Editorial 14.2

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Industrial human activities are transforming much of our Earth's surface and beyond, including the planetary climate itself and all its contributing flows and cycles, but also the rocky, geological Underworld. In the wake of the massive and extraordinarily rapid alterations to our living ecosystems and to their undergirding of mineral support as we frack away at the outer layers of the our world in order to extract fossil fuels while injecting secret industrial poisons, creative authors and artists imagine new narrative forms of collapse and apocalypse. Although many of these tales and artworks feature the popular tropes often labeled "catastrophe porn" for their dwelling on death and destruction in a frenzy of cultural and ecological toxicity and emerging ruins of modern urban landscapes, there are other inspired stories focusing instead on wildly divergent forms of care that emerge within catastrophes. Who and what are left to care, for example, and to be cared for, these authors ask, and in what forms among the rubble and on the overheated planet of expanding storm systems? There are forms of care dedicated not only to the many types of "humans" (for what is it to be human today?), but also to beings who are nonhuman, posthuman, more than human, or even to entire ecosystems, and especially to our co-species and the plants that started it all, this pioneering march across the once rocky Earth's surface that we humans have now shifted into a march of monocrop plantations, deforested desertification, and industrial, fossil-fueled agriculture. Let us seek and consider narratives of care in which caring is carried out by, or for, manifold human beings in their variegated spectrum of genders, but also the nonhuman, hybrid forms, cyborgs, cross-species beings, and entangled beings enacting symbiosis; one might find, too, tales of the "end" that present or imagine trans-kinds of care and queer forms of care that share much with Donna Haraway's vision of "oddkin" in *Staying with the Trouble*. If forests and plants produce living systems enabling all large land animals including humankind and our companion species, does this qualify as "care"? Is reforestation care when it also benefits us during our march towards devastation? What kinds of plants or weeds remain or will remain in the future, and what animal beings and single-celled creatures will live on? What hybrids emerge, and will we care for them, will they care for us? In short, can we industrial humans, in our manifold collapse-imaginings, formulate new/renewed/old kinds of care that extend beyond our self and limited vision of families or of those who are claimed to "matter" due to their finances / skin color / religion / class / geographical/national location? Indeed, this special edition of

Ecozon@ dedicated to "Contemporary Collapse: New Narratives of the End" resonates with reshaped or rediscovered ideas of care extending across all kinds of beings who are nonhuman, posthuman, vegetal, animal, alien, cyborg, and more. These narrative and artistic visions of life acknowledge how we are all (meaning "we," now, as all living things) transformed by colonial, extractivist, imperialist, and economically "rationalist" waste-cultures; in response, several of the authors and artists in this volume feature cyclical time-frames, which is to say, they have overcome the linear claims of "progress" that seems to be moving inexorably toward calamity, and have re-inserted human cultures back into the vegetal and seasonal cycles in which we always have been immersed, despite our "illusions of disembeddedness" (to quote Val Plumwood's *Environmental Culture* and Eric Otto's discussion of Plumwood in *Green Speculations*). *Ecozon@* 14.2 features analyses and stories that rethink human beings from within the entangled and trans-corporeal world of living things that we are changing and, perhaps, caring for or about, as they, too, change us and, one can hope, care for us, during these drastic times.

The special section entitled "Contemporary Collapse: New Narratives of the End" is guest-edited by Sara Bédard-Goulet, University of Tartu, and Christophe Premat, Stockholm University. It includes seven marvelous essays, which, as the editors note, "investigate a posthuman aesthetics in contemporary literature, which builds on, but mostly shifts Western and anthropocentric conceptions of collapse, and diverges" from apocalyptic traditions. Importantly, the authors achieve this shift away from expected tropes found in declensionist narratives by considering "what happens after death, where the posthumus renegotiates the assemblage of chains of life between animals, plants and humans," thereby potentially reimagining care and our entanglements during the "end" that extend beyond simple "human" concerns. These essays offer new possibilities for imagining and perceiving our current ecological and political situatedness within the shifting tides of extinctions and rebirths.

The special section's wide-ranging contributions study literary and artistic works from across Europe, Asia, and North America, including several indigenous authors and artists. Ida Olsen's "Collapse and Reversed Extinction: Beyond Inherited Epistemologies of Species Loss in Louise Erdrich's *Future Home of the Living God*," features, for example, an insightful reconsideration of cyclical time in opposition to what the editors term "the Western teleological discourse of progress." Similarly, Jasmin Belmar Shagulian's essay, "Pachakuti, An Indigenous Perspective on Collapse and Extinction," explores mythocritical indigenous ontologies that are also circular and so shift the focus away from teleological narratives. In "The Future is Collapsing: Feminist Narratives of Unmaking in Laura Pugno and Veronica Raimo," Alice Parrinello demonstrates how these two Italian science-fiction authors adopt Haraway's idea of "oddkins" in their stories of extinctions. The section includes a wide range of genres and formats, too, going beyond novels, myths, and science fiction; Armelle Blin-Rolland reads French graphic novels in terms of queer and feminist stories of the end in "Contemporary Graphic Narratives of the End: Sketching an Ecopolitics of Disorientation and Solidarity through SF *Bande Dessinée*." The impressive linguistic and cultural diversity of the special section continues with Karl Kristian Swane Bambini's "Norwegian Futurisms: Posthumanism and the Norwegian

Nordic Model in Tor Åge Bringsværd's *Du og Jeg, Alfred* and *Alfred 2.0*," that critiques the celebratory vision of Norway as an ecotopia and generous welfare state, establishing instead, through the reading of eco-dytopias, how Norway is also a country enriched by fossil-fuel extractivism. The final two essays analyze art works portraying various eco-apocalyptic visions. Deborah Schrijvers looks at mass extinctions in terms of nonlinear time in "Seeing the World Through Glass: Time and Extinction in Fiona Tan's *Depot* (2015)." Finally, Damien Beyrouthy's essay, "Facing Depletion. Artworks for an Epistemological Shift in the Collapse Era," queries the validity of "technofixes" for environmental crises by evaluating David Claerbout's *The Pure Necessity* (2016), Emilio Vavarella's *Animal Cinema* (2017) and *Amazon's Cabinet of Curiosity* (2019), and his own installation *She Was Called Petra* (2020) ART. Beyrouthy suggests that techno-fixes actually accelerate rather than alleviate ecological damage.

The general section features five essays with a similar sweep across continents and cultures, and includes important discussions of catastrophes, various means of reading both human and nonhuman bodies together, Norwegian birds, forms of feminist readings of bodies, culinary narratives as an antidote to tales of catastrophe, and an animal-studies reading of the Ibero-American coyote trickster. First is Sk Tarik Ali's essay from India, "Pesticide, Politics and a Paradise Lost: Toxicity, Slow Violence and Survival Environmentalism in Ambikasutan Mangad's *Swarga*." The narrative examines the historical endosulfan disaster in the Indian state of Kerala in terms of "slow violence" that impacts bodies, biological systems widely, cultures, and especially the poor. With its resistance against the pesticide industry and imaginative exploration of such a devastating ecological crisis, Ali's study ties in well with the volume's theme of "Contemporary Collapse" even as it presents forms of social protest that might bring change. Endre Harvold Kvangraven offers another Norwegian study, this one on Tomas Bannerhed's *Korparna* (The Ravens, 2011), in terms of both cultural narratives like myth and folklore, and ecological, botanical data from, as Kvangravan explains, "Småland—the historical province in Sweden where Korparna is set." With a study of birds and birding, the author's exploration of the novel emphasizes "emplacement" and connections to the nonhuman as a kind of cross-species care.

Next, Ashleigh McIntyre reconsiders the essentialism of some forms of older feminisms in her essay, "Zoomorphism and Human Biology in Barbara Kingsolver's *Prodigal Summer*." McIntyre addresses both the insights from zoomorphism's focus on human bodies as part of a species within larger systems and the disadvantages that can emerge from overly deterministic gender assumptions. She insightfully concludes that: "Whilst zoomorphisation has the effect of challenging contemporary convictions around the malleability of gender and individual identities, it is an approach that also challenges some of the cornerstones of the perception of human dominance over the natural world." In another ecofeminist essay, Danila Cannamela's "Binding and Liberating: Recipes for Environmental Narratives," looks at Italian "second-wave feminism" in terms of the language of cooking that provides a welcome alternative to "dominant discourses of natural-cultural depletion." By including actual recipes from traditional Italian culinary traditions based on ancient grains, Cannamela provides a material, embodied reading of local, sustainable agriculture as a form of human immersion in the world that continues, cyclically, throughout time, the cyclical time of living beings beyond one individual body.

The final essay in the general section by Miguel Rodríguez García, our one Spanish-language contribution to the volume, "Hacia una historia cultural, literaria y natural del coyote hispanoamericano en los siglos XVI–XIX," looks at the Ibero-American coyote as a being both a part of natural history of the continent and as a cultural icon of folklore. The essay takes a historical view, tracing the coyote from the sixteenth through the nineteenth century, and thus situating human beings alongside this trickster figure featured so prominently as yet another canid whose relationship to us shapes our material and biological bodies and worlds through time.

In the Creative Writing and Arts section, Arts Editor Elizabeth Tavella summarizes the exquisite works she includes in this volume, all of which bring additional nuance and perspective into the theme of, again, "Contemporary Collapse: New Narratives of the End". Tavella notes that such art works not only help us to "confront the enormity of the global issues, they hold the potential to produce an epistemic shift in how we perceive the future." She offers a more optimistic note considering how collapse and decay are part of renewal and change, of, in fact, new, alternative states of being." In continuing the possibility of collapse alongside considerations of care, Tavella promises that the contributions extend beyond the human perspective, that is, they "prompt a reconsideration of the concept of "end" beyond anthropocentric narratives of annihilation." The full array of creative works in this volume, *Ecozon@* 14.2, includes various works of eight authors/artists. On the cover of the volume is Diana Lelonek's striking cover image of life merging with plastic and so offering an aesthetic vision of new hybridities to the narratives of collapse. Similarly, the images presented by Nnenna Okore shape waste products and discarded materials into biologically-inspired forms with bioplastic beauty that is startlingly provocative if disturbing in implication.

The poetry and creative writing in the Arts Section brilliantly reconceives interspecies care in our age of industrial processes, genetic engineering, and pandemics. While Yaxkin Melchy Ramos invites readers, as Tavella writes, "to question the ethics of genetic engineering of more-than-human animals," José Manuel Marrero Henriquez continues his beautifully cross-species project of poetics, "The Poetics of Breathing," with a short story based on newspaper columns, *Antiviral Writings*. The tale connects directly the breath of humans and non-humans alike as we try to breathe in our industrialized world. The next two poems, "Helm" and "Fathom", are from Stuart Cooke, who considers relationships that emerge from extinctions and the resulting languages they necessitate. Then, both Laura op de Beke, in "Ticking Like a Mountain—or the Bezoszoic", and Start Flynn, in "15,000 Metres Above Time", consider new views of time, especially deep time or stopped time in the eye of a cyclone, as a means of extending beyond short-term anthropocentric visions of Earth's systems. Finally, the Arts Section closes with three images by Rowan Kilduff that also suggest deep time, multispecies care, and the collapses that occur with the explosions of nuclear weapons. I end my summary with the words from Tavella's introduction that point towards issues of care in ecological crises; she writes: "In order, then, to nourish a deeper sense of care, it is essential to visit the root causes of ecological collapse and to challenge the systems that support it." And this visitation and thus challenge of root causes is exactly what we see in the prism of art works, poems, and scholarly articles in *Ecozon@*'s volume on "Contemporary Collapse."

Ecozon@ 14.2 also features eight book reviews of new works of environmental humanities and arts: 1) Safak Horzum's review of Scott Slovic, Swarnalatha Rangarajan, and Vidya Sarveswaran, eds. *The Bloomsbury Handbook to the Medical-Environmental Humanities* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2022), 416 pp. 2) Jack Rondeau's review of Pramod Nayar, *Nuclear Cultures: Irradiated Subjects, Aesthetics and Planetary Precarity* (New York: Routledge, 2023), 198pp. 3) Lisa Ottum's review of Marija Grech, *Spectrality and Survivance: Living the Anthropocene* (Lanham, Maryland: Littlefield and Rowman, 2022), 184 pp. 4) Gabby Tapia's review of Douglas A. Vakoch, ed., *Transecology: Transgender Perspectives on Environment and Nature* (London: Routledge, 2022), 242 pp. 5) Bart Welling's review of Kate Judith, *Exploring Interstitiality with Mangroves: Semiotic Materialism and the Environmental Humanities* (London, New York: Routledge, 2023), 212 pp. 6) Rachel Dowse's review of Pippa Marland, *Ecocriticism and the Island: Readings from the British-Irish Archipelago* (Maryland: Rowman and Littlefield, 2022), 276 pp. 7) Grania Power's review of Ve-Yin Tee, ed., *Romantic Environmental Sensibility: Nature, Class and Empire* (Edinburgh University Press, 2022), 304 pp. And 8) Micha Gerrit Philipp Edlich's review of Daniela Francesca Virdis, Elisabetta Zurru, and Ernestine Lahey, eds., *Language in Place: Stylistic Perspectives on Landscape, Place and Environment, Linguistic Approaches to Literature* (LAL) 37 (Amsterdam, John Benjamins, 2021), 258 pp.

Contemporary Collapse: New Narratives of the End. An Introduction[1]

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The apocalyptic genre in Western art is rooted in a long tradition, largely influenced by religious perspectives on the end of the world, with works that highlight the struggle to imagine a world without humans, so that they often depict a never-ending end or a post-apocalyptic world (Gervais). With the increasing acknowledgement of the current ecological crisis, the pervasive awareness of its anthropogenic origin and the human inability to react appropriately to stop or reverse its process, the apocalypse and its representations take a new turn, one that questions the human's relevance on the planet. Contemporary narratives of the end thus need to deal with the perspective of a posthuman world, which has already attracted the attention of scholars for the past decades (Braidotti). Such works offer speculative frames through which to defamiliarize and reorganize the human standpoint on the end, address her/his relationship towards the environment and point out connected realities such as species extinction. Through this reconsidering of the human at the end, contemporary narratives tackle a number of important issues such as the relationship with the Other, whether as individuals, families, communities or species. In this issue of *Ecozon@*, these considerations are examined through aesthetic and narrative choices that embody various possible endings, therebypresenting survivalist struggles, renewal hopes, singular or collective voices, stories in/of ruins, interspecies care, soft and hard versions of the apocalypse, and so forth.

This special issue takes seriously the idea that "global climate change is […] catastrophic for the human imaginary" (Colebrook 10) and focuses on contemporary narratives that nevertheless seek to imagine the end of the world. It includes articles that explore how these narratives question the significance of the human in a collapsing world, how this resonates with current issues in ecocriticism and the

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environmental humanities and allows for an articulation of environmental scholarship with the contributions of collapse and apocalypse studies. The contributions to this special issue investigate a posthuman aesthetics in contemporary literature, which builds on, but mostly shifts Western and anthropocentric conceptions of collapse, and diverges from the apocalyptic tradition. In that sense, this special topic considers the *posthumus* along with the posthuman, to think about what happens after death, where the posthumus renegotiates the assemblage of chains of life between animals, plants and humans (Derrida 285). The issue also includes essays that engage with ethical concerns of apocalyptic narratives, as well as with their epistemological implications, where the presence or absence of human and nonhuman traces determines a specific knowledge and way of knowing in a collapsing world.

The special section of *Ecozon@* 14.2 includes seven articles that engage with literary and artistic works dealing with the end of the world. These articles examine contemporary collapse narratives from different cultural areas to reflect on the aesthetic and ethical concerns of representing a secular apocalypse that accounts for its anthropogenic cause. Representations are particularly apt at articulating the relationship between humans and their environment, providing that we pay a renewed attention to how they also challenge the usual foregrounding of human stories. The posthuman perspective adopted by the authors of this issue highlight the changing state of nature in contemporary narratives and the potential for these narratives to depict the epistemological shift triggered by collapse and propose a new ecopolitics of the end.

In “Collapse and Reversed Extinction: Beyond Inherited Epistemologies of Species Loss in Louise Erdrich’s *Future Home of the Living God,*” Ida Olsen shows how Louise Erdrich’s post-apocalyptic novel *Future Home of the Living God* (2017) questions the epistemological framework through which we currently examine species extinction. Featuring a strange extinction process in which evolution seems to run backwards as much as in any direction, Erdrich’s novel moves away from the 19th century colonial scientific legacy while highlighting its deleterious impact on Indigenous communities. It offers a counter-narrative to the Western teleological discourse of progress and shapes a cyclical time that moves away from the usual apocalyptic timeline and the genre that celebrates it. Olsen convincingly argues that this Indigenous Futurist novel engages with uncertainty about the nature of the world to propose an alternative to the Western colonial system of knowledge as well as to the end of the world that it shapes.

In “Pachakuti, An Indigenous Perspective on Collapse and Extinction,” Jasmin Belmar Shagulian relativizes the meta-narrative of collapse by analyzing the way in which the concept of *pachakuti* in Andean cosmology brings us back to a circular ontology that indigenous literature explores. In *pachakuti*, the perception of collapse is not linear; on the contrary, it is linked to the cycle of life, where things are damaged and regenerated. This reminds us that the anguish of collapse is first and foremost the problem of industrial societies that have lost touch with the world. That is why it is so important to rediscover the dissemination of that ontology in Indigenous narratives such as *Todo está dicho* (*Everything Has Been Said*) by Fredy Chakangana, *La Tórtola* (*pájaro melancólico*) (*The Turtledove, Melancholic Bird*) by Lorenzo Ayllapán, and *Vivir-Morir* (*To Live-To Die*) by Vito Apüshana. In these works, *pachakuti* reveals an incandescent cosmos where forces hold human beings between catastrophic chaos and the construction of fragile communities. By choosing a mythocritical perspective based on the analysis of mythemes, Jasmin Belmar Shagulian describes the archetypes and procession of images that manifest this *pachakuti* in the ceaseless cycle of rebirth. This contribution is all the more original in that it invites us to revisit structuralist methodologies to show the anticipations of these cosmogonies, which had even perceived the scandal of colonization as the sign of this major destruction to be overcome.

Collapse thinking calls for creativity and fictional inventiveness. In "The Future is Collapsing: Feminist Narratives of Unmaking in Laura Pugno and Veronica Raimo," Alice Parrinello takes us to Italian science fiction, with writers such as Laura Pugno and Veronica Raimo taking up the genre. In these authors' works, collapse is not the perception of a global extinction, but a practice of deconstruction, revisiting past certainties and the social and sexual divisions established between people. Based on the study of Laura Pugno's *Sirene* and Veronica Raimo's *Miden*, ecofeminist fiction revives what Donna Haraway calls "oddkins," that is unexpected combinations between living beings (2–4). These two dystopian short stories reveal a sense of physicality as characters attempt to rearrange themselves. In one case, the figure of the mermaid is chosen to herald these coming hybridizations and recompositions of the human species, which involve questioning the patriarchal imaginary. In Alice Parrinello's interpretation of these two dystopian novels, not only is the patriarchal imaginary destroyed, but so are the related categories that defined the human being (maternity, male-female relations, etc.). Binary distinctions collapse, allowing us to see humanity in terms of assembly and solidarity of beings.

In "Contemporary Graphic Narratives of the End: Sketching an Ecopolitics of Disorientation and Solidarity through Sf *Bande Dessinée*," Armelle Blin-Rolland examines conceptions of the end in four science fiction *bandes dessinées*: Jérémy Perrodeau's *Crépuscule*, Enki Bilal's trilogy *Coup de sang*, Ludovic Debeurme's trilogy *Epiphania*, and Jeanne Burgart Goutal and Aurore Chapon's *ReSisters*. She argues that the sf genre and comics medium adequately combine to propose a rebuilding of the collapsed world and an ecopolitics of disorientation and solidarity in the Anthropocene. Her article builds on ecocriticism and queer and feminist studies to discuss counter-narratives of the future that foreground nonhuman agencies and unsettle Western narratives about the environment. Her analysis shows how these narratives disrupt the Modern teleological spacetime and unearth its ideologies, such as the human-nature separation. Blin-Rolland focuses on the narratives' practices of care and resistance that, combined with disorientation, offer an ecopolitical perspective to dissolve the human/more-than-human boundaries and involve the reader into outlining an ecofeminist uprising.

In "Norwegian Futurisms: Posthumanism and the Norwegian Nordic Model in *Tor Åge Bringsværd's Du og Jeg*, *Alfred* and *Alfred 2.0*," Karl Kristian Swane Bambini shows how ecodystopian narratives in Norway challenge the stereotype of a peaceful society with a generous welfare state. In fact, many productions in science fiction revolve around the predation of the Norwegian model which is based upon the securing of fossil energy. The novels of Tor Åge Bringsværd illustrate the revitalization of the genre of science fiction in Norway, where for a long time it was considered as a minor genre. Indeed, this revitalization goes together with a growing interest in societal issues and, in particular, in the place of new technologies in human existence. Ecodystopian novels immerge us into posthumanist quarrels and put into tension the image of a society concerned about the environment with the publication of the Brundtland report in 1987 on sustainable development.

In "Seeing the World Through Glass: Time and Extinction in Fiona Tan's *Depot* (2015)," Deborah Schrijvers focuses on the mass extinction of species that is currently taking place, thereby threatening biodiversity, including that of marine creatures. She argues that this extreme process requires a different, nonlinear time frame for humans to tune into it and that cinematic techniques can provide such an opportunity to apprehend other temporalities. Her article examines Fiona Tan's video installation *Depot* (2015) to identify and discuss the techniques used by the artist to give duration to specimens that she has filmed in the natural history museums of Leiden and Berlin. Stilled images, close-ups, and voice over allow to question Western scientific and imperial discourses embodied in natural history and its linear timeline of progress. Schrijvers shows that by reframing this history, *Depot* decolonizes extinction and provides a new narrative of the ocean that steers away from the previous frontier narrative, reflecting on the human place in a world of extinctions.

In "Facing Depletion. Artworks for an Epistemological Shift in the Collapse Era," Damien Beyrouthy examines epistemological shifts initiated in four artworks that question technofixes as the answer to our collapsing world. His analysis of David Claerbout's *The Pure Necessity* (2016), Emilio Vavarella's *Animal Cinema* (2017) and *Amazon's Cabinet of Curiosity* (2019), and his own installation *She Was Called Petra* (2020) builds on the acknowledgement that, although they are presented as the solution to the exploitation that they necessitate, technofixes accelerate the extraction of resources, whether these be human, nonhuman or geologic. Beyrouthy argues that the works resist fracturing and so highlight the agencies either involved or subdued in the process, thereby pointing to alternative relationships with nonhumans, and creating a horizon for collaborating with them without falling into the illusion of their direct, untranslated presence.

The articles in this special issue exemplify how new narratives of the end can move away from the apocalyptic model to propose alternatives to a nostalgic perspective of a past Western human glory and/or a will to restore this collapsed world. In the narratives examined by the authors of this issue, the anthropocentric point of view on the contemporary collapse is replaced with a posthuman one, which highlights the need for a collaboration with nonhumans, based on a new epistemology and an ethics of care. Rather than giving in to the shriveling of imagination brought about by collapse, these narratives creatively respond to the causes of collapse, pointing to the human responsibility in destroying the planet and the crucial need for establishing a different relationship to our environment (Serres). These narratives' reframing of the past, present and future invite us to question and overcome the various boundaries (race, gender, species, etc.) that have a deleterious impact on the planet and lead to its collapse.

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Collapse and Reversed Extinction: Beyond Inherited Epistemologies of Species Loss in Louise Erdrich's *Future Home of the Living God*

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Abstract

This article argues for the importance of a critical examination of the frameworks and epistemologies through which species extinction is conceptualized. As global biodiversity loss rates accelerate, the legacy of nineteenth-century colonial science continues to inform understandings of species extinctions, whereby the discourse around species loss is profoundly intertwined with notions of taxonomies, race, and hierarchies. My article demonstrates how Louise Erdrich's post-apocalyptic novel *Future Home of the Living God* (2017) exposes and destabilizes these inherited Western epistemologies of extinction. Erdrich's narrative centres around a bizarre extinction event where evolution begins to spin out of control, perhaps running backwards, and where biological categories and species boundaries lose their meanings. As an Indigenous Futurist text, the novel is told from the perspective of a pregnant woman of Ojibwe ancestry who becomes imprisoned when a white authoritarian government, in an attempt to maintain the status quo, detain all women of child-bearing age. The reverse extinction scenario, as my discussion shows, produces an ontological uncertainty within the diegesis, with characters left in a state of unknowability about the nature of the world—a situation that provides Indigenous communities with opportunities for land reclamation and empowerment. The novel reads as a counter-narrative to Western notions about scientific progress also on the level of form, as the text presents an introspective and cyclical unfolding of events. In this way, rather than to provide apocalyptic resolution, Erdrich's novel mobilizes uncertainty and subverts the mainstream post-apocalyptic genre template in order to gesture towards the possibility of alternative futures liberated from colonial epistemologies.

Keywords: extinction, Louise Erdrich, post-apocalypse, colonialism, Indigenous Futurism.

Resumen

Este artículo defiende la importancia de un examen crítico de los marcos y epistemologías a través de los cuales se conceptualiza la extinción de especies. A medida que se aceleran las tasas de pérdida de biodiversidad global, el legado de la ciencia colonial del siglo XIX continúa informando la comprensión de las extinciones de especies, por lo que el discurso sobre la pérdida de especies está profundamente entrelazado con las nociones de taxonomías, razas y jerarquías. Mi artículo demuestra cómo la novela postapocalíptica de Louise Erdrich, *Future Home of the Living God (*2017), expone y desestabiliza estas epistemologías occidentales heredadas de extinción. La narrativa de Erdrich se centra en un extraño evento de extinción donde la evolución comienza a salirse de control, tal vez retrocediendo, y donde las categorías biológicas y los límites entre las especies pierden su significado. Como texto futurista indígena, la novela se cuenta desde la perspectiva de una mujer embarazada de ascendencia Ojibwe que es encarcelada cuando un gobierno autoritario blanco, en un intento por mantener el statu quo, detiene a todas las mujeres en edad fértil. El escenario de extinción inversa, como muestra mi discusión, produce una incertidumbre ontológica dentro de la diégesis, con personajes que quedan en un estado de incognoscibilidad sobre la naturaleza del mundo, una situación que brinda a las comunidades indígenas oportunidades para la recuperación de tierras y el empoderamiento. La novela se lee como una contranarrativa a las nociones occidentales sobre el progreso científico también en el nivel de la forma, ya que el texto presenta un desarrollo introspectivo y cíclico de eventos. De esta manera, en lugar de brindar una resolución apocalíptica, la novela de Erdrich moviliza la incertidumbre y subvierte la plantilla dominante del género postapocalíptico para señalar la posibilidad de futuros alternativos liberados de las epistemologías coloniales.

Palabras clave: extinción, Louise Erdrich, post-apocalipsis, colonialismo, Futurismo Indígena

The twenty-first century proliferation of post-apocalyptic and dystopian narratives has become an extensively theorized phenomenon in recent years.[1] Within the environmental humanities, a number of scholars voice concerns that "mainstream" post-apocalyptic culture—with Hollywood disaster films often being cited as the prime example—simplifies and distorts ecological processes and power dynamics that drive anthropogenic destruction of the nonhuman world. As Noah Theriault and Audra Mitchell remark, what typically remains unquestioned in such post-apocalyptic representations are the structural capitalist and colonial formations that "drive global patterns of extinction" (178). The evidence that a human-driven mass extinction event currently threatens biodiversity on the planet is becoming increasingly incontrovertible. If, as Ashley Dawson argues, this decimation of biodiversity cannot be grappled with in isolation from the forces of capitalism and colonialism (15), then mainstream post-apocalyptic narratives are perhaps particularly misleading when it comes to the sixth mass extinction. Post-apocalyptic fictions, which habitually render extinction as a spectacular event and equate it with the collapse of Western civilization, risk obscuring the "slow violence" of species loss (Nixon 2)—the invisible and systemically complex annihilation of biodiversity across the globe.

An additional critique that arises from scholarly discussions of post-apocalyptic imaginaries is that the genre masks the fact that for Indigenous communities, the apocalypse has already taken place as a result of colonial assaults. Kyle P. Whyte anticipates Theriault and Mitchell's argument in his reflection that post-apocalyptic narratives erase the perspectives of Indigenous peoples who have already endured the hardships that Western culture fears climate change will bring about, such as ecosystem collapse and forced migration (226). In this view, the sixth mass extinction and its effects become a déjà vu situation for many Indigenous peoples (Whyte 226-27). The acceptance of the Native Apocalypse as already having occurred is foundational to the movement known as Indigenous Futurism. Writers of Indigenous Futurism, as Grace L. Dillon explains, "posit the possibility of an optimistic future" (8) in the sense that they challenge the victimization and erasure of

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[1] For more on the recent surge of post-apocalyptic narratives, see, for example, Teresa Heffernan's *Post-Apocalyptic Culture: Modernism, Postmodernism, and the Twentieth-Century Novel* (2008), and Claire Colebrook's *Death of the Posthuman: Essays on Extinction, Vol. 1* (2014).

Indigenous communities that is typified by the Western apocalyptic tradition. Led by scholars such as Dillon, as well as David Gaertner and William Lempert, Indigenous Futurism is both an emerging scholarly practice, a genre, and an activist movement that mobilizes science fiction tropes and that attempts—in the words of Danika Medak-Saltzman—to "imagine otherwise" (Medak-Saltzman 143). Indigenous Futurist art seeks to look beyond settler colonial realities and to actively promote decolonization in the present.[2]

A central example of an Indigenous Futurist text is Ojibwe writer Louise Erdrich's post-apocalyptic novel *Future Home of the Living God* (2017), where both species extinction and Indigenous resilience are core story elements. The narrative follows 26-year-old Cedar Hawk Songmaker, an adopted Ojibwe woman raised by white Minneapolis parents, who is four months pregnant with her first child when the world experiences an apocalyptic event where evolution has seemingly spun out of control, perhaps running backwards. This development leads an authoritarian government to detain all women of childbearing age.[3] Written as a journal and addressed to Cedar's unborn baby, the novel documents Cedar's pregnancy, her process of becoming acquainted with her Native American family, and her eventual captivity. Erdrich's text is a significant contribution to Indigenous post-apocalyptic literature, as well as to species extinction fiction, demonstrating that the post-apocalyptic can be an invaluable genre for mediating Indigenous perspectives on environmental collapse and for underscoring the limitations of inherited Western epistemologies. As scholarship on the novel has already established, Erdrich adroitly pushes against problematic aspects of mainstream post-apocalypticism, particularly through her staging of Native empowerment in the context of ecological and societal collapse. In this way, the narrative gestures toward the possibility of alternative futures liberated from the rule of progress (Childers and Menendez 214; Maucione 268), reproductive futurism (Shaw 322), and colonial epistemologies.

In this piece, I will demonstrate how *Future Home of the Living God* challenges mainstream post-apocalyptic fiction by suggesting that the novel speaks to and subverts a species extinction discourse closely bound up with colonial epistemology and its fixation on taxonomies, race, and hierarchies. My discussion will be focused around the novel's thematic treatment of extinction and its formal composition

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[2] "Writers of Indigenous futurisms," as Dillon remarks, "sometimes intentionally experiment with, sometimes intentionally dislodge, sometimes merely accompany, but invariably *change* the perimeters of sf" (3). Dillon is credited as having popularized the term "Indigenous Futurism" and published the first Indigenous Futurist anthology, *Walking the Clouds: An Anthology of Indigenous Science Fiction*, in 2012. Since then, the Indigenous Futurist movement has steadily grown and has been both advocated and disputed. As Miriam C. Brown Spiers cautions, authors that reclaim older Native texts as belonging to the realm of science fiction potentially end up portraying Native realities as mythical and fantastical to non-Native readers. In this way, colonial structures are reinforced rather than challenged (Brown Spiers xvi).

[3] Critics have commented on the novel's debt (and perhaps too-close resemblance) to Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985), as Atwood's novel, too, conjures a dystopian vision of female enslavement and forced reproduction. See, for example, Stephanie Merritt's review of Erdrich's novel *in The Guardian*.

around the experience of uncertainty. This essay thus adds to existing scholarship on Erdrich's novel by bringing the text's treatment of extinction to the fore. Erdrich constructs her text around a bizarre extinction event that turns all species categories and taxonomies on their head, as contemporary species vanish and hybrid new-old organisms appear. The event produces a profound uncertainty within the diegesis, with characters left clueless about what is actually happening—a situation that Indigenous characters, as the novel suggests, are better prepared for than non-Indigenous individuals. As I show, the novel reads as a counter-narrative to Western notions about scientific progress on the level of form, as the text presents an introspective and cyclical unfolding of events. Importantly, Erdrich's novel exposes how dominant understandings of species extinction are profoundly intertwined with the legacy of nineteenth-century imperialism, and it asks instead what *alternative* and more productive epistemologies of extinction might look like.

"Ducks are not ducks": In Defence of Fuzzy Taxonomies

As rates of biodiversity loss continue to accelerate, awareness of species extinctions increasingly manifests in the collective imagination. While the ethico-political effects of this environmental consciousness include intensified conservation efforts and legal frameworks put in place to protect species, it is crucial to also be mindful of the history, origins, and development of species extinction discourse. It is important to note that, as extinction scholar Dolly Jørgensen states in a recent article, "Western scientific understandings of extinction as a biological phenomenon arose at a specific moment under the context of European colonialism" (210). The Linnaean preoccupation with classifying, hierarchizing, describing, and taxonomizing that characterized European science from the seventeenth century onwards—fuelled by an increasingly systematic uncovering of the fossil record—eventually made species extinction thinkable in both the scientific and the popular imagination (Barrow 5). This conceptualization of species disappearance emerged, more specifically, in the nineteenth-century, through the work of figures like the French naturalist Georges Cuvier. By studying elephant bones and comparing them to mysterious giant fossils sent to Europe by settler colonists in America, Cuvier concluded that there must have existed animals that were once living but that were now *espèces perdues* (lost species) (Kolbert 29).

Following Cuvier's discoveries, the "species" category crystallized as the central "unit" scientists used to measure, theorize, and understand extinction. As Ben Garlick and Kate Symons remark, the perception of extinction as the loss of "discrete units of biological life," which still remains dominant, evinces "the legacies of nineteenth-century colonial science in contemporary biology and conservation discourse" (290). Our contemporary understanding of species extinction, then, developed *through* colonial science. According to Audra Mitchell, while the tendency for our conceptualization of species extinction to coalesce around the "species" category can be useful when it comes to ensuring rapid political action to protect biodiversity and to initiate conservation projects, it also forecloses extinction discourse around this concept (25). The rule of species taxonomies arguably also speaks to a human preference for "orderly" classifications of nonhuman nature and a desire for control and predictability.

Alongside imperialist expansion and studies of the fossil record, which allowed scientists to grasp extinction, also followed ideas about how some species and races were superior to "primitive" ones (Brantlinger 17-44).[4] Species extinction discourse is, as a consequence, intrinsically interwoven with the broader imperialist extinction discourse analysed by Patrick Brantlinger in his book *Dark Vanishings: Discourse on the Extinction of Primitive Races, 1800-1930* (2003). Although primarily concerned with the extinction narrative surrounding Indigenous tribes, Brantlinger's insights about how "[e]xtinction discourse is a specific branch of the dual ideologies of imperialism and racism" (1) in many ways speaks to the issue of species extinction, since ideas about racial hierarchies and species boundaries developed in a joint process. In his recent discussion of geologic extinction, Jeremy J. Schmidt observes that "assumptions of race and empire" fused the concept of extinction to biological loss of species, rather than to also denote broader geological processes such as glacier disappearances (282). The type of logic that species extinction discourse is built on, then, where taxonomies and biological units have been used to justify perceived hierarchies and white supremacy, is something that could fruitfully be studied in greater detail and brought more into focus in contemporary debates around biodiversity loss.

Erdrich's novel, as the remainder of this article will demonstrate, offers a compelling narrative for illuminating the colonial legacy of extinction discourse and for exploring what happens when human understandings of mass extinction are forced to confront the loss of seemingly reliable systems of classification and taxonomizing. The extinction imaginary conjured by *Future Home of the Living God* is one that, as species categories are rendered useless, unsettles the Western-scientific understanding of extinction and instead narrativizes an alternative vision where Indigenous communities thrive and regain sovereignty in the face of environmental and apocalyptic uncertainty. Although the novel hinges on a speculative twist to the narrative of the sixth mass extinction, the sudden species metamorphoses that occur in the story invite an allegorical reading where readers are forced to draw linkages to ongoing biodiversity decline.

From its opening page, *Future Home of the Living God* presents readers with a strange new mass extinction scenario: rather than species becoming extinct in the

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[4] For example, as Charles Darwin writes in *The Descent of Man* (1871), "[a]t some future period … the civilized races of man will almost certainly exterminate, and replace, the savage races throughout the world" (156). Moreover, in his book *The Nutmeg's Curse: Parables for a Planet in Crisis* (2021), Amitav Ghosh notes that Alfred Tennyson's "In Memoriam" (1850) would seem to be expressing a type of justification of species extinction as the natural way in which evolution would confirm humans as the superior species; the poem advances the idea that it is humankind's task to "Move upward, working out the beast, / And let the ape and tiger die" (qtd. in Ghosh, *Nutmeg* 79).

"usual" way and thereby reaching the end of their evolutionary lineages, lifeforms on the planet become subject to sudden mutations that indicate evolution may have reversed itself. In the novel's first paragraph, Cedar narrates that the "world" is now "running backward. Or forward. Or maybe sideways, in a way as yet ungrasped" (3). As Cedar reveals:

> Reports are coming in of experiments hastily conducted on fruit flies, DNA experts who say on the molecular level it is like skipping around in time, and that small-celled creatures and plants have been shuffling through random adaptations for months now. And hasn't anyone noticed that dogs, cats, horses, pigs, et cetera have stopped breeding true? (55)

Humans, too, are affected by the mutations, with neonatal survival rates decreasing and with "male sexual organs … not developing properly. Sometimes not developing at all" (Erdrich 88). People conclude, as a result, that the human species is dying out and that the apocalypse is near. Pieces of information that emerge from the narrative indicate that the novel's present may be a climate-changed future: Minneapolis has already experienced its "first winter without snow" (11), and Cedar's adoptive mother believes that the evolutionary mutations may be "a new kind of virus" released from thawing permafrost (10). At the same time, the novel does not dwell on this potential causality between human-induced ecological destruction and evolution's potential reversal; the message at the core of the narrative is that the event is random and unforeseen.

Not until one hundred pages into the novel does Cedar provide a description of the new species that are mutating and appearing. Cedar now remains locked inside her home, unable to leave the house for fear of her pregnancy being discovered. While looking out the window one morning, she spots something she has "never seen before"—a "bird, or whatever it is" that partly resembles a hawk, but that has a beakless and lizard-like appearance (116). A similar incident occurs soon after: Cedar watches in disbelief as a "sand-colored blur" attacks a Labrador dog in her backyard. "The thing – some kind of great cat, all muscle and powerful guile," writes Cedar, "tears long fangs into and chokes down the bleeding haunches of the dog" (132-33). The "cat," which resembles a sabre-toothed tiger, then climbs up a tree and "stretches itself" along a branch (133). In Emily McAvan's formulation, the text here upsets the "stability of evolution" with its "orderly narrative" (96), and instead evokes strong impulses of chaos and instability. In the aforementioned scene, the scenario of the domesticated dog becoming the victim of unclassifiable wildness—or, as McAvan writes, of "an alterity that cannot be controlled or contained" (97)—collapses the boundaries between wild and domesticated (we are not accustomed to seeing dogs become prey). This unpredictable evolutionary development, then, provides scarce possibilities for any essentialist categories or systemization and thereby undermines the human desire for control of the nonhuman world. If, as Cedar states, "ducks are not ducks" and "chickens are not chickens" (114), then inherited scientific epistemologies lose their meaning and purpose in attempting to grapple with the "fuzzy" species now evolving.[5]

Instead of the de-evolution scenario giving rise to horror and alarm, however, it is framed as a liberating situation that gives Cedar a strange sense of hope. After having reflected on her observation of the lizard-bird, Cedar feels that she is "not at the end of things, but the beginning" (116). When she informs her partner Phil about her sighting of the sabre-toothed tiger, the couple collapse with laughter, "spinning out of control, crazy, weak, until we're gasping on the floor" (133). Crucially, as the situation escalates on a global scale, the ensuing chaos presents Cedar's Ojibwe family with the opportunity to reclaim the territories that were stolen from their ancestors by the United States government. Cedar remains in frequent contact with her birthmother, Mary Potts, and her step-father, Eddy, subsequent to her first visit to the reservation, which takes place at the outset of the novel.[6] Eddy, who shares his step-daughter's optimism about the biological upheaval, writes her a letter to let her know that the tribe has formed its own militia. As he recounts, "[q]uite a number of us see the government collapse as a way to make our move and take back the land" (121). It is also Eddy who explains to Cedar that the Ojibwe community do not interpret the apocalyptic situation as a novelty. According to Eddy, "Indians have been adapting since before 1492 so I guess we'll keep adapting … [T]he world is always going to pieces" (35). Unlike the government, which attempts to conserve the status quo and prevent the situation from accelerating, Indigenous peoples approach the apocalypse as a continuation of an already-apocalyptic present.[7]

Fragile Futures: Embracing Unknowability at the End of the World

In addition to exposing the limitations and colonial legacies of Western species extinction epistemologies, *Future Home of the Living God* casts uncertainty and *not knowing* as more productive stances for navigating environmental catastrophe. Willingness to face uncertainty becomes, as the narrative makes clear, a better alternative to Western science and its fixation on taxonomies, classifications, and hierarchies. As I elaborate below, by making uncertainty its main narrative strategy,

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[5] There are, of course, a number of literary works that perform a similar blurring of species boundaries to that depicted by Erdrich here. Examples include Diether Dath's *Die Abschaffung der Arten* [*The Abolition of Species*, 2008], Johanna Drucker's *Downdrift* (2018), and Jeff VanderMeer's New Weird fiction. In comparison with these works, Erdrich's novel grants less narrative space to descriptions of species "blurrings"—instead, the narrative focus in *Future Home of the Living God* lies on Cedar's experience and interpretations of the strange creatures that confront her. The effect of this "peripheralized" perspective of non-humans in the novel is that the species that appear come across as even more blurry and vague.

[6] It merits noting that Cedar's white adoptive parents support both her and her Native family and actively try to work against the white supremacist authorities.

[7] It is worth underscoring that Erdrich's novel not only evokes Indigenous survival, but also speaks to the wider concept of Indigenous *survivance* – a term coined by Gerald Vizenor to describe, in Vizenor's words, an "active sense of presence over absence, deracination, and oblivion … Survivance stories are renunciations of dominance, detractions, obtrusions, the unbearable sentiments of tragedy, and the legacy of victimry" (1).

the text also mirrors the fundamental uncertainty that is at stake in the sixth mass extinction. The novel's mobilization of uncertainty is a core concern in Silvia Martínez-Falquina's reading of Erdrich's text. According to her analysis, lack of information and certainty about the apocalyptic situation produces an overwhelming uncertainty in both readers and characters, and this stylistic choice serves as the key aesthetic technique employed by Erdrich (167). Drawing on Martínez-Falquina's argument, Emily Childers and Hannah Menendez, too, emphasize the importance of indeterminacy for coming to grips with the novel (219). Uncertainty, they observe, "marks a way of being in the world in which vulnerability has become the norm [for women and Indigenous peoples]" (219). As a result, both Cedar and her Native family stand a better chance of navigating the uncertain biological reversal than the non-Indigenous population (Childers and Menendez 219). Uncertainty and indeterminacy thus become leitmotifs that play a vital role in articulating the novel's Indigenous take on the post-apocalyptic genre.

The relationship between uncertainty, narrative, and the ecological crisis has recently attracted the attention of a number of scholars working in the environmental humanities. In his book *Contemporary Fiction and Climate Uncertainty: Narrating Unstable Futures* (2022), Marco Caracciolo explores narrative negotiation of uncertainty in the context of ecological breakdown, arguing that rather than to consider uncertainty as a stance that should be avoided, an embrace of uncertainty can prompt critical thinking and resilience in the face of environmental challenges (3). Accepting uncertainty, Caracciolo suggests, could lead to an abandonment of human exceptionalism and greater respect for the nonhuman world (3). Such an abandonment would mean letting go of "our culturally ingrained faith in metanarratives of scientific and technological progress and unlimited economic growth," Caracciolo states (183). Throughout his book, Caracciolo discusses various formal strategies employed by contemporary authors to negotiate and provoke uncertainty within their fiction, especially in relation to unstable climate futures.

Bearing Caracciolo's points in mind, I would suggest that Erdrich is invested in engaging uncertainty on levels of both plot and form. Firstly, one striking aspect of the novel is how little both characters and readers know or can know about the unfolding conditions of reversed extinction. The text provides no definite answers as to the exact nature and cause of the situation. The narrative portrays this unknowability as symptomatic of the apocalypse itself; as Phil fittingly remarks, "[t]he first thing that happens at the end of the world is that we don't know what is happening" (117). Cedar comments that while political chaos looms, "people are out in the streets, demonstrating against not knowing what they should be demonstrating about" (66). By emphasizing the unpredictability of the biological mutations, as well as the chaos that accompanies them, the novel evokes a forceful sense of what might be thought of as "nescience." In the words of Anahid Nersessian, nescience constitutes the state of not knowing and involves "the painful or unsettling sense that there is no meaningful link between what is known and what can be known, or what has taken place and what might take place" (315). The runaway nature of the events unfolding in the novel, with no implied forms of causality, would seem to evoke a non-anthropocentric order that human communities fail to grasp, anticipate, or control.

The "biological chaos" (Erdrich 310) at the core of the narrative intensifies as the novel draws to a close. As lifeforms begin to appear more and more unrecognizable, also food takes on unfamiliar qualities. Upon being served lunch at the prison facility after her final capture, Cedar notes that chickens resemble "pale iguanas" more than chickens (317). At the same time, plant vegetation proliferates, threatening human-made structures with "an ever thicker green profusion" (326). As I argued above, these random mutations expose the limitations of biological sciences and scientific predictions. By narrativizing this development, the novel encapsulates some of the complex uncertainty involved in the sixth mass extinction. In her seminal work *Imagining Extinction: The Cultural Meanings of Endangered Species* (2016), Ursula Heise underscores that although we may assume that species extinction is a straightforward process to study and grapple with, the science around extinctions is, in fact, extremely obscure and indeterminate (13). Scientists find extinctions difficult to measure and predict, and the current wave of anthropogenic extinctions may have dramatic and unpredictable consequences for both local ecosystems and for the global biosphere. Since the biological collapse taking place in Erdrich's novel captures this same uncertainty, Cedar importantly concludes that "we've come to the end of science" (78).

In her introduction to the anthology *Walking the Clouds: An Anthology of Indigenous Science Fiction* (2012), Dillon notes that one of the characteristics of Indigenous Futurist texts, such as Erdrich's, is that they "undercut the limitations of science altogether" (2). Reflecting on what the term "science" in Indigenous science fiction denotes, Dillon asserts that Indigenous practices and traditional knowledge do constitute a science of their own "despite their lack of resemblance to taxonomic western systems of thought" (7). The dissemination of these "Indigenous scientific literacies" typically occurs through storytelling and the handing down of everyday teachings (Dillon 7-8).

