

Capitalism Clothes It: Toxic Resilience and Undemocratization in the Face of Climate Change

Leonardo Chinchilla Mora
University of Helsinki, Finland
leo.chinchilla.mora@gmail.com

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Abstract

This paper addresses the mechanisms by which capitalism thrives in the imagined climate crises in the works of Nathaniel Rich's *Odds Against Tomorrow* (2013) and Kim Stanley Robinson's *New York 2140* (2017). More specifically, it approaches resilience as toxic resistance that allows capitalism to survive socio-economic and political forces around it. This article also seeks to uncover the ways in which such resilience deters the acknowledgement of capitalism as an unsustainable, life-threatening system. Furthermore, it scrutinizes the tension between public and private places to reveal capitalism's undemocratic practices. This analysis first identifies the role of futurology as a technocratic resource in maintaining the capitalist system running for *Odds Against Tomorrow* as Mitchell's professionalism is manipulated to perpetuate such a system. On the other hand, I correlate two models of place-connectedness with various economic terms described in *New York 2140* to arrive at a hypothesis of how resilience becomes toxic in allowing the habitation of New York despite submerging progressively. The second half of this essay concentrates on public and private places in which *Odds Against Tomorrow* showcases the vitality of public places as they nurture democratic practices. It also demonstrates two possible courses of action after suffering from a climate crisis: recovery and perpetuation of corporate American habits or their relinquishment accompanied by the embracement of an agrarian lifestyle. Finally, in the case of *New York 2140*, the interplay between private and public places seeks to demonstrate the social injustices brought about by eco-marginalization for which the undemocratic practices of capitalism also surface.

Keywords: Resilience, toxic resilience, critique of capitalism, climate change fiction, undemocratic practices.

Resumen

Este ensayo aborda los mecanismos utilizados por el capitalismo para sobrevivir en las crisis ocasionadas por el cambio climático presentes en las novelas *Odds Against Tomorrow* (2013) de Nathaniel Rich y *New York 2140* (2017) de Kim Stanley Robinson. Más específicamente, aborda la resiliencia como una resistencia tóxica que ayuda al capitalismo a sobrevivir a las fuerzas socio-económicas y políticas a su alrededor. Este artículo busca revelar las formas en las que la resiliencia impide reconocer al sistema capitalista como insostenible y amenazante para la vida. Asimismo, el presente análisis escudriña la tensión entre lugares públicos y privados para revelar las prácticas no democráticas del capitalismo. En primer lugar, este análisis identifica el rol de la futurología como un recurso tecnocrático a la hora de mantener el sistema capitalista en *Odds Against Tomorrow*, ya que se manipular el profesionalismo de Mitchell para perpetuar dicho sistema. Por otro lado, conecto dos modelos de *place-connectedness* (conectividad de sitio) con varios conceptos económicos mencionados en *New York 2140* para formular una hipótesis de cómo la resiliencia se vuelve tóxica al permitir la ocupación de Nueva York a pesar de que se está hundiendo progresivamente. La segunda mitad de este ensayo se enfoca en los lugares públicos y privados en los que *Odds Against Tomorrow* muestra la vitalidad de los lugares públicos, ya que estos nutren prácticas democráticas. También demuestra que hay dos alternativas al sufrir una crisis climática: la recuperación y perpetuación de una América corporativa, o el abandono de dichas prácticas acompañado de un estilo de vida más agrario. Finalmente, en el caso de *New York 2140*, la interacción entre lugares privados y públicos

busca demostrar las injusticias sociales ocasionadas por la eco-marginalización, de la que también surgen las prácticas no democráticas del capitalismo.

Palabras clave: Resiliencia, resiliencia tóxica, crítica del capitalismo, ficción de cambio climático, prácticas no democráticas.

Introduction

Flooding the capital of the world, the heart of corporate America, unleashes a myriad of themes in a novel, especially if it is a direct result of climate change. For this reason, both Nathaniel Rich's *Odds Against Tomorrow (OAT)* and Kim Stanley Robinson's *New York 2140 (NY 2140)* explore depictions of New York threatened and drastically altered by the city's proximity to water, thus imaginatively constructing a megacity that serves as a platform for the discussion of "place" for both humans and non-human agents (Mączyńska 172). What justifies the need for this additional analysis is my approach to *resilience*, which I claim is a malleable concept from which capitalism feeds to survive climatic crisis in both works as people seek "recovery" of "pre-disaster" conditions with slight adjustments despite the crises experienced (Carrigan qtd. in O'Brien 51). Resilience, thus, is understood as nearly indelible resistance against the socio-economic and political forces. At this level, resilience is no longer *sustainable* since it does not foster life, but *toxic* as it foments decay.

