yet-true quality of environmental disaster.

Finally, Karen Tei Yamashita takes on the realist quality of representing space and time in a way that readers experience as lifelike. Her novel gives readers a code with which to understand the storyworld in terms of time and space. This code is disrupted by the effects of climate change. Unseasonable weather magically afflicts various locations in the novel, and distances between locations become elastic as climate change brings them closer together.

Chapter One: Jonathan Franzen's *Freedom*, Metafiction, and the Realist Eco-Novel

My first chapter will examine Jonathan Franzen's 2010 novel *Freedom*. Jonathan Franzen's *Freedom* examines the neoliberal logics of free market competition and individual freedom in order to critique the efficacy of large-scale environmental projects—and also to make visible the inherent conflicts between the entitlements of individual freedom and the sacrifices necessary for the collective good. Throughout *Freedom*, Walter Berglund struggles to articulate a practical environmental policy that does not autocratically infringe on his interlocutors' individual rights (as they see them). He also struggles to enact a way of living that coincides with his environmentalist and humanitarian values that does not conflict too much with his own engrained sense of entitlement. Franzen renders the import of these struggles coherent through his narrative strategies, such as extended use of summary to represent a social totality and putting characters with differing political attitudes in dialogue. *Freedom* also self-consciously comments on the problems involved in writing a committed environmentalist novel. Layers of

mediation distance readers from objective social problems like climate change and the consumption of nonrenewable resources. *Freedom* refers to realistic, complex material problems, but it does so through metafictionally commenting on the inability of the novel to productively address those same problems. It is an econovel about both the inefficacy of ecopolitics and the inefficacy of the novel to depict problems in a way that can lead to social change.

Chapter Two: What's a Death Worth?: Neoliberalism and Necropolitics in *How the Dead Dream*

In the second chapter, I take up Lydia Millet's *How the Dead Dream*, in which Millet begins writing a realist novel (though smaller in scope than Franzen's) with environmentalist themes but then eventually dispenses with realism as the narrative progresses. This chapter will chart how Millet's shift from humanist realism to posthumanist experiment reflects both a change in narrative strategies and a change in attitudes about the nonhuman. Specifically, the narrator of *How the Dead Dream* is initially focused on the doings of a central human character. As the novel proceeds, however, the narrator and the protagonist gradually take an interest in nonhuman animals. As the protagonist spends more time with animals and considers the relative values of their lives and deaths, the radical distinction between the human and the nonhuman erodes. The narrator takes less care to distinguish between the protagonist and the animals around him. At the end of the novel, as the protagonist encounters some kind of animal, the novel's narrator employs an experimental mode of storytelling that refuses to distinguish between the human protagonist and the nonhuman actants around him.

Chapter Three: Beyond Interdependence Day: Pyrotechnic Storytelling and the Unbelievable-

But-True in David Foster Wallace's *Infinite Jest*

The third chapter will look at David Foster Wallace's novel *Infinite Jest* and the ways in which Wallace addresses the difficulty of narrating the events that produce ecological disaster. In *Infinite Jest*, Wallace employs pyrotechnic narration and ekphrasis to mediate between an implausible (though factual) historical narrative and the version the characters in the novel are given. The ecological crisis that the characters in *Infinite Jest* face is narrated alongside a film version of that narrative. Mario Incandenza makes a puppet-show movie about the political rise of American President Johnny Gentle and his policy of dumping toxins in Canada. Wallace's narrator periodically jumps in to comment on the historical accuracy of Mario's film. This commentary frequently takes the form of assurances that Mario's representation of the ecological narrative—though appearing to be outlandish and ridiculous—is actually close to historical fact. In doing so, Wallace maintains the prestige and realism of literary fiction while representing a dystopian ecological catastrophe. Wallace's comedy works to legitimize the strange-but-true narratives of environmental novelty.

Chapter Four: Style as Weather: Narrative Form and Global Warming in Karen Tei Yamashita's *Tropic of Orange*

In my final chapter, I will look at Karen Tei Yamashita's novel *Tropic of Orange* and how Yamashita's narration disperses the reader's attention across several environments and agents. Yamashita addresses the planetary problem of global warming through several characters who experience its various effects at the local level. In the novel, the Tropic of Cancer becomes attached to an orange that travels northward to the United States, dragging the climate, people, and culture of central Mexico with it, literalizing the trope of "climate change" as it travels.

Central to my account of Yamashita's global warming novel is the notion that place and weather have a profound connection. Yamashita employs magical realist aesthetics to narrate fantastic events relating to weather. What is interesting about the novel's treatment of global warming is how Yamashita's complex narration enacts a literary mimicry of some of global warming's features through form. Global warming disrupts weather patterns common to specific places, shifting weather historically common to a given place to other places where it may be uncommon. Global warming also gives rise to weather effects that are unheard of in certain places or produces degrees and features of weather that have never been common to any place at all. Yamashita mimics the effects of climate change at the level of form, using the "HyperContexts" early in the novel to set up readerly expectations about what narrative styles should be associated with certain characters only to blend discrete styles within the space of the chapter. Readers use the HyperContexts to inhabit the lives of Yamashita's characters and get a sense of what is common to their experience. However, the forms that readers are led to believe are common to each character's experience—and the novel's governing structure more generally—mimic weather in an era of climate change by shifting, mixing, and producing effects that are not characteristic of any individual space or character.

In this dissertation, I analyze contemporary American narratives via ecocritical and narratological reading strategies to highlight how novelists approach environmental crises through various narrative strategies. The four chapters summarized above allow me to provide several instances where contemporary American novelists explore environmental crisis with narrative. I undertake an analysis of these narrative strategies because I think novels are cool, and they provide a wide tapestry for exploring society's most pressing concerns. The novels in

this dissertation allow readers access to the underlying ideologies that produce (and continue to produce) environmental disaster. These novels show us how we got to where we are environmentally, but they also suggest through innovative narrative strategies how we might become more aware of our own conventions. I use narratology as a method of inquiry because the conventions of thinking are embedded in the conventions of storytelling and attending closely to the conventions of storytelling can thus open up new ways of thinking about our roles in environmental crisis. I draw on several traditions of scholars trying to rethink cultural products' relationship to the environment and those who explore the conventions of narrative.

Franzen's *Freedom*, Metafiction, and the Realist Eco-Novel

Jonathan Franzen's *Freedom* examines the neoliberal logics of free market competition and individual freedom in order to critique the efficacy of large-scale environmental projects—and also to make visible the inherent conflicts between the entitlements of individual freedom and the sacrifices necessary for the collective good. Throughout *Freedom*, Walter Berglund struggles to articulate a practical environmental policy that does not autocratically infringe on his interlocutors' individual rights (as they see them). He also struggles to enact a way of living that coincides with his environmentalist and humanitarian values that does not conflict too much with his own engrained sense of entitlement. Franzen renders the import of these struggles coherent through his narrative strategies, such as extended use of summary to represent a social totality and putting characters with differing political attitudes in dialogue. *Freedom* also self-consciously comments on the problems involved in writing a committed environmentalist novel. Layers of mediation distance readers and characters from objective social problems like climate change and the consumption of nonrenewable resources. *Freedom* refers to realistic, complex material problems, but it does so through metafictionally commenting on the inability of the novel to productively address those same problems. It is an econovel about both the inefficacy of ecopolitics and the inefficacy of the novel to depict problems in a way that can lead to social change.

In *Freedom*, Walter Berglund wants to do the right thing. Unlike other over-consuming Americans, Walter wants to do right by the natural environment, but neoliberalism gets in the way. David Harvey's much-cited definition of neoliberalism provides the foundation for how I will be using the term: "a theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an

institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade” (2).¹⁸ The individual-centric philosophy thrives on the valorization of competition as an essential value.¹⁹ According to Harvey, neoliberalism ascended in the 1980s in the United States and has been the dominant political-economic ideology since the adoption of the Washington Consensus policies in the 1990s (13). The rise of neoliberalism overlaps with the narrative Franzen writes of the Berglund family in *Freedom*. I use Harvey’s account of neoliberalism because it emphasizes the pervasive ideology of individual freedom that characters in *Freedom* cannot escape, even when they are aware that their decisions are detrimental to the public good. Before exploring the intersections of neoliberalism and environmentalist politics in *Freedom*, however, Franzen registered his skepticism towards large-scale environmentalism in realist terms in his second novel *Strong Motion*.

CORPORATE-SPONSORED ENVIRONMENTAL CRISIS IN *STRONG MOTION*

In *Freedom*, as in all novels that try to address the problem of ecological catastrophe, Franzen is faced with the problem of how to represent the complex causes of ecological catastrophe and the varied consequences of myriad agents and actants. Franzen faced the same problem in his 1992 novel *Strong Motion* where he addressed the problem of complexity by using a reader stand-in to receive the explanation of an expert. Franzen introduces the narrative problems of understandability and believability as they relate to making sense of environmental catastrophe stories. Outsider/romantic hero Louis Holland moves to Boston just as a series of minor

¹⁸ In *In the Ruins of Neoliberalism*, Wendy Brown notes that neoliberalism “is most commonly associated with a bundle of policies privatizing public ownership and services, radically reducing the social state, leashing labor, deregulating capital, and producing a tax-and-tariff-friendly climate to direct foreign investors.”

¹⁹ According to Michel Foucault, under neoliberalism, market principles become governing principles (32). One consequence of governing with market principles is that the governed subject becomes less a classical liberal subject concerned with “exchange and the satisfaction of needs” and more a subject characterized by competition (Brown).

earthquakes begin to rattle the city. The causes of the earthquakes mystify experts and are thus chalked up as rare anomalies. Louis becomes the conduit through which readers take in the expert seismographic information Franzen wants to communicate. Renee Seitchek explains to Louis her theory of how a chemical and textile corporation, Sweeting-Aldren, has instigated the earthquakes by dumping toxic waste down a well and inducing seismicity.

Strong Motion also employs the information available via mass media to convey the necessary plot points readers can use to make sense of the expert testimony. Louis, in place of the reader, pours over *The Boston Globe* to get a basic understanding of what the earthquakes actually consist of and the expert consensus as reported to mass media outlets. In an incredibly convenient turn of the plot, Louis begins dating Renee Seitchek, a seismology graduate student working at Harvard, who further explains to Louis (and the reader) the unlikelihood of the recent earthquakes in Massachusetts. In an equally incredible turn of the plot, one of the recent earthquakes kills an enigmatic relation of Louis's, Rita Kernaghan, who was Louis's grandfather's secretary and then wife. We learn later that Rita possessed stock in Sweeting-Aldren that transfers to Louis's mother upon Rita's death, thus implicating Louis's mother in the increasingly serious earthquakes. Sweeting-Aldren's environmental record is impeccable, we learn from Louis's reading of the *Globe*, and presents a set of problems for Louis and Renee. How can a small group of people, with few resources, "prove" the guilt of a major corporation of environmental injustice? If proved, how can academic research convince the general populace to take steps to prepare themselves for earthquakes when the consensus in mass media outlets is that the earthquakes are merely anomalies? In the same vein, how can this research effectuate the stoppage of Sweeting-Aldren's crimes, either through the legal system or by other tactics?

Finally, should Louis even blow the whistle when his mother's \$22 million in stock will certainly depreciate if he does?

The nature of responsibility is complicated in *Strong Motion* as it addresses what Rob Nixon calls the “slow violence” of certain environmental catastrophes: “a violence that occurs gradually and out of sight, a violence of delayed destruction that is dispersed across time and space, a violence of attritional violence that is typically not viewed as violence at all” (2). Slow violence serves as a counterpoint to how violence is usually understood—“an event or action that is immediate in time, explosive and spectacular in space, and . . . erupting into instant sensational visibility” (2). In *Strong Motion*, the small-scale earthquakes in the Boston area do not cause enough damage to be major media events. Furthermore, Sweeting-Aldren's claim that it is burning its waste instead of dumping it and inducing seismicity does not turn heads, despite the statistically low probability of several earthquakes happening in the Boston area in a short time frame, because the damage caused by the earthquakes does not reach of the threshold of media saturation that makes it necessary to investigate the possibility that Sweeting-Aldren is lying. Furthermore, the “crime” of dumping waste had been committed steadily for a long time without major catastrophe. It is only recently that the consequences of actions perpetrated silently and out-of-sight decades before come to be lethal actions. The company is to blame, but what does that mean exactly? Who should pay and for what exactly?

At the end of *Strong Motion*, Renee's research has been corroborated by other experts and is getting into major media outlets, but the Boston area is in ruins and Sweeting-Aldren's CEOs have passed the blame, taken the money, and fled the country. The slow violence of environmental crime “settles into a conventional potboiler convention, complete with climactic violence” (Rubins). Franzen dispenses with a narrative of slow violence and indulges in the

depiction of a spectacular, disastrous earthquake, connecting decades-old crimes discovered by his characters to easily-observable, material consequences. While *Strong Motion* does not depict a large-scale environmental project like *Freedom* does, it registers Franzen's skepticism that we can prepare ourselves for the disasters of human-created environmental catastrophe.

Indeed, the similarities in approach tie *Strong Motion* and *Freedom* closely together. Like *Freedom*, *Strong Motion* is told in a way that takes as its starting point the third-person omniscient narrator traditionally associated with realist novels (Dawson 4). Indeed, *Strong Motion* is so traditionally realist that, despite its incorporation of expert discourses typical of the postmodern encyclopedic novel, it rarely reflects back on its own narrative performance. In this way, *Strong Motion* is both identifiably realist and clearly in a tradition of postmodern systems novels (Burn 75). *Strong Motion* might then accurately be called an eco-novel, but *Freedom* aspires to comment on the very practice of telling environmental narratives; it might be termed a meta-eco-novel. *Freedom* is also, however, uniquely aware of its historical moment, after the rise and takeover of neoliberalism in the United States, in a way that *Strong Motion*, for all its commentary on corporate wrongdoing, is not.

Ultimately, *Freedom* takes a pessimistic stance, suggesting that the capitalist forces operating in the twenty-first century make meaningful environmentalism on a large scale always-already compromised or downright impossible. "Carbon Capture," Franzen's essay from the *New Yorker*, begins by suggesting that combatting global warming has been futile thus far and is likely to be futile in the future. Comparing the earth to a terminal patient, Franzen wants us to make our final years as rich as possible by making a concerted effort to maintain what biodiversity we still have and continuing to combat large, global issues like carbon emissions in

small, local, personally-meaningful ways. Franzen's brand of conservation, one tinged with faith in earth's near-doom, permeates *Freedom*.

FREEDOM AND CAPITALIST REALISM

While Franzen's early work is often characterized as influenced by postmodern writers of systems novels, his later work—post-*Strong Motion*—is often characterized as almost prototypically realist. Both categorizations are problematic because they miss how realist his “postmodern” novels are and how postmodern his “realist” novels are. Rather than read *Freedom* as an eco-novel, as I do, Kathy Knapp reads Franzen's book in the tradition of post-9/11 suburban novels and white male midlife crisis fiction responding to the rise of neoliberalism. She sees Walter as the protagonist of *Freedom* in a tradition of white, upper-middle class male characters facing a post-war crisis in masculine authority. She reads Walter's environmentalism as a middle-class privilege and notes Walter's hypocrisy with regard to such issues as population growth and carbon emissions.

In its unremittingly grim account of the terrible personal, geopolitical, and environmental costs of an ethos predicated on the quintessentially ‘suburban’ values of autonomy and upward mobility, *Freedom* testifies to the damning failure of success. But it also radically locates in ruin, loss, and despondency the basis for an aesthetic whose ‘social usefulness’ resides in its unwillingness to contribute to the happily-ever-after fairy tale of the elusive American Dream. (57).

Implicit in Knapp's analysis is the necessary intersection of Franzen's way-of-telling in *Freedom* and the values expressed by his characters. The “social usefulness” of realism is contingent on its willingness to testify to “the damning failure of success” and the “unremittingly grim”

consequences of suburban American values. Knapp does not delve into what exactly Franzen's aesthetic consists of, so she misses the idiosyncrasies of Franzen's narration—and what it has to do with “run, loss, and despondency”.

What Knapp characterizes vaguely as “an aesthetic” Franzen employs, we might more accurately follow Alison Shonkwiler and Leigh Claire La Berge in terming “capitalist realism.”²⁰ For Shonkwiler and La Berge, capitalist realism is an aesthetic historically situated at the waning of postmodernism's cultural dominance and deriving from the rise of neoliberal austerity measures (1-3). In their introduction to *Reading Capitalist Realism*, Shonkwiler and La Berge note that the concept of literary realism needs an update to account for several factors that make contemporary realist novels unlike nineteenth century realist novels:

there is no doubt that the realisms of today do not operate in the same world of conditions and demands as a nineteenth-century novel and cannot make the same kinds of claims to truth. Even viewed from entirely within a literary-historical context, modes of realism today are not clearly or straightforwardly alignable with the realisms of previous literatures. (8)

The authors follow Joshua Clover in questioning the capacity of the central tenets of realism (as Clover sees them) to “explain the world around us” (8): “an investment in scenes of the everyday, an accumulation of detail, and/or the moral encounter of the individual with social forces” (9), as well as the realist concepts of “class consciousness, social totality, and historical transition” (10). Shonkwiler and La Berge seek to move beyond the realist-modernist dialectic as it relates to narrative modes, arguing “capitalist realism is unstable with regard to its own mode” (11). Realist novels are not necessarily characterized by free indirect discourse and

²⁰ See also Mark Fisher *Capitalist Realism: Is There No Alternative?*, Zero Books, 2009.

omniscient third-person narration in opposition to modernist first-person narrators (Shonkwiler and La Berge 13, 10). However, realist novels like *Freedom* engage in a post-postmodern commentary on the nature of traditional realist omniscience in fiction, Paul Dawson argues, in response to “the decline in the cultural authority of the novel” (5). In short, “capitalist realism calls into question what realism *is*” (Shonkwiler and La Berge 16). Shonkwiler and La Berge’s introduction makes several references to Jonathan Franzen without ever actually analyzing any of his works within a capitalist realist framework, but his novel *Freedom* is at once realist and at the same time a challenge to realism as it is traditionally defined. The challenges that narration in *Freedom* poses to traditional realism are visible with regard to *Freedom*’s treatment of issues of environmentalism.

Because Franzen’s way of telling is so crucial to what he has to say about environmentalism, it is necessary to describe his aesthetic more thoroughly and specifically than broad labels like “realism” can. Caren Irr calls him “pre-eminent” among “contemporary realist novelists in the U.S. who have heeded [the call to use narrative to help readers come to terms with the Anthropocene],” but she does an admirable job of actually describing how Franzen’s aesthetic works (n. pag.). Irr classifies Franzen’s realism in the genre “novels of habit,” that is, fiction that “establishes character through accounts of routinized behavior” (n. pag.), which Irr maps in rich detail:

Many of [Franzen’s] descriptions begin as conventional realist passages; they anchor a character in concretely observable actions and derive much of their pathos from structural ironies surrounding motives. However hysterically overloaded with information about externalities Franzen’s narration might be, the psychology only remains comic to the degree that it suggests an inner life available to reason, rather than one in which all

human activity is reduced to tragic determinations. Although risking farce, Franzen's realism morphs into satire, since sane and reasoned cognition remains a condition for self-improvement in his writing. This commitment to reason as a fundamental responsibility ultimately defines Franzen's characters. His satires result from the reader's vicarious experience of absurdly habitual actions that can be changed for the better. Franzen's comedies of habit rest on an ethical foundation that takes the cultivation of habit of virtue as a primary goal. (n. pag.)

In other words, while Franzen has his aesthetic peculiarities, some of the features of his writing are markedly realist. His narration offers realist thick description ("hysterically overloaded with information"), the depiction of relatable human psychology and decision-making, and relies on identification for pathos (n. pag.). This decision-making is repeatedly complicated by what Irr calls "[e]ntrapment in habitual double binds" that plague Franzen's "ethically weakest characters" (n. pag.). Indeed, Adam Kelly notes that *The Corrections* (2001) and *Freedom* (2010) are "generally regarded as standard bearers for the contemporary realist novel" and writes as though the last word has been said on the matter (n. pag.).²¹ According to Kelly, "it is difficult to argue against a reading of *Freedom* that sees it as sustaining the notion of the liberal subject that also underlies classic nineteenth-century realist fiction" (n. pag.). While Kelly is content to read Franzen as a realist and Irr notes that Franzen is fundamentally a realist with several notable forays into satire, neither links Franzen's narration to his environmental concerns.

Even so, many critics (Irr excepted) seem reluctant to pin down what exactly is so realist about Franzen's realism. What is at stake in this distinction is the valorization of textual

²¹ Kelly writes that Franzen is "no doubt the preeminent example" of "novelists often presumed by critics to uphold the canons of realism" (n. pag.).

practices that often fall under broad labels like “realist” or “experimental” when these practices actually operate within these categories quite awkwardly. Kelly discusses a review of Jeffrey Eugenides’s *The Marriage Plot* in which the reviewer notes “coy metafictional gestures” that “never break the realist frame” –experimental strategies that do not generically exclude the text from a place in the realist canon (n. pag.), yet these terms “metafictional” and “realist” are often regarded as mutually exclusive, opposing aesthetics.²² Kelly and Irr can identify Franzen’s dominant storytelling mode, but they also note that this mode is not all-encompassing.

To understand what is unique about Franzen’s way of telling, it is useful to refer to the work of Mark McGurl. McGurl provides a helpful corrective to this common separation by applying a theory of reflexive modernity. According to theories of reflexive modernity, “the postindustrial economies of the developed world” have tended towards a “multivalent social dynamic of self-observation . . . over the course of the twentieth century, and in the postwar period in particular” (McGurl 12). While the “self-observation” of postmodern literary production was once viewed as the idiosyncratic hallmark of a niche within postwar literature more broadly, McGurl argues that we can see “self-observation” functioning throughout literary

²² In his review of *Freedom*, Sam Tanenhaus, former editor of *The New York Times Book Review* and perhaps Franzen’s biggest fan, hints at without explicitly identifying *Freedom* as a realist novel. He calls *Freedom*, like *The Corrections* before it, “a capacious but intricately ordered narrative that in its majestic sweep seems to gather up every fresh datum of our shared millennial life” without ever using the terms realist or realism (Tanenhaus). But *Freedom* is more than merely a great database—any blustering postmodernist can make one of those—because it is like *The Corrections*, in which “the data flowed through the arteries of narrative, just as it had done in the novels of Dickens and Tolstoy, Bellow and Mann. Like those giants, Franzen attended to the quiet drama of the interior life and also recorded its fraught transactions with the public world” (Tanenhaus). In other words, Franzen’s novel flouts fashionable postmodernism to embrace a glorious realist tradition concerned with social problems and the interiority of fully developed characters. As Tanenhaus puts it, “the Berglunds, introduced as caricatures, gradually assume the gravity of fully formed people.” The real people, the “journalistic touches” of detail, the depiction of “the world we thought we knew”—these qualities are what make *Freedom* a realist novel. What Tanenhaus does not seem to notice in *Freedom* (or at least emphasize in his review) is that these qualities could easily apply to the postmodern databases he so detests. Indeed, Franzen’s narration demonstrates that, for as much as his reviewers compare him to Tolstoy, *Freedom* cannot escape some of the metafictional awareness of Barth and Coover. Franzen’s depiction of neoliberalism and environmental decay in *Freedom* should thus be considered with both traditions in mind.

texts of seemingly disparate literary genres (12). McGurl moves beyond the realist-experimental dialectic by identifying three categories of postwar American literary fiction: technomodernism, high cultural pluralism, and lower-middle-class-modernism (32). Fiction in each of these categories exercise the self-observation characteristic of reflexive modernity, but each has its own themes and concerns. Technomodernism aligns most closely with postmodern fiction as it is usually thought of, that is, as literature that addresses through form and content society's relation to information technology. High cultural pluralism retains modernism's "high" ideals by focusing on "the experience of cultural difference and the authenticity of the ethnic voice" (32). Lower-middle-class modernism tends to reflect on "economic and other forms of insecurity and cultural anomie" (32). I see Franzen's work (after his first novel) as operating simultaneously within the traditions of technomodernism and lower-middle-class modernism. Like McGurl, I see the realist-experimental dialectic as helpful to identify certain literary practices but also inadequate to account for postwar novels that are by turns realist in form and self-conscious, even metafictional. McGurl's formulation helps to show how Franzen's novel can be at once a realist novel and a metafictional one as well, as it operates in two of the major American postwar novelistic traditions McGurl identifies.

Margaret Hunt Gram only considers one tradition, however, when she notes that reviewers of *Freedom* found the novel's ecopolitics awkwardly integrated into the text through lengthy speeches by Walter Berglund (1). She observes, "*Freedom*'s overpopulation-content and its other political content live in two different diegetic registers"; while other political content resides in the story, the overpopulation-content resides only in Walter's discourse (2). "*Freedom* treats unsustainable growth discursively rather than through story," she argues, "because it is preoccupied with the possibility that an antigrowth politics might be incompatible with the

affective engines that drive narrative fiction in general and with the formal mechanisms available to literary realism in particular” (2). Franzen struggles to avoid didacticism while still revealing “totalizing systems and problems through individual characters who experience those systems and problems in the historical present” (2). Gram suggests that the neoliberal “reproductive futurist logic” of *Freedom* is incompatible with its antigrowth politics (8). She classifies Franzen’s novel as committed to Lukácsian realism and, with this in mind, finds two problems—one of temporality and one of scale—in which Lukácsian realism is an unworkable aesthetic given Franzen’s political concerns: “the temporal difficulty is that unsustainable growth is a problem that, by its own logic, will be fully actualized only in the future rather than in the historical present” (9). Furthermore, “the scale difficulty” Gram notes is due to the fact that the problem of overpopulation is not a problem that can be represented synecdochically. She writes, “No one person’s experience can stand in for the social forces at issue, and so to represent the problem at the individual level is not to represent it at all” (9). Gram suggests that the proliferation of post-apocalyptic contemporary novels may be in response to the same problems of temporality and scale that Franzen is struggling with in *Freedom*. The problem of representing the danger of population growth in a realist novel, she argues, may be a conduit to critiquing economic growth or “growth as a general matter,” given the apparent ridiculousness of Walter’s population growth crankery. Economic growth is part of the plot of *Freedom*, but unsustainable or runaway growth is not (14). Ultimately, *Freedom* fails to produce a critique of growth outside of discourse, but Gram suggests that it hints at a hopeful survival of the neoliberal era of growth with its description of migrating songbirds (18).

Gram’s argument, persuasive as it is, hinges on the understanding that *Freedom* should be (or rather, is best) measured against an ideal of Lukácsian realism, rather than a newer

capitalist realism. Although *Freedom* is, indeed, a realist novel, Gram seems more concerned with what Franzen's novel does than how the novel does it. For instance, Gram does not mention the way *Freedom* is told except to observe the superabundance of ideological content in Walter's discourse. Neither does Gram address the fact that *Freedom* is told in several distinct ways in five distinct sections. These various ways of telling do not conflict with realism as such but are nonetheless significant in how they allow readers multiple ways of seeing the problems that Franzen addresses and Gram critiques. To treat *Freedom* as uniformly coherent with a monolithic realism is then to miss how postmodern the novel actually is.

NARRATION IN *FREEDOM*

Examining *Freedom* with special attention to narrative structure will make clearer how Franzen's grim suspicion of the efficacy of large-scale environmental projects intersect with his realist mode of representation, even as he self-consciously comments on his narrative practice to perform an ongoing meta-critique of environmentalist narratives. Readers are introduced to Walter's environmental politics at the very beginning of *Freedom*. The chapter is oddly focalized, without the assurance of an all-seeing omniscient narrator or the idiosyncratic "take" of an individual's perspective.²³ But to describe the narration as merely "limited" in the traditional sense is not quite accurate either. Rather, the first chapter of *Freedom* ("Good Neighbors") is narrated in the third-person mode, but the focalization is communal, as if from the perspective of "the urban gentry of Ramsey Hill" in St. Paul, Minnesota (3). Readers get hints of

²³ In *Narrative Discourse*, Genette brings up the problem of focalization to complicate what he sees as simplistic accounts of point of view (186). He notes that some narrators are obviously omniscient, but they choose to relay only information available to a certain character or characters, artificially limiting their access for aesthetic purposes. It is necessary then to distinguish between an omniscient narrator who narrates an entire novel and a focalizing character, who may govern the information readers receive for a portion of a story but not actually tell that story (188). In this way omniscient narrators adopt the perspective of a particular character for a section of a narrative through focalization.

Walter's past as people who knew Walter before he moved to Washington, D.C. try to reconcile memories of the man they knew with an unflattering report published in *The New York Times*. They remember Walter as "greener than Greenpeace," but the *Times* report accuses him of such un-green crimes as "conniving with the coal industry" (3). In this way, Franzen introduces the novel's central irony, the contradiction that the narrative will not resolve but will clarify: how can a committed environmentalist also be a coal industry lackey? The focalization oscillates slightly between general community knowledge on Ramsey Hill and the more privileged knowledge of the Berglunds' close neighbors, but it never wavers far enough to assume the authority of omniscience or the subjectivity of an individual with situated knowledge. We learn, for instance, that for years Walter worked as a lawyer for 3M and had several encounters with local celebrities, after which he "surprisingly" changed jobs to become a development officer for the Nature Conservatory (21). Franzen's narrator reports "Nobody except the Paulsens had suspected him of harboring such reserves of discontent, but Walter was no less enthusiastic about nature than he was about culture, and the only outward change in his life was his new scarcity at home on weekends" (21). There's a hint here of disparity between the confident labeling of Walter as "greener than Greenpeace" and being surprised when he changes jobs to pursue environmentalist interests. Beyond these hints, we do not learn anything more about Walter's environmentalism. Ramsey Hill, like Sam Tanenhaus and other critics, is obviously more interested in the juicy family drama surrounding the Berglunds than in Walter's ecopolitics. Already, in the first chapter, environmentalism has to compete with other narratives for the community's attention and is thus relegated to a quirk of a single character instead of a totalizing social problem that has an impact on everyone. As Walter's friend Richard Katz later reflects, he "supposed it was inevitable that his friend became one of those people who carried around

laminated literature” (218). Gram’s critique of scale shows itself to be particularly apt because Walter himself cannot embody all global environmental concerns at once but must if Franzen is to actually address environmental disaster in all of its complexity. Characters, as well as readers, are alienated from the reality of environmental problems.

In the first chapter of *Freedom*, Franzen presents focalization as a problem of knowledge. In “Good Neighbors,” we often read sentences that start like “Barrier Street knew” or “it was known” that later source communal knowledge with phrases like “the mothers said” or “nobody could say” (14, 5, 10, 17). The foregrounding of problems of knowledge in this way points to the insignificance of Walter’s personal environmentalism. As Kathy Knapp puts it, “Unquestionably, this first chapter offers an intentionally reductive portrait of characters that the novel will subsequently complicate” (53). Walter has not led by example because his neighbors merely mark his ecopolitics as a harmless affectation. Franzen’s narrative strategy highlights the communal and shared, and—in so doing—demonstrates what is *not* shared, what is idiosyncratic or weird. The lack of interiority here deliberately passes by Walter’s fervent environmentalism to show how little impact he has made in his own community. Walter is radical enough to be known around the neighborhood as “greener than Greenpeace,” but no occasion makes this a narratable characteristic unless his family is the object of gossip and he is himself suspected of hypocrisy.

Where the first section of *Freedom* explores the limits of collective knowledge, the second section poses the problem of representing serious political convictions like environmentalism in the early neoliberal, high postmodern era obsessed with satire and irony. This section, “Mistakes Were Made: Autobiography of Patty Berglund by Patty Berglund (Composed at Her Therapist’s Suggestion),” is exactly what it purports to be, except that Patty

writes her autobiography in an affected third-person mode. Here Patty, Walter's wife, attempts to compose her version of her own life's story, including her family drama and Walter's troubles, while attempting to distance herself from the subjectivity of first-person narration. She tries to look at her life objectively. Like "Good Neighbors," Patty's "Autobiography" stops short of omniscience but tries to go beyond modernist/postmodernist relativity. Contrary to Knapp's reading and my own, James Phelan reads Patty as "the chief protagonist" of *Freedom*, and indeed Walter does not show up until over thirty pages into Patty's narrative, when she is a student-athlete at the University of Minnesota (Phelan 238, *Freedom* 66). Walter is not associated with environmentalism until almost thirty more pages have passed (93). After Patty has an injury and gets to know Walter because he visits her at the hospital, Patty finds that "Walter burned with all sorts of earnest and peculiar views"—many of which are environmentalist (93). He "approved of the Islamic revolution in Iran, which he hoped would lead to better energy conservation in the United States," as well as population control and "rendering the passenger car obsolete" (93). Patty herself is "not very political," so Walter's investment in current affairs seems merely like a hobby than anything that actually affects her personally (94). People like Walter are interested in "Energy conservation," but they can hardly expect people like Patty to care as much as they do. These nuggets of information about Walter take the form of declarations of truth, but by the time we read them—over sixty pages into Patty's narrative—the affected sheen of omniscience has worn off, and they come off as subjective, personal judgements couched in the language of objectivity.

The conceit Franzen develops in Patty's section, third-person omniscient narration that is really just subjective, embodied first-person narration in disguise, is not the only way Franzen comments on environmentalism's ability to appeal to people who are "not very political."

Patty's "Autobiography" provides Franzen with a forum to begin metafictionally commenting on his own strategies as an ecologically-conscious writer. Patty relates the banter between Walter and his sexy, punk singer roommate Richard Katz. Walter and Richard joke about the problem of converting environmentalist and anti-population growth messages into rock music, but the blatantly ideological, agitprop-y titles render the effect corny and obvious (102). "The fuel-efficiency song", "The public-transportation song" and several others bring out Richard's postmodern sarcasm (102). These ridiculous songs function, according to Gram, collectively as a "figure for the novel Franzen chose not to write: a figure for art gone astray, for misguidedly propagandistic art about a misguidedly misarticulated politics" (3). I read these songs as evidence of Franzen's own self-conscious commentary on narrativizing social concerns; to become too political is to sacrifice artistry and a good story; environmentalist fervor alone cannot power a novel. What becomes abundantly clear is that Patty respects Walter's earnest convictions, but she is really just interested in hooking up with Richard. What she notices and appreciates about Walter is not his environmentalism—or any of his political views—but rather his general likeability and abstract political conviction.²⁴ Walter and Richard joke about environmentalism's disadvantage as an unsexy political stance, but their conversation, to the listening Patty, dramatizes the stakes involved in this unsexiness. Patty is enamored with Richard, the charismatic singer, while Walter struggles to keep her attention, especially with Richard standing right there. The problem of environmental awareness is thus a problem of market share; environmentalism is figured as the frumpy Walter, competing with the much sexier Richard, who represents mass media star-power charisma—cool itself.

²⁴ Later, Richard tells Patty about "Walter's college years" in which he organized symposia on environmentalist issues like overpopulation, and she gets a firmer sense of how serious Walter is about his political convictions (109).