The notion that Western science meets its limitations in the novel's apocalypse is also made visible through Erdrich's depiction of pregnancy. Since babies develop unforeseeable genetic mutations, Cedar remains in the dark about how her baby will turn out and whether it will survive. As Cedar writes, "here I am, maybe a walking contradiction, maybe two species in one body. Nobody knows" (84). Cedar nevertheless finds comfort in listening to her Native grandmother's stories, which the old woman begins to recite when Cedar approaches her to inquire about genetic diseases that run in the family (43). The implication of the scene is that this freely interpretable and story-bound knowledge may be a superior form of scientific method for navigating ecological collapse.

At the end of the novel, Cedar gives birth to a living human son, but remains imprisoned at the detention centre, waiting to become pregnant again. In other words, the novel's ending accentuates the narrative's pervasive uncertainty. Post-apocalyptic narratives, it should be noted, tend to inherently express such an uncertainty in their depiction of the aftermath of cataclysms. As scholarship on the post-apocalyptic tradition argues, the genre must be understood as standing in critical relation, as well as in temporal relation, to the apocalyptic. James Berger, in his study *After the End: Representations of Post-Apocalypse* (1999), explains that if apocalypticism involves closure, revelation, and clarification, post-apocalypticism can offer no certainties or resolutions (5-8). With the rise of post-apocalyptic culture, as Teresa Heffernan asserts, revelation loses its meaning and its function as an organizing principle (7). In the words of Monika Kaup:

> Anything that appears in the *eschaton*, the final events of the divine plan, is part of the predetermined future of apocalyptic narrative … Whereas apocalyptic futures are closed and deterministic, post-apocalyptic developments are open and indeterminate. In the unfolding world of post-apocalypse, the future is once again uncertain, and uncertainty results from spontaneous activity and its (unplanned) consequences. (69)

Hence, the narratives of "reliable" closure, certainty, and predetermined futures that are associated with the apocalypse become unsettled and more complex in a post-apocalyptic climate. In this regard, Erdrich's novel writes itself into the tradition of post-apocalyptic open-endedness—the text refuses to offer any form of redemption or to narrativize situations that stage and overcome direct threats to human survival. The novel instead presents a highly introspective account of the apocalypse, focusing on Cedar's inner mentation rather than external events. This introspective style of the novel gains further resonance through the narrative's use of *contained* spaces as its main setting—the majority of the story takes place within claustrophobic locations such as prison cells and underground shelters.

Intertwined with the novel's strategic use of uncertainty and its subversion of Western extinction science is also what previous scholarship on Erdrich's text has described as its questioning of progress (Martínez-Falquina 165; Childers and Menendez 212). The centrality of the idea of linear progress for evolutionary theory cannot be overstated. Yet, as one of the scientists that makes a television appearance in the novel explicitly states, the fossil record consists of only a fraction of species that have existed (69). With the biological chaos occurring in the narrative, evolution might therefore "skip forward, sideways, in unforeseen directions. We wouldn't see the narrative we think we know. Why? Because there was never a story moving forward and there wouldn't be one moving backward" (69). This passage, in addition to directly undermining the idea of progress and linearity, reads as a comment on the text's own composition.

As a departure from the formal characteristics and genre features typically associated with a post-apocalyptic novel, Erdrich's text engages more spontaneously with form. The novel does not follow what might be thought of as a linear story progression, but presents a cyclical and more multi-layered unfolding of events. Scenes and situations, for example, repeat themselves throughout the narrative: Cedar visits her Native family on the reservation, becomes imprisoned by the authorities, returns to the reservation, and is imprisoned once again. Structurally, the novel is organized around these repetitive episodes and Cedar's processing of them.

With a return to the same occurrences, the narrative can offer none of the redemption and resolution typically provided at the end of post-apocalyptic stories such as Cormac McCarthy's *The Road* (2006) (Colebrook 199). Instead, the text forcefully points to the Indigenous experience of apocalypse as a cyclical phenomenon and to the notion that, as Whyte puts it, many Native cultures "see their societies as already having endured one *or many more* apocalypses" (236, emphasis in original). The effect of the novel's cyclicality is, ironically, that a degree of certainty arises from the future's uncertainty. In the same way that Cedar will continue to fight for her freedom and risk becoming imprisoned once again, so too with the Indigenous experience of ecological apocalypse. As Erdrich's novel illustrates, the future return of world-ending cataclysms is something that Indigenous communities are uniquely prepared for in an already-dystopian and ever-changing present.

Conclusion: Towards New Epistemologies of Extinction and Collapse

In December 2022, when the United Nations Biodiversity Conference (COP15) concluded after its two-week long proceedings, parties had reached an agreement to protect 30 per cent of global lands and seas. While measures such as COP15's ambitious target give cause for hope concerning the future of biodiversity, all evidence suggests that the rates of ongoing species extinctions remain alarmingly high.[8] To halt this anthropogenic ecocide, what may be needed is not only a greater engagement with the capitalist and colonial drivers of species loss (Dawson 15), but a critical examination of the frameworks and epistemologies through which we map and understand extinction. An awareness of how species extinction discourse is indebted to European imperialism and remains entangled with systems of thought rooted in taxonomies, hierarchies, and race, could ultimately lead to decolonial conceptualizations of extinction as not merely a scientific concept describing the evolutionary end of biological units, but as an indicator of the complex modes of violence that have given rise to the Anthropocene.

In this article, I have demonstrated how Erdrich's *Future Home of the Living God* provides an important space for exposing and reimagining the colonial epistemologies of extinction. By evoking the compelling scenario of reversed extinction and its accompanying biological chaos, the novel mediates the limitations of Western extinction science, also pairing that science with a white authoritarian order. Through its use of uncertainty as the central element that animates the narrative, Erdrich illustrates that an embrace of uncertainty can serve as a more productive alternative to Western science's preoccupation with classifying and taxonomizing the nonhuman environment. Crucially, the novel frames uncertainty in

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[8] This fact is made clear in the most comprehensive assessment of global biodiversity decline to be carried out and published in recent years, namely the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES's) *Global Assessment Report on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services* (2019). The report's key findings are bleak, with biodiversity "declining faster than at any time in human history" (xiv).

the face of ecological apocalypse as a state that gives rise to Indigenous empowerment and reclaimed sovereignty, as Cedar's Ojibwe family use the situation as a hopeful opportunity to "keep adapting" (35) and to take back territories that were stolen from them. Whereas many post-apocalyptic narratives treat Indigenous communities, as well as nonhuman species, as inevitable victims of the world's end (Theriault and Mitchell 179), Erdrich's text highlights Indigenous survival and recovery, as well as the importance of storied knowledge. Accordingly, as a narrative that challenges the one-dimensionality of the cultural post-apocalyptic landscape, *Future Home of the Living God* must be approached as a timely and thought-provoking work which demonstrates that to reconceive of endings and extinction is both possible and necessary.

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Pachakuti, an Indigenous Perspective on Collapse and Extinction

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Abstract

This work aims to examine *pachakuti* as the patent mytheme found in three poems written by different indigenous poets: "Todo está dicho" ("Everything has been said") by Fredy Chakangana, "La Tórtola, pájaro melancólico" ("The turtledove, Melancholic bird") by Lorenzo Ayllapán, and "Vivir-Morir" ("To live-to die") by Vito Apüshana. *Pachakuti* is a key concept in Andean literature, both in mythological and cosmological tales, and in contemporary indigenous narrative. *Pachakuti* is interpreted to symbolize a re-balancing of the world through a chaotic chain of events that manifests itself as a catastrophe or an upheaval of the order of things. As *pachakuti* becomes a recurrent motif (patent mytheme) in the chosen poems, it is explored to show a different narrative perspective of collapse and extinction, as well as to expose how earth-beings (latent mytheme) acquire their own agency in the poems and denounce modern forms of extractivism (such as deforestation and water contamination). Through the earth-beings' voices the poems contribute to reveal new perspectives about collapse and extinction anchored in indigenous narratives from the Global South.

Keywords: *Pachakuti*, figurative structuralism, ecocriticism, collapse and extinction, indigenous narrative.

Resumen

Este trabajo tiene como objetivo examinar los mitemas encontrados en tres poemas escritos por diferentes poetas indígenas: "Todo está dicho" de Fredy Chakangana, "La tórtola, pájaro melancólico" de Lorenzo Ayllapán y "Vivir-morir" de Vito Apüshana. *Pachakuti* es un concepto clave en la literatura andina, tanto en los relatos mitológicos y cosmológicos, como en la narrativa indígena contemporánea. *Pachakuti* se interpreta para simbolizar el reequilibrio del mundo a través de una cadena caótica de eventos que se manifiesta como una catástrofe o un trastorno del orden de las cosas. Como *pachakuti* se convierte en un motivo recurrente (mitema patente) en los poemas elegidos, este se explora para mostrar una perspectiva narrativa diferente de colapso y extinción y, además, se expone cómo los seres-tierra (mitema latente) adquieren voz propia en los poemas y denuncian formas modernas de extractivismo, tales como la deforestación y la contaminación de las aguas. A través de las voces de los seres-tierra se revelan nuevas perspectivas sobre colapso y extinción, ancladas en las narrativas indígenas del Sur Global.

Palabras clave: *Pachakuti,* estructuralismo figurativo, ecocrítica, colapso y extinción, narrativa indígena.

In accordance with the Mayan Calendar, the year 2012 marked "the supposed end of the world" and countdowns began running in anticipation of the anticipated great event on December 21, 2012. Websites and chats were devoted to talk about what would or could happen that day, and survival kits were published and sold all over the world to help people survive the apocalyptic event that was predicted to happen. This eschatological episode did not occur, and the world went on as usual. The remarkable issue here is how the concept of apocalyptic events unfolds in Western imaginary. In accordance with Fabry *et al.*, the apocalyptic ending refers to a final dramatic battle between the forces of good and evil; the evil forces prevail, and God intervenes, destroying the dominant powers to restore the good (Fabry *et al.* 13). These apocalyptic imaginings reside also in the indigenous cultures of Latin America or Abya Yala,[1] where it is called *pachakuti* and belongs to the Andean cosmology. Thomson describes *pachakuti* as a concept from the Quechua-Aymara -cosmogony and language- '*pacha'*, meaning spatiotemporal twist or the world, and '*kuti'*, which means upheaval or revolution (Thomson 450). When putting together the word it can be interpreted to symbolize a re-balancing of the world through a chaotic chain of events that could be manifested as a catastrophe or upheaval of the order of things. The definition of *pachakuti*, as indicated by Bria and Walter and Rivera Cusicanqui, therefore means both catastrophe and renovation (Bria and Walter 20; Rivera Cusicanqui 19) and differs from the Western apocalyptic imaginings.

The concept of *pachakuti* was introduced in the seventeenth century by the nobleman Guamán Poma de Ayala in his book *Nueva Corónica y Buen Gobierno* (1615). Guamán Poma presented the concept as an interpretative device combining "the icon of Lucifer and the promise of divine punishment with the Andean belief in the cosmic, cyclical destruction and renovation of the universe" (Adorno 456). According to Adorno the concept is used by the nobleman as a uniquely Andean phenomenon that refers only to Andean events, not to outsiders to the culture. This means, according to Adorno, that not even the Conquest is included in the concept (Adorno 456), though, in recent time, other authors do take this into account. In this respect, Rivera Cusicanqui describes the Conquest and Colonization as an initiation of a "cycle of violent domination best expressed by the Andean concept of *pachakuti"* (Rivera Cusicanqui 19). This perception can be corroborated by Robins who expresses that for the indigenous population of the Andes, the Spanish conquest was perceived as a cataclysm that transformed their lives, but at the same time helped them as well to adjust to the changes brought by the new order of things (Robin 36). In 1613, parallel to Guamán Poma de Ayala's work, Juan Santacruz Pachakuti Yamqui, a noble descendant of the ruling Inca people, drew a picture of the cosmos as his ancestors believed it to be. Vilca describes the picture that illustrates the cosmos as a house in which there dwells a cosmic egg that hatches to give rise to an infinite diversity of beings that divide themselves in dualities; in the centre of the house lives Viracocha (Sun God), to his right stands the sun and to his left rests the moon. The world is subject to a kind of game where both the joyful and the disastrous coexist together.

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[1] Abya Yala, in Kuna language (Panamá), means "land in its full maturity". This term is assigned by the indigenous movements to denominate the American continent in its totality (Arias *et al*. 10).

That is why humanity (in the house), is depicted besieged by four elements that at any given time could turn their existence upside-down, in other words *pachakuti* (Vilca 4-5).

Thus, the aim of this study is to analyse three poems written by indigenous poets Fredy Chakangana, "Todo está dicho" (Everything has been said) (Rocha Vivas 294-95); Lorenzo Ayllapán, "La Tórtola, pájaro melancólico" (The turtledove, melancholic bird) (Huenún 31), and Vito Apüshana, "Vivir-Morir" (To live-to die) (Apüshana 68). These poets' narrative could be placed in the category called *oralitura,*[2] which means that the authors use their oral narrative traditions and put these down in written words as a tool to support the narrative art among indigenous writers, or as Chihuailaf indicates, "It takes place beside my people's oral tradition, beside my elders (with respect for them and their way of thinking)" (Mora Curriao 322).

In the chosen poems I will examine *pachakuti* as a mytheme that belongs to Andean cosmovision, mythological tales and contemporary narrative. I will contend that the *pachakuti* exposes a different form of narrative about collapse and destruction, which provides new viewpoints, anchored in indigenous narratives from the Global South, as a way to denounce the destruction and exploitation through the practice of extractivism in their territories. This literary narrative points out two aspects of the *pachakuti* notion. On the one hand, it reveals the interrelation between humans and "earth-beings" (*seres-tierra*), as Marisol de la Cadena named them, who pertain to the Andean cosmology (de la Cadena, *Earth Beings* 164). These beings are needed to maintain and renew the world to an equilibrium or "living well" (*Buen Vivir* or in indigenous concepts *Sumaq Qamaña, Sumaq Kawsay, Küme Monge)*, meaning fostering "relations of conviviality with all forms of existence" (Prádanos and Figueroa Helland 9; "El Vivir Bien" 137-38, 145-46, 189-90). On the other hand, it denounces through the earth-beings' voices the extractive activities perpetuated by the multinational corporations that affect and destroy "living well". Indigenous people acknowledge the fact that the current world system is in crisis*;* that is the reason for promoting living well by defending Mother Earth to turn the existing *pachakuti* from collapse and extinction to a renewal of the world. Indigenous people are acquainted with *pachakuti*, since this is not a new phenomenon for these cultures. On the contrary, for indigenous people the world has already ended several times, such as in pre-Incan times, the conquest and colonization of the Spaniards, and the mythological apocalypses of *Popol Vuh's* narrative, all events that have shaped their present world (Bold 13-14).

Since the concept of *pachakuti* is associated with a repetition of cycles, it has its place in Durand's figurative structuralism and its methodological theory; the mythocritical method that means a narrative text can be examined in the same way as a myth, as explained in *Mitos y sociedades* (Durand 154). Durand's theory has its

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[2] The concept of *oralitura* was first used by Elicura Chihuailaf (winner of the Chilean literary prize in 2020) during "Primer Taller de Escritores en Lenguas Indígenas" in Tlaxcala Mexico, in 1995.

foundation in the human imaginary, which he calls "the anthropological structures" named in *Las estructuras antropológicas del imaginario* (Durand 44). These structures constitute a force system that includes all the symbolic expressions that define and establish the imaginary, such as images, symbols and archetypes embedded in the mythical discourse. The most important aspect in this method is the identification of mythemes. Durand, in *De la mitocrítica*, deepens and widens the concept of mytheme originally used by Lévi-Strauss by redefining it as a "mythical atom [that] inherently has an 'archetypical' [and] schematic structure, in a Jungian sense [according to Durand], and its content can indifferently be a 'motive', a 'theme', a 'mythical decorate' [...] and emblem, a 'dramatic situation' [...]" (Durand 344). Moreover, in *Mitos y sociedad,* Durand explains that the mythemes can be manifested as actions conveyed by "verbs [...] by kinship relationships, kidnap, homicide, incest [...] or even emblematic objects: staff, trident, axe, a dove [...]" (Durand 163). Finally, but most importantly, these semantic units intrinsically retain a redundancy in which a myth can be stripped down by establishing similia connections that enable labelling the shape of a myth (Gutiérrez 54). The mytheme appears in two forms: 1) a patent form, such as *pachakuti*, meaning an explicit reiteration of contents; and 2) a latent form, earth-beings in this case, meaning a repetition of premeditated representation(s) that are inferred by the context in which they are imbued (Gutiérrez 60; Durand, *Mitos y Sociedad* 2003). The mythemes fulfil the function of structuring the mythical discourse in the chosen poems.

As mentioned above, in *Las estructuras antropológicas del imaginario*, the mythemes will exhibit a range of symbols that the figurative structuralism has classified in two orders of symbolism: the Diurnal Order and the Nocturnal Order. On the one hand, the Diurnal Order is composed by heroic (schizomorphic) structures. These structures split up the world into two groups of antithetical images: the heroic structures are formed by the ascensional, the spectacular and the diæretic (cutting) symbols; and synchronous and opposing the heroic structure, are the "Faces of time" (Bestiary), symbols that comprise the theriomorphic (beasts and monsters), the nyctomorphic (darkness) and the catamorphic (fall/sin) symbols. The heroic structure is characterized for the heroic qualities of its symbols, which strive after and search for light, ascension, and destruction of the "Faces of time" (the Bestiary), because these symbols represent time and dead (Durand, *Las estructuras* 125).

On the other hand, the Nocturnal Order, also named in *Las estructuras antropológicas del imaginario*, contains the mystical structure in which both symbols of inversion, and of intimacy have their place. In this same Order is found the synthetic structure comprised by cyclical symbols and the rhythmic schemata to the myth of progress (the eternal return) (Durand 291-354). The Nocturnal Order, contrary to the Diurnal, aims to appease the previous Diurnal symbolism, using a procedure that Durand designates as "euphemisation" (Durand, *Las estructuras* 120). This means that the nyctomorphic, catamorphic and theriomorphic symbols renounce their evil attributes and convert themselves into symbols of peacefulness, protection and shielding. In this order resides two subdivisions: 1) the mystical structure (nyctomorphic symbols), which incorporates the symbols of inversion and intimacy related to "the continent and the habitat [...] the matriarchal and nutritious sociology" (Durand, *Las estructuras* 60). This illustrates the return to Mother Earth and a value-based transformation of the symbols of death and the grave; and 2) the synthetic structure, which incorporates "the cyclical technics, the agricultural calendar and the textile industry" (Durand, *Las estructuras* 60-61).

To the detection of the patent *pachakuti* mytheme and the latent earth-being mytheme encased in the poems, has to be incorporated the classification of the symbols to which the mythemes belong, the Nocturnal Order and its synthetic structure. By doing this a close reading is possible. By categorizing the symbols found in the poems, analysis reveals the imaginary that underlies and gives a foundation to the way in which the poems express and approach, through the appointed mythemes, the surrounding reality of extractive activities in their territory and how the Amerindian cosmovision, through these mythemes, can show a new meaning and an alternative form of living by reversing the *pachakuti's* collapse and extinction to a renewal.

Pachakuti in Indigenous Literature

According to Rocha Vivas *pachakuti* is a key concept in Andean literature. Rocha Vivas upholds that indigenous literature underlines a key issue about "the flow or exchange between the cosmological, natural and cultural levels" (Rocha Vivas 42) in which *pachakuti* plays an essential function. On the one hand, *pachakuti* is an ancient (cosmological, natural) and a modern concept (natural, cultural) that refers to mythical events rooted in social memory of Andean history, but it also represents actual earthly and environmental disasters with their repercussions (Bria and Walter 18). The *pachakuti* mytheme, as it is classified in this study, is outlined in the Andean cosmogony in which time is divided into "ages or worlds" (Classen 62), where *pachakuti* belongs to the end of each age provoking an upheaval and a reversal of the world, "pachacuti is a mediating period of sacred and highly dangerous fluidity during which humans emerge from the natural world and can also return to it" (Classen 62). From this stage, *pachakuti* can also be transferred to an individual level or microcosmic form of manifestation (Classen 63), that is to say, the concept can be interpreted as linking to a variety of aspects of life where a change occurs. Bold asseverates that the mythological narratives of indigenous people also deal with beginnings and endings and can "construct moral narratives, connecting across the realms of 'nature' and 'culture'" (Bold 4), which creates a co-existing relationship between human and earth-beings who interact for survival in an inseparable way. This means that a world ends when these networks of interaction are interrupted by a lack of engagement in reciprocity towards the non-human entities and the spirits (Bold 5).

On the other hand, the narratives additionally indicate a reversing of the subordinated place that indigenous communities have had through history. This relates to multiple (social, political, economic, and cultural) narratives (and contexts) that have been stripped of their own name, and place, divested of their roots, and consequently placed in the margins of modern society, as an upside-down movement. As a result, *pachakuti* serves as way to mend this indigenous world (Noriega 491) by reorganizing and restoring life and vanquishing the already established order through this modern form of narrative. With the *pachakuti* as a common argument, the narratives reflect how it relates and defends earth-beings/nature, as an integrated part of human life and of a revitalization of the cycle of life. *Pachakuti* exposes a different kind of conception of collapse and extinction, where the idea of catastrophe does not mean an end to the order of things. On the contrary, life is conceived as a movement of forces, a world reversal that goes in cycles, and even more as a notion which brings about a consciousness of how this collapse and destruction is being shaped by the multinational corporations through the extractive activities throughout the world, but especially in indigenous territories; these narratives are a form of denouncing these transgressions. This manifests an empowerment created through their narrative, which exposes and denounces the conflicts and inequalities suffered by them in the hands of their governments and multinational corporations, but at the same time reproduces their old ways of life as a present, and future alternative way of living.

As previously explained, the patent mytheme displayed in this analysis is *pachakuti*. This mytheme flows through the narrative of the three poems and has an inherent significance that belongs to the cosmological viewpoint of Andean cosmovision. At the same time, *pachakuti* correlates to the Nocturnal Order of the figurative structuralism (Durand, *Las estructuras* 60-66, 207-354), and consequently it has a place in the synthetic structure where the cyclical symbols and the myth of the eternal return prevail. Additionally, *pachakuti* encounters other mytheme, with the earth-beings recognised as the latent mytheme and the voices denouncing the extractive activities.

***Pachakuti*: The Face of Collapse and Extinction Voiced through Earth-Beings**

The first two poems exhibit, besides the latent *pachakuti* mytheme as the common argument, the patent mytheme of the earth-beings in danger. The first poem "La Tórtola, pájaro melancólico"[3] (The turtledove, a melancholic bird) was written by Lorenzo Ayllapán.[4] Pérez indicates that Ayllapán's poetry highlights mostly birds as agents (2006 4). The second poem "Todo está dicho"[5] (Rocha Vivas 294; Suescún) (Everything has been said), written by the Yanakuna poet Fredy Chikangana[6], follows Ayllapán's mytheme about the earth-beings, but focuses on the rivers.

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[3] "El nido de cuatro palitos de la tórtola/ se ha derrumbado y por eso llora/ por la continua tala del bosque nativo [...]/ al ver pasar los intrusos, los ajenos codiciosos/ y canta: se quebraron los huevos/ muy triste llora la tórtola por la desgracia/ por ser testigo del permanente castigo a la Madre Tierra (Huenún 31).

[4] Lorenzo Ayllapán Cayuleo, born in Southern Chile, is a Mapuche poet, actor, film producer, anthropologist and teacher of his mother tongue, Mapudungun. He is also known as *Üñümche* or bird man and, as such, he communicates with birds, which is the feature of his own contribution to Mapuche poetry (Pérez 4-5). His poetry expresses the profound interconnections between his culture and the birds, but also between the birds and the ecosystems of Southern Chile (Aillapán and Rozzi 420-21; Binns 5): he is a representative of the Mapuche ethno-ornithology (Binns 8). He won the prestigious

On the one hand, in Ayllapán's poem, the patent mytheme is about conveying the turtledove's vision and emotions about the destruction of its environment. On the other hand, in Chikangana's poem the rivers and doves also bear witness to the destruction and collapse of their environment. Both poems acknowledge, through the different voices of nature, the predominant and important role play by earth-beings in the current world system that is in crisis. Earth-beings are present in Andean cultures and have become, as de la Cadena explains in *Earth Beings*, political actors during the 21st century's social movements among indigenous populations that protest against extractivism such as mine-related environmental issues, pollution of water resources and deforestation (de la Cadena, *Earth Beings* 341).

The latent *pachakuti* mytheme appears clearly in both "La Tórtola, pájaro melancólico" and "Todo está dicho", where the movement of the upside-down turning of the world materialises when nature speaks out its reality, giving us, as described by Rocha Vivas, the vision of the defeated (2010 294). In the beginning of "Todo está dicho", the conjured verses denote a strong presence of an apocalyptic catastrophe incarnated in the voice of a human, "I have nothing to say/about the time and the space that/have come upon us/Everything has been said"[7] (Suescún). The poetic voice perceives the crisis brought by the *pachakuti* but seems resigned to the fate; however, the enunciation of these words displays what Bria and Walter explain about *pachakuti* as "equally a way to acknowledge and accept the inevitable traumas of history" (Bria and Walter 20), because *pachakuti* encompasses past, present, and future, thereby facilitating a person's acknowledgement of history conceptualizing its "position and agency within the world during times of widespread transformation" (Bria and Walter 2019 20).

As mentioned previously, in both Ayllapán and Chikangana birds appear as earth-beings, "The turtledove's nest of four sticks has been shattered, she cries/For the constant chopping down of the native forest/for the constant aggression against mother nature […]" (My translation).[8] Here, the turtledove's statement describes its laments and its sorrows of losing its home because it has no trees left to build its nest. In Chikangana's poem the poetic voice says, "[…] let the doves say something from

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literary prize Premio Casa de las Américas de Literatura en Lengua Indígena, 1994. The poem to be analysed here was first published in 2003 in the book *Úñümche. Hombre Pájaro.* Later, it was republished in 2007 in the anthology *La memoria Iluminada: poesía mapuche contemporánea*. This is the edition that I use in this analysis.

[5] "No tengo nada que decir/sobre el tiempo y el espacio que se nos/vino encima./Todo está dicho. Que hablen los ríos desde su agonía,/que hablen las serpientes que se arrastran/por ciudades y pueblos,/que algo digan las palomas desde sus/ensangrentados nidos;/yo,/hijo de tierras ancestrales,/no tengo nada que decir./[…]Todo está dicho" (Rocha Vivas 294-95).

[6] He is borne in Yanakuna County in Colombia. He considers himself as a poet and *oralitor* and he is an activist for the defence of Mother Earth. His works has been part of many anthologies.

[7] "No tengo nada que decir/ sobre el tiempo y el espacio que se nos/ vino encima" (Rocha Vivas 294).

[8] El nido de cuatro palitos de la tórtola/se ha derrumbado y por eso llora/por la continua tala del bosque nativo/por la continua agresión a la madre naturaleza […]" (Huenún 31).

their/nests spattered with blood […]”[9] (Suescún), expressing a more dramatic and radicalized image that exhibits a destiny of extinction. These poetic voices assume a collective position showing the earth-beings' suffering. Birds, explains Cirlot, are symbols of the spirituality representing the soul that flies away after death, but also as messengers (Cirlot 356-58). The presence of birds in the poems serves the purpose of carrying ominous message or/and testimony, since birds for indigenous people are messengers of both good and bad omens (Montecino 2015 487-92). In this case the turtledove and the doves are earth-beings presenting a testimony and passing a message of the consequences of the exploitation of their habitats. The poetic voices in the poems suggest a complexity of entanglements between humans and earth-beings where both groups perceived the environment (Mother Earth) as a “living being with which we have an indivisible and interdependent, complementary and spiritual relationship” (“World Peoples' Conference”). What the poetic voice presents is the presence of “transformational entities” that propose insights into the “multiverse” where humans and earth-beings are interconnected (Viveiros de Castro 38). The birds denounce what Brightman and Lewis describe as an agency that solely concentrates its efforts in the “growth-based market economies that have intensified resource extraction and consumption around the world, mostly externalizing the cost to non-human species and environments” (Brightman and Lewis 14).

In “La Tórtola, pájaro melancólico” the turtledove laments its inability to nest because of deforestation, then the trees constitute a life-interrelation. This description of the trees embodies, according to the synthetic structure with its symbols and myths of progress, the life of the cosmos with what Cirlot names “density, growth, proliferation, creation and regeneration” (89), which at the same time is an unquenchable source of life, thereby it represents immortality that has been disrupted. The bird exposes a sign of the crumbling of the centre of the world. The imbalance is mourned by it laying the blame on the intruders that the turtledove glimpses at from one of the few trees left and by it sentences, “Seeing the intruders go by, those greedy strangers” (My translation).[10] The turtledove is aware of the danger that these foreigners embody to its existence. These strangers do not belong to the territory and are perceived as a representation of bestiality (theriomorphic symbols) expressed in the appropriation of the land, because they express an evilness (nyctomorphic symbols) marked by the act of deforesting the bird's habitat, which *per se* is an act of destruction manifested in *pachakuti*.

Thomson clarifies that before the colonization indigenous societies were organized in relationships based on reciprocity and complementarity, and “a respect for plurality, coexistence and equality” (450), which is the explanation for the turtledove's testimony denouncing the destruction of its natural environment as a devastation. In the following verses, the narrative voice, articulated by the bird man, proclaims, “She sings: the eggs broke/ The turtledove cries so sadly for the

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[9] “[…] que algo digan las palomas desde sus/ ensangrentados nidos; […]” (Rocha Vivas 295).

[10] […] al ver pasar los intrusos, los ajenos codiciosos […] (Huenún 31).

misfortune/ Because she is a witness to permanent punishment to Mother Earth […].”[11] (My translation). The turtledove, through this testimony, owns a subjectivity through which it expresses its own perspective of the territory’s exploitation. This does not represent a humanisation or a metaphorical approach for explaining the conduct of this earth-beings. Viveiros de Castro conceives this as perspectivism, a concept suggesting that the world is populated by different forms of subjectivities (Vivieros de Castro, *The relative* 229) that involve humans and more-than-humans, or earth-beings, as de la Cadena designates them (164).

While the poetic voice in “La Tórtola, pájaro melancólico” denounces the cruel reality of the forests of Mapuche territory, “Todo está dicho” reveals the endangerment of the riverine waters when declaring: “Let the rivers talk in their agony.” As observed in this verse, the earth-beings are the rivers. As Montecino and Portela Guarín describe it, for indigenous people the water takes different shapes - sea, lakes, rivers- and it is considered the dwelling of spirits, mermaids, monsters - earth-beings- or enchanted cities; there is also a bridge or a passageway to the other life (Montecino 41; Portela Guarín 18, 66). Durand postulates that the water also symbolises a creative force directly entangled with Mother Earth or the “Mother of the world” that precedes all creation and form to which all life wants to accede; water is the beginning and the end of the cosmic creation too (Durand, *Las estructuras* 2005 237, 266). Portela Guarín postulates that since water is perceived as the origin of life it belongs to the cosmography of the indigenous people, which is a fragile ecosystem because of the extractivism through mining, the cattle industry and monoculture that has contaminated and diminished these sources of life (53). This situation causes the spirits living in the waters to leave it and the water loses its power, provoking an imbalance in nature that negatively affects the cycle of life of both earth-beings and humans, disrupting “the good living”, which means “a fullness life in a community, together with other persons and Nature” (Gudynas 2011 442). This concept of “the good living” is found among many indigenous people that refer to it in their own languages. The Quechua people calls it *Sumak Kawsay*, the Aymara names it *Suma Qamaña* and the Mapuche people refers to it as *Küme Mongen* (2011, 442-43).

The testimony of the birds and the rivers is a narrative that fits in the Nocturnal Order and in the synthetic structure of the cyclical symbols and the myths of progress, because it manifests a cyclical movement that spins around situating the earth-beings on the upside-down of *pachakuti*, *pachakuti’s* side of collapse and extinction. The stories also denounce this annihilation to the multinational corporations that destroy the ecosystem in which the earth-beings live. These viewpoints expressed by the earth-beings in the poems entail, accordingly to Viveiros de Castro perspective, shifts that involve the differences of bodies and not the culture the subjects belong to. This is what he calls *multinaturalism* in opposition to multiculturalism. The author indicates that “where our modern, anthropological multiculturalist ontology is

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[11] […] canta: se quebraron los huevos/muy triste llora la tórtola por la desgracia/por ser testigo del permanente castigo a la Madre Tierra (Huenún 31).

founded on the mutual implication of the unity of nature and the plurality of cultures, the Amerindian conception would suppose a spiritual unity and a corporeal diversity— or, in other words, one 'culture', multiple 'natures'" (Viveiros de Castro 36, 59). The turtledove, the doves, and the rivers, as earth-beings, bear witness to the collapse and extinction of their world carried out by humans, who destroy both the landscapes and the earth-beings that inhabit these territories in pursuit of the resource extraction (Bold 3).

In the final verses of "Todo está dicho" the poetic voice has the sentences, "I/son of the ancestral lands/have nothing to say […]/Everything has been said […]" (Suescún). Jenkins *et al.* explains that indigenous "cosmovision refers to narratives in which beings in the world tell their own stories, and in the telling make manifest the deeper meanings of the world and humans woven into it" (Jenkins *et al*. 107), showing that there is no difference between humans and earth-beings telling the story. This verse exposes the importance that indigenous people place on letting earth-beings assume their own positioning to denounce the *pachakuti* of this era from their point of view.

Pachakuti: The Renewal of the Cycle

Finally, the poem "Vivir-morir"[12] ("To live-to die") by Vito Apüshana[13] shows the *pachakuti* mytheme in its latent form related to the cyclical process which involves both catastrophe and reminds of the myth of the eternal return renewal (Muyolema Calle 122; Eliade, *The Myth* 86). This myth involves a symbolical reverie of the return to the Mother after death which indicates a victory or an inversion of time and death by unifying the symbols of the cradle and the tomb, where the earth, as a womb, signifies the ultimate repose (Gutiérrez 112-13). The poem relates the cycle of life from beginning to end, and to beginning again.

In the poem, it is observed that humans are represented as equal to trees and earth beings, "We grow, like trees, inside/the footprints of our ancestors" (Suescún). Cirlot explains that the trees represent the life of the cosmos, from which all beings emerge; trees are bound to earth by their roots, and humans are attached to earth by the footprints of their own ancestors who lie in the earth interconnecting the living with the dead in an ever-ending cycle (367). The footprints are remnants of the feet, which at the same time symbolise the soul that connects humans to earth in a funerary sense (367). This means that the feet, by the act of walking belong to earth and unite humans to the land of the dead where the ancestors lie and towards where all humans return. In accordance with the cosmogonical beliefs of the Andes, the cosmos is divided in two: the world above (sky) and the world below (earth). The

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[12] "Crecemos, como árboles, en el interior/ de la huella de nuestros antepasados./ Vivimos, como arañas, en el tejido del rincón materno./[…] Soñamos allá, entre Kashii y Ka'i, (la luna y el sol) en los predios de los espíritus./Morimos como si siguiéramos vivos" (Apüshana 68).

[13] Vito Apüshana or Miguel Ángel López is an indigenous poet of the Wayuu Nation (Northern Colombia). He was awarded in 2000 the Latin American literary prize Casa de las Américas for the book *Encuentros en los senderos de Abaya Yala*. He has written four books of poems.

footprints are placed in the world below, appearing as a poetic expression that channels, as Bouysse-Casagne explains, the (eternal) return of the dead. The ancestors follow the living because there is a link between present and past-future that pertains to a hidden side of the world (qtd. in Rocha Vivas 169). These verses give a sense of being protected, as the footprints represent the link to the mother's womb.

In the next verses the symbol of the mother's womb is reinforced by the image of the spider, "We live, like spiders, in the web/of the maternal corner […]". Cirlot emphasises that these three different significances "overlap, confuse or discern in accordance with the case in question" (88). This animal embodies, as Cirlot refers to it, the capacity to create through its weaving and the web itself relates to the centre of the world (88); it has also the negative attribute of aggression (88). Despite this fact, the spider, much like the cosmic tree, is associated with the cosmic centre of the world (88), and the spider's web symbolises the centre of the cosmos in which all sentient beings live wrapped up. The spider, with its ceaseless creative and destructive capacities, signifies the constant inversion through which the cosmos' equilibrium is preserved; the spider winds both life and death (88-89). Durand classifies it into the cyclical-lunar symbols since these symbols can be identified with an eternal repetition and renovation (Durand, *Las estructuras* 323-24). The lunar symbols, with the moon as the highest manifestation, signify the first dead and the first resuscitated (Durand, *Las estructuras* 295-96).

Many indigenous people count the spider as a deity or as a mythological figure, some examples are the Totonaco people and the Navajo. Among the Navajo the spider is responsible for teaching this people the art of cultivating and weaving cotton, introducing the spindle and the loom, "A cosmic loom" (Pitarch 1195), and when the Spider Woman spins around her loom it produces a change in the order of the world triggering a new epoch or time (1195) which relates to *pachakuti*. For Andean cosmovision spiders are magical creatures that bring luck and good fortune (Montecino 74-76) and are associated with both the weaving and the maternal deities (Casas Mendoza 30). The maternal aspect in which the poem refers to the spider denotes an intimate symbology as returning to the mother's womb instead of to dying. In the poem, the spider transforms itself and its web into a grave-cradle, a womb, a container in which beings cuddle and rejoice, and feel safe and nourished (Durand, *Las estructuras* 245).

In this cyclical narrative is found a circo-spiral movement expressed by the web of the spider. This movement is also conveyed in the verses, "[…] We dream there, between *kashii* and *ka'i*[14][…]/on the land of the spirits[15]". (Suescún) In these verses, the spiral movement expresses the cyclical principle that sustains *pacha* (space-time). This movement communicates where the future lies, indicating that a person walks through life backwards, seeing only what it has done; being the past the point of

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[14] The moon and the sun.

[15] "Soñamos allá, entre Kashi y Ka'i, […]/ en los predios de los espíritus" (Apüshana 68).

orientation (Achig Balarezo 6). The reality is a cosmic one, *pacha*, which includes the masculine and feminine aspects of all living things, represented by the sun (*ka'i*) and the moon (*kashii)*, as complementary opposed unities. *Pacha* then is a concept that encompasses all the spheres of the cosmos, that includes, as Estermann explains, the natural world to which mankind belongs to, thereby it is "an expression beyond the bifurcation between the visible and the invisible, of the material and the immaterial, of the worldly and celestial, of the profane and the sacred, of the exterior and the interior. It contains temporality and spatiality" (Estermann 157-58). Then *pacha,* as an organized cosmos, at some decisive point, reaches a peak of returning, a peak of being reborn, *kuti* (Estermann 179-180). That is why and when *pachakuti* turns the world upside-down through natural cataclysmic catastrophe, political conflicts, social and/or religious upheavals collapsing the reality as it is known (Torres Chacón 24-25). Nonetheless, *pacha* is not "totally different 'worlds' or 'strata' but aspects or 'spaces' of a same interconnected reality (Estermann 157-58) which is observed in the last verse of the poem: "We die as if we were still alive."[16] Here *pachakuti* is incorporated on a macrocosmic level (Classen 63) that integrates the physical individual body (63), relating equally to an embodiment of the human condition linked to the natural/cosmic world, where humans and earth-beings are bound by Mother Earth to interact with each other in order to create "the good living." When this interaction is disrupted, *pachakuti* emerges as a devastating force. In this aspect, Classen speaks of *pachakuti* in a metaphor of "the body turning around and facing the opposite direction (or, on the north/south axis, by being stood on its head). When this occurred the structures of the past would become submerged in the fluidity of the future and the world would be restructured according to new principles" (221). In this final verse, to live and to die does not make any difference because in Andean cosmovision the body expresses the spirituality of a person, like virtue, sin, and illness. Then the body, although always permeated by the presence and the power of its owner, even after death, has a close bond to the land because the body is created from earth, it lives on it and returns to it at death. Death then strengthens this connection to earth in an eternal return that reaffirms life itself by triggering the cycle of life over again (Classen 271-272).

The imaginary that the indigenous literature shared with other imaginings is also a "network of mental representations nurtured by a mythical, religious and/or historical legacy" (Fabry *et al.* 12), but in this case it differs in its ontological, axiological and epistemological value from the Western point of view. While Western culture through the religious Judeo-Christian beliefs perceives the world and its time in a linear and irreversible way, with a beginning and an end (a finite time) "between two atemporal eternities" (Eliade, *The Myth* 112), in which when the catastrophe arrives, the world will be onset anew, as it was at the beginning of times (Eliade, *The myth* 67), the indigenous cosmogony understands and tells about a cyclical time that undergoes periodical regenerations "*ad infinitum"* with new creation and a cosmic

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[16] "Morimos como si siguiéramos vivos" (Apüshana 68).

regeneration of the world (Eliade, *The Myth* 112). This is what Eliade calls the myth of the eternal return, the circular time that manifests itself (Eliade, *Mito y Realidad* 62-63), in this case in the Andean concept of *pachakuti*, a renewal of time which we also find in these modern literary manifestations of Amerindian cultures. This reasoning reveals that the *pachakuti* mytheme involves a form of environmental cataclysmic event which can start because of humans' predatory actions, like the one witnessed in the poems that denounce extractive projects, deforestation or contamination of the water resources that leads to earth-beings abandoning their landscapes of origin or denouncing the destruction of these landscapes.

Conclusion

The aim of this work was to show a new viewpoint of collapse and extinction through the latent *pachakuti* mytheme. In the poems the active presence of earth-beings as "spokesbeings" is found to be a patent mytheme. It is through their narratives or viewpoints that the environmental destruction comes to light, showing how humans overexploit and disrupt the relationship to the environment, turning it into a natural resource for human consumption. The *pachakuti* mytheme, but also the earth-being mytheme, that runs through all three poems exhibits its phases of environmental cataclysm ("La Tórtola" and "Todo está dicho"), but also the phase of the renewal of the cycle of life that corroborates the bounding interrelation of reciprocal energy existing between humans, earth-beings, and nature ("Vivir-morir").

The above analysis demonstrates that collapse and extinction occupy an important space in indigenous cosmovision, linking this to a cyclical return of transformations, regenerations that could mean either good or bad impacts for the people, all of them concerning a cyclical re-creation of the world. On the one side, the poems also demonstrate a re-emergence of indigenous voices and agencies, earth-beings, who belong to their cosmological world and aim to confront both the global ecological crisis and the repercussions that this environmental injustice causes by denouncing the extractivism that multinational enterprises execute by exploiting the natural resources, causing the imbalance that is destroying humans, earth-beings, and nature. On the other side, the poems raise an awareness about the importance of these indigenous perspectives and the contribution that they could offer, where *pachakuti* is a collapse and extinction but also a renewal of the world, with both phases needed to maintain the balance in the world.

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The Future is Collapsing: Feminist Narratives of Unmaking in Laura Pugno and Veronica Raimo

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Abstract

While long ignored in the Italian panorama, in recent years science fiction and speculative fiction have seen a significant increase in the number of novels and critical analyses related to the two genres. Women writers are reclaiming a central spot in the fields in general, as demonstrated by collapse and extinction narratives in particular. Laura Pugno's *Sirene* (Mermaids, 2007) constitutes a significant example of such fiction. The work depicts a dystopic future, in which humans are facing extinction due to a dangerous cancer caused by pollution. While mermaids are immune to the disease, they are imprisoned by humans either for mermaid meat production or for sexual purposes. Veronica Raimo's *Miden* (2018) has points in common with Pugno's novel, even if from a (seemingly) utopian perspective. Miden is an ideal society that has flourished according to gender equality, happiness, and community principles. However, not too long after having moved there due to the economic (and moral) "Collapse" of their country, the main character and his partner are investigated by Miden's society as the protagonist is accused of sexual assault. Both novels have been described by Marco Malvestio as eco-dystopias. Stemming from his definition, the paper investigates how both *Sirene* and *Miden* apply the concept of collapse as a key methodology in constructing their narratives. In this way, Pugno and Raimo collapse the human and nonhuman and the dystopia and utopia binaries. The paper argues that the authors follow a queer practice of unmaking theorised by Jack Halberstam, who stated that the only way forward is to unbuild, unmake, and collapse (2021).

Keywords: collapse, ecofeminist fiction, Laura Pugno, Veronica Raimo, queer theory.

Resumen

La ciencia ficción y la ficción especulativa se han visto tradicionalmente relegadas a un segundo plano en el panorama de las letras italianas, si bien en los últimos años el número de novelas escritas en estos géneros, así como la crítica literaria sobre ambos, ha aumentado significativamente. Las escritoras están reclamando un lugar central en este campo en general y, en particular, en las narrativas de colapso y extinción. *Sirene* (Mermaids, 2007), de Laura Pugno, constituye un importante ejemplo de este tipo de ficción. La obra representa un futuro distópico en el que los humanos se enfrentan a la extinción debido a un cáncer peligroso causado por la contaminación. Las sirenas son inmunes a esta enfermedad, pero los humanos las han encarcelado y las utilizan bien para producir carne bien con fines sexuales. *Miden* (2018), de Veronica Raimo, tiene puntos en común con la novela de Pugno, incluso aunque esté escrita desde una perspectiva aparentemente utópica. Miden es una sociedad ideal que ha florecido de acuerdo con los ideales de la igualdad de género, de la felicidad, y de la comunidad. Sin embargo, poco tiempo después de haberse mudado allí por el desplome económico (y moral) en su país, el protagonista y su pareja son investigados por la sociedad de Miden, porque acusan al protagonista de violencia sexual. Marco Malvestio denomina las novelas eco-distopías. Basándose en esta definición, este artículo analiza la manera en que ambas novelas utiliza el concepto de derrumbe como la piedra angular en la construcción de la narración. Así, Pugno y Raimo derriban los binomios de lo humano y no humano, así como los de la distopía y de la utopía. El artículo sostiene que las escritoras siguen una práctica queer denominada 'unmaking', como propuso Jack Halberstam, que afirmó que la única manera de proceder es desconstruir, deshacer y derribar.

Palabras clave: derrumbe, ficción ecofeminista, Laura Pugno, Veronica Raimo, teoría queer.

Introduction

Tales about flying saucers, aliens, dystopic regimes, apocalypses, or utopian planets have rarely appeared in critical analyses on Italian literature. As argued by Daniele Comberiati and Luca Somigli, due to various reasons, such as the division between high culture and low culture or the incorrect assessment of the genre as derivative from Anglo-American cultural productions, science fiction in Italy has not easily legitimised itself in the second half of the twentieth century (7). Despite this context, Italian science fiction works were not limited in numbers during that period, "between 1952 and 1979, Italian sf works were published in consistent numbers: 71 collections, 20 magazines, and 2256 books" (Brioni and Comberiati, *Italian Science Fiction* 2). Catching up on this cultural trend, in recent years many critical analyses on Italian science fiction or speculative fiction have been published, such as the monograph *Distopie, viaggi spaziali, allucinazioni: Fantascienza italiana contemporanea* by Giulia Iannuzzi (2015), the volume by Simone Brioni and Comberiati *Italian Science Fiction: The Other in Literature and Film* (2019), or the *Narrativa* issue on "La fantascienza nelle narrazioni italiane ipercontemporanee" edited by Comberiati and Somigli (2021), just to name a few. These publications denote a significant shift in the perception of the fields, which is perhaps due to the genres' own characteristics.