The particular focus of this investigation contributes new insights building on existing analyses. Previously, Rich's *OAT* has been widely analyzed as it was thought to exemplify the term "cli-fi" (Streeby 4). Hence, various investigations have studied the novel's portrayal of resistance to climatic events in the form of 'cultural memory' as a "counterhegemonic" narrative (Crownshaw 131). Similarly, it has also been examined as unsettlingly "deficient" in representing climate justice *outside* north American literary traditions (Schneider-Mayerson 953). Moreover, it has been considered, like many works of cli-fi, to be limited to the representation of heteronormative futures leaving queer alternatives unspoken and unexplored (Evans 95). Two more investigations seem relevant. First, Mardalena Mączyńska has selected these two works and added Rosen's *Depth* in her "micro-archive" in which she discusses the imaginative possibilities of climate fiction (strengths and weaknesses) with more of an eco-centric focus. Her analysis underscores the mechanisms by which readers can see "the post-Anthropos [New York] as a mutable, techno-biological site of multi-species habitation" (178). Second, Lieven Ameel's analysis of *NY 2140* focuses on capitalist tenets of "appropriation," "distribution," and "production," which showcase the characters' "agency at/of the waterfront" (Ameel 2020). Contrary to prior analyses which mostly focus on representation and style, I align myself with Ameel to look at capitalism, but I do so, first, for both novels *OAT* and *NY 2140* given their economic-laden narrative and, second, from the premise of toxic resilience as explained above. More specifically, this article seeks to uncover the economic patterns of corporate New York to reveal their toxic resilience since it prevents acknowledgement of

capitalism as an unsustainable system. Moreover, I evaluate the role of public places that are targeted by capitalistic threat of undemocratization.

Throughout this analysis, I target the following questions about capitalism and external socio-economic and political forces around it. (1) How does unethical professionalism endorse profit and toxic resilience? (2) How do models of place-connectedness for New Yorkers aid capitalism to resist the will of water? (3) How do these models intersect with economic behavior? (4) How do ideologies travel to determine the inhabitation of public and private places, and (5) how does democracy become the antithesis of capitalism in the intersectional nature of climate change? In that light, this analysis encompasses a mechanism to “seeing things new, seeing new things”—Buell’s imperative to “displace to replace” (*The Environmental Imagination* 266).

Resilience through Professionalism

The notion of progress has not only occurred alongside the relentless exploitation of nature—which became a tenet of the capitalist system¹—but it has also been heavily sustained by futurology² by way of assuring “progressive futurism.” I believe *OAT* presents a world that largely portrays a “liberal version of futurology” in offering “‘possible’ futures that helped to explain—and legitimate—many of the ‘flexible’ planning features of a new economic order” (170). In brief, futurology analyzes current trends and extrapolates future outcomes based on the—sometimes doctored—constancy of variables. Such analysis has been professionalized as a technocratic resource and, in doing so, futurology has become the mechanism by which the elite maintains a capitalist economy running (Waskow qtd. in Ross 178), while disregarding the urgency of ecological concerns and actions. However, (the desire for) predicting the future is not an issue on its own, but rather the main issues derive from these questions: at what point does futurology become a hinderance to recognizing the dangers of a changing climate? How can such a professional branch of forecasting the future be attached to a narrative of resilience? How does capitalism benefit from this? It must be noted that despite these “real world concepts” being analyzed through the lenses of fictional worlds, literature can still create the space for paradigm change to emerge. Indeed, Hubert Zapf comments that literature “is a textual form which breaks up ossified social structures and ideologies, symbolically empowers the marginalized, and reconnects what is culturally separated. In that way, literature counteracts economic, political or pragmatic forms of interpreting and instrumentalizing human life” (138). Given this, fictional worlds that “instrumentalize” futurology and showcase climatic disaster provoked by unchanged ideological systems like capitalism are a suitable means to attempt to solve these inconsistencies in the real

¹ See, for example, Carolyn Merchant’s *Death of Nature: Women, Ecology and the Scientific Revolution* (1980) and *Radical Ecology: The Search for a Livable World* (1992).

² Defined as “a social science of systems analysis created to facilitate military and industrial planning and fully institutionalized today as an instrument for acquiring strategic military and corporate advantage” (Ross 170).

world. Guiding my analysis on the aforementioned questions, I proceed to summarize the world of *OAT*.

Tired of working for a company that does not appreciate his potential, Mitchell Zuckor, the protagonist of *OAT*, is lured into the insurance company “FutureWorld” for which he displays acute adroitness in terrorizing all clients. Briefly, FutureWorld profits by selling exorbitant catastrophe insurance to other rich companies in New York. During his employment, Mitchell is paired up with an assistant, Jane, who is to learn from the master by taking part in successful “terror meetings.” However, when a heavy downpour comes to New York, Mitchell’s realizes that the city may experience severe flooding. Despite his realizations and predictions, he is forced to work on the day a hurricane called “Tammy” arrives. Thus, he winds up trapped inside his apartment with Jane, and uses a ludicrously expensive canoe, (called *psycho canoe*) which he had bought, to float out of the city in the aftermath of the hurricane.