In Patty's "Autobiography," Franzen metafictionally reflects on the consequences of getting too political for an unprepared audience. In the third chapter of Patty's "Autobiography," we get a glimpse of just how ridiculous Walter's political convictions can be made to seem without sexiness to back them up—or even the charm of abstract conviction. After marrying Walter, Patty introduces him to her family when they all go out to dinner. Walter talks to Patty's professional Democrat mother about the "Club of Rome," an organization "devoted to exploring the limits of growth," and the philosophy behind his anti-growth stance (121). This, too, is a metafictional moment. Franzen betrays anxiety about inserting environmental politics into a novel that thrives on juicy domestic drama—even as the anxiety about politics works to generate that same drama. Patty's family does not understand Walter's earnestness; he gets preachier and stauncher; Patty's family move from confusion to subtle, snide remarks. To Patty, Walter's conviction becomes an embarrassment when her family prefer frivolity and light conversation (123). Patty's mother struggles to find an appropriate word to describe Walter later, settling for "*autocratic*" to account for Walter's radical politics (123, italics Franzen's). In this scene, serious environmentalism shows itself to be so far outside of the boundaries of the stances taken by either Republicans or Democrats as to seem almost lunatic. Walter, as a spokesman for environmentalism and anti-growth messages, sounds crazy in a room full of politicians and regular civilians unused to radical thinking. Franzen's metafiction demonstrates alienating an audience that is not fully prepared to receive environmentalist messages, messages that need to be rendered carefully by a charismatic spokesperson to hit home. If Franzen-as-novelist is akin to Walter, as I argue he is in many ways, then this scene suggests that Franzen fears he may do more damage than good by alienating a potentially receptive audience, like Patty and her family, by getting too political with his forum.

This anxiety is borne out over the next hundred pages where Franzen seems to avoid metafictional treatments of environmental politics, instead focusing on a more accessible and traditional infidelity plot. After the dinner with Patty's family, Walter's ecopolitics disappear for thirty pages of Patty's narrative as Patty and Walter build a family in St. Paul, Minnesota. Walter fades into the background as Patty becomes increasingly focused on her children, especially her son Joey. Readers have to be reminded that Walter "quit 3M and joined the Nature Conservancy" as a side-note to Patty's description of her ongoing infatuation with Richard Katz (153). She cheats on Walter with Richard, and Richard writes an album's worth of songs about Patty that makes him a star. In what Patty interprets as a competitive gesture, Walter creates the "Cerulean Mountain Trust" with "megamillionaire Vin Haven" through the Nature Conservancy, but Patty can summarize these major career moves in one page at the end of her "Autobiography" because she mostly just notices Walter's travelling, her son's drama, and her own guilt for cheating on her husband with Richard (186). Narrating her life story for over one hundred pages makes clear just how non-totalizing environmental catastrophe feels, how easily it fades in and out of one's attention and becomes associated with individuals who take it more seriously than Patty does. Her "Autobiography" also reveals Franzen metafictionally working through his predicament as a politically-committed novelist. His narrative choices demonstrate why it is so difficult for unpopular environmentalist political projects to gain traction. Patty stands in for sympathetic potential readers who can be put off by an over-eager novelist pushing an unsexy political agenda.

"2004" AND ENVIRONMENTAL P.R.

Even when the novel shifts the narrative away from Patty's faux-objective focalization, environmentalism still remains aligned almost exclusively with Walter. The most traditionally realist section of *Freedom* is the third and longest section, "2004." Even so, Franzen's crafty, idiosyncratic use of third-person omniscient narrator, free-indirect discourse, summary, and dialogue work metafictionally to comment on the difficulty of finding a novelistic mode likely to mobilize environmental activism and retain artistic integrity. Third-person omniscient narration alternates focalization between Walter, Richard, and Joey. These three characters are faced with various ethical dilemmas concerning how to live a virtuous life. James Phelan accurately notes that "it is during this section that Franzen does the most to explicitly link the lives of the Berglunds to larger historical events and concerns, especially the Iraq War and environmentalism" (243).

The subtitle of the first section of "2004," "Mountaintop Removal," foregrounds the chapter's emphasis on the historical problems of environmental degradation and energy consumption, but Franzen addresses these themes through third-person omniscient narration and direct discourse full of exposition. The section begins by situating Richard Katz in the tenuous post-success time when he should be recording a follow-up to his recent breakthrough album (191). After his affair with Patty and writing a critically-acclaimed album about it, Richard drifts away from Walter. When Walter calls to reestablish contact, their conversation, like most of the conversations between Richard and Walter for the rest of the section, serves to update readers on Walter's current status. Franzen crams exposition into Walter's discourse, and readers—in the place of Richard—re-learn about Walter's environmentalist plans (206-7). Richard agrees to meet with Walter and his assistant Lalitha about a proposal for "Saving the planet," in which they plan to involve Richard (207). The momentarily limited third-person perspective positions

the reader with Richard as experts explain complicated scientific and political ideas to him, much like Franzen's narrative strategy in *Strong Motion*. Walter now works for Vin Haven, "a big oil-and-gas guy" (209). The free-indirect discourse (even though it is focalized through Richard) mimics Walter's speaking without having to put several pages on end in quotes as Walter explains his situation to Richard (and us). As a result, the seemingly objective summaries provided for us by an omniscient narrator are actually heavily influenced by Walter's perspective; indeed, Walter's language creeps into these descriptions to remind us that we are privy to a particular perspective, not objective truth. Or is this Richard's language? After all, this section of the chapter started with Richard's focalization. Ultimately, then, what we read is an omniscient performance of Richard's focalization summarizing Walter's speeches. While the commentary is subtle, Franzen undercuts the authority of omniscient narration by sneaking in hints that the discourse is subjective and situated. This undercutting is important because it shows Franzen being aware of the novelist's temptation to proselytize. He is willing to put environmental rhetoric in Walter's mouth, but he insists on placing a character next to him who can listen to that rhetoric and call it crazy. The environmental rhetoric is Walter's in the direct discourse, but the critique is also in Walter's voice.

When Walter and Richard meet, Franzen relies heavily on two strategies to further the novel's environmental plot: summary filtered through free-indirect discourse and exposition crammed into direct discourse. We learn that the multimillionaire Vin Haven decides "to blow more than half his total wad on the preservation of a single bird species, the cerulean warbler" which is "the fastest-declining songbird in North America" (210). The seemingly convenient alliance between Haven and environmentalists is complicated by money. Haven plans to create a colossal nature reserve in West Virginia for the warbler that he will be allowed to mine coal via

mountaintop removal.²⁵ The venture is obviously risky for environmentalists because they might be lending their name to a disaster. Other environmentalists have refused to participate in the scheme, but Walter is willing to make concessions to the coal interests if it means that he can do some environmental good saving birds.

The summaries that Franzen uses to bring readers up to speed have several distinct qualities. Richard's free-indirect discourse makes sure to attribute the summary to Walter.²⁶ Furthermore, the use of contractions and emphasis on Walter's unique place within the project highlight the narrative mediation filtering information for Richard and the reader. Walter is the subject of several sentences in this seemingly objective summary. Between long summaries and direct discourse relating to the project from Walter or Lalitha, the free-indirect discourse chimes in, commenting on Richard's thoughts on the sexual tension in the room, reminding readers that—indeed—all the information we're receiving is “filtered” through Richard. The novel is constantly conjuring and dispelling objectivity in a narrative method that is recognizably realist but that also consistently embeds perspective in free-indirect discourse. I point out this finicky,

²⁵ “The cerulean warbler, Walter said, bred exclusively in mature temperate hardwood forests, with a stronghold in the central Appalachians. There was a particularly healthy population in southern West Virginia, and Vin Haven, with his ties to the nonrenewable energy industry, had seen an opportunity to partner with coal companies to create a very large, permanent private reserve for the warbler and other threatened hardwood species. The coal companies had reason to fear that the warbler would soon be listed under the Endangered Species Act, with potentially deleterious effects on their freedom to cut down forests and blow up mountains. Vin believed that they could be persuaded to help the warbler, to keep the bird off the Threatened list and garner some much-needed good press, as long as they were allowed to continue extracting coal. And this was how Walter had landed the job as executive director of the Trust. In Minnesota, working for the Nature Conservancy, he'd forged good relationships with mining interests, and he was unusually open to constructive engagement with the coal people.” (210)

²⁶ To help save the cerulean warbler, Walter said, the Trust was aiming to create a hundred-square-mile roadless tract—Haven's Hundred was its working nickname—in Wyoming County, West Virginia, surrounded by a larger “buffer zone” open to hunting and motorized recreation. To be able to afford both the surface and mineral rights to such a large single parcel, the Trust would first have to permit coal extraction on nearly a third of it, via mountaintop removal. This was the prospect that had scared off the other applicants. Mountaintop removal as currently practiced was ecologically deplorable—ridgetop rock blasted away to expose the underlying seams of coal, surrounding valleys filled with rubble, biologically rich streams obliterated. Walter, however, believed that properly managed reclamation efforts could mitigate far more of the damage than people realized; and the great advantage of fully mined-out land was that nobody would rip it open again. (211)

technical move by Franzen because it shows Franzen trying to find a way to incorporate earnest environmentalist rhetoric into the novel while also insisting on a simultaneous critique of that same rhetoric. It also shows Franzen trying to distance his narrator's voice from the voice speaking earnest environmentalist rhetoric.

Franzen's chief problem with how to write an environmentalist novel mirrors Walter's public relations problem. Walter notes that there are "several" problems with his project, which is why he is talking to Richard about it (213). The project's central woes are limited funds and public relations. Because Walter and Lalitha expanded their project to purchase South American tracts of land, they now need government funding to purchase the tract in West Virginia (213). Grassroots protesters are waging war on the project because of anti-MTR (mountaintop removal) sentiment, which Walter thinks stems from editorials in *The New York Times* (213). The public relations problem is particularly interesting in that Walter becomes like Franzen, rhetorically trying to tell an environmentalist story, struggling to find a technique that will help him to develop interest and outrage in his interlocutor. As a stand-in, Walter has the luxury of calling in charismatic help, but Franzen is on his own. Walter's environmentalist project is a metaphor for the novelist's environmentalist project, but Walter's collaborative effort is also the novelist's fantasy of an earth-saving, communal artwork.

One of the troubles Walter and Franzen face is the problem of boredom. The conversation between Richard, Walter, and Lalitha is almost self-consciously dull. Walter constantly asks Richard if he's "bored yet" or if he is "at all interested in the details" (214). The summary-discourse mix amounts to an exposition of a plot apparently too complex to integrate into the actions and lives of characters. The conversation also suggests that there is no realistic alternative to human-generated environmental catastrophe and, if there were, there would be no

way to articulate it in a manner that would convince masses of people. Even as Richard sympathetically listens to Walter and Lalitha's plans, he refers to Walter and Lalitha (in the free-indirect discourse) as an "*angry crank*" and a "crackpot" (respectively?) (218, 219).

Besides boredom, another problem Walter faces is the problem of sounding crazy or overenthusiastic. The more Walter talks, the crazier he sounds to Richard. We learn that Vin Haven has bought up mineral rights in West Virginia on good information that incipient "regulatory and tax code changes" would "render natural-gas extraction economically feasible in the Appalachians" (215). Walter and Lalitha know that their project is being used "for cover" in this mineral rights coup (216). Walter has been tricked into helping to greenwash a resource extraction project by emphasizing the project's conservationist angle.²⁷ Because Walter feels slightly betrayed by Vin Haven, he says that he and Lalitha have "decided to take some liberties with interpreting the mission of the Trust"—meaning they intend to use Trust moneys to address what they feel is the root cause of the cerulean warbler's woes: human overpopulation, Walter's hobby-horse from college. They want Richard to use his celebrity to "make having babies more of an embarrassment. Like smoking's an embarrassment," as Walter puts it (221). Lalitha and Walter want Richard to "help us get people thinking about . . . overpopulation" (222) by organizing and promoting some vague event about overpopulation, perhaps "some sort of summer music-and-politics festival" (223). Richard agrees to help, but with silent reservations. His free-indirect discourse confides to the reader that listening to Walter and Lalitha's enthusiastic plans leaves him "feeling sad and remote. Walter and the girl seemed to have

²⁷ Later, a brief analepse relates Walter's interview with Vin Haven. Haven tells a story to Walter of "Martin Jay" of the Audubon Society, who wants Haven to set up a meeting so Jay can pitch conservation to Karl Rove. Haven tells Jay that he can easily set up the meeting, but that Jay has to do a reputable survey of swing voters to demonstrate how much of a priority conservation is to them. Haven ends the story, saying, "I never heard from him again" (300). Haven and Jay agree that—in the current political climate—conservation is a political loser.

snapped under the pressure of thinking in too much detail about the fuckedness of the world” (224). This language, clearly reflecting Richard’s perspective, stands in marked contrast to the summary of Walter’s position. While the summaries betray both Richard’s and Walter’s perspective through language choices, they lack the outright judgement of Richard’s reservations. Their plans to change people’s minds about overpopulation are unrealistic and ridiculous.

After the meeting, the third-person narration emphasizes Walter’s contempt for the poor people affected by the Trust’s plan. The section begins from a third-person omniscient perspective and the focalization gradually narrows in on Walter’s consciousness. This narrowing begins from a place of objective, neutral narrative summary but ends with focalization so narrow that readers are left with Walter’s anger and prejudice. First, Walter and Lalitha have to displace “two hundred or so families” who live on the land set aside for Warbler Park (294). Walter buys out over half of them, but several continue to resist selling their land. The focalization narrows when Walter and Lalitha are faced with meeting the surly Coyle Mathis, a notoriously standoffish landowner who has been historically unreceptive to offers to buy his land. Walter does not help matters with Coyle Mathis. When Mathis rejects the Trust’s offer of money, land, state-of-the-art reburial of ancestors from the local cemetery, and other perks, Walter replies, “that is just *stupid*” (295). Walter apologizes, and Lalitha does damage control, but Walter’s condescension is unmistakable. After the scene involving Coyle Mathis, the narration narrows in on Walter’s perspective, relaying how impressed he is with Lalitha and what he thinks of the poor landowners: “as far as Walter could tell, the people of Forster Hollow had negligible skills

beyond hunting, engine repair, vegetable growing, herb-gathering, and welfare-check cashing” (298).²⁸

Because “2004” is *Freedom*’s most Lukácsian section, Gram’s critiques most apply here. Even at his most Lukácsian, however, Franzen still incorporates layers of mediation into his narration. Lukács’s aesthetic praises novelists who represent a social totality through the experiences of a single character. He writes, praising Balzac, “In his writings the unfolding of material problems is always indissolubly bound up with the consequences arising from the personal passions of his characters” (51). Although this method “seems to take the individual alone for its starting-point,” it actually “contains a deeper understanding of social interconnections and implications, a more correct evaluation of the trends of social development” (Lukács 51). Walter’s individual struggles are not necessarily indicative of “social interconnections and implications.”²⁹ Gram argues that Franzen “struggles with that cardinal Lukácsian rule *No didacticism* and with the complementary imperative that the realist writer reveal totalizing systems and problems through individual characters who experience those systems and problems in the historical present” (2). But Walter is the only one who seems to care about environmentalism, and he does not *really* experience the effects of environmental

²⁸ Coyle Mathis and the rest of the holdouts are ultimately lured by the promise of jobs working for a defense contractor who provides armor for U.S. soldiers in Iraq (301-2).

²⁹ Walter’s anxieties about wanting to cheat on his wife parallel his anxieties about “cheating” on his environmentalist convictions with the coal industry, and the third person narration gives readers entry into his psychological dilemma (323). Walter sees Lalitha as something of a reward for his scrupulousness, yet the narrator constantly intones, “How to live?” (319). The narrative strategies allow readers access to Walter’s thinking to demonstrate the coexistence of his worldly, politically-correct skepticism toward capitalist interests and his own self-indulgence and rationalizations. He wrestles with his desire to sleep with Lalitha—even have kids with her—and his political conviction not to have (more) children (319). When Walter calls his wife, in a furor both over his alluring proximity to Lalitha in an adjacent hotel room and a *New York Times* article disparaging the Trust’s project, the conversation between Walter and Patty briefly confuses the oncoming professional disaster with the threat of personal disaster (323). Walter warns Patty that, “We’re heading for a catastrophe, Patty,” but Patty does not understand that his talking about his career and replies, “that’s starting to sound like kind of a relief to me” (323). Franzen aligns the individual failure of fidelity onto the species failure to respond constructively to climate change, and he does so through direct discourse between two characters.

crisis at all, except through various media platforms. The events in *Freedom*, unsurprisingly—they chronicle the existence of middle-class American white people—are actually so far removed from the objective social condition of environmental catastrophe that Franzen does not represent environmental crisis at all. There is no climactic event in *Freedom* that depicts the genocide of huge quantities of American songbirds. The crisis is present only in the bits of data that Walter reports about decreasing songbird numbers.³⁰ Indeed, even though Walter and Lalitha go bird-watching around the United States, there's very little description of birds or even of people observing birds. Furthermore, Franzen does not provide descriptions of actual mountaintop removal or mining. The mountaintop removal discussed in the book is either abstracted into an event that has or will happen discussed by characters or made hypothetical through a general description of what happens environmentally when such an event occurs. But the events themselves do not occur in the novel. The events are not actually narrated. They are, instead, inferred by hints such as Walter's seeing mining machinery on the mountain. His conversations also tell us about what happens "off screen." What we read, though, is not a description of environmental crisis, but—rather—a conversation between characters.

The Walter's and Patty's marriage "toxicity" reaches its apex when Patty gets a job and saves up for breast-augmentation surgery (333). Franzen hammers home the metaphorical carryover of environmental toxicity and relationship toxicity: "Walter was frightened by the long-term toxicity they were creating with their fights. He could feel it pooling in their marriage like the coal-sludge ponds in Appalachian valleys" (333). Walter's fear about the toxicity of his marriage leads to him reflecting on the fact that "when you dug up coal you also unearthed nasty

³⁰ While waiting for Lalitha to mollify and angry protester, Walter mentally tallies "what had gone wrong in the world in the hours since he'd awakened," for instance, "Net population gain: 80,000. New acres of American sprawl: 1,000. Birds killed by domestic and feral cats in the United States: 500,000" etc. (341-2). These grim tallies bring Walter "a strange spiteful satisfaction" (342).

chemicals like arsenic and cadmium” that inevitably caused environmental havoc (333). This reflection leads back to Franzen, again, reinforcing his metaphor: “It really was a lot like the deep shit that got stirred up when a married couple fought: once certain things had been said, how could they be forgotten again?” (333). The answer, according to Franzen, is one lies to oneself: “Lalitha was able to do enough research to reassure Walter that, if the sludge was carefully sequestered and properly contained, it eventually dried out enough that you could cover it with crushed rock and topsoil and pretend it wasn’t there” (333). Walter believes this “because he had to believe in it” (333). Walter’s fears and beliefs thus come from his anxieties about the viability of his project and the stability of his marriage.

Lawrence Buell famously characterizes the discourse around environmental anxieties as “toxic discourse” (30). Toxic discourse, according to Buell, is “expressed anxiety arising from perceived threat of environmental hazard due to chemical modification by human agency” (31). Buell notes that environmental anxiety has always been a concern for people, but the neoliberal era is unique in the proliferation of toxic discourse: “never before the late twentieth century has it been so vocal, so intense, so pandemic, and so evidentially grounded” (31). *Freedom and Strong Motion* certainly function as expressions of Franzen’s anxieties about environmental hazard, but Walter’s (and Franzen’s narrator’s) discourse is odd in its treatment of toxicity. First, Walter does not express his insight about the toxicity of his own marriage as such, and therefore his ideas about toxicity do not actually enter direct discourse. He reflects on the commonalities between environmental hazard in Warbler Park and his marriage, but he keeps his insights to himself. These thoughts are related through free indirect discourse, and where exactly the anxiety lies is ambiguous. The narration notes that coal mining pollution “had a way of seeping into the water table and ending up in drinking water,” but what exactly concerns Walter about

this is unclear (333). He may be concerned for the birds' sake—or the viability of his project generally if it leads to too much pollution—but the narration only mentions the “drinking water” problem (and pollution more generally) as an abstract problem. It is never spelled out how exactly this pollution relates to birds, Walter's PR concerns, or the surrounding human life. Of course, water pollution will affect each of them, but—because the discourse is never pinned to Walter's specific concerns for any of the above—the toxic discourse never settles into a material problem, only an abstract one. When Lalitha kisses Walter the morning after Walter's argument with Patty, he pulls away after a while, guilty, saying, “I'm still trying to figure out how to live” (336). His semi-apology is an encouragement to Lalitha, but the metaphor marriage-toxicity-as-environmental-toxicity fades. The romance between Lalitha and Walter reads less like a sordid contribution to marriage toxicity and more like a hopeful relationship that buds just as an unfortunate marriage shows itself to be not working out.

Walter, Richard, and Lalitha try to hash out a way to appeal to young people, and their efforts mimic the efforts of the novelist Franzen as he tries to find a form that will bring environmentalism to masses of readers. Richard meets with Walter, Lalitha, and Jessica to discuss overpopulation; this passage resembles the one almost 150 pages earlier when Walter and Lalitha convince Richard to help with “some sort of summer music-and-politics festival” to make raise awareness about overpopulation (223). There are several reasons why overpopulation is a difficult topic to gain traction with, as Walter points out: “Because the subject is a downer. Because it seems like old news. Because, like with global warming, we haven't quite reached the point where the consequences become undeniable. And because we sound like elitists if we try to tell poor people and uneducated people not to have so many babies” (360). This section reads as if Franzen is rehearsing the difficulties of writing a novel

about overpopulation. Walter lays out the statistical connections between growth rate and economic status, as well as growth rate and the age at first pregnancy (360). In his description, Walter suggests that poor people are like “rats . . . because they reach sexual maturity so much sooner” than “leopards,” an analogy that Richard points out is “already a problem” (360). Walter realizes the public relations problem he faces: “If we try to pick on religion, which is our real villain, we’re picking on the economically oppressed” (360). Neither a good environmentalist nor a good novelist picks on the economically oppressed.³¹ The litany of obstacles facing activists concerned with human overpopulation’s negative environmental impacts serve to frustrate a clear way forward for, not just committed environmentalists, but for environmentally-conscious artists as well. Here Walter speaks frankly about the complicated concerns of environmentalist rhetoric. The section also emphasizes the ways in which Walter and Franzen are different. Franzen (one assumes) would not be tactless enough to refer to poor people as like rats. Walter is used to express what Franzen suspects to be the unvoiced attitudes of some environmentalists: brutal, privileged, and prone to elitism.³² The group struggles to come up with a name for their initiative, most of which “hurt Katz’s ears” (364). These names—from Youth Against Insanity to What’s the Rush?—pose an aesthetic problem Franzen struggles

³¹ Walter explains to the group that overpopulation boils down to “the same problem of personal liberties” (361). In sum, the American way of thinking is: “You may be poor, but the one thing nobody can take away from you is the freedom to fuck up your life whatever way you want to” (361). Richard points out that free market ideology rules many Americans’ thinking. Growth is viewed as inherently good and necessary (361). Communicating an antigrowth message makes no sense: “If you want to be heard in the capitalist media, and communicate in a capitalist culture, overpopulation cannot make any sense. It’s literally nonsense. And that’s your real problem” (361). Katz suggests a wholesale overthrow of the capitalist system in the United States; “sign me up for that,” he says (362).

³² Walter’s son Joey presents a stark contrast to the idealism Walter has for young people. Joey likes his Republican neighbors and feels that Republicans differed positively from Democrats because “they didn’t *disdain* people the way liberal Democrats did” (393). The off-putting snobbery that Joey associates with his parents drives him to revile the “unexamined condescension” that “liberal Democrats” have for “white people from less privileged backgrounds” (393-4).

with metafictionally throughout the novel (364-5). Propaganda makes for awkward art.³³ They settle for “Free Space,” with its connotations of free parking—and suggesting that the problem of overpopulation solved means more resources for everyone else (365-6). A music and politics festival is broadened into twenty different battles-of-the-bands, culminating in a mega-battle-of-the-bands held on the Cerulean Mountain Trust lands to promote awareness of overpopulation (366).

The way the discussion is presented in the novel also demonstrates the difficulty of performing environmental activism when the consequences of inertia are not immediate. The longer the discussion goes on, the more overwhelming it seems to appeal to young people, and the free indirect discourse shows a stark contrast between what is said in direct discourse and what is thought in indirect discourse.³⁴ As Walter “held forth on the subject of college kids,” Richard becomes distracted by the sounds Patty makes in the next room. Positive social change momentarily takes a back seat to personal desire. Richard’s distraction is narrated in free indirect discourse. What appeared a fraught, if well-meaning, conversation between serious adults is reduced to an “old friend’s intellectual fantasies” as Richard ponders why he tolerates Walter at all (363). The problem itself and potential solutions are treated seriously by Richard on one page in direct discourse and as “fantasy” on another in indirect discourse. As Richard ironically fantasizes about being with Patty, he struggles to pay attention to the meeting about “too much procreation” (364). The clear implication is that Richard is not fully committed to the serious task at hand. He agrees to several favors asked of him because he resolves to take Patty

³³ See Walter Benjamin. “The Author as Producer.” Trans. John Heckman. *New Left Review* (1970): 1/62. *Walter Benjamin Archive*. Web. 24 February 2021.

³⁴ As Walter sees it, European nations’ success is due to their socialism, where citizens are “not so hung up on personal liberties” (362). Positive change happens through capturing the indignation of college students, according to Walter (362).

away from Walter and never follow through on his obligations to the Cerulean Mountain Trust (366-7).³⁵

When *Freedom* addresses environmentalist themes outside of direct discourse, the omniscient narration emphasizes Walter's mediated experience with the nature he tries so hard to protect. After the meeting discussed above, a passage narrated from an omniscient perspective relates the roots of Walter's attitudes towards nature and selfish Americans. In this section, large portions of summary tell Walter's woeful tale while connecting his childhood frustration with his later decisions. We learn that Walter's mother inherited a house by Nameless Lake, Minnesota when Walter was in high school (451). Walter spends the summer after his junior year in high school fixing the property up for ten hours per day and making "an experimental nature film" about bitterns (454-5).³⁶ He spends time outside "seeking beauty in nature" (455). Walter relishes the solitude, but the solitude is short-lived since Walter's lazy brother Mitch invades the premises with his friends to take the property away from "nature boy" (456). Walter is furious. Laying awake while his brother parties into the night, Walter has an epiphany:

He'd come open-hearted to nature, and nature, in its weakness, which was like his mother's weakness, had let him down. Had allowed itself so easily to be overrun by noisy idiots. He loved nature, but only abstractly, and no more than he loved good novels or foreign movies, and less than he came to love Patty and his kids, and so, for the next twenty years, he made himself a city person. Even when he left 3M to do conservation work, his primary interest in working for the Conservancy, and later for the Trust, was to

³⁵ That night, Richard talks to Patty, who leaves her *Mistakes Were Made* document for him to read (377). He stays up all night reading it and then leaves it for Walter to read (378). Patty shows up at Richard's place in Jersey City later saying she had been "evicted" (381).

³⁶ Walter's father wants to sell the house, but Walter puts off the sale by promising to fix up the house, hoping to rent it (452-3).

safeguard pockets of nature from loutish country people like his brother. The love he felt for the creatures whose habitat he was protecting was founded on projection: on identification with their own wish to be left alone by noisy human beings. (457)

Walter sees himself as the biblical steward. Nature, like Walter's mother, is at once a lovable ideal and a defenseless sap who cannot defend against obnoxious human agency. Nature is most loveable when it fits its ideal. The flashback to his childhood also demonstrates how Walter's investment in nature is an aesthetic one. The mosquitos of northern Minnesota—and the unwillingness of bitterns to photograph willingly—makes for a nature that is more fun in theory than in practice. For Walter, whose experience with nature has been mediated by novels and movies, some of nature's pleasures are unexpectedly difficult to access for an uninitiated novice. With only modest enjoyment to be had, Walter would rather keep habitats for the animals than allow other humans to enjoy them. The analepses is important because Walter's foiled attempt to harness nature for his experimental film returns as his inability to manage the media portrayals of his conservation efforts. First, he tries to do damage control when a front-page *New York Times* story portrays Walter and the Cerulean Mountain Trust in an unfavorable light (472). Then, instead of playing nice, Walter finally has enough of his own (and others') hypocrisy and goes on an epic, viral rant at the body armor plant opening.³⁷

Related in direct discourse, including generous usage of ALL CAPS, Walter's rant is the climax of the novel. While Walter's relationship in much of the novel is heavily mediated, his rant, while not exactly unmediated, draws its power from the impression of immediacy and how "unfiltered" it comes across. Walter registers his contempt for the sell-out Coyle Mathis, but his

³⁷ In a fit of self-pity, Walter takes Patty's past-due-date trazadone pills and is in no condition to attend the body armor plant opening lunch (480-1). He is supposed to speak at the opening because, as "executive director of the Trust," he is "responsible for bringing all those wonderful, sustainable jobs to Whitmanville and the local economy" (483).

disingenuous “welcome” expresses anger, frustration, contempt, and disappointment, but these emotions seem to be addressed in the mode of apostrophe to an American middle class that Mathis now represents for Walter. Walter’s rage, then, is directed as much at Mathis and those like him as at people like Walter himself. The following passages seethe with resentment at lower-class mobility and Walter’s hatred of his own middle-class existence. For instance, Walter rages against consumption of televised media while ironically using the language of TV to make his critique.³⁸ Walter is disillusioned with the prospect of saving environments, and his speech registers his despair. The energy the plasma-screen TVs waste is “Okay,” he says, “because that’s why we threw you out of your homes in the first place, so we could strip-mine your ancestral hills and feed the coal-fired generators that are the number-one cause of global warming and other excellent things like acid rain” (483). Walter notes that this constitutes a “perfect world . . . a perfect system” because it means “as long as you’ve got your six-foot-wide plasma TV, and the electricity to run it, you don’t have to think about any of the ugly consequences. You can watch *Survivor: Indonesia* till there’s no more Indonesia!” (483).

This section also shows how dependent Walter is on mediation, even as his expression is as unfiltered as it can be. Even as he complains about TV, he uses the style and references of TV to make his point. Walter notes the televisual spectacle of environmental disaster while blaming apathy and media addiction as root causes for such environmental problems as rising sea levels. The comments highlight the uneven vulnerability to environmental disaster. Middle-class Americans are both distracted from environmental disaster as well as insulated from (some of) it by their status. Because its consequences are not immediately felt, environmental disaster is

³⁸ He jeers, in the fashion of a gameshow host, “You, too, can help denude every last scrap of native habitat in Asia, Africa, and South America! You, too, can buy six-foot-wide plasma TV screens that consume unbelievable amounts of energy, even when they’re not turned on!” (483).

reduced to television spectacle. Indonesia and the people living there are reduced from a real place with real people to an exotic setting for a primetime TV show. He yells, “I want to welcome you all to working for one of the most corrupt and savage corporations in the world!” (484). This, too, is an invitation to middle-class privilege. Walter jeers, “you can finally make enough money to keep your kids from joining the Army and dying in LBI’s broken-down trucks and shoddy body armor!” (484). When Walter’s mic goes dead, he continues (in all caps):

WE ARE ADDING THIRTEEN MILLION HUMAN BEINGS TO THE POPULATION EVERY MONTH THIRTEEN MILLION MORE PEOPLE TO KILL EACH OTHER IN COMPETITION OVER FINITE RESOURCES AND WIPE OUT EVERY OTHER LIVING THING ALONG THE WAY! IT IS A PERFECT FUCKING WORLD AS LONG AS YOU DON’T COUNT EVERY OTHER SPECIES IN IT! WE ARE A CANCER ON THE PLANET! A CANCER ON THE PLANET! (484)

As the sarcasm and rage amplify, Walter’s speech aligns the body armor plant workers with ever broadening groups. First, he welcomes them to the American middle class, then aligns them with an obscure “us” that takes over sovereign nations and steals their resources, and finally he rails against the body armor workers as humans generally past and present. Walter is punched and kicked by a mob of people, after which he tells Lalitha he is “definitely feeling better” (485).

The rant is cathartic, but Walter’s outburst smacks of indulgence.³⁹ When confronted with the

³⁹ Walter ironically harnesses media for his political ends after his rant. Walter is fired from the Cerulean Mountain Trust for his outburst, and Free Space dissolves, but—as soon as it does—it comes to life again. Local TV footage of Walter’s rant goes viral and inspires radical environmentalists from across the United States to take an interest in the now-defunded project (487). Walter, who had been invested in the portrayals of his conservation efforts in TV and print media for the duration of the novel, only has to move online to find his audience. He has struggled his whole life to make environmentalist messages appealing, and his biggest success in this regard happens during an uncalculated moment of rage.

inability to do something constructive to address the environmental disasters he is so conscious of, Walter settles for doing something for himself—yelling it out.⁴⁰

Reading Walter’s digressive rant previews some of the controversies that would follow in the wake of the popularization of the term “Anthropocene.” In June 2017, the United Nations reported that the world population would reach 9.8 billion people by 2050 and 11.2 billion by 2100. These population increases present several environmental problems, certainly. Climate change, however—and the Anthropocene generally—is not produced by all humans equally. Jill S. Schneidermann summarizes the problem succinctly:

The proposal to name an Anthropocene epoch originates in the awareness that human beings, acting in ways that are out of sync with the pace of geological time, are the chief cause of most contemporary global change. Nonetheless, one can argue that the choice of that particular name does not do justice to the true causes of the epochal change. The Anthropocene does not acknowledge that some groups of human beings have had greater effects on the planet than others . . . [T]he Anthropocene narrative represents humanity as an undifferentiated species assuming power over the rest of the earth system. But in the crucial field of climate change . . . a large segment of humanity has not participated in the fossil fuel economy that has led to global warming. (184)

⁴⁰ Though his audience still does not experience environmental disaster in a way that resonates with them, they experience his anger—and that resonates with them. Joey uses his ill-gotten parts money to write a check to Free Space for \$100,000 (487). Two verbal exchanges with Joey are enough to put the ethical implications of taking this money to rest (487-8). The narrative is more interested, at this point, in highlighting Walter’s successes. He makes up with his daughter, Jessica (488). He moves out of the Cerulean Mountain Trust mansion and skips town with Lalitha on a camping and bird-watching road trip (489). For once, everything is going great. As Walter steps away from the sources of his anger, he notices the nuance-less anger of the radical environmentalists he writes to in his blog and meets touring the U.S. for Free Space events (491-4). Increasingly, Walter connects his diminished rage to being away from people, isolated in the forests looking at songbirds (495). This retreat from the difficulties of interacting with people and tolerating their choices is exacerbated when Lalitha is killed in a car accident (500). Walter goes to Nameless Lake to grieve (501).

Walter does not make such fine distinctions. The slippage in his rant between high-consuming middle-class Americans and a general “us” betrays the confusion Walter has about humanity generally. His rage fails to distinguish between humans who have not participated substantively in the fossil fuel economy and those who have been a major part of it.

The most curious passage in the novel follows Walter’s cathartic outburst. A single paragraph narrates what happens when “a few hundred bird species grew restless” (485). Whereas the previous sections in this chapter used the experience of an individual character to limit the scope of the narrative, often delving directly into psychonarration or free indirect discourse, this single paragraph broadens the scope of Franzen’s narration substantially. The narrative shift is so dramatic because readers have just encountered an extensive sample of Walter’s direct discourse—the language of a single person. The scope narrows as the paragraph progresses, however—first, to just “hundreds,” and then to “four” tanager species that take off from South America northward (485). The wide scope is staggering after the minute interiority of the novel’s other passages. Instead of the workings of a single human, what is narrated is how “cell phone towers and road traffic mowed down millions of migrants, but millions more made it through, many of them returning to the very same tree they’d nested in the year before” (485). The scope narrows from hundreds of species, to four species, to millions of individual birds, to “many of them” and the evocation of single trees with single birds in them. Each year, individual birds come back to find “more of their former homes paved over for parking lots or highways, or logged over for pallet wood, or developed into subdivisions, or stripped bare for oil drilling or coal mining, or fragmented for shopping centers, or plowed under for ethanol production, or miscellaneously denatured for ski runs and bike trails and golf courses” (485).