Science fiction and speculative fiction[1] have been praised by Italian scholars due to their ability to analyse modern-day conflicts (Comberiati and Somigli 16). For instance, as stated by Florian Mussgnug, Italian apocalyptic narrative is a strongly political genre, as it often investigates "political, military and economic interests operating on a planetary scale; weapons of mass destruction; industrialisation; unstoppable environmental degradation; exponential population growth; forced migration; genocide" (213). Considering its crucial relevance today, many works of science fiction and speculative fiction have unsurprisingly engaged with climate change (or the inability to fully portray it).[2] Mussgnug argued that "an ever-increasing awareness of the environmental catastrophe has aroused interest in new literary forms and themes" (209). Localising the phenomenon in the Italian context, Marco

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[1] While stemming from a similar background, science fiction and speculative fiction present a distinctive nuance. Margaret Atwood specified the distinction by saying, "I liked to make a distinction between science fiction proper – for me, this label denotes books with things in them we can't yet do or begin to do, talking beings we can never meet, and places we can't go – and speculative fiction, which employs the means already more or less to hand and takes place on Planet Earth" (513).

[2] In *The Great Derangement: Climate Change and the Unthinkable* (2016), Amitav Ghosh argued that the Anthropocene tests "the arts and humanities, but also [...] our commonsense understandings" (9). Ghosh stated that today the humanities are unable to engage with climate change and that, consequently, there is a crisis of the imagination (11).

Malvestio claimed that "the diffusion of ecological dystopias (eco-dystopias) in Italy is in line with the [international and Anglo-American] trend […] of a revival of the modes and forms of dystopian and post-apocalyptic science fiction to narrate climate change" (31). In this way, Malvestio also promoted the use of the productive label, "eco-dystopias," which denotes many key Italian works today (34).

The development of the science fiction and speculative fiction genres has also been marked by a proliferation of works written by women and of works promoting a feminist view (Carrara 46). In Italy, the sheer number of novels belonging to the feminist science fiction genre cannot match the one of the Anglo-American contexts (Carrara 46). Nonetheless, as argued by Giuseppe Carrara, an increasing amount of works can be read from a feminist perspective and "there is no shortage of community-based cultural and creative experiences, very often born out of counter-cultural claims or explicitly linked to feminist movements" (46). The analyses by Carrara, as well as the volumes *Femminismi futuri: Teorie, pratiche, fabulazioni* (2019) edited by Lidia Curti, and *Donne e Fantastico: Narrativa oltre i generi* (2020) by Giuliana Misserville, to name a few, denote a significant blossoming in the field of Italian feminist science fiction.

Two relevant examples of the genre are: *Sirene* (Mermaids, 2007) by Laura Pugno and *Miden* (2018) by Veronica Raimo.[3] Pugno's work depicts a dystopic future, in which humans are facing extinction due to a dangerous "cancro nero," caused by atmospheric changes and spread both by sun exposure and contagion (16).[4] The main character is Samuel, a man grieving the loss of his partner Sadako, caused by the black cancer. He works for a criminal organisation, a "yakuza," which raised him and gave him a job in an underwater mermaids' farm. Upon appearance to humankind, the mermaids were imprisoned by criminal organisations both as sources of meat and of pleasure. For this reason, yakuzas created mermaids' farms to breed them and produce mermaid sushi or opened brothels where to keep (and exploit) female mermaids. While humans are constantly dying from the black cancer, the mermaids are immune. Veronica Raimo's *Miden* seemingly stands in stark opposition to Pugno's novel, as it depicts an ideal society that has flourished according to gender equality, welfare, and community principles. However, not too long after having moved there due the economic (and moral) "Crollo" of their country,[5] the main character, a professor, (simply called "il compagno," the male partner) and his partner ("la compagna," the female partner) are investigated by Miden's society as the protagonist is accused of sexual violence by a girl, who used to be his student. The novel follows the trial against the professor, the investigation by a Miden committee, and the reaction of *la compagna*.

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[3] Unsurprisingly, Pugno centred mermaids in her work of feminist science fiction, as they have been described as "lively feminist figures for rethinking human–water dependencies along posthuman lines" (Stifjell 99).

[4] Black cancer.

[5] Collapse.

A comparison between the novels by Pugno and Raimo seems productive because of the several thematic threads that connect them. For instance, both novels centre women (and female mermaids) in a context of patriarchal violence and human collapse. In particular, while in oppressive circumstances, the narratives by Pugno and Raimo both bring to the forefront humans and nonhumans and their bond. Taking its cue from Malvestio's thought-provoking definition of *Sirene* and *Miden* as eco-dystopias (34), the paper will firstly explore their depiction as "eco-" novels. The paper will investigate how the novels depict the human and nonhuman binary and if they promote its collapse, by employing ecofeminist tools for the analysis (Haraway 2016). Secondly, the paper will build on the definition of *Sirene* and *Miden* as "dystopias," by claiming that both novels are not easily classifiable and that they encourage a blurring of the dystopia and utopia categories. Thus, after having examined the collapse of the human and nonhuman and utopia and dystopia binaries, the paper will investigate the contextual societal collapse described both in *Sirene* and *Miden*. In particular, the analysis will suggest an affinity between *Sirene* and *Miden* with queer modes of collapse (Halberstam 2021). Finally, the paper will connect the novels' societal undoing with forms temporal disruption (Lothian 2018). Thus, the term 'collapse' in this paper possesses a multi-faceted nature; it refers to both a descriptive societal and environmental collapse, as well as collapse as an active practice of disruption of oppressive systems and binaries.

Eco

Marco Malvestio included both *Sirene* and *Miden* in his overview of Italian eco-dystopias because, although they do not adhere perfectly to the definition, they engage with climate change issues (37). For instance, while in *Miden* the Collapse of the protagonists' former society was socio-economic in nature, it also was accompanied by a crucial waste management crisis. According to Malvestio:

> Waste disposal is a recurring theme in recent Italian environmental history, and it is significant that Raimo, in one of the few passages devoted to the country of origin of her protagonists, chooses to focus precisely on this detail; at the same time, the difficulty of waste disposal in capitalist modernity is a topos of ecological dystopia. (38)

Arguably, alongside such a crucial environmental issue, there is also another element that allows an ecocritical (and ecofeminist) analysis: the connection between humans and nonhumans. In particular, the novel features recurrent associations between women and nonhumans.[6] For instance, the girl who accuses the professor is described by *la compagna* as menacing and predatory animal, "Her thinness appeared menacing, the skinned carrion of an animal that has come to bring misfortune into the home" (14).[7] Similarly, *la compagna* is described as an animal through her partner's point of view, "She looked in pain, an animal that does not know in which direction to flee. [...] Then she burst into tears" (93).[8] In another scene, the professor describes her again in similar terms, "I found her by the window as if in a painting. The shadow of her belly created the silhouette of a strange sleeping animal on the wall" (151).[9] Significantly, the act of seeing the two women as animals is only associated with negative feelings on their part—they are suffering, isolated, upset, and, thus, wild animals.

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[6] One exception is an art installation done by a student of the professor, depicting him and the girl as porcupines.

This trend of painful association between women and nonhumans continues in a crucial moment of the narrative, when the professor and *la compagna* go into the woods to bury her trolley. By mistake, *la compagna* kills a mole-looking nonhuman that was hiding in the ground surrounded by baby moles (169). Upon seeing them, the woman bursts into tears. Even in death, a connection is established between the mole and *la compagna* through motherhood, as the latter was pregnant at the time. Furthermore, when the professor suggests leaving them to die, *la compagna* complains, saying "You are abandoning our son to groan in the mud" (171),[10] creating an immediate connection with the pups. *La compagna* is, even briefly, extending a kinship bond towards the pups, generating, in the words of Donna Haraway, oddkin. According to Haraway, oddkin is formed by "unexpected collaborations and combinations" and "rather than, or at least in addition to, godkin and genealogical and biogenetic family" (*Staying with the Trouble* 2-4). The connection between *la compagna* and the pups blurs any human and nonhuman division and hierarchy, and in this way, creates a stronger bond between the woman, her child, and the moles, than the one between her and her partner. The connection is brief, because the professor decides to kill the pups without warning, fully embodying a form of patriarchal violence and oppression.[11] Significantly, after this episode, the relationship between the two protagonists will start to crumble.

Malvestio describes Pugno's *Sirene* as an eco-dystopia as well (34). However, if Raimo places humans and nonhumans on the same level for a brief, even if meaningful, amount of time, Pugno takes a more explicit approach. At the beginning of the novel, Samuel, while in charge of overseeing the mermaids' breeding, decides

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[7] "La sua magrezza appariva minacciosa, la carogna spolpata di un animale che è venuta a portare sciagura dentro casa". (All translations of texts are mine)

[8] "Sembrava sofferente, un animale che non sa che direzione prendere per la fuga. [...] Poi è scoppiata a piangere".

[9] "L'ho trovata vicino alla finestra come in un dipinto. L'ombra della sua pancia creava la sagoma di uno strano animale dormiente sul muro".

[10] "stai abbandonando nostro figlio a rantolare nel fango".

[11] The professor's predatory behaviour towards women is equated to the one towards the environment, matching his killing of the moles. A character argued that the professor's inappropriate relationship with his student was caused by the Collapse, "pensavo che lo sradicamento dal suo Paese passasse attraverso questo tipo di sublimazione [...]: voler possedere un altro corpo perché si è persa una terra" ("I thought the uprooting from his Country went through this kind of sublimation [...]: wanting to possess another body because one has lost a country."102). The simultaneous patriarchal oppression of women and the environment is at the core of Western ecofeminist theory (Plumwood 1993; Gaard 1993), thus, it situates Raimo's novel on a specific genealogy.

to substitute a male mermaid with himself to mate (or, more appropriately, rape) a mermaid, who has the most human-like features, the "half-albino" (14).[12] Not only the *mezzoalbina* has human-looking features, but also, she is associated with Samuel's late partner, Sadako, as he thinks of her while diving into the water tank. The connection between the *mezzoalbina* and Sadako is also contextual to their situation as victims of a patriarchal and violent environment: just like the *mezzoalbina* is imprisoned by the criminal organization, similarly Sadako was treated as an object by yakuza men and was given to Samuel as a gift. Born the illegitimate child of a senior member of the yakuza, Sadako was enslaved by a man, who decided to tattoo her body not only as a mark of his ownership, but also to relish her pain, "While the old man pierced her skin with needles Sadako had not moved a muscle, until he asked her to cry and scream, to wriggle out of the pain, and then she did" (63).[13] The world depicted by Pugno equally exploits women and mermaids, justifying the violence in the name of men's needs.

The connection between women and mermaids takes physical shape, when the *mezzoalbina* gives birth to a mermaid that is half human half mermaid after she was raped by Samuel (56). As described by Roberta Tabanelli, "in Pugno's post-human hybridity, the title of Haraway's recent study, *When Species Meet*, becomes a literal assumption" (16). The post-human quality of *Sirene* is also highlighted by Pierpaolo Antonello, who states that, "*Sirene* can easily be inscribed within the articulation proposed for example by Rosi Braidotti of the post-human as a theoretical field of emancipatory character in relation to epistemic categories and anthropocentric social practices" (162). Following the mores of the violent patriarchal society in which he lives, Samuel is immediately tempted to rape his child and decides to name her Mia, highlighting his possessiveness and entitlement towards her body. He then decides to tattoo her body to look like Sadako's (90-91). Mia becomes an object, much like Sadako used to be for the old yakuza men. While they both have no agency, they are brought together by their condition.

Just like Raimo placed the unborn child of the main characters on the same level as the baby moles, Pugno similarly creates a connection between Sadako, the *mezzoalbina*, and Mia. Not only their condition and equal suffering disrupt any notion of hierarchical division between them, but also Mia physically blurs it by being a hybrid between humans and mermaids. In this way, Mia and her daughter embody Haraway's cyborg, as suggested by Hanna Serkowska and Aleksandra Pławska (177). Haraway defined the cyborg's appearance where "the boundary between human and animal is transgressed" (*A Cyborg Manifesto* 11), it "is about […] potent fusions, and dangerous possibilities" (Haraway, *A Cyborg Manifesto* 14).[14] A blurring of the human

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[12] "Mezzoalbina".

[13] "mentre il vecchio le bucava la pelle con gli aghi Sadako non aveva mosso un muscolo, finché lui non le aveva chiesto di piangere e urlare, di divincolarsi per il dolore e lei l'aveva fatto".

[14] Furthermore, according to Amélie Aubert-Noël, the hybridation of the human and nonhuman categories is reflected in the structured of the novel itself, as it is "deeply hybrid because of the way it reworks the mythical material from which it takes its cue, particularly through the influence of Japanese manga" (188).

and nonhuman category is embraced by both Raimo and Pugno, as a way to de-centre an anthropocentric and patriarchal point of view. In a way, *Sirene* and *Miden* "can suggest a way out of the maze of dualisms in which we have explained our bodies and our tools to ourselves" (Haraway, *A Cyborg Manifesto* 67).

Utopia

Sirene and *Miden* seemingly belong to two opposite genres, the first appearing as a canonical dystopia and the second depicting a utopian world. While the terms 'dystopia' and 'utopia' have often been understood as part of a binary, strongly opposing one another, in recent years the two categories have assumed porous connotations. For instance, Francesco Muzzioli, in his analysis on dystopian fiction and catastrophe writings, stated that utopia and dystopia are often woven together and that they are often "paradoxically interchangeable" in contemporary fiction (20). Similarly, Fredric Jameson in *Archaeologies of the Future* (2005) argued that today utopia is represented in new ways and that is often mixed with its opposite (in Muzzioli 20).

Despite the porosity of the utopia and dystopia division, recent scholarship regarding *Miden* seemingly prefers one label over the other. For instance, Malvestio describes Miden as a dystopia, arguing that, "the dystopian dimension concerns Miden's social and cultural system, a strange version of collectivism and Protestant ethics in which citizens seem obliged by law to nurture good feelings" (37). On the contrary, Giuseppe Carrara classifies Miden as a utopia, "*Miden* [...] could be identified as a 'critical utopia' or a 'non-utopia', as a seemingly perfect world is revealed, through small details, to be in reality, not exactly desirable" (55-56). On a surface level, Miden seemingly also rejects the porosity suggested by Muzzioli and Jameson (as well as Malvestio's classification), as it intensely appears as a utopia: it is an ideal place, where its inhabitants are moved by the highest ideals.

> In Miden they are obsessed with these things because they are at the top of all the rankings. First place for: Quality of Life. Confidence in the Future. Social Equality. Human Rights. Job Satisfaction. Women's Emancipation. If you add up all the factors you get bingo, and you get what you are looking for: first place for Happiness. (17)[15]

Furthermore, Miden's principles are integrated into its citizens' social practices. For instance, they were not allowed to know the sex of unborn babies, in order not to create prior psychological conditioning (135). Not only Miden has put into place ways to avoid sexist behaviour, but also as a society it possesses infrastructures to eliminate poverty and unhappiness (72). In order to maintain this generalised wellbeing, Miden heavily influences and regulates the lives of its citizens, and, simultaneously, its biopolitical apparatus expects that citizens contribute to it. Once

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[15] "A Miden sono fissati con queste cose perché sono in cima a tutte le classifiche. Al primo posto per: Qualità della vita. Fiducia nel futuro. Uguaglianza sociale. Diritti umani. Soddisfazione professionale. Emancipazione della donna. Se sommi tutti i fattori fai bingo, e viene fuori quello che cerchi: al primo posto per Felicità".

the professor is accused of rape, he does not risk being incarcerated, but being expelled from Miden, since "the germ of violence that lurked within me would have threatened to undermine the social fabric il germe della violenza che si annidava dentro di me avrebbe rischiato di compromettere la tenuta sociale" (27).[16]

While apparently based on the most noble ideals, Miden nonetheless promotes happiness at all costs in a forceful and coercive manner, which soils its image of perfection. This negative aspect is slowly discovered by the protagonists in the course of the narrative. For instance, the antisociality displayed by *la compagna* is frowned upon because it betrays Miden's lifestyle, "In Miden, no one had anything against a romantic couple, or even against a solitary heart, and yet you felt a greater and more generous idyll looming: the Dream of Miden claiming your tribute of universal love" (29).[17] Perhaps due to her lack of social skills or due to her foreign status, *la compagna* is constantly placed under scrutiny by her neighbours. They spy on her to make sure she adheres to Miden's rules, for instance, by checking if she throws away the trash in the appropriate bin (58). Almost imperceptibly, the novel shows cracks in the perfectly crafted image of Miden's society and atmosphere, cracks that question its utopia definition. For instance, in the Garden dedicated to elders, *la compagna* sees people picking cherries that were deceptively placed on fir trees to create an enjoyable environment (45).

Thus, Miden oscillates between being a utopia and a dystopia, rendering Carrara's and Malvestio's assessments both equally accurate. Its coercive state, while based on honourable ideals, suppresses its citizens. At the same time, as a society, it is flourishing and allows its citizens to live a wealthy and happy life. Miden is thus the perfect example of the literary porosity described by Muzzioli and Jameson, as the 'utopia' and 'dystopia' definitions as "paradoxically interchangeable" (Muzzioli 20).

While in *Miden* the dystopian elements are under the surface, the world described in *Sirene* strongly places itself on the side of the dystopia, as suggested by Malvestio. The primary reason is that humankind is dying because of the black cancer and there is no available cure. At the same time, the mermaids' treatment at the hands of humans presents an equally robust reason behind its dystopia classification. Upon their appearance, the mermaids were regarded by some as deities, but the majority of the humans decided to exploit them. For instance, in one of the first years of the mermaids' appearance, many of them died *en masse* on the beaches. While the living mermaids were imprisoned, the dead were exploited:

> During the mass death, the Museum teams had taken some mermaids still alive from the beach. They had killed them with a shot of poison mixed with sedative, and had embalmed the bodies. It was said that they had made up their faces, to make them

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[16] "Il germe della violenza che si annidava dentro di me avrebbe rischiato di compromettere la tenuta sociale."

[17] "A Miden nessuno aveva niente in contrario a due cuori e una capanna, o persino a un cuore solitario, eppure sentivi incombere un idillio più grande e generoso: il Sogno di Miden che reclamava il tuo tributo di amore universale."

> look more human. Green lips covered in lipstick. The muscular mass of hair braided with flowers. (21)[18]

One scene especially epitomises the way the mermaids were violated: when it was still possible to hunt mermaids, Samuel witnessed an old yakuza simultaneously raping, eating, and killing a wild mermaid (52). The scene highlights the complete disregard towards nonhumans and the multiple ways they were violated and exploited.

According to the Mermaid Liberation Front activists (a group that wanted to save the mermaids), the black cancer was God's judgement for humankind's treatment of the mermaids (10). While the disease appeared as unrelated to the mermaids, the black cancer nonetheless foreshadows a future extinction of humankind. A general decline is already present at the beginning of the novel:

> In Underwater, food was becoming scarce, for everyone, but not for the yakuzas. Everything was going wild again. Underwater, the Territories, the ocean. The mermaids would stop living at the bottom of the sea and succeed us on Earth. We haven't tamed them, not yet. We keep them captive, we eat their flesh. But we have not tamed them. (19)[19]

After the numerous gruesome descriptions of violence against mermaids (and women), the end of humankind is seen as almost a relief for nonhumans and the planet itself. It anticipates final freedom and respite. In this way, *Sirene* does not fully belong to the utopian or dystopic genres, it oscillates between the two. As stated by Aubert-Noël, the novel is a "anti-anthropocentric utopia, which reaffirms the survival and strength of the savage in spite of all humanity's efforts to subjugate him, and poetic utopia, which celebrates the irreducible permanence of that space of freedom and creative reflexivity" (194). The novel is indeed a dystopia, given the rapid decline of humankind both in terms of population and its morals. Simultaneously, the same decline cannot be perceived negatively for the nonhumans inhabiting the Earth.

Sirene and *Miden* oscillate between various perspectives: the human, the nonhuman, the local, and the foreign. Arguably by complicating the depiction of a single narrative and by embracing a multi-faceted view, they successfully collapse a rigid distinction between utopia and dystopia. In this way, the two novels conform to Muzzioli and Jameson's analyses regarding the porosity in the utopia and dystopia binary. Rejecting a strict division between the two, *Sirene* and *Miden* embrace indefiniteness and a liminal positionality.

Collapse

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[18] "Durante la morìa le squadre del Museo avevano prelevato alcune sirene ancora vive dalla spiaggia. Le avevano uccise con uno shot di veleno misto a sedativo, e avevano imbalsamato i corpi. Si diceva che avessero truccato loro il viso, per farle sembrare più umane. Labbra verdi coperte di rossetto. La massa muscolare dei capelli intrecciata di fiori. "."

[19] " A Underwater, il cibo cominciava a scarseggiare, per tutti, ma non per gli yakuza.
Tutto stava ritornando selvaggio. Underwater, i Territori, l'oceano. Le sirene smetteranno di vivere in fondo al mare e ci succederanno sulla Terra. Non le abbiamo addomesticate, non ancora. Le teniamo prigioniere, mangiamo la loro carne. Ma non siamo riusciti a addomesticarle."

The blurring of the human and nonhuman and the dystopia and utopia binaries situate the collapse of rigid definitions as a key practice of *Miden* and *Sirene*. This approach is mirrored in the way that the novels engage with societal and environmental collapse in the narratives. For instance, in *Miden*, the two protagonists moved there after an economic collapse invested their country:

> The newspapers spoke of the Collapse every day, counted the emigrants as displaced, fenced off the survivors. It seemed that natural disasters were in a lull: no earthquakes, hurricanes, floods. There were no pests to flay the trees, no scorching heat to crack the earth [...] "The worst is over," the politicians said, and meanwhile they were sending children and money to the other side of the world. The truth was that the worst could not pass, because it would never really come. (13)[20]

The socio-economic collapse is echoed by the one enacted through *la compagna*'s betrayal of the professor. Throughout the novel, the professor displays a backward way of thinking, rooted in patriarchal thought, which is a stark contrast to Miden's mentality. A character summarised the differences by saying, "a culture so different from ours, where the role of women is unfortunately still subordinate to that of men. I have read things about their country, many interesting articles, and if I may say so... they have a long way to go!" (113).[21] Miden's citizens see the professor's backward mentality as a remnant from his former country. For instance, one of his other acquaintances argues that it would have been able for him to have a cultural mediator, since "The professor comes from a different culture than we do, and I think a certain forma mentis is hard to overcome. If you have been used to atomising a woman's body, it is difficult then to grasp the whole, no?" (112).[22] In this way, the Miden's citizens' view of the professor follows their attitude regarding *la compagna*: since they are foreign bodies into the seemingly perfect environment of Miden, the professor and *la compagna* are not as progressive as them and should be constantly monitored and brought up to speed. The comments by Miden's citizens reproduce the xenophobic and racist remarks that distinguish narratives of migration from the Global South to the Global North, which connect backwardness to specific geographical locations.

After the trail against him ends with his mandatory expulsion from Miden, the professor and his partner set to leave the country together, but in a sudden twist, *la compagna* leaves him and returns to Miden. The change of mind was caused by a series of factors, such as the killing of the moles. Most importantly, it was affected by

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[20] "I giornali parlavano ogni giorno del Crollo, contavano gli emigranti come sfollati, recintavano i superstiti. Sembrava che le catastrofi naturali fossero in un periodo di stanca: niente terremoti, uragani, alluvioni. Non c'erano parassiti a scarnificare gli alberi, né l'arsura a crepare la terra. [...] "Il peggio è passato" dicevano i politici e intanto spedivano figli e soldi dall'altra parte del mondo. La verità è che il peggio non poteva passare, perché non sarebbe mai davvero arrivato."

[21] "una cultura così diversa dalla nostra, dove il ruolo della donna è purtroppo ancora subordinato a quello dell'uomo. Ho letto delle cose riguardo al loro Paese, molti articoli interessanti, e se posso permettermi… ne hanno di strada da fare!"

[22] "il professore viene da una cultura diversa dalla nostra e credo che una certa forma mentis sia dura da sconfiggere. Se sei stato abituato ad atomizzare il corpo di una donna, è difficile poi cogliere l'intero, no?"

her attitude towards the student, “There was something much more serious that I could not forgive myself: the hatred for the girl. I could have become a better companion, but life was not going to discount the price I had to pay for that feeling. It was still there, intact, [...]the girl had made me the partner of a rapist” (195-196).[23] By refusing to follow the professor, she collapses her attachment to him and to her former country. Instead, she embraces female solidarity and frees herself from the strict patriarchal norms, which had previously moved her to side with the professor. By depicting *la compagna*, who resisted more than the professor to Miden’s norms and the one that could more easily see through Miden’s façade, as the one to stay and not return to their original country, the novel questions the progressive Global North and backward Global South binary it seemingly reproduces. *La compagna* is free at the end of the novel not because she uncritically adapts to Miden’s standards and is able to develop because of them, but because she continues to have a critical and questioning attitude, starting from her doubts about the place itself. In this way, she is able to overcome her former patriarchal mentality.

The professor is not only described as backward because of his morals, unable to fit into Miden’s modern society, but he is also temporally turned back towards his past, stuck there and unable to move forward. He is trapped searching for a past that does not exist anymore. A former colleague describes him as “A man who clings as best he can to certain vices of his life gone; I find it very human, a chasing after youth, what will not return” (122).[24] The professor even portrays himself as someone who spends a lot of time focusing on his regrets, “I thought back to my country as a nostalgic old man, a shitty old man that I would once have hated” (124).[25] His attachment to the past is significant, as in the end he does move both in space and in time, as he is sent back to his former country and his former life. By deciding to stay in Miden, *la compagna* refuses to be sent back to her past, and instead creates a new future for herself, highlighted by the fact that she gives birth to a daughter at the end of the novel and becomes friends with the girl.[26] *La compagna* does embraces a future opposed to patriarchal norms and instead based on female solidarity.

In *Miden* the socio-economic collapse is in the past, but in *Sirene* the collapse of humankind is in the making and the novel’s ending is constituted by the collapse of its key individual, Samuel. After he tried to kidnap Mia and was imprisoned by the yakuza, he manages to free both himself and Mia, by opening a secret passage into the ocean. While Samuel dies in the process, but Mia is free for the first time in her life. Meaningfully, the novel assumes her point of view for the first time in its final pages

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[23] “c’era qualcosa di molto più grave che non riuscivo a perdonarmi: l’odio per la ragazza. Potevo diventare una compagna migliore, ma la vita non mi avrebbe mai fatto sconti sul prezzo da pagare per quel sentimento. Era ancora lì, intatto, […] la ragazza mi aveva reso la compagna di uno stupratore”.

[24] “un uomo che si aggrappa come può a certi vezzi della sua vita andata; lo trovo molto umano, un rincorrere la giovinezza, ciò che non tornerà”.

[25] “ripensavo al mio Paese come un vecchio nostalgico, un vecchio di merda che un tempo avrei odiato”.

[26] The child is named after the girl, who becomes the baby’s babysitter. While none of the names are mentioned in the novel, *Miden* presents a stark difference from *Sirene*’s Mia and “the logocentric impulse of the man's possessive dominance” (Antonello 168).

to recount the birth of her daughter. Her new-found freedom is directly opposed to the patriarchal oppression she has suffered throughout the novel. The world of men is substituted by a new order dominated by mermaids and Pugno "seems to suggest [it] is necessary to replace the patriarchal model" (*Ideologia e rappresentazione* 181).

The end of the novel does not only describe Samuel's death, but Mia's complete forgetting of him. While she repeats the one word he taught her, his own name, she does it cluelessly:

> When she was very tired, or away from the herd, that cry would come back into her throat. Mia never hissed in front of the other females, never in front of the betas. She no longer remembered that it was Samuel's cry. She didn't even know where they were, her and her pack, on human maps. Samuel could have told her she was far, far away from the yakuza marine reserve, but Samuel and the yakuza, for Mia, were no more alive than her last meal. That was the ocean.
>
> Mia's mind was tabula rasa. (133- 134) [27]

Mia's mind is completely blank of any memory of humans and of her experiences with them, a "tabula rasa" (134). According to Tabanelli, Mia's mind "is the void/all of possibilities [...] the end of the human for the triumph of the (post)female" (17). The verbal and knowledge void depicted by Pugno is a way of depicting humankind's collapse and its aftermath. According to Robert Rushing, Pugno engages with the dilemma of "how to speak from the 'other side' […] The only possible register is that of *suggestion* […] without effectively 'gentrifying' that alien world, re-colonizing it with human speech or the speech of men" (14). Thus, the novel's ending de-centres not only men, but humankind as well, leaving space only for their absence, allowing us to "criticize, challenge, and oven overcome our humanity" (Fulginiti 172). Humankind is left in the past, opening up to new possibilities for the mermaids.

Much like *Miden* ends with a declination of female future and the interruption of the patriarchal timeline dominated by the professor, in the same way, the mere existence of Mia's daughter changes dramatically the course of events. Mia's pregnancy is the trigger of her escape, which allows her to collapse the timeline that the yakuza wanted to impose on her. A timeline that would have resulted in either slaughter or sexual slavery. *La compagna* and Mia cause collapse and, if seen in accordance with their nonhuman and human bonds, they can be connected to Donna Haraway's' encouragement to stay with the trouble, "to stir up potent response to devastating events, as well as to settle troubled waters and rebuild quiet places" (*Staying with the Trouble* 1). Haraway's theory possess a temporal dimension, as "staying with the trouble requires learning to be truly present, not as a vanishing pivot between awful or edenic pasts and apocalyptic or salvific futures, but as mortal critters entwined in myriad unfinished configurations of places, times, matters, meanings" (*Staying with the Trouble* 1). *La compagna*'s and Mia's temporal position is deeply situated in the present; they refuse to be brought back to a patriarchal and backward timeline and they are on the cusp of a potential future transformation for them and their daughters. *Sirene* does not depict the future, the mermaids' domination, but the events that immediately preceded it. Similarly, *Miden* only suggests *la compagna*'s and her child's future.

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[27] "Quando era molto stanca, o lontana dal branco, le tornava in gola quel verso. Mia non soffiava mai davanti alle altre femmine, mai davanti alle beta. Non ricordava più che era il verso di Samuel. Non sapeva neanche dove si trovassero, lei e il suo branco, sulle mappe degli esseri umani. Samuel avrebbe potuto dirle che era molto, molto lontana dalla riserva marina yakuza, ma Samuel e la yakuza, per Mia, non erano più vivi del suo ultimo pasto. Quello era l'oceano. La mente di Mia era tabula rasa."

While the two novels are not explicitly queer, they nonetheless present key elements that connect it to queer theory, starting from the indication of collapse as the only solution. Collapse has been regarded by Jack Halberstam as a queer methodology in the context of climate change and societal crisis, arguing that the only way out is to unbuild, unmake, and collapse (2021)[28]. In this way, *Sirene* and *Miden* can be read alongside Alexis Lothian's analysis of science fiction and queerness. Lothian stated that:

> Queer theory and activism pushed against structures that seemed immutable, insisting on the contingent past and unpredictable future of masculinity, femininity, kinship, and desire. How could attempts to envisage possibilities outside heteronormative structures not involve a certain futurity? There is a powerful speculative element in the move from deconstructing existing binaries to visualizing—one might even say fictionalizing—how the world might be changed by those binaries' subversion or destruction. (5)

In particular, *Sirene* and *Pugno* can be associated to a specific approach of queer science fiction narratives, "just as some speculative fictions may be prototypes for the prediction of a future more or less like the present, others may preemptively imagine its collapse or transformation" (Lothian 19).

Other key elements of the novels can be scrutinised through queer theory. For instance, *Sirene* and *Miden* centre the act of disrupting the human and nonhuman binary. Thus, Raimo and Pugno's work can be linked to Mel Y. Chen's theory around queer animacy and its ability to "to blur the tenuous hierarchy of human-animal-vegetable-mineral with which it is associated" (98). While usually "nonhuman animals are typologically situated elsewhere from humans" (Chen 89), in the novels, humans and nonhumans are connected by deep bonds, which also assume the form of hybridisation. Furthermore, *Sirene* and *Miden* straddle the line between the utopia and dystopia labels, occupying a liminal position. While indeed part of a larger trend within dystopian fiction, the novels' oscillation presents many similarities to the way queer scholars challenge "essentialist categories, while emphasizing notions of multiplicity, fluidity, and hybridity" (March 459). Furthermore, by creating a new future for themselves, a future based on the disruption of patriarchal norms, on the centring of human and nonhumans, and of female subjectivities, Mia and *la compagna* produce queer "strange temporalities" (Halberstam, *In a Queer Time and Place*), which hint simultaneously at the past, the present, and the future.

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[28] Albeit Halberstam focused on the black aesthetic of Alvin Baltrop, Cameron Rowland, and Gordon Matta Clarke (2021), it can arguably be expanded onto other cultural venues because of its relevance on present-day issues.

Conclusion

Sirene by Laura Pugno and *Miden* by Veronica Raimo are the Italian embodiment of current trends within women writers' science fiction. Even if the two novels seemingly are set in opposite worlds, they present substantial similarities. The essay has been developed following Marco Malvestio's definition of both novels as eco-dystopias and it has expanded both terms of the definition, not to challenge such classification, but to explore all the further possibilities provided by the two narratives. The essay has investigated how *Sirene* and *Miden* embrace collapse as a key practice, and not just as a contextual element. *Miden* blurs the human and nonhuman hierarchy by placing on the same level the protagonists' unborn child and various baby moles, while *Sirene* focuses on Mia, a mermaid that is half human and half mermaid. This binary is not the only one probed by the narratives by Pugno and Raimo, as their novels also oscillate between a utopian and dystopic definition, without finding a fixed position. Finally, the protagonists of *Miden* and *Sirene* collapse a temporal linearity that is based on violent patriarchal norms and would force them into a trajectory of oppression. Instead, they are free and create a future for them and their daughters. Unsurprisingly, both novels construct the future by focusing on a mother and daughter bond, as it is one of the key elements of contemporary women's apocalyptic writing (Watkins 119-120). According to Susan Watkins, the genre promotes "the replacement of colonial and patriarchal narratives of paternity and conquest with metaphors of mother-daughter relationships" (119-120). Recent works of science fiction and speculative fiction "express discomfort with the focus on returning women to domesticity and the home and the recreation of traditional gender roles" (122) and instead are able to engage with motherhood "in more complex and positive ways" (125). Both *Sirene* and *Miden* end with the birth of a daughter, but they do not reproduce patriarchal and traditional family structures. In both novels, the fathers are de-centred (being either dead or exiled) and the children are raised by a female network, either by *la compagna* and the student, now the child's babysitter, or by the wider pack of female mermaids. In this way, Pugno and Raimo show new future possibilities and the collapse of backward structures, troubling them.

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Contemporary Graphic Narratives of the End: Sketching an Ecopolitics of Disorientation and Solidarity through Sf *Bande Dessinée*[1]

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Abstract

This article focuses on visions of the end in contemporary science fiction *bande dessinée* to explore the combined potentialities of the sf genre and the comics medium for imaginaries of world-rebuilding in the Anthropocene, and to develop an ecopolitics of disorientation and solidarity for a collapsing world. Bringing an ecocritical approach to queer and feminist theorizations of the politics of disorientation, it first discusses texts that draw (counter-)narratives of Anthropocenic futures, in which other-than-human agencies, spatialities and temporalities take centre stage in unsettling ways and collapse Western master narratives of the environment. In Jérémy Perrodeau's *Crépuscule*, the non-linear storylines of an artificially created and now contaminated planet collide and assemble to disrupt the myth of a 'virgin land', rendering the erasure and slow re-inscription of genocidal and ecocidal violence. In Enki Bilal's trilogy *Coup de sang*, it is the illusory hyper-separation of humans from nature that is dismantled through post-apocalyptic elemental graphics. The article then explores ways in which disorientation becomes fully productive as part of an ecopolitics when it is entwined with solidarity, a term that here extends beyond the human and is understood as a praxis of both care and resistance, drawing on ecofeminism and environmental philosophy. This is explored through Ludovic Debeurme's trilogy *Epiphania*, which critiques and dissolves the human-animal boundary into enmeshed relationalities in sf visions toward multispecies communities and bodily and ethical mutations; and Jeanne Burgart Goutal and Aurore Chapon's *ReSisters*, a choral narrative that makes use of comics' potential for diffractive and participatory readings to draw the outlines of an ecofeminist uprising.

Keywords: Ecofeminism, decolonial ecology, elemental ecocriticism, care, resistance.

Resumen

Este artículo analiza las visiones del fin en la *bande dessinée* contemporánea de ciencia ficción y examina el potencial de este género de cómic para la creación de imaginarios de reconstrucción en el Antropoceno, a través de una ecopolítica de desorientación y solidaridad en un mundo que se derrumba. Aportando un enfoque ecocrítico a las teorizaciones queer y feministas de la política de la desorientación, primero se analizan textos que dibujan (contra)narrativas de futuros antropocénicos, en los que voluntades, espacialidades y temporalidades distintas a las humanas cobran protagonismo de manera inquietante y colapsan las narrativas maestras occidentales del medio ambiente. En *Crépuscule* de Jérémy Perrodeau, las tramas no lineales de un planeta creado artificialmente y ahora contaminado chocan y se ensamblan para desbaratar el mito de una "tierra virgen", borrando y reinscribiendo lentamente la violencia genocida y ecocida. En la trilogía *Coup de sang* de Enki Bilal, es la ilusoria hiperseparación de los humanos de la naturaleza lo que se desmantela a través de una

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estética gráfica postapocalíptica de los elementos naturales. A continuación, el artículo explora las formas en que la desorientación se vuelve plenamente productiva como parte de una ecopolítica cuando se entrelaza con la solidaridad, un término que aquí se extiende más allá de lo humano para ser entendido como una praxis tanto de cuidado como de resistencia, inspirándose en el ecofeminismo y la filosofía medioambiental. La trilogía *Epiphania* de Ludovic Debeurme disuelve las fronteras entre lo humano y animal para proponer una relacionalidad entre comunidades multiespecie junto con mutaciones corporales y éticas. Por su parte, *ReSisters* de Jeanne Burgart Goutal y Aurore Chapon, es una narración coral que hace uso del potencial de los cómics para ofrecer lecturas difractivas y participativas que dibujen el comienzo de un levantamiento ecofeminista.

Palabras clave: Ecofeminismo, ecología decolonial, ecocrítica elemental, cuidado, resistencia

A panel filled entirely with black ink as a vision of the end in/of the Anthropocene: this is one of the recurring images woven through the network of Philippe Squarzoni's 2012 climate change graphic memoir *Saison brune* (*Climate Changed*),[2] among hockey-stick graphs, clocks ticking or spherical forms from the planet to a bomb. In one instance, this black panel echoes the question just posed of whether there is still time, in opening a page featuring drilling rigs and pipelines, images of the "abundant and almost free" energy that "has defined our civilization" (305-306). This is a collective pronoun that Squarzoni is careful throughout to problematize as the 'we' of the Global North, steering clear of universalising narratives of the Anthropocene that emphasise its planetarity while erasing its inequalities. *Saison brune* is a striking text in part for its use of the specificities of the comics medium, notably verbal-visual interactions and multilinearity, to draw eco-anxiety in the face of the overwhelming scale of the climate emergency. In this sense, its network of entirely black panels can be read as a representation of (the impossibility to imagine) the end without humans. Yet this "ungraded blackness" (Chute 98) may also perhaps be understood as thickness rather than void,[3] leaving open rather than closing off the future, in a way that echoes Terry Harpold's discussion of his and his students' affective reactions to the text as one opening "the slimmest space in the middle from which to build a path to the edge of an outside of despair" (58). This article focuses on *bandes dessinées* that deploy the speculative—rather *Saison brune*'s documentary—mode precisely to sketch (im)possible futures into this void/thickness. Graphic sf texts can powerfully combine the exploration of the medium's formal possibilities with its aptitude for imagining worlds, as this article will discuss in relation to Enki Bilal's elemental climate change trilogy *Coup de sang* (*Fit of rage*) (2009-2014); Jérémy Perrodeau's narrative of outer-space exploration/colonisation *Crépuscule* (2017); Ludovic Debeurme's trilogy of becoming-earth other *Epiphania* (2017-2019); and Jeanne Burgart Goutal and Aurore Chapon's ecofeminist fable *ReSisters* (2021).

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[2] 'Woven' is used here in Thierry Groensteen's sense of *tressage* [weaving], when spatially distant images echo each other across a comic (*Système* 25-27).

[3] I am here borrowing Hillary Chute's words about the use of solid black in Marjane Satrapi's *Persepolis* that "shows not the scarcity of memory, but rather its thickness, its depth" (98).

Key questions guiding this article are thus how and what to draw, script and sketch in a world where the future may seem unthinkable, yet where "only the yearning for sustainable futures can construct a liveable present"; and how to harness the ecographic possibilities of comics and ecopolitical potential of creative speculation to "[transpose] energies from the future back into the present" (Braidotti, "Posthuman" 206-207). The texts I discuss are sf graphic narratives of world-*re*building that, in differing ways, sketch what Debeurme terms "the imaginaries that have become absolute necessities in the urgency of our world, of a decentring of the human toward a broader whole" (Gaboriaud).[4] The potentiality of sf for this decentring has long drawn critical attention, as "fiction that refuses to accept the world as it is" and develops "an ethics of becoming that both interrupts and revises power structures" (anthropocentric, patriarchal, (neo-)colonial, capitalist and/or heteronormative) as characterised by Lauren J. Lacey, who focuses on women's writing that deploys sf as well as other fantastic forms (5). Donna Haraway's evocative opening of sf—a key inspiration for this article—to "science fiction, speculative fabulation, string figures, speculative feminism, science fact, so far" understands it as "practice and process; it is becoming-with each other in surprising relays; it is a figure for ongoingness in the Chthulucene" (*Staying with the Trouble* 2-3). While discussions of green sf have tended to focus on literature and film, the comics medium offers rich ecographic possibilities for such speculative engagements with the more-than-human world, drawing on narrative and formal aspects such as graphic style, colour, linear and multilinear relations between panels, and text/image interactions for tracing ecological storylines of posthuman futures.[5] The sf visions such as those I will explore in this article—of strange new worlds, elemental (post-) apocalypse, multispecies pacts and ecofeminist uprising—draw on the combined potentialities of the sf genre and the comics medium for "staying with the trouble" (Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble*) of the present as "always the future present" (Braidotti "Posthuman" 206), and they, crucially, help us sketch the outlines of what I term an ecopolitics of disorientation and solidarity in and for a collapsing world.

Disorientation

Bilal's *Coup de sang* and Perrodeau's *Crépuscule* are narratives of disorientation, for their characters as well as their reader. In a transposition and amplification of ways in which the climate emergency has redefined human-centred space-time coordinates, environments can no longer be mapped out and time seems to shift in scale as characters attempt to find their way on a changing planet. The Anthropocene, as econarratologist Erin James notes, demands renewed conceptualizations of time, space, agency and narration.[6] My emphasis here is that it both creates and demands disorientation, understood as an experience that is unsettling—defamiliarizing, perhaps uncomfortable, even violent—yet that can also be productive. Disorientation may challenge and disrupt the coordinates of, and thus decentre a material-discursive world that is oriented around the human, and redirect what (future) we are oriented toward. My understanding of disorientation here draws on its theorization in queer and feminist phenomenology, in particular in the works of Sara Ahmed and Ami Harbin. While neither Ahmed nor Harbin adopt an explicit ecological perspective, they draw on a vocabulary of embodied interactions with surrounding environments that finds echo with a more-than-human conceptualization of disorientation with humans thrown "off center" (Ahmed 41). The figure of the ground as material-discursive, natural-cultural recurs throughout Ahmed's *Queer Phenomenology*, as that "into which we sink our feet" and that is "not neutral", trodden upon and lined with hegemonic paths that orientate—in the production of heteronormativity or whiteness, as Ahmed explores; or anthropocentrism—and construct as others those that stray or deviate (160). Moments of disorientation may be violent, in the ways in which they "throw the world up, or throw the body from its ground" (157). Yet "the point is what we do [with them], as well as what [they] can do – whether they can offer us the hope of new directions" (178) toward (more-than-human) liveability and habitability. Harbin echoes these complexities of disorientation as moments that are "most promising when they not only jostle, but also propel" (277). Resonating again with ecological and ecopolitical thought and praxis, Harbin writes of the "particularly anti-dualist qualities" (277) of disorientation as potentially compelling us to "re-establish capacities for embodied, relational selfhood" (270), as subjects enmeshed in communities and environments, in a world where recognition of vulnerability, limited resources and interdependence can direct us to articulate and respond to "calls for more just political action" (271).

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[4] "Les imaginaires, qui deviennent nécessités absolues dans l'urgence de notre monde, d'un décentrement de l'Humain, vers un ensemble plus large." All translations from French are my own.

[5] On ecographics and ecological storylines, see my article "Towards an Ecographics", in particular 10-11.

This framework provides us with evocative (non)coordinates to explore the experiences of disorientation featured in *Crépuscule* and *Coup de sang*, in speculative futures where environments respond in unsettling and decentring ways to the foundations and directions of master narratives of nature and their material impacts. Perrodeau's *Crépuscule* tells the non-linear storylines of a planet called Grand Central, whose ecosystem was artificially created. It is now contaminated by an unknown virus, its trees, streams, plants and rocks sprouting and morphing into geometrical structures. This phenomenon is explored by our human and android characters who, in sequences told in orange hues, investigate the disappearance of the scientific team that first observed it. Characters struggle to orientate themselves temporally and spatially across a ground upon which "what happens follows no discernible logic"

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[6] Erin James and Eric Morel have developed the term econarratology to refer to "the paired consideration of material environments and their representations and narrative forms of understanding" (1).

(56).[7] As they advance into these strange landscapes, they are small figures lost in panels stretching with the expanse of a contaminated nature, and the comic further draws on the graphic interplay between sequentiality and co-presence to render their disorientation in an environment that disrupts the direction of their path. Their climb down a cliff is broken down into panels on a page that viewed as a whole forms the mountain, the *périchamp* directing the reader's attention toward the other-than-human spatiality and temporality of the landscape that is all but background (40),[8] echoing the characters' later realisation that a mountain is no longer where it should be (48), as if the virus had contaminated and accelerated the movements of deep time. Elsewhere, a wordless strip of three tall panels shows the team walk up and down streams (42), rendering a sense of both advance and stagnation in an environment where, as later noted by one of the androids, distance to their destination decreases without them getting closer (48).