OAT seems to present a subtle criticism of the ways in which a “future professional” (i.e. an authority on the subject) can actively convince others that the dire capitalist system is a sustainable one despite its foreseeable collapse due to resource depletion and unmeasured accumulation. Accordingly, I argue that Mitchell is dually aware of the usage of his profession as a futurologist, yet the demands of his job at FutureWorld lure him to restrict his predictions to convenient moves that corporations can make in order to continue profiting from ongoing exploitation. This is evident in Mitchell’s interactions with Nybuster and in his choice to adopt an alternative lifestyle after hurricane *Tammy*.

Mitchells’ identity is largely defined by his job as he believes deeply in what he preaches. Indeed, his paranoid, detailed-obsessed personality, and inclination for imagining the worst-case scenarios surface even in his physical complexion when he interacts with his clients; “he allowed fear to radiate out of his eyes. He would use the fear” (35). Once employed by FutureWorld, his first meeting is a success since he convinces a skeptical client to believe in imminent threats. He states, “I’d like to tell you what’s going happen in about ten years (sic), once Beijing attacks. Before the first missile lands in Times Square, Nybuster, Nybuster and Greene will be ruined. And I don’t just mean the firm. I mean your private wealth, your legacy, your next of kin” (35). Afterwards, he sketches a dystopian end for Nybuster’s corporation, which includes dollar inflation, political corruption and kidnapping, and even mentions New York turning into a “radioactive wasteland” (36). Mitchell’s mathematical operations are so millimetric that he persuades Nybuster that they are on the verge of inevitable threats, thus, “profitably managing insecurity” (Mehnert 139). In like manner, Mitchell’s skilled performance gives readers confidence to identify him as a “form of absolute trust in absolute power,” as Bruce would say, since “professional specialization marks a comforting site where the spectator’s confidence in the character’s performance can be total” (30). Therefore, Mitchell’s professionalism serves to manipulate corporations’ interests and channel them toward FutureWorld’s profit. Coalesced to this, the political interests of futurology grow more visible: “it is easy to see how it [futuresologist’s research] serviced the corporate need for contingency planning. Such models reduced corporate anxieties by rationalizing the scope of possible control over future trends. The goal was intelligent management and

control of the unpredictable” (Ross 177). From this perspective, these “surprise-free scenarios” that Nybuster and other clients instrumentalize the future, professionalism, and the environment while prolonging the resistance of capitalism.

While fully aware of the consequences of his predictions, Mitchell, nevertheless, chooses not to disclose such information openly as he has abandoned his professional ethics for profit. For example, he would like to show that outside the ostensibly safe skyscrapers, “temperature,” “barefoot beggars,” “plague,” and “pestilence” are real problems not too far from the “Dark Ages” (38). Thus, Mitchell recognizes the duality of his profession, but he is compromised as a corporate tool. Indeed, Bruce explains the relinquishment of professional’s subjectivity while employees work for a company:

Ethical responsibility, and even more so political responsibility, is assumed to be located elsewhere, at some higher level (the motives of the employer or of the society as a whole) where the professional need not, should not, and perhaps cannot allow himself to be distracted by it. As far as the professional is concerned, ethics are to be provisionally suspended for the duration of the job. (31)

This “suspension” of Mitchell’s ethics seems to hint at the kind of futurology present in the novel, as characters seem more interested in the repetition—and exhaustion—of a system than in the adaptation of an alternative ecology prompted by prediction and channeling of such dire natural catastrophes. In the words of Andrew Ross, this would be “liberal futurology” since it pushes a “basic framework of liberal capitalist society” without much room for divergent economies (176).

Despite the sole emphasis on keeping an economic system running, *OAT* does present one instance in which ecological disruption is a threat to humanity’s future: hurricane *Tammy*, which is popularly perceived as a blessing for the sultry summer in New York. In the novel, Mitchell carefully considers the propensity of New York to become inundated given its prolonged scarcity of water (70). In this regard, Mehnert has spoken of such a hurricane as “manufactured uncertainty” which Beck defines as “incalculable, uncontrollable and in the final analysis no longer (privately) insurable” (qtd. in Mehnert 129). Incorporating their views entails that climate-driven phenomena are too complex and intersectional for their risks to be accurately measured. Therefore, Mitchell’s professionalism is not as stable an entity as in the successful “terror meetings,” but rather it succumbs to the reality of a “manufactured uncertainty” where he “does not choose between safety or risk but between various risky alternatives” (Beck qtd. in Mehnert 129). Furthermore, the contrast between the ways in which Charnoble and Mitchell process the aggravation of the hurricane showcases their interests. Charnoble says, ““They’re *calling*. They want meetings. And meetings mean more money. Money, money, money—”” (Rich 70; emphasis in original). When the hurricane escalates to category 2, Charnoble increases his excitement even further (72). Mitchell, however, resorts to “math for relief” (73) given his philosophy that “fearing the worst usually cures the worst” (45). Once again, the interest of corporations lies in profiting from others’ fears, not in listening to the warnings of ecological disruptions such as *Tammy*.