The litany of “or”s signifies a legion of excuses for destroying migrant bird habitats. Most of the reasons are energy-based, but not all. All of the reasons are about human demand.

Franzen does much to characterize the experience of migrating songbirds as full of the pathos of human experience. He describes the birds as “migrants,” for instance, but he also describes their habitats as “homes,” and their long journeys as just as trying as long human journeys. Their journeys are narrated as follows: “Migrants exhausted by their five-thousand-mile journey competed with earlier arrivals for the remaining scraps of territory; they searched in vain for a mate, they gave up on nesting and subsisted without breeding, they were killed for sport by free-roaming cats” (485). The sadness in the birds’ doomed lot is palpable. The term “migrant” evokes images of exhausted human migrants struggling for a place to exist and failing. The experience of the troubled species is carefully humanized. The verbs Franzen uses are actions that humans can identify with; birds are not the only ones who search, give up, or are killed sometimes. This passage above stands in stark contrast to the rest of the novel because it takes as its object the nonhuman. Even while parts of the rest of the novel address environmentalist themes, it does so by focusing on the lives of individual humans. In this case, Franzen narrates the actions of a collective subject “they.” The short passage gains its power from being so different from the rest of the novel. It’s shortness also suggests that Franzen is unwilling to dwell too long on the birds’ plight, as if—without access to the drama of human interaction—nonhumans struggle to hold readers’ attention. The end of the paragraph transitions into a brief discussion of “pockets full of bird life” still in the United States there to be viewed by humans, and then the brief sojourn into the experience of the birds gives way to Walter and Lalitha birdwatching (486).⁴¹

⁴¹ Indulging in a cathartic rant leads Walter to feel acutely the sense of entitlement he decries in others. First, he rationalizes the gas-guzzling bird-watching trip because he “felt he was owed one petroleum splurge after a lifetime

The novel's final section presents a semi-retired Walter working to subvert the environmentally destructive, neoliberal obsession with individual freedom in a nearby subdivision. The section adopts the narrative strategy Franzen uses in the first section. Communal knowledge characterizes the focalization in this section. While the focalization is unlimited, what is actually reported is limited to the general knowledge of the community. For instance, the first paragraph describes the disappearance of a community family's cat: "it was widely assumed on Canterbridge Court that Bobby had been killed by Walter Berglund" (541). The community sprang up near the Berglund property and the new community members' cats hunted outdoors in the woods by the Berglund place, "where the birds were" (542). Walter goes door to door asking community members to keep their cats indoors (542). He is still an outsider because the "political trembling in his voice . . . rubbed the families on Canterbridge Court the wrong way" (542). A single conversation with Linda, "Evangelical and the most political person on the street," serves to illustrate the uselessness of Walter's attempts to regulate personal freedom (542). Walter presents several arguments for keeping the cat indoors year-round, but Linda is not receptive to his suggestion. The cat likes being outside, and the cat is a member of the family, so Linda's sense of personal freedom extends into a cat's freedom to roam and kill birds (543). The collective good is framed as full of radical restrictions on personal freedoms. Linda's Fox News-ish paranoia about big government and the Obama administration make her downright antagonistic towards Walter's attempts to help the songbirds. Other, less political

of virtue, one nature-filled summer in payment for the summer he'd been deprived of as a teenager" (486). The section following the description of the songbirds' journey dig into Walter's consciousness through third person omniscient narration with its scope often limited to Walter's thoughts and experience. Instead of the anger characterizing his consciousness earlier in the novel, Walter feels he has earned the good things in life. The post-cathartic-rant euphoria comes across as everything suddenly starts going right for Walter.

neighbors simply cannot be bothered to care about what their cats do—what with the recession and credit card debt and other worries (544-6).

Halfway through this final section, the focalization changes from third-person omniscient narration focalized through the community, and readers get a sense of Walter's thinking about cats through free indirect discourse. The description of the cat's predatory habits makes clear that Walter has become obsessed, that the inability to fix all of the world's problems has manifested itself in a mania for cats. As the narrator puts it, the knowledge that cats were killing songbirds "deranged him" (549). Therefore, "after a second summer of diplomacy and educational efforts had failed," Walter traps the cat and drives it three hours to an urban animal shelter (549). When he gets back, the narrator emphasizes Walter's grief and the tone shifts from a semi-comedic episode about an environmentalist dealing with cats to an extended reflection on Walter's personal grief and attempts to numb all feeling (550-1). When Walter gets back from abandoning Bobby, Jessica calls him to talk about why he will not divorce Patty. He answers, "I don't want to think about it. I just want to go out every morning and see birds who have nothing to do with any of it. Birds who have their own lives and their own struggles. And to try to do something for them. They're the only thing that's still lovely to me" (553). Walter's grief has produced a stubbornness that idolizes nature and has become totally unforgiving of human error.

What's so realistic about Franzen's novel is that, in a world characterized by neoliberal competition, so much should oppose Walter in his quest for a pure and good life of ecological beneficence. In the section "2004," Walter eventually sees just how much he has been used and how much damage he has helped to cause in the name of environmentalism. He screams at a Trust-sponsored event, "WE ARE A CANCER ON THE PLANET" (284). But Walter cannot help but be the cancer he denounces. *Freedom* aspires toward a Lukácsian "social totality" that

allows us to see the myriad forces that complicate Walter's attempt to do good. The largeness of Walter's project makes it vulnerable to the multiple capitalist forces that make it ultimately complicit in capitalist destruction. The reason *Freedom* sees the failure of environmentalism is because, by taking pains to represent the multiple forces operating against a pure ecological act, it represents the multiple equivalences that can replace or compromise ecological acts that require sacrifice. In representing the personal gains that replace collective gains in a dialectic of ecological-capitalist acts, *Freedom's* realism engages a logic of comparison, forcing ecological acts via the law of general equivalency to compare with acts of personal freedom, to which they compare unfavorably on a large scale, destined to lose. How can this be avoided? To realistically represent anything anymore, authors have to represent neoliberalism. To represent neoliberalism is to represent a multitude of conflicting forces competing for our energy and attention. To realistically represent environmentalism, then, is to represent the forces that keep us from acting according to the principles we know are necessary. *Freedom* not only represents the competitors with acts for the public good, it also reflects on the dissemination of environmentalist ideology and texts that try to subvert the neoliberal imperative of personal freedom.

What's a Death Worth?: Neoliberalism and Necropolitics in *How the Dead Dream*

Like Jonathan Franzen's *Freedom*, Lydia Millet's 2009 novel *How the Dead Dream* narrates the neoliberal tendency to submit nonhuman nature to the capitalist law of general equivalence.⁴² Unlike *Freedom*, however, Millet's bildungsroman does so by measuring the affective capital expended on various human and nonhuman deaths, engaging the necropolitics of neoliberal valuation.⁴³ In *How the Dead Dream*, Millet tells the story of the deterioration of assertions of radical differences between the nonhuman and the human through the development of the novel's protagonist, T. By moving beyond the assertion of radical difference between human and nonhuman, the novel also opens a space for a revaluation of both human and nonhuman life in terms of cohabitation rather than competition. My purpose in analyzing *How the Dead Dream* in terms of its depiction of human reactions to human and nonhuman deaths is to identify some of the strategies used to assert and reassert human superiority over nonhumans, to note and flesh out the unique position affect and materiality occupy in these strategies, and to show how the novel offers alternative narrative strategies to collapse the radical hierarchized distinction between humans and nonhumans. First, I will examine *How the Dead Dream* to note how the novel positions the radical separation of human and nonhuman as a problem of maturity. Then I will discuss the novel's commentary on materiality and affective labor—and how these

⁴² According to Marx, money is the expression of the form of value of goods being traded. Money translates proverbial apples into oranges. Under neoliberalism, market logics have infiltrated institutions that were formerly regarded as relatively insulated such logics, such as churches, pensions, marriage, and some kinds of education. David Harvey identifies this trend as one of the destructive consequences of neoliberalization. The logic of neoliberalization, according to Harvey, "holds that the social good will be maximized by maximizing the reach and frequency of market transactions, and it seeks to bring all human action into the domain of the market" (3). Marx, Karl. *Capital, Volume 1: A Critique of Political Economy*. Trans. Ben Fowkes. New York: Penguin, 1992. Web.

⁴³ Achille Mbembe describes necropolitics as "contemporary forms of subjugation to life to the power of death" (39).

concepts function in the separation of human and nonhuman.⁴⁴ I will show how the narration in *How the Dead Dream* comments on the necropolitics of valuing human and nonhuman deaths. Finally, I will analyze the ending of *How the Dead Dream*, in which Millet's narrative strategies soften the radical distinction between human and nonhuman. The ending of the novel, I argue, productively decenters the human without effacing it, allowing the human and the nonhuman to coexist in a confused state that dispenses with the impulse to compare them at all. In doing this, *How the Dead Dream* participates in "the nonhuman turn," working to undermine "human exceptionalism" and the dualism that separates humans from animals (Grusin x).

Few critics have commented substantively on *How the Dead Dream*. The critics who have noted Millet's novel have commented on her reflection on the relationship between humans and nonhumans, especially animals. Ella Soper roots the novel's environmental message in the figure of the inconsolable mourner (746). Rachel Greenwald Smith argues that "*How the Dead Dream* illustrates how the awareness of the centrality of nonhuman beings to human survival exposes the single-minded entrepreneurial pursuit of profit as disastrous for humans and nonhumans alike" (28). Greenwald Smith continues, "Yet the novel also performs its own futility in the face of the attempt to represent nonhuman experience, as it ultimately deteriorates into clownish pastiche and fragmented aphorism once its central character comes to this realization" (28). Benjamin Bateman argues that the form of *How the Dead Dream* critically

⁴⁴ I will be discussing affective labor as a theoretical heir to Marx's "immaterial labor." Leopolda Fortunati describes the concept of "immaterial labor" in Marx as follows: "Marx addresses [immaterial labor] . . . where he provides a secondary, supplementary description of productive labor as labor that produces material wealth . . . the implication being that those who produce immaterial wealth do not constitute productive workers. Marx continues his analysis by stating that immaterial production can be of two kinds. One which results in material goods (books, pictures, etc.), and one in which the product is not separable from the act of production itself, as is the case of artist performers, orators, actors, teachers, doctors, priests, and so on. Marx's observations clearly refer only to the labor invested in the production of commodities, as he does not take into consideration, for example, how much of domestic labor is constituted by immaterial labor." (139).

exposes “the limitations of a ‘set-aside’ approach to environmental conservation” (152).⁴⁵ An essay by Carne Irr and two essays by Ursula K. Heise mention *How the Dead Dream* only briefly as an example of larger phenomena. Heise notes that novels like *How the Dead Dream* and *Freedom*, with biodiversity as their subject, “often focus centrally on the meaning of nonhuman species for humans” (27). In another essay, Heise roots *How the Dead Dream* in the “Animal Moment” of posthuman discourse (462).⁴⁶ Caren Irr situates *How the Dead Dream* in a genre she calls “the new green novel” (84).

Greenwald Smith exaggerates when she argues that “the novel ends up positing immediate physical contact with the nonhuman world as the only alternative to the bodily investment of neoliberal subjects in the circulation of capital” (103). I argue that these close encounters are the events that can lead to a keener sense of likeness, as moments of growth, not necessarily as moments of perfect harmony. According to Greenwald Smith, however, these encounters suggest an aesthetic giving up: “[s]tory and ecological consciousness, the novel suggests, are, at root, incompatible, and the only ecological role remaining for the novel is to tell is the story of this incompatibility” (104). In this, I think Greenwald Smith reads T. a bit too straight, a bit too unironically. T.’s growth is not the reader’s growth. His grief is not our grief. When he wanders off into the wilderness to connect to nature, we should read this moment critically. He craves closeness to nature, but this craving is still manic, individualized, and borne of profound privilege. T., for all of his growth, is not the uncomplicated hero at the end of the novel that Greenwald Smith reads him as. I do not think his conclusions are the ones Millet wants us to reach or his actions those Millet wants us to emulate.

⁴⁵ He also argues that “through his somnolent form, the novel imagines sustainable and rehabilitative alternatives to traditional character development” (152).

⁴⁶ For Heise, a literary tradition starting in the mid-1990’s responds to advances in genetics and biotechnology, coinciding with the emergence of animals studies (455).

The narration throughout most of *How the Dead Dream* functions to centralize both human experience and draw attention to the ways humans make sense of the world. *How the Dead Dream* begins by introducing readers to Thomas, or T. as he is called by almost everyone, a little boy obsessed with the materiality of currency. The narrator here and throughout the novel employs inner monologue to capture T.'s voice as well as his thinking. The narrative is, then, clearly and obviously concerned directly with human experience. The narrative voice is consistent throughout the novel, and it is closely aligned with T.'s voice—resembling a conventional unobtrusive, “well-spoken” narrator (200).⁴⁷ Although T. does not narrate, he is the driving force behind the story and its focalization point. The external narrator relates T.'s thoughts directly at times, especially after T. graduates from college, but does not pass judgment. Any judgement or reflection on other characters' thoughts is coded as actually from T.'s ideological point of view. The verbalization of T.'s thoughts is what Chatman calls “a cognition” (as opposed to “a perception”) since the portions of the text that report T.'s thoughts clearly organize them into logical and grammatical units (instead of a more experimentally-rendered lump of perceptions) (181). The distinction is important for the presentation of thinking and reflection as distinctly human activities and ways of making sense of the world. Benjamin Bateman describes the narration in the first thirty-four pages as “mostly deadpan,” and notes that “the possibility of interiority is granted but never explored” (157). The style avoids flamboyance, and the tone is, as Adelle Waldman notes writing for *The New York Times*, “deadpan, albeit in a lyrical and meditative prose.” Upon publication, some reviewers took issue with Millet's affectless style. An anonymous *Kirkus* reviewer remarks, “Millet's latest doesn't

⁴⁷ A well-spoken narrator is “a narrator whose mode of expression is a standard (or even elegant) one and functions as a norm in terms of which the characters' modes of expression are situated” (105). Gerald Prince. *A Dictionary of Narratology*. Revised Ed. Lincoln: U. of Nebraska P., 2003.

work as a novel—it’s exhausting and disappointing. The author seldom deviates from the expository voice.” Patrick Ness, writing for *The Guardian*, found of Millet, “Her writing can be portentous and overdone” while the book itself is “reserved and oblique.” These critiques apply to Millet’s writing, but they also extend more generally to her narrator and her protagonist. Even as a child, T. is not excitable or passionate, and the third-person narration throughout the novel captures T.’s self-conscious rationality and down-to-earth-ness.

How the Dead Dream initially presents the radical distinction of the human and the nonhuman as a distinction borne of immaturity. As a child, T. loves cash so much he “had a habit of secreting coins on his person, a thick and powerful quarter lodged under his tongue or discreet dimes tucked into the cheek pouches” (3). T. loves money so much that he feels a need to incorporate it into his very self, to elide the distinction between the valuable thing and his own body. T. works for his money, but the ethics of his “commercial dealings” cover a broad spectrum, ranging from hard-earned return on lemonade stand investment to charity walkathon fraud (6). While at school, T. is popular and successful, but his fetishization of cash makes him amoral when it comes to money. He goes so far as to accept from “not a first-order friend” twenty dollars per week—or “services rendered” as he sees it—for social “favors” like keeping this “friend” from getting bullied at school (9). The third-person narrator of *How the Dead Dream* frames T.’s obsession with the materiality of coinage as a kind of youthful “stage” that he grows out of. He retains his obsession with money, but this obsession does not take the form of becoming one with the money. This growth, following the format of the bildungsroman, is an aesthetic education:

As he grew up, his love became sophisticated. He no longer needed to touch coins or bills; he found his satisfaction in surges of energy, in the stream of contact between

machines that processed binary. He learned to like abstract money better than its physical body. The solid house that money built sheltered him and he felt keenly that money was both everything and nothing, at once infinite, open potential and an end in itself. (13)

A “sophisticated” understanding of money that leads T. into fiscal maturity hinges on the mere displacement or diffusion of money’s materiality. His “satisfaction” is not in the “touch” of “coins,” but in ambiguous “surges of energy” that have all the appearance of bodily reactions but are actually a kind of synonym for the function “contact between machines.” The energy is qualified as machine energy but is nonetheless related to T.’s own satisfaction. Instead of seeing and touching money, T. can encounter the material effects of money by feeling the climate-controlled environment of his house and appreciate the reasoning that translates hard currency to the sensations of physical shelter. T.’s sophisticated understanding of money is in appreciating how coins turn into “the solid house that money built,” which in turn allowed him the bodily “feeling” of money’s true importance. In one paragraph, Millet pushes a readerly understanding of materiality from a naïve fixation on physical objects to a sophisticated understanding of the flow between currency, bought commodities and services with their use values, bodies, and the affective states produced by the interplays between each of them. The mature T. better understands the relationship between the material and the immaterial, which later leads to collapsing the radical distinction between the nonhuman and the human.

By signaling this aesthetic and intellectual growth so early in the novel, however, Millet suggests the preternatural maturity of T., implying that, having achieved his growth early, his education is already over before the novel really begins. Millet undercuts this narrative a page later when her narrator notes that T. was “guilty” of “seeming like a prodigy,” as if T.’s fiscal

sophistication were a kind of put-on, an ethos adopted until he could actually *be* a prodigy (14). T. grows further while attending college, from the satisfaction in “surges of energy” that are also “the stream of contact between machines” to the “quiet satisfaction” of day trading “wins” (15). The satisfaction here is coded as even less material than a few pages before. T. has more growing up to do because he has lost the pleasure of materiality. The machines are left out of the narrator’s description and thus unconnected to any bodily sensation of T.’s, as if monetary-aesthetic sophistication means eschewing materiality and only focusing on money’s abstract qualities. T.’s monetary-aesthetic sophistication now resides less in the having of money, tactile or abstract, but in the theoretical gamification of finance—the winning. What Christopher Breu calls “the neoliberal logic of winners and losers” is made even more sophisticated by T.’s exercises in hiding his winning and losing, in the practice of financial secrecy (148). T. seeks to create the maximum distance between his financial dealings and his own material existence while maintaining the stability of both. What this leads to is the gradual abstraction of T.’s financial practices and his having to fake affective investment to maintain social options, captured exquisitely by Millet when T. “consult[s] his watch” while lending a sympathetic ear to a suicidal frat-mate (17). The distance T. starts to create between his financial practices and his material existence is decidedly temporal. At college, he focused on post-college life: “he looked to the life beyond . . . He was beyond what there was, and in the not-yet-existent imagined a great acceleration” (18). Focusing on the materiality of the present becomes another symptom of childishness: “As a child he had lived in the present; now he lived in the future” (21). While the grammar of this last sentence counters its subject’s fantasy of futurity, T. nonetheless tries to assert a claim on “the not-yet-existent” in the present.

IMMATERIAL LABOR AND NECROPOLITICS

How the Dead Dream explores how affect and necropolitics contribute to the radical separation between human and nonhuman after T. graduates from college. When he graduates, T. invests in his own affective labor to develop business partnerships. Shortly after college, T. “made his first six-figure profit” by “brokering the sale of a derelict apartment building” and gives up day trading for real estate (29). Without connections, T. fakes friendships, preying on the self-interest of the rich and clueless, in the service of his developing real estate company. The work T. has to do in this section of the novel—the self-conscious forging of friendships to further his career—is the affective labor that underlies the materiality of his real estate production. Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri call this labor “immaterial labor”—that is, “labor that produces immaterial products, such as information, knowledges, ideas, images, relationships, and affects” rather than physical goods (65).⁴⁸ Immaterial labor is often paid service work approached as an essential component of certain jobs, functioning as a kind of work-before-the-work—planning, for instance. It is also an add-on the managerial class expects in addition to regular service or material labor—not merely waged production and service, but service with a smile, a policing and monitoring of affect. This sort of labor, however, looks much like what Silvia Federici calls “reproductive work,” the naturalized, often unpaid labor (usually performed by women) that underlies capitalist production (93).⁴⁹ While T.’s affective labor is “reproductive” in the sense that it is consciously directed towards the continuation of the conditions of capitalist production, it is “immaterial” in that this labor, by itself, does not produce a commodity. *How the Dead*

⁴⁸ Alternatively, Maurizio Lazzarato, who popularized the term “immaterial labor,” defines it as “the labor that produces the informational and cultural content of the commodity.”

⁴⁹ In *Sociology of Work: An Encyclopedia*, Mignon Duffy notes that “reproductive labor” has been defined and used in many different ways. Chiefly, it has been used “to describe unpaid activities in the home as work, thereby conferring value and visibility on the largely invisible labor performed overwhelmingly by women.” According to Federici, women’s work is also literally reproductive in that birthing children produces new workers for exploitation and new consumers to participate in a capitalist economy (93).

Dream does not explicitly tie affective labor to capital accumulation, but I read T.'s calculated and reserved deployment of affect—especially early in the novel—as very much like his considered and frugal approach to money.

The concept of affective labor has recently become a heuristic with which theorists have described the demands of capital on labor in a neoliberal service economy.⁵⁰ If capital is stored up labor, then the concept of affective labor implies that a capitalist, by deploying capital, can buy affective labor and in turn sell it at a profit.⁵¹ It also connotes a worker with a limited but renewable supply of affective potential that they can sell for a wage, a small but renewable store of capital.⁵² Just as some productive labor is expended for a wage as paid work, some is saved for the (re)productive labor of leisure and, in turn, affective labor is expended both for a wage and for leisure. Yet the capital spent on leisure— affective or otherwise—is necessarily limited and is therefore subject to valuation. For example, do I have enough affective capital left, after smiling all day in a service occupation, to care about both the hurricane wreckage in Mexico and my grandma's radiation treatment?

In *How the Dead Dream*, T. is willing to invest whatever affect is necessary to forge business connections. That is, he is willing to invest immaterial labor (mere time and a

⁵⁰ Juan Martin Prada puts it this way: "Throughout the recent history of industrial and commercial practices, affectivity has generally acted as a language or a means that incites a certain positive predisposition in the interlocutor, like when a salesperson smiles and affectionately greets a new customer (in fact, many affective expressions are socially and not emotionally motivated). However, the gradual acknowledgement of the relationship between affectivity and business effectiveness has meant that little by little, values such as personalised attention, closeness and proximity to the customer have become some of the essential principles of corporate action."

⁵¹ According to Marx, "Capital is the *governing power* over labor and its products;" therefore, "Capital is *stored up labor*" (36, italics in original). Karl Marx. "Profit of Capital." *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*. Trans. Martin Milligan. Amherst: Prometheus Books, 1988. Print. However, affective labor has certain limits that "productive labor" does not. While an individual can accumulate and hoard unlimited amounts of capital (and therefore productive labor), they cannot stockpile massive amounts of affective capital. While capitalists can (and do) pay for care, they have a necessarily limited ability to care themselves.

⁵² Running out of such capital is known as "burn-out," which the World Health Organization defines as "a syndrome conceptualized as resulting from chronic workplace stress that has not been successfully managed. It is characterized by three dimensions: feelings of depletion of enthusiasm, increased mental distance from one's job, or feelings of negativism or cynicism related to one's job, and reduced professional efficacy."

minimum of attention, for instance) and a kind of forged affect or pretense to produce an economic relationship that will be beneficial to him in the future. Even this forged affect, the product of waged service work everywhere, requires some affect to produce, requires energy and patience. Indeed, his investment in suffering the inanities of his frat brothers comes back to him in the form of the real estate opportunity noted above, which he gets through his friend Brad's family (26). In the first chapter of novel (where all the previous information has been communicated), T. trains himself to be affectless even while appearing to exude the proper affects for the benefit of his marks. Beyond these potential business partners, T. is reluctant to invest affective capital elsewhere. Caring about too many things can be a liability for a properly ruthless venture capitalist. But the concept of affective capital suggests to me that we do not always have a choice where we "invest" it. Indeed, as the novel plays out, many affective investments are obligatory, and one's stock of affective capital often vulnerable to emergencies. At this point in the novel, however, T.'s deployment of affect is mostly calculated as a means of promoting business options (as opposed to required as a condition of for his continued employment).

T.'s calculated and voluntary deployment of his affective labor is upset when he suddenly encounters death. Death, whether it makes sense as a commodity or not, is the event for which we are socialized to muster a sum of affective capital to deploy to the satisfaction of a community that expects this deployment from us, or—more often perhaps—the event of death can rip affective capital from us regardless of our rational attitude towards its deployment (though we may find it cathartic to get rid of this affective capital, even if we then lack capital for other kinds of affective expenditures).⁵³ But death happens everywhere almost all the time,

⁵³ According to Eric Cazdyn, death, both individual and socioeconomic, makes sense as a commodity in several ways. The example he uses in *The Already Dead* is the life insurance resale market wherein "life settlement"

and we certainly do not expend the same capital on every death. Deaths, by this logic, compete for our attention and then for affective capital. The market for affective capital to “spend” on any death, individual or collective, constitutes a necro-economics. The ideological forces that encourage the valuation of certain deaths over others struggle in what might be described, following Mbembe, as necropolitics.

Mbembe introduces necropolitics in his analysis of the location of sovereignty. To this end, Mbembe finds that the “ultimate expression of sovereignty” is not in “the boundaries of the nation-state, within institutions empowered by the nation-state, or within supranational institutions and networks,” but rather, “in the power and the capacity to dictate who may live and who must die” (11). Mbembe initially interrogates what constitute sovereign rights to imagine “politics as a form or war” to ask broader questions like “What place is given to life, death, and the human body (in particular the wounded or slain body)? How are they inscribed in the order of power?” (12). Mbembe notes that the onset of slavery is “one of the first instances of biopolitical experimentation” and that, violence under the biopolitical institution of slavery “becomes an element in manners . . . an act of caprice and pure destruction aimed at instilling terror” (21). Mbembe’s use of “manners” to denote “the links between *social grace* and *social control*” with reference to biopower hints at how necropolitics underlie contemporary American attitudes toward all life forms. Although *How the Dead Dream* does not explicitly pressure the contours of state sovereignty, it does demand reflection with respect to humans’ power of life and death over some nonhumans and how that power turns nonhumans into subjects of a generalized human sovereignty. The legal right to kill most animals without infringing on the privilege of the state might suggest that the deaths of animals are not political—at least not in the

companies buy life insurance policies from policyholders for more than they would have made giving the policy up and then cash in when the original policyholder dies (160).

biopolitical sense that Mbembe is discussing death in “Necropolitics”—but the grieved reactions of humans to animal death put these deaths in a broader matrix of biopower.⁵⁴ If one measure of the value of a life is the degree to which one can grieve for it, then the value of animals’ lives is necessarily comparable to the value of human lives.

In *How the Dead Dream*, T. expends affective capital on several deaths, but he does not spend equally, thus demonstrating the necropolitical market at work and encouraging readers to follow the storyworld’s valuation of various deaths. Specifically, in this necropolitical market, several nonhuman deaths compete with various kinds of human death for human affective capital. At the beginning of the novel’s second chapter, T.’s single-minded affective investment in the goings-on of his potential business partners is upset by an unexpected death. Sounding a chord that will not reverberate until the end of the novel, Millet’s narrator coyly suggests a human murder at the beginning of *How the Dead Dream*’s second chapter. “He killed her driving to Las Vegas,” the chapter starts, and the rest of the paragraph piles up prepositions signaling what happened before the killing, never indicating exactly whom or what “He” killed (35). The “He” is itself ambiguous. We assume “He” refers to T., but the narrator does not make this explicit. We know that “he emerged from the diner,” but specifically-human actions are muffled until the second paragraph:

Driving up the freeway on-ramp he turned the radio on and knew the smoothness of his
buttery seat leather against the backs of his thighs. He was satisfied; he was easing in.

Then a shape, blurred and fast from the right, and he hit it. The car bumped over it and

⁵⁴ In *What Animals Teach Us About Politics*, Brian Massumi writes about how zoos help to express how animals are excluded from human politics: “In the zoo, the foregrounded animals are set off from the background in such a way as to put them on display as essentially visual figures” (66). This caging/framing, Massumi argues, following Giorgio Agamben, repeats the “founding gesture of *human politics*” (66). The animal is “excluded from the polis” by being reduced to “mere biological life” (66). Massumi notes that “[t]he zoo is an exercise of human sovereignty vis-à-vis the animal” because it “shunts the animal to the side of unqualified life, in other words ‘killable’ by nature” (68, 68-9).

veered off the road onto the shoulder. He jammed the brake pedal to the floor and sat shaking.

Dust rose behind and beside him, and his two right wheels were off the shoulder pavement. He looked out the window behind him to see if there were other cars coming.

What was that on the road? What was hit? (35)

At the end of the above passage, third-person narration shifts to interior monologue or “direct free thought” (Chatman 183). Millet makes use of this narrative tool frequently throughout the novel. Often, events are actually narrated matter-of-factly, dispassionately—in this case, even ominously procedurally—to be followed by T.’s interior monologue responding to the narrative situation. Close by, “a mound” turns out to be “a coyote,” an observation later amended via psychonarration: “the poor thing was a bitch” (36-7), but the above passage makes clear the human-oriented phenomenology of the accident. The subjects of these independent clauses—the actors in the narrated events—are mostly “he” (with a few references to his car and its wheels).⁵⁵ Thus, the temporality of the scene is rigidly oriented around a human’s consciousness. The coyote, because “he” does not yet know she’s a coyote, is referred to vaguely by depersonalized, gender-neutral pronouns and as “a shape”; before the narrative moves on, the narrator taps T.’s inquiring consciousness, which has indeed reduced the coyote to a “what”—a thing in its vaguest sense. The information in this scene is only reported once it becomes available to T., the subject of the interior monologue.

The structure set up in this scene—narrated encounters with humans and nonhumans followed by T.’s reflections related through interior monologue—is a structure that repeats throughout the novel. I will be focusing particularly on T.’s reflective interior monologues

⁵⁵ The combination of “he” and automobile functions as a Latourian “hybrid actor” (33). The human “agent” and the nonhuman “actant” are both named by the narrator (Latour 33).

because they often eschew narration and always allow the reader access to T.'s understanding of his own relationship to humans and nonhumans at any given point in his development. These reflective interior monologues function as what David Herman calls "self-narratives" (13). Herman describes self-narratives as "the stories people tell in order to make sense of and justify their own actions—with this storytelling process at once reflecting and helping establish relational ties with others" (13). According to Herman, "such stories of the self are imbricated with assumptions concerning the scope and limits of selfhood as such" (25). I bring up Herman specifically because his account of self-narratives emphasizes "how self-narratives relate to—emerge from but also potentially impinge upon—assumptions about possibilities for selfhood beyond the human" (Herman 25).

The shift from a more distanced approach to T.'s thoughts to interior monologue occasions this focus on self-narrative. At this point in the novel, what worries T. is that the thing is not just a thing, that it has a human connection and thus his hitting it entails his responsibility to another human. T.'s processing of the shift from thing to coyote happens as follows: "A coyote. People said they were pests. They took pets out of yards in the suburbs, ran off with children's kittens. He was briefly relieved: no one to be angry at him, no owner" (36). The recognition of the thing's species is immediately followed by "People"—the only reference point T. has that matters. T. rehearses the very human-made meanings associated with "coyote," shifting immediately from identification and denotation to the negative connotations humans have for coyotes. He assesses the thing's value and is relieved to find that it has "no owner," so the thing does not put an obligation on him to a specific human in terms of a property relation. What makes him actually check on the coyote is the thought that on-coming cars might stop and put him in the awkward position of trying to leave the animal with potential witnesses to his

responsibility, so “[h]e leaned down and put his arms around the front, picked up the body with its head lolling against his chest” (36). The sensation of having the physical “thing” in his arms brings about a confusing change in T. “It,” he notes, “was curiously light for its size and left a sweep of blood on the blacktop when he dragged it” (36). The idea of the coyote becomes more real and requires more of his attention when its materiality asserts itself. The weight of the thing, the trail of blood it leaves, the growl it utters combined with its unmoving legs—these sensory details, experienced first-hand, alert T. to the possibility that “it probably did not want him near” (36-7). “It”—or at least the combination of “Its” qualities—makes T. recognize in the animal a will. T. wishes to respect what he thinks “It” wants, but “somehow he could not leave”—instead anxiously going to his car and then coming back out again “to see if she was dead yet” (37). The pronouns shift here from “it” to “she,” as if the time T. spends with the coyote eventually necessitates the transformation of the coyote from a mere thing to a gendered being, also requiring more intimate terminology. This materiality is oppressive. T. “willed himself not to look at her legs” but the loud surge of cars with their bright lights and the smells of asphalt and blood do not go away no matter where he looks (37).

The materiality of the dying coyote prompts T.’s reflection on the relationship he has to the nonhuman dead. This relationship takes the form of comparison and a weighing of relative value. The comparison reasserts his value as a human and mitigates the value of a coyote’s death based on the responses to each: “Animals died by the road and you saw that all the time, everyone did. You saw them lying there, so obvious in their deadness . . . You saw the insides all exposed. You thought: that is the difference between them and me. My insides are firmly contained” (37-8). Note the rhetorical “you” here, as if the psychonarration insists on appealing to the human-ness of the reader to legitimate human superiority and the insignificance of an

animal's death. The first type of comparison here simply notes difference; it concerns the material fact of internal organ placement, the material fact of being alive versus being dead.

There is another comparison, however: "And were I to lie on the side of the road dying, it would be nothing like that. No one would drive around me: the cars would stop, tens upon hundreds of them; there would be lines of stopped traffic for miles as they removed my body . . ." (37-8).

What separates the human from the nonhuman in this situation is that the human is alive to see and note the deadness of the nonhuman.

This kind of distinction is what Herman is referring to when he writes about how self-narratives condition "assumptions concerning the scope and limits of selfhood as such" (25). He writes, "these understandings are interwoven not only with assumptions about what a human self is and how it emerges over time, but also with broader cultural ontologies, which determine the kinds of selves that are assumed to populate the world, and hence the range of others in relation to whom a given self-narrative takes shape" (Herman 25). These "cultural ontologies" indicate "what sort of entities should be profiled as a 'who' and not just a 'what'" (Herman 25). T.'s internal monologue shifts to measuring significance in terms of human response. Humans give meaning to any death by their reactions. Stopped cars and lines of automobiles are signs of the importance of humans. A lack of these signs signifies unimportance, that "it was just a coyote" (38). The narrator informs us that, in spite of T.'s reasoning, "he felt confused" (38), suggesting that his rationalization is less than persuasive even to himself. T.'s rationalization demonstrates his eagerness to absolve himself of wrongdoing towards a coyote, but his confusion shows that he does not achieve this self-absolution.

What sort of death is this? Mbembe discusses several types of death that might characterize an animal death at human hands, “survivor” and “sacrifice,” for instance.⁵⁶ But Mbembe does not discuss accidental death in his article and the deaths he is interested in are human deaths at the hands of other humans.⁵⁷ The types of death Mbembe discusses all indicate a conscious, reasoned killing functioning symbolically as a display of power. Is T.’s accidental killing of a coyote, then, outside of necropolitics? It is certainly enmeshed in potential legal obligations to other humans if the carcass causes any damage to human life or property on the road. The killing is not in itself a demonstration of sovereign power calculated to further subdue more nonhumans and coerce specific behaviors. Yet his response is political. It requires, at least from him, a response, an obligation of some kind. It has to be justified and evaluated. As we see in the pages that follow the death of the coyote, killing the animal also changes T.’s habits in terms of deploying affect.