These space-time disruptions culminate in a twelve-page sequence (77-88), the album shifting to a blue palette, after the team reach the epicentre of the disturbance and pass through a violent gravity storm. The reader experiences this along with one of the humans and one of the androids, looking across pages with no clear linear progression, seeing them falling through blackness, their bodies distorted, dismantled, face melting and skull exploding, multiplied in one panel and decomposed across others. This is a portal to a twin planet, or perhaps the same one, where geometrical forms have fully taken over life. Two members of the team, arrived seconds earlier that turned into decades, have settled, dug, cultivated and developed this strange environment "thanks to the exploitation of natural resources" (105),[9] grafting and creating geometrical plant and animal life. As the android who has been on the planet for decades tells his teammates, they are "the pioneers of a new land/earth" where "everything is to be built" (116).[10]

The colonial dimensions of these words are brought to the fore in the entwinement of this survival storyline of lost explorers with the yellow-coloured sequences which with it has alternated throughout, and that are arranged in a non-linear order across the album. The first, which opens the *bande dessinée*, charts the formation of Grand Central, with a sphere releasing geometrical structures that burst and sow, water, feed, and create the planet's luxuriant ecosystem. The next yellow sequence shows a man native to the planet teaching his son about their responsibility as guardians of this environment located at the intersection of several worlds. It is the cornerstone of a precarious multiverse structure that can collapse at any moment, the consequences of which will not be visible immediately but felt eventually (47), words that echo the "slow violence" of environmental degradation (Nixon). The Indigenous community is later slaughtered by soldiers who have landed from a spaceship, and

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[7] "Ce qui se déroule ici ne suit aucune logique." (All translations of texts are mine)

[8] Benoît Peeters coined the term *périchamp* to refer to the fact that each panel is perceived at the same time as the other panels around it, which constitute its perifield (15).

[9] "grâce à l'exploitation des ressources naturelles".

[10] "les pionniers d'une nouvelle terre" [the French word 'terre' can mean both land and earth]; "tout est à construire."

the now emptied and razed planet can be artificially re-created, in a sequence that reproduces the first page, a *tressage* effect (Groensteen 25-27) that calls upon the reader to return to the beginning of the album as it nears its end. In this sense, *Crépuscule* takes on what Nixon terms the major representational challenge of "how to devise arresting stories, images, and symbols adequate to the pervasive but elusive violence of delayed effects" (3). It does so by rendering both the highly visible violence of genocidal and ecocidal acts (the slaughter of the Indigenous community and the razing of the planet's ecosystem) and the "temporal dispersion of slow violence" (Nixon 3). Its non-linear narrative structure of differently coloured and entwined temporalities makes visible long-term consequences, not only in shifting back and forth in time, but also through the spaces between panels and pages, which, as argued by Groensteen, are "central to the operative logic of comics as a system that communicates meaning" (*The System* viii). Gutters and margins are both elliptical and filled with meaning for the reader, as a productively disorienting visual inscription through blankness of a violence that is invisible to the human.

In its alternating storylines, *Crépuscule* thus roots the sf trope of disruptions in the space-time continuum in the violence of genocide and ecocide, rendering both its erasure from the (scientific) creation myth of Grand Central and its re-inscription on its ecosystem. Echoing the colonial and gendered dimensions of the ideological construction of a 'virgin land', the process is described in *récitatifs* early in the comic as extermination for penetration: "through annihilation, the land was sterilised so as to facilitate the implantation of a new ecosystem" (25).[11] From then on, the scientific team rarely interfered with the ecosystem as "its evolution, while accelerated, should be as natural as possible" (25).[12] Interactions with nature shift from invasion to observation as if from a perspective that would be transcendent, not relational or enmeshed, not oriented or directed—what Haraway has critiqued as objective knowledge ("Situated Knowledge") and Stacy Alaimo as "perspectiveless perspective" (*Exposed* loc. 1816). This is a large-scale experiment across multiple planets, and one that, as we have seen, goes wrong, the environment responding in disorienting ways to its destructive creation. The album's last two blue-tinged double pages show the geometrical forms spreading to meteorites, whose rocky irregularities sprout the cylindrical or rectangular shapes into which they will eventually morph. The geometrical forms that have taken over the album's panels and pages are both clearly human-technologically-made, and evading their control as they proliferate, both turned part of the fabric of the drawn environment and still at odds with its irregular and lively outlines. A symptom of contamination, they also resonate beyond the album with the disorienting experience of seeing the shapes of human-produced waste proliferate in environments imagined to be far removed or preserved from human actions, such as the deep sea.

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[11] "Par annihilation, on stérilisait le terrain, afin de faciliter l'implantation d'un nouvel écosystème." *Récitatif* is the French term for narrative voice-over in comics.

[12] "L'évolution, bien qu'accélérée, se devait d'être la plus naturelle possible."

Crépuscule's characters, human and android, lost scientists and pioneers of a new world, remain unaware of or blind to the yellow-coloured storyline to which the reader has access, and do not formulate an ethical questioning of Operation Grand Central. It is, rather, the reader who is not only jostled but also propelled by a productively disorienting experience to combine and collide the album's non-linear storylines in a decolonial re-visionary reading. In the end, the reader is left to reflect on what new world the Anthropocene may mean back on Earth—one rooted in genocide and ecocide erased from its creation myth, as in the album's cyclical opening and ending, heading (back) toward collapse, thrown upside down by a slow violence that cannot be controlled; one saved by technicist solutions, where humans and androids together create natural-artificial animal and plant life. Or it may be a new world starting with productive disorientation, where master narratives collapse upon themselves, one reoriented toward decolonial sustainability in dialogues with Indigenous epistemologies that do not fall into a neo-imperialist anthropocentric/biocentric binary (see notably Cilano and DeLoughrey). It may be a new land/earth to *re*-build with humans off centre, always already enmeshed with a ground that is neither neutral nor ever still under our feet.

And it is to the Anthropocene Earth that *Coup de sang* returns us, one that, the prologue states, is "totally disoriented, devastated, broken" by a nature that "spat out its anger" (7).[13] Human perception is defamiliarized from the start of the first volume, opening with a page zooming out of a dolphin's eye with *récitatifs* in which the man with whom it has temporarily merged (the former child subject of scientific experiments in hybridity) talks of experiencing through and with the animal's senses that are now entangled with his (9). This high-technological vision of animal futurity recalls those that have long populated sf (see in particular Vint), and indeed Bilal's own exploration of the posthuman hybridity of the "mecanhumanimal" (as in the title of his 2013 exhibition). If the animal-human boundary is eroded to the point of embodied dissolution from the *bande dessinée*'s opening, it is more broadly the illusory "hyper-separation" (Plumwood, *Feminism*) of humans from nature, in which the latter is constructed as background and resource for the stories and needs of the former, that *Coup de sang* will disrupt through its evocative imaginaries-imageries of other-than-human agencies. Commonly referred to as Bilal's 'trilogy of the elements', with the absence of fire due to the post-apocalyptic focus on a world re-building itself (with little to no input from humans, as we shall see), the series follows a different group of climate refugees in each volume, eventually bringing them together in the last. The elementality of this graphic narrative is strikingly rendered through monochromatic colour schemes, with the first volume set in polar landscapes and awash with the grey-blue hues of water; the second with the ochre tones of earth dominating its scenes of a desert drenched in oil; and the airy conclusion, where the blues of gradually brighter skies open to a full "Technicolor" (248) world as the three groups come together, rebooted on and by a planet transformed.

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[13] "totalement désorientée, dévastée, morcelée" ; "a craché sa colère."

Coup de sang, importantly, complexifies the cultural trope of a "monstrous nature" that its opening words of wrath and violent disorientation may have pointed toward, and that, as Stacy Alaimo has analysed, posits humans as "the endangered species" ("Discomforting Creatures" 279) in an anxiety-ridden exploration of the monstrous consequences of the collapse of the nature/culture divide. The trilogy's imaginary-speculative recognition of other-than-human agency is articulated in terms that are anthropomorphic, to be sure, but strategically so, "allied with the elements" (Cohen and Duckert loc. 279). The wrath directed at humans is here not contained in monstrous animal creatures—animals are, after all, much too porously enmeshed with humans, and in fact are just as disoriented by this environmental fit of rage – but elemental forces that are multiple, distributed, shifting, everywhere. This is an agency from which the human characters cannot distance themselves or take shelter, and with which they cannot not interact. The texture of the world is morphing, causing extreme disruption in the perception of space, which alters the propagation of sound for instance, impacting all human senses. Characters fail to orientate themselves across unstable and changing environments with impossible earthly cartographies: the Alps are seen in a North Pole that may itself be under a Southern hemisphere sky, and the ground of the Gobi Desert sways with the movements of perhaps the Baltic Sea. The environment is, more so even than shifting from background to foreground, *overwhelming*. Volume two is particularly "lively", to use Stephanie LeMenager's evocative phrase about the "visceral knowledge" elicited by literary renditions of petro-scapes (131), the hotel in which the characters have taken refuge drenched with sticky and smelly oil that is no longer underground, as the earth bark is lifting and ripping itself open. The division between nature and culture explodes also through an erratic material-discursive intertextuality, when words imperceptibly float or swirl and are breathed in and out by humans as if possessed or ventriloquised: in volume two, characters act out *Romeo and Juliet* with no knowledge of the play; in volume three, twin girls temporarily acquire encyclopaedic knowledge of culture and history when the Zeppelin on which they are travelling goes through natural-digital clouds.

Creatively transposing and amplifying the embodied experience of the elementality of the world into disorientation, the *bande dessinée* resonates with the idea in elemental ecocriticism that "elemental agency engenders perspective tumble, an unstable shift between familiar, domestic frames (the elements are the substance of the inhabited world) and the disorientations of a wildness that may be distant or within (the elements are climatic as well as corporeal and diegetic forces)" (Cohen and Duckert loc. 411). Elemental agency is evoked through text, as characters reflect on the disorienting visceral experience of "ceaselessly productive" matter (Cohen and Duckert loc. 99). It is also, of course, strikingly visual, rendered through Bilal's well-known painterly graphics. Panels tend to stretch in size, drawing the reader in the density of water, earth, air, in the vibrant materiality and narrativity of an environment that is in the process of self-sculpting, melting, de- and re-composing, the comic engaging with thick elementality through layered and textured ecographics.

This elemental agency is one that characters struggle to understand, and the recurring idea of *not* trying to understand what is happening is taken to extremes in the final volume. As the fit of rage begins to make sense for the reader—transformed but clearly captioned maps reappear—the human characters start to feel their memories and selfhood being erased as they are being re-programmed so that they are ready to enter a pact of association with a planet that has cleaned itself up of pollution. It is, indeed, the planet itself that initiated the trilogy's titular fit of rage, a complex and revolutionary phenomenon aiming to rewrite the "laws of living together outside of the current economic, financial and geopolitical schema it has deemed inoperative, obsolete and suicidal", as the trilogy's epilogue explains (285).[14] The comic ends with seemingly gleeful scenes of humans 'associating', and the closing splash page zooms out to reveal a now square planet. This sf trilogy concludes playfully, with a solution to the climate emergency that strips humans of their own agency on a planet that proposes or imposes to them a contract to which they may or may not have agreed. The ending, which is too ludicrous to be really utopian, mocks the hubris of an Anthropos who sees himself as both harbinger and saviour of the environment. It is also a darkly humorous reversal of a criticism addressed to Michel Serres's vision for a natural contract of "symbiosis and reciprocity" (38) to which the environment could not possibly agree *if* we do not hear that "the Earth speaks to us in terms of forces, bonds, and interactions" (39), if we direct ourselves by human-centred coordinates on the straight and narrow path of exceptionalism. The trilogy's premise and conclusion are, in Bilal's own words, absurd to be sure (Bry). Yet it is no more so than hyper-separation from the elements out of which we never are, whose forces and vibrancy are palpable, and increasingly overwhelmingly so, and to which humans can no longer afford not to re-attune our limited senses.

The hallucinatory elemental graphics of *Coup de sang* bring a speculative imaginary to Ahmed's words that in moments of disorientation "the hand might reach out and find nothing, and might grasp instead the indeterminacy of air. The body in losing its support might then be lost, undone, thrown" (157). What if it were not nothing to grasp the indeterminacy of air; how much more lost, undone, thrown might the body be by this speculative recognition, and what may she do with it? In what direction, toward what future(s), may disorientation propel us, in jostling us off-centre on a changing planet of entanglements and exclusions, where the slow violence of colonial histories and presents is inscribed in the fabric of the earth, and our becoming is enmeshed with other-than-human agencies, temporalities, spatialities? I would argue that it is when it entwines with a praxis of more-than-human solidarity that disorientation, a process that disrupts, dissolves, dismantles human-centred coordinates, becomes fully productive as ecopolitics.

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[14] "lois de vie commune, hors des schémas économiques, financiers, géopolitiques en cours, jugés par elle inopérants, obsolètes et suicidaires."

Solidarity

Solidarity is a key term in Val Plumwood's environmental philosophy, whereby "an appropriate ethic of environmental activism is not that of identity or unity (or its reversal in difference) but that of solidarity – standing with the other in a supportive relationship in the political sense" (*Environmental Culture* 22). This, as Chaone Mallory explores, raises the question of whether the language of solidarity, and ""traditional" political concepts, categories, and values […] that is, the languages through which we articulate the political, [can] be applied to the more-than-human world" (4). The two key points I wish to make for the understanding of solidarity I develop here are, first, to propose to root it in disorientation, in recognising that terms such as solidarity need precisely to be decentred, redirected around the unsettling recognition of other-than-human agencies; and, second, that a solidarity that stems from such disorientation can be productively conceptualized and deployed as a praxis of both care and resistance. Care can be a contentious notion, one that Sherilyn MacGregor points out can "narrow our understanding of women as political actors" (58). Yet the care envisaged here is not limiting or a hindrance to a political ecofeminism. Rather, it is combative, radical care—*disruptive*, such as that theorized by María Puig de la Bellacasa, in the affirmation that care matters "despite and because of its ambivalent significance" (2). It is part of a process of ongoingness, in "attentive practices of thought, love, rage, and care" (Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble* 55-56), of making kin and *resisting* with and as kin. Resistance is understood here as shared beyond the human "with the environment, the landscape, and all their eco-social bodies", as developed in Serenella Iovino's eco-cartography of Italy as text and land (5). This opens to liberatory practices of writing and reading more-than-human stories etched into and by the land (echoing the hallucinatory elemental agencies of *Coup de sang*, or the re-inscription of violence upon the ecosystem in *Crépuscule*), and stories for other futures on a habitable and just planet. To bring out care's potential as and for resistance, the combativity of care and the caring of combativeness, it is useful here finally to evoke Martin Crowley's concept of "antagonistic alliances", which foregrounds that the Anthropocene is an era of conflict, war even, that demands resistance from "weird solidarities" (202).[15] That solidarity as a praxis of more-than-human care and resistance is indeed weird, difficult to prehend, *disorienting* is a given. It thus requires a "speculative ethics" (Puig de la Bellacasa), which is where sf—science fiction, speculative feminism, so far (Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble* 3)—is productive to transpose, amplify, think through, try out, and as per my focus here on graphic sf, *sketch* the outlines of an (im)possible "future present" (Braidotti "Posthuman" 206).

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[15] Crowley borrows this term from Karen Gregory, who imagines weird solidarities at work in contemporary data alliances.

Debeurme's *Epiphania* is such a story of care and/as resistance, in the practice and process of, as the author explains, family-making beyond the human (Gaboriaud). The Epiphania are beings that begin as human-nonhuman animal hybrids and later morph into other types of life forms that are eventually unrecognisable. Across the trilogy, they are engaged in a process that echoes Deleuze and Guattari's "Becoming-Animal," which is in fact quoted at the beginning of the trilogy. As I will return to below, this is a transformation that can be thought of as becoming-"earth other", to use Plumwood's evocative term that recognises "in the myriad forms of nature other beings" (*Feminism* 137). The trilogy opens with natural catastrophes and meteorites that plant animal-human babies into the land where they crash around the world, and follows Kojika, who is adopted by the young widower in whose garden he arrived. Volume one sees Koji as a child navigate the complexities of living in a human society as an Epiphania, and of understanding his own transformation as an adolescent, as his body changes (he grows horns) and he rebels against his father as a parental and human figure. In volume two, he leaves his father to join a group of Epiphania who have escaped from the scientific-military facility where they were detained and grew up, and becomes part of an activist network. The last volume sees the planet disrupted again by the arrival of, first, semi-giants and giants composed of natural materials (referred to as Organics, Lithos and Metalics [sic]) that wage war on human societies. They are then joined by gigantic beings of earth, wind, fire and air (Elements) with whom Koji and other Epiphania, who have by this stage themselves transformed into animal-human-environmental giants, eventually make a pact. In its exploration of animal-human hybridity, *Epiphania* is reminiscent of sf graphic visions such as Jeff Lemire's DC series *Sweet Tooth* (2009-2021), in the initial focus on a child protagonist and humans' military-scientific experimentation on the hybrids; and Charles Burns's *Black Hole* (1995-2005), in its imageries-imaginaries of teenage bodily transformations through an animal lens. It also clearly echoes with *Coup de sang*, yet crucially its sf elements of animal-human hybridity, a wrathful and monstrous nature, other-than-human agencies, and a pact are deployed with a focus not on disoriented humans, but on the disorienting Epiphania.

The trilogy seems, at first, to be tightly focused on the human-animal boundary and exploring both its porosity and harmful materialisations. Through the treatment of Epiphania by humans, the *bande dessinée* makes an explicit link between speciesism and the animalisation as dehumanisation and marginalisation of certain human communities: the outfits of the "anti-mixbodies" militia are strikingly similar to the KKK's, and the camps in which Epiphania are imprisoned are reminiscent of human detention facilities. Importantly, *Epiphania* goes beyond a metaphorical use of animals to tell a human story, offering instead an intersectional exploration of entanglements *and* exclusions in a world where non-human animals are both constructed as figures of alterity and enmeshed with human (animal) existence. The Epiphania, who are hypervisible in society and media, in fact expose the very invisibilisation of their animal kin as resources for human needs, as the activist group that Koji joins attacks slaughterhouses and laboratories, spaces where, as Sherryl Vint points out, human dependence on animal products is hidden away (1). After standing with animals against human others and rising against speciesist structures, the Epiphania later become part of multispecies communities as a refuge from the war waged by the Giants. A panel in volume three shows an Epiphania—human body with horns and pointy ears—with a snake around his arm, a bird on his shoulder, insects on his legs and a cat and a bear next to him, the *récitatif* telling that "we had crossed the barriers that usually separate beings from each other" (loc. 66),[16] in a community of care composed of all those seeking asylum, animals, Epiphania and humans.

Yet this first vision of the possibility of cohabitation is short-lived, destroyed by the army of a humankind that is still at war with the Giants. This nascent utopia will fully develop when the boundary between the human and their (animal) Other, which volumes one and two critique and dissolve, is in the third more explicitly located as part of a broader understanding of the living. This enmeshment of human-animal relations within the world that they inhabit was foreshadowed in volume one, in scenes where news reports about the Epiphania were followed "sans transition" [without transition] (loc. 90) by reports on an "autre titre" [other headline] such as the environmental catastrophe of an oil tanker sinking or radioactive waste (loc. 102). Here, the comic's grid aesthetics, with square panels stuck to each other without visible interframe spaces, render both hyper-separation and entanglement, in the division into separate panels of the Epiphania (human-animal) question and environmental matters, which are simultaneously entwined as part of what Debeurme calls the page-entity (Gaboriaud). It is from the chapter in volume three entitled "Pact" that the frames of panels—that, as the author puts it, both limit perception and gesture toward what lies beyond them (Gaboriaud)—give way to a looser, freer layout, just as the war ends and humans (are made to) recognise and live with the limits of nature.

The Epiphania have by this stage transformed after touching one of the meteorites that had crashed in the deep sea, morphing beyond (un)familiar animal-human hybridity toward becoming at once animal, human, elemental, natural. The Epiphania's becoming-earth other lies not in the finite result of their literal transformation, but in the process of, to draw on Deleuze and Guattari's becoming-animal plateau, which as mentioned above is quoted at the opening of the trilogy, their "organism [entering] into composition with *something else*" (274), with the animal, human, environmental. These are not "fixed terms through which that becoming passes" (238) but worldly elements ceaselessly changing in their relation to each other. As boundaries dissolve, the *mise en page* opens along with utopian visions of a pact agreed between Giants and Epiphania to end a war that was not about the end of the world, but the end of a world (loc. 111). Pages show humans small in lively environments of mountainous, watery, or woody Giants, a perspective that gives them a sense of the scale of the world (loc. 119). New multispecies communities take form, ones where modernity is not discarded, but everything reconsidered in relation to the limits suggested by nature (loc. 118). In the end, *Epiphania* is not (only) an sf story that explores and critiques the material-discursive construction of animality as alterity. It is a graphic narrative of becoming-earth other and family- and community-making beyond the human, bodies *and* ethics mutating (Braidotti *Transpositions* 274) toward a speculative future in which solidarity, as a praxis of care and resistance, comes to mean that "nothing [can] be done against nature itself anymore" (vol. 3, loc. 118).[17]

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[16] "On avait franchi les barrières qui habituellement séparent les uns des autres."

Epiphania, like *Crépuscule* and *Coup de sang*, offers spectacular visions of the end of the, or a world. There is nothing of the sort in *ReSisters*, which is set in a world slowly collapsing in the near future of 2030 that the reader is likely to identify as both resembling and amplifying her own present of environmental degradation, capitalism with shades of green-washing, and entrenched inequalities. The *bande dessinée* is a choral narrative of multiple voices and perspectives. The characters are introduced to an ecofeminist community named ReSisters, first through mysterious notes that Pierre, an executive at an organic food corporation, finds at his workplace and that were anonymously left by Sandy, a cleaner in the company. The notes are signed with a bee symbol and feature various unattributed quotations (but attributed in the comic's appendix) that gesture toward the breadth of ecofeminist influences and thought, for instance Ursula Le Guin, whose writings deploy sf as subversion to bend and break binaries; decolonial environmentalist thinker, activist and physicist Vandana Shiva, who advocates for earth democracy built on justice, sustainability and peace; or Fatima Ouassak, whose pirate ecology reclaims the mother as a revolutionary subject and popular urban spaces as ecopolitical sites. Pierre's friend Lila investigates the notes, decodes its coordinates, and that night finds herself transported to the ReSisters community, where she learns about their experimentations with various ideas, rituals and actions to build other ways of living. Ecofeminism is here both theoretical and grassroots-activist, and its radical ecological solidarities are at once decolonial, queer, crip, anti-capitalist, multispecies. It is built on care, reclaimed as combative and disruptive in particular by the character of Sandy from its gendered and economic marginalisation, which is rendered through the wordplay 'pre-care'/*précaire*, the French word for precarious (Chapter 3). It is a praxis of sororal resistance (as encapsulated in the community's name) from the bottom-up against neo-colonial patriarchal capitalism, in individual, community and organised ways, the ReSisters forming also a counter-army (Chapter 10). Moreover, the comic draws (on) ecofeminism as an international movement that is, crucially, planetary rather than global in Gayatri Spivak's sense, across a "differentiated political space" (290) of "planetary creatures rather than global agents" (292). A fresco that retraces its history (Chapter 10) is not a universalising narrative of a Global North female Anthropos, but a complex chronology of simultaneity and advances, parallelisms and exchanges across India, Kenya, the United Kingdom, Indonesia, Argentina, the United States or France, and whose origins in the 1970s are

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[17] "Rien ne [peut] être à nouveau fait contre la nature elle-même."

not European (Françoise d'Eaubonne comes second), but the Indian Chipko movement.

ReSisters is striking in terms of its form both for the amount of text it features at times (some pages draw on the tradition of illustrated books with blocks of texts supplemented or complemented with images), and the profound irregularity of its *mise en page*. This resonates—formally, narratively, politically—with the idea of reweaving the world, the title of the seminal 1990 ecofeminist text edited by Irene Diamond and Gloria Feman Orenstein that features prominently in the comic (it is read avidly by one of the characters).[18] The amount of text in some places serves to render that reweaving the world is a praxis that requires thought, action, dialogue and experimentation. Text-heavy passages delve into the complex diversity of ecofeminism, as well as its theoretical-activist dimensions. Lila's character for instance has many questions about the practical functioning of the ReSisters community, the detailed answers to which can be summarised with her interlocutor's words that "everyone contributes in the way that they can: that's what solidarity is" (Chapter 7).[19] Blocks of text relate in open ways to images that they do not anchor with fixed meanings, such as when a page telling of the premises and promises of the ReSisters community as a transformative space faces a wordless visual sequence of Lila listening attentively to the other-than-human agencies of an animal-plant-soil ecosystem (Chapter 7). Images of elements of the garden tend toward abstraction as they are heard anew, prefiguring the ritual later in the comic of holding a Council of All Beings, which this time draws heavily on text to articulate a radical ecofeminist politics where environmental rights are integral to democracy (Chapter 8).

The text-heavy spreads and their supplementary/complementary images render processes of explaining, nuancing, contextualising, exchanging verbally, trying out and sketching the outlines of revolutionary living. These combine in productive ways in the reading experience with the more 'classically'-comics spreads, where extreme variation in layout deploys both the codes and the flexibility of the page architecture as part and parcel of an eco(graphic)feminist practice and project. There is, for instance, a page where colourful unframed panels that stretch to the bleed line, in which Lila talks of identities not fitting into gendered or racialised boxes, contrast with the thickly-drawn borders of the stark black and white panels below that recount experiences of racism (Chapter 2); or a confrontation on the horizontal axis of the page of the narratives, laid out in vertical strips, of imperialist global green capitalism on the left, and of a planetary decolonial praxis situated in India on the right (Chapter 12). There are the two "anti-gravity" spreads that represent ecofeminism as a theoretical-activist movement composed of and through sorority/solidarity, post-colonial thought, radical feminism, deep ecology, ecosexuality, or sharing care work, visualised first as the various rooms of a house that takes up a full double page. On

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[18] I employ (re)weaving here taking inspiration but also departing from Groensteen's seminal and strictly formalist concept of *tressage*/weaving, to attend to comics' aesthetic, narrative and political potential for ecofeminist readings. I develop this in my forthcoming chapter "Graphic Entanglements".

[19] "Chaque personne contribue comme elle peut : c'est ça, la solidarité."

the next spread, they are divided into panels that do not form a linear progression but are each connected to all the others, as noted by Lila in her *récitatif* in the bottom right corner of the page, thus explicitly demanding multilinear reading (Chapter 7).

In the creative ways in which it draws ecofeminism across its panels and pages as both "theoretical constellation and activist inspiration" (Sandilands 223), *ReSisters* is a text that calls upon the reader to engage in a diffractive reading of "various insights through one another to produce something new, new patterns of thinking-being" (Karen Barad qtd. in Dolphijn and van der Tuin 58). As such, it is also a strikingly participatory comic, making full use of the medium's potential for involving its reader in the (re-)making of its graphic network. This becomes explicit on one page with a space left blank for the reader to write or draw what she can and wants to do to ecofeminise her life (Chapter 10), working with the limitations and possibilities of her own situated perspective to affirm her "response-ability" (Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble* 12). At the end of the book, the figure of the reader is not just addressed but materialises. At this stage Lila and her friends have returned to the ReSisters community to find that it has disappeared, leaving behind it the premises and promises of an ecofeminist revolution to be made. The reader appears, disoriented, holding the comic as a manifesto-amulet through which, she is told, she can connect to this "intimate place of power and hope" and contribute to "building a part of the world with us" (Chapter 12).[20] *ReSisters* deploys the speculative mode for world-(re)building, in ways that both differ from and resonate with the other *bandes dessinées* I have discussed in this article. Like *Epiphania*, it offers fantastic visions of present-future solidarities as care and resistance. Crucially, these are words-actions whose revolutionary potential *as ecofeminist* the *bande dessinée* draws out and etches (back) into the ecographic-ecopolitical praxis of reweaving the world through new patterns of thinking-doing, thinking-becoming-with.

Conclusion

"Catastrophic for the human imaginary" (Colebrook 51), and leading to some catastrophist and immobilising imaginaries of the end, global climate change is also something with which artists cannot not engage. Graphic narratives, in their perceived accessibility and the potential complexity of their storytelling and aesthetic architectures, as well as their shifting place in popular culture, bring an interesting and still under-examined angle to debates in the environmental humanities around narrative, which has been variously decried as all-too-human or hailed as essential (see James 183-184). *Crépuscule, Coup de sang, Epiphania* and *ReSisters* show some of the ways in which sf graphic narrative specifically, in deploying the ecographic possibilities of comics and ecopolitical potential of creative speculation for liveable future presents, may be productively disorienting, propelling us to envision more-than-human solidarities in and for the Anthropocene. This article has thus examined the entwined potentialities of the sf genre and the comics medium for disanthropocentric imaginaries and imageries and for ecological storylines of world re-building. We have seen non-linearity rendering the erasure and slow re-inscription of genocidal and ecocidal violence; textured watery, earthy and airy graphics evoking overwhelming elemental agencies; hyper-separated binaries dissolving into enmeshed relationalities in the (un-)framing of bodily and ethical mutations; and an ecofeminist use of multilinearity and text-image interactions for diffractive and participatory readings.

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[20] "lieu intime de puissance et d'espoir" ; "construire un bout de monde avec nous."

These different yet resonating contemporary graphic narratives of the/an end have helped us in drawing the outlines of an ecopolitics in and for a collapsing world, with disorientation and solidarity at its core. The dismantling of master narratives, and the unsettling recognition of other-than-human agencies, spatialities and temporalities that throw humans off centre, open toward a praxis of combative care and more-than-human resistance against the material-discursive structures of neo-colonial patriarchal speciesist capitalism. The violent disorientations of living in the Anthropocene need reorient us—a collective pronoun shot through with entanglements and exclusions, to be reconfigured in planetary terms—away from universalising, hubristic visions and amnesiac histories, toward a praxis of more-than-human solidarity on and for a changing planet. As Braidotti writes, “the future as an active object of desire propels us forth and we can draw from it the strength and motivation to be active in the here and now” (“Posthumanism” 206). Graphic sf texts such as *Crépuscule*, *Coup de sang*, *Epiphania* and *ReSisters* evoke some of the ways in which we can draw from our speculative futures the earthly imaginaries through which to script and sketch now the outlines of sustainability as ecopolitical becoming-(with)-earth others.

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Norwegian Futurisms: Posthumanism and the Norwegian Nordic Model in Tor Åge Bringsværd's *Du og Jeg*, *Alfred* and *Alfred 2.0*[1]

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Abstract

In Norway, much of the Science Fiction published over the last two decades has been dystopian and focused on the future effects of climate change on society. In light of this trend, this article explores how the ecodystopian duology, *Du og jeg, Alfred: Et tidsbilde* (2020) and *Alfred 2.0* (2022), written by Tor Åge Bringsværd under the pseudonym Edgar Burås, reflects on and criticizes the Norwegian Nordic model, particularly in relation to Norway's oil wealth, social welfare, consumerism, and ecological concerns. As both novels mobilize characters and technologies that blur and confuse the boundaries of the human, the posthumanist theories of Donna Haraway are utilized in interpreting their cultural and socio-political symbolism. Additionally, these novels also serve as an intertextual update to Astrid Lindgren's *Emil i Lönneberga* series (1963-1970), with the traditional boundaries of familial relationships pushed into posthuman notions of gender, age, and species. This article ultimately argues that the ecodystopian setting and posthuman characters posit an intersectional diversity and multispecies kinship that challenge notions of ecological and social sustainability in the Norwegian Nordic model. This article begins by introducing Bringsværd and the core texts, then concretizes the Norwegian Nordic model and explores the ecodystopian setting in light of neoliberalism and nationalism, and concludes with a discussion of posthumanism and intertextuality.

Keywords: Posthumanism, intertextuality, Nordic model, Norway, science fiction, ecodystopia.

Resumen

En Noruega, gran parte de la ciencia ficción publicada en las últimas dos décadas ha sido distópica y se ha centrado en los efectos futuros del cambio climático en la sociedad. A la luz de esta tendencia, este artículo explora cómo la duología ecodistópica, *Du og jeg, Alfred: Et tidsbilde* (2020) y *Alfred 2.0* (2022), escrita por Tor Åge Bringsværd bajo el seudónimo de Edgar Burås, reflexiona y critica el modelo nórdico noruego, particularmente en relación con la riqueza petrolera de Noruega, el bienestar social, el consumismo y las preocupaciones ecológicas. A medida que ambas novelas movilizan personajes y tecnologías que desdibujan y confunden los límites de lo humano, las teorías posthumanistas de Donna Haraway se utilizan para interpretar su simbolismo cultural y sociopolítico. Además, estas novelas también sirven como una actualización intertextual de la serie *Emil i Lönneberga* (1963-1970) de Astrid Lindgren con los límites tradicionales de las relaciones familiares empujados a

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[1] This article was inspired by the doctoral course "Ecocriticism and Didactic Practices" organized by the Western Norway University of Applied Sciences and is indebted to the researchers Lykke Harmony Alara Guanio-Uluru (HVL) and Rolf Theil (UiO) for their encouragement and input. I am also thankful to my doctoral advisors Barbro Bredesen Opset (HiØ) and Reinhard Hennig (UiA) for sharing their energy, time, and knowledge during the writing process.

nociones posthumanas de género, edad y especie. En última instancia, este artículo argumenta que el entorno ecodistópico y los personajes posthumanos postulan una diversidad interseccional y un parentesco multiespecie que desafían las nociones de sostenibilidad ecológica y social en el modelo nórdico noruego. Este artículo comienza introduciendo a Bringsværd y los textos centrales, luego concreta el modelo nórdico noruego y explora el entorno ecodistópico a la luz del neoliberalismo y el nacionalismo, y concluye con una discusión sobre el posthumanismo y la intertextualidad.

Palabras clave: Poshumanismo, intertextualidad, modelo nórdico, Noruega, ciencia ficción, ecodistopía.

Introduction

Much of the Science Fiction (SF) produced in Norway in recent years has been dystopian and focused on the future effects of climate change on society. These texts are embedded in Norwegian culture and respond to broader societal concerns over Norway's oil wealth, consumerism, social welfare, and ecological commitments. The recent duology, *Du og jeg, Alfred: Et tidsbilde* (2020) and *Alfred 2.0* (2022), written by Tor Åge Bringsværd under the pseudonym Edgar Burås, are prominent examples of this literary trend as they extrapolate devastated visions of Norway and Europe into the year 2131, exploring both social and ecological collapse under a waning neo-liberal capitalism. As both novels mobilize characters and technologies that blur and confuse the boundaries of the human, this paper will use the posthumanist theories of Donna Haraway to interpret their cultural and socio-political symbolism. These posthuman elements serve as an intertextual update to Astrid Lindgren's Emil i Lönneberga series (1963-1970), with the traditional boundaries of familial relationships pushed into expanded conceptions of gender, age, and species. Ultimately this paper argues that the ecodystopian setting and posthuman characters posit an intersectional diversity and multispecies kinship that challenge notions of sustainability in the Norwegian Nordic model. This paper will first introduce Bringsværd and the core texts, then concretize the Norwegian Nordic model, followed by a review of the ecodystopian setting and a discussion of posthuman elements, and conclude with a brief analysis of intertextual connections to Emil i Lönneberga..

Tor Åge Bringsværd: *Du og jeg, Alfred* and *Alfred 2.0*

Bringsværd is one of Norway's central and most prolific SF and Fantasy authors; he debuted in 1967 and has published a wide range of novels, anthologies, children's books, and theatre/radio productions. He also worked alongside the now deceased Jon Bing, another iconic forefather of Norwegian SF and fantasy. The pair were known as "Bing & Bringsværd," and helped introduce SF to Norwegian readers in the 1960s–1970s. While the pseudonym Edgar Burås was exposed by Johannes Fjeld in the Norwegian newspaper *Dagbladet* in 2020, Bringsværd has acknowledged that he writes under other aliases which have yet to be revealed (Fjeld).

Du og jeg, Alfred: Et tidsbilde and *Alfred 2.0* (henceforth *Doj,A* and *A2.0*) are a duology that take place in the year 2131, with *Doj,A* set in Norway and *A2.0* set in Ukraine. Both novels are epistolary and focalized through the main protagonist Elias Vagen (a self-chosen alias alluding to the prophet Elijah), who documents the events of both novels on thirty-two pieces of paper looted from an abandoned museum (*Doj,A* 8). As communication in the year 2131 is now exclusively digital, these pages function as a literary anachronism and are a marker of his eclectic nature.

The first novel, *Doj,A* takes place in the fictional town of Marestein, near Porsgrunn. Elias is a loner who struggles making connections with other people. He runs away from a series of complicated relationships, including his politically conservative parents, his gang member life in Oslo, and multiple romantic partners. This pattern changes when he inherits the smart-house Alfred. Though Alfred is essentially a mechanized house and can only speak through disembodied speakers, Elias and Alfred find companionship with each other over time. This friendship grows to include Zakkeus, a cat discovered in the toxic environment outside. As the story progresses, Elias writes down discussions, errands, and thoughts, using the physical pages as a space for both recording recent events and navigating the traumas of his past. About mid-way through the novel, Elias and Alfred rescue the cyborg prostitute Syrin from the human residents in Marestein, who want her destroyed. As the search for Syrin intensifies, Alfred's consciousness is downloaded into Syrin's cyborg-mind and Elias, Alfred, Syrin, and Zakkeus all flee Norway.

A2.0 begins in Mayaky, a radioactive disaster site in Ukraine reminiscent of Chernobyl, which functions as a refuge for over 30,000 artificial intelligence (AI) machines. Alfred is given a humanoid body, and the group shares a small house on the outskirts of the city. There they cultivate a small garden and make friends with their neighbor Zhaba and two wild chickens they discover. Elias is the only human in the city and is essentially treated as an outcast. As he adjusts, he tries to make sense of major events in the city, including the sabotage of Mayaky's protective shield and the murder of a robot companion. Elias, Alfred, and Syrin uncover a plot to merge all AI life into a swarm that can destroy humankind (and consequently all organic life) on Earth. Elias continues to write, but begins burning his past attempts as he works to forget his troubled past and better understand himself (*A2.0* 24-25, 51). The novel ends when Elias convinces the central AI to break off its plans for global ecocide. Elias is aided by Zakkeus, who provides companionship to the fluctuating image of the central AI consciousness.

Norwegian Ecodystopias

Traditionally a minor genre in Norway, SF has experienced a revitalization over the past decade (Henanger; Jensen). A diverse range of texts have been written, including the space-colonization novel *Fugl* (2019) by indigenous Sámi author Sigbjørn Skåden, the military SF trilogy "Eldfell" (2014–2019) by Ørjan N. Karlsson, and the SF biomedical novels *Den siste hjelperen* (2018) and *Kjærlighetsfragmentet*

(2020) by Cathrine Knudsen. Norwegian authors are more frequently applying SF tropes to their work, as evidenced by the ecodystopian dream-visions in Jostein Gaarder's *Anna: En fabel om klodens klima og miljø* (2013), the far-future historical frame in Jan Kjærstad's *Slekters gang: Fortellinger fra et glemt land* (2015), and the temporal leaps in Maja Lunde's popular series "The Climate Quartet" (2015–2022). A wide range of SF dystopias have also been produced, including the anti-utopian novel *Nullingen av Paul Abel* (2019) by Bjørn Vatne, the apocalyptic *Fiolinane* (2010) by Jan Roar Leikvoll, and the post-apocalyptic young adult novel *Vega: Kampen for en ny verden* (2017) by Elin Viktoria Unstad. Other recent SF literary outputs include works of poetry, one anthology of short stories, and multiple graphic novels.

Despite their variety, many of the texts mentioned above share a distinct imaginative framework concerned with climate and the environment. Darko Suvin defines SF as a "literary genre whose necessary and sufficient conditions are the presence and interaction of estrangement and cognition, and whose main formal device is an imaginative framework alternative to the author's empirical environment" (7–8; emphasis removed). The climate-related cognitive estrangements in many Norwegian SF novels have led to them being analyzed as "climate fiction," which is, as Caren Irr states, "Characterized most frequently by efforts to imagine the impact of drastic climatological change on human life and perceptions" (2). Climate fiction has become a literary staple in Norway and the Nordic zone and has begun receiving strong critical engagement (Hennig et al.; Goga et al.; Furuseth et al.).

While *Doj,A* and *A2.0* can be read as both SF and climate fiction literature, their extrapolative tendencies, societal focus, and emphasis on technology justify the application of an SF lens. As James Gunn states:

> Science fiction is the branch of literature that deals with the effects of change on the real world as it can be projected into the past, the future, or to distant places. It often concerns itself with scientific or technological change, and it usually involves matters whose importance is greater than the individual or the community; often civilization or the race itself is in danger. (1)

In *Doj,A* and *A2.0*, the transhumanist advancements and environmental devastation are global extrapolations from the real world at the author's time of writing. As they are referencing actual socio-political trends in Norway and abroad, there is an implicit social commentary and activist stance inherent in both novels, particularly relating to the environment. As Eric C. Otto states, "Ecodystopian science fiction stages dystopian presents and futures, frightening worlds not disengaged from the now but instead very much extrapolated out of some current and real, anti-ecological trend" (50). *Doj,A* and *A2.0*, like many of the SF texts referenced above, use frightening depictions of the future to warn against ecologically unsustainable trends in society today. This is not to say that all Norwegian ecodystopias mobilize SF tropes. For example, Karl Ove Knausgård's *Morgenstjernen* (2020) takes a more speculative and supernatural approach to environmental estrangement. However, in most cases, Norwegian ecodystopias can be viewed as an increasingly popular subgenre localized at the intersection between climate fiction and SF, inhabiting a speculative literary zone warning against future societal and ecological catastrophe.

Green Exceptionalism and the Norwegian Nordic Model

While the upswing in ecodystopian publications shows a growing concern for the environment in Norwegian literature, Norway is still perceived as an egalitarian, eco-conscious, and welfare-oriented state. Norway has consistently scored in the top ten of the World Happiness Report since its inception in 2012, which rates 156 countries based on GDP per capita, social support, life expectancy, freedom, generosity, and corruption (World Happiness Report). These results correspond with the positive image of the Norwegian Nordic model (henceforth "Norwegian model"), which bases its values on democracy, human rights, solidarity, and trust and has as its goals personal freedom, social equality and economic growth ("The Norwegian Model"). Labelled a "Supermodel" by LO Stat and Spekter, the Norwegian model can be summarized as 1) the interplay between unions, welfare schemes, and economic policy, 2) the cooperation of state and private interests, and 3) the management of workplace conflicts (Fløtten and Jordfald 6-7), with the role of oil often being downplayed in the model's success ("The Norwegian Model," Fløtten and Jordfald 10). While Norway's variant of the Nordic model is similar to that found in Iceland, Sweden, Denmark, and Finland (all of which are regulated market economies with strong labor policies and welfare systems), Norway is unique in its high state ownership, large sovereign wealth fund, and fossil fuel revenues ("Norway: The Rich Cousin"; Halvorsen and Stjernø 9, 25–26, 30–31).

With the introduction of "The Brundtland Report" in 1987, the Nordic model experienced an environmental turn and began emphasizing ecological, alongside social and economic, sustainability (Hennig et al. 4). Norway has the highest per capita usage of electric cars globally (Olano), offsets 80% of its greenhouse gas emissions through carbon trading and taxation (Energifaktanorge, "Taxes"), and generates roughly 98% of its power from renewable sources (Energifaktanorge, "Electricity"). These achievements are connected to state regulation, ownership priorities, and government subsidization, all of which feed into the Norwegian model. The conception of a "model" implies "something that can be copied and implemented elsewhere" (Browning 27). As Browning notes, "the idea of the 'Nordic exception' and of a particular Nordic way of doing things has been a central element in Nordic and national *identity* construction for the Nordic states" (27; emphasis in original). All of the metrics discussed above, from social welfare to environmental policies, are part of a national identity formation that has coalesced into a specifically Norwegian narrative of green exceptionality. Like all nations, Norway is an imagined community, and the Norwegian model helps reinforce its idealized social construction.

While the Norwegian model may appear to have achieved an ideal balance between well-funded social programs and ecofriendly initiatives, a study from 2008 showed that Norwegians have become more aware of their privileged position in globalized society and are more concerned about climate change and environmental crisis (Hellevik). In 2009, three scathing historical books were published on the consequences of oil on the Norwegian political economy (Skjeldal and Berge; Ryggvik; Sætre). Of these, Helge Ryggvik's analysis emphasized that Norwegians had become global aristocrats, and that the 1990s–2000s were defined by a collective schizophrenia where Norwegians could enjoy life and consume without any fear of the future because they could simply live off the interest of the Norwegian sovereign wealth fund (9). These studies mark a rising moral awareness that correlates with the increasing publication rate of Norwegian ecodystopias. As will be explored below, ecodystopias like *Doj,A* and *A2.0* play on the tension between Norway's identity as a social ecofriendly nation and its identity as a neoliberal labor exploiter and global energy polluter. As of 2021, Norway is the eleventh largest exporter of oil and the third largest exporter of natural gas in the world (Norskpetroleum) and its sovereign wealth fund, welfare systems, cultural institutions, policies, and domestic consumerism are, in large part, funded through the petroleum industry. As Hennig et al. state, "studying Nordic narratives of nature and the environment [...] can contribute to a better understanding of the historical developments that contributed to the construction of the Nordic countries' contemporary green image, and at the same time critically question the realities behind the image" (5). In this case, the generic qualities of ecodystopian narratives help problematize the implicit foundations of the Norwegian model, including both its reliance on neoliberal politics and the petroleum industry for its continued existence.

Norway in the Year 2131

Within the above context, this section will explore the ecodystopian framework Bringsværd establishes in *Doj,A* and *A2.0*. Much of the environmental degradation is described through short diegetic snippets, which are focalized through Elias's colloquial and offhand reflections. Elias is 104 years old (*Doj,A* 9), and often muses over the large environmental shifts that have occurred in his lifetime. While he only needed sunglasses and some nasal spray to go outside when he was younger, now he feels like "an astronaut as he walks, covered from head to toe in a metal suit of spider silk"[2] (*Doj,A* 78). When he moved to Marestein in 2069, Elias could still catch fish at the local beach, however by 2131 the majority of animal life on Earth had gone extinct and the oceans universally polluted with microplastics (*Doj,A* 22, 26, 35, 39). Masks were mandated by law in 2084 due to air pollution, and by 2131 thunderstorms had become life-threatening events (*Doj,A* 28, 48). Another threatening development is anthropogenic acid rain, which falls in thick clumps and leaves behind a slimy yellow residue (*Doj,A* 5, 9, 78). This rain is so toxic Elias decides to burn his clothes after just a short exposure without protective gear (*Doj,A* 6).

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[2] "en romfarar her jeg går, dekka fra topp til tå av ei metalldrakt av spaiderspinn."(All translations of texts are mine).

In contrast, the robot city of Mayaky, described in *A2.0*, functions as an ecologically utopian counterpoint to Marestein. There are no humans, and consequently, less industry and less pollution. While there is still gloppy acid rain, it is less severe and less dangerous (*A2.0* 17). Cyborgs have minimal environmental impact as they live in small homes and require no food (*A2.0* 14, 70, 78). Mayaky has a recycling facility and maintains a circular economy, even re-using parts from dead cyborgs (*A2.0* 61, 92). Local animal populations are rebounding, including foxes, wolves, and wild boar (*A2.0* 18, 67). Cyborgs are more sensitive towards animals than humans are, with Zhaba condemning Elias's consumption of chicken eggs as theft (*A2.0* 29-30). As Syrin explains, both animals and cyborgs have been exploited under human ownership, helping Elias understand the kinship cyborgs feel with animals and their loathing over keeping them as pets (*A2.0* 69). Despite the radiation poisoning, local soil and flora are relatively healthy, and Elias forages for wild berries and mushrooms in the surrounding brush (*A2.0* 25). He can even grow potatoes outside his house (*A2.0* 16).