While Mitchell’s predictions do speak of the interconnectedness of humanity in the world since he waxes eloquently about how one factor in the political spectrum may affect

social relationships (to give one example only), and while he may be aware of how uncertain the risks are, the hurricane is the agent that comes across as transmogrifying. In the aftermath of the hurricane, there are two possible courses of action: either corporate American business is restored and prolonged or there is relinquishment of such practices. To explore these alternatives, Jane and Mitchell epitomize them perfectly. In the case of Jane, the flood affects her in a profoundly personal way as they row in the *psycho canoe* and encounter debris like floating animal carcasses and human bodies. She wonders, “why is this happening to us? A whole city [. ...] All the destruction. The *death*. Everything is dead. This city is dead. It’s a graveyard” (99). Indeed, she discloses to Mitchell that it is not just about the city but also herself as she feels torn apart as well particularly because her dream of succeeding in New York seems unstable (100). Nonetheless, once both make it to dry land safely and learn that Mitchell has been proclaimed the prophet who predicted the hurricane, Jane seizes the momentum of Mitchell’s fame to propose the start of a new consulting firm called “Future Days,” (114-116). In an instant, Jane moves from grieving the destruction surrounding her to channeling such grief toward (the possibility of) profit, the only way a corporate New Yorker knows. She seems to hark back to what she says earlier in the novel, “the world began without man, and it will end without him. Until then, there’s FutureWorld” (64), which assumes that, despite the transgressions corporate America incurs, the business of fear will accompany humanity’s affairs till the end of the Anthropocene. Hence, Jane becomes Rich’s embodiment of a New Yorker’s fidelity to a system even after directly facing an unspeakable disaster. This is capitalism stubbornly resisting the will of water for, as she trusts, New York is “invincible” (108). Remarkably, Mitchell sees Jane’s return as something plausible over the short term since he is acutely aware that the current capitalistic system is unsustainable and will cause colossal ecological disbalances in the upcoming years making everything “a lot wetter” (108). For these reasons, Jane is an apparatus to make visible how populations can manipulate the corporate, ecological (and even political) discourses to pretend that capitalism will provide endlessly and ceaselessly, as Timothy Morton would say, as if “resources sprang out of nowhere” (88).

Even though Mitchell initially entertains Jane’s idea to start a new firm, he later confesses that he cannot be part of such an unsustainable system any longer. His journey follows the ethic of Elsa Bruner who functions in the novel as a hint that the price he is paying for being a futurist is living a life of perpetual fear entrapped within the skyscrapers’ fenestration.³ Indeed, Elsa is referred to as Mitchell’s “paragon of solitary idealism, of single-minded devotion to higher purpose” (159). As it must be remembered, Elsa is Mitchell’s opposite since she represents an alternate lifestyle, which Mitchell conceives of as nonsensical and perilous. Their correspondences reveal a tension regarding whose lifestyle is the most appropriate: Mitchell’s corporate, controlled life or Elsa’s agrarian and free life. Thus, the hurricane allows Mitchell to literally flood out of corporate America into the suburbs to settle for a more agrarian lifestyle; he is unfettered

³ This “price” I refer to seems to resonate with Mehnerts’s mention “affective dimension of fear.” See Mehnert, 133.

from the numerical entrapments of his mind. A shift of this magnitude in the protagonist signifies a collapse of his professional identity and relinquishment of corporate affordances. It also symbolizes the awakening of his sensibility toward a harmonious, sustainable self. This is what Schneider-Mayerson identifies as “a sense of masculinity and Emersonian self-reliance” (952). I, however, go further in view of Merchant’s *Reinventing Eden* to claim that Mitchell may be opting out of a relationship of power over nature in which he predicts future events to sustain a system, to embrace a “partnership” ethic with human/non-human agents working synergistically (5). In the words of Merchant, this “partnership” is a “dynamic relationship to nature as a partner” admitting that there is real unpredictability and tangible, observable agency in both humans and nature as they “inject uncertainties into the trajectories of progress and decline” (5).

In essence, *OAT* juxtaposes a stability that is potentially lucrative for capitalism to continue exploiting resources in corporate America to the instability with which natural phenomena threaten that system. This creates a conflict between predictions and realities in which the incongruence will only increase as Mitchell knows. This novel, then, showcases most people’s preference to maintain business afloat even when there are alternative ways of life, and the systems they believe in are becoming growingly unsustainable. Toxic resilience has many forms, however; I turn now to the toxic resilience presented in terms of place-connectedness and economic behavior in Robinson’s *NY 2140*.

Resilience through Place(full-less)ness in *New York 2140*

Unlike Rich’s, Robinson’s novel portrays this metropolis with drastic water changes already having occurred. Indeed, lower Manhattan is underwater due to a 50 vertical feet water rise and, consequently, waves make direct contact with buildings in an area called the “intertidal zone,” where the MetLife building is located. Given the fervent attachment of New Yorkers to a city that is being progressively submerged, I here analyze models of place and juxtapose them with an analysis of the titles of the novel’s parts⁴ in order to formulate a hypothesis for New Yorkers’ sense of place. This will provide evidence of toxic resilience in their inhabitation and behavior.

