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Marco Caracciolo, *Narrating the Mesh: Form and Story in the Anthropocene* (Charlottesville and London: University of Virginia Press, 2021), 240 pp.

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Marco Caracciolo's tour-de-force *Narrating the Mesh: Form and Story in the Anthropocene* eschews the empathy discourse informing neoliberal discussions about Anthropogenic climate crisis (Elvia Wilk) in favor of form. By demonstrating the tractability of affective patterning through human-nonhuman enmeshment in exquisite close readings of a diversity of speculative fiction, this deeply researched and meticulously argued book generously contributes to the ongoing project of rendering reality open to creative transformation.

*Narrating the Mesh* meets the urgent phenomenological call to “translate science into the human-scale embodied language of everyday perception” by defending the thesis that “narrative has the tools to perform such work of translation—and that these are, fundamentally, formal tools: strategies at the level of plot dynamics, character, consciousness representation, and metaphor, that mirror or integrate contemporary science in order to unsettle the primacy of the human-scale world” (12). Caracciolo's book is a rigorous defense of narrative form when confronting Anthropogenic climate crisis, a scientific and logical abstraction that is scalarly distinct from mundane experience. However, it brings these levels into asymmetrical correspondence, so it will be of interest to environmental humanities scholars. The author has done a great service by gifting us three powerful heuristics—nonlinearity, interdependency, and multiscale— that can be mobilized and augmented to grasp the causes and effects of Anthropogenic climate crisis as they manifest in narrative form. The book lays a solid foundation for future experiments in the burgeoning field of econarratology (see, for example, Erin James and Eric Morel's 2020 volume *Environment and Narrative*).

For instance, after engaging with it, I wonder about staging a dialogue between econarratology and ecosemiotics through a rehabilitation of French structuralism, the latter of which Caracciolo mentions in the excellent introduction, which primes readers to appreciate the value of reading narrative form today. I also wonder about bringing these tools to bear on the study of pareidolia, metonymy, and jouissance in French and francophone literature from a variety of historical periods and in a variety of methodological modes. Indeed, *Narrating the Mesh* achieves an admirably open accessibility amenable to realizing such possibilities. This openness is due in part to the author's neatly conceived, theoretically sophisticated, and utterly comparative method, which focuses on the links between narrative form, affect, and semiotics. Caracciolo explains, “the form of narrative is the configuration of emotionally charged circumstances created by the telling” (5). The formal textual strategies in which he is interested—

themselves based in neuroscientific and psychological development—modulate this configuration in novel ways. A key interlocutor is Timothy Morton, whose idea of enmeshment between human and nonhuman phenomena provides Caracciolo with a poetic figure for reading relationally outside the self/other binary.

Following the introduction is a theoretical chapter, “Complex Narrative in the Anthropocene,” devoted to understanding narrative form vis-à-vis complex systems. Caracciolo’s examples—which encompass literary fiction and contemporary film and comics—qualify the importance of fictional narrative in sensitizing people to the complexity of Anthropocenic climate crisis, which authorizes the apprehension of it as the “emergent agency of industrialized societies under a capitalist system” (93), prompting, hopefully, a push to dismantle the structures—for example, anthropological difference—responsible for generating it. The two chapters of Part I focus on nonlinearity and climate anxiety. Chapter 2, “The Form of the Butterfly,” contains beautiful readings of Julio Cortázar’s and Ted Chiang’s science-fictional short stories and Dale Pendell’s experimental novel *The Great Bay: Chronicles of the Collapse* (2010) that emphasize circular logic and discontinuous sampling, respectively, to challenge the psychological bias of linearity that forecloses responses to climate change that would not reiterate notions of technological and economic progress. This chapter should be of interest to scholars of science fiction studies and the fantastic. Chapter 3, “Negative Strategies and Nonlinear Temporality in Postapocalyptic Fiction,” examines Emily St. John Mandel’s *Station Eleven* (2014), Cormac McCarthy’s *The Road* (2006), and Colson Whitehead’s *Zone One* (2011) that emphasize negation in superimposing temporalities of the pre- and post-apocalyptic (story)worlds. As Caracciolo summarizes, such strategies “conflate the imagination of something and the poignant awareness of its absence” (81). Following Sartre’s psychology of imagination, he carefully delineates the experiential ramifications of this conflation, which involves a movement through any negation’s affirmative counterpart. This chapter should be of interest to scholars of apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic studies, in addition to theorists of negativity.