AFFECTIVE OBLIGATIONS AND MATERIALITY

Narration in *How the Dead Dream* explores how affect and materiality contribute to the deterioration of radical distinctions between the human and the nonhuman. In the passages following the death of the coyote, T.’s habit of rational expenditure of affect is challenged in

⁵⁶ Jacques Derrida famously follows Heidegger and Levinas in his distinction between human and animal in his interview with Jean-Luc Nancy: “The animal will never be either a subject nor a Dasein. It doesn’t have an unconscious either (Freud), nor a rapport to the other as other, no more than there is an animal face (Levinas).” According to Donna Haraway, Derrida is commenting on the “logic of sacrifice” here, “in which there is no responsibility toward the living world other than the human” (78). In other words, “Within the logic of sacrifice, only human beings can be murdered” (Haraway 78).

⁵⁷ In *Animal Liberation*, Peter Singer avoids commenting on humans killing nonhumans because of how complicated the issue is, choosing to focus on animal pain to make his argument. Nonetheless, he writes, “Just as most human beings are speciesists in their readiness to cause pain in animals when they would not cause a similar pain to humans for the same reason, so most human beings are speciesists in their readiness to kill other animals when they would not kill human beings.” He continues, “to avoid speciesism, we must allow that beings who are similar in all relevant respects have a similar right to life—and mere membership in our own biological species cannot be a morally relevant criterion for this right.” Before moving, however, Singer makes clear that “a rejection of speciesism does not imply that all lives are of equal worth.”

several ways. Indeed, the narrative emphasis on T.'s interiority asks readers to question both how rational humans really are and how rational they should be. The psychonarration in the passages after the coyote incident provide a phenomenological description of T.'s experience of change. He rationalizes, acts on a whim, cares for his distraught mother, falls in love with an investor's assistant, and grieves when the woman he loves suddenly dies. These scenes—and T.'s internal reactions to them—pressure the radical distinction between human and nonhuman by demonstrating the human tendency towards irrational behavior while maintaining the ability to rationalize.

T. struggles emotionally and psychically because his experience tells him to rationalize a radical distinction between the human and the nonhuman, but he feels guilt as if the death of the coyote were fundamentally *like* a human death. T.'s response is typically human in this sense; he relies on the uniquely human faculty of rationalization to cope with the fear that certain valued qualities are not unique to humans. After the coyote dies and T. goes back to Los Angeles, his rationalizing continues as a symptom of his obvious affective investment in his material role in the coyote's death. He abjectly gets rid of the car he hit her with—"irrational, but he had to get rid of it" (38). T. tries to convince himself that it was "maybe half-blind" or "feeble and exhausted" (38). Perhaps it suffered and consciously chose to be hit by his car. This line of thinking is a dead end, however: "But no. A coyote might want relief from suffering, but to plan for her own end seemed human" (38). Of course, the coyote cannot have human qualities! His response is irrepressible, "a rising pity he could not repress" (38). This pity causes him to reflect (another uniquely human activity) on how he has interacted with animals throughout his life. As a child he always wanted a pet, but his mother refused. His mother liked animals "as long as they stayed where they belonged—that is, in paintings, stories, even stained-glass windows"

(39). She refuses several ideas for pets with a variety of reasons related to hygiene and cleanliness, chiefly that they all “smelled” (39). It’s clear from T.’s reflection that he has internalized from his mother’s conditioning uncomfortable feelings about animal materiality. Representations of animals—the idea of animals—were interesting and desirable, but the fact of them being near repulsed her. When T. thinks of coyotes later he feels “a pulse of identification and regret, curious and painful” (62).

The narrative description of irrationality and rationalizing is accompanied by a narrative emphasis on phenomenology and materiality. On a whim, T. adopts a dog, and the process is narrated with strange attention to detail (40).⁵⁸ The narrator continues to present T.’s internal reactions to these goings-on, narrating such oddly obvious non-events as “An animal was with him” (40). The effect of such statements is bizarre; T. is obviously adapting to the novelty of being in proximity to an animal he chose, but the only novelty in this situation is the material fact itself. There is nothing else to narrate except the blatantly obvious, banal fact of T.’s coexistence with the dog, yet—to accurately follow T.’s thinking—this non-event must be narrated because it’s novel *to him*. The narration also focuses on phenomenology in this portion of the novel, as opposed to reporting rational human thought or action. In such moments, Millet begins to use narrative to break down the radical distinction between human and nonhuman. While T.’s rational thought is uniquely human, the feeling of closeness is not.

How the Dead Dream examines the nature of affective obligation by putting T. in situations where the rational construction of affective expenditures is disrupted by other kinds of affective work. The adoption of the dog is followed by another unwelcome affective obligation. T.’s mother Angela shows up at his workplace crying because, as she tells T., “Your father’s

⁵⁸ Dogs and coyotes are both in the genus *Canis* and are thus closely related species (Bekoff 2).

gone” (41). When T. asks where his father has gone, she responds “I don’t know” (41). The internal monologue following this exchange demonstrates T.’s gauging the affective obligation required of him: “*I don’t know*, he thought. So not dead” (41). T.’s affective investment in his family necessitates several kinds of responses to the vague status of “gone.” Gone-as-in-dead requires one type of affective display, and gone-as-in-merely-disappeared requires quite another type. The affective display T. chooses turns out to be something of an over-commitment when his mother stays in his guest room where she is still living weeks later. The psychonarration notes that “in terms of progress her presence threatened to reduce him” and therefore “[s]he was a liability” (44). Like the scene in which T. kills the coyote, Angela’s material presence in his home comes as an awkward and inconvenient infringement on his autonomy because it elicits affects he tries to hold in check as much as possible. Also like the coyote, Angela’s physical presence is experienced by T. in terms of weight, as a kind of oppressive thing-ness: “now suddenly he carried personal freight, which threatened to hold him back” (45). The use of the word “progress” earlier and the phrase “hold him back” here suggest a physical burden, wherein the metaphor of personal freedom and success as a kind of unencumbered movement positions T.’s mother’s presence itself as a carryable, burdensome thing. Here, again, rational human thought is mixed with phenomenal emphasis on materiality in Millet’s narration. The narrative focus on materiality is not linked to nonhumans specifically, however. Indeed, it functions more like a metaphor for T.’s experience of stress. T. fears that his investors will correlate childishness with his mother’s presence. Angela’s presence is thus both like a physical weight in the metaphor of financial freedom as freedom of movement and evidence of the lack of sophistication T. hopes to have grown out of earlier in the novel. But T. lets her continue to stay,

in spite of her inconvenience, because “he could not bring himself to hurt her further” and “he wanted to comfort her” (45, 49).

In these passages, the novel seems to focus on how T. deals with unplanned affective expenditures—most of which are inconvenient and unwelcome. T.’s conversations with his mother demonstrate his insistence on dispassionate calculation and his mother’s panicked inability to function on her own. T. accepts the affective obligation of her presence because of her own affective dependence. Part of what frustrates T., however, about his mother’s affective dependence on him is his notion that this dependence should be located elsewhere.⁵⁹ He struggles to cope with his father’s “callousness” in leaving without a word (52). When she gets a letter from T.’s father indicating that the divorce has been finalized, T. comes home to find her and her friend Terry outside, and Terry informs him that “She broke things” (63).⁶⁰ That night T. finds her in the bathtub unconscious from a stroke and calls paramedics in time to save her life (66). While Angela is at the hospital, T. concludes that “His father’s absence . . . meant more to her than his presence ever had” (66). When Angela leaves the hospital, T. installs her in her own apartment (69). Like his mother, T. needs an outlet for the aggression catalyzed by his father’s apathy. Unlike his mother, however, T. runs to relieve this energy. For him, the physical exertion is not how he gets rid of this energy, but through the pounding his feet take on the sand (83). The sensation of slamming his feet into the sand works like his mother’s breaking of household objects. The narration emphasizes T.’s attempts to reconcile his sense of obligation to

⁵⁹ When his father calls, T. insists that his father call his mother and account for his actions. What’s owed here is recognition of another’s affective investment.

⁶⁰ As it turns out, T.’s father has dispensed with all of his marital affective obligations and has chosen to embrace a new lifestyle as a gay man in the Florida Keys (76). T. resents his father’s transformation yet recognizes when he meets him that “he was not the same man” (78). His father’s transformation is almost complete; he is physically more fit and tan, blonder as well, and he dresses more casually. He goes by “Davy” now instead of “Dave” or “David” as T. remembers him (80). He’s “starting fresh” and T. remarks that he “doesn’t seem to be interested” in Angela’s stroke (81).

his mother with his impatience. These passages also make clear how much T. depends on others to do affective work that he would rather not do. Not all unplanned affective expenditures are unwelcome, however. T.'s next unexpected affective investment happens when he falls in love with an investor's assistant named Beth. This sensation is "giddy, liberated and captive both" as he "lost his autonomy" (58). For thirty pages she is his perfect companion. When she is suddenly killed due to a rare cardiac event, T.'s grieved response connects this human death to the death of the coyote earlier in the novel (90-1): "His ears were ringing. He was choking and his knees buckled. His head was squeezed, itched, and stung" (90).

The description of T.'s response to his girlfriend's death demonstrates several things about affect. T.'s response shows the ways in which affect is not always expended rationally. Initially, his grief is so visceral that he has to be helped to a cot and then to a toilet because he has trouble controlling his bowels (91). When he gets out of the bathroom, his body seems not his own: "The teeth chattered out of control; his jaw was not his own. He thought his eyeballs might be jarred loose" (91). The doctor tries to manage his grief by assuring T. that her death was instantaneous, that she would not have known what was going on, that she would not have felt pain (92). His mother takes care of him while he is all but incapacitated by grief.⁶¹ When T. gains more control of his body, he mourns for several pages while periodically trying antidepressants and religion to alleviate his ennui, until he can visit her grave. Then he visits Beth's grave obsessively, even though she's buried in another state, and starts a fire near it for no apparent reason (109). His grieving becomes insistent and spectacular. The narrator informs us that "soon grief ceased to order his time and his demeanor returned intact" (111). Yet an "alteration" in his routines insists that the grief has not actually passed, only become repressed or

⁶¹ Indeed, he is so incapacitated that he finds out later that he missed Beth's burial (96).

properly sublimated (111). As he walks away from the fire in front of Beth's grave, he can hear sirens in the distance (presumably to respond to the blaze at the cemetery), but he feels better. The psychonarration tells us simply, "Authority was not all," and, though the narrator does not dwell on this statement, it proves an epiphanic moment as T. comes to the realization that the only way for him to come to terms with his grief is through processes that are not officially sanctioned or socially acceptable responses to death (109).

THE GRIEF MARKET

How the Dead Dream uses T.'s experience to draw comparisons between various kinds of death. T. gets back into real estate. He has the chance—a "golden egg"—to develop "a swath of empty desert" into a retirement community (55). Bateman describes this project as a "set-aside" development (160).⁶² Although, this development project will result in the displacement of an obscure rat species, T. goes ahead with the project anyway (123). A biologist explains to him that the kangaroo rats might go extinct because of this project (125). While the biologist tells him this in "a matter-of-fact" way, T. "found his own throat closing" (125). He wonders what could cause this emotion: "Was it something else from his life? It must be, something else glancing across from the side as he stood there. Still always Beth, possibly; he could not be choked up over the kangaroo rat," though he obviously is (125). He mistakes the guilt of being responsible for the deaths of the last members of a species for a belated moment of grief over Beth's death. Shortly thereafter he finds out that the rats had been "extinguished" (128). When

⁶² According to Bateman, "In conservation biology, 'the set-aside' (Sotherton 259) designates a compromise between environmental preservation and economic development. In exchange for setting aside a piece of land for protection of a vulnerable or endangered species, the developer or farmer is allowed to proceed with a project, be it the extraction of resources from proximate land or the construction of residential or commercial property upon it" (152).

he finds out that the kangaroo rat is extinct he examines the desert oasis he constructed and notes the boundary between the property and the unbuilt environment where coyotes live: “Coyotes could live anywhere. They were not like the rats, who lived only on one small patch of land. They could live anywhere and die anywhere too. Like him. They were opportunists” (128-9). To diminish his grief and guilt, T. compares rats to coyotes and coyotes to himself, finding the rats inferior for their inability to adapt, for their lack of durability. His psychic well-being is predicated on a comparison that is always-already self-serving. Bateman argues that the concept of a “set-aside” proves untenable, both in terms of conservation and as a metaphor for T.’s sense of independence from his environment: “The very place he had intended to sequester in order to distinguish himself as both a valuable developer and a conscientious conservationist becomes instead the site of his undoing and absorption into an ecology whose multiple nonhuman agencies refuse to separate or be set aside” (161).

T.’s self-understanding as obviously, radically different from the nonhuman world begins to break down after the kangaroo rat extinction, about halfway through the novel. Greenwald Smith sees the novel’s major tension in T.’s return to real estate as he comes to consciousness about his role in violence towards nonhumans (107). In these passages, reading is awkward because it’s difficult to identify with T. (Smith 107). Greenwald Smith writes, “The result is a prevailing sense of unease, alienation, and distress, as the need for communion with the nonhuman is urgently declared and the opportunity for interspecies relation through emotional codification is denied” (107). He frequently returns to the desert outside of the built community where he feels “permeable” and “oddly inseparable from the dirt and the dry golden grass” (129). He sits staring into the desert for hours and feels elemental sensations: “Sediment accumulated on him, buried him gradually, and more and more he was silted in” (130). Being “silted in” here

amounts to effacement of personal identity as a tactic for allaying grief and other troubles of being in the world. As Greenwald Smith notes, however, “Despite T.’s existential revelations, the novel stubbornly continues to put him at the center of the action, seemingly more in accord with the novel’s form than in any way consistent with the belief and motivations of T. as a coherent character” (109). While the protagonist has a mental shift with regard to his attitudes towards nonhumans, the novel does not enact a corresponding formal shift by decentering the human.

Ella Soper reads *How the Dead Dream* as participating in the interdisciplinary animal studies project that seeks to transform human relationships with nonhuman animals in the interest of justice (746). According to Soper, literature is uniquely capable of contributing to this transformation because it can encourage humans to empathize with nonhumans (746). To this end, Soper “suggest[s] that the novel provokes our moral imaginations by foregrounding the figure of the resistant mourner” (747). By “resistant mourner” Soper means that “both the attitude of the melancholic mourner, who resists consolation, and the ways in which mourning beyond prescribed social bounds might culminate in acts of overt dissent” (747). The structural elements illuminating T. as a resisting mourner that culminate in T.’s act of overt dissent are “his surprising and erratic encounters with wounded and imperiled animals” (749). Soper then focuses on the instances in which T. is called upon to respond to various deaths, both human and nonhuman. Like *Freedom*, *How the Dead Dream* self-consciously reflects on the ethics and feasibility of producing eco-narratives at all. Soper notes that Millet uses the character of T. to comment on the ethics of profiting through ecological grief-mongering. Soper notes that T. profits from the destruction of animals, but he does not seem to understand his role in their deaths or allow knowledge of his role to change his actions. T., not unlike the novelist or

ecocritics, “profit[s], to one degree or another, from the grief work they feel compelled to perform” (755n2). This leads Soper to call for a practice of grief in response to species loss that resists consolation, thus drawing attention to the ongoingness of the dead grieved for by refusing appeasement.

The affective price of various deaths must be considered, at least partially, with an eye towards character development. For example, T. at the beginning of the novel spends little time thinking about the death of the coyote—and from this readers get a sense of both T.’s early callousness as well as a general understanding that the coyote’s life is not worth what a human life is worth—but he might, after some affective training or character growth, expend more sympathy if he were to encounter such a death near the end of the novel. What, then, is Millet really measuring here? On the one hand, the death compares with other deaths in the novel, so readers can judge an appropriate response to the deaths and thus the appropriate value of the imagined life. On the other hand, however, readers can also judge T.’s response to the death by degrees of appropriateness—perhaps on a scale from callous indifference to sentimental overflow of feelings—thus measuring T.’s character itself based on his over/under-valuations of deaths and lives. The temporality of the novel then can function to either line up instances of comparable data (deaths) for us to compare and generate market information from or it can function as a conditioner of moral fiber—the longer the hero lives, the closer he gets to the appropriate response to any given death.⁶³ As Soper puts it, T.’s learning to sleep in the presence of animals becomes “a measure of his affective growth” (752).

⁶³ The novel’s message about grief is constructed through this death data. Harvey notes that neoliberalism’s “commodification of everything” runs against the grain of some cultural values, such as the inappropriateness of commodifying religious events (166). While the value of an individual death may be uncomfortable to calculate or discern by comparison, Millet’s novel demonstrates just how susceptible death is to neoliberalization.

REFLECTING ON DIFFERENCE

T.'s excessive grief expresses itself in his insistence on cohabitating, even briefly, with the last of various species. Rachel Greenwald Smith argues that this concerted effort at “envisioning the world from the perspectives of endangered species” signals the dissolution of “[t]he foundations of the bildungsroman form” (103).⁶⁴ In these cohabitations, the cognizing of grief becomes inadequate to do justice to these dying creatures. T. finds their dying demands his physical presence, his material self, to cohabit with them, to share the space of their enclosures for at least one night. Brian Massumi argues that “in the case of the zoo, as well as in other contexts where humans work to hold themselves at a distance in the role of uncomplicated observer, whether in the field, in the laboratory, or in front of a screen, it is visibly an issue of a rigidly exclusionary operation” (65). T.'s cohabitation suggests that the “exclusionary operation” of animal observation must, for no stated reason, become less rigid. When he starts cohabitating with animals at night, he has no special expertise. He knew the zoo animals lived in cages but nothing more about them except that they were alone, most of them, not only alone in the cages, often, but alone on the earth, vanishing” (134). T.'s loneliness after Beth's death makes him empathize with animals stuck alone in enclosures and map his loneliness onto them. According to Massumi, even though zoos enact an exclusionary gesture on caged animals, zoos encourage spectator identification with the animals: “an identificatory confusion is overlaid upon the category separation inherent to the institution of the zoo” (72). His considerations of mortality align the individual human life with threatened species life—precarious, protected but

⁶⁴ For Greenwald Smith, this dissolution has broader implications: “The end of the novel sees narrative form floundering in the face of a Copernican revolution in species supremacy. The implication is that the form of the novel itself, and indeed perhaps the form of stories in general, is so firmly esconced in the legacy of capitalism and, more radically, in human exceptionalism that it cannot articulate challenges to these foundational beliefs without ceasing, in some fundamental sense, to tell a story” (104).

nonetheless vulnerable, ultimately doomed. The animals, whom T. reads as lonely, offer him an image of his own loneliness, as if only they can truly appreciate his own condition. Like him, “rare” animals were “at the forefront of loneliness” (135). T. admits to himself, however, that “he had no good reason for doing this” when he climbs, for the first time, into the enclosure of an aging Mexican grey wolf (135).

T.’s “identificatory confusion” in zoo enclosures can be productively understood in terms of what David Herman calls “discourse domains.” (20). According to Herman, discourse domains are “the arenas of conduct in which strategies for orienting to self-other relationships—including human-animal relationships—take shape. Discourse domains are frameworks for activity that, operative in a full range of cultural, subcultural, and interpersonal settings, determine what kinds of subjective experiences it is appropriate and warranted to attribute to others, nonhumans as well as human” (202).⁶⁵ According to Herman, “it is an established position within narratology to associate far-reaching mental-state attributions with fictional narratives” (223). Nonetheless, *How the Dead Dream* speculates very little on the mental-state attributes of nonhuman animals. It does, however, track the mental-state attributes of a human in several different discourse domains as he changes his thinking about how animals think. The passages in which T. is breaking into zoos emphasize the human quality of reflection, but the need to enter enclosures are never presented as the result of reasoning.

The narrator presents T.’s growth in his thinking about the relationship between humans and animals, but we are never given access to persuasive, logical accounts of why T. has to break into zoos to sooth his grief (or for any other reason). After spending a night in the zoo with the

⁶⁵ Herman uses the examples of “paleontological research, debating the status of animal minds, or going on a walk with a dog”—“Clearly, different sorts of ascriptive practices will be deemed appropriate and warranted across these different domains” (222).

Mexican grey wolf, T. reorients his perspective on animals. He reflects, “Animals were self-contained and people seemed to hold this against them—possibly because most of them had come to believe that animals should be like servants or children. Either they should work for men, suffer under a burden, or they should entertain them” (137). The distance separating T. from animals has shifted. When he kills the coyote earlier in the novel, he thinks in dualistic terms: me vs. not-me, like-me vs. not-like-me, human vs. non-human. He has not likened the animals to himself, but he chooses corollaries that are human.⁶⁶ These corollaries, however, are classed—kinds of humans that he is not himself, humans with less agency or even subjectivity. Nonetheless, T. realizes that he is only in the process of overcoming long held beliefs and prejudices about wild animals. Even as he recognizes that it is wrong to expect animals to either work for humans or entertain them, he harbors these desires himself: “Privately, he thought, at the heart of it, you wanted animals to turn to you in welcome” (138). The narrator insists on marking the unutterability of this sentiment. T. thinks this, but also maps the thought onto someone else, anyone else—“you.” T. knows how ridiculous it is to expect wild animals to actually turn tame and friendly when humans desire it, but the narrator suggests how difficult it is to come to terms with this desire and respond to it ethically.⁶⁷

T.’s attempts to recognize his grief and loneliness reflected back at him in “lonely” zoo animals leads him to see that his economic choices make him complicit in the loneliness of endangered animals. The more he researches, the more he sees that mass extinction is linked to the expansion of capital. He considers his own situation as a real estate developer and knows

⁶⁶ The narrator channels his thoughts as follows: “Beth was finished being dead, with her departure accomplished and her absence complete . . . The animals on the other hand were in the middle of dying, not only one at a time, but in sweeps and categories. This he found increasingly distressing” (139).

⁶⁷ It’s only later, after T. becomes a seasoned breaker-and-enterer-of-zoos—and after a run-in with a baby crocodile—that the narrator can state firmly “[t]hey were not pets” (164).

that he has a job to do but laments that “[t]here should have been a fair fight . . . there had to be reason, balance. There had to be, at the very least, recognition” (141).⁶⁸ But T. is interested in more than recognition. He wants to make animals his “study” because the animals in them were “close at hand,” so he researches them extensively (141).⁶⁹ He does not break in to “stalk” them.⁷⁰ Rather, he “enter[s] their enclosures [to] sit in one place to observe them” (164). He learns lock-picking to aid his study and visits zoos “at nighttime, which left his days free for commerce” (141). Susan McHugh notes the hypocrisy in T.’s attempts at “recognition”: “At night he breaks into zoos and captive breeding facilities in order to make himself vulnerable to these rare animals, explicitly not to look at them but to enable them to notice him feeling the loss of their kind” (249). This is not quite accurate, as the quotes above should make clear. T. certainly does break into the zoos to see them in a particular way—as well as to be seen by them. Nonetheless, McHugh criticizes T.’s actions thus: “It reads like a version of white-savior complex because it remains unclear what that does for the animals” (249). This point is an important one because the novel is clearly more concerned at this point in what T.’s actions do for T. than what they do for the animals.

T. attempts to put himself in the place of the vanishing animals in an effort to understand what their existence is like. David Watson notes that “the affective and ethical transformation” of T. is occasioned his brush with extinction and his realization that “the human species shares in

⁶⁸ T. begins subscribing to magazines that gave him information about vanishing animals (139).

⁶⁹ He also “only broke into accredited zoos” because he wants to see something besides misery—which is what he thinks he would see if he broke into unaccredited zoos with a low standard of treatment for the animals (151).

⁷⁰ According to Bateman, T.’s entrance into enclosures to sleep is a form of surrender. He argues, “His surrender to sleep in these scenes is simultaneously a surrender to the animals. If sleep is something we surrender to from the earliest age, then perhaps it is the condition of our ability to surrender to other forces and agencies as well” (164). Bateman reads T.’s act of sleeping as a gesture that resists “the modern idea that each sleeper should have his own private quarters” that “has led to the construction of larger houses and the destruction and displacement of still more wildlife” (164).

this drift toward extinction” (61).⁷¹ He visits some pupfish—which evolved in isolation and are therefore very rare—and has a similar sensation. He reflects, “It was easy to think of the fish existing in pure monotony” (161). He cannot understand what it is like to be these fish. At this sanctuary for the fish, he engages in metacognitive work, realizing that his ideas about the personalitylessness of fish are linked to how they figure as “lesser” beings than humans. When he breaks into enclosures, he begins to realize that he cannot actually understand their loneliness or their boredom, so he cedes power to the animals by falling asleep in their enclosures, often waking up with the animals nearer him than he expected (164-7).⁷² As he does this, his mother’s condition deteriorates. T.’s mother stops exhibiting some of the features that T. associates with her as an individual human being, such as cleanliness, materialism, pickiness with regard to the food she eats (146-8). The narrator does not use language that specifically animalizes T.’s mother, but T. hires a nurse to make sure that she bathes, as if an effort must be made by those involved to keep her human. He reflects later that his mother “was so often childlike” (159).

As T.’s reflection on how nonhumans should be treated develops, he begins to treat humans with more tenderness. Around the same time that his mother’s condition starts to deteriorate, T. meets Casey, the daughter of his assistant, Susan. Casey is an “angry and depressed” paraplegic (152). T. is “amused by her pugnacity”; she seems like a teenager to him, even though she’s only a few years younger than him (155). He spends time with her almost every week. When his mother fails to recognize him, he treats her with more care and patience than he did earlier in the novel (189-94). He also reflects on the affective conventions of family. He realizes that he is not *close* to his family: “Part of the growing estrangement from family, in

⁷¹ With a Sumatran rhinoceros, T. tries to fathom the animal’s loneliness and cannot gauge anything about what it thinks or feels. He obstructs his own sight to try to approximate how the rhinoceros sees (145).

⁷² According to Bateman, “Resting and sleeping symbolize T.’s flatness, but they also function as a melancholic identification with the dead” (159).

the end, was a simple product of freedom. It was the American way to pick and choose from a range of possibilities, not to be bound and obligated”—and so too with divorce (195). T. considers how animals are different (195-6).

T.'s reflections on the relationship between humans and nonhumans develops throughout the novel. He reflects, “The zoos were not new. What was new about them was the way the animals were valued as possessions more than symbols, the way the animals had become scarcer and scarcer as millennia passed so that they now were tradable” (196). Mass extinction turns zoos into mausoleums where animals are preserved on their way to disappearance. This realization eventually overwhelms T. He spends several nights with elephants who remember him from previous nights, and he begins to feel what he thinks is their loneliness, boredom, and rage (198-200). He resolves not to return to zoos anymore for fear of being infected with their ennui(199).

The last few chapters of the novel relate T.'s trip to Belize, where he is developing a tourist resort.⁷³ About halfway through the novel, he buys a jungle island in Belize to develop a tourist destination and initiates plans to strip the shoreline of vegetation, to ship in sand from elsewhere to make the spot look more traditionally tropical (111-3). When he takes a trip to supervise the construction, it is on the eve of a major tropical storm (about which he is “not worried”) (204). The storm functions as both a tragic human disaster and a spectacular nonhuman reclamation of space. Flooding spoils the man-made landscapes around the hotel he's staying at, and the television feed the guests are using to monitor the storm's progress fails (205-

⁷³ While T.'s real estate business is apparently based mostly in the United States, his foreign enterprises mark him as one of the elites of neoliberal globalization who are not tied down—financially or otherwise—the any particular nation-state (Harvey 35-6).

6). The power is out and the gardens are destroyed when the storm finally “blew itself out”

(207). T. reflects on the flimsiness of human works:

Mastery was only a moment in the mind—of other men, of yourself. Like the stock market, a consensus of optimism, a pure abstraction, nothing to the tsunamis, the boiling sun, the plate tectonics. The social compact was abstraction—roads, buildings, and a temporary agreement about behavior. That was it. The matter beneath it all was what lasted, and meanwhile, always, the world of people was on the edge of dissolution. (207)

These reflections are framed as the drunken musings of a bored T. as he drinks wine in a hotel without any electricity. Nonetheless, they present a commentary on T.’s earlier insistence on and fetishization of control. In these musings, control is precarious, necessarily temporary, and perhaps illusory. The control he thinks he exercises is dwarfed by natural disasters. Emblems of human control over nature like roads are ultimately reduced to mere matter when stripped of their human-endowed meaning.

The next day, when people can finally leave the hotel, T. wants to get a boat to his island to assess the damage. When trying to find a pilot, however, he finds out that the nearby village has been decimated. His workers’ lives are in disarray. His foreman’s son has not returned and is probably drowned (211). T. tries to empathize with his foreman, and—in an odd moment—asks for a guide down the main river into the jungle “to the preserve where the jaguars live” (211). When he finds out his development property is “totaled,” he lends his hotel room to a family whose house had been destroyed (212). He calls his mother to tell her he will be out of touch for a few weeks, but she cannot hear him well and does not recognize him (213). He heads inland and wonders, “Was that where everyone would go, once the coastlines were gone? Higher ground” (213). He considers the jungle the place where men can go to be animal again,

but also considers what it means to be human: “you did not have to know yourself to be fully human. There were always those who did not, and no one said they were beasts” (214). This last passage seems to connect with T.’s last conversation with his mother, who does not recognize him—or even herself. He clings to the notion of his mother as human but—uncharacteristic at this point in the novel—relies on a logic that appeals to what “no one” said for affirmation. His ambitions are animal freedom, but he wants human-ness for his mother.

In the jungle, T.’s guide explains to him that the odds of seeing a jaguar, even on a jaguar preserve, are extremely low (215). T. replies, “It’s OK . . . I just want to be where they live. I want to be in the theater. You know? But I don’t expect them to give me a show” (215). The metaphor is an odd one because, even framing the jaguar search in terms of theater belies T.’s desire to see a jaguar. He may not realistically expect a show, but he cannot help but want one. The passage echoes his frustration with the inconsiderate family in the zoo earlier in the novel. Even as T. tries to separate himself from the selfish human spectator that appreciates nonhuman animals only for their spectacular qualities, he indicates that he is—in fact—much like them. He reflects that he “had mostly wanted to get away” (216). The “mostly” here is telling because it is evidence of the desires that T. knows to be illicit or unethical but that he harbors nonetheless.

After a few days of travel, the narration begins to change subtly. T. returns to camp to find his guide unresponsive, perhaps dead (219).⁷⁴ He is five miles from the riverbank and a few days on the river away from anyone who can help him, but he resolves to drag the guide’s body back to human-populated areas.⁷⁵ The passages following the guide’s death relate T.’s hapless attempts to drag the body to the river and navigate a boat downriver to settlements (219-24). In

⁷⁴ This discovery occurs directly after T. reflects on how dependent he is on humans and suffers hints that his fantasy of re-animalization is superficial (218).

⁷⁵ His trial is excruciating, and “once or twice, exhausted, he found himself weeping, though he did not feel grief” (221).

these sections, T. is never referred to by Thomas or “T.,” as he has been referred to throughout the novel. His identity is effaced, and T. becomes simply “he.” T. loses his name and, with it, his identity. Specifically, his actions become indistinguishable from the actions of any other forest entity to whom masculine pronouns apply.

NARRATION

The narration in *How the Dead Dream* consistently reasserts the primacy of human experience in opposition to the experiences of both other humans and nonhumans. It does so, that is, until the end of the novel. Much of the novel reinforces a familiar realist humanism at the expense of narrating with the nonhuman in mind. This reinforcement is expressed most when the narrative “stops” and the narrator reports T.’s reflections. The reportage of time passing and events happening takes a back seat to the supposedly human faculty of reflection.⁷⁶ Near the end of the novel, however, the discourse domain changes dramatically. Earlier in the novel, narrative depended on the human faculty of reflection and a particularly human experience of the passage of time. When T.’s ability to reflect gets muddled, and his sense of the passage of time becomes less distinct, the narrative tools to represent experience that is uniquely human become inadequate, and representational strategies Millet employs reflect experiences that are not particularly human.

At the end of the novel, however, T. fades as a distinct character separate from other characters and his surroundings. Caren Irr writes of the end of the novel: “[it] closes with a dangerous trek through a tropical forest” and “resolves in the hero’s renunciation of his drive to know his environment” (86). After the death of T.’s guide in the Belizean jungle, the narrator

⁷⁶ Herman notes that “forms of reasoning” have long been held up as “threshold criteria for species identity” (100).

stops referring to T. as “T.” and instead T. becomes simply a masculine pronoun. It is this masculine pronoun the narrator refers to when T.’s reflections are expressed. After growing frustrated with the oarless boat and exhausted, T. sets up the tent on land and considers that he has spent much of his life in buildings, in cities, and how far he is from cities now (228). He absent-mindedly notices “an animal perched on a branch” but does not identify it (231). The boat accidentally escapes, and T. is stranded in the jungle, where he reflects, after indulging in some of his remaining whisky, “When a thing became very scarce, that was when it was finally also seen to be sublime and lovely” (238). T. thinks he finally comes to a mature epiphany about the value of animals, even though “the market had failed to see the animals for what they were . . . worth far more than single commodities” (238). The market, T. realizes, will take too long to realize its mistake, however (238). T. falls asleep with these reflections only to awaken because “an animal lay on the right hand and arm through the mosquito net” (239). T. cannot see the animal because it is dark and he refuses to move and risk disturbing it. The description here is vague: “There was a heft to it, but it was not huge; it was neither large nor small. It was a mammal, certainly. It was not a jaguar, nor an ocelot or a margay, nothing feline and sly—more likely a young tapir or a paca, large, stout, snouty, and ground-dwelling” (239-40). He tries to fall asleep again into his whisky reverie, he periodically wakes up and his reflective sensations are reported by the narrator. This act is reported as follows: “They were sleeping simply, as the other animals did, sleeping and dreaming of the life that once might have been . . . As the animal slept its way through time until the end of it came, so would he” (241). This passage first uses the plural pronoun to unite the human and the nonhuman. In the next sentence, “the animal” could well apply to either the human or the nonhuman. The last few pages play on this ambiguity. Stripped of his name, and his human identification, T. and “the animal” become

closely aligned, even indistinguishable. According to Caren Irr, “both creatures are shadowed by the threat of extinction” (86). The passage following the portion quoted above reports a narrative of “the mother” leaving its young alone. This speculation could be T.’s. He may be considering a plausible narrative to account for this lone animal’s snuggling up to him. The narrative also applies to T. in his grief over his mother’s deterioration, as well as what an animal might think coming upon a stationary, lost mammal in the jungle. The reflections are therefore not rigidly coded as those of either the human protagonist or the nonhuman character.

The human is not subsumed by the nonhuman, however. Some combinations of pronoun and verb suggest human action more than others. Within any given paragraph some sentences may seem to refer to a human actant while others are more ambiguous. The narrative focalization becomes more communal. The actions are all shared to one degree or another. No actions are clearly separated into the categories of human or nonhuman. The ambiguity presents some narratological confusion. This confusion is best explained by referring to Seymour Chatman’s theory of “existents” (107). According to Chatman, existents are “the objects contained in story-space . . . character and setting” (107). Chatman calls for what he calls an “open” theory of character, one in which character “is reconstructed by the audience from evidence announced or implicit in an original construction and communicated by the discourse” (119). The problem with “reconstructing” character in the passages at the end of *How the Dead Dream* is that, while the original constructions clearly delineate between T. and “a mammal” who is not T., the “evidence announced or implicit” that the audience is supposed to use to reconstruct character fails to clearly delineate the two.