To begin with, I shall first establish what is understood by “place.” Erica Carter et al., claim that “space” morphs into “place” “by being named” since “the flows of power and negotiations of social relations are rendered in the concrete form of architecture [...] and by embodying the symbolic and imaginary investment of a population” (xii). Thus, place implies attachment through a sense of identification with concretized structures. Likewise, even if place is an “elusive” concept (Buell 60) and has been used to ground identity and resist “colonizations of capitalist modernity” (Oakes 509), place is a resistance that “seek[s] empowerment within the world economy” (Buell 59). Considering these facts, “place” is, first, grounded in emotion and, second, not necessarily an instrument able to resist the overpowering presence of capitalism (as Timothy Oakes

⁴ The novel is divided in “Parts” rather than “chapters” or “sections.”

insinuates), but rather a tool used to justify upward mobility within the capitalistic hierarchy and economy as it simultaneously reinforces and nurtures such a system. Consequently, how do New Yorkers inhabit their city?

Lawrence Buell offers two models of place-connectedness that form the basis for understanding attachment to a metropolis: “concentric” and “dynamic.” The concentric model envisions “place” as a group of expanding circles of knowledge “from-home-to-society bases”; in other words, the model is like a rippling effect on water (64-65). This creates both an epicenter and an orientation that portrays any other place as secondary since it orbits around the existence of that one epicenter. Indeed, understanding place as the most significant site for one’s (inter)actions grounds one’s identity in it and simultaneously gives it emotional affect. This can seep into other relational aspects such as the economic system. The succeeding question is, how does such a model ground the belief that capitalism can resist the will of water?

To begin with, Part One, titled “The Tyranny of Sunk Costs” offers an explanation: it refers to stubborn resilience, a result from having invested so much in a business that the attachment impedes recognizing failure and walking away (37). As a result, the mentality of a New Yorker in 2140, from the outset, seems to be one of fierce commitment to resilience. This resilience hinders consideration of alternative ways of managing an economic failure. On that note, when people have been stricken by crisis, a mindset of “recovery” based on a “pre-disaster” world order is sought and endorsed (Carrigan qtd. in O’ Brien 51). In this way, resilience can become toxic when facing climate threats since it may be believed that the problem will be solved with minor fixes; as David Harvey would say, “financial crises serve to rationalize the irrationalities of capitalism” (11) and, unfortunately, alternative ecologies are not rational amid crises. Even when the lower part of their metropolis lies now underwater, these stubbornly resilient New Yorkers continue to reside and perpetuate their economic system despite the displacement of citizens, the diminishing public places, and threats to life of such rising waters.

The concentric model of place not only takes root in “The Tyranny of Sunk Costs,” but also in New Yorkers’ personality as inward-looking and self-centered since their city is the “center of the universe,” as Mączyńska comments (168). New York is not just “the spot where the Big Bang occurred” (Robinson 38), but also the land of superlatives, a place where the adjectives “busiest, noisiest, fastest-growing, most-advanced, most cosmopolitan” take origin (38). Notably, the model of place as an epicenter begins to fit in a fictional world with citizens who see their very existence as the most exquisite expression of humanity. The reason behind people dwelling in an area so prone to drowning starts to become clearer: the emotional affect coalesced with a circling model of place-sense dispersed across all aspects of their existence, even their economy. New York is a submerging dream, but it is a dream apparently worth dying for, worth annihilating the life around it for.

Additionally, Buell’s second model of place becomes crucial in further understanding that attachment as it regards “place” as dynamic since “places themselves are not stable, free-standing entities but continually shaped and reshaped by forces from both inside and outside” (67). This perspective further argues that places are “open and

porous networks of social relations” (68) which connects with Carter’s et al., conception of “place.” I wonder, then, what further impact must economy (a socially created and nurtured concept) have on the attachment to this city? Part Five, titled “Escalation of Commitment,” suggests a response since, as an economic term, it explains the behavior of further investing in a business to recover from previous, unsuccessful events. This mentality that ignores possible losses, I argue, is comingled with capitalism since its intrinsic ambition is to expand without regard to shortcomings. As an economic system that is propelled by a “mantras of ‘growthism’” (Grgas 74), a system that “undermines the original sources of all wealth” (Marx qtd. in Morton, *Ecology Without* 91), and one which “encrypts labor” and automatizes the worker (Morton 92), capitalism lies in close parallels with a narrative that is always being remade. This is the fabric of New York as a city in the eyes of New Yorkers:

Anyway there it lies [New York] filling the great bay, no matter what you think or believe about it, spiking out of the water like a long bed of poisonous sea urchins onto which dreamers cling, as to an inconveniently prickly life raft, their only refuge on the vast and windy deep, gasping like Aquaman in a seemingly-impossible-to-survive superhero’s fake low point, still dreaming their fever dreams of glorious success. (39)

On close examination, this quotation seems to suggest that capitalism and place-connectedness synergistically feed one another as capitalism finds its expression in New York City with its leading economic presumption and ever-expanding nature. The quotation similarly exemplifies the resilience of New Yorkers “clinging” to that commitment of living in a submerging dream, which has *escalated* to a “poisonous level.” I would lastly argue that the idea of New York’s ability to endure even in “seemingly impossible to survive” situations is part of the dream of this city, and its success in doing so is its prize and a simultaneous stimulus to reinforce the system despite any crises it produces. In these ways, resilience partly justifies New Yorker’s sense of place, but environmental peril cannot be abrogated for too long, unless their city projects the illusion that humans are in control of their surroundings.