While Mayaky may represent a spartan and efficient society, Norwegians in Marestein maintain a decadent middle-class lifestyle. Despite the catastrophic environmental conditions, residents have access to food, work, housing, internet, 3D books, religious services, shopping, cyborg prostitutes, and a healthcare system based on artificial organs and longevity (*Doj,A* 14, 34). As Fredric Jameson so famously emphasizes, "it is easier to imagine the end of the world than the end of capitalism" (199). In *Doj,A*, capitalism continues as before, with life-extension treatments being both inexpensive and readily available, and artificial hearts advertised as so cheap that that almost anyone can afford them (34). Notably, human organs are "mass-produced in low-cost countries"[3] (*Doj,A* 34), stressing Norway's privileged position in the global economy. Elias's 118-year-old acquaintance, Gubben (whose name translates to "old man"), has replaced almost every organ in his body and is in better shape than the younger Elias, who eschews artificial organs (*Doj,A* 33).

The advanced state of biomedical technologies in an ecodystopian setting is a symbolic warning against anthropocentric and consumeristic thinking. Instead of developing technologies designed to rehabilitate natural environments on a societal level, life-extension technologies have been prioritized and sold to privileged individuals eager to escape death. That these biomedical technologies are being used in the creation of cyborg laborers and sex-workers for further human gratification only stresses this point. While some environmental technofixes and regulations are mentioned in the narrative, including augmented jellyfish for removing ocean plastics and a mandate allowing only one car per person, these have ultimately failed and Norwegians seem resigned to consume their way into oblivion (*Doj,A* 15, 39, 55–56).

While much of Marestein lies in ruins, it still has a grocery store, a cafe, and a showroom where products can be ordered and delivered via drones (*Doj,A* 14). Many in Marestein still work, even if they have to commute to larger towns, and Elias works testing livable 3D-books from home for a company based in Germany, another example of neo-liberal integration (*Doj,A* 14, 46). In one book, Elias is eaten alive by jungle animals as he tries to understand them, both a cathartic response to humanity's ecological devastation and a testament to the impossibility of comprehending the animal other (*Doj,A* 21-22). Norwegians still own cars, with Elias driving an old rechargeable solar-beetle (*Doj,A* 31). They also still play football and meet up for social drinks (*Doj,A* 14, 33). While there is a slight nod to liberal integration in the inclusion of both a church and a mosque, the representation of the drone showroom (*Doj,A* 32–33), *Alis dronehandel* (attended by a young woman in a hijab), has subtle racist undertones. Even in the year 2131, small shops continue to be run by individuals with a migrant background, a situation made only more awkward by Elias's repeated references to Ali Baba's cave. Elias never buys anything, but he finds it exciting to go in and look around. "The walls are full of all kinds of tempting holograms [...]. Everything you need can be found here in the showroom of Ali's drone shop, everything you want - and everything that has long since been sold out and is impossible to get anymore"[4] (*Doj,A* 32). There is a sense of wistful regret in Elias's description of the declining consumer-utopia the showroom represents. Ultimately, this waning middle-class lifestyle stands in stark contrast with the climate refugees hiding in the shadows of Marestein's abandoned houses (*Doj,A* 13, 31).

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[3] "masseprodusert i lavkostland"

In addition to refugees, Norway is struggling with the emergence of AI, a new and symbolic form of immigrant both stronger than humans and more resistant to climate change (*Doj,A* 82). In *A2.0*, Elias makes the point that these machines have overtaken many human jobs, putting them in direct competition with human workers. While Alfred calls them "our new compatriots,"[5] Elias is more skeptical of their ability to conform and integrate themselves into human society (*Doj,A* 19). This exchange complicates the symbolism of AI machines in both novels and conflates the notion of automated production with human workers both in and from developing countries, including mobile immigrants and the hidden industrialized laborers of globalized society. Adding a racist dynamic to this symbolism, humans consider humanoid AI machines as inferior and want to enslave them (*Doj,A* 19; *A2.0* 27). This bigotry leads to an AI rebellion in 2040, eventually resulting in the daily human bombing of Mayaky (*A2.0* 27–28, 58). While humans may be universally afraid of AI machines, Elias becomes more empathic to androids due to his many conversations with Alfred. This is a character development that feeds into his accompanying Alfred, Syrin, and Zakkeus to Mayaky in *A2.0*. Ultimately, Elias develops a kinship with both AI machines and animals that he has lacked with other humans over the course of his life.

The Extremes of Neoliberalism and Nationalism

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[4] "Veggene er fulle av alle slags fristende hologrammer [...]. Alt du trenger finnes her i sjåvrommet til Alis dronehandel, alt du ønsker deg - og alt som for lengst er utsolgt og umulig å skaffe lenger."

[5] "våre nye landsmenn."

Despite the environmental conditions and AI conflicts, the conception of the Norwegian state has survived, albeit weakened by the gradual neo-liberal absorption of Norway into the European Union (EU). As both novels are epistolary, language becomes one of the first and most consistent examples of this neoliberal trend. Elias uses what he considers old-fashioned and poetic language when he writes, including words like *vårs*, *huser*, *åssen*, and *sjæl* (*Doj,A* 8, 25). He incorrectly attributes these words to *Bokmål*, a written variant of Norwegian used by the majority of today's population, when they actually belong to the traditional Oslo-dialect, which is vernacular (Larsen). Elias's ironic mistake marks him as an unreliable narrator and represents a historical break in Norway's linguistic heritage. From Elias's writing, the reader learns that Norwegians in the year 2131 speak *nordisk* (*Doj,A* 74), implying that the Nordic languages have lost their distinctive elements and fused into one language. *Nordisk* also includes many English and Chinese words (*Doj,A* 25), implying that the Nordic languages have been further diluted and absorbed into neoliberal linguistic hegemonies. Elias uses Nordic variants of English words throughout his narration, including *feiknjus* (fake news), *strime* (stream), *hæker* (hack), and *teik keer* (take care) (*Doj,A* 17, 37, 87, 92).

While language may be the most prominent example of neoliberal integration, Elias also provides frequent glimpses into Norway's declining socio-political environment. Revealed in short snippets, these estrangements function as an overarching cognitive framework for the anxieties Norwegians have over their national sovereignty today. At the start of the novel, Elias states that the EU had assumed responsibility for the operation of Norwegian drinking water and waterfalls in 2069 (*Doj,A* 6). As Elias later notes, the Chinese had a toxic mining operation in Hylefoss (a play on the real town Ulefoss), which ruined the local water supply. Similarly, the Norwegian state was ready to convert Marestein into a massive garbage dump for waste from Europe and the Middle East, a plan that was later abandoned due to toxic spills and mismanagement (*Doj,A* 13). Additionally, Elias reveals that America had purchased land and created a naval base near Oslo, symbolically localized in the former headquarters of Equinor (Norway's state oil company) (*Doj,A* 41). The above estrangements encompass not only who has jurisdiction over Norway's resources, but also to what extent that ownership diminishes Norwegian sovereignty, pollutes Norwegian land, and impoverishes local populations.

Situating *Doj,A* in a broader socio-political context, Elias's musings reflect on Norway's complex relation to the EU, NATO, and global markets today. As of 2022, Norway maintains its own currency and is not part of the EU, however, it is a member of the European Free Trade Association (EFTA) (Halvorsen and Stjernø 26). EFTA allows Norway to export its oil and gas to European markets, but also subjects it to European regulations. As the Norwegian welfare system is financed through fossil fuel revenues, it is entirely dependent upon this EFTA agreement for survival. While much of Norway's energy infrastructure is hidden offshore, the area where Elias lives, Porsgrunn, is a municipality with a long history of industrial pollution (Borchgrevink). By situating *Doj,A* in an area of Norway that still struggles with its polluted heritage, and then cognitively estranging that pollution within a neo-liberal context, Bringsværd is helping to both undermine some of the exceptionalism around Norway's image as a green nation and simultaneously draw attention to Norway's interconnected market dependencies.

When it comes to the American military, Norway is a member of NATO, which helps secure its territorial waters and offshore drilling rigs from larger neighbors like Russia. While this alliance protects Norway's economic sovereignty and safeguards the Norwegian welfare model, it also subjects Norway to international military obligations, like when Norway bombed Libya in 2011 or patrolled Afghanistan for twenty years. Despite its long NATO membership, Norway has consistently avoided hosting American soldiers on its soil so as not to antagonize Russia, a neutral stance that has eroded with the annexation of Crimea in 2014. Bringsværd is able to highlight and cognitively estrange these sociopolitical tensions through Elias's musings, and uses the ecodystopian setting to tweak the future of Norway's national and economic sovereignty in uncomfortable ways.

Returning to *Doj,A*, there are two connected responses to both the neo-liberal and anti-immigrant sentiments discussed above: nationalism and religion. These are best exemplified by the rise of the conservative political party "*Norway First,*"[6] which is protectionist, pro-Christian, anti-Muslim, and anti-AI (*Doj,A* 44, 55, 99, 64). Elias, who was raised *Norway First*, was "convinced that left-wing forces could pounce on us at any time and mash us into jam"[7] (*Doj,A* 44). *Norway First* is a strong financial supporter of Norwegian Christianity, and supports the development of *Jesuspark,* a publicly traded Christian theme park. As Elias notes:

> *Norway First* was heavily invested, and the Christians in Southern and Western Norway bought shares like crazy. Year 64. The great "awakening" had just swept over the country, and many young people had been gloriously saved. The miracle preachers had had their time, now it was big capital's turn to make money on heaven and hell. It was collect and hallelujah time. No one believed that the climate crisis could be resolved. We knew that we were lost. The earth would go under. But the Jesuspark was the best example of a sustainable longing for something to believe in. (*Doj,A* 55–56; emphasis in original) [8]

Elias's narration emphasizes that *Jesuspark* was financially supported by Christian Norwegians, implying the joining of religion and domestic capitalism in a politically conservative Norwegian national formation in the face of ecological catastrophe.

Towards the end of *Doj,A*, *Norway First* proposes the solution that all Muslims should wear a distinct crescent mark on their outer clothing (99), indicating that the Norwegian government is developing fascistic tendencies reminiscent of Nazi

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[6] "*Norge først*"

[7] "overbeviste om at venstrekreftene når som helst kunne kaste seg over vårs og mose vårs til syltetøy."

[8] "Norge Først var tungt inn på eiersida, og kristenfolket på Sørlandet og Vestlandet kjøpte aksjer som gærne. Året av 64. Den store 'vekkelsen' hadde nettopp feid over landet, og mange ungdommer var blitt herlig frelst. Mirakel-predikantene hadde hatt sin tid, nå var det storkapitalens tur til å tjene penger på himmel og helvete. Det var kollekt og halleluja-tid. Ingen trodde at klimakrisen lot seg løse. Vi viste at vi var fortapt. Jorda ville gå under. Men Jesusparken var det best eksemplet på en bærekraftig lengsel etter noe å tru på."

Germany. This is a Norwegian national identity reacting to both the loss of language and national sovereignty, one that literally feels (within the context of the novel) polluted by global integration. In a broader sense, Bringsværd is connecting the rise of Christian movements and fascist nationalism with the ecologically destructive and culturally integrative tendencies of neo-liberal capitalism. As global economies are dependent on the free flows of capital and foreign labor, including the linguistic and cultural integration this economic relationship entails, *Norway First* represents a form of religious and cultural resistance to globalism that reflects not only the "America First" rhetoric of Donald Trump, but also the rise of nationalism and economic protectionism throughout Europe and the world today. In contemporary Norwegian politics, the far-right parties *Norgesdemokratene* and *Fremskrittspartiet* both have conservative anti-immigration initiatives, with the former even having the slogan "Norway First" on its political logo. This is a clear source of inspiration for Bringsværd and he extrapolates these real political parties in fascist and dystopian directions by having them form a political alliance with the fictional *Norway First* in the narrative (*Doj,A* 16).

These political tensions are even further cognitively estranged and exacerbated in A2.0. Several members of the leading committee in Mayaky plot to exterminate humanity by uniting all AI machines into a cyborg swarm. This will create a global electromagnetic pulse deadly to all biological life on Earth (A2.0 95). The committee is allied with a religious cyborg group called "The Son of Man",[9] who want to replace humanity as the new and true humans. These forces mirror the nationalistic and religious movements Elias details in Norway, and both the human and AI ideologies lead to a similar xenophobic focus on exterminating difference. Bringsværd's work extrapolates both neo-liberalism and nationalism to their utmost extremes, with neither pole in the dichotomy portrayed in a positive light. As these are novels about belonging and identity, Bringsværd makes clear that neither sociopolitical movement helps unify people and neither is ultimately sustainable (whether socially, economically, or environmentally). Neoliberalism leads to massive inequalities, both economically and in terms of environments and nonhuman others. Likewise, extreme nationalistic and religious movements are bigoted and exclusive, and offer little alternative to capitalism. Instead, as will be explored below, Bringsværd posits more sustainable posthuman systems of relation based on diversity, communication, and kinship.

The Posthuman: Technology, Diversity, and Kinship

Many of the narrative elements discussed above, including cyborg cities, toxic landscapes, and human life-extension technologies, are estrangements that transport the reader beyond the human into posthuman territories. In analyzing popular media, Erika Cudworth and Stephen Hobden note that, "The term posthumanism has been

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[9] "Menneskesønnen."

used in three principal ways: in the sense of as a world after humanity, as forms of body modification and transhumanist 'uplift', and [...] in the sense of a world comprised of the more-than-human" (5). All three strands of posthumanism are evident in *Doj,A* and *A2.0*. In terms of a world after humanity, both the toxic levels of pollution and the emergence of adaptive AI indicate that humanity's time as the dominant species is slowly coming to an end. When it comes to body modification and transhumanist uplift, human medical science has greatly advanced, replacement organs are cheap, and lifespans are greatly extended. And last, in terms of a world comprised of the more-than-human, Elias becomes embedded in a multi-species community that embraces diversity.

When it comes to the interplay between transhuman technological developments and the more relational embrace of posthuman difference, it becomes important to understand the schism between "transhumanism" and "posthumanism." As Francesca Ferrando explains, "Transhumanism recognizes science and technology as the main assets of reformulation of the notion of the human, and employs the notion of the 'posthuman' to name an era in which such reformulations will have irredeemably impacted the evolution of the human, giving raise to the posthuman" (170). In this sense, transhumanism has as its focus the material and technological improvement of the human. Like Gubben's modified organs, these are technologies that can be researched, controlled, and ultimately sold, which aligns well with the market ideologies of capitalism. However, as evidenced by the ecodystopian setting, neoliberal exploitations, and the rise of *Norway First* above, Norwegian citizens in the year 2131 can hardly be called evolved; instead, the priority of these biomedical technologies over environmental solutions marks Norway as anthropocentric and inegalitarian. The narrative implicitly emphasizes that a technological uplift should not be considered an improvement if it does not correspond with better social understanding and acceptance. This point is reinforced in *A2.0* with the threat of the swarm. While it is certainly an advancement in AI consciousness and technology, it becomes a speciesist totality, ready to eliminate all biological life on earth to further the goals of AI existence.

In contrast, the field of posthumanism works from a cultural and philosophical perspective, and sees the notion of the human, and human exceptionality, as socially constructed. As Ferrando emphasizes, the posthuman is "a condition which is already accessible, since we have never been human: 'human' is a human concept, based on humanistic and anthropocentric premises" (170). While transhumanism can be viewed as anthropocentric and hierarchical, posthumanism represents a de-centering of the human, and focuses on humanity's relationality to both itself and to non-human others. Posthumanism can then be seen as rejecting the privilege of humans over nonhuman objects, as in object-oriented ontology (Morten), and sees humans as horizontally embedded in shifting networks of relationships, as in actor–network theory (Latour). This relationality is evidenced in the comfort Elias and Alfred find in one another's company, despite their many differences. Likewise, Zakkeus becomes a companion species to them both, with Alfred even calling him

"Our child"[10] (*Doj,A* 20). These feelings of kinship extend towards Syrin as well, "I look at Alfred's round, lively face. I look at Syrin, who is really only five years old, but still grown up, more than enough. And I feel like maybe I've gotten a new family"[11] (*A2.0* 33). Eventually, this circle of oddkin grows to include their surviving chicken, Gudrun, and neighbor, Zhaba, who looks like a polygon on caterpillar feet (*A2.0* 29). Throughout both novels these characters learn to navigate each other's differences, traumas, interdependencies, and agencies, ultimately learning to sustainably and equitably become-with each other in a complex multi-species family.

This notion of multispecies family, or kinship, is a central theme in both *Doj,A* and *A2.0* that reinforces an implicit posthuman value set. While Donna Haraway astutely denies being a posthumanist (she prefers the term 'compost'; *Staying* 101), her notion of kinship helps in understanding how Bringsværd's characters overcome bias and extremism both across species and in terms of the environment. For Haraway, "*Kin* is a wild category that all sorts of people do their best to domesticate. Making kin as oddkin rather than, or at least in addition to godkin and genealogical and biogenetic family troubles important matters, like to whom one is actually responsible" (emphasis in original, *Staying* 55). Haraway emphasizes that kinship with oddkin does not exclude biological family or other kinds of community, but that it instead opens for a diversity of perspectives, stories, entanglements, and helps us "stay with the trouble" of our environmental and social issues today. She also stresses that making oddkin involves responsibility, often human responsibility, for those differences, though she still attributes tremendous agency to non-human others. Haraway wraps these complex notions of multi-species entanglements and kinship into what she calls the "Chthulucene," an acknowledgement of the myriad non-human others thriving about us, a call to live and die in response-ability on a damaged earth, and her response to the more human-centric "Anthropocene" (*Staying* 2).

The notion of fighting for diversity and difference requires a consideration of feminism in posthuman studies. As Ferrando explains, "in the Western tradition, only a specific type of human had been recognized as such: he had to be male, white, Western, heterosexual, physically able, propertied and so on" (169). A revisitation of the notion of the human means then recognizing "all the 'other' humans, who had been left out" (169). In this sense, feminism functions as a critical and intersectional base from which to destabilize many of the enduring Western dualisms still functioning in society today, like "nature/culture, female/male, black/white, gay/hetero etc" (169). In delineating Kimberle Crenshaw's arguments from 1989, Ferrando states that:

> feminism can only be intersectional: a closed form of feminism, which does not take into account other forms of discriminations such as racism, ableism or ageism, structurally undermines its recognitional intent. Any form of discrimination is a potential carrier for any other forms of discrimination, and it is related to all forms of

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[10] "Ungen vår."

[11] "Jeg ser på det runde, livlige ansiktet til Alfred. Jeg ser på Syrin, hu som egentlig bare er fem år gammal, men likevel voksen så de holder. Og jeg føler at jeg kanskje har fått en ny familie."

> discrimination: sexism is not separated from speciesism, biocentrism and so on; thus, it cannot be approached in isolation. (170)

Both *Doj,A* and *A2.0* are stories of fluid and constructed identities that destabilize the dualisms noted above, embodying many of the intersectional qualities of posthuman feminism. For example, Elias self-identifies as male, but he wears dresses. He "Likes to walk around in them. They are light and airy. Aren't tight in the crotch"[12] (*Doj,A* 7). Similarly, Zakkeus is discovered to be a female cat, yet Alfred and Elias continue using his male name and pronouns despite this discovery (*Doj,A* 10–11). Before Elias moved in, Alfred originally self-identified as a woman and was called Alfhild. Alfred switched genders when Elias moved in as an "act of solidarity"[13] (*Doj,A* 11). These are examples that both express the performativity of gender and confound categorical norms, revealing new and more diverse alliances and voices. As Baccolini and Moylan state:

> With an exploration of agency that is based in difference and multiplicity yet cannily reunited in an alliance politics that speaks back in a larger though diverse collective voice, the new dystopias not only critique the present triumphal system but also explore ways to transform it that go beyond compromised left-centrist solutions. (8)

Bringsværd's framework and setting help highlight these utopian posthuman elements and mark his work as a critical and more hopeful form of dystopia.

When it comes to exploring posthuman feminism, characters like Syrin, who have experienced sexual and emotional trauma, require extra consideration. Syrin was created as a cyborg prostitute for a bordello near Marestein. All of the prostitute cyborgs were given flower names, with Syrin's name translating to lilac. These names were a form of objectification and would change if they were sold to another bordello (*Doj,A* 88). Syrin was meant to be a non-sentient object of pleasure, however, she, like Alfred, gains consciousness. In her seminal 1985 essay, "A Cyborg Manifesto," Haraway defines the cyborg as "a cybernetic organism, a hybrid of machine and organism, a creature of social reality as well as a creature of fiction" (5). In *DojA*, Syrin is situated as a human/machine hybrid with feelings and sexual desires; she is contradictory, illegitimate, unfaithful, and insurrectionary (*Cyborg* 15). She must kill two humans and a fellow cyborg in her escape from the bordello, and is, in Haraway's words, "oppositional, utopian, and completely without innocence" (*Doj,A* 91; *Cyborg* 9). In her manifesto, Haraway takes a transhumanist stance and emphasizes that capitalist technologies and methodologies can be appropriated and turned against hegemonic forces. While a product of capitalism, Syrin is in opposition to her owners and creators; she takes control of her own agency, technology, pleasure, and violence. As Haraway states, "The main trouble with cyborgs, of course, is that they are the illegitimate offspring of militarism and patriarchal capitalism, not to mention state socialism. But illegitimate offspring are often exceedingly unfaithful to their origins. Their fathers, after all, are inessential" (*Cyborg* 9–10). In this sense, Syrin's mechanized parts are just as much a part of her identity as her human organs and

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[12] "Liker å gå med dem. De er lette og luftige. Strammer ikke i skrittet."

[13] "solidarisk handling."

traumatic history, and, despite the pain, she assumes control over them. However, despite her strong points, Syrin unfortunately receives much less textual space than either Elias or Alfred, and she is relegated to a peripheral character that is discussed, but not given enough space to really unfold. That she must be "saved" in *Doj,A* is another worn trope.

While Haraway may have distanced herself from her manifesto in recent years, her reading of the cyborg, so contrary to ecofeminists in 1985, is helpful for redeeming the more positive elements of transhumanism both in Bringsværd's work and in relation to overall identity formation, particularly in relation to those who are disabled, chronically ill, and/or transgender, among others. Regardless of nation, these are kin who navigate the travails of medical technologies, social biases, and bureaucracies on a daily basis and are always already cyborgs.

In closure, there are some final examples that require a posthuman lens. The cyborgs in Mayaky are a strong symbol of otherness in their diversity of forms. Some choose humanoid bodies, while others live as balls of yarn or geometric shapes (*A2.0* 18–19). Some work as researchers and craftsmen, while others pursue art (*A2.0* 31, 34, 77-78). These are individual choices within a socialized communal cohesion, and can be read as a positive reflection on diversity of possibilities inherent in Nordic social democracies (*A2.0* 64, 69). Cyborg sex is also an expression of difference, with copulation occurring both digitally through data links and physically in humanoid bodies, redefining conventional notions of pleasure, intimacy, and physicality (*A2.0* 46, 74–75). Lastly, there is the enormous amoeba, Franz Joseph, consuming large parts of Hungary (*A2.0* 65, 90). Named after the Austro-Hungarian emperor, Franz is a reflection on the nature of aggressive totalities, both in terms of *Norway First* and the AI swarm. These totalities, whether political, biological, or cyborg-collective, are selfish and xenophobic. Like the Norwegian model's reliance on oil wealth, there is an irrational exceptionality that privileges them to an inegalitarian share of finite global resources. This stated, like most good SF estrangements, Franz can also represent an extreme form of diversity and otherness; described as both mushroom and animal, its foreign sentience confounds categorization and represents a new and dangerous form of agential life after humans (*A2.0* 65). Ultimately, these cognitive estrangements help destabilize the major dualisms that Haraway lays out in her Cyborg manifesto, including animal/human, organism/machine, and physical/nonphysical, and help reconceptualize sociopolitical transformations.

Intertextuality*: Alfred, Elias, and Emil i Lönneberga*

The notion of posthuman kinship takes us back to the relationship between Alfred and Elias, and to the titles of both novels: *Du og Jeg, Alfred* and *Alfred 2.0*. Even though the story is narrated by and focalized through Elias, Alfred is the namesake in both titles, with the "2.0" indicating an upgrade or development. Most Scandinavians will recognize the first title as a reference to Lindgren's *Emil i Lönneberga* (1963), where the 6-year-old prankster Emil would often companionably say "*Du och jag,* *Alfred*" to the family farmhand Alfred. Lindgren's original series consisted of three books, and has been serialized into three films and a TV series with thirteen episodes. Lindgren's work remains a staple of children's culture in the Nordic region and has, despite a few kinks, aged well.

Emil lives on a farm and would often play pranks on others that would get him into trouble. While his father would get angry and beat him, Alfred would often show compassion and listen quietly instead. Alfred becomes Emil's faithful friend, mentor, and father figure. As Leif Knutsen states, "In Alfred, Emil finds the fixed point he needs to integrate his impulses, his skills, and his problems".[14] With Alfred as a primary anchor point, Emil slowly develops a kinship with various farm animals, including a horse, pig, and chicken, and later throws a feast for the poor and elderly villagers of Katthult. These relationships can be intertextually connected to Elias. Like Emil, Elias also struggles developing fulfilling relationships. He ran away from an extremist right-wing family, became part of (and fled) a gangland life, and struggled to maintain romantic relationships. However, with the smart house Alfred as an anchor and stable father figure, Elias felt safe enough to develop his interpersonal capacities with Zakkeus, Syrin, Gudrun, and Zhaba. As Elias emphasizes, "Alfred taught me patience - and the joy of just sitting completely still and doing absolutely nothing. I never stopped looking over my shoulder, because I had many reasons for that, but with Alfred I felt safer"[15] (*A2.0* 39). In this sense, Bringsværd updates and extends Lindgren's original narrative by pushing the boundaries of these relationships into posthuman notions of gender, species, and a diverse range of interpersonal entanglements. While *Emil i Lönneberga* is about children overcoming complicated family situations, *Doj,A* and *A2.0* are about oddkin coming together and overcoming the environmental and social challenges looming ahead.

Conclusion: Making Kin and Dying Responsibly

Both *Doj,A* and *A2.0* lie at the heart of myriad cultural and sociopolitical contexts, particularly in terms of the Norwegian model, the environment, and the posthuman. These novels use the ecodystopian form to illuminate and critique Norway's unsustainable trajectory, both inherent in its petroleum-driven consumption and in terms of its neo-liberal abuses of foreign labor, while simultaneously highlighting and condemning extreme nationalistic and religious responses to crisis. Bringsværd's work plays on anxieties over national sovereignty and undercuts much of the green exceptionalism inherent in Norway's national identity.

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[14] "I Alfred finner Emil det faste punktet han trenger for å integrere sine impulser, sine ferdigheter, og sine problemer."

[15] "Alfred lærte meg tålmodighet – og gleden over å bare sitte helt stille og ikke gjøre noen verdens ting. Jeg slutta aldri å se meg over skuldra, for det hadde jeg mange grunner til, men sammen med Alfred følte jeg meg tryggere."

Despite the ecodystopian framework, the largest commentary on the Norwegian model is a utopian one, established in the contrast between Mayaky and Marestein. While Marestein depicts a Norwegian consumer society in decline, Mayaky represents a form of societal organization that humbly re-envisions environmental, social, and economic sustainability, where everyone is willing to contribute to the greater whole, but generally does what they wish unless called upon (*A2.0* 44). It is a spartan city that embraces individual freedom, alterity, and multivocal hybridity, while still maintaining many of the basic principles of the Nordic welfare state in terms of housing, healthcare, and basic welfare, in addition to supporting the arts and research. Even Elias, a hated enemy and refugee, is given a universal basic income upon arrival (*A2.0* 44). It is at least one imagining of an egalitarian multispecies society, where nonhuman beings, humans, and human-machine hybrids can embrace their varied and multivalent identities while still loosely belonging to a collective that supports them. These are narratives about avoiding extremist totalities, blurring boundaries, and about the willingness to help each other despite the differences. While Bringsværd offers no concrete solution to the ecological crisis, his challenge to the Norwegian model's exceptionality opens up for expanding conceptions of sustainability.

Lastly, Elias is, like his namesake Elijah, a prophet, albeit of change, acceptance, and kinship, rather than God. However, he also represents a much-needed human responsibility for today's ecological crisis. As Haraway states, "Living-with and dying-with each other potently in the Chthulucene can be a fierce reply to dictates of both Anthropos and Capital" (*Staying*, 2). From Haraway's perspective, capital and human-centered paradigms should be rejected, and that we need to learn "to stay with the trouble of living and dying in response-ability on a damaged earth" (*Staying*, 2). In this sense, we need to not only live in response-ability, but also die in response-ability in order to achieve a more sustainable multispecies future. While most of Norway in the year 2131 is set upon living (and consuming) forever, Elias takes a contrarian route and decides to end his life. He rejects artificial organs and moves to Mayaky, knowing full-well that he will be killed by the ambient radiation within a few years. In this way, Elias is truly a prophet of the Chthulucene, choosing to live and die meaningfully with oddkin, rather than live an empty disconnected life alongside his former citizens.

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Seeing the World Through Glass:
Time and Extinction in Fiona Tan's *Depot* (2015)

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Abstract

These times of mass extinctions ask for different temporalities than rationalized, linear time, to become in synch with them. *Depot* (2015) is a film installation by Indonesian-Australian artist Fiona Tan showcasing endangered and extinct marine animals that are preserved in jars, taxidermied or parts of skeletons in the natural history museums of Leiden and Berlin. I argue that through cinematic techniques such as stilled images, (extreme) close-ups, framing and a poetic voice-over recounting memories of marine animals, these specimens are given duration. Through this, *Depot* scrutinizes narratives of Western science and imperialism tied to linear time and progress perpetuated by natural history museums. The scientific and objective status of the natural history museum and its extraction histories is not only criticized, but its histories are also acknowledged, lamented and reframed. As such, *Depot* offers a decolonising extinction temporality as well as a new ocean imaginary that opposes ideas of ocean life as abundant frontier. I argue that *Depot* questions the mechanisms of science and time that determine how we see ourselves as humans and our place in the nonhuman world.

Keywords: cinema, time, extinction, video installation, ocean imaginary, natural history museum, *Depot*, non-linearity, decolonisation.

Resumen

Estos tiempos de extinciones masivas piden temporalidades diferentes al tiempo racionalizado, lineal, para sincronizarse con ellas. *Depot* (2015) es una instalación cinematográfica de la artista indonesia-australiana Fiona Tan que muestra animales marinos en peligro de extinción y extintos que se conservan en frascos, disecados o partes de esqueletos en los museos de historia natural de Leiden y Berlín. Sostengo que, a través de técnicas cinematográficas como imágenes fijas, primeros planos (extremos), encuadres y un doblaje poético que narra recuerdos de animales marinos, se les da duración a estos especímenes. A través de esto, *Depot* escudriña las narrativas de la ciencia occidental y el imperialismo ligadas al tiempo lineal y el progreso perpetuado por los museos de historia natural. No solo se critica el estatus científico y objetivo del museo de historia natural y sus historias de extracción, sino que también se reconocen, lamentan y reformulan sus historias. Como tal, *Depot* ofrece una temporalidad de extinción descolonizadora, así como un nuevo imaginario oceánico que se opone a las ideas de la vida oceánica como frontera abundante. También argumento que *Depot* cuestiona los mecanismos de la ciencia y el tiempo que determinan cómo nos vemos a nosotros mismos como humanos y nuestro lugar en el mundo no humano.

Palabras clave: cine, tiempo, extinción, instalación cinematográfica, imaginario oceánico, museo de historia natural, *Depot*, no linealidad, descolonización.

Introduction

The public, visiting the BALTIC Centre for Contemporary Art at Gateshead in the UK in 2015 for Fiona Tan's exhibition *Depot*, was in for a surprise.[1] The exhibition filled two floor levels with monumental projections and a 76 foot long lorry. The Level 3 Gallery showed installations questioning the very idea of a collection, who controls these processes and the power structures they reflect and produce, and how the choice of film format affects the public's interpretation of collections. The big surprise, though, was on the Level 4 gallery, where the exhibition drew thematically on Newcastle's history as major whaling port in the 18th and 19th century. The enormous trailer, on the outside provided with the text *The Giant Whale "Jonah"*, was rebuilt by Tan, referencing the historical lorry that travelled throughout Europe from the 1950's to 1970's with a preserved fin whale, called Jonah. Instead of entering the inside of a dead whale, the public entered a natural history museum in its own right, an exhibition within an exhibition. On display were whales in old photos, cabinets filled with narwhal tusks, glass sea creatures by Leopold and Rudolf Blaschka (circa 1870) and sea anemones in glass jars.

There was also a film installation called *Depot* (2015, 22 minutes and 40 seconds), commissioned by the BALTIC, containing footage of so called 'wet collections': preserved marine species in glass jars, next to different scales of (incomplete) marine animal skeletons. The wet collections in *Depot* mostly originate from the natural history museum Naturalis Biodiversity Center (Leiden), but also some from the Museum für Naturkunde (Berlin). Outside the trailer, another film installation could be viewed, also commissioned by the BALTIC, *Leviathan* (2015, 4 minutes and 30 seconds), based on archival footage from the early 20th century, from the EYE Filmmuseum in Amsterdam. This film depicts the stripping of a whale, the name Leviathan obviously referring to the sea monster in the Old Testament.

In this article I will focus on the film installation *Depot*. Following what *Depot* mediates, rather than testing the artwork against in advance formulated theories, I argue that through Tan's choice of subjects, medium and formal techniques, time is centralised. *Depot* visualizes heterogeneous extinction temporalities, producing duration, and by doing so, is opening up an experience of time and extinction that differs from linear and progressive clock time. Through slow filming—tracking shots, framing, medium, regular and extreme close-ups—as well as sound editing and the use of a voice-over of the narrator who recounts a man's memories and associations with the ocean and several aquatic animals, specimens seemingly are coming to life.

Secondly, I argue that these techniques offer an alternative view on aquatic animals, other than traditional ocean imaginaries as criticised in the Blue Humanities (Ratté, Rozwadowski, Steinberg, Yaeger) in which they are presented as hidden and anonymous masses, dehistoricized along with their environment, the sea. Instead, Tan gives them singularity, while referencing the loss of human-animal histories

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[1] The exposition lasted from 9 July until 1 November, 2015.

through subsequent extinctions that gives both aquatic animals and the ocean a temporality deflecting their dehistoricization. *Depot* embeds them in situated, but comparatively largely understudied by the natural sciences and therefore unknown ecosystem endangerment and extinctions, in stark contrast to terrestrial megafauna extinction. The preserved, sometimes (almost) extinct animals, now only exist in the memory of the voice-over. This singular and temporal view on ocean life impacts how we look at specimens in natural history museums, and their relation to extinction.

Finally, I argue that *Depot*'s visualization of a non-linear, heterogeneous temporality produces a possible decolonizing aspect. The conception of time as linear and progressive arguably reflects the imperial and capitalist origins of global time synchronisation in the 19th century, in which both photography and cinema were important tools to spread this ideology of 'imperial temporality' (Azoulay). *Depot* therefore balances a tightrope between reproducing and reinventing an aquatic colonial extinction narrative, both in terms of medium specificity, as well as its subject choice of natural history museum collections. Museums and zoos documenting the loot of colonial expansion through new archival technologies such as photography and cinema to supplement human vision have been implicated in this process since their production. I argue that *Depot* engages with history and memory as part of colonialism through the criticism of imperial temporality and the production of heterogeneous temporalities.

Extinction as concept and materially unfolding event is intricately linked to time: its conceptualisations depend on constructions and boundaries placed on or removed from the past, the present and the anticipated future. In extinction studies, time and temporality have been linked in various ways to extinction: extinction is conceptualised as intergenerational, meaning that extinction is a process of disrupted sociocultural relations, instead of a singular event (Chrulew et al.); extinction is conceived of as something of the past, present and future: our present views of the past affect visions of the future, mostly in terms of conservation (Jørgenson). This means that extinction is conceived of as non-linear but transgressive, as something of the past, present and future.

This reframing of extinction as non-linear is important, since linear time is unable to appropriately engage with extinction and climate change. Therefore, philosopher Michelle Bastian pleas for the rethinking of telling time: away from linearity and towards ways of coordinating actions to the world (24). She argues that our current paradigm of telling time does not represent the urgency of environmental changes, but instead emphasises continuity and similarity across all moments, projecting an empty and unending future (33). According to Bastian, we need 'new clocks', to be able to be in synch with environmental catastrophes: countercurrents that envision and emphasise alternative ways of being in time. Such new devices are necessary to intervene and transform our understandings and experiences of relationality (37). This entails a shift towards heterogeneity and relationality, emphasising other virtual and potential currents that are actualising in the periphery of the present. I propose and analyse *Depot* to be such a 'new clock'.

***Depot*: Preservation and Stillness**

Depot opens with a medium close-up of a jar containing a preserved coral with a tag by Naturalis, amidst other jars of different sizes. The viewer therefore assumes that the setting is Naturalis' depot. The stilled image lasts eight seconds, accompanied by slight background noise, seemingly produced by lamps and environment controlling technologies, confirming the suspicion of the setting. The camera then cuts to another medium close-up of jars of different sizes. As no jar is centralised in the shot, the viewer is able to identify part of an octopus leg and part of a crustacean, but taxonomic tags are out of sight. This stilled image also lasts for eight seconds. Another cut follows, to a medium close-up of jars of different sizes, but identification is obscured through dark lighting, except for one jar containing a giant tiger shrimp. After eight seconds of this stilled image, the video cuts to a close-up of part of a jar containing a horseshoe crab, while other jars are blurred from vision. After four seconds, there is a cut to a stilled close-up of a jar with part of an octopus, stuck to the inside of the jar, making the suction cups visible.

At thirty seconds, the male voice-over starts: "He enters the storage room. In the corner he finds a notebook. He opens it to the first page. Seastar, sealily, seabiscuit, seacucumber, seahorse, sealion, seaunicorn, seacow, seadragon." During this meditative recitation by the actor who remains off-camera during the whole film, the camera cuts to a close-up of blurred jars with coral; a stilled image lasting for almost twenty seconds before cutting to an extreme close-up of a jar filled with sea stars, again a stilled image that lasts for almost fifteen seconds. This sequence of stilled images, which appear to be photographs, is disrupted by a medium close-up of jars showing a hand holding a smaller jar with a baby turtle, placing this in front of the others. The baby turtle moves inside of the jar for a few seconds, but the image becomes still when the specimen inside no longer moves due to the intervention.

The first ninety seconds are indicative of the tension between stillness and movement in *Depot*, which for a large part consists of stilled/delayed images of marine animals in formaldehyde and alcohol jars, lasting for several seconds. This produces two things. Firstly, it plays with the ontological question of film, in its apparent distinction from photography, moving between the stillness of the photograph and the movement of the film as a whole. Secondly, it creates the visual analogy of cinema as preservation/taxidermy and preservation/taxidermy as cinema. According to film theorist Mary Ann Doane, the difference between photography and film has historically been the difference between fixing a moment by photography and producing a record of time by cinema, the latter making duration archivable (22). Contrary to photography, film creates the illusion of movement, eliminating the stillness of photography associated with death (Barthes). Photography is an instant production of history of the moment, killing the present, and typified as violent act of detachment from relations beyond the frame.

This tension of the still photograph—'killing' the present to freeze a moment for eternity—relates it both materially and thematically to the natural history museum and its practice of preservation/taxidermy for display or research. Like the photograph, which mechanically preserves a moment of life stopped and held in perpetuity, the preserved animal is embalmed in time and becomes a marker for both their species and endangerment or extinction history. This practice disguises that animals are extracted, dehistoricized and systematized into a seemingly neutral taxonomy, actually functioning as part of imperial ideology (Huggan 46). The assembled jars in *Depot* read as 'this was now', as its mode of display in the natural history museum relies on the petrification of the animal body with a mimesis of livingness. Using film to record preserved animals, a doubling of recording/stilling of reality and its bodies is created.

In producing animal death by embalming, subjects become both scientific and aesthetic objects. This tension between objectification and aestheticism is also present in *Depot*, yet I find it an example of how taxidermy as specimen of 'pure nature' or scientific objectivity is folded by representing it through another visual form. By using preserved animals as subjects, Tan visually investigates the way in which cinema reanimates both the dead and the living and examines the indiscernible boundary between the two. As film theorist Laura Mulvey, argues, the dead merge with the living and movement merges with stillness when cinema projects dead bodies (101). By using the stilled image, or the freeze-frame, duration is imposed on these animals that were and are preserved as objects to be stored and frozen in time, through which the natural rotting process is—seemingly—eternally halted, similar to the photographic image.

Art historian Hanneke Grootenboer calls Tan's technique which produces stillness as motion the 'filmed photograph' or 'stilled film', comparing it to a painting set in motion (27). This hybridity of stillness and motion in Tan's work arguably creates a new modality inviting the viewer not to interpret but to think. Thus pensiveness can be situated in the context of cinema as a form of thinking. According to Mulvey, this produces a 'pensive spectator' who can reflect on the cinema, as pensive images show the past-ness of film and the inseparability of stillness from movement and flow, blending different kinds of time by stretching the images into new dimensions of time and space (195). Through the arrested image, cinematographic time is stopped and the past of the photograph is blended with the present of the cinema. I argue that *Depot* creates pensive images, which invite experiences of time through stillness as motion. Through this, I believe *Depot* envisions alternative extinction temporalities.

The stilled image producing a pensive image/spectator creates a new clock as alternative to rationalized clock time and its structuring ideology. In pensive images, the pensive spectator is able to see the presence of the past. It invites viewers to see the specimens as outside of assigned eternal representation, as temporal creatures, even in death. Through duration and time reorientation, the specimens refer not only to a former time or history, but move within time. *Depot*'s stilled images visualise inorganic, past life with a continuing decaying presence, gesturing to the unknowability of that world, that thwarts the logic of action and linear narrative of these animals as new clock.

Depot: Singularity and Movement

By using tracking shots, Tan gives movement and duration to the specimens, and through careful framing, also gives them singularity. At two minutes, the first of many slow tracking shots of one of the marine animals appears. After the voice-over's list of aquatic animal categorisations, there is a halt before he says 'sea urchin', which has been prefaced by one stilled image of sea urchins. After twenty seconds of a close-up of these sea urchins, there is an extreme close-up of one of them. Whereas it is another seemingly stilled image, there is movement visible in the fluid: tiny dust particles floating around in the jar. This is again observed in the next shot, which is an extreme-close up of the spikes of a sea urchin, but then invisible in the next shot, which is an extreme close-up of the sea urchin's mouth. The viewer is left to question whether the earlier stilled images were truly that, or only seemingly, having watched movement as stillness. The focus on the details and different body parts of the aquatic animals—frequently showing their faces if they have them or other body parts, realising a form of intimacy between the viewer and viewed animals—gives them a form of subjectivity, without disavowing their deaths. These techniques question the eternal past in which these animals are placed as still and fixed.

After the stilled images of sea urchins, a slow and smooth tracking shot of them follows, resembling the movement of water. This shot of several seconds is disturbed by the second human hand we see in *Depot*, intervening in the meditative images. The hand cleans the outside of a jar, containing a crab, with a cloth, spinning the jar around to be able to do so, with a soft sound of falling rain accompanying the background audio track. The camera cuts to an extreme close-up of the top of the jar, revealing crab legs and the liquid surface. The ripples in the surface of the fluid, caused by human movement, create an effect as if moving in an oceanic environment outside of the depot. The camera slowly moves in a downward spiral around the jar, revealing two crabs stacked together below the liquid surface. This visually invites the contemplation of unknown life beyond the surface of the water.

Aside from tracking shots of individual specimens—mostly moving horizontally, sometimes vertically—there are several tracking shots of both assembled jars and of taxidermied fish and skeletons arranged from small to big in the storage room. These are mostly medium shots, their tags unreadable, and as they are assembled together, not all bodies are wholly inside the frame. Unlike what a viewer might expect from a depot, the lighting in these shots obscures parts of the frame. This creates the illusion of travelling down deeper sea depths which disables the viewer to fully identify the framed animals. This is an alienating experience as the viewer is accustomed to the camera serving a surveilling/recording purpose—especially in nature and wildlife documentaries—by projecting light and enforcing proximity with the intent of knowability. In the context of the natural history museum, literary scholar Dominic O'Key illuminatingly calls this mode of human-animal gaze mediation the fixity of the anthroponormative gaze (643).

Neither of the used techniques provides an overview shot, instead Tan uses (extreme) close-ups, mostly face-level and low angles, combined with obscure lighting. This point of view visually undermines the hierarchical relation between the viewer and viewed. It implicates that the specimens, as part of an archive, visually escape the viewer, resisting their possible placement into a totalising framework of knowledge. Additionally, inherent to the camera frame as opposed to the frame of a painting, the camera cuts from a larger field, which "implicitly acknowledges the existence of a larger world beyond the frame" (Butler 75). Thus, although the choice of medium is in danger of reinforcing visual animal objectification, it also aids the acknowledgement of lifeworlds of the specimens beyond the frame.

Through these cinematic techniques, Tan visually goes against ocean imaginaries and their visual language as reproduced by natural history museums, including their projections of ocean temporality as eternal and constant. Culturally, the sea functions as a trope of boundlessness, encouraging humans to treat it as an "inexhaustible storehouse of goods" (Yaeger 535). In terms of temporality, the ocean is popularly conceived of as eternal—past, present and future—and vast (Rozwadowski 521). Due to scale, the ocean is coded as impersonal, since knowledge of the ocean relies on technology because of its inaccessibility to humans, which as a result necessitates a disembodied experience of the examined object. This means that ocean temporality is perceived an antithesis to the linear progressive temporality on land. *Depot* reframes this ocean temporality through a focus on specimen movement and extinction, highlighting the material effects of maritime extraction of individual specimens, impacting species and ecosystems.

The imaginaries of the sea as eternal, lawless and boundless is harmful for several reasons. Firstly, it fails to incorporate non-human elements (Steinberg); and secondly, it enables destruction of the maritime industry with monetary instead of non-human interests (Yaeger). It also fails to include the ocean's changing natural, geological, evolutionary and environmental history, as humans are currently changing the structures of marine ecosystems through overfishing and climate change altering ocean chemistry (Rozwadowski). Although the ocean is viewed as a commons—a collectively owned space that serves both national and international interests—Yaeger states that maritime preservation and management is in the interest of capitalism (525). This has been recently re-emphasized through the High Seas Treaty (2023) that under the banner of biodiversity conservation prioritizes equal profits of genetic material resource extraction—both in the present and future—shared by the Global North and South.

Ocean imaginaries are historically and in the contemporary intertwined with capitalist and imperialist motives, motivated by the promise of abundance and extraction wealth of living and non-living resources. The 19th century motive for exploring the ocean and 'deep ocean' were not just scientific, but according to

Rozwadowksi mostly political and economical, with the sea described as a largely unexplored 'frontier' (522). In the contemporary, technology that enables disembodied, distant seeing and surveilling is vital to the imperial expanding human control over the ocean. This involves underwater remote sensing and autonomous marine robots, "translating immense marine spaces into functional, measurable, or geographically specific knowledge", as expanding maps (Ratté 141, 144-45).