These last passages also narrativize a shift from humanism to posthumanism outlined by Cary Wolfe. While Wolfe carries several definitions of posthumanism through his book, one

useful definition he uses to describe posthumanism is “a new theoretical model for biological, mechanical, and communicational processes that removed the human and *Homo sapiens* from any particularly privileged position in relation to matters of meaning, information, and cognition” (xii). In *How the Dead Dream*, T. clearly occupies a privileged place in the narrative, and the emphasis on his actions and reflections mark the text as privileging human experience—even as nonhuman experience is pondered by T. According to Wolfe, “the human occupies a new place in the universe, a universe now populated by what I am prepared to call nonhuman subjects” (47). *How the Dead Dream* presents an interesting case in which the philosophical question of what it means to be a subject is explored novelistically. Narrative attention is never fully taken away from the human in favor of the nonhuman, but the attention of the human subject of the novel is frequently drawn to the experience of nonhumans. Furthermore, the plural pronouns at the end of the novel grammatically encode a decentering of the human, though they do not—consequently—privilege the nonhuman as such. The narrator seems to follow T.’s thinking about walking “to the sea” in the morning, but attribution of these thoughts is not explicit. Indeed, what the narrator reports is reflection on likeness: “they breathed and breathed. They both had lungs, they loved to sleep, they liked to be alongside each other in the comfort of their rhythm” (243).

The last paragraphs emphasize the materiality and affect of closeness, “the feel of others like itself here close” (243). These passages seem to echo the scene earlier in the novel when T. hits the coyote and lifts her body. The way *How the Dead Dream* functions as an eco-novel is by asking big picture questions about what something is worth in the twenty-first century, when apocalyptic predictions increasingly warn us about the extinctions of humans and nonhumans. When apocalyptic predictions become increasingly mundane and fail to be newsworthy, what

constitutes “newsworthy” is the effect of an affect economy. “Appropriate” grieving becomes increasingly untenable. Millet’s treatment of T.’s affective growth dramatizes the difficulty of reconciling capitalist success and conservation. The narration in *How the Dead Dream*, ultimately, takes a more productive approach than the protagonist. While T. tries to juggle his grief for the oncoming and already-here extinction of humans and nonhumans alike with his business interests, the narrator of Millet’s novel abandon’s the privileged place of the human in the moment of crisis. From this critical moment of ideological change, the novel enacts a radical shift that T. cannot perform himself.

Beyond Interdependence Day:

Pyrotechnic Storytelling and the Unbelievable-But-True in David Foster Wallace's *Infinite Jest*

In this chapter, I will focus on several passages from David Foster Wallace's novel *Infinite Jest* that present the reader with information about the ecological catastrophe in the novel's storyworld. In *Infinite Jest*, pyrotechnic narration and ekphrasis serve to mediate between an implausible (though factual) historical narrative and the stylized version of history the characters in the novel accept as truth. To make sense of Wallace's approach to representing geopolitical violence in the novel, it is necessary to understand his treatment of the concept of believability. The plausible plot of realist fiction would seem to be far removed from Wallace's famously satirical aesthetic agenda, but verisimilitude is central to how his narrator in *Infinite Jest* treats historical truth within the novel's storyworld. I will put Wallace's project in dialogue with Amitav Ghosh's recent argument that literary fiction in the realist tradition has struggled to address the problems of climate change. I will briefly situate Wallace relative to this realist tradition because I think critics have largely ignored Wallace's concern with realism, as well as his environmentalism, in favor of connecting his work to topics Wallace himself wrote about—such as irony and postmodernism. Ultimately, I argue that in *Infinite Jest*, Wallace interrogates the idea of interdependence in its various valences—political, ecological, and medial—through an unbelievable-yet-true environmental catastrophe narrative. While interdependence is ironized in the novel as a geopolitical relationship, it is complicated by Wallace's layering of media to present his history of environmental injustice. Through the concept of “interdependence,” Wallace shows how geopolitical and environmental histories are a highly mediated constructs, narratives that are themselves composed of various media and competing interpretations.

Wallace's pyrotechnic storytelling presents the ecological consequences of environmentally unjust geopolitics, and his humor and overdescription attend to the unbelievable-yet-true quality of environmental disaster. The ecological crisis that the characters in *Infinite Jest* (which was published in 1996 but is set in the future) face is narrated alongside a film version of that narrative. The conceit itself requires extensive description to even summarize. Briefly then: a character in the novel, Mario Incandenza, makes a puppet-show movie about the political rise of an American president and his policy of dumping toxins in Canada. Wallace's narrator provides ekphrastic description of that film and periodically jumps in to comment on the historical accuracy of Mario's project. This commentary frequently takes the form of assurances that Mario's representation of the ecological narrative—though appearing to be outlandish and ridiculous—is actually close to historical fact. In doing so, Wallace maintains the prestige and realism of literary fiction while representing a dystopian ecological catastrophe. Wallace's comedic epic works to legitimize the strange-but-true narratives of environmental novelty.

Wallace shows how environmental justice eludes historical documentation. In the novel, government officials cover up toxic dumping and characters are left with limited journalistic accounts and rumors to account for birth anomalies and other evidence of poisoning. Through Mario's film, Wallace points to the ways in which various media construct environmental histories that are by turns outlandish and mundane. The causes and effects of environmental catastrophe are both mired in a mix of journalistic fact and tall tale. What counts as a "believable" or "plausible" history of environmental injustice is complicated when the facts prove to be just as fantastic as tabloid headlines and conspiracy theories. The anomalies caused

by environmental disaster defy realist representation by being so far removed from what is taken to be common or everyday.

Amitav Ghosh notes that literary fiction struggles to represent climate change because of the unbelievability of climate weather events.⁷⁷ Literary fiction gained its prestige and popularity by maintaining the illusion that its narratives were true despite their fantastic qualities. Climate change exists beyond the scope of literary fiction because its weather events do not achieve requisite believability. In *The Great Derangement*, Ghosh tries to account for what he sees as literary fiction's lackluster response to climate crisis. According to Ghosh, literary fiction has not responded to the climate crisis for several complex reasons. One has to do with the way novels depict reality.⁷⁸ According to Ghosh, in the eighteenth century mainstream literary fiction rose in prestige and popularity because of its ability to appeal to readers' sense of realistic narrative (16-7).⁷⁹ Even while recounting improbable events, novels insisted on the illusion of probability and gained prestige through this adherence to the illusion of realism, especially in contrast to other forms, such as the epic, the myth, the fable, etc. Because the fantastic weather events of our age of climate crisis are significant precisely because they go against the statistical evidence of several centuries, Ghosh argues that literary writers risk losing the prestige associated with literary fiction by representing events that are inherently unrealistic (24-6). Furthermore, novels buck up against the scalar magnitude of climate change. Its causes

⁷⁷ Amitav Ghosh, *The Great Derangement: Climate Change and the Unthinkable*. U. of Chicago P., 2016

⁷⁸ In *The Rise of the Novel*, Ian Watt argues that what was so novel about the novel form was its ability to represent human experience realistically. Novelists follow "a set of narrative procedures" common only to the novel and found "rarely in other genres"—what Watt calls "formal realism." The chief doctrine of formal realism, though only implicit, is that the novel form is used to present "a full and authentic report of human experience," which is accomplished with special attention to "details" and "a more largely referential use of language." Ian Watt. *The Rise of the Novel: Studies in Defoe, Richardson and Fielding*. Penguin, 1963. Pg. 32. See also Georg Lukács. *The Theory of the Novel: A Historico-Philosophical Essay on the Forms of Great Epic Literature*. Trans. Anna Bostock. Cambridge. M.I.T. Press, 1971.

⁷⁹ See also Nancy Armstrong. *Desire and Domestic Fiction: A Political History of the Novel*. New York: Oxford UP, 1987.

are centuries old, exceeding the temporal scope of even epic literary novels (61-2). Its causes are also global in scope, exceeding the spatial limitations of the intimate and distinctive worlds constructed by literary novelists (63).

Although Wallace was skeptical towards the kind of literary fiction that Ghosh clearly has in mind—that is, literary fiction in the realist tradition—critics have been conflicted about the realistic aspects of his work. Wallace describes himself as “clearly not” in the realist tradition, but even with the blatantly unrealistic satirical elements in his fiction he tried “to countenance and render real aspects of real experiences that have been previous excluded from art” (McCaffery 139, 140). What Wallace calls “Big R” realism of literary fiction is not what he is going for, though there is an element of realism that he holds dear.⁸⁰ Some critics have noted realist qualities in Wallace’s fiction. For instance, Timothy Jacobs argues that “[i]n *Infinite Jest*, Wallace revives the mimetic tradition of realism . . . by defamiliarizing current literary perceptions and expectations within his artifact” (216).⁸¹ Still, Wallace’s satirical novel, at first glance, makes few claims to believability. It is hardly the kind of realist literary fiction that Ghosh is writing about. Frank Louis Cioffi calls *Infinite Jest* “a science fiction novel of a sort insofar as it presents a future world” (165). While its literariness has rarely been disputed, how to categorize *Infinite Jest* has been the subject of much critical debate. Though it may be obvious, Tore Rye Andersen notes that the dust jacket for *Infinite Jest*’s first edition makes sure

⁸⁰ In his interview with Larry McCaffery, Wallace, who was writing *Infinite Jest* at the time, makes the distinction between “big-R” realism “in the Howells/Wharton/Updike school of U.S. Realism” and “little-r realistic” (139). According to Wallace, “the binary of realistic vs. unrealistic fiction” is an illusory distinction constructed by and for writers in the Big R tradition of contemporary fiction “to marginalize stuff that isn’t soothing and conservative” (139).

⁸¹ Catherine Nichols, conversely, argues that “Wallace uses irony, metafiction, and polyphonic intertextuality not only to de-center empty avant-gardism throughout *Infinite Jest*, but to defamiliarize the hallmarks of classical realism” (14). Nichols, Catherine. “Dialogizing Postmodern Carnival: David Foster Wallace’s *Infinite Jest*.” *Critique* 43.1 (Fall 2001): 3-16.

to distinguish *Infinite Jest* from other genres: “Wallace and/or his publisher have clearly found it important that their book be characterized as a novel” (257). Marshall Boswell sees Wallace, despite his admirable work in several areas of writing—short stories and journalism most notably—as primarily a writer of encyclopedic novels, of which *Infinite Jest* is the most obvious example, and argues that Wallace saw himself as such (264). In a similar vein, Tom LeClair regards the “prodigious fiction” of Wallace, Richard Powers, and William T. Vollmann as “information systems, as long-running programs of data with a collaborative genesis” (14). Wallace himself had much to say about the kind of writing a serious writer should do.

Much of the critical response to Wallace’s work—especially the critical response initially following *Infinite Jest*—has been skewed by Wallace’s own forthright publications about his aims in writing fiction. Wallace’s essays and interviews frequently comment on the responsibility of artists and the proper goals of fiction. Wallace’s 1993 essay “E Unibus Pluram: Television and U.S. Fiction,” is frequently read as a manifesto outlining Wallace’s aesthetic theory. In this essay, Wallace argues that “irony and ridicule are entertaining and effective, and . . . at the same time they are agents of a great despair and stasis in U.S. culture, and . . . for aspiring fictionists they pose terrifically vexing problems” (171). While irony was, for postmodern artists (especially fiction writers) a useful tool for critiquing dominant power structures, Wallace points out what he sees as the co-opting of irony by television and mass culture, making irony lose its bite, turning it into “weary cynicism” (184). To counter the overabundance of irony in 1990’s U.S. culture, Wallace suggests that “the next real literary ‘rebels’ in this country might well emerge as some weird bunch of ‘anti-rebels,’ born oglers who dare to back away from ironic watching, who have the childish gall actually to endorse single-

entendre values” (192).⁸² Many viewed Wallace as therefore attempting to break from the tradition of postmodern irony to advocate for a new sincerity in literary fiction without resorting to an outdated form of literary realism.

What this critical concern amounts to is Wallace setting the terms under which his work, especially *Infinite Jest*, would be discussed for almost two decades. Bradley J. Fest correctly suggests that “a ‘standard’ reading of his fiction has emerged,” one that “revolve[s] around irony and his sense of being a latecomer in relation to his postmodern forbears” (284). Mary K. Holland argues that “*Infinite Jest* fails to deliver on the agenda that Wallace set for it, not only because it fails to eschew empty irony for the earnestness that Wallace imagines but also, and more importantly, because it fails to recognize and address the cultural drive toward narcissism that fuels and is fueled by that irony” (218). Timothy Jacobs compares the ideologies expressed in Wallace’s *Infinite Jest* and Fyodor Dostoevsky’s *The Brothers Karamazov* to argue that in *Infinite Jest* “Wallace subtly suggests that the same kind of cultural nihilism of Dostoevsky’s time is apparent in contemporary American literature” (269). Iannis Goerlandt argues that *Infinite Jest* “explicitly functionalizes the abstract ‘superstructure’ of poetic texts to counter an ironic reading,” unlike the “Entertainment” cartridge in the novel’s plot (310). These critical accounts of Wallace and irony function to focus on the ways in which Wallace is mired in a tradition of postmodern metafiction that had rejected literary realism as outdated—even as Wallace himself tried to rehabilitate the reputation of some realist literary principles.

⁸² Other literary critics have focused specifically on irony in Wallace’s work. Mark Bresnan’s essay on *Infinite Jest*, for instance, focuses on play and anxiety. Bresnan writes that “In each of *Infinite Jest*’s three interconnected plots, characters confront dilemmas that require them to renounce their autonomy in order to engage in playful activities, including sports, recreation, and leisure” (52). Petrus van Ewijk sees Wallace’s treatment of Alcoholics Anonymous in *Infinite Jest* as a curative rebuttal of irony-obsessed mass consumer culture or at least a temporary safe haven from it (143). Allard Den Dulk offers a systematic comparison of the “irony critique” of David Foster Wallace (by focusing on *Infinite Jest*) and Søren Kierkegaard (325). Adam Kelly argues that *Infinite Jest* “instantiates a new brand of sincerity in a formal and performative manner” (n. pag.).

Curiously, few critics have commented on Wallace's environmentalism. The most influential account of how Wallace's fiction comments on environmentalism is almost certainly Heather Houser's description of the linkage between the affect of disgust and somatic sickness in *Infinite Jest*. She argues as follows:

Wallace's fiction of social, ecological, and somatic poisoning molds a medicalized environmental consciousness with disgust as its emotional core. Activated by the imbrication of body and environment, disgust is a conduit to engaging with human and nonhuman others as it counteracts forms of detachment that block environmental and social investment. (120)

For Houser, bodies and environments are always-already interdependent, but the way we have access to this interdependence is through analyzing bodily responses to environments—what she understands as affect. Houser roots the environmental and somatic sickness in *Infinite Jest* in a broader cultural obsession with detachment. She shows how Wallace's grammatical structures, such as passive voice and strings of prepositional phrases, figuratively detach the narrator from narrated bodies—the objects being described and the synecdoches for those things, respectively (122-3). She reads the style of *Infinite Jest* as symptomatic of a detached social attitude that produces or necessitates a toxic governmental and political policy of detachment: "*Infinite Jest* expounds its claims for somatic/ecological interdependence by conceiving of urban space *in terms of* the medicalized human body. *Infinite Jest* animates its setting through human forms such that contemporary space and the body are 'cobuilt'" (129). Houser tracks Wallace's descriptions of the landscape around Enfield, noting "the body is the vehicle for a conceit that generates a medicalized symbolic landscape" (130). The affect of disgust is unique in its political efficacy because it—unlike other affects, Houser argues—is unignorable. Houser's

interpretation is perhaps too sweeping. Not every instance of *Infinite Jest* that addresses problems concerning the environment is charged with disgust. Furthermore, it is not clear whether *Infinite Jest* produces the affect of disgust in the reader through something like an objective correlative or whether Wallace's descriptions of the characters' affective states (or both) are supposed to lead us to ecological consciousness.

N. Katherine Hayles has a more nuanced take. Hayles argues that in *Infinite Jest*, "possessive individualism and redemptive wilderness interact destructively with one another when the illusion of autonomy is allowed to blot out the fact of recursive interrelation" (678). She explains: "As *Infinite Jest* suggests, adding virtual environments to the mix, far from offering an escape from contemporary ecological problems, is likely to intensify the already existing paradoxes to the point of implosion" (678). For Hayles, *Infinite Jest* critiques the idea that the abject—waste and pollution, for instance—can just be dumped somewhere and safely ignored. As she suggests, because these wastes "always return[] in recursive cycles of interconnection that inexorably tie together the sanctified and the polluted," the media "serve as the social mechanism" which both expels and returns this waste (687). This point is underscored by Wallace's recursive narrative structure in *Infinite Jest*. Readers are given information "through mediating pathways" such as Wallace's notorious endnotes (688).

While Bradley J. Felt does not directly comment on Wallace's environmentalism, he brings up the theme of apocalypse so crucial to environmental thinking. He sees Wallace as countering the apocalypticism of postmodern metafiction. For Felt, Wallace's "*Infinite Jest* and his subsequent fiction dramatize the profound necessity for literature to continue imagining a world in which the future is not always already eschatologically foreclosed" (127). Felt is more interested in how Wallace inverts postmodern tropes about nuclear warfare than the actual

environmental disaster on-hand in the novel, though he does note that the crux of Wallace's depiction of environmental disaster is the "highly mediated textual layering" in Mario Incandenza's filmic representation (132).

INTERDEPENDENCE IN THE YEAR OF THE DEPEND ADULT UNDERGARMENT

Published in 1996, *Infinite Jest* takes place in a dystopian future world. In the world of *Infinite Jest*, numbered years of the Gregorian calendar (like 1996) have been replaced with names of years sponsored by corporations to generate tax revenue. Much of the novel's action takes place in the Year of the Depend Adult Undergarment (Y.D.A.U.), which critics say corresponds variously to 2008, 2009, or 2011. The novel speculates comically on what kinds of technologies, language, and geopolitical structures will govern daily life barely a decade after the novel is published. While readers become accustomed to the sci-fi neologisms throughout the first few hundred pages of the epic novel, the main "history" of post-1996 political decisions that bring us to life in the Y.D.A.U. is narrated chiefly through an ekphrastic description of a student-made film celebrating/parodying that history. Here's a broad-strokes summary: when NATO dissolves, the United States and Canada are presented with an environmental crisis concerning how to deal with waste from nuclear warheads. Because the germophobe U.S. president does not want the waste on U.S. land, he "strong-arm[s]" Canada and Mexico into signing on to a "CONTINENTAL ALLIANCE" called the "Organization of North American Nations"—or O.N.A.N. as it is abbreviated—in order to dump waste into northeastern United States and "expropriate" that poisoned region to Canada (Miller 9, Wallace 391). The ratification of this new geopolitical entity is known as "Interdependence," the day of which is celebrated on November 8 (31). One of the consequences of the formation of O.N.A.N. is the sectioning off of

a large chunk of northeastern United States and southeastern Canada to create The Great Concavity (or The Great Convexity from the Canadian perspective), into which the United States jettisons toxins. While many New Englanders evacuate the area, the toxic waste that is basically dumped into Canada has terrible effects on residents of Quebec.

Infinite Jest weaves three major threads into its plot by focusing on the actions of three loose groups: a Québécois separatist organization called Les Assassins des Fauteuils Rollents, several Boston-area substance-abusers associated with Ennet House Drug and Alcohol Recovery House [sic], and the students, faculty, and staff at a Boston-area tennis academy called the Enfield Tennis Academy (E.T.A. for short). The plot revolves around the Incandenza family. James O. Incandena, founder of E.T.A. and filmmaker, and his wife Avril have three children: Orin, Mario, and Hal. James O. Incandenza allegedly created a mythical film cartridge called The Entertainment that is so entertaining that it causes catatonia in anyone who views it. Various organizations in the novel are seeking a copy of the cartridge. The scenes in *Infinite Jest* are not presented in chronological order, but Richard Stock argues that the general structure of Hal's narrative is chronological after the initial scene, the first in the novel, which presents Hal after everything else in the novel has occurred (44). Though Hal is more central to the novel's plot, it is Mario who occasions much of the novel's ecological focus. Mario, the middle child, assists his father on film shoots and inherits a great deal of professional equipment when James kills himself. Mario's first finished film cartridge is a puppet show shot in a janitor's closet chronicling the history of the founding of O.N.A.N., a project that has proved so popular with the faculty and students of Enfield Tennis Academy that the school screens it every year on Interdependence Day for the entire Academy. An ekphrastic description of one such screening,

on Interdependence Day Y.D.A.U., is the source of readers' historical understanding of *Infinite Jest's* storyworld's ecological crisis.

Much of the authority of the improbable-yet-true climate crisis narrative comes from the intervention of Wallace's omniscient narrator. Frank Louis Cioffi aligns the show-off-y narrative voice with Wallace's penchant for verbose prose (167-8). According to Paul Dawson, the omniscient narrator is a voice associated by most critics with the canonical works of nineteenth-century (Big R) realist novels, and it waned with early twentieth-century modernism's emphasis on subjectivity (2). In the twenty-first century, it is a bit of an anachronism in literary fiction, sometimes viewed as either philosophically untenable and/or politically conservative (Dawson 2, 9-10). Nonetheless, many contemporary fiction writers, such as Wallace, adapt the conventions of omniscient narration for new historical contexts (Dawson 2). As Dawson sees it, the return of omniscient narrators in literary fiction is a response to "the decline in the cultural authority of the novel" (5). Wallace's narrator performs many of the rhetorical features Dawson aligns with omniscient third-person storytellers: providing intrusive commentary, ranging freely across space and time, and providing access to the consciousness of characters (1). And, indeed, the narration in *Infinite Jest* is such a performance. Cioffi goes so far as to argue that "the novel's performative gestures, its Brechtian alienation effects that interrupt the flow of the narrative and call attention to the work *qua* performance, encourage readers to become conscious of their own performances as readers" (168). Dawson describes several types of twenty-first century omniscient narrators, even using Wallace's story "Octet" as an example of what he calls the "ironic moralist," but his description of the "pyrotechnic storyteller" is a more apt type to account for *Infinite Jest's* narration (73, 111). The narrator of *Infinite Jest* maintains a distinct, idiosyncratic style, even while presenting the consciousness of disparate characters. Dawson

describes the pyrotechnic storyteller as: “typically humorous or satirical, employing a flourishing and expansive narrative voice, a garrulous conversational tone, to assert control over the events being narrated, eschewing the impersonality of analytic omniscience to the extent that the narrative voice often overshadows the characters being described or analyzed” (111).⁸³

Wallace’s narrator is intrusive, but the voice “produced most strikingly by expressive features of style” (Dawson 111). Dawson notes that authorial style is not a quality of omniscience, but it “establishes an idiosyncratic presence tied to the narrative voice itself” (111). These descriptions, which are meant to describe the category of pyrotechnic storytellers, apply directly to Wallace: “For David Foster Wallace, stylistic pyrotechnics, in the form of extended sentences replete with qualifications and parentheticals, function as a way to elaborate the convolutions of individual character thought, while retaining a deliberately bland “style” in terms of lexical choice and figurative range” (115). Dawson describes Wallace’s pyrotechnic narration: “These features of style—overdescription, metaphorical excess, and narratorial elaboration of character thought—are all ways in which the omniscient pyrotechnic storyteller rhetorically performs the controlling presence of the authorial narrator” (116). Such features are on full display throughout the novel, but I want to focus on the narration that most directly addresses the ecological crisis in *Infinite Jest*’s storyworld.

Before the novel gets around to presenting Mario’s cartridge screening, readers get an important hint of the geopolitics of environmental disaster in the Year of the Depend Adult Undergarment. The day before Mario’s screening (and almost 100 pages before the description of that screening begins), Hal is working on “the only really challenging . . . class” he has: “Separatism and Return: Québécois History from Frontenac Through the Age of

⁸³ Though *Infinite Jest* is outside the scope of Dawson’s study, he notes that this type of omniscient narrator can be found in “much of the work of David Foster Wallace” (111).

Interdependence” (309). Channeling Hal’s thoughts, the narrator remarks that although Hal “[found] the stuff rather more high-concept and less dull than he’d expected—seeing himself as at his innermost core apolitical—[he] nevertheless found the Québécois-Separatism mentality almost impossibly convolved and confused and impervious to U.S. parsing” (310-1). Wallace frequently focalizes through characters in his third-person omniscient narration, most notably Hal, though Hal is not the novel’s narrator (as Greg Carlisle argues) (45, Carlisle 205). The text-proper at this point does not go into the environmental disaster, but an endnote does. Instead, when the narrator describes the antics of a Québécois separatist terrorist cell he notes that when Hal considers U.S.-Québécois relations he feels “nauseous . . . as if someone had been reading mail of Hal’s that he thought he’d thrown away” (311). Without getting into much detail, Wallace’s narrator presents Hal’s feelings alongside the hint of environmental injustice, positioning Hal as the beneficiary of U.S. geopolitical gerrymandering. This is the first instance of the disgust that Houser identifies as linked to environmental toxicity. It also hints at the complexity of the geopolitical relations the ekphrastic description of Mario’s film will take pains to elucidate almost 100 pages later.

An “Inter-Day Eve” conversation between Hal Incandenza and his brother Orin, lumped in an extremely long endnote, introduces the geopolitical situation later addressed in Mario’s film (1007n110). Orin, a professional football player, wants to impress a woman interviewing him who has asked about Canadian politics, so he calls to ask his brother Hal what the word “samizdat” means and why it would be connected to their family (1011n110). This question hints at the future revelation that Orin and Hal’s father created The Entertainment being used for terrorist purposes. Then Orin wants to know why the Québécois separatist movement shifted “seemingly overnight” to anti-O.N.A.N. agitation about The Great Concavity (1012n110). Hal,

like many who do not suffer obvious effects of others' environmental decisions, identifies as a "privileged white seventeen-year-old U.S. male" and therefore asks Orin "why not just say *who cares?*" (1016n110). Hal voices his doubts about Orin's selfish reasons for wanting to know about Québécois politics, but he eventually tells Orin the "obvious response" to questions about Québécois terrorism: "the Concavity—the physical fact and fallout of the Concavity—it's Québec's problem. Something like 750 clicks of border along the Concavity, with attendant seepage, for Notre Rai Pays" (1017n110). Orin replies "Yes plus the brunt of the airborne wastes from the high-altitude ATHSCMEs, plus being the province that gets splatted when the E.W.D. vehicles overshoot the Concavity" (1017n110). Not only is the U.S. jettisoning toxic waste onto land occupied by Québécois, they also set up fans to make sure that the airborne toxins from the dump do not make their way back southward. What becomes clearer from Orin and Hal's conversation is that the risk of consequences from environmentally risky acts is not shared equally among Canada and the United States. Also, Hal and Orin, though apparently political neophytes, know enough about U.S. dumping in Canada to have an informed conversation about it. According to Hal, "it's Québec that's borne the brunt of what Canada had to take" (1017n110). It is Québec that suffers

the gooey end of the Canadian dipstick. It's mostly now western Québécois kids the size of Volkswagens schlumpfing around with no skulls. It's Québécois with chloracne and tremors and olfactory hallucinations and infants born with just one eye in the middle of their forehead. It's eastern Québec that gets green sunsets and indigo rivers and grotesquely asymmetrical snow-crystals and front lawns they have to beat back with a machete to get to their driveways. They get the feral hamster incursions and the Infant-depredations and the corrosive fogs" (1017n110).

The description here aligns closely with a later description in Mario's cartridge. The correlation between this laundry list of Québec's harrowing consequences of living with nuclear waste and the later description in Mario's cartridge suggest that these consequences are generally known but little cared about. The mixture of harrowing consequences with comical description also points to an attitude shared by many characters who take the daily reality of environmental injustice as a bit funny if it's not happening to them. As Mathieu Duplay puts it, "Wallace's particular brand of terror is fully compatible with an acute sense of humour" (77). Though the narrator's presentation here is of Hal's direct discourse, several of the terms—and even ways of thinking—are common to several privileged characters in *Infinite Jest*.

Wallace's narration also blends extreme, unbelievable descriptions of environmental consequences with more plausible, realistic consequences of toxic exposure. Kids the size of Volkswagens are paired with odd-colored sunsets. Because the description is put in the mouth of a (sometimes sarcastic) character, it is not clear how seriously readers should take Hal's characterization. Hal's hyperbole is delivered with the jaded cadence of a snarky, privileged teenager poking fun at dire (though novel) environmental consequences. The mix of plausible and implausible descriptions also suggests that Hal does not really know the extent of the consequences of toxic dumping, electing to repeat hyperbolic or mythical descriptions for their novelty in the absence of more widely known, accepted facts.

These diagnostic descriptions are frequent in *Infinite Jest*. Emily Russell has focused on the embodied politics in *Infinite Jest*, "discover[ing] assembly in the physical, social, and textual bodies of Wallace's novel, arguing for the perils and possibilities of this conceptual and material intervention" (150). Russell notes that Wallace's extensive descriptions function like a "medical chart" in which "a collection of increasingly specific descriptors will be able to account for a

character completely” (153). While Russell is most interested in the medicalized descriptions of exceptional and disabled bodies in *Infinite Jest*, her point about Wallace’s style applies well to the description of Québécois children and environment more generally. These descriptions are hardly “realist,” however. The descriptions do not “document social and material fact” as realist descriptions traditionally do (Puskar 19). Instead, they are simultaneously descriptions and overdescriptions, accounts of what we are supposed to take for truth provisionally in the absence of a higher narrative authority and accounts that seem unbelievable in and of themselves.

The remainder of Orin and Hal’s conversation reveals a pronounced skepticism towards Interdependence as satisfactory geopolitical situation. Orin questions if there is “really any sort of realistic hope of Québec getting Gentle to get O.N.A.N. to reverse the Reconfiguration. Take back the Concavity, shut down the fans, make us acknowledge the waste as fundamentally American waste”, to which Hal replies, “Well probably of course not” (1017n110). Before Hal hangs up, Orin floats the idea that Québec separatist terrorists are making their acts seem like Canada has endorsed them as collective anti-O.N.A.N. acts, hoping to secede from Canada and O.N.A.N. by claiming The Great Concavity as their own, even though it’s toxic (1019-20n110). Readers leave this scene with the ominous sense that the Québécois terrorists will stop at nothing to free Québec from “Interdependence,” even harming themselves. They are also left with a sense that everyone knows that the United States is dumping toxins in Canada and that this problem has faded into an injustice so commonplace that only terrorists make a big deal about it. This is also an occasion to ponder what exactly “Interdependence” means in the context of the novel.

What is interdependence? According to the Oxford English Dictionary, “interdependence” is a noun meaning “the fact or condition of depending each upon the other;

mutual dependence” (*OED*). The “each upon the other” here suggests that interdependence happens between at least two coherent entities. The word “Interdependence” has a noted corollary in the history of environmentalism with regard to toxins. In her landmark book on the dangers of pesticides, *Silent Spring*, Rachel Carson describes the problem of poisoning individual species as “a problem of ecology, of interrelationships, of interdependence” (189). As Carson makes abundantly clear, environmental hazards never affect a single species because of the linkages between individual species and the ecosystems they are a part of. For Carson, “interdependence” refers to a situation of mutual implication and culpability, of mutual benefit and mutual risk. “Interdependence” is the noun Carson uses to articulate a “problem” concerning human-caused environmental destruction. The idea of mutual dependence, however, is somewhat unclear in Carson. She explains that, for example, salmon are dependent on flies to live, and she makes clear that some animals and economies are dependent on salmon fishing, but this dependence does not appear to be mutual. Rather, Carson seems to suggest that what she characterizes as a problem of interdependence is the ecological problem of at once depending on and being depended upon, a problem of positioning within a food chain. The flies and salmon—as well as several other organisms discussed by Carson—occupy this position of being food for some creatures or performing some necessary function for the production of energy for some organism, and—at the same time—consuming some creature, that is, depending on some other creature for survival.

The reason I want to pressure the word Carson uses here—“interdependence”—is because it suggests that the food chain is some kind of connecting circle or closed system, in which humans naturally occupy some essential place as producers of energy for other organisms. “Interdependence” suggests that the salmon is somehow dependent on us. The notion of

interdependence is often self-serving—in this case, to the human. Certainly, we can imagine organisms being dependent on us: our pets, for example, are dependent on us; mosquitos prey on us; deer hunters in Wisconsin argue that if populations are not managed, then disease could decimate the entire white tail population. Are these animals dependent on us in the same way that salmon are dependent on flies? “Interdependence” takes on a very different valence in *Infinite Jest*, referring ironically to a geopolitical dependence by which a nation coerces another nation into subservience, all the while appealing to the illusion of mutual benefit. Interdependence is thus not interdependence at all, but simply *dependence*. Wallace addresses the ways in which interdependence becomes a rhetorical tool to legitimate parasitic relationships in which dependence gets reframed as somehow mutually beneficial, obscuring lopsided power dynamics simply by adding the prefix “inter.”

NARRATION AND EKPHRASIS

The idea of interdependence is not merely disingenuous rhetoric to legitimize exploitative geopolitical relationships; it operates in other registers within *Infinite Jest*. Mario’s depiction of Reconfiguration and Interdependence is heavily influenced by his late father’s (James Incandenza’s) interpretation of these historical events, and the information we get in this scene should be taken with a grain of salt (Wallace 385). Indeed, both Incandenzas make cartridges about the history of Interdependence.⁸⁴ What we read when we read about the formation of O.N.A.N. is a description of Mario’s film wherein the narrator occasionally comments on the potential discrepancies between Mario’s film and historical truth. It is mostly (but not entirely)

⁸⁴ We learn little of James O. Incandenza’s project, but one of Wallace’s many endnotes indicates that Mario’s *ONANtiad*, though an “explanation-parody,” is “funnier and more accessible than [James’s], if also a bit more heavy-handed” (380, 1032).

clear that what the narrator is describing is *not* the historical events themselves but—rather—the events as they appear in Mario’s film. Mario’s film recounts events that are patently ridiculous but are nonetheless often historically accurate; his film is a 48-minute puppet show shot in a closet, and the DIY nature of the project combined with low production value add layers of mediation that call attention to the text’s distance from the actual events being recounted.⁸⁵ A great deal of work has gone into making sure that we do not read any of this as realistic. And yet, in a world so ridiculous as the one portrayed in *Infinite Jest*, what counts as “unrealistic” should be reconsidered frequently.