Unlike *OAT* where the negligence comes across through Mitchell’s professionalism and the corporate deployment of futurology, the sense of alienation in *New York 2140* comes through sophisticated, technological fixes such as skybridges and water-permeating sheets attached to buildings. These changes are part of what Harvey would call “second nature” through the process of “creative destruction” since “nature is reshaped by human action” (185) to isolate both. The sense of externality of the dangers of an “outside world” reassures citizens that they are in control. In fact, Buell contents that place may either be “an insulating or a galvanizing force” (*Writing* 56). The city enables this insulation by offering minimal interaction with their environment through a cunning manipulation of the cityscape. Hence, the existence of an unsustainable capitalism is prolonged as the city limits the spaces of interaction with the decaying surrounding, deterring citizens from facing the need for a change in ecology. In *NY 2140*, New Yorkers interact with their surrounding environments minimally since they move around skybridges and on-water transportation. Furthermore, Derrida’s “re-mark” is influential in the backgrounding of such phenomena (qtd. in Morton 48). This “basic gesture”

concerns the distinction between background from foreground, music from noise, “space” from “place,” and so forth. In this case, it is possible that the decision to background the environment and foreground the corporate shelters facilitates this detachment from endangered life, theirs included. Consequently, the city itself is capable of backgrounding the imperative of adequately responding to climate change through those technological fixes while the citizens’ attachment to their place and functional-but-pernicious system inhibits their recognition that a change is imminent. Both models of place-connectedness exemplify that resilience can indeed perpetuate unsustainability.

In essence, New Yorkers are characterized by their self-absorption in being “the big bang” epicenter, their superlatives of self-expression, and their self-fabricated blindness for the threats to life. These characteristics emerge from the primacy of their place-connectedness and their adamant resilience to remain residing in a submerging city. Finally, New York seems to be filled with places that are too sacrosanct for the collective whole to consider their abandonment, even in the face of severe floods and threats to life.

Public and Private Places in *OAT*

OAT depicts the tension between private and public places, particularly in the aftermath of *Tammy* as Mitchell and Jane float out of Manhattan. The consequences to place democracy become axiomatic when rich and poor individuals suffer equally from the inaccessibility of public services amid a crisis. In this analysis, I will use Donald Woods Winnicott’s concept of “holding environments” to delve into the novel’s criticism of how capitalism can threaten democracy. A “holding environment” is comprised of “public things” such as “parks, prisons, schools, armies, civil servants, hydropower plants and/or electrical grids,” which are associated with democracy as they remain public places accessible to populations at any given moment (qtd. in Honig 59).

Regardless of Mitchell’s socio-economic status, he experiences the dire effects of the hurricane like anyone else since he lacks access to democratic, public places. As these become the only viable option for Mitchell and Jane, they realize how unattended they have been because of corporate America’s sole interest in privatizing places and objects. As Honig asseverates, “these things in the world may become ruins. They may decay if untended. They may be sold off, if unguarded, privatized if undefended. They won’t be there in a few years unless we commit to maintaining them so that they may maintain us” (65). Given the epiphanous sense of emergency for those public objects, I would argue that, as Jane and Mitchell paddle through the city, they realize that their “holding environment” is incapable of supporting their existence. Further, despite their lives usually being surrounded by private, stable, and efficient objects (now contrarily floating around), the only thing left for them is the publicness of emergency that the storm has created.⁵ Here, a further mention of the “holding environment” must be made in relation

⁵ Honig remarks that ‘emergency’ is becoming “the only public thing left to us” when discussing Hurricane Sandy. I agree and claim that such is the case in the imagined catastrophe of hurricane *Tammy* in Rich’s *OAT*.

to its capacity to serve everyone alike through its publicness: the holding environment is inextricably bound to democracy as it is at the service of all individuals regardless of their “backgrounds, classes, and social locations” (Honig 66). Despite this shared aspect, capitalism has rendered invisible the need for maintenance (also read defense) of those public places, even when no private benefit will measure up against the will of water regardless of its resilience. More significantly, the material proliferation of objects creates a “dramatic shift,” as Mączyńska argues, since the escape from the drowned metropolis demands recognition of those customary objects “whose overproduction had precipitated run-away climate change” (170). Capitalism is foregrounding the collapse of the metropolis by following primarily consumerist demands, and this is also connected to undemocratic practices from Honig’s point of view: “If public things are a constitutive element of democracy, then economies that undermine the thingness of things,⁶ as such, and reflexively prefer privatization to public ownership or stewardship, are in relations of (possibly productive) tension with democracy” (61).