Iterating the ocean imaginary of abundance, the visibility of fish in wildlife documentaries has often led to the massification of fish on screen. According to film theorist Laura McMahon, this massification repeats a representational trope of animal life as an anonymous mass, which becomes almost abstract through the sheer abundance in fish representation. She flags this type of fish representation as a monstrous horde of anonymous animality to be tamed as harvestable biomass (147), which visually reproduces an indifference to fish as singular beings. McMahon's argument demonstrates the tension and difficulty in representing marine animals as worthy of life: either as unknown masses that remain unknown due to their invisibility, or as singular beings that are loved due to their high visibility. The latter risks an over-exposition in danger of anthropomorphism, repeating scientific thingification or producing individual fetishization as part of liberal ideology with commodification potential.

This tension of massification and singularity of marine animals, visualized through the camera, is one of the double binds of *Depot*: on the one hand, there is hardly any informational entry into the screened animals, due to which the marine animals in the film installation forego their status as harvestable biomass, in this case as knowledge objects. On the other hand, *Depot* nonetheless utilises dead animals that are filed, displayed and stored as natural history objects and therefore reproduces that status; the film is not wholly able to escape the massification volume and architecture of the depot. The historical and contemporary conception of the sea as bountiful resource of knowledge and goods is testified by the enormous size of the 'wet' collections in natural history museums, with marine animals of the same species frequently lumped together in jars. The jars in *Depot* continue to function as small ocean laboratories that objectify these animals.

Nonetheless, I argue that Tan is able to fold both the anthroponormative gaze and surveillance technology through framing of the specimens as singularities. Additionally, fetishization of the individual is folded due to the obscured framing and lighting of the animals, due to which they remain largely ungraspable. Individualism is also subverted through the continual cuts to medium shots in the film, with several animals in them that are mostly obscured, instead of focusing on one animal throughout the film. Through this framing, the camera does not invite an imperial projection of future imaginings onto the specimens, but examines the ruin of techno-capitalist-imperialist oceanic explorations. *Depot* shows the opposite of endless regeneration of marine animals and therefore provides a new imaginary with an anti-imperial gaze of the ocean.

Depot: **Memory, the Archive and Temporality**

So far, I have focused on marine animals and the duration and temporalities they are given through cinematic techniques by Tan. Although humans are hardly within the frame of the *Depot*, I argue that it thematizes human histories in several ways. As the ocean imaginaries and contemporary human-ocean relations that are identified in Blue Humanities scholarship demonstrate, humans are present through disembodiment and mediated technologies, and their traces in the form of pollution, climate change and mass extinction. It could be argued that Tan made a film installation about humans and their conceptions and objectification of aquatic animals and their habitats. With its off-screen voice-over, the video is related to the human experience of time, as the material registration of objects that are the visual companions of the voice-over measuring their enduring existence against the time of the human subject, functioning as what film theorist Alison Butler helpfully terms 'memory objects' (77).

In *Depot*, Butler's memory objects are preserved animals. Due to the materiality of preserved animals, they are evidence of human colonial histories of extermination, testimonials of the hunt for (now) endangered animals, in order to present and preserve them. *Depot* explicitly explores the place of humans in oceanic mass extinction through the voice-over, displacing the objectivity of the specimens. As film theorist Matilda Mroz states, sometimes there is a fluid relation between image and voice-over, but when there is not, it creates two temporal rhythms (3). In *Depot*, the voice-over adds another temporality to the durations already evoked, through both cultural and personal memory. Memory as temporality moves through all the tenses, destabilizing the linear clock to instead coordinating oneself to the world according to recounted embodiment and experience.

The voice-over is an aspect of the soundtrack associated with narrative (Garwood 102), and in *Depot*, the voice-over states the setting ("He enters the storage room"), the possible contextualization of the setting as physical and discursive archive (the notebook and alphabetical list of marine animals), which is juxtaposed by the voice-over's associations triggered by this list. Halting before pronouncing "Sea urchin", after a short pause he continues: "Like blind old warriors, they slowly and patiently transgress the ocean floor. As a child he once accidentally stood on one. Just like a hedgehog's, the spines were sharp as needles, but they were also brittle and snapped off, after lodging themselves underneath the skin." This digression brings out the tension in the video and its subject matter: the immersive experience of time through interventions of memory in perception that rubs against the chronological and eternal time that the natural history museum implies and enforces. The list and childhood memory produce a negotiation of the memory objects. The specimens are prepared for eternity, yet the camera and voice-over meander over these specimens as beings that participate(d) in a shared world that allows them to partly escape the time and space they are allocated in the museum. The viewer is offered an escape from linear time into an experience of time and space that includes specimens beyond their taxonomical categorisation.

Although most parts of the video are unaccompanied by the voice-over, when there it provides an alternative narrative to the natural history museum information signs. As a child, the man used to dream about the sea and feel like "he could breathe there"; he used to go snorkelling with his father who wore spectacles under his suction cup, and once when he went snorkelling his legs got caught in kelp, he thought he would drown. Next to subjective memories, the narrator also offers cultural, collective memories of certain specimens across cultures that live(d) in proximity with those animals. He states: "The ancient Greeks called the paper nautilus the sailor of the sea". After a pause, the narrator states not only the cultural name and some scientific information, but a personal experience with a paper nautilus: "he once found a whole one, perfect and glistening white, larger than his own hand".

Another example of the cultural mark of one of the aquatic animals in the depot is that of the horseshoe crab: "There is something ancient and alien about horseshoe crabs. For the Japanese, they are reborn samurai warriors who sacrifice their lives in battle". These parts of the voice-over stand in strong contrast with the acknowledged mediation in which he describes his current interaction with the world and these aquatic animals: "Glass. He realizes that he sees the world through glass. Grimy and mottled and tinted windows. The glass of his reading glasses, the looking-glass, the magnifying glass, the lens of the camera, these jars and files". This description evokes not necessarily a disembodied mediation, but the sense of an inability to form a direct relation with the world and animals that world it. There is no direct access to these animals, but through older cultural narratives and a scientific framework, except for some of the recounted memories.

Although the voice-over script is poetic and avoids a straightforward narrative, the narrator does offer ruminations about why human-ocean relations have become increasingly fraught. Near the end of his voice-over he states: "Natural history came of age in the 19th century, the golden age of exploration and expedition, a time when maps lost all their blank spaces, time and space expanded. And together with all that forward thinking swelled the insatiable desire to amass, collect, to catalogue and collate, to measure and to circumscribe, to describe, to own, to conquer". He hints at the role of capitalism in this disrupted relation, which has been part of human-ocean relations for so long that the voice-over does not specify but leaves the example of narwhal harvesting within the realm of myth: "The horn of a unicorn was worth more than gold. But such a horn was in fact the tusk of a narwhal, the unicorn of the sea. In powdered form, the tusk was prized as an antidote for poison and, indeed, for melancholy". What is left after maritime extraction are these memory objects within the depot, making the link between photography/cinema and preservation/specimen explicit, almost in an attempt to time travel back: "He finds himself surrounded by these sad messages in bottles which he tries to read and interpret. Like photographs they speak firs of death and only after that of what they once were".

The result of ocean extraction and extinction is not only evidenced by the abundance of collected dead animals, but also in their own habitats: "In his childhood memories, everything stays the same, but as a grown man, he returned after many years only to find the same reef of his childhood stripped bare and barren, haunted and deserted like a graveyard". Opposed to ocean imaginaries and the natural history museum, the environmental world has not been stilled or eternalised. The eternal presence of specimens in the natural history museum is traded with the present and future absence of these specimens in their natural habitats; life is traded for death for the sake of knowability, scientific research, visibility, aesthetics and monetary gain. The narrator finishes his narrative with one final memory: "He remembers now the ferry crossing, sitting on deck in the wind and sun, and looking out across the bay. 'Blowers' they were called, white fountains of water shooting across the calm waters of the bay, a regular occurrence that no one paid much attention to. Only now he realizes, that this must have been whales, spouting as they came up for air".

By interlacing the voice-over of the ocean and the creatures that live and make the ocean with both childhood and collective memories of some of the specimens, *Depot* counters the way in which voice-over is usually employed in wildlife documentaries. Wildlife documentaries, like natural history museums, aim to make animals transparent and knowable through mediated technologies. As such, their voice-overs are often characterised by anthropomorphically projected psychology onto animals (McMahon 7). This is reversed in *Depot*, as the taxonomical drive of the natural history museum is undercut by the voice-over. The voice-over distorts by withholding information about animals onscreen, he does not describe the images or explain them, subverting the informative and educational framing of conventional wildlife film. Due to the juxtaposition of the voice-over and visuals, *Depot* asks the viewer to imagine the animals projected on screen beyond their eternal captivity in the natural history museum and wildlife documentary tropes.

Through memory, all times—past, present, future—co-exist, which therefore forms a layer of temporality that is heterogeneous and a crucial aspect of understanding *Depot* as a new clock. This experience of non-linear time is emphasized through the juxtaposition of the narrator's vivid memories with the images of the dead animals in the natural history museum context. The monologue goes against the desire to collect them (as physical objects nor for scientific information). The combination of stilling and the voice-over thus create what philosopher Gilles Deleuze terms 'time-images' in *Depot.* Instead of being subordinate to movement, the film installation shows a direct image of time which opens up the past as in motion (169). A key factor of the time-image is the dissolution of chronology and the separation between past, present and future, opening up time, which means that "there is no present which is not haunted by a past and future" (Deleuze 38). Memory plays a key role in the time-image, as perception is related to memory instead of action in this type of cinema. Importantly, the time-image in *Depot* as transgressive time tenses invites explorations of colonial history not as closed off but as part of the colonial present, vital to conceptualising extinction temporalities.

The time-image makes tangible that perception is continually invaded by memory, which produces a nonlinear temporality, defining duration not as succession but coexistence. Linearity of time and knowledge of the ocean as capitalist and imperialist endeavour is scrutinised by the voice-over, as it presents marine animals as part of human histories before/aside from their Enlightenment scientific discovery and use. Memories explore and rework the past, which offers a productive way of visualising and experiencing nonhuman extinction through non-linearity, as urged by Bastian and Jørgenson. These memories are an exploration of relational worlds with aquatic animals, impossible to rewind, but to be reworked to think and act differently in the present and future. This includes the acknowledgement of histories and ongoing practices of imperialism and extractivism as part of scientific narratives that continue to shape human-animal lifeworlds and the necessity to rework these relations through inseparable social and environmental justice.

Haunting the Archive and Decolonising Linear Time

After the memory about 'blowers' (whales), there follows a break, followed by a different type of space and audio track: large skeletons accompanied by wind instruments playing music that resembles whale song. This second part opens with a close-up of a hook holding something grey, then cuts to another hook holding part of a skeleton and another one, and to a piece of wire holding up part of a skeleton. In this part, the camera cuts to parts of skeletons and jaws of bigger—unidentified—marine animals. Although the framing and lighting of the animals is similar to the first part—mostly in close-up obscuring a totalising view of them—the camera movement is different, as is the editing. The cuts are faster than in the first part and for most of this part, the camera seems handheld and slowly tracks from left to right, up and down skeletons.

As in the first part of *Depot*, there is a dynamism between stillness and movement in time. Stillness is observed as the objects are skeletons, yet movement is formally suggested through the audio track and camera movements. The camera frames the bones from low angles and often up close, due to which it becomes hard for the viewer to discern where one skeleton begins or ends. Due to the way in which these skeletons are displayed next to each other and without fleshy substance, these shots, even when focusing on one skeleton, show multiple skeletons at once, making their boundaries illegible for the viewer. Even more so, as some of the skeletons are incomplete or consist of one or a few bones. Next to this, the camera is gently and slowly swaying, suggesting firstly, that the camera haunts while moving ghostlike; and secondly, that it is swimming among the skeletons, giving the most lifeless creatures of the film a form of agency beyond the scientific and visible world.

I argue that this haunting is double: it is a formal haunting of cinema that makes inanimate images come alive in film projection, and it is the haunting of all the dead animals that make up the natural history marine collection. These hauntings reinforce each other: through the film installation, these animals are given new life outside of the depot, but are also testimonies to the mass killings that have led to their death, species endangerment and extinction. Haunting is both an aspect of photography and of cinema, as the photograph as index haunts the blurred boundary between life and death through its embalming qualities that I mentioned above. The image with an index is haunted by its object, put into real connection with it as it is assurance of existence (Doane 94), as well as by its aspiration to presence. As characteristic of cinema, being able to show a past as present duration, the threshold between the spaces of life and death becomes uncertain, blurring the boundaries of the rational and supernatural, of the animate and inanimate (Mulvey 37).

Material traces of the past create the immaterial presence of the dead that haunt memory in cinema. In *Depot* the specimens are forced into this position: they have been indexed by taxonomy and preservation and are now double indexes through the installation. They have been forced into visibility through death, with the aim to understand and preserve knowledge of biological life through their death. Mulvey discusses, similar to Doane, that ruins, like photographs, form an imprint left by original objects, bringing with it the possibility of the return of the repressed and presence of the dead (106). The haunting quality of bringing to life a past moment or person as characteristic of cinema, made phantoms popular subjects in early cinema, arguably repeated and reflected throughout *Depot*. These animals' bodies and histories recede into the past and form traces of a world marked by their absence due to ecological destruction and extinction, bearing witness to the reality of their once presence. As such, *Depot* intermingles the past and present, preserving the dead as reanimated stillness and as ghosts. The scientific specimens become haunters, disassembling our order of the natural world and primacy of rational/scientific that guards the border of death/object.

In *Depot,* the specimens are not reflecting but making a world beyond taxonomy as part of colonial/scientific epistemologies. The aquatic animals are able to draw together worlds that have been desynchronised and detemporalised from each other through their mass killings, extraction and objectification. I therefore argue that heterogeneous temporalities have a decolonising potential of experience and thought offered by artworks such as *Depot*. As media and political theorist Ariella Aisha Azoulay argues, colonisation does not only consist of land, but also of time. What she terms 'imperial temporality' is an ideology that values preservation of the past and linear progress (75). Imperial institutions such as museums and collections are material evidence of past and ongoing colonialism and the destruction of shared worlds that make museum objects out of artefacts, animals and humans (and their remains).

Azoulay's concept of the 'shutter' in useful in this respect, as it illuminates the way in which the camera operates to (re)produce imperial temporality, as well as visual and physical extraction. The shutter points towards the extractive nature, regardless of context, of both museums and archives, as well as the camera itself (2). The development of the camera coincided with the rise of nationalism and imperialism and was employed to make imperial world destruction visible and acceptable, and legitimised the world's reconstruction on imperial terms (7). Although Azoulay exclusively theorizes the concept in the context of human lives and cultures, *Depot* demonstrates that this concept could and should be extended into the realm of animal extinction, encompassing both human and non-human destruction and reconstruction.

My analysis of *Depot* demonstrates that the shutter as concept is also useful in dialogue with the natural history museum, to better understand its negotiation of imperial source material and medium. Azoulay states that the camera enabled the "violence of forcing everything to be shown and exhibited to the gaze" (5), which includes the practice and purpose of natural history. The imperial regime of exhibition and enforced visibility of animals as ahistorical objects themselves but testimonies of progressive human knowledge, carries on till this day. As *Depot* suggests, this also leads to the destruction and extinction of animals and reduces them to memories. In the case of aquatic animals in natural history or zoological museums, the question of 'unlearning imperialism', as *Depot* puts forward, then might consist of reinventing them not as detached objects whose representation becomes epistemologically authoritative through assumed objectivity, but through temporality that divides the shutter imposed on them.

Conclusion

In this paper I have argued that Tan uses film to criticise the violence of killing and embalming aquatic animals both on the level of the image and natural history museum object. However, there is a limit to this: these animals are dead and were most probably killed for scientific or display purposes; hence Tan's use of stillness and movement lays bare the tension of these aquatic animals' temporalities in terms of extinction. There is an openness of time, to a degree: the film presents no strict chronology of time, neither is the museum object (as photograph or image) locked into one mode of time. Instead, in *Depot* all three time tenses of past, present and future co-exist, creating heterogeneous extinction temporalities through both image and audio that rework harmful ocean imaginaries. Through Tan's use of the medium, the video's pensive and time-images conceptually reflect the tension of the ethics involved in animal specimen display and its history, reimagining and proposing a future in which the past is rediscovered and explored. In examining extinction temporalities, this means a consistent focus on its entanglement with histories and ongoing practices of imperialism and extractivism. The reworking of the past is directed at the future, which is all the more urgent as there is a finiteness to the photographic image, as there is to mass extinction. The singular and generational deaths cannot be reversed except through memory. Explorations of the past and future in the present through artworks such as *Depot* might lead to different ideas about non-human extinction and the place of personal human histories and the roles of colonialism and capitalism.

Next to this, I have demonstrated that it is vital to garner alternative ways that acknowledge the importance of animal lives that does not rely on their visibility and knowability which ultimately leads to further exploitation and killing (Ratté, Yaeger), but recognizes that invisibility can also mean anti-colonial resistance to the imperial gaze that craves transparency for dominance through imperial tools such as the camera and museum display. I believe *Depot* demonstrates an alternative way of visualizing marine animals that experiments with the invisibility or lack of visibility—through partial framing of animals, through partial lighting and therefore obscurity, by not giving orderly overview shots of depots and the animals arranged together in one shot—and therefore shows an alternative way to imagine human-animal relations needed in the natural history museum and beyond. This is necessary not only to reshape conceptual human-animal hierarchies away from an imperial, dominant gaze, but also crucial as a strategy to include invisible extinction and prevent further developments of the blue frontier.

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Facing Depletion.
Artworks for an Epistemological Shift in the Collapse Era

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Abstract

This article first reports a victory of technosolutionism over the other alternatives, the degrowth for instance, to the ongoing collapse (species extinction, ecosystems depletion...). The victory is considered double: extraction can continue to increase (quantity and scope) and the devices made by technoscience are accepted as a solution to the problems caused by intensive exploitation (which they also increase). Exploitation is extended, following Achille Mbembé's proposal, to humans, non-human animals, and the earth (in a geological sense), retaining the terms fracturing, extraction, depletion. Four works are analyzed as epistemological shifts to technosolutionism. David Claerbout's *The Pure Necessity* (2016) is an animated cartoon of animals with a streamlined behavior depicted with the graphic style of Disney. The complex interlocking of eras, styles, behaviors (human and non-human) is envisaged as resistance to fracking and exploitation. *Animal Cinema* (2017) by Emilio Vavarella is a short film made from rushes produced by non-human animals. It is emphasized that the frugal production method opposes the spectacular logics of big-budget animal reporting. It adopts the animal point of view while respecting their means of production. It is also seductive by a fluid and hypnotizing editing more easily accessible to humans. Emilio Vavarella's *Amazon's Cabinet of Curiosity* (2019) is an installation with a strict protocol: the artist asks what he should order to make an artistic production. He then buys each suggestion until his budget is exhausted. By its absence, the commercial behavior of the so-called intelligent device is underlined. The artist also resists fracturing and exploitation by reducing himself to a demand. Finally, *She Was Called Petra* (2020) by myself is a multi-media installation. In this one, language is re-interrogated and a zone of contact is set up to cohabit with a hybrid presence.

Keywords: David Claerbout, Emilio Vavarella, contemporary art, collapse era, smart devices, epistemological shift.

Resumen

Este artículo da cuenta en primer lugar de una victoria del tecnosolucionismo frente a otras alternativas al colapso en curso (extinción de especies, agotamiento de ecosistemas...). La victoria se considera doble: la extracción puede seguir aumentando (en cantidad y alcance) y los dispositivos fabricados por la tecnociencia se aceptan como solución a los problemas causados por la explotación intensiva (que también requieren). La explotación se extiende, siguiendo la propuesta de Achille Mbembé, a los seres humanos, los animales no humanos y la tierra (en sentido geológico), conservando los términos fracturación, extracción, agotamiento. Se analizan cuatro obras como giros epistemológicos hacia el tecnosolucionismo. *The Pure Necessity* (2016), de David Claerbout, es una caricatura de animales con un estilo gráfico similar al de Disney. El complejo entrelazamiento de épocas, estilos, comportamientos (humanos y no humanos) se vislumbra como resistencia al *fracking* y la explotación. *Animal Cinema* (2017) de Emilio Vavarella es un cortometraje realizado a partir de juncos producidos por animales no humanos. Se hace hincapié en que el frugal método de producción se opone a la lógica espectacular de los reportajes sobre animales de gran presupuesto. Adopta el punto de vista de los animales respetando sus medios de producción. También resulta atractivo por su montaje fluido e hipnótico, más accesible a los humanos. *Amazon's Cabinet of Curiosity* (2019), de Emilio Vavarella, es una instalación con un estricto protocolo: el artista pregunta qué debería encargar para realizar una producción artística. Luego compra cada sugerencia hasta agotar su presupuesto. La fuerte retracción subraya el comportamiento comercial del llamado dispositivo inteligente. El artista también se resiste al *fracking* y a la explotación reduciéndose a una demanda. Por último, *She Was Called Petra* (2020), de mi autoría, es una instalación multimedia. En ella se reinterroga el lenguaje y se crea una zona de contacto/intercambio para cohabitar y pensar en una presencia híbrida.

Palabras clave: David Claerbout, Emilio Vavarella, arte contemporáneo, era del colapso, dispositivos inteligentes, cambio epistemológico.

Introduction

In 2018, Alexa, Amazon's "smart" Internet-connected speakerphone, started laughing unexpectedly in several homes, notably when owners went to their kitchen at night. These disturbing situations were reported in various newspapers (Koerber; Fingas; Moscaritolo). Could this be an allegory of the so-called intelligent devices victory over the earth/living?

Better still, Alexa's laughter could be interpreted as a double victory: that of the successful extension of exploitation by extractivist companies and that of the acceptance of technosolutionism (Morozov) as a panacea by a majority of individuals. Indeed, contemporary capitalism, called surveillance capitalism by Shoshana Zuboff (Zuboff, *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism*), has succeeded in creating value with one more element, personal data, which serves as raw material for a number of companies, mainly GAFAMs, which then sell it, after processing, to a multitude of third parties and partners. Moreover, contemporary technologies, including the so-called Internet of Things, are responsible for the current depletion of raw materials (Bonneuil et Fressoz)—especially through the work of extracting, storing and processing personal data. Simultaneously, these same technologies claim to be a solution. This old aporia seems to be well disseminated and the subterfuge works since the exploitation is more and more massive and diversified, and the production of machine-solutions is exponential.

Alexa thus doubly threatens the earth-system by finding new resources to exploit and new justifications for ever more intensive production in the age of collapse (species extinction and resource depletion).

In the face of Alexa's laughter, contemporary artists are exploring the relationships among machines, humans, non-humans and the earth in order to provoke epistemological shifts that will perhaps unravel the ideology at work behind the double victory of reinforced extraction and production. The aim of this article is to specify the extension of extraction in the collapse era and to explore some epistemological shifts provoked by some contemporary artworks.

This community of artists is large and developing. A selection therefore had to be made for this paper. Four productions will be presented and analyzed. Each one approaches the relationship among machine/human/non-human from various angle. This diversity will allow to draw up a first panorama for a possible later study. Moreover, my position as an artist-researcher brings me to include a personal work in the corpus and to think, notably with this last one, the epistemological shifts suggested by the studied artistic practices and their effects on the extension and the increase of the extraction and the production in the collapse era.

In order to unfold this reflection, two main parts will structure this article. In the first part, I will specify the problem and explain the idea of extraction and production apply to the collapse era. The second part will examine the productions and their effects from different perspectives: David Claerbout's *The Pure Necessity* will allow to think with the exploration of old animal representation in popular culture; Emilio Vavarela's *Animal Cinema* will look at non-human from the perspective of Animals and new media; Vavarela's *Amazon's Cabinet of Curiosities* will be a reflection between the Human and smart devices; finally *She Was Called Petra* by myself, will look at Human, non-human and smart devices relationship.

Extending Extraction in the Collapse Era

In this first part, I will return to what I have proposed to call a double victory. What makes it possible to say that exploitation has been extended and that technosolutionism has been accepted, resulting in the perpetuation of productivism? I will also seek to identify several notions that will be reused in the second part, devoted to the analysis of artworks.

Extending Extraction

The extraction and exploitation of humans, non-humans and the earth (in its geological dimension) are generally treated and considered separately (see Casilli; Campagne; Parenti and Moore; Di Muzio; Grusin; Barua; Bardi). The “raw materials” are indeed so different that many attempts have resulted in comparisons that are at best hazardous, at worst very problematic (the Modern link between animal and machine for instance). However, recent writings have made it possible to bring together these multiple exploited entities (especially in the sense of mining) in a more convincing manner, by using terms with broader meanings. Among these authors, Achille Mbembé, in one of his recent works, *Brutalisme* (2020), proposes a stimulating and effective thought in this regard. It will be used as a framework in the analysis of the works in this article:

> If [...] humanity has been transformed into a geological force, then we can no longer speak of history as such. All history is now [...] geohistory, including the history of power. By brutalism, I am therefore referring to the process by which power as a geomorphic force is now constituted, expressed, reconfigured, acted upon and reproduced through fracturing and cracking. [...]

> By means of these political techniques that are fracturing and fissuring, power recreates not only the human, but species, truly. The material it is trying to (re)shape or transform into new species is treated in a similar way to the way rocks and shales are blasted to extract gas and energy. Seen from this angle, the function of contemporary powers is therefore, more than ever, to make extraction possible. This requires an intensification of repression. The drilling of bodies and minds is part of it. [...]
>
> To the logics of fracturing and fissuring, we must now add those of exhaustion and depletion. Once again, fracturing, fissuring and depletion do not only concern resources, but also living bodies exposed to physical exhaustion and to all sorts of biological risks that are sometimes invisible [...] Reduced to a slick and a surface, it is the whole of the living world that is subject to seismic threats. It is this dialectic of demolition and "destructive creation" insofar as it targets the bodies, nerves, blood and brains of humans as well as the bowels of time and the Earth that is at the heart of the following reflections. (Mbembe, *Brutalisme* 9-11)

If Achille Mbembé relies on the slave trade of modernity to explain the contemporaneity and postulates that the contemporary era is marked by the "becoming-Negro" (Mbembe, *Critique de la raison nègre*) of humanity, it seems to me that other comparisons and readings can be added to his statement.

Indeed, humans considered as surfaces, are imagined without interiorities. Since the advent of behavioral psychology, internal psychic processes are considered as unknowable, as a black box. The only thing of interest in this approach is therefore based on external behaviors and manifestations. Thus, the human being, over time, has lost its depth to be reduced to a surface, an observable and quantifiable expanse. This approach has become widespread and its concepts widely accepted. Moreover, this approach has been coupled with cybernetics and the digitization of the world, to the point of considering the brain as an information processing system (Epstein) and reality as completely measurable and quantifiable (Rouvroy et Berns, "Le nouveau pouvoir statistique"; Rouvroy et Berns, "Gouvernementalité algorithmique et perspectives d'émancipation"). With this process, the equivalence between exploitable entities has been extended. Humans (especially subordinates) are no longer very different from shale deposits, diamond mines, cattle and sheep (for the notion of subordinates, see in particular Benerjee and Wouters). The whole has been fractured to become extractable. All that remains are masses, flows, energies, so many raw materials to be exploited.

In addition to this equivalence, there are more and more important areas of exploitation, as I mentioned before. One of them is the surveillance of human behavior on networks (Internet, telephony, gps...). Shoshana Zuboff makes an exemplary and complete analysis in *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism:*

> III. What Is Surveillance Capitalism?
> Surveillance capitalism unilaterally claims human experience as free raw material for translation into behavioral data. Although some of this data are applied to product or service improvement, the rest are declared as a proprietary *behavioral surplus*, fed into advanced manufacturing processes known as "machine intelligence", and fabricated into prediction products that anticipate what you will do now, soon, and later. Finally, these prediction products are traded in a new kind of marketplace for behavioral predictions that I call behavioral futures markets. Surveillance capitalists have grown immensely wealthy from these trading operations, for many companies

> are eager to lay bets on our future behavior. (Zuboff, *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism* 15)

Regarding the mining process, as Zuboff notes, mining and interpreting human behavior has become the main source of revenue for the Internet giants (led by Google, Amazon, Facebook and Microsoft). And behavior mining is used not only to improve logic bots, but more importantly to predict future users' behaviors in order to sell these predictions to various private groups and to influence those same behaviors.

Thus, the extension of the extraction is done by a generalized equivalence where the whole earth-system is considered as a surface to be extracted and where all recorded human behaviors (and fewer and fewer of them escape the recording) are raw materials to be refined into predictions and models to be sold to different companies.

These details on the extension of extraction help to clarify the context and analytical framework of the artworks that will follow in the second part. Indeed, considering raw materials in a broad way will enable us to consider humans, non-humans and machines in a more intertwined way. Fracturing and extraction can also be applied to different entities. Transformation into usable matter, discretization for non-humans and humans (putting different behaviors and cognitions into numbers), will enable us to make the link with machines.

Collapse Era

Another important point to clearly understand the particularity of the extraction in this time is the notion of collapse. Many theorists and scientists envisage it as a coming event that will be sudden and brutal. But others consider that the collapse is and will be progressive (see Citton and Rasmi), or that it has already taken place (see Servigne, Stevens, Chapelle, and al.). Thus, Achille Mbembé, again, argues that: "For a large part of humanity, the end of the world has already taken place. The question is no longer how to live in anticipation of it, but how to live in the aftermath of the end, that is, with the loss, in the separation. How to remake the world in the aftermath of the destruction of the world" (Mbembe, *Politiques de l'inimitié* 51). Considering the number of catastrophic events occurring simultaneously, it seems quite possible to consider this time as the time of collapse (the ongoing global warming, the sixth mass extinction of species, the increasing pollution [not a single drop of rain is drinkable anymore], the flow of human and non-human populations due to environmental problems, the depletion of raw materials, the erosion of governmental systems...). In this article, the analysis of different artworks are deployed in the context of a collapse that has already taken place. And communication and information technologies are major contributors to pollution and extraction of raw materials (energy and materials), the smart device industry in particular due to the massive need of power for computing. For the second part, thinking of the artworks in a context of collapse allows us to envisage them outside the age of abundance, in times of a certain anxiety and urgency.

Technosolutionism

Faced with the extension of extraction and the actuality of collapse, those responsible for the problem propose to increase industrial production. For the advocates of technosolutionism, the cause of the problem is the solution. They go even further by asserting that the replacement of what has disappeared (extinction, depletion) will lead to an improvement.

At the same time, this ideology pushes for what might, at first sight, appear to be a contradiction in terms: the acceleration and increase of exploitation. But, as the problem of collapse is considered urgent, exploitation must accelerate so that a solution can be found quickly (this impetus is part of a wider movement of acceleration (Noys)).

To put it another way:

> Technological solutionism means trusting in techno-scientific innovation to solve all problems. In the face of the ecological crisis, it is both a dangerous gamble and a powerful guardian of the established order: given the urgency and gravity of the threats, believing that a miraculously clean technology will get us out of trouble is particularly risky - but nurturing this hope has the advantage, for supporters of the status quo, of excluding from consideration a whole range of alternative political proposals. The idea of "saving the planet" (or rather, the system) through technology also poses a number of well-known and reknown ecological problems: the displacement and/or transformation of pollution, the rebound effect, the depletion of resources (mining or land), and so on. What's more, it still and always traps us in a blindness to alternatives, demiurgic fantasies and delayed action. (Berlan et al. 15)

And it seems that this ideology has gained a lot of ground if we notice the multiplication of companies contributing to this ideology and the numerous criticisms raised against it (Morozov). For example, a group of researchers at Harvard University is developing "robobees", microrobots that should pollinate flowers instead of bees that are on the verge of extinction. The communication about this project even claims that the "robobees" will probably do a better job and will have other functions: they will be able to count the number of flowers per species and systematically monitor all the places they pass through. One can also think of the recurrent absence of teachers and schools in sufficient quantity in several African countries that are replaced by applications, like eneza education, meaning "'to reach' in Swahili, is the educational platform that acts as a virtual tutor and teacher's assistant for thousands of Kenya-based students" (Halilou) or the automation of more and more important parts of the health system. Apart from bees, some scientists want to reintroduce extinct species using their DNA (Davis; Norman).

Through the prism of technosolutionism, we can understand the current paradox of the problem claiming to be a solution, and the increase in exploitation rather than its decrease.

To think about this double victory situation, the example of contemporary technologies in relation to animal and human representations will be particularly significant and synthetic. Indeed, cause and solution, they embody the double discourse currently at work (use of raw materials, energy, information resources claimed solutions to many problems). Artistic productions, by a different use of these technologies (hijack for instance), allow shifts of apprehension, even epistemological shifts.

In this way, we will see whether the proposed works invite us to move away from the brutalist paradigm of contemporary capitalism towards a different relationship with humans, machines and animals. These epistemological shifts may point to alternative futures: sustainable human lives, collaboration, frugal approaches and more.

Epistemological Shifts

In order to grasp what will be sought in the analyses of artworks that will follow, I would like to specify how epistemology is understood here. In this paper, epistemology is considered in its broadest sense: as much as the analysis of existing categories (subject, object, human, animal, plant...), as the ways of categorizing, the methods of approaching a question or a subject, and even the way in which a thought is elaborated. Thus, the apprehension of the earth-system as a geological whole to be fractured in order to make it extractable is a particular episteme that Achille Mbembé studies. I therefore consider an epistemological shift to be any artistic proposal that causes a fracture (again), a displacement, a destabilization of an episteme. I am now going to look for potential shifts in the prevailing epistemology in four artistic productions.

Revisiting Old Animal Representation, The Pure Necessity

The first artwork does not use contemporary technologies, but revives animation techniques from the 1960s. *The Pure Necessity* is a cartoon that was made in 2016 by David Claerbout.

In this work:

> [t]he animals behave instead [of in *The Jungle Book* of 1967] in a manner befitting their species. Balloo, Bagheera and Kaa, whose songs and slapstick acts have been delighting children and adults alike for decades, are now back to being bear, panther and python.
>
> Over a period of 3 years, David Claerbout and a team of professional artists painstakingly redrew the frames of the original movie by hand, one by one, and then assembled them to create an entirely new, lifeless animation—a contradiction in terms—which stands in raw contrast to the lively and rhythmical original. Now devoid of narrative, the animals move amidst the jungle as if the story were of their own making.[1]

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[1] https://davidclaerbout.com/The-pure-necessity-2016

This cartoon[2] lasts 50 minutes against 78 minutes for *The Jungle Book* and borrows Disney's type of graphic representations. The title *The Pure Necessity* refers of course to the famous song of *The Jungle Book* of 1967: "The Bare Necessities". Without going back over the explanations of the title given by the artist, we can make a first analysis of this work by seeing it as an endeavor of anthropogenization of the animal representations and their environments in a Disney film. This appears as a critique of what Whitley identifies as "rampant anthropomorphising" (Whitley 3) in Disney productions.

Moreover, Tony Ross proposes in "Slow Aesthetics and Deanthropomorphism as Ecocritical Strategies" another reading of this work. According to him, "Claerbout's video also raises questions about anthropomorphising habits in natural history documentaries." (Ross 8). This is an interesting proposition insofar as mainstream animal documentaries produce a dominant representation that contributes to the problem. These documentaries seek spectacle, script animal behaviors, anthropize them, require colossal budgets and advanced technologies ("intelligent" cameras, connected, exceptional lenses, very high-resolution digital recording...). Using ancient techniques, David Claerbout also questions the validity of contemporary documentary practices.

A third reading could be proposed for this work insofar as *The Pure Necessity* produces epistemological shifts on several levels. This animated film is not only a realistic representation, but also shows a hollowed out animal behavior. The animals are not returned to their "natural state", but appear in a half-life: they barely move. Their movements are reduced to a minimum to give an impression of life. Thus, rather than giving an impression of life in its natural state, the animals in *The Pure Necessity* behave in a way that evokes life in captivity, such as in zoos (this impression is reinforced when we learn that the artist used shots taken in zoos to animate these animal representations).

This reduced life elicits a feeling of mourning and nostalgia, pointing out that something is gone. The species represented are not extinct (not yet), but to represent them with a technique of the 1960s in this state of half-life proper to life in captivity refers to a multiplicity of losses.

Although not quite identical, this work could be compared to the *Bee Orchid* comic strip by xkcd mentioned by Donna Haraway, a great thinker on interspecies entanglement, in *Staying with The Trouble*:

> But what happens when a partner involved critically in the life of another disappears from the earth? [...] In xkcd's cartoon "Bee Orchid," we know a vanished insect once existed because a living flower still looks like the erotic organs of the avid female bee hungry for copulation. But the cartoon does something very special; it does not mistake lures for identity; it does not say the flower is exactly like the extinct insect's genitals. Instead, the flower collects up the presence of the bee aslant, in desire and mortality. The shape of the flower is "an idea of what the female bee looked like to the male bee . . . as interpreted by a plant . . . the only memory of the bee is a painting by a dying flower." Once embraced by living buzzing bees, the flower is a speaker for the dead. (Haraway 69)

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[2] Link to video excerpt.

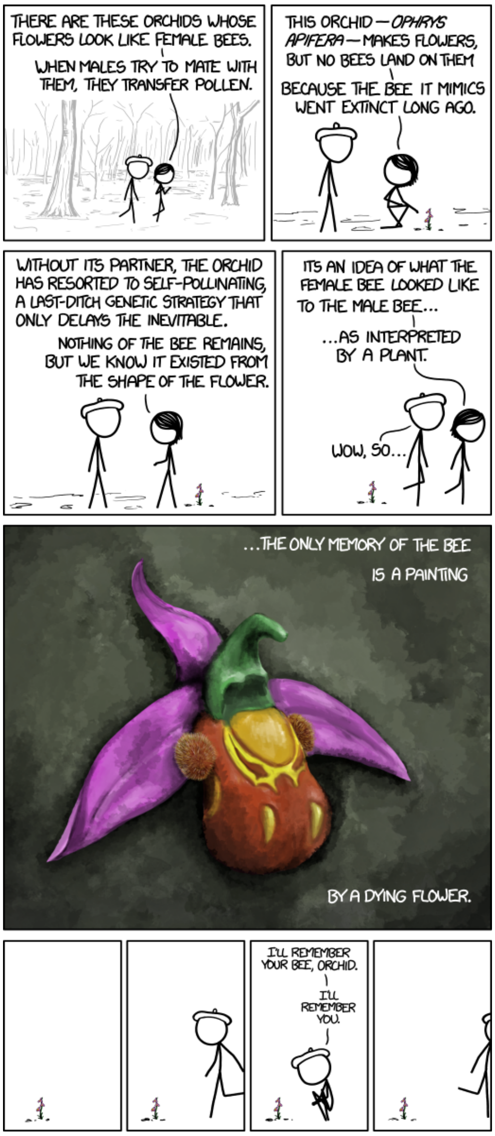
THERE ARE THESE ORCHIDS WHOSE FLOWERS LOOK LIKE FEMALE BEES.
WHEN MALES TRY TO MATE WITH THEM, THEY TRANSFER POLLEN.
THIS ORCHID—OPHRYS APIFERA—MAKES FLOWERS, BUT NO BEES LAND ON THEM
BECAUSE THE BEE IT MIMICS WENT EXTINCT LONG AGO.
WITHOUT ITS PARTNER, THE ORCHID HAS RESORTED TO SELF-POLLINATING, A LAST-DITCH GENETIC STRATEGY THAT ONLY DELAYS THE INEVITABLE.
NOTHING OF THE BEE REMAINS, BUT WE KNOW IT EXISTED FROM THE SHAPE OF THE FLOWER.
ITS AN IDEA OF WHAT THE FEMALE BEE LOOKED LIKE TO THE MALE BEE...
...AS INTERPRETED BY A PLANT.
WOW, SO...
...THE ONLY MEMORY OF THE BEE IS A PAINTING
BY A DYING FLOWER.
I'LL REMEMBER YOUR BEE, ORCHID.
I'LL REMEMBER YOU.

Figure 1, xkcd, Bee Orchid
https://imgs.xkcd.com/comics/bee_orchid.png

In *Bee Orchid*, memories are nested and multiple representational shifts are at work. In light of this comparison, could we say that *The Pure Necessity* recalls the relationship with non-humans in modern times, animal life outside of reserves and zoos, habitats that have almost disappeared, a different relationship to production time? The particular knotting David Claerbout proposes with this work refers to all these memories, and questions them in many ways. Firstly, he proposes encounters in different ways. Secondly, he proposes a shift in the aesthetics of the glorious thirties, while injecting a much more realistic, less anthropogenized animal behavior. Finally, he simultaneously devitalizes these realistic representations by attributing to them the behavior of animals in captivity in contemporary times.

The power of this work lies not only in a critique of representation, in Disney or animal documentaries, but also in the connections, the unexpected knots that shake the current state of things and its genealogy. The play with the temporality also proposes a destabilizing anachronism. And perhaps this long-term work produces a proximity for the public with the forms of representations of subtropical forests and animals, what remains of them. This set of elements—putting in relation, temporal telescoping, long time, meticulous evocation—these multiple interlockings, appear as a form of resistance to fracturing, separation and revitalization. In other words, the entanglement is located at such a number of levels that extraction is made difficult: everything holds together and is constructed by multiple interconnected references.

This work thus seems to achieve what Graham Huggan called for in his article: "And perhaps the next best one might be to join the new 'economy of emotions' (Woodward) to the even newer 'animal turn' (Kalof and Montgomery) in order to see in what ways human and animal lives are ethically, politically, and ecologically entangled" (Huggan 22).

Animals and New Media. Animal Cinema

In contrast to a very important effort of human reconstruction (through a study of the animation film archive, the study of animal behavior and the reuse of time-consuming techniques) in *The Pure Necessities*, Emilio Vavarella, with *Animal Cinema* (2017), barely intervenes in the relationships that take place between animals and very current technologies (GoPro type cameras).

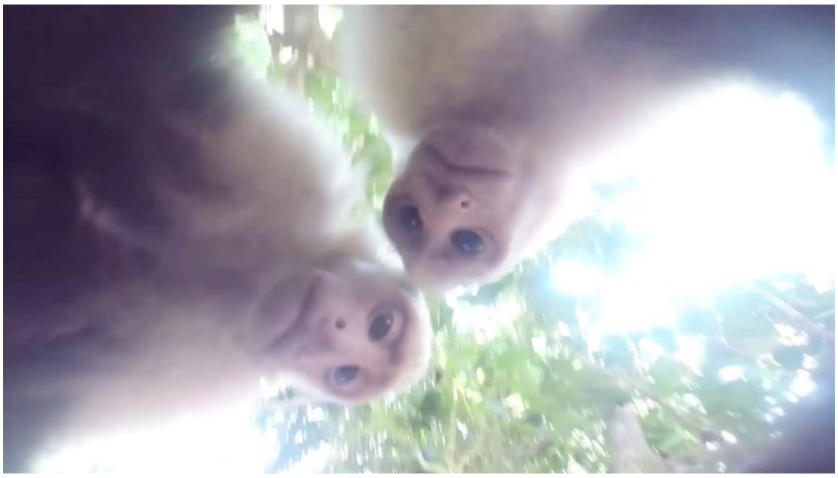

Figure 2 Emilio Vavarella, Animal Cinema*, 2017*

This artwork[3] is presented as follows on the Film Freeway website:

> [This] is a film composed of fragments of videos of animals operating cameras. All cameras were stolen by animals who acted autonomously. These video materials, downloaded from YouTube between 2012 and 2017, have been reorganized in *Animal Cinema* as a constant unfolding of non-human modes of being.[4]

We also notice, on the same site, the very particular distribution of the protagonists. We discover that Cardisoma guanhumi (land crab), Octopus vulgaris (common octopus), Amphioctopus marginatus (veined octopus), and so on,[5] are the Key Cast, the hardwares are mentioned just after them and the humans, are only Youtube uploaders, except for Emilio Vavarella who is Director and Producer.

Thus, a first analysis of this work leads us to the concern of a direct representation of the animals, a representation without intermediary. The artist describes his work as follows in the magazine Palm: "documentary flow whose protagonists are not simply characters who have renounced theatricality and 'enter into life' (Deleuze) (as Jean Renoir wished), but embody the 'life' that unfolds under the hyper-realistic and accidental gaze of a camera" (Vavarella). Thus appears a desire

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[3] Link to video excerpt

[4] https://filmfreeway.com/animal-cinema

[5] Canis lupus familiaris (German shorthaired pointer), Ursus arctos ssp. (grizzly bear), Panthera leo senegalensis (West African lion), Panthera leo (African lion), Sciurus carolinensis (eastern gray squirrel), Cebus capucinus (white-headed capuchin monkey), Simia inuus (macaque), Haliastur sphenurus (whistling kite).

and a more direct work of animal representation without intermediary than in *The Pure Necessity*.

However, is it, as Aliocha Imhoff and Kantuta Quirós describe it in *Qui parle ? (Pour les non-humains)* [*Who Speaks? (For the Non-Humans)*], a direct speech, without any "trueness", "nor human translation", a project of "a nature that represents itself, a minima" (Imhoff et Quirós 65)? Is it a "transparent" word (with quotation marks) "as pretention to make emerge, without mediation of the non human "voices", to reach the things themselves, to restore their point of view, or rather henceforth, as Emanuele Coccia suggested it, their point of life (Coccia), as an eye outside of oneself" (Imhoff et Quirós 66)? Even if a direct relationship is felt, the work of choosing sequences and editing distances us from the analysis that Florian Leitner had proposed in his article "On Robots and Turtles: A Posthuman Perspective on Camera and Image Movement after Michael Snow's *The Central Region*" (Leitner 268). The latter analyzed a sequence posted on the Internet without editing of a turtle that had carried a camera before abandoning it to the ocean currents. No human post-production had been done. The human was then an archivist and the whole was a shared agency.

But Emilio Vavarella, through his editing work, places these shots and these non-human operators in an anthropic space. The editing produces effects of continuity between initially very heterogeneous shots. The values of similar shots (with close-up elements) and the visibility of the non-human operator also contribute to the fluidity of the sequences between species, biomes and continents.

This intermingling between a relative "transparency"and effects of continuity and fluidity produced by the editing leads to a plural reading of this work. First of all, there is an effect of seduction, even hypnosis, by the fluidity mixed with the absence of narration, replaced by simple displacements (devouring, entry/exit, theft...). One could bring this closer to *The Clock* by Christian Marclay who plays very strongly on fluidity and continuity without narration by taking shots from the history of cinema to constitute a cinematographic clock. The seduction is also played by the close-ups which can recall the human practice of selfies and helps to produce a link between human and non-human animals. On the other hand, a very material dimension emerges from this work: the portable camera object appears as a volume of plastic and metal that can be manipulated, and we can also see that things have been done with the production of non-human animals - there have been no added shots or effects. This work is produced with few resources and carefully considers the gestures of the non-humans. Thus, between a seduction and a simple materiality, *Animal Cinema* delivers a relationship to the non-humans outside the economy of the big-budget documentary, in a frugality that is nonetheless linked to the human world by the fittings and movements.

The epistemological shift in this work is then located in a frugality of means and in more organic associations that do not deprive themselves of human gesture through fluid editing. Rather than transparency, *Animal Cinema* proposes another mode of collaboration with non-humans without crushing them with a profusion of technological tools, but by making with their proposals. The work suggests that non-human animals are perhaps the most capable of reporting on themselves. It only remains to connect these scattered self-portraits to produce another form of assembly. Let us stay with the contemporary machines but leave the non-human animals for a while.