Wallace’s narrator’s description of Mario’s film fits into a long tradition of ekphrastic writing, yet it is unique in that tradition.⁸⁶ Jean H. Hagstrum’s influential account of literary pictorialism discusses ekphrasis extensively, acknowledging that it is sometimes understood as a large category of literary description, but defining ekphrasis as “that special quality of giving voice and language to the otherwise mute art object” (18n34). Ekphrastic writing, then, takes a (usually) static art object, like a painting or statue, and seeks to give it voice. When ekphrastic poets succeeded in bringing to life a static scene, they achieved the effect of *enargeia* (Hagstrum 29). In relying on ekphrasis as a mode of description, Wallace effectively treats narrative itself as an object. The object Wallace describes, a narrative film, has a temporal element that makes

⁸⁵ Raymond Williams describes mediation in art extensively in *Marxism and Literature*. For Williams, one important way of understanding mediation as a “persuasive physical metaphor”, as distinct from reflection. In one view, artists merely “reflect” the world around them (Williams 97). An opposing theory of art suggests that artists do not merely reflect the world around them in art. Instead, they actively intercede or interpret the world around them (Williams 97). Mediation should be understood both in its negative sense as an ideological disguise through which art distorts reality and in its positive sense as merely a necessary process by which any meaning is reproduced, that is—one form, such as lived experience, is translated into another, such as literature (98-100). With this in mind, I understand “layers of mediation” to be both of Williams’s versions of mediation: first, as disguises upon disguises that distance readers and viewers from social reality further and further with each “layer,” and second, as merely different media through which messages must go through to reach their audience.

⁸⁶ See, for instance, James Heffernan. *Museum of Words: The Poetics of Ekphrasis from Homer to Ashbery*. Chicago: U. of Chicago P., 1995. See also W.J.T. Mitchell. *Picture Theory: Essays on Verbal and Visual Representation*. Chicago: U. of Chicago P., 1994.

Wallace's description very much like narration, but ultimately history and time are treated like art objects. In one sense, ekphrasis writing exercises interdependence. Ekphrastic writing is dependent on some other text for its own generation. That other text is dependent on ekphrastic writing for its *energia*. Furthermore, Wallace's ekphrastic description complicated structuralist models of narration, especially the concept of duration.

Wallace's ekphrastic description puts some pressure on structuralist models of the narratological concept of duration. Because ekphrasis usually describes static objects, it operates unconventionally when describing a dynamic object that unfolds in time. According to Seymour Chatman, duration "concerns the relation of the time it takes to read out the narrative to the time the story-events themselves lasted" (67-8). Both Chatman and Genette identify several varieties of duration, but both base their systems on the idea that the telling/reading must be understood as taking one time while the story-events take another (Chatman 68, Genette 94-5). While this idea makes sense, it functions under the assumption that what is being narrated actually counts as a story-event. In the *ONANTiad* sections of *Infinite Jest*, the "events" being narrated are sometimes themselves representations, not necessarily real-life events that actually happen in the storyworld. Wallace's narrative practice, therefore, blends the narratological categories of "summary" and "pause." Summary is when the "discourse is briefer than the events depicted" (Chatman 68). A pause is when "story-time stops though the discourse continues, as in descriptive passages" (Chatman 74). Genette refers to these portions as "absolute slowness . . . where some section of narrative discourse corresponds to a nonexistent diegetic duration" (93-4). Because the screening takes place over about sixty pages in the novel and corresponds to the 48 minutes of the cartridge, the passage functions narratologically as "scene"—the one-to-one temporal correspondence of telling and tale told. The sixty or so pages do not all refer to the

screening itself, however, so the telling is actually shorter than the tale. Furthermore, the telling itself is not really narrating a story, but—rather—describing Mario’s telling of the story of interdependence, a story that takes place over a much longer period of time.

The description of Mario’s film starts with marking the occasion for its screening, an Interdependence Day holiday event (Wallace 380).⁸⁷ Following the scene at Enfield, the narrator starts to describe the film cartridge’s cheapo production quality and its introductory emphasis on President Johnny Gentle (Wallace 381). What follows this introduction is a six-page description of Johnny Gentle and his rise to political power.⁸⁸ Gentle has his

white-gloved finger on the pulse of an increasingly asthmatic and sunscreen-slathered and pissed-off American electorate . . . in a dark time when all landfills got full and all grapes were raisins and sometimes in some places the falling rain clunked instead of splatted, and also, recall, a post-Soviet and –Jihad era when . . . there was no real Foreign Menace of any real unified potency to hate and fear, and the U.S. sort of turned on itself . . . with a spasm of panicked rage that in retrospect seems possible only in a time of geopolitical supremacy and consequent silence, the loss of any external Menace to hate and fear. (Wallace 382)

The list of requirements for a third-party candidate to get elected is rather long. Johnny Gentle’s rise in politics is contingent on appealing to disillusioned fringe voters. Furthermore, Gentle becomes president at a moment when ecological crisis so threatening that a one-issue candidate can be elected (a time when there is no foreign crisis distracting American voters). His career is

⁸⁷ Mario made the film for “woefully historically uniformed children” at Enfield, but the film is screened every Interdependence Day—November 8th—at an all-school assembly (380).

⁸⁸ Gentle is a “world-class retentive” with “a paralyzing fear of free-floating contamination” (Wallace 381). He is “the founding standard-bearer of the seminal new ‘Clean U.S Party’”—or “C.U.S.P.,” the “agnation” of jingoistic far-right and radical environmentalist far-left American fringe politics (Wallace 382).

dependent on silence and absence. It is also interesting that the narrator demands that readers “recall” the historical moment, as if watching these events years after they occur makes them incomprehensible or the historical reasoning inscrutable.

ONANtiad

The beginning of Mario’s cartridge mixes summary and scene to show how geopolitical interdependence came to be—and also to help readers to understand exactly how the storyworld works, but these summaries and scenes occasionally demand commentary by the narrator. The interplay of various media also emphasizes the interdependence of media accounts in the production of environmental history. The Clean U.S. Party’s platform is structured around the policy of launching waste into space, but—instead of doing that initially—the Organization of North American Nations is created. For Gentle, cleaning up the United States is “an essentially aesthetic affair” (Wallace 383).⁸⁹ Instead of making the world better environmentally, the cleaning up of the United States is a selfish effort. Cleaning one area means dirtying another. In a speech, Gentle tries to put an end to “atomized Americans’ fractious blaming of one another for our terrible internal troubles” (Wallace 383).⁹⁰ The tone of the self-consciously ridiculous speech is a bit difficult to describe. Mario apparently captures an American structure of feeling at a point of geopolitical dominance in the face of environmental disaster. He does so, however, in such a brazen way that Gentle’s rhetoric sounds either sarcastic or necessarily dumbed down to convey the structure of feeling to school children.⁹¹ Mario’s depiction of Gentle’s jingoistic

⁸⁹ Gentle reflects the popular American attitude when it comes to environmental destruction: Not In My Back Yard.

⁹⁰ Mario’s movie depicts Gentle as he “declares Dammit there just must be some people besides each other for us to blame. To unite in opposition to . . . He swears he’ll find us some cohesion-renewing Other” (Wallace 384).

⁹¹ Gentle is, after all, admitting that he’s actively looking for a scapegoat to blame in order to achieve political success.

inauguration speech shifts to a representation of the president's cabinet, which includes the Presidente of Mexico and the Prime Minister of Canada being "honorably appointed" to cabinet positions as "secretaries" of their own countries (Wallace 384).⁹²

Wallace's narrator does not merely summarize historical narrative. Intermixed with narrative summary is commentary on Mario's representational strategies. In representing Gentle's cabinet, Mario conceives of dialogue which clarifies how exactly "interdependence" is understood geopolitically by the citizens of the United States and Canada. In this dialogue, Gentle sweet talks the Canadian Prime Minister into helping dissolve NATO and making sacrifices to ensure that NAFTA remains in place, including a provision which disarms Canada's "strategic capacity" of ICBM missiles which leads Gentle to announce "we're interdependent" (Wallace 385-6). They're interdependent because Canada is dependent on the United States for economic reasons, and—as we find out—the United States is dependent on Canada as a place to dump waste. The narrator's elaborate description of Mario's cartridge and the scene around which it screens devolves due to Mario's repetitious filmmaking:

Mario as *auteur* opts for his late father's parodic device of mixing real and fake news-summary cartridges, magazine articles, and historical headlines from the last few great daily papers, all for a sort of time-lapse exposition of certain developments leading up to Interdependence and Subsidized Time and cartographic Reconfiguration and the renewal of a tight and considerably tidier Experialist U.S. of A., under Gentle. (Wallace 391)⁹³

⁹² The narrator reminds us that, at this point, Mexico and Canada are basically "post-millennial American protectorates" (Wallace 384). The sovereignty of the neighbors of the United States has been so eroded that their leaders are reduced to secretaries in the Gentle's cabinet. This is a calculated, more-or-less bloodless takeover where the issue of dependence and interdependence is most clear.

⁹³ As Bradley J. Fest puts it, "Rather than absorbing and transforming the other through imperialist foreign policy and the grand narrative of Manifest Destiny, Gentle's program gets rid of the exorbitant, excessive other by 'gifting' or 'exporting' irradiated portions of the United States to Canada" (132). Fest also notes the importance of "U.S. Experialism" to the plot of *Infinite Jest*: "U.S. foreign policy describes the horizon of *Infinite Jest*'s narrative structure, as most of its many characters and virtually every plot point are continually set against the background of

This bit of film criticism re-alerts readers to the fact that they have been reading an ekphrastic description of historical events, not history itself. The story of *Interdependence* is constructed with interdependent media. The narrator cannot show the cartridge itself, so they represent it, not just as a narrative summary, but as a description of the technical strategies Mario uses and the story he tells. This mix of narrative summary and film criticism is important because it demonstrates how the historical narrative that characters in the storyworld take for truth is embedded in the media they rely on to tell that historical narrative and is, for readers, inextricably connected to those media. The mix also demonstrates how “real and fake news” become the basis for strange-but-true narratives of environmental catastrophe. Furthermore, the film criticism positions Wallace’s narrator slightly closer to “reality” than Mario’s aestheticized retelling of history. By assuming the authority to comment on Mario’s representational strategies, the narrator also assumes the role as arbiter of what counts as “realistic” within the scope of the novel—and important role in a novel that often seems unrealistic and readers might easily make the mistake of lumping every scene together as equally divorced from reality.

The narrator draws readers’ attention to the formal elements in Mario’s cartridge. What follows the narrator’s editorial commentary on Mario’s representational strategies is literally three pages of time-lapse newspaper headlines telling the story of *Interdependence*. After these headlines, Wallace includes a paragraph to remind readers that we are not, indeed, reading newspapers as such but, rather, a boy’s lo-fi video project collation of those headlines—some from respectable New York-based papers and others from local periodicals. The headlines, Wallace’s narrator reminds us, come “twirling journalistically out from a black acetate . . .

Experialism” (132). U.S. Experialism produces two major eschatological, nuclear-bomb-like threats: the Medusa-like “Entertainment,” so engrossing its viewers stop doing anything but watching it, and The Great Concavity, the irradiated landscape in the former New England that has been ceded to Canada (132).

background in vintagely allusive old b&w-film style, with a sonic background of that sad sappy Italianate stuff Scorsese had loved for his own montages” (393). These elements are presented comically, as derisive criticism—though the narrator does not, at this point, tell readers that any of Mario’s depiction is untrue. While not necessarily untrue, they account is difficult to take seriously because of how mediated it is. Even if the events presented can be read as realistic, the form they are presented in makes them unrealistic. History is rendered, simplistically or not, by a not-so-adept filmmaker, who himself relies on his father’s interpretation of history and dominant accounts published in newspapers. Furthermore, his interpretation demands further explanation and comment by a narrator reporting on the filmic text in an idiosyncratic way. The film is dependent both on commentary to give it narrative authority and other media texts, such as newspapers, for its very construction. The newspapers are dependent on Mario’s film to make history accessible at all to “woefully historically uninformed children” (380).

The editorial film criticism and heavy exposition should alert the reader to several other things as well. First, the agents who orchestrate O.N.A.N. and the Great Concavity are hidden behind newspaper headlines. Abstract monoliths like Mexico and Canada do things, not individual people. Because of this, interdependence exists between abstract monoliths as well, rather than deformed rural Québécois and addicted American consumers. Second, the complexity of historical representation proves too ambitious for a low-budget film cartridge, and thus history itself is reduced to newspaper headlines. The paragraph at the end of the montage betrays an anxiety that readers will take the headlines too seriously or invest them with too much unmediated access to the storyworld’s environmental history. Mario (and perhaps Wallace) finds geopolitics almost unrepresentable. Through these headlines we learn that “MEXICO SIGNS ON FOR ‘ORGANIZATION OF NORTH AMERICAN NATIONS’ CONTINENTAL

ALLIANCE,” Burger King wins the bid for naming the first year of subsidized time, that “CANADA ‘NUCK’LES UNDER,” and that Canada’s missiles have merely been transferred to the United States (391-2). After the creation of O.N.A.N., the Great Concavity is made. These macro-events, national and continental in scope, mask intricate sets of conflicting and negotiating values as well as individual agencies operating over long periods of time.

N. Katherine Hayles is alert to Wallace’s mediation in his presentation of information and environmental waste. As Hayles puts it, “Within the world of *Infinite Jest*, this double move of obscuring and clarifying is associated with media, which operate in the original sense of media as mediation, circulating information along pathways so circuitous it is at once revealed and covered up” (686). She continues, “Crucial information is conveyed through such devices as a puppet show, a seventh-grade essay, a ‘soft profile’ for a popular magazine and correspondence buried in the footnotes” (686). Waste and information function similarly in the novel. Just as waste is cycled through the Great Concavity to create energy, “information is recycled through a variety of media before it arrives on the page for the reader to consume” (686). While waste ultimately becomes energy through intermediaries in the novel, the material reality of environmental injustice filters through various media before a historical narrative becomes coherent.

What becomes increasingly clear in *Infinite Jest* is that one of the elements complicating Mario’s representation of environmental history is the complicity of the United States government in geopolitical violence. Because the United States is complicit in criminal acts of poisoning, media outlets become more credible than official government accounts of environmental history. The newspaper headlines show that Gentle’s plan to launch waste into The Great Concavity is showing signs of inefficacy. One headline assures us that “YOU’LL BE

ABLE TO EAT RIGHT OFF TERRITORIAL U.S. BY END OF TERM'S FIRST YEAR” according to President Gentle, but the next headline reads “ANOTHER LOVE CANAL? – 24-point Superheader; TOXIC HORROR ACCIDENTALLY UNCOVERED IN UPSTATE NEW HAMPSHIRE” (398-9). For this tidbit, Mario treats viewers to a section of the news article itself. In it, we find that “18 federal EPA staffers” accidentally “quote ‘stumbled on’” huge drums “leaking industrial solvents, chlorides, benzenes, and oxins” near Berlin, New Hampshire (399). While “environmental officials . . . flatly denied” the existence of the drums, the staffers claim that were planted by hazmat-suited workers from “long shiny trailer trucks” with O.N.A.N. logos on them (399). Residents in the surrounding area report “incidence of soft-skulled and extra-eyed newborns” exceeding the national average (399). Several other sites are “STUMBLED OVER” by EPA investigators, and Gentle declares the area north of Syracuse-Ticonderoga-Salem as federal disaster areas as health anomalies become pervasive in the area (399).⁹⁴ Government staffers are apparently responsible for the dumping that the Environmental Protection Agency is investigating. Obviously, readers are not to trust government accounts of environmental history because one government agency is struggling to hold another accountable. Clean-up is financially impossible, so funds are sought for those who wish to relocate from New England (400). The headlines are interrupted by a narratorial “and so on and so forth,” suggesting that the extensive parade of headlines presented to readers is nonetheless incomplete (400).

As Mario shows government accounts of *Infinite Jest*'s environmental crisis to be suspect, he also casts doubt on the legitimacy of the news media outlets he gets his headlines from. We learn that “it’s hard to tell which of the headlines and other stuff are for real and

⁹⁴ For example, a headline from the *Scientific North American* reports that “SUB ROSA FUSION-IN-POISONOUS ENVIRONMENT TEST SITE ALLEGED AT MONTPELIER, VT” (399).

which have been dickered with, usually, if you're too young to recall the actual chronology" because Mario had access to James O. Incandenza's "old optical editing lab," which "has imposing Compugraphic typesetting and matting facilities" (400). This is yet another reminder that the students at ETA are not watching history, and the reader is not reading it. The kids know that "[a]t least some of the headlines are phony," but in the absence of any more legitimate authority, Mario's cartridge "gets to stand uncontested by fact" (400). What readers are left with is a series of historical interpretations, each of which Wallace gives readers reason to doubt the legitimacy of. None is wholly untrue; all contribute to the novel's depiction of historical reality.

Because the facts are apparently matters of conjecture, Mario's version of environmental history is just as true as anyone's—unrealistic as it may seem. His cartridge then recounts a cabinet meeting that is, nonetheless, highly unbelievable. The cabinet members are represented by "doo-wopping" puppets in "purple dresses and matching lipstick and nail polish" (400).⁹⁵ The interdependence of various media and historical interpretations are again on full display. The six-page scene is presented in the fashion of a teleplay, but the narratorial voice describing the action is clearly the same narrator describing Mario's cartridge earlier. The dialogue, then, is the narrator's presentation of Mario's take on what might have been said at the historical cabinet meeting. The action is the narrator's comical description of Mario's *mise-en-scène*. In the scene, an incoherent Gentle, communicating only in "Hhhaaahh Hhhuuuhh"s, has apparently appointed "MR. RODNEY TINE, CHIEF, U.S. OFFICE OF UNSPECIFIED SERVICES" as his proxy. While Gentle spends the meeting inhaling "pure oxygen," Tine provides a map of the toxic area and proposes to the cabinet that the U.S. "give it away" (400, 402). The narrator describes the photos that Tine displays to accompany the maps:

⁹⁵ President Gentle, a former lounge singer, has a cabinet appropriately outfitted in the fashion of Motown background singers.

a New Hampshire runoff-ditch running of stuff a color nobody's quite ever seen before; a wide-angle horizon-stretching vista of skull-embossed drums, with short-haired guys in white body-suits walking around adjusting knobs and reading dials on shiny hand-held devices; a very weird chemical sunrise, close in hue to the Cabinet members' lipstick, over some forests in southern Maine that look way taller and generally lusher than January forests ought properly to be; a couple indoor-lit snapshots of a multi-eyed infant crawling backwards, its ear to the carpet, dragging its shapeless head like a sack of spuds. The last display's a real heartstring-plucker. (400-1)

This passage functions as an ekphrasis within an ekphrasis—the hyper-interdependence of visual and descriptive media. Mario alludes to the environmental crisis cartoonishly through photos of “skull-embossed drums,” and the infinitely complex ecological consequences of introducing massive amounts of toxins is being attended to by official-looking people “adjusting knobs and reading dials” (400, 401). Scientific response is reduced to what is minimally observable. The garish, unnatural sunrise has a corollary in the appearance of the Cabinet members' appearance. The coy understatement “generally lusher than January forests ought properly to be” suggests that the toxins are amplifying natural processes (401). The gruesome photos of infants with birth defects, placed next to evidence of toxic waste's effects, makes clear the connection between the two. Readers are dependent on descriptions of photos, which are, in turn, dependent on tragic events—to present environmental history. They are also dependent on this layering of media to link the affective response to its material roots. The narrator's phrase “a real heartstring-plucker” works to emphasize the tragedy, but it does so in a distanced, ironic way, both acknowledging the affecting quality of the photo and suggesting, in its insistence on comedy, that the instance is more entertaining than awful, an object of sport even in its obvious horror.

The narrator does not insist on the invalidity of Mario's interpretation, suggesting that it is, indeed, close enough to an accepted interpretation (1030n156). An endnote in the narrator's voice comments on the fairness of Mario's interpretation of history here, describing it as "simply one theory and direction for finger-pointing" (1030n156). Mario's version emphasizes the ironic nature of interdependence. The various U.S. secretaries show signs of being comically disengaged from the crisis.⁹⁶ The next set of newspaper headlines show Gentle trying to give away the toxic parts of New England to Canada as a gift and the Canadian Prime Minister politely refusing, "INTERDEPENDENCE RHETORIC, OR NO" (406). Canada is not "dependent" on the United States for anything; indeed, Canada only acquiesces to a policy of interdependence because of threats.⁹⁷ The headlines hint at Johnny Gentle's deteriorating mental stability and investigations into possible incompetence (406). When Mario provides the story accompanying one of his headlines, it's a wacky situation indeed (406-7). Gentle has "isolated himself in a private suite at Bethesda Naval Hospital" and sings to the person handcuffed to the Black Box of U.S. nuclear codes (406, 407). In this state, officials decline to comment on reports of "erratic Executive directives," one of which is to remove missiles in the toxic zone and replace them in their silos upside-down (407). Another report says that Gentle has "COMPLETELY LOST [his] MIND" and threatens to detonate missiles if Canada does not accept the toxic territory (407). Thus, the Great Concavity might be irradiated because the U.S. has exploded nuclear missiles on its own soil.⁹⁸

⁹⁶ They all recognize the seriousness of the crisis, but they do not act as if the problem affects them personally. They are also unconcerned about the public relations fallout from exporting populated U.S. lands to another nation.

⁹⁷ Quebecers threaten secession if Canada accepts the territory (406). According to Mario's headlines, Gentle threatens "LOOK, BABE, TAKE THE TERRITORY OR YOU'RE GOING TO BE REALLY REALLY SORRY" (406).

⁹⁸ Indeed, both the United States and the U.S.S.R. did fire missiles during the cold war—they just shot them at themselves. Fest's "Nuke in the Garden" essay picks up on this idea, seeing it as a clever inversion of the postmodern nuclear trope (133).

The ekphrastic description of the end of the film transitions into the narrator recounting legend of Eric Clipperton, which the narrator insists Mario's cartridge alludes to. The Clipperton digression further demonstrates the ironic nature of interdependence in *Infinite Jest*. Clipperton, as legend has it at E.T.A., was a junior tennis player who held a gun to his head and threatened to shoot himself if he lost matches—and thereby found a strategy for winning all of them (407-10). Clipperton, the story goes on later, ends up shooting himself in the head at E.T.A. (433). His only friend was Mario Incandenza. Emily Russell asserts that the “Clipperton legend . . . demonstrate[s] the fatal ends of an independent star”—in contrast to the celebration of interdependence depicted in the cartridge, even when “interdependence loses some of its utopian luster in the geopolitical context of *Infinite Jest*” (157). Mario's cartridge celebrates interdependence, though ironically. Wallace places the Clipperton legend next to the ekphrastic description of Mario's film because an ironic depiction of interdependence is too simplistic. Clipperton's success is dependent on his opponents whether he likes it or not, and the illusion of independence is a dangerous one. In a similar way, nations are dependent on each other's decisions whether they like it or not.

The narratorial interruption to explain that the cartridge slyly alludes to the Clipperton legend emphasizes how incapable Mario's cartridge is of standing in for history to an audience of non-initiates. After this digression, Wallace's narrator notes that the Interdependence Day crowd watching Mario's cartridge is getting bored, though it's at this time that the narrator describes Mario's father's version of the *ONANtiad* in an endnote for the purpose of comparing Mario's version to it favorably (438, 1032n176). The footnote, situated next to a telegraphed concern with narrative excitement, betrays anxiety about how “boring” narratives fail to convey historical content if they cannot command their audience's attention. History is dependent on

media for its transmission, but the media texts are dependent on audiences to actually attend to them. Wallace himself bifurcates his own narrative by putting important parts of it in the endnotes, the realm of those interested in the details—thereby implying that some readers would, quite reasonably, not be interested.

The medial interdependence continues when the narrator’s summary of the Clipperton narrative ends and the ekphrastic description of Mario’s cartridge must continue, this time with more summary headlines and a teleplay. As Mario represents another cabinet meeting, the narrator notes that the puppets’ mustaches “could be straighter but are on the whole pretty impressive mustaches,” lest we make the mistake of believing what we’re reading to be an accurate historical record (439). Gentle declares “Territorial Reconfiguration” a success, despite cost figures that cause “a couple mustaches” to “fall off altogether” in surprise (439, 440). Gentle and his cabinet consider their revenue problem and decide they cannot raise taxes or cut programs, so Gentle—inspired both by the Chinese Agricultural Calendar and its zodiacal Terrestrial Branches and the practice of naming sponsored college bowl games—prepares to suggest the era of Subsidized Time (442).⁹⁹ The scene is odd for several reasons. First, it’s not clear at the beginning of the scene where it’s going narratively or historically until the very end when Gentle prepares to propose Subsidized Time. Second, the narrator’s point (four pages earlier) that the upcoming scene is historically anachronistic seems to invalidate the entire scene, even while the narrator implicitly endorses the historical interpretation on view in much of the rest of the cartridge. Finally, an articulate Gentle would seem to stand in opposition to the increasingly deranged figure portrayed earlier in the cartridge.

⁹⁹ An earlier page tells us that Subsidized Time did not, indeed, occur after Territorial Reconfiguration in response to a revenue problem but, rather, before it (438).

Infinite Jest includes information about ecological crisis in a few other areas of the novel besides the scenes involving Mario's cartridge screening. The Territorial Reconfiguration narrative disappears for over a hundred pages at the end of this section and, with it, direct references to the ecological crisis underlying life in *Infinite Jest*.¹⁰⁰ When interdependence returns, it comes as an explanation of how waste and energy are interdependent in the world of *Infinite Jest*. E.T.A. student Michael Pemulus lectures another student about annulation a few days after the Interdependence Day screening. E.T.A., it turns out, has a special connection to the environmental catastrophe in *Infinite Jest*.¹⁰¹ Pemulus is trying to tell another student, Idris Arslanian, about the plight of Anton Doucette, an otherwise minor character in the novel, who has an anxiety attack in the weight room of E.T.A. (569, 567). Doucette is failing a "laughable Energy survey class" because he does not understand "annular fusion/fission cycles, DT-lithiumization"—both processes made up by Wallace in relation to nuclear fusion (569). Pemulus thinks the basics of these processes are easy to understand:

Just picture a massive pseudocartographic right triangle. You've got your central, impregnately-guarded O.N.A.N.-Sunstrand waste-intensive fusion facility up in what used to be Montpelier in what used to be Vermont, in the Concavity. From Montpelier,

¹⁰⁰ Rodney Tine shows up, however, investigating reports of The Entertainment in the "metro Boston" area, though this time he's not being represented in Mario's cartridge (548). This scene does not comment on environmental disaster as such, though the CDC is investigating The Entertainment's properties and Tine suspects that there are Canadians plotting to use the device for terroristic purposes (549). The description in this short, two-page, section of The Entertainment is notable because it recalls Mario's cartridge by bringing up Tine, but this time Tine is connected to a different cartridge, one that cannot be described. Wallace's narrator describes the U.S. Office of Unspecified Services' attempts to describe what exactly The Entertainment entails, what its "qualities" are (549). All that they learn is that it "opens with an engaging and high-quality cinematic shot of a veiled woman going through a large building's revolving doors and catching a glimpse of someone else in the revolving doors, somebody the sight of whom makes her veil billow" (549). And that is all the U.S. government knows about the actual contents of the cartridge. This is a marked contrast to the extensive description Wallace's narrator provides for Mario's cartridge.

¹⁰¹ Pemulus explains that James O. Incandenza "helped design these special holographic conversions so the team that worked on annulation could study the behavior of subatomics in highly poisonous environments. Without getting poisoned themselves" (572).

the process's waste's piped to two sites, one of which is that blue glow at night up by the Methuen Fan-Complex, just south of the Concavity, right flush up against the Wall and Checkpoint Pongo . . . where the toxo-fusion's waste's plutonium fluoride's refined into plutonium-239 and uranium-238 and fissioned in a standard if somewhat hot and risky breeder-system, much of the output of which, is waste U-239, which gets piped or catapulted or long-shiny-trucked way up to what used to be Loring A.F.B.—Air Force Base near what used to be Presque Isle Maine—where it's allowed to decay naturally into neptunium-239 and then plutonium-239 and then added to the UF₄ fractional waste also piped up from Montpelier, then fission in a purposely ugly way in such a way as to create like hellacious amounts of highly poisonous radioactive wastes, which are mixed with heavy water and specially heated-zirconium-piped through special heavily guarded heated zirconium pipes back down to Montpelier as raw material for the massive poisons needed for toxic lithiumization and waste-intenseness and annular fusion. (Wallace 571)

Briefly summarized, Pemulus says this process is “[j]ust a moving right-triangular cycle of interdependence and waste-creation and -utiization” or, as Pemulus states later, annular fusion is “a type of fusion that can produce waste that's fuel for a process whose waste is fuel for the fusion” (571, 572). According to Pemulus, the only problem “with the whole process environmentally” is that “the resultant fusion turns out so greedily efficient that it sucks every last toxin and poison out of the surrounding ecosystem, all inhibitors to organic growth for hundreds of radial clicks in every direction . . . You end up with a surrounding environment so fertile lush it's practically unlivable” (573). It's difficult to gauge the degree of truth in Idris Arslanian's response: “Therefore rapacial feral hamsters and insects of Volkswagen size and infantile gigantism and the unmacheteable regions of forests of the mythic eastern Concavity”

(573).¹⁰² Pemulus agrees with this characterization and explains that this is why O.N.A.N. needs to keep catapulting toxins into the eastern part of The Great Concavity to “keep the uninhibited ecosystem from spreading and overrunning more ecologically stable areas” (573). Waste is catapulted on each month’s prime numbers, so that the eastern Great Concavity is “especially barren” early in the month because of frequent poisoning (573).¹⁰³ At the end of the month, however, growth is accelerated, which Pemulus likens to “an incredible *slowing down of time*” (573).¹⁰⁴ This description by Pemulus makes clear that the United States really is dependent on Canada to get rid of waste and to produce energy. How this relationship is “interdependent” for Canada—that is, how Canada is dependent on anyone else—is unclear, underscoring the ironic quality of Wallace’s geopolitical interdependence. The description of annular fission/fusion suggests a less ironic interdependence between energy and waste, however.

The Pemulus scene is notable because it is clearly from an American perspective, where the tragedy of environmental injustice is viewed as a necessary evil. Wallace balances this Americentric perspective with a scene in which Rémy Marathe tells a woman in a bar that his wife is dying (775). Marathe is a member of the Québécois separatist organization called Les Assassins des Fauteuils Rollents and may or may not be double- or triple-crossing the organization with O.N.A.N. officials. He is wheelchair-bound and claims to be Swiss to tell his

¹⁰² At E.T.A., which is near The Great Concavity, the students have their own notions of what the area consists of. While cleaning out litter from the tunnels underneath E.T.A., students are afraid of encountering “a Concavitated feral hamster” (or maybe just a rat) (668). The exciting potential of seeing a gigantic feral hamster is occasion for the narrator to list the kids’ other Concavity rumors: “mile-high toddlers, skull-deprived wraiths, carnivorous flora, and marsh-gas that melts your face off and leaves you with exposed grey-and-red facial musculature for the rest of your ghoulish-pariah life” (670). The E.T.A. students are convinced of the reality of huge feral hamsters, however—“the sort of rapacious locust-like mass-movement creature that Canadian agronomists call ‘Piranha of the Plains’” (670).

¹⁰³ According to Fest, “Wallace, through merely suggesting that nuclear weapons have been inverted in their silos and used against New England, creates an alternative space where the boundaries between ‘machine’ and ‘nature’ break down, not by creating a pastoral space but rather a fundamentally uninhabitable ‘outside’ which is neither nature nor technology, a space that the United States nevertheless relies upon for its energy” (134).

¹⁰⁴ The eastern Concavity is “a whole different kettle of colored horses” from the western Concavity, however, which is “barren Eliotical wastes” (574).

story to Kate Gompert, an addict recovering at Ennet House (774-6). Marathe tells Gompert about the sense of hopelessness he feels about combatting the surrounding countries who have invaded his beloved “Swiss” land until he saves the life of his wife (777).¹⁰⁵ Marathe’s wife, he tells Gompert “has no skull” because she is “among the first Swiss children of southwestern Switzerland to become born without a skull, from the toxicities in association of our enemy’s invasion on paper” (778-9). She wears “a metal hat,” without which “the head hung from the shoulders like a half-filled balloon or empty bag, the eyes and oral cavity greatly distended from the hanging” (779).¹⁰⁶ Marathe describes his wife further, noting that “her head it had also neither muscles nor nerves” and

[t]here was the trouble of the digestive tracking. There were seizures also. There were progressive decays of circulation and vessel, which calls itself restenosis. There were the more than standard accepted amounts of eyes and cavities in many different stages of development upon different parts of the body. There were the fugue states and rages and frequency of coma. (779).

Marathe’s wife, Gertraude, has a hook for a hand and is currently in a permanent “comatose and vegetative state” (780). Wallace faces a unique narrative problem with Gertraude’s ailments. To describe actual deformities suffered by victims of environmental injustice, he risks making his novel too realistic and losing the comical and satirical edge. Therefore, Wallace’s exaggeration here is obviously barbed. His overdescription is comical in its outrageous calamity but part of the humor of the exaggeration is the understanding that environment-related deformities can be

¹⁰⁵ Marathe rescues his wife and takes her to “the nearest Swiss hospital specializing in deformities of grave nature,” which is a bit of an understatement (779).

¹⁰⁶ She leaks “cerebro-and-spinal fluids . . . at all times” (779).

very grave, so we never know if Wallace is really exaggerating, even when the list of symptoms are couched in Marathe's cartoony Frenchified-English.

In *Infinite Jest*, Wallace explores the idea of interdependence in its various valences—political, ecological, and medial. While interdependence is ironized in the novel as a geopolitical relationship, it is complicated by Wallace's layering of media to present his history of environmental injustice. Furthermore, through the conceit of annular fusion/fission, Wallace suggests how interdependence works ecologically for humans who overtax energy resources. For Wallace, a history of environmental decay is almost literally unnarratable. Instead, his narrator provides readers with an ekphrasis of Mario's film, highlighting the layers of mediation and the distance from those who want to know the truth from what is, ultimately, an unknowable real.

In this chapter, I presented scenes from *Infinite Jest* that provide the reader with information about the ecological catastrophe in the novel's storyworld. I showed how Wallace's humor and overdescription attend to the unbelievable-yet-true quality of environmental disaster. Wallace presents readers, not with history itself, but a description of a novice filmmaker's take on history. Mario's account of interdependence is a hodge-podge of newspaper headlines—some real, some fake—and patently ridiculous renderings of the actions of government officials. Wallace uses these tactics to present environmental history as a highly mediated construct where official accounts are always compromised by the crimes of officials complicit in environmental crimes. Though obviously not a realist novel, in *Infinite Jest* Wallace attempts “to countenance and render real aspects of real experiences that have been previous excluded from art” by presenting environmental history as he does (McCaffery 140). Environmental disaster is increasingly common due to climate change, and its effects are increasingly unrealistic when

judged against the data of the past. The aspects Wallace addresses are the unbelievable occurrences of environmental novelty in the age of flora and fauna mutated by toxins and weather that defies the logic of centuries. While much of Wallace's novel seems unrealistic, the grounds on which readers gauge what is plausible and what is fantastic are the frequent themes of *Infinite Jest*.