In a similar way to the criticism of New Yorkers’ personality presented in *New York 2140*, *OAT* criticizes the habits of people and their inhabitation of places through the contrasting depictions of Camp Ticonderoga, property of Elsa’s father-in-law. Originally, it was a business, but with deterioration and lack of interest, it became a working farm in which Elsa lived. It also becomes a shelter for refugees after Tammy hits. Throughout the novel, Elsa’s epistolary revelations give Mitchell the puzzling sensation that her agrarian experiment in Camp Ticonderoga is succeeding: she is living harmoniously with nature as she plants vegetables, plays outdoors, and paddles canoes. Similarly, she is free from private services like internet and cellphone signals, and she is content with her agrarian lifestyle (23-25). As a matter of fact, one could argue that her life is balanced and freer because her actions toward her surrounding holding environment are grounded in “common love for shared objects and even in contestation of them” (64 Honig). In that way, her life is freer due to the abundance of democracy—friendly accessibility—of her environment. This is evident in the retrospective testimony of a stranger, who states:

‘It was a real good thing,’ said the woman. ‘For the first couple days at least. If you could make yourself useful on the farm, you could stay. Indefinitely. They didn’t pay nothing, but they served food and the cabins have cots. Vegetables in the fields, water from a natural well. The water was clean and fresh. Cold. Bottom-of-the-ocean cold.’ (123)

There is an abundant shareability of this agrarian life and faith in the publicness of objects that seems to provide everyone with a priceless benefit: “the human world with stability and form” (Honig 60). This stranger’s testimony showcases the feasibility of a life dependent on the common goods and relying on an all-accessible holding environment that can flourish given the right mindset, given the right ecology.

Conversely, as Michell and Jane enter Camp Ticonderoga, it looks dismantled by another kind of hurricane, a more anthropogenic one. There is anarchy, massive displays of violence and incivility brought by the city people who migrated to the suburbs, which shows that the biggest issue is not the space to be inhabited but the attitudes of the

⁶ Defined by Honig as “[the objects’] capacity to provide the stability and durability necessary to the stable and durable relationships that constitute human flourishing” (61).

collective toward it. On that note, this incivility of ostensibly “civilized” people represents the corporate derailment of New Yorkers that takes root in disowning private property. I claim this as Merchant recounts that a narrative of progress has been linked to ownership in the following manner: “Ownership of private property became an integral part of the emergence of civilization from the state of nature.⁷ To be civilized was to impose order on personal life; *civilization represented the imposition of order on the land*” (68; my emphasis).

Therefore, it can be theorized that losing their private property makes city-minded people feel the loss of a man-made Eden (as Merchant could refer to it); i.e., what most people call “metropolis.” Additionally, this same character grievingly speaks of the camp: “This place was a little treasure, but they’ve ruined it now. Like the always do.’ ‘Who ruined it?’ ‘People. Human beings. Well, to be specific, men. It’s the men that did it. They’re doing it still” (Rich 123-124). This quotation seems to ascribe violence to men exclusively; hence, it could be insinuating that men are mostly responsible for the corporate business, so they have little chance of survival in adapting to a sustainable lifestyle with no commodities.⁸ The contrasting depictions of this camp demonstrate resilience of their behavior irrespective of whether or not they are in the city. Ideology is resilient and travels through people along with citizens’ affiliations and ascription to public or private institutions, which can either nurture a life like Elsa’s or one of chaos like that of the savage refugees of the camp.

Public and Private Lands in *New York 2140*

The MetLife building is menaced by environmental factors that come along with its proximity to the intertidal zone. I will approach these threats in two different ways: the induced migratory crises arising after the floods, and the indemnification of private places over public ones.

Part of such a struggle to recover from the devastating Pulses (sea water rise events) is the induced migratory crisis. This is visible as many citizens lost their documentation because of the Pulses, which has caused a reorder of hierarchies and privileges. Even though New York is a city of immigrants, as Charlotte remarks (50), many U.S. citizens are now treated as illegal since they lost their documentation (214). The long-established impervious and impenetrable North American character had literally been washed away and a new migratory crisis ensued from the flood and ebb tides. At this point capitalism has progressively sidelined its New Yorkers. In essence, the Pulses augmented the population that suffers from inequality and the increased number of affected ones evinces social injustice, which is strictly related to the changed climate and perpetuated

⁷ This “state of nature” is referring to Thomas Hobbe’s primitive state of society of which no civility could emanate.