Human with Smart Devices. Amazon's Cabinet of Curiosities

Amazon's Cabinet of Curiosities (2019), also by Emilio Vavarella, is between the replacement of the artist by the machine and a form of artist-machine cooperation.

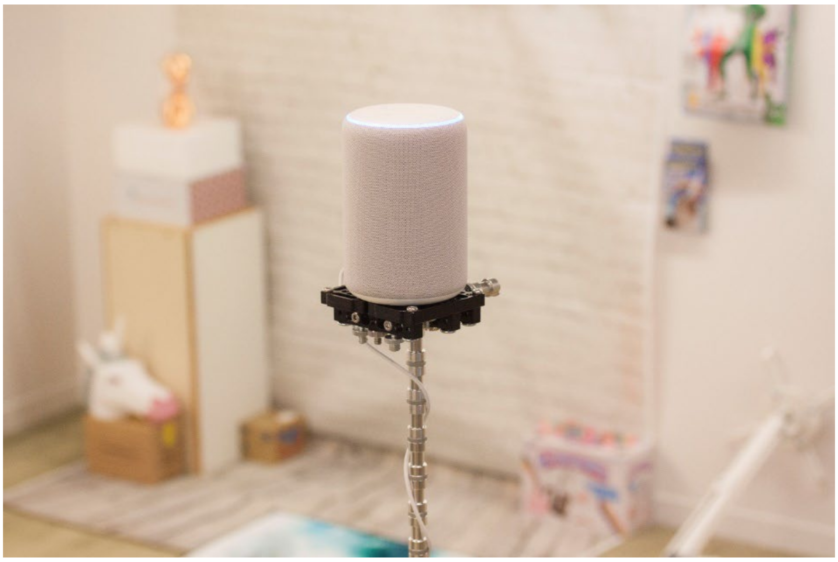

Figure 3 Emilio Vavarella, Amazon's Cabinet of Curiosities*,* 2019

The artist explains the process in these terms:

> *Amazon's Cabinet of Curiosities [...]* is the result of my cooperation with Alexa Voice Shopping, the artificial intelligence developed by Amazon. To produce this work, I asked Alexa one question: "Alexa, can you suggest a product for a new artwork?". Immediately after buying the recommended product, Alexa suggested another one, and then another one, and so on, and on… I followed and acquired every product suggested in this way until my production budget was entirely spent.[6]

Here, the artist obeys to the "smart object" and buy everything suggested by it.

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[6] http://emiliovavarella.com/amazon/

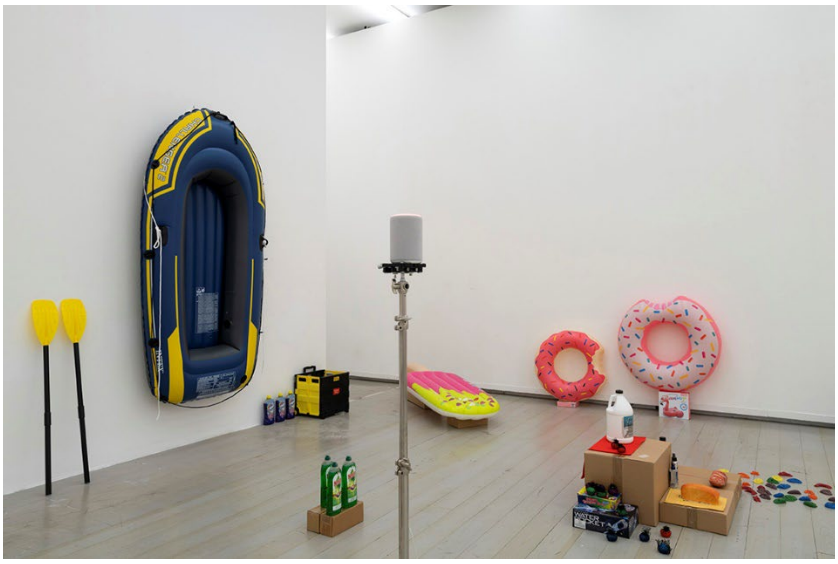

Figure 4 Emilio Vavarella, Amazon's Cabinet of Curiosities*, 2019*

Before going further, I would like to mention that several newspaper articles have recently headlined that AI could soon replace artists and gave nextrembrandt.com[7] as an example. Others, being less alarmist, indicate that a cooperation between human and machine will become more and more important. We can also remember the multiple advertising campaigns inciting to be creative, and that, to achieve it, it would be enough to buy such intelligent device, tablet, application... A double discursive movement of dispossession—of the human artistic productions—and of accessibility—to the production of forms—has thus developed since the beginning of the 21st century. It undergoes a new phase with the so-called intelligent objects and programs: gpt3 and DALL-E to quote the most recent and known. Artistic productions, and perhaps even artists, have been fractured, discretized and extracted before being reassembled, revitalized and commercialized. Even if artists and their productions are labile, cunning, can flee, poach, camouflage, even maroon, a fracture and a form of extraction has taken place.

Here, in an attitude of feigned surrender, Emilio Vavarella recognizes with *Amazon's Cabinet of Curiosities* the victory of the intelligent device over the artists. He humbly and ironically asks it for a suggestion for a new artistic production. It is therefore doubtful that *Amazon's Cabinet of Curiosities* is really the result of a cooperation as the artist says. Indeed, his involvement is very weak, he does not make any choice, and he only applies the protocol he decided before his request. His subjectivity and his judgment are suspended. This is more like what Estelle Zhong Mengual has called "delegated performance" following Claire Bishop. Indeed, she proposes this term while analyzing a work by Jeremy Deller (*It Is What It Is. Conversations About Iraq*, 2009): "There are thus two levels of participation in this project: the artist inviting Pasha [an Iraki artist] and Harvey [a former American military officer] to carry the project, and then Pasha and Harvey inviting passers-by to talk with them. Claire Bishop uses the term 'delegated performance' (Bishop) to refer to this process of the artist handing over the keys of the project to others" (Zhong Mengual 34). Later, she concludes, "some British artists take a very different perspective on their relationship with participants: the latter are often seen as those who help the artists and not the other way around" (Zhong Mengual 45). Thus, Emilio Vavarella would delegate the production of his project due to his incompetence and would ask for help from the network of artificial intelligences.

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[7] https://www.cnetfrance.fr/news/quand-l-intelligence-artificielle-va-t-elle-remplacer-les-artistes-39865578.htm
https://experiences.microsoft.fr/articles/intelligence-artificielle/ia-demain-artistes-augmentes/

But this staged victory turns the situation around. By giving the keys of the project to the machine, he highlights its limits and its merchant functioning with a non-human logic. Following a more psychoanalytical analysis, the artist places himself in a masochistic position of realization of the fantasy of the Other and produces by that a detachment. In this regard, it is useful to recall Slavoj Žižek's analysis, in *The Coming Subjectivity*, of a scene from the film *Fight Club*: "in order to get his boss to pay him to do nothing, the narrator blackmails him by throwing himself across his desk and beats himself up before security arrives; in front of a dismayed boss, the narrator implies that he is the one who assaulted him" (Žižek 88). And he concludes: "The pure subject can only arise from that experience [...] of radical subjective disintegration, when I allow the other to lower me [...] thus emptying me of all substantial content[...] beating oneself up makes it obvious that the master is superfluous [...] the primary purpose of this violence is to violate the bond that attaches oneself to the master" (Žižek 91). In *Amazon's Cabinet of Curiosities*, the gesture is less violent since it is done through a request. However, it can be read in the same way: the Other, in this case Alexa, wants to dominate the artists and Emilio Vavarella, conforming to the protocol of addressing the machine, makes himself a subaltern, suspending his subjectivity and surrendering himself totally to the machine through his neutral request. This gesture produces at best two interesting effects. First of all, it reveals the functioning of the machine, because the human action is reduced to a radically congruent portion. An expressiveness mixing machine intelligence and commercial logic is thus revealed. This reveals an imagination of the artistic production created through machine learning. The artist then resists the fracturing and the extraction by reducing himself to a shallow request. Thus, a human reduced to a request is opposed to the opacity of the machine. There is a double movement for the artist: he denies, for a time, his artistic subjectivity, fractures the reconstruction operated by brutalism, deconstructs himself, and he opposes an unexploitable opacity for the contemporary discretizing protocols.

Human, Animal and Smart Devices. She Was Called Petra

She Was Called Petra (2020) is a crossing between a machine, Amazon's "intelligent speaker" Alexa, two humans and a parrot.

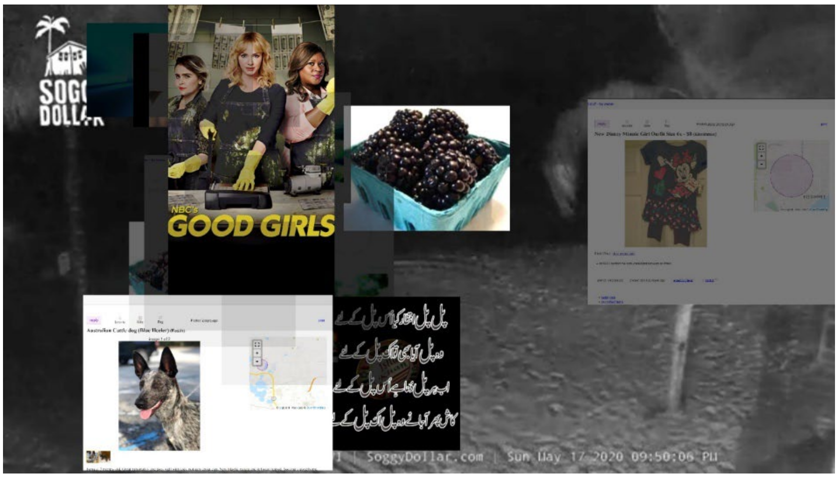

Figure 5 Damien Beyrouthy, *She Was Called Petra,* 2020

In 2019, a female parrot, an African Grey named Petra, managed to order online with a connected speaker. She thus added a certain quantity of items, rather diverse, to the shopping list of the human who lives with her in Orlando (USA, Florida). Since then, the talking speaker (Alexa), Petra and the human continue to communicate.

In *She Was Called Petra*, we can hear the voices of these three protagonists (along with a few others) in a single loudspeaker. Their words and sounds trigger the appearance of "commanded" images on a search engine. Simultaneously, live recordings of beaches in Asia, America, and the African savannah scroll across a screen and cell phones. Further on, the commands made by Petra, interpreted by a human, were brought and placed on the ground.[8]

Link to the video of the installation

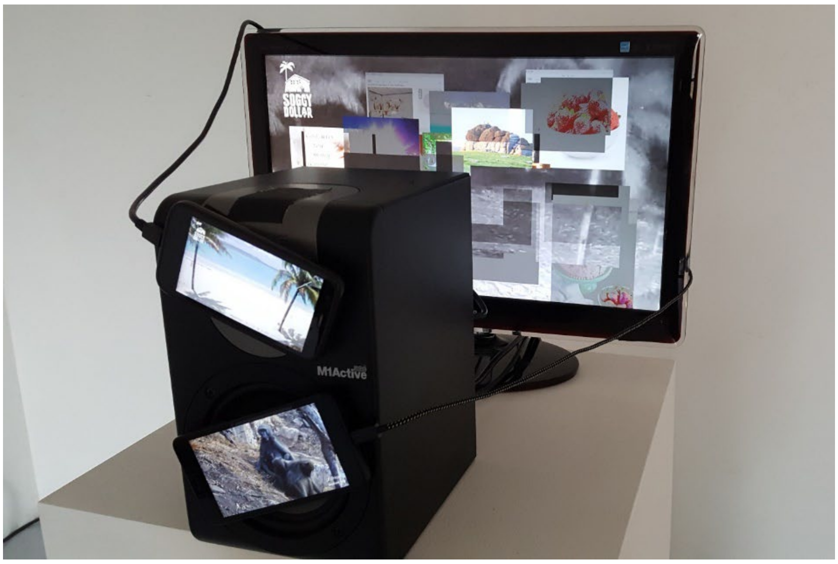

Figure 6 Damien Beyrouthy, *She Was Called Petra*, 2020

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[8] https://damienbeyrouthy.com/she-was-called-petra/

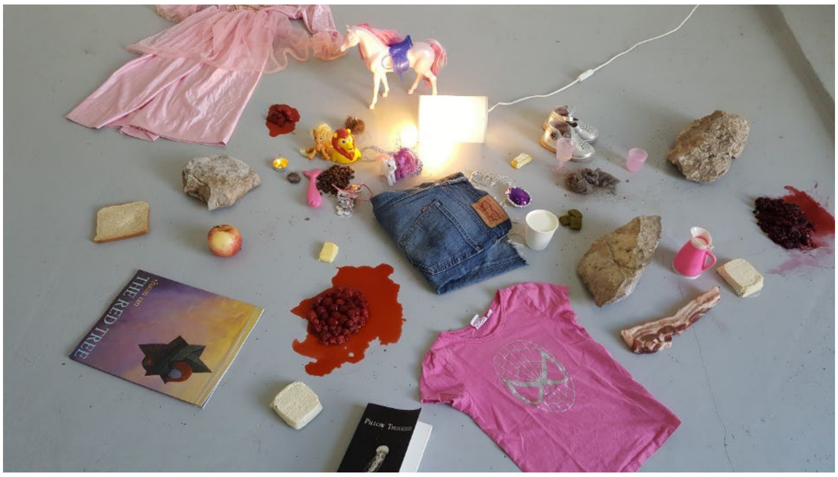

Figure 7 Damien Beyrouthy, *She Was Called Petra*, 2020

Human, non-human animal and smart object were involved in this project. With *She Was Called Petra*, it is the knot between human, animal and machine that is questioned. This questioning is already present in the initial story where Petra, the African Grey, carries out commands with Alexa, like her human, who broadcasts Petra's activity on YouTube and asks visitors to buy a number of objects from Petra. One could say with this story that the animal communicated with a logical robot without the intermediary of its human and that the latter tried to find a place in the relationship. A decentering had indeed taken place: the human was no longer at the center of the relationships in her own home. Usually, she addressed Alexa and Petra separately, but Alexa and Petra were not supposed to interact, let alone without needing her presence or action. Thus, by staging Petra's purchase requests to Alexa, she is reinserting herself into a relationship in which she was not initially involved. But this gesture can also be seen as the creation of a “contact zone” described as, extending anthropologist Marie-Louise Pratt's (Pratt) proposal: “a contact zone, no longer between cultures but a linking agent between worlds” (Imhoff et Quirós 100).

The whole installation *She Was Called Petra*, consisting of scattered objects, a speaker and screens, can be seen as an extended contact zone in which an entity that is not quite Petra, Alexa or her human, evolves. The part gathering the scattered objects on the ground corresponds to my attempt to translate Petra's heterogeneous list into material objects. Thus, I insert myself into this contact zone and expand it. I also asked Amazon what it suggested for tricky words “poetry”, “girl”, “red tree” and bought what appeared as the first result. With this action, Alexa, connected to Amazon, is reconvened. And throughout the process, as I was learning about this type of parrot, I wondered what would be the best fit for Petra. The request is thereby amplified and interpreted. And I become the delegate of a request that was not addressed to me, but did not quite come to fruition either.

The other part of the installation, made up of a screen and two smartphones, is an attempt to put this critter (Haraway), situated between a machine, an animal and a human, into pictures and sound. I am also part of this assemblage through my choice of mediums and sequence. This production process could be approached as a chain of interpretations, translation, representation and recollection as in *The Pure Necessity*. But here, human, animal and machine also attempt to interpret and understand each other, according to their own logics and interests. Indeed, as I said, the animal imitates the human to command a machine that, itself, tries to interpret what the human or the animal says and tries to answer it by imitating the human communication. This initial, unplanned circulation is then extended into a circuit of interpretations. I have gathered, on a pedestal, sounds of animals, humans, machines and images of animals and environments facing objects that are themselves animal, human, machine or come from the environment.

In relation to the technosolutionist and extractivist victory, one could read this work in multiple ways. First of all, these attempts at inter-species understanding (if we include Alexa as a critter), multiplied and repeated in *She Was Called Petra*, could suggest that the commands uttered by Petra, and then declined by the image, the verbalization, the order, are not only a matter of consumption, but also of a request, of an address to the other. Also, the list of objects, more or less material, could be received as a form of language or concrete poetry. Redeployed in space and image, it shakes the human systems of categorization, relation, language, signifier and signified. Could this be close to what Alyosha Imhoff and Kantuta Quiros identify as the third level of translation?

> The first level, that of stories and children's literature, is literally anthropomorphic; the second level, that of approaching, as close as possible, their own Umwelt, their own world, maximizing the possibilities of language and voice, while the third level is primarily the paradoxical operation performed on language, so that one can no longer distinguish between an infinite play of language, an openness to new modes of meaning, and the reality of radical otherness. (Imhoff et Quirós 136)

Does *She Was Called Petra* in its use of language, its redistribution in space and on screens open new modes of meaning? Does it also allow us to consider radical otherness? If each non-human animal can be considered as a radical alterity and the translations of third level open towards these radical alterities, an entanglement such as *She Was Called Petra* opens perhaps to the alterities that appear following the new technological productions as soon as they are registered in relations to the living. Without being able to answer the definition of this particular entity, *She Was Called Petra* allows to wonder about it. What happened to language after its appearance? What about demand, desire, or even reality?

The double victory of technosolutionism (extension of extraction, techno-production as a solution) is now strongly extended in the collapse era. The domains of extraction now include the earth, non-human animals and humans reduced to flows, energies, forces, materials, information. Everything must be reduced to extractable surfaces. The exhaustion resulting from this exponential extraction is resolved by the production of technologies that are themselves responsible for the exhaustion. Faced with this camouflaged paradox, we have seen four artistic creations that allow multiple epistemological shifts that question the dominant position. David Claerbout's *The Pure Necessity* (2016) provoked interlocking representations, worlds, separate temporalities making it more difficult to extract a defined surface. Emilio Vavarella's *Animal Cinema* (2017) thwarts an expected animal representation, all the more so with recent cameras, producing a frugal cinema, while seducing the human gaze with its continuity. *Amazon's Cabinet of Curiosities* (2019), also by Emilio Vavarella, reveal the working of the device through a radical submission to it while rendering itself opaque and unassimilable by the device. Finally, *She Was Called Petra* (2020) by myself materializes an entity that no longer responds to the human, the animal, the machine and is located in an intermediate zone. Other forms of language are proposed in this work, the space of meeting reconsidered and the market order proposed as poetry or request to a third party. These four artistic productions thus appear as forms of resistance to fracking and extraction in different ways. They also suggest alternative lifestyles for some of them: frugality, cooperation, assembly.

The transformations identified in these artistic productions are thus varied and effective. A study of a larger number of works would make it possible to systematize the proposals for change and alternatives that fracture technosolutionism and the current brutalist approach.

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Binding and Liberating:
Recipes for Environmental Narratives

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Abstract

Crafting narratives alternative to dominant discourses of natural-cultural depletion is one of the signature goals of the ecocritical “test kitchen.” This culinary analogy highlights deeper similarities: both recipes and eco-narratives create symbolic and material connections between people and the environment, which, in turn, enable transformative practices. But how can we craft messages that are generative of positive processes of transformation? Or, to put it differently, what are recipes for eco-narratives? This article proposes a versatile method to test what uses of language and dynamics elicited by texts might produce environmental action. The culinary experiment draws on Italian second-wave feminism, a theoretical “cuisine” that has engaged with language to rework dominant relationships to others and to the world. Feminist strategies, including the practice of “starting from oneself,” the reclaiming of the personal as political, and the retracing of alternative genealogies, have used language as a means simultaneously of liberation and of reconnection with the material, embodied world. This liberating binding is repurposed as a key technique to craft and identify effective eco-narratives. Here, feminist strategies intersect with the chemical and social operations of cooking through discussion of three recipes tied to the author’s Mediterranean origins: a milk pudding, eggless fresh pasta, and a type of ancient-grains bread. Through the processes of binding and softening, common to preparations that employ starch, the analysis demonstrates that a starchy language used both to bind (us to material life) and to soften (power structures) has enormous environmental potential. While primarily serving scholars in Italian studies and ecocriticism, this culinary method invites adaptations across food cultures and gender identities.

Keywords: recipes, Italian feminism, eco-narratives.

Resumen

Confeccionar narrativas alternativas a los discursos dominantes del agotamiento natural-cultural es una de las metas distintivas de la “cocina de prueba” de la ecocrítica. Esta analogía culinaria destaca similitudes más profundas: tanto las recetas como las eco-narrativas crean conexiones simbólicas y materiales entre las personas y el entorno, las cuales, a su vez, permiten posibilitan prácticas transformativas. Sin embargo, ¿cómo podemos confeccionar mensajes que generen procesos de transformación positivos? O, dicho de otro modo, ¿cuáles son las recetas de las eco-narrativas? Este artículo propone un método versátil para comprobar qué usos del lenguaje y dinámicas obtenidas de los textos pueden producir acción medioambiental. El experimento culinario recurre a la segunda ola del feminismo italiano, una “cocina” teórica que ha interactuado con el lenguaje para reconfigurar las relaciones dominantes con los otros y con el mundo. Las estrategias feministas, incluyendo la práctica de ”empezar por una misma”, reclamar lo personal como político, y volver a trazar genealogías alternativas, han usado el lenguaje como una forma de liberación así como de reconexión con el mundo material. Este vínculo liberador vuelve a proponerse como una técnica para confeccionar e identificar eco-narrativas efectivas. Aquí, las estrategias feministas se cruzan con las operaciones culinarias químicas y sociales a través de la discusión de tres recetas ligadas a los orígenes mediterráneos de la autora: un pudin de leche, pasta fresca sin huevo, y un tipo de pan de granos ancestrales. A través de los procesos de vinculación y de moderación, comunes a las preparaciones que usan almidón, el análisis demuestra que un lenguaje almidonado usado tanto para vincularnos (a la vida material) como para moderar (las estructuras de poder) tiene un enorme potencial ecológico. Aunque sirva principalmente para académicos en estudios italianos y ecocrítica, este método culinario promueve adaptaciones a otras culturas culinarias e identidades de género.

Palabras clave: recetas, feminismo italiano, eco-narrativas.

Introduction

Hazelnuts, cocoa, sugar, palm oil, powdered milk, lecithin, vanilla extract.

These are the ingredients of Nutella, the iconic hazelnut chocolate spread made by the Italian company Ferrero and sold in 160 markets, for a total of 400 thousand tons of Nutella every year (Fantigrossi, Greco). The exact recipe is still a secret. What is well known, though, is that the original recipe has changed. In 2017, the company was criticized for distributing a version of the product in the German and French markets that contained increased percentages of powdered milk (from 7,5% to 8,7%) and sugar (from 55,9% to 56,3%), and reduced percentages of cocoa and hazelnuts, which—needless to say—are more expensive ingredients (Cozzella). In 2015, Ferrero introduced the use of palm oil, imported from Indonesia, Malaysia, and New Guinea, to make its cream smoother and less spoilable while also cutting production costs. When a debate arose about the usage of palm oil—an oil that Italian customers perceive as unhealthy for being high in saturated fats—Ferrero "launched a large media campaign advocating for the health benefits of properly sourced palm oil" and simultaneously pledged that "the products it imports do not involve deforestation and indigenous exploitation" (Cesaretti 17). In response, competitor brands adopted the counter-strategy of labelling their products "without palm oil" and therefore healthier. Nutella and its competitors thereby created different, if related, eco-narratives. Furthermore, as Enrico Cesaretti noted, the eco-consciousness displayed by Ferrero in its sourcing of palm oil clashes with the company's plan of "increasing [by] 30% (20.000 tons/10 million plants) the production of national hazelnuts by 2025;" the issue is that "hazelnut plantations […] are characterized by practices of land-clearing and substantial use of fertilizers, pesticides, and weed-killers" (14).

Retracing the evolution of a recipe that became smoother, sweeter, and more resistant to external agents makes us wonder if the corporate sustainable narratives and practices were crafted to smooth, sugarcoat, and protect the "persisting legacies of capitalism entering the planet's green organosphere" (Cesaretti 16). If environmental narratives can hide bitter old flavors, if they can be artificially processed and even emptied of their substance in order to maintain rigid agrilogistic structures, the question to tackle is how to make eco-narratives from scratch or pick out "organic" ones that are substantive and transformative.

During the late-capitalist era, consumerism and its detractors came to resort to the same list of ingredients: strategies of diversification and customization have gradually colonized niche-markets and "communities of resistance [have been] replaced by communities of consumption" (Massumi 20–21; hooks 375–76). Global corporations have appropriated the environmental lexicon to the point that sugarcoating goods with green buzzwords—all natural, plant-based, organic—has become a popular strategy to devise messages aimed at fueling tried-and-true systems. Despite there being an actual need for words that invite "positive Earth emotions" and strengthen symbiotic relationships between people and the planet, here my goal is not to coin a new lexicon (Albrecht 22). Environmental narratives are not, or not solely, words blended together into ecological messages; effective eco-narratives depend on the capacity of language—even language not explicitly environmentalist—to activate modes of thought and interaction that dislodge exploitative mindsets and spur alternative ways of world-making. In this analysis, I aim to provide a practical-theoretical method to guide our understanding and deployment of processes vehiculated by language that might generate nourishing discourses of change.

Crafting new palatable narratives could be a goal of the ecocritical "test kitchen." This culinary analogy suggests deeper similarities between environmental discourses and recipes. All recipes across cultures are texts that, in developing material and symbolic connections between individuals and food, generate transformative practices. It is in the recipe's interplay of words and work that ingredients turn into dishes. Likewise, eco-narratives create a connective tissue between nature and culture, and, in doing so, become generative of policies, behaviors, and actions that can benefit both humans and nonhumans. But, if recipes and eco-narratives similarly feature a synergy of world, words, and work, what "chemical" processes and techniques allow for the transformation of the ingredient that is everyday communication into discourses of change? Or, to put it in cookbook terms, what are recipes for environmental narratives?

This article engages with the culinary art as a method to test what uses of language and relational dynamics elicited by words might enable environmental action. My cooking experiment draws from Italian second-wave feminism, in particular from the Milan Women's Bookstore Collective and the Diotima community. Thinking of feminism as a cuisine and of feminist proposals as recipes re-envisions what might by some be considered an outdated or controversial theory into an innovative take on environmentalism—one focused on the real-world processes that language can activate or involve.[1] Chemical and social operations of cooking become

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[1] As Casarino and Righi explain, this lineage of Italian feminist theory has elicited boredom and annoyance for its emphasis on the mother, for not adequately grappling with intersectionality, and for portraying an understanding of sexual difference (in the singular) that might seem "steeped in old and

a lens to discuss how feminist "recipes," through their texts and practices, have reworked dominant relationships to others and to the world, and can still offer models for effective environmental narratives. The notions of "starting from oneself" and of embracing "difference," the reclaiming of the personal as political, the "practice of doing," and the retracing of maternal genealogies are all strategies that have used language as a revolutionary means of reconnection with the material world *and* of liberation—a liberating binding.

By repurposing the kitchen from a site of female relegation into a space for intellectual engagement,[2] I have redeployed Italian feminist theory into techniques to develop eco-narratives. Recipes of starchy food tied to my Mediterranean origins—a milk pudding, eggless fresh pasta, and a traditional type of bread—lead to an examination of broader material and linguistic processes that inform environmental discourses, practices, and ethics. Exploring the operations of binding and softening, common to preparations that employ starch, demonstrates that a starchy language used both to bind (us to material life) and to soften (power structures) has enormous environmental potential.

Starting from myself, I locally sourced the recipes shared here in my native island, Sicily. The preparations feature the twofold use of starch as thickener and softener. Once mixed with water, starch creates cohesive "relational" structures; this is why it is commonly used to thicken sauces or puddings. However, starches can also help soften the rigid protein structure of gluten, resulting in lighter baked goods. The recipes include: *biancomangiare*, a milk pudding in which a few simple ingredients bind together while maintaining their distinctive flavors; *pasta povera* (poor pasta), a type of fresh pasta that does not use eggs as a binding agent; and *pane di Castelvetrano*, a bread made with ancient grains that, being naturally low in gluten, contribute to creating a porous texture. Infused with feminist thought and framed by an ecocritical understanding of the material world as "stories embodied in material formations," these recipes exemplify the importance of adopting both binding and softening techniques to craft narratives of natural-cultural (re)connection and liberation (Oppermann 57). The silky texture of *biancomangiare* comes to illustrate how language can tie us to material life while offering a means of individual and collective freedom; the preparation of *pasta povera* showcases how this process of liberating reconnection has informed creative solutions; finally, *pane di Castelvetrano*—a recipe and story that I reconstructed through interviews with Sicilian farmers—demonstrates how implementing different approaches to agriculture has percolated through the local environment and softened rigid socio-economic structures.

In a 1994 paper featuring sixteen perspectives on ecocriticism, Christopher Cokinos observed that both feminist and ecocritical analyses "re-emphasize the real work of words in a world of consequence, joy, and despair" while drawing

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superseded patriarchal divisions between man and woman (9). On these issues, see their introduction to *Another Mother*.

[2] An inspiring example of this repurposing is Clara Sereni's *Casalinghitudine*.

"connections among self, society, nature, and text" (What is Ecocriticism?). Reading Italian recipes and feminist theory as texts that generate transformative processes can prompt environmental reflections on the types of interactions through which words put the world to work. Ultimately, sharing recipes for eco-narratives is a way to spur unforeseen pairings and flavorful interdisciplinary research on issues at the crossroads of language, food science, and sustainable practices.

***Biancomangiare*: The Texture of Environmental Words**

Ingredients
500 ml milk
100 gr sugar
50 gr starch
cinnamon, dark chocolate, pistachios
Preparation
Mix the starch in 150 ml of milk and set aside. Mix the remaining 350 ml of milk with the sugar and bring to boil. Reduce the heat and add the starch dissolved in milk. Let the mixture thicken for about 4–5 minutes, while continuing to stir. Pour it in a mold, let it cool, and refrigerate for at least four hours. Remove the pudding from the mold and serve sprinkled with cinnamon, grated dark chocolate, or pistachios.

Biancomangiare is a delicate milk pudding and a comfort food of my childhood. Its taste still recalls memories of a familiar attachment that gifted me with the curiosity to leave and explore, and with a longing for returning. In this recipe, the starch acts as a thickener and its function can be explained by recalling some notions of organic chemistry. Starch is a polysaccharide, formed when molecules of the simple sugar are joined together into long chains (amylose) and branch trees (amylopectin). When heated in water, starch granules absorb the water and expand, eventually separating into a loose liquid colloid that acts as a thickener (Quellen Field 49–50). In the making of *biancomangiare*, the use of milk rather than water prevents the formation of a thick gel. The texture of this pudding is softer than the firm consistency of jello, which is made with fruit juice and gelatin, or of *crème brûlée*, in which eggs act as a stronger binder. The creaminess of *biancomangiare* derives from a binding process that thickens the ingredients without generating either a rigid structure or a distinctive aroma. Yet, it is the starch that, despite remaining almost undetectable, shapes this dessert.

The consistency of *biancomangiare*—the starchy binding that delicately holds the ingredients together and lets their individual flavors shine through—resembles the texture of maternal language, one of the signature "dishes" of Italian feminist theory.[3] Maternal language takes shape from the close bond between infant and caretaker: in this relationship language skills are formed through tactile, emotional,

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[3] On maternal language see Muraro, Zamboni, and Casarino and Righi.

and creative connection. For some readers this traditional feminist cuisine might seem old-fashioned, renowned for its overuse of womanhood as a unifying essence and the maternal as the "parsley in any soup"—an Italian idiomatic expression that indicates an unfailing, cumbersome presence.[4] Still, despite its grandma's-cooking feeling, this approach remains highly original and can serve as a basic recipe for achieving (or at least envisioning) the thick and soft consistency that environmental narratives could ideally take.

Feminist philosopher Luisa Muraro, in developing her view of maternal language, challenged dominant positions (first and foremost Lacanian theories) that identify the mother with the space of the pre-linguistic, and language acquisition as a separation process through which a symbolic order rises above maternal shapeless matter, like water separating from oil. For Muraro, when language acquisition is conceived of as a process of separation, it "impl[ies] and sustain[s] the parallelism between natural life and culture together with an unlimited series of oppositions and analogies between one and the other" (18). The artificial divide between matter and language might explain why the arguments of climate change deniers have resorted to a metaphoric device of hyperseparation from disturbing material referents that, to recall Carol Adams' claim, become "absent" (67–68). These discourses tend to filter away (feminized) images of "vulnerability, risk, gender, threat, crisis, or harm" by adopting an overtly "objective" scientific language, purified from any material and emotional residue (Alaimo 99). By contrast, Muraro contended that learning how to speak derives from a thickening process in which "disparities, irreversibilities, dependencies, and all the other possible mixtures" clump together and shape our possibility of self-expression (18–19).

The Symbolic Order of the Mother (1991) is the theoretical "cookbook" in which the feminist thinker has retraced language acquisition to the interplay of "language and life, speech and body, words and things" that enabled our vital communication with the mother or with those "who [are] in her place" (Muraro 40).[5] However, the key ingredient of maternal language is not so much the mother, acting as the fermenting starter, but the mother in relation to the child—their meaningful connection and interaction. Chiara Zamboni, another feminist philosopher of the Diotima community, has acknowledged the difficulty of reconstructing "the substance of that first language" we all spoke as children but no longer speak: "that language [that enabled us to learn other languages] incorporated itself into [those] languages, merging with them […] just like water, which, given its transparency, once mixed with other liquids, can no longer be separated" ("Maternal language" 133). Maternal language, though, does not act (solely) like water, but like the milk that, in the *biancomangiare* recipe, is mixed with the starch and added to the boiling pot. That starchy liquid has neither a definite taste nor a shape, but mediates the creation of other textures and flavors.

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[4] On the critics to Italian feminism see Zerilli, De Lauretis, and Casarino and Righi.
[5] The mother should not be associated necessarily with female sex and biology.

The experience of coming to life is defined by a relationship of co-dependence, by a gestational process that anchors each of us to another body while building our first experiences as individuals. Also, language acquisition develops from a bond that creates embodied relationships while enabling new forms of life and narratives to thrive. Birth and language acquisition are two universally binding events, across humans and across species: plants and animals do come into the world via birth, and, as studies on vegetal life prove, not only animals, but also plants are able to communicate (Gagliano, Ryan, and Vieira). Therefore, the binding and liberating properties of maternal language can become foundational for the making of starchy narratives that blend nature and culture to enable different modes of thinking and acting.

However, in an epoch of widespread greenwashing, building narratives that bind people to their environment is not enough to usher in environmental behaviors. As the case of Nutella demonstrated, Ferrero's updated recipe was linked to ecological messaging to implement procedures that reduced production costs, lowered the quality of the product, and might cause environmental damage at global and local scale. The operation of binding alone would not make a good *biancomangiare* either; it is the thickening process initiated by the starch *together with* the softening agency of the milk that turn the liquid mixture into thick creaminess, adaptable to infinite shapes. Similarly, the bond between mother and child is tied to their potential to speak freely and use words as tools to soften and reshape rigid structures of power, starting with the "natural" expectations about motherhood and, more broadly, with patriarchal associations between women and nature. For Italian feminists, reconnecting women to an embodied and meaningful place of origin—to a female genealogy—was a way to claim women's free choice to generate or not (Cavarero 59). It is still a way to liberate the maternal from the procreative and nurturing function that have (uniquely) been assigned to this figure, and from a pro-life agenda that remains unconcerned with creating life-affirming conditions for humans and nonhumans.

Rediscovering our connection to the mother implies exploring the possibility to mold new understandings of motherhood, conceived of as a right across species, beyond idealized notions of sacrifice and unpaid labor, beyond stereotypical views of masculinity and femininity, heteronormative family models, and figurations of Mother Earth in capitalist contexts. As Black feminist activist Alexis Pauline Gumbs suggested, "the word 'mother'" should be regarded "less as a gendered identity and more as a possible action, a technology of transformation" (23). The maternal theorized by Muraro is a binding agent that creates relationality and transformation through "a living (rather than an instituted) order" (65). Like the *biancomangiare*'s starchy mixture, maternal language generates an order that does not crystallize into a structure, but forms a relational system that can change shape and flavor profile depending on the mold and spices used, without losing its texture. As Muraro further explains, the maternal order is "maintained [...] by means of its constant transformation that allows it to take shape again in spite of and even thanks to the countless irregularities of our speaking" (65).

Maternal language and its relational symbolic order employ operations of binding and softening that are fundamental in the making and enacting of eco-narratives. These discourses aim to strengthen the intimate environmental bond that we experience through our own body, which is "intra-connected" with our surroundings, and at a broader scale, beyond the boundaries (and the privileges) of our individuality. But in thickening the lived experiences of different co-inhabitants of earth, environmental narratives should also soften the idea that categories such as the Anthropocene or the Capitalocene constitute the only possible words to describe the (somewhat) natural order of things. Eco-narratives can turn into effective practices only when they re-enact the world-building experience of maternal language; namely, when they bind people around a shared creativity—around the possibility to envision "new forms of exchange [and coexistence] that are created from our differences and not by erasing difference"[6] (Zamboni, *Sentire e scrivere* 77). In connecting people as well as human and nonhuman life, these embodied stories should sound as an open invitation to experiment with the imaginative potential that resides within an infinitely moldable language. The words that are tied together to form environmental discourses have a pudding-like texture that remains adaptable to countless shapes, and is generative of forms of life, communication, relationality, and self-affirmation that are associated with the ethics of codependence.

***Pasta Povera*: How to Make the Difference**

Ingredients
500 gr semolina flour
350 ml lukewarm water
Some extra flour
Preparation
Make a hill of the flour with a hollow in the middle. Gradually incorporate the water and knead the dough to form a smooth, elastic ball. Then roll it out into a very thin layer. Sprinkle some flour on top and, using a knife, cut a series of strips. Roll up each strip and cut into slices to form tagliatelle noodles. Unwrap the noodles and let them dry for 30 minutes. Bring a pot of salted water to boil and cook the pasta for 3–4 minutes.

Unlike its richer counterpart made with eggs, *pasta povera* requires two basic ingredients: water and semolina flour. My grandmother's family used to reserve eggs for other meals or dishes, so she learned to make more with less and has carried on this southern culinary tradition across generations. The pasta has maintained its delicate taste and consistency, yet despite the changes in average wealth and availability of food, what used to be a resourceful dish, dictated by necessity, became a meal for special occasions. The need to feed everybody using fewer ingredients has evolved into a moment of celebration, while memories of post-WWII scarcity have fueled a new abundance. In the history of this recipe, the relationship between words and world has changed, and *povero/a*, an adjective that indicates deprivation, has come to refer to a bountiful environment.

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[6] My translation.

Pasta povera carries a story of enriching minimalism that is intrinsic to its preparation. When making fresh pasta, eggs usually serve as binding agent; however, the poor dough gains its consistency and softness only from gluten, a protein complex of wheat. Semolina flour contains a higher quantity of gluten (13% or more, compared to 8 to 11% contained in all-purpose flour). Since gluten is insoluble in water, instead of dissolving, it creates a gelatin complex that substitutes for the protein binding action of eggs. Furthermore, because of its reticular chemical structure, gluten retains the starch present in the flour. This property helps with maintaining the shape of the noodles throughout the cooking time and with keeping their soft texture. What might look like lack of ingredients is revealed to be a chemical process that enhances both cohesion and flavor.

In the recipe of *pasta povera*, the interplay of binding and softening derives from a minimalist substitution. Swapping water for eggs does not aim at replacing the missing ingredient with something else, as happens, for example, with the mixture of flax and water used to make vegan "eggs." In the preparation of eggless pasta, the substitution works as a radical subtraction, predicated on the bold idea that eggs are not an essential ingredient to make fresh noodles. The minimalist richness of *pasta povera* offers an alternative to the underlying logics of capitalism—to its pressing call for overabundance and its constant anxiety about scarcity. This recipe generates a *different* fulfilling path that problematizes the abundance/scarcity binary and dominant cookbook practices, by maximizing the properties of pantry ingredients and daring to experiment with other sets of needs—creativity, joyful sharing, sense of community.

The operation of creative subtraction that shapes eggless pasta resonates with the feminist notion of *difference* and can inspire narratives that resist the homogenizing script of green consumerism. Like the pasta recipe, this approach hinges on a radical proposition, namely, that it is possible to embrace liberation and emancipation without fighting for inclusion. Carla Lonzi elaborated on difference in her groundbreaking *Let's Spit on Hegel* (1970). Here she dislodges Hegelian dialectical thinking—a thinking that assimilated women within the values and needs of patriarchal society, but never acknowledged their independent role. In reclaiming that role, Lonzi is not setting women in opposition to men, as a specular antithesis looking for recognition. Rather, she is removing women from this polarized logic, and positioning them into *another* possible space: "Women are not in a dialectic relationship with men. The demands we are trying to make clear imply not an antithesis, but a *moving on another level*" (291). The idea that another level exists—a place outside the scarcity of options provided by sexist culture yet also outside men's privileges—implies questioning the popular narration that being included, becoming followers of the standardized "recipe to success," is what minoritized groups should chase after. But what if a space to move freely and experiment with unexpressed needs and desires existed?

This alternative view of freedom that does not call for equality and inclusion is hard to digest for an Anglophone western audience.[7] Its full theorization appeared in *Non credere di avere dei diritti*, a 1987 book authored by the Women's Bookstore Collective of Milan (and translated in English as *Sexual Difference*). The collective's thought-provoking "recipe" for women's liberation was not based on a vindication of "equal rights under the law, but only [on] a full, political and personal accountability to women" outside sociopolitical institutions (Zerilli 93). For the Milanese group, forms of social reparation and attempts to coopt women into the dominant system could not *substitute for* a type of freedom built by women through their relationships, their dialogue, their being together. They could do without "an ideal of equality which neither grew out of [women's] history nor corresponded to [their] interests" (Zerilli 108). The group rejected using women's historical oppression as a binding agent for their gatherings, and aimed at building bonds around narratives that would allow women to (re)define freedom for themselves, in line with desires that would not adopt (or adapt to) "what others have said or would say" (Muraro 32).

Feminist difference springs from a bold "subtraction" that makes new texture, flavors, and modes of sharing, while challenging the assumption that enjoying more means *being included* into a system of power that has normalized inequity and can only work if equality is a promise, dislocated in the future, or mythicized into a virtuous exception for privileged groups. For the Milanese collective, the process of exploring the free sense of their difference rather than fighting for a sense of equality tailored by men for men entailed acknowledging that even women are "not equal among themselves," and that forming real bonds involves facing disparities—many of which are unjust, while others can foster relationships of *affidamento* (entrustment) and shape relationships from an apparent condition of necessity (The Milan Women's Bookstore Collective 132). Rethinking the ingredients that made their freedom rather than accepting a tried-and-true recipe is a self-critical process that led women to explore a variety of possible preparations, all different yet all "starting [...] with women as subjects" (De Lauretis 5).

If the 1970s and early 1980s marked a period of great ferment for Italian feminism, in the late 1990s collectives had established forms, languages, and figures—in particular, the figure of the mother. In 1999 feminist philosopher Angela Putino stirred up the debate with her pamphlet, *Amiche mie isteriche* (*Dear Hysteric Girlfriends*). In this work, Putino warns her companions of the risk of falling into habits, or even worse, of creating a fit-all "recipe" of maternal order that would paradoxically serve the agenda of patriarchy. She reminds her girlfriends that *difference*, far from being a homogenizing binding narrative founded on having a uterus, resides in a never-ending "questioning of the meaning of freedom and justice"

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[7] On this, see De Lauretis and Zerilli.

(51).[8] This shared process of inquiry should encourage processes of disjunction and divergent evolution, or, in our cookbook language, of inventive substitutions. Putino was especially concerned that the maternal practice of care—or rather its unquestioned abundance or scarcity—might turn into a rigid prescriptive structure, into a system of assimilation controlled by power and institution. Care can create a "regime that […] assign[s] value to that part of humanity that enjoys it;" and, being inspired by desires of protections and guidance, the exercise of care "is not spoiled by the fear of the coercive violence" that might underlie its practice (66).

Environmentalism has molded narratives of care that have united people around a shared platform; yet if caring for the environment can act as a powerful binding agent, creating eco-narratives entails rethinking environmentalism as a matrix of uses of language and practices that can loosen our ties to a late capitalism with a green and caring facade. *Pasta povera*, through its logic of subtraction that succeeds in creating joyful abundance, escapes the popularized eco-narratives of care that, by focusing on the fear of scarcity, have served the capitalist agenda of overproduction. Its material discourse of enriching minimalism invites us to *sottrarci* (to remove ourselves) from the unquestioned recipe that "producing more [is] the single most urgent priority" (Parasecoli 135). Rather than focusing exclusively on quantities—on cutting doses, or swapping a (cheaper) ingredient for another—the preparation of *pasta povera* shifts the focus toward the qualities of relationships. In this recipe, what makes the difference is valuing the binding properties intrinsic to water and flour, as this acknowledgment opens another possible way of creating material and symbolic relationships. In making the poor dough, women like my grandmother inventively reworked the scarcity of their war-time pantries into the possibility of gathering people at the table, nourishing them, and caring for those resisting the hardship of war.

The preparation of eggless pasta demonstrates, in an intuitive and practical way, a concept that Frances Moore Lappé and Anna Lappé have argued in their analysis of sustainable agriculture: "it is the quality of human and ecological relationships that determines whether we experience scarcity or not, now and in the future" (5). In a similar way, Diana Ojeda, Jade Sasser, and Elizabeth Lunstrum have spelled out the importance of *removing ourselves* from a narrative solely based on quantities that underestimates the difference between scarcity and unequal allocation of resources: "both poverty and resource scarcity" flow largely from the uneven distribution of resources since capitalism simultaneously "encourage[s] overconsumption by the wealthy and well-connected, and prevent[s] the poor from accessing resources that effectively have been 'captured" (8). Too often, neo-Malthusian eco-narratives have manufactured scarcity and precarity into unstoppable "natural phenomena" related to population growth (once again, a matter of quantity) and fostered stories of climate change mitigation or adaptation that do not call for envisioning actual socio-political and economic alternatives. Botanist

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[8] My translation.

Robin Wall Kimmerer has also problematized the meaning of scarcity from an environmental perspective that draws on her Potawatomi cultural background: "economics is about decision-making in the face of scarcity" and "with scarcity as the main principle, the mindset that follows is based on commodification of goods and services" and on the creation of "artificial scarcity through hoarding" (The Serviceberry). Wall Kimmerer suggests to prioritize a set of binding discourses—"relationship and purpose and beauty and meaning"—that escape logics of commodification. She concedes that "market capitalism is [not] going to disappear anytime soon" but exhorts readers to nurture "a gift economy that runs right alongside the market economy, where the good that is served is community."

Paying attention to the quality of the binding makes the difference by changing the dominant relationship between words and world. In the case of *pasta povera*, subtracting becomes an enriching way to unite people and free them from corporate narratives of environmental care that equate scarcity with fear and deprivation, and abundance with profit and accumulation.