The two chapters of Part II focus on interdependency and enmeshment. Chapter 4, “Five Ways of Looking at Nonhuman Actants,” is a brilliant meditation on Algirdas Julien Greimas’s actantial narrative model of character, whose high structuralism Caracciolo convincingly critiques for remaining locked into a conception of language whose possibility condition is the subject/object binary. Thinking beyond the transitivity elevated by Greimas, Caracciolo moves toward enmeshment by upscaling Andrew Goatly’s ecolinguistics through the evacuation of the human subject, reciprocity, place qua character, and nominalization and abstraction in narrative progression in examples of contemporary fiction, including Jim Crace’s *Being Dead* (1999), Jeff VanderMeer’s Southern Reach trilogy (2014), and Kurt Vonnegut’s *Galápagos* (1985). Anticipating the possibility of a critique that nonhuman actants in narrative are simply metaphors, Caracciolo suggests nonhuman realities actually resist metaphorical (and anthropomorphic) appropriation, an idea developed in the next part. This chapter is of interest to scholars dedicated to problematizing the structuralism/poststructuralism binary. In Chapter 5, “Minding the Anthropocene,” Caracciolo studies three examples of the neuronovel—Richard Powers’s *The Echo Maker* (2006), Rivka Galchen’s (astonishing) *Atmospheric Disturbances* (2008), and Bruno Arpaia’s *Qualcosa, là fuori* (2016)—and evokes the ways in which human-nonhuman enmeshment surfaces in characters’

consciousnesses through internal focalization and first-person narration. Against the semantic (and metaphysical) oppositions constitutive of Greimasian structuralism, Caracciolo stresses the “human mind’s intrinsic attunement to nonhuman patterns” (117), a nonrepresentational attunement that foregrounds embodied, enactivist, and extended cognition. The stakes here are ontological inasmuch as the human/nonhuman binary is exhaustively problematized. This chapter should be of interest to scholars of the neurohumanities and of new materialisms.

The two parts of Part III focus on multiscalarity and metaphor. The sixth chapter, “Metaphorical Patterns in Anthropocene Fiction,” is a refreshing and heady collaboration between Caracciolo, Andrei Ionescu, and Ruben Fransoo. Combining computer-aided quantitative and qualitative methods, the authors analyze Atwood’s *Oryx and Crake* (2003), Jeanette Winterson’s *The Stone Gods* (2007), and Ian McEwan’s *Solar* (2010), highlighting irony, looping temporality, and the grotesque, respectively, extending the scope of conventional interpretation. This chapter should be of interest to scholars of the digital humanities. Chapter 7, “Metaphor, Scale, and the Value of Conceptual Trouble,” locates metaphor’s value in its creation of emergent meanings by considering the consolidation of source and target in Le Guin’s “Vaster than Empires and More Slow” (1971) and Jonathan Lethem’s *As She Climbed across the Table* (1997). This chapter contains an insightful examination of Lambros Malafouris’s concept of isomorphic projection and Derek Woods’s concept of scale variance, which Caracciolo applies to make the remarkable argument that metaphorical language’s bidirectionality, in blurring distinct semantic domains, asymmetrically approximates the complex feedback loops of Anthropocenic climate crisis. This chapter should be of interest to ecocritics invested in language and matter.

The coda consists of a reading of excerpts from an interview conducted by Susannah Crockford with a writer and former environmental activist as a part of NARMESH, the European Research Council-funded project that helped generate *Narrating the Mesh*. The haunting interview focuses on deep time, metaphor, and embodiment, leading Caracciolo to surf the conceptual instability of the mesh, and its attendant affects. Thinking with and beyond literary form, on the last page, he ponders the project’s and book’s ambitions: “Literature can train readers to conceptualize with nuance their position with respect to more-than-human realities: if we could find ways to maximize the effects of this training on the collective imagination of the nonhuman in schools and other public contexts (a big ‘if,’ of course), we would have a powerful case for the ecological value of literary form” (186). From this reader’s perspective, the book’s scientific faith in the power of form successfully meets these lofty ambitions by pointing the way to an ecosemiology that would study the social function of living signs, leading us back, at last, to the philosophical problem of meaning under the sign of Anthropocenic climate crisis. A milestone of the environmental humanities, *Narrating the Mesh*, like the most interesting Weird fiction, confronts us with increasingly abstract formalisms before returning us to the mundane with a greater appreciation for narrative’s power to enact responsibility.

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