Style as Weather: Narrative Form and Global Warming in Karen Tei Yamashita's *Tropic of Orange*

In *Anthropocene Fictions: The Novel in a Time of Climate Change*, Adam Trexler asks several questions in an attempt to develop a method adequate to the description of climate change in the contemporary novel. One of these, “How can novels articulate the simultaneously local, national, and international politics of climate change,” guides my investigation of narration and global warming in Karen Tei Yamashita’s 1997 novel *Tropic of Orange* (Trexler). Yamashita addresses the planetary problem of global warming through several characters who experience its various effects at the local level. In the novel, the Tropic of Cancer becomes attached to an orange that travels northward to the United States, dragging the climate, people, and culture of central Mexico with it, literalizing the trope of “climate change” as it travels. Central to my account of Yamashita’s global warming novel is the notion that place and weather have a profound connection. Yamashita employs magical realist aesthetics to narrate fantastic events relating to weather. What is interesting about the novel’s treatment of global warming is how Yamashita’s complex narration enacts a literary mimicry of some of global warming’s features through form. Global warming disrupts weather patterns common to specific places, shifting weather historically common to a given place to other places where it may be uncommon. Global warming also gives rise to weather effects that are unheard of in certain places or produces degrees and features of weather that have never been common to any place at all. Yamashita mimics the effects of climate change at the level of form, using the “HyperContexts” chart early in the novel to set up readerly expectations about what narrative styles should be associated with certain characters only to blend discrete styles within the space of the chapter. Readers use the HyperContexts to inhabit the lives of Yamashita’s characters and

get a sense of what is common to their experience. However, the forms that readers are led to believe are common to each character's experience—and the novel's governing structure more generally—mimic weather in an era of climate change by shifting, mixing, and producing effects that are not characteristic of any individual space or character.

Many of the characters in *Tropic of Orange* are displaced, and displacement functions as one of the novel's governing premises. The novel follows seven characters over seven days as they reside in, travel from, or travel to Los Angeles, California “perhaps . . . [in] the recent past” near the summer solstice (sometime between June 20 and June 22) (*Tropic of Orange*, hereafter *ToO* n. pag.) The seven characters are Rafaela Cortes, Bobby Ngu, Emi, Buzzworm, Manzanar Murakami, Gabriel Balboa, and Arcangel. Rafaela Cortes is a Mexican immigrant to the United States and a labor organizer working at Gabriel Balboa's house near Mazatlán, Mexico; she is recently estranged from her husband, Bobby Ngu. Bobby Ngu is “Chinese from Singapore with a Vietnam name speaking like Mexican living in Koreatown” and a workaholic small business owner (*ToO* 15). Emi is a Japanese-American television news producer and is Gabriel Balboa's on-again-off-again girlfriend. Gabriel Balboa is a Chicano journalist who often relies on Buzzworm for tips on untold stories about Los Angeles. Buzzworm is an African-American “Angel of Mercy” who patrols Los Angeles giving aid to the city's poor and homeless (*ToO* 26). One of the homeless Buzzworm is aware of is Manzanar Murakami, a Japanese-American who stands on platforms as a “conductor” of traffic symphonies (*ToO* 34). Arcangel is a five hundred-year-old man, a mythological trickster figure making his way north, and a symbol for the peoples of Latin America. The plot of the novel concerns an automobile pile-up on the Harbor Freeway and the homeless community takeover of abandoned vehicles following the accident.

Several critics have read *Tropic of Orange* as a critique of globalization, specifically the 1994 North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). Molly Wallace sees *Tropic of Orange* as a “politically productive symbolization of NAFTA” and traces the metaphors critics of globalization saw NAFTA representing (standing in for globalization or neoliberalism, for example) while Wallace herself notes how NAFTA is troped in Yamashita’s novel (158). In *Tropic of Orange*, one of Arcangel’s many guises is El Gran Mojado (The Great Wetback) who challenges a personified NAFTA (known as SUPERNAFTA) to a wrestling match, a major media event that occupies several chapters at the end of the novel. The chief critique of NAFTA articulated by the novel is the tendency it perpetuates to allow for the free flow of capital across borders while restricting the movement of bodies.

Several critics have also noted that *Tropic of Orange* is replete with border-crossings and that Yamashita’s characters reflect on the easy mobility of capital and labor versus the strained mobility of migrants. Kandice Chuh writes that “Yamashita’s work encourages an opening out of U.S. boundaries in different registers (the political, the imaginative, and the critical) and multiple directions (south and west, especially)” (621). John Blair Gamber argues that *Tropic of Orange* “challenges absolutes of purity as they relate to space and place (especially as examined by borders, boundaries, and cartography)” (122). He continues: “[a]ll boundaries—whether between nations or territories; between past, present, and future; between the self and the other; or between humans and other species—are positively polluted, recognized as porous, and constantly permeated and penetrated” (Gamber 122). Even as the novel embraces qualities like multiculturalism, it does not merely present multiculturalism as cure-all. Hande Tekdemir is skeptical of claims that hybridity is the “ultimate solution to Eurocentrist, imperialist, and colonialist discourse,” as is Yamashita’s character Emi (41). Emi scorns the “multicultural

mosaic” as “just about money” (*ToO* 127, 126). She insists to Gabriel that “cultural diversity is bullshit . . . cultural diversity is a white guy wearing a Nirvana t-shirt and dreads” (*ToO* 128).

Iyko Day argues that *Tropic of Orange* demonstrates how “neoliberal multiculturalism reinforces the abstraction of both wealthy and poor Asian North Americans” (171). Yamashita is careful not to romanticize multiculturalism even as she employs magical realism to blur traditional borders and boundaries.

For a novel about globalization and border-crossings, few critics who have commented on *Tropic of Orange*’s treatment of global environmental problems, instead reading the novel as an environmental justice text. As Julie Sze puts it, *Tropic of Orange* “traces the geography of neoliberalism and free trade, including the shifting barriers between nature and culture, as inscribed on women’s bodies, because women’s bodies are the means through which new processes of global production and consumption operate” (35). Following Sze’s example, Chiyo Crawford argues that *Tropic of Orange* “link[s] the historical trauma of internment during World War II (1939-1945) to recent environmental justice struggles for Japanese Americans, shaping a critical discourse on human values that will be crucial for the entwined outcomes of social justice and environmental preservation” (87). Crawford’s reading draws parallels between Manzanar Murakami’s connection to Japanese forced removal to the Manzanar Internment Camp, where Manzanar was born and chooses his name from after abandoning life as a surgeon, and Los Angeles’s attempts to forcibly remove the city’s homeless population (91). Although I agree that *Tropic of Orange* is concerned with environmental justice, focusing on environmental justice too narrowly has led critics to pay close attention to only a few of the novel’s characters, thus missing how the novel positions global problems in relation to local contexts. I argue that *Tropic of Orange* is what Hande Tekdemir calls a “local adaptation” of magical realism that explores

the conflict between global and local understandings of the problem of climate change, not just as collection of regional social justice issues (51n5, 53n13). To understand how *Tropic of Orange* comments on climate change as both a global and local problem, it is essential to understand how the “HyperContexts” early in the novel sets up readerly expectations about the narrative space of each chapter.

Ursula K. Heise has noted the theoretical conflict between a sense of place and a sense of planet, especially as it relates to environmental concern. On the one hand, notions like globalization and transnationalism seek to transcend the narrowness of national- and community-based identities to demonstrate how some political problems—like nuclear proliferation—are global problems that affect everyone, not just the citizens of certain nations or communities (Heise 5-6). On the other hand, there has been a recent return to local-, regional-, and nation-based identities as “a tool of resistance to global imperialism” (Heise 7). The problem of climate change gets at the heart of this tension. Climate change is a planetary problem that transcends nations and individual communities, but it also does not; the manifestations of global warming’s consequences are observable at the local level. *Tropic of Orange* addresses the problem of global warming by commenting on the local effects of climate change in each chapter by treating the space of the chapter metaphorically as a region or locality within which style functions like local climate. The HyperContexts is a paratextual grid printed on the pages after the “Contents” and before the novel’s dedication, somewhat like an alternative rendering of the table of contents that lists the seven characters along one axis and the seven days in which the novel takes place along the other axis. The grid suggests that each character has seven chapters devoted to their story, one for each day of the week. In the initial chapters, the reader finds that the style in each of the first seven chapters, a style associated with each individual character, is different from any

other chapters, as if each character gets their own narrative style unique to “their” chapters. Throughout the novel, however, these stylistic expectations are subverted. The code suggested by the HyperContexts proves helpful but ultimately inaccurate. Styles from some chapters invade the space of other chapters, for instance, acting like weather anomalies pointing to a disruption in the stability of the HyperContexts’s chapter-style code and the “climate” of the chapter-space.

In *Tropic of Orange*, Yamashita provides a stylistic and structural corollary to climate change’s effects. The stylistic boundary-crossing is not the only way that Yamashita mimics the effects of climate change at the level of form, however. The stylistic disruption of chapter-space is like the magical disruption of Yamashita’s literary realism. Elizabeth Ermarth argues that the lifelike aesthetic of literary realism is produced by the serial representation of scenes from a unified perspective (511).¹⁰⁷ While Ermarth’s point is that individual scenes in a novel do not have the character of realism until taken collectively, her analysis is contingent on “the conception of time as a common plane which extends to infinity and, thus, as a continuous medium in which distinctions between past, present, and future are meaningful because they are mutually informative” (512). Ermarth’s description of realism’s dependence on human “experience of consciousness in time” apply to human experiences of space as well (512). As novels construct time and space to correspond to readers’ experience of those concepts, experimental novelists have often constructed space and time in novels in ways that do not correspond directly to familiar human experiences. What readers recognize as a disruption of the formal code they were led to believe governed the novel aligns with anomalous weather events that contradict decades of experience and, in some cases, centuries of documented scientific

¹⁰⁷ Different narrative perspectives present “concordable differences” which “always exist to be overcome” in realistic fiction (Ermarth 514).

climate data. Yamashita disrupts the realist sections of her novel with magical contractions and expansions of both space and time. In disrupting familiar experiences of space and time in the novel, Yamashita translates climate change into a disorienting human experience—not just an effect demonstrable through data.

Ultimately, Yamashita uses style and structure to reframe how readers think about climate. The space of the chapter (and character-based chapter-set) gives the reader the impression of something that is both discrete and coherent though, of course, connected to the novel as a whole. Combined with Yamashita's incorporation of global warming discussion in the novel's direct discourse and the use of magical realist aesthetics that trope the effects of climate change, Yamashita uses the readerly expectations constructed by the HyperContexts to show how the worlds of the characters overlap and how their experiences of time are vastly different due to climate change. What appear to be discrete worlds at the outset of *Tropic of Orange* prove to be inextricably bound together. What binds these characters together is not merely that they are figures in the same novel but that they all experience the spatial and temporal effects of climate change in their own way. Each character suffers the consequences—either directly or indirectly—of climate catastrophes far away or close at hand.

GLOBAL WARMING AND SENSE OF PLACE

While the history of climate change research is clearly influenced by scholars who understand it as a global phenomenon, by the 1990s various places began to record its effects at a local level (Weart). A 1988 *New York Times* story about James E. Hansen's testimony to Congress illustrates how global warming was popularly understood (Shabecoff). The story starts with assertions about global planetary conditions ("The earth has been warmer in the first five months

of this year than in any comparable period since measurements began 130 years ago”) and continues with the language of globality and planetary shared conditions until near the end of the article, where the reporter—Philip Shabecoff—notes that “the rise in temperature is not expected to be uniform around the globe” and finally mentions a few specific places that are expected to be affected in specific ways. For some people the most obvious manifestation of the effects of global warming is at the local level, through such consequences as weather anomaly. According to the National Wildlife Federation, “The intensification of weather and climate extremes will be the most visible impact of global warming in our everyday lives” (“Global Warming”). While climate change scientists are quick to point out that extreme weather events are the product of many factors (not just climate change)—and are therefore only partial manifestations of climate change—there is evidence to suggest that extreme weather is, indeed, linked to global warming. The United States Environmental Protection Agency encourages visitors to their website to think of climate change as “increasing the odds” of extreme weather (defined as changes in frequency, intensity, duration, and/or timing of climate events), rather than causing it (*EPA*). Yamashita addresses the notion of weather anomaly at the level of manifest content in the plot of *Tropic of Orange*, as well as stylistically.

The novel explicitly references global warming on several occasions in the direct discourse, though critics have focused more on the environmental justice commentary in the novel than the novel’s treatment of climate change. What is interesting about these references is that they are occasioned by a sense of abnormality associated with place. In the first chapter, the narrator, clearly channeling Rafaela’s thoughts, reflects on Gabriel’s navel orange tree—“the only citrus tree in the garden that had a fruit on it”:

The tree was a sorry one, and so was the orange. Rafaela knew it was an orange that should not have been. It was much too early. Everyone said the weather was changing. The rains came sooner this year. “What do they call it?” mused Doña Maria. “Global warming. Yes, that’s it.” Rafaela had seen it herself. The tree had been fooled, and little pimples of budding flowers began to burst through its branches. And then came a sudden period of dry weather; the flowers withered away except for this one. Perhaps it had been the industriousness of the African bees, their furry feet dusted heavily in yellow pollen, that had quickly mated the flower to its future, producing this aberrant orange—not to be picked, not expected, and probably not very sweet. (*ToO* 11)

In this passage, Rafaela’s individual reflections are backed up by what “everyone said.” The local, place-based knowledge that “the weather was changing” accounts for the tree’s early blooming. The early bloom is not an isolated instance of aberrant weather, but evidence of a greater climate change. What constitutes “early” here is also place-based, what the EPA passage above calls changes in the timing of climate events. Weather thus functions as a code by which we understand what is normal or common for a specific place, in this case Mazatlán. According to that code, the orange is an “aberrant orange”—a product of global warming. The aberrant weather could be seen as just that—an aberration, not a product of global warming—but the novel’s emphasis on foregrounding other kinds of simultaneous aberrations suggests a link to climate change, not just a stand-alone anomalous instance. Rafaela’s observation above endows the orange with a quality of synecdoche: as a product of global warming, it stands in for global warming throughout the novel. The individual events that it produces are then not merely isolated instances of odd aberrations but evidence of a larger pattern of events connected to climate change.

Later, in Emi's first chapter, Emi marvels to Gabriel that a sponsor paid for a mid-afternoon slot on the news (*ToO* 20). She speculates that the sponsor "didn't want to hear of anything controversial" and thus ended up getting slotted before the weather report (*ToO* 20). The notion that weather is not "controversial" is doubly ironic when read against Rafaela's statement on global warming only nine pages earlier. First, it cannot be controversial because, as Rafaela points out, "everyone said the weather was changing"; a consensus exists about the problem. Second, even though "everyone said the weather was changing," there's no mention of anyone doing anything about it. A consensus about climate change is rendered uncontroversial nonetheless because of political apathy. Layers of irony pile up as Emi makes fun of Gabriel's love of L.A.-based detective movies wherein "[i]t's always raining" even though "[i]t never rains here! The only reason it rains in those films is so that Bogart can wear a trenchcoat" (*ToO* 20). In Emi's mocking formulation, weather is denaturalized, made an effect of human artifice. Film-weather is likened to real weather while being contrasted with it. The notion that weather is uncontroversial based on Emi's sense of Los Angeles's famous weather patterns: "Monday. Overcast in the morning. Sunny in the afternoon. Tuesday. Overcast in the morning. Sunny in the afternoon. Temperature holding at seventy-eight degrees" (*ToO* 20). Before the chapter is over, it starts raining (*ToO* 25). Indeed, the rain is more than a mere shower, but a downpour, a flash flood, that ends almost as soon as it begins.

Manzanar Murakami's chapters also explicitly comment on climate change. He uses the patterns associated with place to conduct symphonies. These patterns, too, are related to climate change. According to the omniscient narrator of Manzanar's chapters, "There was a schedule of sorts, a program, an appropriate series of concerts and symphonies in accordance with the seasons and the climate of the city. As noted by many others, climatic change in L.A. was

different from other places. It had less perhaps to do with weather and more to do with disaster” (36). Manzanar’s compositions are partially weather-related and partially based on the “climate” of the city’s populace. By tapping into a the Heideggerian *stimmung* of the city, Manzanar can express a collective affect that, without him, is doomed to dispersal.¹⁰⁸

The Los Angeles weather is revealed to be an amalgamation of natural pattern and human tampering and artifice. The degree to which it can be predicted is contingent on human understandings of such natural patterns and their own influence on global climate. Buzzworm, for one, puts little faith on human ability to manage climate. His veneration of palm trees is almost pantheistic. He tells various neighbors, “Palm tree’s smart, knows the time for everything. Knows to put out flowers and fruit when the time’s right, even though out here don’t seem like there’s any seasons to speak of. Suppose we could all learn something from a palm tree that knows the seasons better than us” (*ToO* 31). Buzzworm’s veneration of palm trees, as Amy C. Tang points out, “appears to offer a fairly straightforward parable about learning to appreciate one’s local environment by developing an indigenous viewpoint” as well as a simple respect for nature (97). However, the beauty Buzzworm sees in palm trees is a beauty that is best when viewed from a distance (Tang 97). Up until this point in the novel, chapter 6, nonhumans respond according to realist expectations of the characters. After this point, however, what the human characters think they know about nonhuman processes—weather, for example—is brought into question by the magical elements in the text, particularly the magical realist moments that *Tropic of Orange* uses to figure global warming’s consequences as magical events.

¹⁰⁸ Jonathan Flatley describes *stimmung*, following Heidegger, as “one’s primary way of being in the world, “the presupposition for” and “medium” of thinking and acting” (5). Flatley himself describes *stimmung* as mood, “a kind of affective atmosphere . . . in which intentions are formed, projects pursued, and particular affects can attach to particular objects” (19). Manzanar is both reader and interpreter of moods and conductor or shaper of moods. Jonathan Flatley. *Affective Mapping: Melancholia and the Poetics of Modernism*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2008.

MAGICAL REALISM AND GLOBAL WARMING

Yamashita tropes global warming by employing magical realist techniques in her novel. Specifically, an orange growing on the Tropic of Cancer in Mexico travels north to the United States and, as it travels, it takes the Tropic of Cancer with it. Several critics have commented on this magical realist aesthetic, but such a categorization requires several caveats. *Tropic of Orange* is, in some ways, a realist text, but—as Iyko Day puts it—Yamashita “reworks the Real into a narrative whose fantastical elements are not pure fantasy; neither is its blunt realism an earnest display of social documentary” (172).¹⁰⁹ Most critics have commented on the text as largely magical realist, a term that has several related-but-competing definitions. Tekdemir collects several of them in an endnote to her article on magical realism and *Tropic of Orange*, which she calls a “local adaptation” of the genre (51n5, 53n13). Some of these definitions treat magical realism as itself a literary or narrative technique. Others, like Tekdemir’s own definition of choice, treat magical realism as a set of techniques or a genre. She describes magical realism as “an odd, matter-of-fact integration of reality and fantasy, an almost taken-for-granted intimacy between the extraordinary and the familiar” (42). Tekdemir characterizes magical realist texts as often having a “fixed narrative perspective” (45). However, in the postmodern city Yamashita represents, “direct communication is illusory” because “people and machines impede easy access to information in/of the city” (Tekdemir 47). Magical realism functions especially to give voice to marginalized groups of people (Tekdemir 44). Yamashita’s emphasis on individuals, as opposed to groups of people, is what makes *Tropic of Orange* unique as a magical realist text. Tekdemir notes that *Tropic of Orange* does not, like many magical realist texts, focus on a

¹⁰⁹ Amy C. Tang, on the other hand, asserts that “*Tropic of Orange* is not a realist novel at all” (70).

community. Rather it focuses on seven characters who have some relationship with each other but are—nonetheless—distinct individuals with clearly-defined voices and unique narrative styles (Tekdemir 45). These seven characters do, however, function as stand-ins for communities.

Bagoña Simal-González offers a more inclusive definition of magical realism, which may exclude *Tropic of Orange*. According to Simal-González, “[m]agical realist fiction can be simply described as encompassing those literary texts where the realistic and the fantastic coexist with no apparent contradiction” (124). Throughout her essay on magical realism in Asian-American fiction, however, Simal-González, frequently refers to “moments” of magical realism. Reading her definition and her usage together, then, *Tropic of Orange* may not be a magical realist novel, but—rather—a novel with moments of magical realism. Like Amy C. Tang, Simal-González suggests that *Tropic of Orange* can be helpfully understood as magical realist, but that—by its nature as a postmodern pastiche text—it must also be understood as—for example—detective novel, a disaster novel, and an immigration novel (Simal-González 141, Tang 70). In addition to these magical realist elements, however, there are also other fantastic elements that I would characterize as more mythical than magical-realist. While the magical-realist moments seem to comment on some aspect of global climate change, the mythical elements seem more concerned with the wealth disparity between the global north and the global south.¹¹⁰ My argument chiefly concerns how magical realism is used to represent the

¹¹⁰ The mythical elements have a less direct connection to the novel’s commentary on global warming. Arcangel is a five-hundred-year-old mythological figure who pulls a truck filled with oranges off the road by running a rope around the truck’s axle and then hooking the ends of the cable into holes in his sides (*ToO* 75). He also fights a personified NAFTA. Rafaela transmogrifies into a snake to fight a transmogrified dealer in human organs who has turned into a jaguar. In these moments, the fantastic and the realistic hardly “coexist with no apparent contradiction” (Simal-González 124). These sections seem to employ narrative tropes from genres different from magical realism, such as myth, legend, and folk tale. These sections, though eschewing realism, also address national and continental themes and conflicts, rather than the tension between global and local that I see the magical realist passages commenting on.

consequences of global warming, not the fantastic figuration of conflicts between north and south.

What is initially magical about Yamashita's magical realism, and how that aesthetic addresses climate change, has to do with space.¹¹¹ In the novel, an orange from Gabriel's half-built home on the Tropic of Cancer in Mexico travels to Los Angeles, "utterly transforming the entire geography of North America" as it travels (Lee 88). When the orange is taken North, "[t]he Southern Hemisphere is pulled into the North" (Day 173). The pulling of the South into the North has been read by most critics as an allegory of the northward flows of capital and bodies in the 1990s.¹¹² Yamashita's direct references to global warming early in the novel demonstrate that the northward flows of capital and bodies is not simply a mysterious aftereffect of trade agreements. As the planet warms, El Niño produces more severe droughts and floods in Central America (Lustgarten). The droughts and floods lead to periodic resource scarcity. Some of consequences of this scarcity include political instability in the regions effected and more people struggling to gain access to basic necessities like food and water. The people travelling northward from Central America, then, are, in many cases, fleeing the consequences of climate change in the forms of economic precarity and political violence.

Global warming and climate change come up early in the novel, but they are not made "magical" until Gabriel's Monday chapter. In this chapter, Gabriel makes several phone calls in his office in Los Angeles. One of these calls is to Buzzworm, who tells him about deaths in the "transvestite camp" due to the recent flash flooding: "We got a wall of rain. And I mean a wall of rain. Flood conditions. Dumps a whole foot in five minutes. I timed it, so you know I know"

¹¹¹ John Blair Gamber argues that "*Tropic of Orange* maintains a deep concern with representations of geographic space, particularly in demonstrating the failure of maps and cartography generally" (128).

¹¹² While I agree with these readings, I do not think they focus enough on the ways in which the northward migration of the Tropic of Cancer literalizes the trope of climate change in global warming discourse.

(*ToO* 41). Gabriel is hesitant to write about this problem and asks what else Buzzworm has for news. Readers should remember the downpour from the previous day in Emi's chapter. What Emi experienced as an inconvenient occurrence related to her job and Gabriel experienced from the comfort of a restaurant has killed the some of the city's most vulnerable population. The novel does not dwell on the inequalities in how much risk various populations assume when confronted with erratic weather caused by climate change, but the implicit message here is that the well-off, middle-class, employed characters are much less likely to suffer the consequences of global warming than the poor and other invisible populations. They are therefore fundamentally less aware of the risks weather anomalies present.

While flash-flooding is hardly magical—indeed, it's all too real—the conversation between Buzzworm and Gabriel soon shifts from the bizarre (though not unheard of) weather to impossible behavior by the sun. Buzzworm also tells Gabriel that “The sun's up. I mean up. Like it's never gonna go away. And by my synchronization, it's near going on seventeen hundred. Daylight savings my ass. This is like Alaska” (*ToO* 42). When Gabriel leaves the building he finds that “the rush of heat and humidity outside the glass doors was sudden and oppressive (*ToO* 45). The sensation does not seem magical at all—of course it's hot in Los Angeles at “about four o'clock in the afternoon . . . mid-June” (*ToO* 37). The heat, however, is not all that is strange: “I realized how strange this was: in the middle of towering thirty and forty floor buildings there was not a single shadow . . . the sun had aimed its rays straight down into the downtown canyon. At this hour it seemed impossible” (*ToO* 46). Because the earth's rotational axis tilts most closely to the sun on this day, the sun appears higher than usual (“What's a Solstice?”). To produce no shadows, however, the sun would have to be directly overhead, which only happens at the Tropic of Cancer on the summer solstice. Since Los

Angeles is not on the Tropic of Cancer, what's so "strange" is not so much that there would be no shadows at four o'clock in the afternoon but that there would be no shadows in that particular place. The weather effects indicate that the Tropic of Cancer has somehow magically moved north to Los Angeles or that the earth's axis has somehow altered! The effects of deteriorating ozone and the build-up of greenhouse gasses is made metaphorical as the characters' sensations of the sun literally getting closer to the place addressed in narration.

The novel does not present an authoritative figure to interpret the strange goings-on for them. In the absence of such a figure, characters experience weird weather events but struggle to articulate why such events affected them the way they do, losing confidence in the evidence of their own senses. The next day, Emi rescues Gabriel when he is in a hurry and his car has broken down. Gabriel tries to articulate what Rachel Adams calls the "strange mutations in regional weather, flora, and fauna," but Emi does not feel the same sense of weirdness (Adams 260, *ToO* 62). He tells her, "I mean the length of the day. The weather. The light for godsake. Time. It's got something to do with time. Place. Damn! . . . Every which way you turn, the sun is in your windshield" (*ToO* 62). Gabriel tries to repeat what Buzzworm noticed to Emi, but she just jokes about Gabriel's disorientation and changes the subject of conversation. To Emi, who "love[s] to shift gears," the flash-flooding-immediately-followed-by-sun is not bizarre at all (*ToO* 61).

On Tuesday afternoon, Rafaela starts noticing bizarre spatial anomalies and, like Gabriel, has trouble making sense of the events to those around her. For instance, while cleaning the house she notices several crabs even though the house is nowhere near a beach. When asked if the crabs are normal, Rodriguez, a local handyman working on various projects at the Mazatlán house, responds, "Of course not. Who ever heard of such a thing? It would take a man many

hours to walk to a beach. But a crab!” (*ToO* 64). Rodriguez apologizes profusely to Rafaela for reasons that are unclear at the time (*ToO* 63). Doña Maria mentions that she has never seen a crab in the area either (*ToO* 66). When Rafaela returns from the hotel, where she picked up a package from Gabriel, she gets caught in a downpour that disorients her, and she sees hundreds of crabs in the rain (*ToO* 70). When she finally gets back to the house, she sees that the wall Rodriguez was working on appeared to be stretched and appeared to be curved slightly, which is not characteristic of Rodriguez’s regular methodical work (*ToO* 70). The orange is gone; we learn in the next chapter that it was picked up by a vendor Arcangel dreamed about (*ToO* 75). Arcangel takes the orange after his feat of strength on the highway and heads north (*ToO* 75). The chapter starts the strange migration of wildlife occupying inland areas have not been known to inhabit and then shifts to emphasize the literal stretching of space with the description of the warped wall. Part of what is interesting here is that Rafaela knows, as most people do, that inland Mexico is not the natural habitat of crabs, but she notes their indisputable existence and doubts her own knowledge of the place. She defers to other authorities to make sense of the animal habitat oddity, though the authorities she consults are older people who have been in the area for a long time who assure her that her initial disorientation was on the mark: there should not be crabs in central Mexico.

As the novel progresses, the spatial distortions (and other distortions) seem to lose their obvious connections to global warming and are more directly associated with oranges. Spatial distortion becomes associated with a different set of oranges—a load spiked with concentrated narcotics—when Buzzworm buys an orange from a street peddler and talks to a scared young man (*ToO* 85). Readers remember Buzzworm speaking to this cocky young guy in his previous chapter, but now the “Kid” is “turning several shades of green” and “blubber[ing] something

about curving bullets” (*ToO* 85). The “Kid” insists he ““saw the bullets is all . . . like slow motion . . . They curved by me sudden-like”” as if ““space curved”” (*ToO* 85, 86). Buzzworm seems to believe the young man’s bizarre testimony. It’s not clear how the spatial anomaly in this section relates to the novel’s larger commentary on global warming in which spatial disorientation is often directly linked to the effects of global warming. Instead of global warming being figured in this instance of spatial distortion, one set of oranges seems to cause spatial calamity like the orange connected to the Tropic of Cancer causes spatial calamity when it moves north.

On Wednesday and Thursday, characters experience global warming as temporal distortion and as an unaccountable deformation rooted in the bodily experience of space. In Los Angeles, a semi jackknifes on the Harbor freeway when a driver eating a spiked orange crashes into it, exploding, and the homeless take over the abandoned cars. In Mazatlán, on her way to visit Doña Maria, Rafaela notices the “pregnant bulge” in the fence Rodriguez built, a bulge that in the afternoon seems more pronounced than in the morning (*ToO* 115). Rafaela panics when she finds herself in the company of Doña Maria’s son, the trafficker in children’s organs. She cannot seem to gauge how far away Gabriel’s house is after dropping Sol off at Doña Maria’s house: “the more she ran, the farther it seemed to be” (*ToO* 119). Rafaela’s panic manifests itself as a feeling of heaviness. The distance back to Gabriel’s house seems overwhelming, and she returns to Doña Maria’s house to retrieve Sol. At this point, the reader is unsure if Rafaela’s narrated sensation is a magical realist stretching of space—the literal stretching of the field between Gabriel’s and Doña Maria’s house—or merely the perceptual distortion of bodily

panic.¹¹³ What is at stake in this confusion is how the novel asks readers to make sense of spatial anomaly. We are faced with two options: to interpret spatial anomaly as a magical happening within the diegesis or as merely a strange effect experienced by individual characters, like a hallucination.

The mounting spatial distortion is exacerbated the next day, Thursday, by temporal distortion as well.¹¹⁴ The characters experience temporal distortion, but this distortion is also passed on to readers. While readers are faced with a choice about how to interpret the characters' experience of spatial distortion, the experience of temporal distortion is passed on to readers because the HyperContexts structure diegetic time for readers, and that structure becomes warped. This distortion is hinted at on Tuesday afternoon, when Rafaela goes to the local hotel to retrieve the faucets Gabriel has sent to his Mazatlán house. When she picks them up, the clock reads 11:45, but she knows it must be much later than that (*ToO* 68-9). The narrator of Buzzworm's chapters begins the first Thursday chapter "[t]he world teeter-tottered" (*ToO* 137). Buzzworm experiences the distortion "as a vision thing," but he notices that "[t]ime stood still momentarily. Time stood still eternally. Whatever it was doing, it was standing. Just standing. Buzzworm was sure of that" (*ToO* 137). Buzzworm notices that—at noon on Thursday—his watches stop momentarily at 12:00 and every station he listens to on the radio momentarily held a single note; "[t]hen it was back to normal-like" (*ToO* 137). In these moments, the part of the day where the sun is highest seems to stretch just as the land stretches in other parts of the novel. The sensation of the hottest part of the day extending is a metaphor for

¹¹³ The confusion mounts the next day, and it is likened to the confusion with the crabs earlier in the novel. Rafaela notices and feels the distortion of space, but she cannot pin down whether this distortion is—indeed—a bizarre physical anomaly or an affective, bodily response unique to her alone.

¹¹⁴ While most critical accounts of *Tropic of Orange*'s magical realism address the spatial distortion, few seem to notice the novel's temporal distortion.

global warming's gradual, incremental takeover of our experience of both space and time as they relate to weather.

Buzzworm experiences odd spatiality and temporality, but the oddness is narrated as odd *for Buzzworm*, not the reader. The temporal distortion in Rafaela's chapter is experienced by the reader, however, not just characters. In this way, the novel invites readers to share in the experience of spatial and temporal distortion felt by the characters. Bizarrely, Rafaela's Thursday chapter picks up exactly where the Wednesday chapter leaves off. Rafaela picks up Sol because she "missed him" even though, as Doña Maria points out, "It's been less than five minutes" (*ToO* 148). Rafaela replies, "No. It's been an eternity. I can't explain it. I really can't" (*ToO* 148). In one sense, Rafaela's response is a mom's hyperbolic response to being away from one she loves. In another sense, Rafaela has somehow lost about twenty-four hours between the end of her last chapter and the beginning of this one, if we follow the structural logic of days governing the passage of time in the novel. Are we meant to take the seven days as actual days in the diegesis or not? This section of Rafaela's narrative casts doubt on whether the other characters' chapters are really on separate days or not. The narrator comments on Rafaela's reflection on her own sense of place:

She had come home to México to be by herself, to be somewhere familiar. Everything was as she had always known it to be and yet nothing was. Had she never noticed? The elasticity of the land and of time. This sensation of timelessness, of yawning distances, of haunting fear, of danger. Perhaps it was just here . . . And ever since the orange—that orange—had disappeared. (*ToO* 149)

Rafaela's reaction to the oddity of spatial and temporal distortion has much to tell us about the phenomenology of global warming, and her response is like—though not identical to—the

reader's response to reading a text that distorts space and time. Rafaela approaches the landscape and climate of Mazatlán as something she thinks she knows--"somewhere familiar"—as we all approach landscapes and climates that we've spent years in. Anomalous, though sometimes barely perceptible, alterations in those landscapes and climates are difficult to pin down as anomalies at all. As someone returning to Mazatlán, Rafaela falls victim to postmodern doubt, unsure if the landscape she is momentarily estranged from has always been this way or if it just seems so. In short, because of the barely perceptible changes and moments of weirdness, she cannot know for certain whether the landscape or she herself has changed. Her response is akin to what Rob Nixon calls "slow violence" (2). Nixon defines "slow violence" as "violence that occurs gradually and out of sight, a violence of delayed destruction that is dispersed across time and space, an attritional violence that is typically not viewed as violence at all" (2). Indeed, Rafaela obviously feels more disoriented than violated, but the dispersed nature of the changes to landscape and time cause her to doubt their actuality, to consider them as a product of her own inability to recognize stability. The reader is hardly better off. Because the narrator does not definitively root the spatial and temporal distortion anywhere—leaving open, rather, the possibility that Rafaela has simply panicked, that the distortions are a product of her personal experience and not an objective phenomenon—the reader cannot root these distortions in the world of the text generally or in the personal experience of a character.

Rafaela's experience reflects the spatial and temporal warping caused by the movement of the orange as it travels north. On Friday, Rafaela flees from Doña Maria's son and then decides to take a bus north when she sees Arcangel, who has the magical orange with the

translucent strands signifying the Tropic of Cancer wound around him.¹¹⁵ When the bus stops, she is abducted by Doña Maria's son in the black Jaguar as Sol and Arcangel continue heading north. As the bus drives further north, the "time" of day quickly passes from noon to afternoon to evening and night to dawn the next day (*ToO* 186). In Rafaela's next chapter, her "Saturday" chapter, the action picks up from when she was kidnapped on "Friday" as she fights Doña Maria's son, who has transformed into a jaguar (*ToO* 220).¹¹⁶ Gabriel, who has traveled to Mexico researching a story about the traffic of human organs, finds Rafaela on the road and is surprised that he can see his house from the spot where she has been dumped, even though he figures he has at least an hour left to drive before he should have reached it (*ToO* 223). In this section the magical qualities of the orange, a product of and synecdoche for global warming, comment most directly on the disparities between the global north and the global south. Global warming, in the form of the orange, push the Tropic of Cancer north, both in terms of climate and landscape, transforming northern Mexico into southern and central Mexico. Global warming, in the form of the orange, also pushes people north in huge groups.