⁸ I ground this claim the opposition Carolyn Merchant traces in her book *Reinventing Eden*, where she explains the role of gender in the narratives of Eden that are out there. Accordingly, women are usually constrained and associated with earth and nature (though this is usually perceived as negative) while men are perceived as the epitome of modern science, thus leading the way toward progress. See Merchant’s *Reinventing Eden* pp. 20-22.

through capitalism. Indeed, Julie Sze remarks “the existence of environmental injustice is a reminder that people’s experience of ‘nature’ are shaped by their experiences of social, economic and political inequalities” (159). As this happens to everyone who is unfortunate to live in an area prone to drowning, it forms a hierarchal displacement that is unsystematic. This shows how the resilience of capitalism threatens life by being a top-down system. This kind of ecological marginalization is a rather powerful message to reveal the tragedy of commons that capitalism can create by menacing to drown everyone in such pyramidal economy regardless of race or nationality. Such is the nature of climate change.

Similar to *OAT*, *NY 2140* criticizes the unfair advantages that private places possess over the public ones in the face of such environmental degradation and the crises that New Yorkers experience. During the novel’s climax, the hurricane, numerous affected New Yorkers wind up sheltering in Central Park, and even when Charlotte personally contacts the mayor to demand that private, vacant buildings in Upper Manhattan be inhabited, the mayor fails to adequately respond to the needs of the people. Hence, Charlotte leads an unsuccessful protest to claim the habilitation of such buildings, which are exempt from the havoc of this phenomenon. This is akin to an “ecojustice” revolt as it “entails the redistribution of wealth through the redistribution of environmental goods and services” (Merchant, *Reinventing* 141). In the case of this novel, “environmental goods” refers to the state of immunity from the dangers of hazardous natural waste that the dry Upper Manhattan towers have. Regardless of the success of the protests, this instance demonstrates to all affected New Yorkers that private corporations (including the venal mayor) do not care to defend the lives of the affected ones, but only their ulterior and unscrupulous, lucrative interests. By the same token, Kristof comments on the tendency to prefer private services over public ones due to their *perceived*, elitist efficiency (qtd. in Honig 66-67). This surfaces as a criticism of private entities as being only ostensibly efficient: they offer benefits for a small number of people, yet in the face of more comprehensive threats, they are manifested as inefficient or poor in coverage. This is exactly what occurs in Robinson’s work: while the idea of investing in the “SuperVenice” seems innocuous, it takes a climate-induced crisis to visualize inequalities and the lack of (democratically defended) places that sustain all life regardless of class. Consequently, *NY 2140* criticizes capitalism for disregarding the degradation of the environment even when the great majority is being directly affected, excepting the elite in their private, dry, and impervious buildings. This minority of privileged individuals is constantly growing more elitist since the floods have also caused the social hierarchies to be more marked. For this reason, the Citizen’s comments, “A state of revolt against global finance? Democracy versus capitalism? Could get very ugly” (196) making *NY 2140* a stage for the survival of “democracy versus capitalism,” a battle in which resilience makes democracy more powerless and capitalism is dangerously relentless and resilient as an economic system that is still nurtured by everyone’s ideologies.

Conclusion

Throughout this discussion, I have answered multiple questions, which emanate from the central question: how does capitalism survive through toxic resilience in the face of changes at socio-economic and political level in both novels? As fictional works highly praised for their potential to awaken the readership's sensibilities and engage in different societal spheres that influence climate action, *Odds Against Tomorrow* and *New York 2140* reimagine the metropolis in immediate and projected futures with great insightful potential for the role of resilience as toxic in the perpetuation of capitalism and the active denial of climate change. In the case of *OAT*, resilience becomes toxic, first, when merged with profiting ends for private interests in corporate America through professionalism. This occurs through the manipulation of futurology as loophole for the paradoxical nature of FutureWorld business in ascertaining insurance over uncertainty. Second, resilience is toxic when attached to the ideological foundations of citizens and people become carriers and destroyers of plausibly different places like Camp Ticonderoga. Third, toxicity is evident when, after the direct experience of climatic disasters, the lure of corporate America ensures the return of the "invincible" city of New York. As for *New York 2140*, resilience is toxic in so far as it is attached to New Yorkers' sense of place, and then, this sense of place is compromised by behavioral patterns that justify their adamancy. Thus, "tyranny of sunk cost" and "escalation of commitment" along with the models of place have fostered the resilience of an elitist capitalism. In like manner, capitalism has fed from its state of crisis to re-emerge and blind the collective from the need of a new ecology.

Prolonging such a model of repairment that seeks to preserve the balances of corporate, unsustainable America will inevitably endanger life—ours included. Indeed, these novels showcase that only *partly* adjusting human behavior does not suffice to solve an issue that is so colossally interconnected. For these reasons, these novels aim to reshape the imagination of space, its subsequent inhabitation, and to detach from cultural resistance to change habits that might blind the collective's understanding of this issue's urgency. Therefore, Mitchell is capable of embracing an agrarian life in the suburbs of New York, and the New Yorkers in Robinson's novel are able to turn New York's economy into welfare with progressive taxation implemented. The novels further imply that private-focused economy undermines democracy and (the defense of) public places. It is only by reconfiguring the blueprints for the human envisioning of places *together with* the surrounding environment—*not dominant* to it by means of futurology research nor by exasperated dire economic behavior—that a sea change will make possible the preservation of the human/non-human world(s), and thus we will thrive.

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