The temporal distortion that Rafaela experienced as an effect of global warming shows itself to be a corollary to spatial distortion. The time it takes to do things expands and retracts, much like the spaces occupied by the novel's characters. For example, even though Rafaela and Sol had been riding north in the bus for several hours before being abducted, Rafaela can still see the same scenery by Gabriel's house out the window (*ToO* 183).¹¹⁷ Bobby, whose chapters had hitherto been characterized by stark realism, encounters spatial distortion when returning to Los

¹¹⁵ Looking towards his house, she encounters further spatial distortion: "[b]ut it could not all be this close to the hotel. Even without the burden of Sol in her arms, it was at least a twenty-minute walk, and yet Gabriel's place seemed to be creeping up, step by step toward the hotel" (*ToO* 152).

¹¹⁶ She herself is transformed into "a muscular serpent," and the third person narrator notes that "the sound of her screams traveled south but not north" (*ToO* 220).

¹¹⁷ According to Vint, "the highway's growth is effected by the gravitational force of the lines emanating from Arcangel's orange" (410).

Angeles from the border. He finds getting back to Los Angeles easy—“Never got to L.A. so fast” (*ToO* 230). When he gets off the packed freeway, he finds that getting home “Takes hours. Streets stretched and shrunk this way and that. Someone put this city in the washer/dryer. Shrunk 50% in places. Then ironed it out 200% in others” (*ToO* 230). In Rafaela’s “Sunday Chapter,” she somehow reunites with Bobby (even though he was on his way to the Pacific Rim Auditorium in Los Angeles the last time readers read about him (*ToO* 253)). The dreamy passages that follow emphasize their intimate closeness and their use of the strands connected to the orange to facilitate such intimacy, but the strands also separate them even as they bring them closer together. Rafaela asks, “Will you wait for me on the other side?” and it is not clear if she means the other side of the thread, the U.S.-Mexico border, or if she is dying (or some combination of the three) (*ToO* 254). The global warming surrogate brings them closer together but also creates new impassable boundaries through its distortions of space.

Global warming is present in the novel in passages where characters actually describe and discuss the effects of climate change, as well as in passages that refer to the magical orange and its effect. Since the novel takes place over only seven days, its representation of climate change is reliant on the characters’ experience and discussion of aberrant weather within the diegesis and the magical treatment of space and time occasioned by the novel’s magical orange. These are not the only ways that Yamashita comments on global warming in the novel, however. Besides incorporating global warming into the manifest content of the novel and representing it figuratively through the magical orange, Yamashita treats style as weather in her formal practice. To best understand how Yamashita’s formal choices function as a commentary on global warming, I first demonstrate how she uses the HyperContexts to mimic the effects of at the level of style.

CLIMATE, PLACE, AND STYLE

Critical discussions of magical realism offer one way to hone in on *Tropic of Orange*'s unique formal practice and what it has to do with climate change. While *Tropic of Orange* may seem to be a magical realist novel, one of the qualities that makes it a local adaptation of magical realism (as opposed to a canonical or archetypal example) is the use of multiple narrative perspectives. Accompanying the multiple perspectives in *Tropic of Orange* are multiple, distinctive voices. Multiple narrative voices allow Yamashita to comment on climate change by crafting chapters as unique conceptual spaces. As the novel progresses, readers adapt to the shifting perspectives and voices, aligning certain perspectives and voices with chapters about certain characters. The HyperContexts at the beginning of the novel serve to prepare readers for these shifts (and to help the reader keep the narratorial codes associated with each character straight). The HyperContexts consists of a paratextual grid after the table of contents and before the first chapter. This grid's vertical axis lists each of the seven protagonists while the horizontal axis lists each of the seven days of the week. The logic of the HyperContexts suggests that each of the seven characters has a chapter devoted to him or her for each day of the week—the novel itself taking place over seven days. It also suggests that the chapters can be grouped in various ways—by day or by character. There are, for example, seven Tuesday chapters and there are seven Buzzworm chapters. Reading the novel linearly means shifting back and forth between several narrative techniques, codes, styles, and voices while learning to understand how the techniques, codes, styles, and voices are grouped according to the action surrounding specific characters.¹¹⁸ Each character's set of chapters, however, conform to a much more stable set of

¹¹⁸ According to Tang, "as the significance of the specific genres fades into the background, what strikes us most forcefully is the novel's own narrative movement between them" (87).

techniques and styles. For instance, Bobby Ngu's chapters (2, 12, 15, 26, 34, 40, 49) are all written in much the same style. As Tekdemir notes, the stylistic variations Yamashita employs are unique to each set of chapters, as if the characters themselves are representing themselves in seven different ways (46). Close scrutiny, however, reveals that the narratorial codes associated with each character's chapters serve to complicate the notion that these codes are, indeed, unique to a single character or that a single chapter or set of chapters is "about" a single character. To make this clearer, I will briefly describe the narrative perspectives and voices associated with each character's chapters. To understand how Yamashita uses style in each character's chapters as a corollary to weather, it is essential to first understand how the chapter-sets are distinguishable in terms of style.

Several characters' chapter-sets adhere closely to the logic of the HyperContexts. These chapters follow through on the implication that the chapters are, in some essential way, about their character and their character's experience. Gabriel Balboa's chapters are narrated with an aesthetic nod towards detective fiction's frequent use of first-person perspectives. As Amy C. Tang puts it, "Gabriel . . . speaks primarily in the first-person voice of Raymond Chandler's hardboiled fiction and the film noir detectives it inspired, until he morphs into the late twentieth-century incarnation of the noir detective, a hacker modeled on the hero of William Gibson's cyberpunk novel *Neuromancer*" (85). Gabriel's chapters report on Gabriel's thoughts as he reasons out several mysteries presented to him in his career as a journalist. These thoughts are accompanied by several conversations between him, Buzzworm, Emi, and other characters with whom he comes in contact and spends time.

Arcangel's chapters are narrated in the fashion of myth. Tekdemir associates the "fixed narrative perspective" of these chapters with magical realism as a genre (45). The distance from

characters' thoughts is more pronounced in Arcangel's chapters, which are all about narrative action, not interiority. Tang describes Arcangel's chapters as "bring[ing] to the novel the linguistic hybridity, historical perspective, and Chicanismo of U.S.-Mexico border fiction" (86). His chapters mix third person omniscient narration with italicized verses that recall epic poetry.

Bobby's chapters are narrated by an ambiguous narrator in a style that is immediately distinguishable from others in the novel. The first Bobby Ngu chapter begins "Check it out, ése. You know this story?" (*ToO* 14). The narrator tells Bobby's story directly to an implied reader/listener in the second person. Although the narrator never identifies himself/herself, the narrator discusses Bobby's doings at a distance but in voice we take to be like Bobby's, if not Bobby's exactly. One of the effects of switching perspectives and voices from chapter to chapter is a shifting of narrative proximity. Bobby's chapters are the most intimate in the novel and present a marked contrast between those that come before and after. Tang describes the narration in Bobby's chapters as characterized by "necessity" (85). Bobby's background is related as follows: "Bobby's story. It's a long story. Gotta be after hours for Bobby to tell it. And then, he might not." (*ToO* 15). The short sentences and sentence fragments characterize the voice in these chapters, and they all stick closely to Bobby's experience.

Like Bobby Ngu's chapters, Buzzworm's chapters employ a style characteristic of oral communication. According to Tang, these chapters "evoke the modern urban novel" (85). Unlike Bobby's chapters, however, Buzzworm's do not identify a specific implied reader. The distinction amounts to the difference between second person narration in Bobby's chapters and free indirect discourse in Buzzworm's chapters. While Buzzworm's chapters have moments of second person narration, the free indirect discourse that characterizes them is marked by several

of the features of African American English (multiple negation, article dropping, “g-dropping,” etc.), and these are the same features that characterize Buzzworm’s direct discourse.

Several characters’ chapter-sets deviate from the logic of the HyperContexts. These chapters do not follow through on the HyperContexts’s implication that the chapters are, in some essential way, about their character and their character’s experience. Tang points out that “*Tropic of Orange* does not present its different genres clashing, or even intersecting. For despite the novel’s central conceit of geographical collapse, the characters’ generically defined worlds remain distinct, even as the characters themselves begin to cross paths” (86). As I will show, this is not actually true. Tang continues: “[p]astiche in *Tropic of Orange* seems aimed primarily at foregrounding a constant oscillation between genres rather than commenting on any one in particular; generic boundaries serve mainly to demarcate the different conceptual spaces across which the narrative can be seen to travel” (87). This is accurate to a degree, but Tang’s formulation does not account for the prominent instances of boundary transgression in the novel. As I noted earlier, several critics have noted the porousness of borders in *Tropic of Orange*—not just geographical borders, but also the borders between self and other, human and non-human (Chuh 621, Gomber 122). The “conceptual spaces” in *Tropic of Orange* have their own native style, but other styles invade these spaces. These native styles, I argue, function as a kind of weather to the conceptual space of the chapter, or, more accurately, to the characters’ chapter sets. The style/weather is, for the most part, distinct to each character—as Tang notes—but not always, mimicking the weather shifts of climate change. The overarching code by which we measure what weather is appropriate or native to the chapter sets is governed by the HyperContexts.

Another way of understanding how the HyperContexts function like weather report in the space of each chapter-set is through Heidegger's rich understanding of moods. For Jonathan Flatley, Heideggerian *stimmung*—moods—“are not transitory of fleeting elements of everyday life, but are foundational and primordial” (21). They are prior to cognition, not environmental side-effects (Flatley 21). Indeed, they are more like environment itself, except that we do not exist in them, nor they in us (22). One is always disposed or attuned in one way or another, so [t]he world never presents itself to us as some kind of value-less set of facts or perceptions—things always appear to us as mattering or not mattering in some way” (Flatley 21). Moods are like narrative styles in the sense that they are often unnoticed as moods—or as styles—until they are disrupted (Flatley 22). None of the seven styles of narration in *Tropic of Orange* is particularly avant-garde, defamiliarizing, or experimental in itself. The style in each of the first seven chapters corresponds to a familiar set of codes we use to understand narrative fiction, and the HyperContexts set up expectations for how these codes will operate for the rest of the novel.

Rafaela's chapters are narrated from a third-person omniscient perspective, which clashes at points with the logic of the HyperContexts.¹¹⁹ The HyperContexts would lead readers to believe that the Rafaela Cortes chapters (1, 10, 18, 24, 30, 38, and 45) are in some essential way devoted to the character Rafaela Cortes.¹²⁰ The omniscient narrator of these chapters certainly focuses, for the most part, on Rafaela and—to a lesser extent—her son Sol, but readers are also privy to the unspoken thoughts of Gabriel (with whom Rafaela talks on the telephone) and Doña Maria, a neighbor near the house in Mazatlán whom Rafaela frequently comes in contact with. But the omniscient reportage of characters' thoughts in what are ostensibly Rafaela's chapters is

¹¹⁹ Tang aligns the narration in Rafaela's chapters most closely with “the magical realism of Latin American Fiction” (85).

¹²⁰ Each chapter has a title and a location but no explicit connection to a specific character outside of the HyperContexts.

messy, obstructed by the narrator's play with distance from the action. Some portions of the chapters about Rafaela employ a perspective that is far from the action while other portions are closely focalized through a single character (who is not always Rafaela).¹²¹ When the narrative focalization appears to adopt Rafaela's perspective, the reportage of thoughts becomes even more complicated because the focalization suggests that the character, not necessarily the omniscient narrator, is speculating on another character's thoughts, as in the following example from early in the novel when the reader learns about how Gabriel came to buy a house (a money pit, actually) hundreds of miles from Los Angeles, where he works:

This project had already been going on for eight years. It had begun one summer when Gabriel felt a spontaneous, sudden passion for the acquisition of land, the sensation of a timeless vacation, the erotic tastes of chili pepper and salty breezes, and for Mexico. And there had been one additional attraction: the location. It was marked exactly by a sign on the highway shoulder beyond the house: Tropic of Cancer. In Gabriel's mind the Tropic ran through his place like a good metaphor. (*ToO* 5)

Rafaela is talking to Gabriel on the telephone when readers are presented with this background information. The style might suggest zero focalization, an ontologically stable assessment of Gabriel's thoughts and feelings, but the next paragraph, which uses the same style, proves that the narrative perspective is limited, that the knowledge available is contingent. The narrator tells readers that "[e]veryone could tell he was green and took advantage of it . . . [n]obody remembered the grandmother who supposedly came from right around there" (*ToO* 5). The

¹²¹ For instance, the following sentence is clearly focalized through Doña Maria, even though it takes place in Rafaela's chapter: "[m]aybe Gabriel had been trying to achieve a rustic old México look what with that heavy dining table, the big leather chairs, and that giant mirror framed by a colorful Quetzalcoatl, not Doña Maria's personal preference; she liked what she called a French Mediterranean look" (*ToO* 65). These are clearly Doña Maria's subjective, contingent reflections ("maybe" is an obvious indicator) even if they're presented from a third person perspective; interestingly, however, the style does not shift to a more conventional free indirect discourse.

intimate knowledge about Gabriel's thoughts and feelings, a trademark of omniscient narration, is hyperbolically extended to include what "everybody could tell" and "remembered," but the word "supposedly" registers a distinct note of skepticism (*ToO* 5). The above passages are focalized through Rafaela, and re-reading the block quote above in light of this insight reveals an ironic attitude towards Gabriel's fanciful appropriation of what he takes to be Mexican culture. The irony and skepticism expressed in the narratorial focalization through Rafaela's perspective ends abruptly, however, when readers are informed that the grandmother in question was "a little girl kidnapped by the grandfather and taken north," a fact that "some people pretended to remember" (*ToO* 5-6, 6). The authority with which the fact of the kidnapping is related is contrasted with the skepticism of "supposedly" in the previous sentence and the pretending in the sentence that comes after. Yamashita is clearly shifting distances from the narrative action, getting closer and then farther away, endowing her narrator with omniscient authority and then subjective contingency even within the same paragraph. These shifts are significant because they upset the expectations set up both by the familiar codes we use to interpret narrative fiction and the logic of the HyperContexts. If we understand the space of the chapter—the space of the chapter as a set—metaphorically, or at like a geographic space, then the stylistic "weather" becomes anomalous when the codes and expectations are systematically broken.

The logic of the HyperContexts is subverted further when Rafaela meets Arcangel. Their stories become intertwined in several ways. They both inhabit the same chapters on Thursday and Friday; the chapters are not really devoted to either of them. When the chapters are not devoted singularly to each of them, their narration becomes stylistically enmeshed. Both characters talk to one another, so their direct discourse occupies much of the narrative space. The styles that were formerly unique to Rafaela's chapters and Arcangel's chapters appear in the

same chapters. “Rafaela’s” Friday chapter starts with a poem, epic in its vision, written by Arcangel (and italicized to ensure the reader does not mistake the stylistic idiosyncrasy) (181-2). “Archangel’s” Friday chapter mixes stylistic features of his past chapters (italicized poetry, an epic catalogue, omniscient narration) with stylistic features from Rafaela’s chapters (close attention to what Sol is doing, free indirect discourse) even though Rafaela is no longer “in” the chapter because she had been kidnapped in her “own” chapter. These examples, I argue, point to a muddying of the weather/style we are supposed to associate with Rafaela’s chapters. The chapters give the appearance of being stylistically unique and consistent, as well as conforming to the logic of the HyperContexts, but, like global warming, the chapters quickly shift weather and are subject to anomalies and incursions of weather usually associated with other places. What we find is that these chapter-sets are not “generically bound worlds” in the last instance, but worlds that are subject to stylistic disturbance (Tang 90). The stylistic mixture also suggests that the characters do not merely interact and experience their worlds as individuals. The experiences of what appear to be discrete entities prove to be collective experiences (within the limited scope of the novel).

The narration in the chapters that are ostensibly about Emi, like the narration in Rafaela’s chapters, complies with and disrupts the one-character-per-chapter logic of the HyperContexts. Narrated using “idioms from the television shows she produces,” her first chapter (chapter 3), begins with dialogue-heavy narration that is clearly from a third person perspective but becomes limited to Emi’s perspective, bordering on free indirect discourse, before the narrative distance expands to include Gabriel, and Emi leaves the narrative scene altogether, effectively exiting “her” own chapter (Tang 85). The chapter starts with simple descriptions of Emi’s actions and reportage of her and Gabriel’s conversation at a restaurant (*ToO* 18-9). We then learn that “She

had started dating Gabriel because he was Latino, part of that hot colorful race, only to find out that, except for maybe his interest in tango (and even that was academic), he wasn't what you call the stereotype" (*ToO* 19). As in Rafaela's chapter earlier, the "maybe" here marks the discourse as contingent, rooted in character instead of omniscience. The specific insertion of the phrase "part of that colorful race" links the discourse to Emi's consciously provocative stereotyping of Gabriel and his romanticizing of identity and cultural heritage. When Emi says the wrong thing, the narrator tells us that "he didn't even seem to be listening" (*ToO* 23). The chapter, which is ostensibly about Emi and her thoughts, gradually shifts to actually be about Gabriel and his thoughts.

A shift in focalization in "Emi's" chapters signals the disruption of the one-character-per-chapter logic of the HyperContexts. The next few sentences discuss Gabriel's unwillingness to argue with Emi. Gabriel is the subject of these sentences, but his actions are not narrated; rather, we find out about what he knows and thinks (*ToO* 22). The shift in focalization is not pronounced, however, because the subsequent narration consists of dialogue. The narrative center of gravity is ambiguous until Emi fields a call on her cellphone about a crisis at work, after which she tells Gabriel "I'll call you this afternoon" and leaves the restaurant (*ToO* 24). The next two paragraphs demonstrate a clear shift in perspective:

Gabriel stared down at the *pappardelle con funghi al vino marsala*, the fragrance of wine and rosemary rising, the delicate slices of wild mushroom limp and appealing coyly to his senses just under and between the firm ribbons of pasta. But this was passé. So what was in? Probably burgers.

Someone was knocking at the glass in the window pane next to his table. He looked out. It was Emi. (*ToO* 24)

The action is not merely *about* Gabriel; its narration is focalized *through* Gabriel. The beginning of the quoted section relates Gabriel's actions after Emi has left the restaurant. The end of the paragraph indicates Gabriel's internal reflections. The experience of noticing "someone" knocking shows that the narrator is relating Gabriel's experience here. The initial lack of recognition about where the knocking is coming from indicates the perceptual limits associated with first-person narrators, but it's clear that Gabriel is the one perceiving—not Emi—even though we are in "Emi's" chapter. This kind of shift—starting with narration that moves, almost imperceptibly, from a third-person narrator who is not Emi to a third person narrator who is clearly limiting the experience narrated to Emi's experience (and sometimes borrowing her voice) to narration that is clearly relating experiences and thoughts that can only be Gabriel's and then back to narration about Emi's experience—this shift happens throughout the novel. Finally, Gabriel is not the only character whose perspective takes over Emi's chapters. After Emi has been shot (which happens in "her" chapter, 44), the narrative perspective governing her chapters seems to shift to Buzzworm (*ToO* 250). Like Rafaela's chapters, the weather/style that characterizes the conceptual space of Emi's chapters is not unique to Emi's chapters. Indeed, Emi's chapters contradict the logic of the HyperContexts by demonstrating that significant portions of "her" chapters are completely unconcerned with her as a character.

Manzanar Murakami's chapters present the "epic vision" of what appears to be an omniscient narrator's perspective, a perspective that cultivates a notable distance between the narratorial gaze and any characters' thoughts (or the novel's action) (Tang 85). Amy C. Tang points out that "the novel repeatedly asserts the superiority of his panoramic view over the limited perspectives of the masses teeming beneath his feet" (82). This perspective, however, aligns closely with what we as readers are led to believe is Murakami's own aloof, disinterested

perspective. Nonetheless, phrases like “Manzanar wondered” and “Manzanar pressed on . . .” reveal the narration to be from a third-person perspective (*ToO* 121, 122). Still, Gayle K. Sato theorizes that the narration in Manzanar’s chapters reproduces what Manzanar sees:

Manzanar’s moving line of vision is the primary trope throughout his chapters in *Tropic of Orange*, for his visual mapping of everything he sees, his seeing everything, and his insistence on the rightness and wellness of wanting to see as much as possible are what constitute the mode of being through which he worked his way out from a position of absent presence in U.S. society. (Sato 130)

The third-person narration oddly picks up Manzanar’s perceptions, even closely mapping his feelings, but does not relate them in free indirect discourse. Manzanar rarely speaks, so his direct discourse and his voice are hidden; his reflections and feelings are tirelessly reported by a voice that is not Manzanar’s own. These chapters have little to do with Manzanar’s experience, however, because they report what happens around Manzanar, not what happens to him. The effect is paradoxical, that of an omniscient first-person narrator or a third-person narrator who is both limited to narrating Manzanar’s perceptions and, at the same time, omniscient (because Manzanar seems to have a super-human capacity for perception. In terms of experiencing the effects of global warming, Manzanar is both global in his seemingly omniscient perspective and local in his embodiment. This is clear in the novel’s description of Manzanar. *Tropic of Orange* also uses the literalized global warming trope to comment on the effects of automobile-related pollution. As Chiyo Crawford notes, the narrator’s description of Manzanar Murakami emphasizes how at-risk he is as a resident of Los Angeles, with its notorious pollution problems (92). Manzanar is described as having a “blackened appearance like a chimney sweep” from his life on the streets of Los Angeles and from working near freeways (*ToO* 110). The simile

Yamashita employs here is significant. The environmental damage caused by the burning of gasoline and diesel are here likened to coal in the nineteenth century, fossil fuels all. The narrator alerts us to Manzanar's victimization by anthropogenic climate change, but Manzanar's perspective never actually dwells on Manzanar's person beyond this one local description.

Tropic of Orange roots the unnatural migration of the Tropic of Cancer in the flow of commodities north to satisfy American overconsumption habits. Crawford points out how Emi, the novel's most conspicuous consumer, is often unaware of weather in the novel, as if she refuses to see the connection between her consumption and climate change (97). Iyko Day describes *Tropic of Orange* as "an allegory of capitalist ruin" wherein the intersection of characters from "varying racial, economic, and citizenship classes" reveal "capitalism as a dynamic ecology" (172). Some of the connections that the text amplifies between "human, technological, and spatial dimensions" are environmental relations produced by capitalism (Day 173). Jessica Maucione reads *Tropic of Orange* as an example of literary ecology that focuses on human reinhabitation of alienated capitalist places as sites of potential postcapitalist rehabilitation (90).

The novel seeks one solution to global warming in the mid-90s fascination with recycling. A narrator tells us that "Manzanar imagined himself a kind of recycler" (*ToO* 56). At one point in the novel, Buzzworm censures Gabriel: "around here, brother, we recycling your pulp as beds" (*ToO* 42). Besides the actual textual references to recycling, recycling is also embraced as an aesthetic. Sato describes Manzanar Murakami as a sonic recycler (128). Tang suggests that Yamashita's project as a whole is a kind of recycling (71). Yamashita employs pastiche as manner of recycling literary styles (Tang 71). However, it's hard to imagine recycling defeating major global environmental problems except as a part of a much larger

collective project. While recycling is mentioned a few times in *Tropic of Orange*, the larger project of collective response to environmental disaster is addressed with more emphasis on the novel.

Ultimately, the end of *Tropic of Orange* functions allegorically as a critique of consumerism and free market capitalism. The magical moments that pointed towards the bizarre effects of global warming fuse with the mythical effects that comment on the great divide between north and south. In the novel's final scenes, weather and climate become subordinate themes to the novel's interest in figuring working class migrant values versus privileged middle-class American values. The climax of the novel occurs when Arcangel (as "El Gran Mojado") fights SUPERNAFTA. SUPERNAFTA gives a speech to the huge crowd before the fight linking human freedom to the free flow of capital (*ToO* 257). El Gran Mojado replies that "*The myth of the first world is that / development is wealth and technology progress. / It is all rubbish*" (*ToO* 259, italics in original). These seem to be the novel's ideological takeaways. The aesthetic border-crossing and code-breaking become subordinate to the aesthetics of a spectacular sporting event. Big speeches and good-versus-evil storytelling serve to align great differences with one of two camps. After the speeches, Arcangel gives Sol and the magic orange to Bobby, who is sitting ringside, before the fight commences (*ToO* 261). El Gran Mojado and SUPERNAFTA destroy each other and everyone leaves the auditorium (*ToO* 262-3). After the end of the fight in chapter 47, the novel backtracks to narrate Bobby's experience arriving at the fight and purchasing a ticket from a scalper (*ToO* 266). Inside, Bobby has a vision of Rafaela, who keeps pointing to the magic orange (*ToO* 267). When Sol gives her the orange, she makes Bobby cut it. He cuts it, slicing the line corresponding to the Tropic of Cancer, but he insists on holding the two pieces together, even though he does not know why. As the line stretches tighter

and tighter and becomes more and more difficult to hang on to, Bobby finally lets it go (*ToO* 268). Bobby Ngu stretches and contorts his body, clinging to the strands that symbolize the imaginary borders and boundaries that separate North from South, the human from the nonhuman, and other binaries.

But if we consider the orange (and the line connected to it) as a symbol of climate at the Tropic of Cancer, then Bobby is the figure that ends up managing responsibility for the northern existence of a southern climate. How are we to read this? It's true, as other have noted, that Bobby accepts the imaginary boundaries as a matter of course, almost obliviously, not understanding how his labor is being exploited, for example (class division). In holding these strands together, he also puts in a great deal of work, much like he does at his various jobs, abusing himself to ensure that his family can have access to education and consumer goods that he did not have access to. He understands, earlier in the novel, that the work he puts in to be able to buy commodities for his family cannot replace the time they want to spend with him, so the effort he exerts to make money is weirdly like his unthinking effort in holding the threads that connect unknown elements to each other. He asks what these strands are supposed to connect. Is it his unthinking consumerism that ultimately makes Bobby someone who drags the symbol of southern climate into the North? Is his letting go at the end a gesture of renunciation of the commodified lifestyle that has led to the acceleration of climate change? I read it as a moment of epiphany. Bobby comes to consciousness of the effort he puts in to purchase what he does not want, ultimately destroying what he *does* want. The letting go at the end of the novel is the letting go of a set of consumerist values, a letting go of the American dream. In putting in so much effort to manage the strands emanating from the magic orange, Bobby cannot embrace his family. He can only do that when he lets go.

The novel spares us moralizing, but it is clear that Bobby's letting go is to be aspired to. If we are to take the orange as a synecdoche for global warming, as I have been doing throughout this chapter, then the effects of global warming are neutralized when the object itself is destroyed at the end of the novel. The effects are neutralized, that is, unless Bobby insists on holding the cords together that emanate from the halved orange, the cords that have dragged people and weather from Mexico to the United States. Bobby holds onto the cords representing man-made boundaries out of habit until he becomes aware of how unnecessary these boundaries are. While holding the strands that represent the Tropic of Cancer, he becomes like all consumers who practice consumption habits that ultimately displace people and weather and insist on man-made boundaries. When he lets go of them, the implication is that he disperses with the insistence on a north versus south binary, with all its political ramifications. He is empowered individually in that moment to reject American society's harmful distinctions. The style of the chapter remains the one characteristic of all of Bobby's other chapters. It would also seem that he single-handedly ends global warming in that moment, but his idiosyncratic narrative voice keeps its authenticity.

The chapter-sets function as spaces where voice functions stylistically as a kind of weather that pervades the chapters. Disruptions of the voices characteristic of each chapter-set are easily noticeable and allow Yamashita to mimic the epistemological underpinnings of climate change. Yamashita addresses the problem of climate change in the early chapters of the novel directly, but her later chapters address it through magical realist aesthetics and using the conceptual space of the chapter as a metaphor for regional space wherein style functions as weather. Global warming is both a topic directly addressed by the novel and a process mimicked through narrative form. After the initial chapters of *Tropic of Orange*, the style native to each

chapter changes like anomalous weather. The logic set up by the HyperContexts—that each of seven characters would have one chapter devoted to them for the timespan of a week—deteriorates as the characters converge and “pollute” each others’ chapters. In this way, Yamashita presents a formal corollary to the effects of climate change. The spaces of chapters experience aberrant stylistic “weather” and what, at the beginning of the novel, seemed to be separate and discrete proves to be blurred and connected. The blurring and connection culminate in the allegorical fight between free market capitalism and the working class. The various styles coalesce into a myth that absorbs individual narratives into itself.

Because each of the characters in *Tropic of Orange* experiences climate change and its effects differently, I do not think there is a clear message about how climate change affects people collectively except that it affects them collectively. Some characters experience the magical occurrences in the novel merely as weirdness or inconvenience. Others experience those same occurrences as catastrophe and threat. These experiences are highly dependent on class, geographical location, and gender, and they are all linked in some profound way to capitalism. The blending of styles and worlds shows how some are relatively insulated from climate risk but not entirely so. The blending also shows how the most vulnerable populations are most in need of collective response to protect themselves from the worst effects. Finally, Yamashita’s aesthetic is shows how the separate worlds of characters is both illusory and a fact of privilege.

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Spring 2015 (2 sections), Fall 2015, Fall 2016 (2 sections)

English 215: Introduction to English Studies

English 215 is a writing-intensive introduction to multiple forms and contexts of literary and nonliterary texts and discourses in English, in a cultural, historical, and global framework.

Spring 2016

English 201: Strategies in Academic Writing

English 201 consists of intensive practice in expository writing designed to continue development of already proficient writers while exploring the field of Literacy Studies. In English 201, students consider the meanings of both "literacy" and "education." The readings and writing of this course ask students to consider what it means to be a student and become "educated," how that happens, and what obstacles or complications we might encounter in that process.

Fall 2015, Spring 2016

English 101: Introduction to College Writing

English 101 introduces students to college-level reading and writing practices through a sequence of writing assignments that integrates critical reading, writing, and reflection. The course builds on what students already know about reading and writing, and it invites them to develop more complicated composing strategies for responding to their own and others' concerns.

Fall 2013 (2 sections), Spring 2014, Fall 2014 (2 sections)

Department of English, Illinois State University

English 101: Composition as Critical Inquiry

English 101 challenges students to develop a range of rhetorical and intellectual abilities. Students learn how to analyze the multiple dimensions and meet the multiple demands of a variety of written rhetorical situations. Students also develop an array of strategies to help them navigate different genres and writing situations. These strategies include: reading, brainstorming, writing to learn and think, drafting, research (both textual and empirical), giving and receiving helpful responses, revision, editing and proofreading, publication, and techniques for researching writing processes, including their own.

Fall 2010

English 101.10: Composition as Critical Inquiry

Co-Instructor
Spring 2010

Interdisciplinary Studies 121: Texts and Contexts - The 1960's
Teaching Assistant (discussion group leader)
Spring 2011

Languages, Literatures and Cultures 125: Literary Narrative
Teaching Assistant (discussion group leader)
Fall 2009

Learning Resource Center, Lincoln College – Normal

Writing Tutor at the Learning Resource Center and Testing Center
2011 – 2012

English 100: Writing Fundamentals
In-Class Writing Tutor, Instructor: Oren Whightsel
Fall 2011, Spring 2012

Julia N. Visor Academic Center, Illinois State University

Writing Tutor, CRLA Level-II Equivalent Certified
January 2010 – May 2011

CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS

National and International Conferences

“Jonathan Franzen’s *Freedom* and the Borders of Climate Fiction”
Association for the Study of Literature and the Environment (ASLE) Conference
University of California – Davis
June 2019

“Feeling/Meaning: Nostalgia, Affect, and Literary Theory”
Louisville Conference on Literature and Culture since 1900
University of Louisville
February 2018

“What’s a Death Worth?: Neoliberalism and Necropolitics in *How the Dead Dream*”
Association for the Study of Literature and the Environment (ASLE) Conference
Wayne State University
June 2017

“The Legacy of David Markson (Or Is It David Foster Wallace?)”

The Fourth Annual David Foster Wallace Conference
Illinois State University
June 2017

“English Studies after Literature: Teaching ‘Authority and American Usage’”
The Third Annual David Foster Wallace Conference
Illinois State University
July 2016

“Beyond Interdependence Day: Problems of Ecology and Interrelationships in David Foster Wallace’s *Infinite Jest*”
The Second Annual David Foster Wallace Conference
Normal, Illinois
May 2015

“And Especially Thomas Pynchon: *The Broom of the System*, The Paratextual, and Literary Tradition”
The First Annual David Foster Wallace Conference
Normal, Illinois
May 2014

“Ishmael Aloft: Impossible Narrations and Weather in Herman Melville’s *Moby-Dick*”
Association for the Study of Literature and the Environment (ASLE) Conference
University of Kansas
May 2013

“The Literati vs. Kmart People: Cultural-Regional Antipathies in David Foster Wallace’s Travel Essay ‘Getting Away from Already Pretty Much Being Away from It All’”
Louisville Conference on Literature and Culture since 1900
University of Louisville
February 2013

“The Post-Postmodern Project: How David Foster Wallace and Jonathan Franzen Approach the Aesthetics of Difficulty”
Louisville Conference on Literature and Culture since 1900
University of Louisville
February 2012

Regional and Local Conferences

“Slouching Around L.A.: Mobility and Agency in Yamashita’s *Tropic of Orange*”
Convention of the Midwest Modern Language Association
Detroit, Michigan
November 2014

“Practical Technology: Literacy, Composition, and Collaboration with Web 2.0”

Writing Program Professional Development Forum
Digital Humanities Lab, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee
April 2014

“Lovers and Thieves: Jonathan Lethem’s ‘The Ecstasy of Influence’ and the Idea of ‘The New’”
Convention of the Midwest Modern Language Association
Milwaukee, Wisconsin
November 2013

“Post-irony: Jonathan Franzen’s *The Corrections* and American Fiction after David Foster Wallace’s ‘E Unibus Pluram’”
New Directions in English Studies
Illinois State University
February 2011

“Eco-Ideologies: Pushing Ecocritical Film Studies Forward”
(Human) Nature: An Interdisciplinary Conference on Ecotheory & Justice.
Illinois State University
December 2010

SERVICE

Volunteer Committee Member
Graduate Student Advisory Council
University of Wisconsin – Milwaukee
Fall 2016 – Spring 2017

Volunteer Committee Member
Graduate Student Appeals Committee
University of Wisconsin – Milwaukee
Fall 2016 – Spring 2017

Conference Panel Moderator
English Studies at Large: Hybrid Place & Liminal Spaces
Illinois State University
February 2016

Conference Panel Moderator
English Studies at Large: Memory & the Material World
Illinois State University
February 2015

Volunteer Committee Member
English 102 Goal Revision Committee
University of Wisconsin - Milwaukee

Spring 2015

Co-organizer

“Practical Technology: Literacy, Composition, and Collaboration with Web 2.0”

Writing Program Professional Development Forum:

Digital Humanities Lab, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee

April 2014

Conference Panel Moderator

English Studies at Large: Failure and Collapse

Illinois State University

February 2014

Conference Panel Moderator

English Studies at Large: “The Novel” in English Studies

Illinois State University

February 2013

Conference Panel Moderator

English Studies at Large: Uncovering Cultural Artifacts

Illinois State University

February 2012

Conference Panel Moderator

English Studies at Large: G/great W/writers

Illinois State University

February 2011

PROFESSIONAL AFFILIATIONS

Association for the Study of Literature and the Environment (ASLE)

Illinois State Society of Literary Scholars

Sigma Tau Delta: National English Honors Society