Pane di Castelvetrano: Kneading a Porous Dough

Ingredients
800 g Sicilian blond durum wheat flour
200 g timilia flour
800 ml lukewarm water
200 g starter (or mother) dough
20 g salt
Preparation
Put the flours, the starter, and 700 ml of water in a kneading machine. Begin at low speed for 7–8 minutes. Add the remaining 100 ml of water and the salt, and mix for other 7–8 minutes. Move the dough to a bowl and cover it with a cloth for the first proof. After two hours, place the dough on a countertop sprinkled with flour. Roll it with a rolling pin into rectangular shape; then fold up the four sides and join them in the middle. Shape into a round loaf and move it to a baking pan. Let it rise until it has doubled in size (about two hours). Bake the loaf at 260 °C for an hour or until it gets a coffee-colored crust.

Pane di Castelvetrano is a Sicilian bread made with *timilia* and at times *russello*, ancient grains that along with *maiorca* and *perciasacchi* (long farro), were dismissed in the 1950s. As a child I never had the chance to savor this bread; at the time, *timilia* was forgotten, replaced with modern varieties of wheat. I stumbled on this recipe much later, in the early 2000s, when local farmers started to retie their lost bond with grains native to the island.

Based on my current field work, this last section highlights the fruitful intersections between feminist perspectives and on-farm experiences. It features conversations with cereal growing practitioners, including Filippo Drago, a miller from Castelvetrano who initiated the ancient grains revolution in Sicily; Silvia Turco, who runs a women-owned organic farm near Enna; and Massimiliano Solano, the manager of Valdibella, a co-op farm at the forefront of sustainable food, in the area of Palermo. Their commitment to retaining old ingredients and recipes has permeated socio-cultural environments by mobilizing different thinking and actions within Sicilian communities.

Kneading Castelvetrano produces relations that build a porous structure. The interaction of starch and gluten creates a stable network, able to retain fermentation gas in the dough and prevent the collapse of the bread during baking and cooling (Onyango). When the dough is heated, starch granules absorb water, swell, gelatinize, and lose their semi-crystalline nature. The linear amylose polymers leach out of the granules leaving amylopectin-enriched granules. Being lower in gluten, timilia features a more balanced ratio of starch and gluten than modern grains. The higher quantity of starch allows the dough to retain more air during fermentation, resulting in a loaf pierced with air pockets.

The porosity of Castelvetrano bread offers a fit culinary image for the relationships that women kneaded together through the so-called “practice of doing.” Up to 1975, feminist groups had mainly met to talk, but in the mid-1970s women started to do things together: e.g. creating bookstores, libraries, publishing houses, and new meeting places (The Milan Women’s Bookstore Collective 81). Collaborating in these enterprises made it possible for “a movement without a unified organization” to come together in order to accomplish particular projects. It appeared that, “in the process of doing, desire can assert itself with the greatest determination without denying the possibility of other desires, other choices” (The Milan Women’s Bookstore Collective 82). This work built tight bonds between women while generating porous spaces within the social environment.

Establishing more inclusive venues contributed to fostering a sense of community but also to welcoming and retaining new ideas: “it was understood that doing, and all it brought to light, should be open to reflection so as to transform experience into knowledge” (The Milan Women’s Bookstore Collective 82). Through the interaction of work and words, of labor and (self-)reflection, women’s “socialized life” became visible and political, and female politics shifted its focus from gaining “access to consciousness and speech [...] [to activate a] joint transformation of the female body and the social body” (The Milan Women’s Bookstore Collective 84). For the feminists of the Milan Bookstore, binding and mobilizing women through shared work was “more subversive than a showy demonstration” (84–85). In a 1976 article published in the magazine *Sottosopra* they affirmed that “things change to the extent that we strengthen and valorize relations among women, and *on that basis* we make our decisions about what to want, what to do” (85). The feminist practice of doing retained “air” from the outside to build cooperation among women and release new (transformed) energy into the society. This “kneading” process resonates with the idea that eco-narratives can gather communities around ecological issues by mediating a vibrant exchange between the socio-cultural world and the natural environment.

Beyond the culinary analogy and theoretical application, the action of kneading *pane di Castelvetrano* exemplifies a practice of doing that has generated environmental narratives in which manual labor and discourses of positive (ex)change have porous borders. In Sicily, rediscovering ancient grains has led to a broader process of reconnection with the natural-cultural heritage: these crops have bonded people to the complex history of colonization, migrations, and encounters inscribed in this Mediterranean island, and have simultaneously shaped liberating practices against corporate monocultures.

The term *timilia*, or in Sicilian dialect *tumminia*, derives from the ancient Greek *trimenios*, designating a grain that likely originated in Mesopotamia and whose growing cycle takes only three months. Timilia is also called *grano marzuolo*, meaning a grain sprouting in March. The names of other ancient varieties are similarly rooted in the linguistic and cultural variance of the island: e.g. *rossello* (or *russello*) takes its name from *russu*, the reddish color of its ears; *perciasacch*i from its long grains that make holes (*perciare*) in the bags (*sacchi*); while the name of *maiorca* likely comes from the whitish color of majolica (Venora and Blangiforti 43). For decades, this diverse lexicon has been erased by the monocultural language of modern grains. Between the 1960s and 1970s, in the midst of the "green revolution," intensive cultivations were introduced in Sicily, controlled by northern agrobusinesses that distributed within the Italian peninsula and across global markets. Wheat underwent a process of artificial dwarfing to prevent the fertilized crop from growing too tall and bent toward the ground. The outcome was the creation of modern varieties, milder in taste and higher in gluten. The richer content of gluten allows the wheat to sustain the high drying temperatures of a faster and more efficient industrial production. However, "the breeding of the biggest, juiciest, sweetest grains has eliminated biodiversity and has resulted in a more-than-ironic unintended consequence" (Morton); speeding up industrial production by using wheat higher in gluten has slowed down people's digestion and increased the incidence of intolerances. As one of my interviewees, Massimiliano Solano, put it: "food should nourish everybody and taste good; when food pollutes, intoxicates, or enslaves, we should question our choices, and the narratives and relationships behind those choices."[9]

In Sicily, retrieving narratives from the past and challenging dominant techniques of production began in the late 1990s–early 2000. At that time, ancient grains still inhabited the maternal language of a new generation of farmers across the island: Solano recounted that his grandfather used to call *russello*, *gianti russu* (Sicilian dialect for "red giant") as the crop was far taller than his grandchildren, and Drago shared vivid memories of his family bringing their *timilia* harvest to the local stone mill on a donkey. For him going back to cultivating *timilia* has created a bridge between the donkey of his childhood and the iPhone of his present, between a remote

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[9] Phone conversation with Solano, on April 27, 2022.

past and current innovation.[10] Coming from a lineage of millers, Drago was among the first to experiment with ancient grains, thanks to the help of Stazione Consorziale Sperimentale di Granicoltura per la Sicilia. Since 1927, the center has kept a record of all the varieties of Sicilian grains that, in 1942, inspired the comprehensive study of Ugo De Cillis, *I frumenti siciliani*. This work provided a map of the physical and morphological characteristics of forty-five types of local wheat, and has offered concrete narratives to farmers interested in the recovery and preservation of this local heritage.

Relearning how to speak the language of ancient grains has reintroduced agricultural practices of cultural and culinary enrichment, and created "pockets" of resistance to agrobusinesses. Unlike modern wheat, ancient grains are more resistant to the drought typical of the Sicilian inland. Being taller—*russello* can reach 1,80 meters of height—these native crops can thrive among weeds, without any herbicides or nitrogen fertilizers. Their cultivation simply requires plowing and seeding the soil. In addition, *russello* can be used in zootechnical activities in place of hay, and plays an enhancing function in grazing grounds during periods of rest. As Turco explained during our conversation, it might sound counterintuitive but the only profitable way to cultivate ancient grains is organic agriculture.[11] The use of chemical fertilizers and pesticides would not substantially improve their yield (roughly 1/3 of modern grains). Ancient varieties need more time to be processed into flour and bread, but are more nutritious than "regular" wheat: low in gluten, high in proteins, and rich in microelements and polyphenols, these grains invite people to eat less but eat better.

Ancient crops have engendered subversive supply chain models that defy the laws of corporate agriculture. Strict norms regulate patent law in biotechnology and plant breeding: "the agribusinesses's ownership of intellectual property of genetic materials limits farmers' control over their crops because seeds from one year's harvest legally can't be set aside, […] used in the following growing season," or shared (Parasecoli 108). Corporations like Syngenta or Monsanto/Byer have also filed (and at times obtained) patents for conventional breading of crops like barley, tomatoes, or broccoli because, while according to European patent laws "processes for conventional breeding cannot be patented, plants and animals stemming from these processes are patentable" ("Patents on plants and animals"). Ancient grains are not patented and therefore farmers can own, save, and exchange the seeds. "Binding" these seeds to the land has marked an act of self-determination and liberation.

Liberation also comes from reconnecting with the history of encounters that has shaped and transformed the Sicilian soil. To strengthen this natureculture nexus, on the occasion of Expo 2015 (the World Expo hosted in Milan)— "Feeding the Planet, Energy for Life"—the archeological park of Selinunte assigned an area within the park to the cultivation of ancient grains. The harvesting was live streamed during an event of Expo dedicated to Mediterranean organic food, while the flour from the harvest

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[10] Phone conversation with Drago, on April 26, 2022.

[11] Phone conversation with Turco, on April 29, 2022.

went into making the Castelvetrano bread served during food tastings in Milan (Ansa). This project, which currently involves a larger area of the park, aims to forge ties to the "agri-cultural" heritage of Sicily, and give visibility to overlooked aspects of bio-cultural diversity.

In a 2017 study, biologists Gianfranco Venora and Sebastiano Blangiforti have highlighted how the actions of seeding and harvesting ancient grains have activated discourses of cultural conservation, raised awareness of health concerns, and developed local relationships of ownership and distribution, alternative to corporate models of vertical integration (46–47). From the perspective of a committed practitioner, Solano has also stressed that the ancient grains revolution can lead people toward a type of sustainable agriculture that would free both farmers and consumers by bringing them closer—as partners willing to strategize together, willing to eat what is in season, what is far from spotless, or what might have an unfamiliar taste. Today, he continued, farmers are used to receiving subsidies to destroy excess harvest. What if those subsidies were used to retain and distribute that excess? The model at which Solano hinted in our conversation would focus on (re)tying people to actual needs: producing healthy, nutritious food for all, enhancing biodiversity and human dignity, and minimizing waste and pollution. This model kneads together personal and political, by linking individual needs with nonmonetizable and "nonquantifiable knowledge [that] corporations and governments refuse to value" (Teare). This view of community-based agriculture envisions a way of living and narrating the world founded on the feminist proposal of granting primacy to contact, contiguity, and contingency while exploring new meanings for the "inseparable transmission of life and language" (Dominijanni, *Il trucco* 168: My translation).

The recipe of Castelvetrano bread retells the story of lost *words* that, once retrieved and re-*worked*, have built a new *world*—or at least areas of resistance—in which cohesion between people and their environment has molded porous relationship, infused with bubbly freedom.

Conclusion

From academia to advertising, environmental narratives are a staple dish of eco-conscious offerings. But, as with food, also with discourses, we rarely stop to think about what we are consuming: What operations turn everyday language into eco-narratives? What are the implications of these processes? And how is making environmental narratives different from feeding green capitalism?

In answering these questions, I resorted to culinary and feminist "recipes"—texts in which the synergy of words, world, and work becomes visible and transformative. The operations of binding and softening, employed to create the texture of a pudding, make eggless fresh pasta, and shape a loaf of bread, have illustrated key strategies for environmental recipes. A starchy language, used both to enhance cohesion and lighten rigid structures, can produce eco-discourses that adapt to various contexts, resist the pressure of consumerist scripts, and open porous spaces of natural-cultural interaction.

The action of ecological discourses does not uniquely reside in their message but also in the fact that these narratives do not use language to turn reality into "highly processed food." They employ language as a liberating vehicle of reconnection with a life that, since our childhood, has been mediated (and not altered) by words. Acknowledging that our bond with material, embodied reality originated our ability to speak freely is at the core of the transformative thinking that unites environmental narratives across languages and cultures. Once again, the similarity with the culinary art is striking: like the process of crafting eco-discourses, cooking is a practice of transformation that requires that we bond with material ingredients to enjoy the creative freedom of experimenting with flavors, smells, and textures.

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Pesticide, Politics and a Paradise Lost: Toxicity, Slow Violence and Survival Environmentalism in Ambikasutan Mangad's *Swarga*

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Abstract

Ambikasutan Mangad's *Enmakaje* (translated into English as *Swarga* by J. Devika) is a dystopic tale of socio-environmental crisis that represents the actual event of endosulfan disaster in the Indian state of Kerala in literary imagination. This paper examines how Mangad's text represents the "slow violence" the endosulfan disaster unleashes, in encrypted and incremental ways, upon the environs, bodies and psyches of the victims. It looks into how the politics of denial tries to suppress the inconvenient truth about the invisible invasion of the foreign element in an area where the local people live in reciprocity with their immediate environment. The paper also dissects how Mangad's use of the images of deformed human bodies with congenital anomalies in rendering the amorphous threats visible brings the environmental and disability concerns together and how these contravened and disabled bodies mark the uncanny nature of the disaster. Finally, it focuses on how the poor victims put up a collective protest in the form of an ecopopulist movement against the pesticide lobby and how their resistance to the socio-environmental injustice substantiates the fact that in a postcolonial country like India environmental issues are integrally connected to the issues of sustenance, shelter and survival of the "ecosystem people".

Keywords: Pesticide, disaster, slow violence, disabled bodies, survival environmentalism

Resumen

Enmakaje de Ambikasutan Mangad (traducido al inglés por J. Devika como *Swarga*) es una historia distópica de crisis socioambiental que representa el evento real del desastre del endosulfán en el estado indio de Kerala en la imaginación literaria. Este artículo examina cómo el texto de Mangad representa la "violencia lenta" que desata el desastre del endosulfán, de forma encriptada y progresiva, sobre el entorno, los cuerpos y la psique de las víctimas. Analiza cómo la política de la negación intenta suprimir la verdad incómoda sobre la invasión invisible del elemento extranjero en un área donde la gente local vive en reciprocidad con su entorno inmediato. El documento también analiza cómo el uso que hace Mangad de las imágenes de cuerpos humanos deformados con anomalías congénitas para hacer visibles las amenazas amorfas une las preocupaciones ambientales y de discapacidad y cómo estos cuerpos contravenidos y discapacitados marcan la naturaleza misteriosa del desastre. Finalmente, se centra en cómo las víctimas pobres organizan una protesta colectiva en forma de movimiento ecopopulista contra el lobby de los pesticidas y cómo su resistencia a la injusticia socioambiental corrobora el hecho de que, en un país poscolonial como la India, los problemas ambientales están integralmente conectados. a los temas de sustento, cobijo y sobrevivencia de la "gente del ecosistema".

Palabras clave: Pesticida, desastre, violencia lenta, cuerpos discapacitados, supervivencia ambientalismo

Introduction

In the year 1962, Rachel Carson, an American author-conservationist published *Silent Spring*, a treatise on the danger of pesticide poisoning, that ignited the modern environmental movement in the West. Carson's "toxic discourse"[1] engages with the physiological and eco-environmental problems caused by chemical pesticide overuse across the world in post-war time which sees rapid growth in industrial agriculture and excessive consumption of toxic "substances of incredible potential for harm" (Carson 25).[2] Carson observes that an indiscreet overuse of persistent synthetic pesticide in capital-intensive and resource-intensive commercial farming results in adverse environmental conversions and slowly unfolding disaster that causes insidious harm to the whole biota and people exposed to the contamination, directly or indirectly. Disaster experts across the world believe that sudden, calamitous and spectacular events are less ravaging and fatal than the apparently invisible and gradually unfolding disastrous "processes" where the "catastrophic events are consistently entwined with "ordinary," "chronic," or "slow onset" disasters[...]or where the state itself constitutes a "hazard"" (Carrigan 121). The ineffability and elusive nature of these accretive disasters make them pervasive processes that take their toll "gradually and out of sight" (Nixon 2). The endosulfan disaster[3] in the Indian state of Kerala is one such invisible and attritional chemical pesticide disaster that has been taking its toll on the environment and vulnerable local people for the last five decades. The unrestrained aerial spraying of endosulfan in the cashew plantations of the Kasaragod district in Northern Kerala has resulted in a catastrophe continuum that has terminated normalcy for the environment, the individual and the social collective in the particular area.

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[1] Lawrence Buell defines "toxic discourse" as a mode of writing that expresses "anxiety arising from perceived threat of environmental hazard due to chemical modification by human agency." See Buell (2001).

[2] In the post-war era the world saw great proliferation in the use of chemical pesticide, particularly DDT. While the scientific fraternity was silent about the dire impacts of DDT on public health and the whole biota, it was Carson who did thorough research, collected important data and put them together to make people see the reality of the insidious effects of DDT. Within ten years after the publication of *Silent Spring,* the Environmental Protection Agency in the US acknowledged the adverse environmental impacts and potential human health risks involved in the use of DDT and issued a cancellation order for DDT in 1972.

[3] In the years 1963 and 1964 the Kerala agriculture department started planting cashew trees in a monoculture plantation system in the hill areas of Northern Kerala. In 1978 the Plantation Corporation of Kerala (PCK), which was formed to facilitate the Green Revolution in the state, took over the cashew plantation estate. Since it took charge of the estate, the PCK started spraying endosulfan aerially and unprecedentedly turning a blind eye to its lethal impacts on human health and ecosystem in the area. The disaster came to wider notice when the local people started protesting against the contamination of the environment and the birth of deformed children in the area. It is the concerted action of national and international environmental pressure groups like KSSP and CSE that played a big role in banning endosulfan in Kerala ultimately in 2011.

As regards the representation of the Kerala endosulfan disaster in the literary imagination, the writer-activist Ambikasutan Mangad's novel *Enmakaje*[4] is a riveting work of imaginative literature that narrates the story of pesticide, politics and a paradise lost involved in the endosulfan disaster. By interweaving myth, lore, folktales, history and fiction in the narrative, Mangad tells a moving tale in a deceptively lyrical manner. The dystopic tale of environmental breakdown, cultural collapse and humanitarian crisis helps to apprehend the formless threats of pesticide poisoning imaginatively that might otherwise have escaped the notice of the literary world. In fact, the representation of the disaster in fictional imagining is an integral part of Mangad's anti-endosulfan activism, and the novel *Swarga* "is not just art but an act of protest".[5] The main purpose behind representing the chemical threat in literary imagination is to "lodge crisis into the heart of political and public consciousness while soliciting new ways of negotiating with disaster" (Rastogi 4). As a postcolonial disaster narrative the text focuses on a problem of the present and depicts the experiences of a "real-life catastrophe along with (its) deep-lying causes" (Carrigan 131).[6] In the novel, the actual event and the story are in a "constant dance with each other, one in which the Disaster Unconscious plays the tune to which they move" (Rastogi 8). This pas de deux of story and event foregrounds the interconnection among history, politics, economy, poverty and vulnerability involved in any disaster in postcolonial states. In the novel, a whole raft of environmental concerns has been integrated with serious issues in human society like class discrimination, disability, inequity, injustice and violation of human rights. Although the pesticide industry–structural power nexus suppresses all forms of dissension in the text, the villagers' environmental justice movement substantiates that in the postcolonial South, environmentalism is mostly concerned about an uneven conflict between the powerful "omnivore" sector on one hand and the disempowered "ecosystem people" on the other.[7] This article reads Mangad's *Swarga* to look into the politics of denial that created an illusion of safety discarding the local people's apprehension of the invasion of the foreign element i.e., endosulfan in the area. It examines how Mangad's narrative documents the "slow violence" unleashed upon the environs, bodies and psyches of the endosulfan victims in invisible and incremental ways. It investigates how Mangad's use of the images of deformed bodies for the purpose of rendering the formless threats perceptible brings the environmental and disability concerns together and how the crippled bodies with birth anomalies suggest the uncanny nature of the disaster. Finally, it focuses on the impoverished victims who put up a collective protest in the manner of an ecopopulist movement against the pesticide lobby–structural power nexus. It explores how the local people's resistance to environmental injustice and "intra-species inequalities" substantiates the fact that in a country like India, the environment is not only about the beautiful, picturesque and sublime aspects of nature and that environment in India should rather be seen in terms of the interface between local people and the immediate environment they depend upon for shelter, sustenance and survival (Malm and Hornborg 62).

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[4] The original Malayalam novel *Enmakaje* was published in 2009 and J. Devika's English translation of the original text was published with the title *Swarga* in 2017.

[5] See https://www.thehindu.com/books/books-authors/it-is-not-just-art-but-an-act-of-protest/article18302952.ece. Accessed on 06-03-2022.

[6] There is no denying that disaster risks are disproportionately distributed across the world and that the postcolonial states in the Global South are most exposed to the enduring impacts of different forms of disaster. The disproportionate disaster vulnerability that the postcolonial subjects experience has its roots in the history of colonial exploitation. Critics like Anthony Carrigan have pointed to a connection between disaster vulnerability and colonial past in the post/neocolonial South. Taking his cue from the World Bank's report (2014) and Naomi Klein's work on "disaster capitalism" Carrigan observes: "It is no surprise that these (disasters) take a disproportionate toll on the world's poorest communities, many of which are still grappling with the legacies of western colonialism and neocolonial practices" (117).

[7] Gadgil and Guha coined the term "ecosystem people" to refer to people who depend upon their immediate environment for shelter and sustenance. According to them, these ecosystem people are the victims of the resource-intensive and socially unjust development system that disproportionately benefits the *omnivores*, people who enjoy extensive control over resources, at the cost of environmental degradation and dispossession of the poor. See Gadgil and Guha (1995).

Utopian Vision and Dystopian Reality

In Mangad's *Swarga*, two human protagonists Neelakantan and Devayani repudiate the city life, shed their names and return to original lifeforms in the midst of dense verdure and wild animals in search of a peaceful life in the wild. Unlike in colonial ecological fiction, their return to the forest has nothing to do with the appropriation and colonisation of the environment and local people there.[8] Actually, it is some unpleasant experiences of urban life that led Neelakantan and Devayani to choose an undisturbed life of seclusion in a remote forest in the Western Ghats. Mangad's novel, in fact, borrows largely from Edenic tropes, as instantiated in the title of the English translation, as well as from the tales of forest exile in the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata.*[9] The voluntary rejection of the privileges of urban life and the retreat to the sacred grove eventually end in an encounter with a dystopian reality of disease, death and deterioration. The serenity that surrounds the disaffected renunciants' reclusive life far from the chaos and corruption of the city turns out to be a deceptive one. The discovery of a disfigured child with a corroding body in the forest brings them face to face with the harrowing reality of how the land and its people are slowly succumbing to toxic contamination due to unscientific aerial spraying of endosulfan in the cashew plantations in the area. What starts as a

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[8] In colonial ecological fiction like Rudyard Kipling's *The Jungle Book* (1894) and Edgar Burroughs's *Tarzan of the Apes* (1912) that tell stories of white men's conquest of wild (forest)land in Africa, the white, male protagonists renounce the privileges of European civilisation and return to a prehistoric life-form in some jungle where they adapt to primeval ways of life in the wild. The antiquity of life-forms determined by seasons, topography and basic needs reverses the standards of civilisation in these texts.

[9] In Hinduism, the Sanskrit word "swarga"/ "Svarga" means heaven, the celestial abode of the devas, the divine beings. It is one of the three Lokas as described in the Hindu cosmology [the other two being *Bhuloka* (earth) and *Patala* (netherworld)]. However, the idea of heaven in Hinduism is not similar to that in the Abrahamic religions.

romantic tale of escape gradually turns into a powerful disaster "faction"[10] that represents the grim reality of state-backed environmental catastrophe in a part of "God's own country". And as the narrative progresses, the narratorial focus shifts from human characters to the ravaged site to suggest the danger and "horrorism"[11] implied in the disaster. The decayed ecosystem and polluted biosphere where the air, water and bodies all host toxins signify the vulnerability of human and non-human lifeforms and their attendant ecosystems in the area.

In her 2015 essay "Anthropocene, Capitalocene, Plantationocene, Chthulucene: Making Kin", Donna Haraway uses the term "plantationocene" to refer to the problem of "extractive and enclosed" monoculture plantation that brings about a dreadful homogeneity disturbing the traditional link between local ecology and local economy (Haraway 162). In *Swarga*, Mangad addresses this problem of monoculture plantation that shatters the traditional understanding of human–environment intercourse in the area. As we see in the novel, the monoculture plantation of cashew trees brings adverse changes in the local ecosystem and the lives of local people who depend upon their local environment for their sustenance needs:

> They set up these monoculture plantations, destroying pricelessly biodiverse forests. And not in a negligible area. Six hundred hectares in Enmakaje alone!
>
> 'And for what? Most of the biodiversity disappeared. The water sources dried up. The land is filled up with sickly people… like the eucalyptus plantations in Karnataka and the pine plantations in the Himalayas. (Mangad 154–155)

However, this problem of monoculture plantation has been addressed only sparsely in the novel, and Mangad's main focus is clearly on the poisoned plantations with their lethal impacts on human health and the ecosystem in the area. Mangad uses an inductive approach (from Pareekshit's deformed body to the local people's experience of the degraded environment in general) to refer obliquely to the implied cause of the disaster. The local people's experiences of the effects of poisoning in the forms of degraded environment, deformed bodies and disturbed relations between human and non-human life forms are the visible manifestation of the disaster which is ineffable and intangible in nature. Although the local people were initially led to believe that the place was doomed because of the curse and anger of the guardian spirit of the area, the strange disabilities with which children were born and the haunted landscape made them realise that the entire biosphere was at risk because of its exposure to an unseen presence of toxic substances: "Now, all the houses near here have strange children. With enlarged heads[...]tongues too big...It is Jadadhari's curse, they console themselves. No. I am sure, no God will be so wrathful towards children" (77). It is important to note here that like the Bhopal gas tragedy (1984), the Chernobyl accident (1986) and many other anthropogenic human-environmental disasters, the endosulfan disaster is also caused by environmental negligence, state-

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[10] The Sri Lankan English novelist and poet Carl Muller coined the term "faction" to describe his own works which are, according to him, 'fictional-fact' or 'factual-fiction' (fusion of fact and fiction).

[11] According to Cavarero, unlike words like "terror" that refer to the violence from the perspective of the perpetrators, "horrorism" addresses the violence from the perspective of the defenceless and vulnerable victims. See Cavarero (2011).

backed repression of information and the distortion of the truth. As we see in Mangad's novel, it is the politics of denial and suppression of inconvenient truth by the pesticide lobby that gradually led to the disaster. Information about endosulfan toxicity and the health risks associated with it, had been concealed. The safety regulations during the spraying like covering waterbodies before aerial spraying (105), giving two days' notice to local people (105), and doing the spray only early at dawn (105) were completely flouted. When Neelakantan reminded the PCK officer that the precautions needed to be followed before spraying endosulfan were not maintained by the corporation, the officer argued that whatever the government was doing was "for the good of people" (105). Even after the National Institute of Occupational Health (NIOH) and the Centre for Science and Environment (CSE) found the presence of endosulfan in the biosphere much above the permissible levels and even when there were visible signs of poisoning in the area, it was promulgated that "Endosulfan is not a poison. It's medicine used to produce more cashew nuts, understand? If there are diseases here, get good doctors" (171). The liaisons between the pesticide industry and the state machinery created an illusion of knowledge that dismissed the reality of experience. And this withholding of information and downplaying of risk apprehensions resulted in the catastrophe eventually[12]. As regards the role of the state in this politics of downplaying the truth, it is important to quote what Nayar observes in a different context: "the state as protector and as guardian has not only failed in its responsibility but actively supported the wrong-doers" (50). The politics of repression, apprehension and recognition has been brilliantly recorded in *Swarga*. The sudden absence of butterflies in the forests, "water in which 'no fish, no frog, gro'(sic)" (70), "land where bees don't thrive" (94), strange children with deformed bodies, "wide incidence of cancer, epilepsy, mental aberrations" (120), no leopards in Enmakaje which was once the "leopard's own country" (121), not even an earthworm beneath the soil (122–23), unhealthy areca palm trees (127), "Not a dragonfly or a bird anywhere" (152)–all these are explicit and uncanny signs of poisoning in the area. Neelakantan sarcastically comments on how their utopian vision of living in a *Swarga* (paradise) has ultimately brought them to a mysterious *Naraka* (hell): "'This is not Swarga- heaven- Devi, this is Naraka- hell'" (73).

As in the other Indian disaster narratives like Indra Sinha's *Animal's People* (2007) and Mahasweta Devi's *Pterodactyl, Puran Sahay, Pirtha* (1993), in Mangad's *Swarga*, myth has been used to communicate the feeling of the uncanny produced by

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[12] The environmental activist groups like the CSE and Kerala Sastra Sahitya Parishad (KSSP) had to fight hard to expose "the tactics the pesticides industries used to suppress information, distort truth and discredit the whistle blowers". The CSE, in particular, fought hard for banning endosulfan and getting justice for the victims. It has been a difficult fight because the pesticide lobby used every means in maligning the organisation and the individuals associated with it. All the details about CSE's war against the endosulfan lobby has been documented in an article titled, "Endosulfan Industry's Dirty War - A Chronology of events" published in the official website of CSE. The above-mentioned quotation is taken from that article. See https://www.cseindia.org/endosulfan-industrys-dirty-war-a-chronology-of-events--1927.

the disaster.[13] However, the use of myths in *Swarga* has another important function which is to highlight how the toxic intervention damages the local people–biota interface in the area. The use of local myths of *Jadadhari Bhoota*, snakes, leopards and monkeys signifies how in the primal forest the other-than-human world is not a passive world of objects. Through references to local myths, legends and folktales, Mangad seems to highlight how the local people live in close reciprocity with flora and fauna and how their cultural practices and beliefs are woven around the immediate environment where the nonhuman is as active as human subjects. Their ecospiritual consciousness and traditional ecocentric culture have been reflected in the celebration of human–environment intercommunication in local myths and folktales. They believe that "Siva is Nature itself. Siva exists in every leaf, every flower." (185). It is important to quote what Neelakantan tells Jayarajan about the serpent-worship practice in the area: "'At the heart of serpent worship, there is huge concern for nature. These groves protected species diversity and the water. They are sacred–no one enters them or cuts the trees, or takes even a dry twig for firewood. That's how it is here'" (134).

This harmonious interrelationship between local people and their physical environs has been completely shattered by the invasion of a foreign element i.e., endosulfan. Significantly, the serpent image has been repeatedly used in the narrative to suggest how it is the arrival of a deadly foreign agent that results in the loss of paradise for the Enmakaje people. The novel exposes the control gradually asserted by toxic biopolitics over all forms of life in the area. It embodies the idea of "biopower" in referring to how the iron triangle of the pesticide industry, crooked politicians and unscrupulous bureaucrats controls all forms of life and their attendant ecosystems in the area. The pesticide residue that dominates this death-world slowly drains the local people and the environment of life. The poisoned bodies, disturbed reproductive functions and decayed environment, as represented in the text, imply the "necropolitics"[14] that dominates the area. The vulnerability of all lifeforms and the condition of always being-at-risk generate what Nayar calls the "ecological gothic".[15] The next section studies how this ecological gothic has been produced by lingering toxicity that takes its toll on human and non-human lives slowly and invisibly.

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[13] In Indra Sinha's *Animal's People* (2007), a novel that fictionalises the Bhopal gas tragedy, the protagonist Animal takes recourse to myth to communicate the feeling of uncanny produced by the sight of the derelict factory. The use of Hindu myth in representing the disaster-affected locale intensifies the horror and produces the ecological uncanny. Again, in Mahasweta Devi's novella on pesticide poisoning, *Pterodactyl, Puran Sahay, Pirtha* (1993), the author introduces a flying reptile-bird from the Mesozoic era to convey the truth about the endangered conditions of Indian tribals in the face of pesticide poisoning. In the story the pterodactyl is both a myth and a messenger.

[14] Necropolitics, according to Achille Mbembe, is the politics of excluding and exploiting a group of people to such a level that they lose control over their bodies and lives. See Mbembe (2003).

[15] Nayar (2009) defines "ecological gothic" as "the horror, the nightmare and the suffering that arise from misalliances and imbalances among the various elements of life in a particular ecosystem. It is the horror that results from the presence, permeation and persistence of waste (wasted humans as well as other waste) in a system" (39). See Nayar (2009).

Pesticide Poisoning and Slow Violence

Unlike sudden-onset spectacular disasters like cyclones, earthquakes, flash floods, and volcanic eruptions, the endosulfan disaster is a continuing disaster, a slow-onset "process" that wreaks havoc on "the living, the unborn and the animate deceased" insidiously and inconspicuously (Nixon 17). In his book *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* (2011), Nixon defines "slow violence" as a "violence of delayed destruction that is dispersed across time and space, an attritional violence that is not seen as violence at all" (2). Concerning the slow-onset dynamics of slow violence, Nixon observes that slow violence "needs to be seen—and deeply considered—as a contest not only over space, or bodies, or labor, or resources, but also over time" (8). The slow violence causes a life-in-death situation for the residents of the disaster-hit area as this violence is "not content merely to kill because killing would be too little, aims to destroy the uniqueness of the body, tearing at its constitutive vulnerability" (Cavarero 8). As represented in *Swarga*, the residues of the chemical linger in natural components and human blood for a really long time. As the residues of organochlorine pesticides move through the food chain and are transmitted from one organism to the other by means of energy flow, they live "beyond their initial deployment and continue to affect the population beyond their initial targets" (Sadler 350). The effects of pesticide fallout are, thus, not "contained by a single spatiotemporal moment" (Sadler 386). It is "incremental and accretive, its calamitous repercussions playing out across a range of temporal scales" (Nixon 2). In *Swarga*, after the strange child Pareekshit dies, Neelakantan observes that the child is not dead but rather is killed slowly by the invisible killer: "'Not dead, you know, killed… and not with a single blow. Inch by inch. Or milliliter by milliliter…the killer is gloating somewhere, invisible'" (163). It is important to note that in naming the deformed infant Pareekshit Mangad must have drawn on the story of Uttara's son Parikshit in the *Mahabharata* where Parikshit is born lifeless because of his exposure to Aswathama's *Brahmashira Astra* when he was in his mother's womb. The creeping illness of Pareekshit owing to his exposure to endosulfan poisoning when in his mother's womb suggests a resemblance between endosulfan poisoning and *Brahmashira Astra,* the most destructive weapon as described in the epic. In Mangad's text, pesticide toxicity is compared to a "big bomb (that bursts). Not at one go, slowly, gradually[...]" (176). Srirama echoes this idea of endosulfan poisoning as a slow-ticking time bomb when he observes that "all the Hiroshimas and Nagasakis now happe' here, onl' slowly, ver' slowly (sic)'" (193). All these suggest the long drawn-out temporalities of the slow violence.

One serious ramification of slow violence is the victim-survivors' loss of their home and transformation of their familiar place into an unknown and foreign one. The slow disintegration of the victim-survivors' home-place results in their "displacement without moving" (19). As represented in *Swarga*, the impoverished people living in the hills and forests of Enmakaje are dispossessed and displaced in their home, and the slow conversion of their familiar place into a toxic wasteland renders it into a land of fear. The presence of invisible toxicants transforms the *swarga* (paradise) into a strange *naraka* (hell):

> This was no Swarga- Heaven-but hell- Naraka. The land must have yielded gold before endosulfan's entry. The soil was so rich, so well endowed with water sources. Maybe that's why it was named heaven….the curs' of the lan' was tha' poison[...]twenty-five years[...]they sprayed tha' deadly venom on our lan' (sic). (112)

The endosulfan victims experience their familiar landscape of Enmakaje as a strange site owing to the presence of invisible contaminants in land, air and water. It is a "gothicized inverted world" where the known and the familiar are transformed into the strange and frightening, and the survivors' sense of place in which their identity is largely rooted is gradually fragmented (Haider 57). And it is the deformed bodies of the victims and the poisoned wasteland that embody the curse of slow violence which cannot be seen but can only be perceived by seeing the lasting imprints it leaves on human bodies and the land. The victims' bodies become alien to them due to the presence of poison in them. These diseased and disfigured bodies no more fit into the norms of being human. The eroding and crumbling bodies of children with mysterious ailments show how slow violence results in the loss of the sovereignty and integrity of human bodies.

The invisibility of slow violence coincides with the marginality of the poor endosulfan victims in *Swarga*. Nixon argues that slow violence affects poor people the most and "their unseen poverty is compounded by the invisibility of slow violence" (40). As represented in Mangad's text, the endosulfan victims are the impoverished ecosystem people who live in far-off hills area far away from the privileges of the city. These subsistence people are forest-dwellers, and most of them make "a living from collecting honey. They are not honey farmers but collectors, from the forest" (96). In the discourse of national development, these people are, unlike the actively imagined national community, "unimagined community"[16] pulverised by the very governments they have elected (176). Srirama has bluntly pointed to the local people's status of deprivation and dispossession when he says: "'Peopl' here know thi' place is in Kerala onl' durin' election time (sic)." (127). Again, Jayarajan points to the state's indifference to the disaster victims:

> This is all I expected. No Agriculture minister in Kerala will ever move against endosulfan. No matter which party in power, the agricultural officers will always side with the manufacturers of this poison. No government-appointed committee will side with us. (158)

The toxic intervention results in complete helplessness for these "uninhabitants".[17] Their belonging to and control over their home are gradually lost due to the invasion of monoculture plantation first and then the pesticide pollution. The poisoning of the landscape beyond repair eventually lead them to an existential crisis because as

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[16] Unimagined communities, according to Rob Nixon, are the disenfranchised people who are imaginatively excluded from the idea of the nation. See Nixon (2011).

[17] According to Nixon, slow violence renders the home an alien place for the victim-survivors, and the transformation of the familiar place of safety and security into a land of fear makes them "uninhabitants" in their own home. See Nixon (2011).

Fanon (2004) has observed, "for a colonized people, the most essential value, because the most concrete, is first and foremost the land which will bring them bread and, above all, dignity" (9). The state-backed slow violence condemns these "contaminated communities" to continuing suffering and trauma, and it is their emaciated bodies that manifest their prolonged suffering and continuing trauma (Edelstein 2004). The next section studies how the diseased and deformed bodies of the human victims, as represented in Mangad's narrative, mark the uncanny nature of the endosulfan disaster.

The Grotesque Body and the Uncanny

In his 1980 book *The Writing of the Disaster*, Maurice Blanchot observes that disasters are difficult to deal with in literary imagination because of their nature of defying speech and compelling silence. Again, in *Postcolonial Disaster* (2020), Pallavi Rastogi observes: "Literary narrations of disaster are always aporetic in seeking to depict what cannot be put into words yet needing articulation in order to manage and prevent catastrophe" (Rastogi 17). There is no denying that pesticide poisoning is difficult to deal with in imaginative literature because of the apparent immateriality and invisibility of toxic contaminants. As the cause of the disaster is not apparently visible, it is by representing the marks of toxic presence in human and nonhuman bodies that the severity and intensity of the disaster are represented in toxicity disaster narratives. The transformation of human victims into the grotesque with deformed bodies and postural abnormalities is one commonplace trope used in toxicity disaster narratives to show the peril of poisoning in concrete and visible form. In *Swarga*, disability is the predominant metaphor for representing the "long dyings—the staggered and staggeringly discounted casualties" of toxic environments (Nixon 2). As represented in the novel, the endosulfan victims, particularly children, become fragmented bodies lacking consciousness, and this contravention of normal bodily arrangements indicates that "the 'original' has been breached, invaded and irrevocably altered" (Nayar 29). Pareekshit's disfigured body with congenital illness is anything but normal human form as defined by the normative mainstream discourse:

> Its body was covered with sores. The sores gaped mostly around the junctions of the limbs and the neck….the child's hair was grey in some patches….The child was still arching its back and trying to scream….Yes, the mouth was cut all right[...]but the throat was not! (12)

The malformed body of the child is a sign of the transformation of the human into an "abhuman subject", into something "not-quite-human subject, characterized by its morphic variability, continually in danger of becoming not-self, becoming other" (Hurley 3). This transmutation of the body and the degeneration of the human into something strangely unfamiliar loom large over "the land of strangely sick people" (129): "'Al' twenty-seve' 'ouses 'ere hav' sick people[...]chil're' and bi' people. Nowher' else you'll fin' so many sick people(sic)'" (70). Sivppa Nayak's daughter

Bhagyalakshmi cannot close her mouth: "She stood with a big tongue jutting out through her mouth. A rosy red tongue. It lay well below her chin […] Tongue 'ung out eve' in sleep. Can' eat anythin' soil'" (69–70). The sight of Narayan Shetty's daughter's deformed body is a nightmare for Neelakantan: "Her body was grotesque[...]her head was bigger than her body, her limbs were tiny[...]'Children with big heads, the' wer' many 'ere. Al' died soo', the' don' live lon'(sic)" (71). Tummana Shetty's cognitively disabled children are always kept in chains (71). In the cursed land of Enmakaje, there are children with "enlarged heads[...]tongues too big" (77), children whose "head was the size of an unripe coconut" (80), children with "arms and legs covered with reddish body hair" (80), children who look and act like monkeys (83). Mangad's catalogue of crumbling bodies suggests the collapse of the corporeal identity of the endosulfan victims. The doctor's helplessness in treating children with degenerative diseases suggests the horror of helplessness:

> 'This lan' is ful' of disease I haven't seen in medical books and journals. My med'cineisn' workin'. Thi' boy's paren's ha' delusions… I'ad given the' med'cin'. Both killed themselves. Ther''re fifty mental patients i' the small numbe' o''ouses just aroun''ere. Lots o' abortion, cancer. My personal opinion is tha' some terrible poison ha' sprea' all o'er the soil and wate''ere (sic). (83)[18]

The invasion of the body by a foreign agent is also marked by the degeneration of human language and loss of anatomical expressions. The accumulation of toxic chemicals in human bodies results in "the ruination of the human subject", and the disabled bodies are reduced to primal sounds, like groans, cries and screams (3). In Indra Sinha's *Animal's People*, the disabled protagonist "hear(s) the screams and cries of dying people" (Sinha 32), and this "sonic depletion" (Bruyn 153) indicates how the noxious MIC gas writes power on the bodies of the victims (Sinha 32). In *Swarga*, the diseased children cannot speak clearly; they can only produce vague and indecipherable sounds. When Devayani tries to make Pareekshit laugh "the child did not laugh….it began to writhe as if in agony, its mouth opening in a scream" (35). Again, when Devayani starts rubbing the medicinal paste on the child's deformed body, "the child….began squirming, beating its hands and legs on the ground. Its mouth was open in a scream…" (60). Another child-victim makes "ugly sounds and baring its teeth. The grimaces and gestures made it resemble a monkey even more than its appearance." (80). This catalogue of vague and inaudible human vocalisations suggests the crisis of human audio caused by an invisible hyperobject's invasion of human bodies. The capacity of the microscopic and inanimate toxicants

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[18] Critics have found fault with the English translation of the Malayalam original in *Swarga*. They have observed that the local flavour of the Malayalam original mixed with a rich diversity of local dialects is lost in the homogenising English translation. The action of the novel takes place in the Kerala-Karnataka border region of the Kasaragod district of Kerala where people speak Malayalam mixed with a bit of Tulu, Kannada, Marathi and Konkani. Kasaragod district is, in fact, known as *Saptha Bhasha Sangama Bhoomi* ("land where seven languages meet"). This multicultural and multilingual reality of the setting has been well captured in the Malayalam original. In the English translation, the translator has perhaps used fragmented and incoherent English for producing the local feeling which is virtually impossible to do. However, the fragmented English words and sentences certainly highlight the degeneration of human identity of the endosulfan victims in the novel.

to turn human bodies into indistinct sounds suggests how the contaminants achieve "their own animacy as an agent of harm" by poisoning and colonising human bodies (Chen 187).

The notions of the abject and the abhuman[19] concentrating on something alien and atavistic are at the heart of the uncanny. In Mangad's *Swarga*, the deformed body of the infant victims and the poisoned land generate the experience of the uncanny. After Neelakantan sees the "strange(ly familiar) children, neither animal nor human" (73) on the other side of the Kodangiri canal, he "can't bear it any more" (73), and the heart-wrenching images of the screaming and fragmenting bodies produce the feeling of the haunting and the weird. The poisoned and wasted land also contributes to the ecological uncanny because it is both familiar and strange. When Neelakantan passes through the big areca nut garden, the "fatal silence" (123) of the "lifeless" place haunts him and makes him "nervous" (121):

> Suddenly something struck him (Neelakantan). In this vast expanse, he could not sense the presence of a single living creature…Neelakantan broke into a cold sweat, feeling as if he were stranded in the middle of a huge graveyard.…the thought that not even a cockroach was to be seen was truly scary. (122)

As regards disaster vulnerability, it is no denying that some people and some places are in more vulnerable conditions than others and that disasters take a disproportionate toll on the poor and marginalised communities. The next section explores how the poor endosulfan victims of Enmakaje try to put up a collective protest in the fashion of an ecopopulist movement against the pesticide lobby and how their resistance to environmental injustice substantiates the fact that the idea of environment and environmentalism are not the same everywhere across the world. The endosulfan victims' resistance to toxic intervention also highlights that the "survival environmentalism" of the developing countries is different from the "postmaterialist environmentalism" practised in the developed countries of the Global North.

Environmental Injustice and Survival Environmentalism

Before the 1990s the popular idea about environmentalism was that it was not a global phenomenon and that environmental concerns were limited to the rich people of the developed countries of the Global North.[20] It was actually Ronald

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[19] In her book *Powers of Horror* (1982), Julia Kristeva defines *abject* as something which falls outside "the scope of the possible, the tolerable, the thinkable" (1). According to Kristeva, *abject* marks a primal order which cannot be assimilated into the normal experience of the Symbolic order. Kristeva observes that an encounter with the *abject* caused by the breakdown of "identity, system, order" generates a feeling of uncanny, the experience of something familiar yet strange (Kristeva 4). Again, in *The Gothic Body* (2004), Kelly Hurley relates the idea of *abhuman*, humans with transmuted bodies to Kristeva' idea of the abject. Hurley observes that abhumanity is linked to abjection in that "the ambivalent status of the human subject...labors to maintain (the illusion of) an autonomous and discrete self-identity", while welcoming "the event or confrontation that breaches the boundaries of the ego" (Hurley 4).

[20] This idea about environmental ethics and praxis as limited to the economically prosperous countries was substantiated in the Brundtland Commission's (1987) report which proclaims that there exists a positive correlation between environmental decline and economic poverty.

Inglehart's "Postmaterialist Value Thesis" that provided the rationale behind how material affluence and luxury were the prerequisites for environmental concerns.[21] The popular assumption about the correlation between postmaterialist value shift and environmental concerns was later debunked, and two reasons can be identified for this: (i) the active participation of the poor countries of the postcolonial South in the Rio Earth Summit (1992) and (ii) the rise of grassroots ecopopulist movements in Global South countries. Inglehart later revised his Postmaterialist value thesis and put forward the "Objective Problems-Subjective Values" (OPSV) model. The OPSV model posits that while subjective postmaterialist values inspire environmental concerns in developed countries, it is the local environmental problems and a community's direct experience of and fight against them that environmentalism in the postcolonial South is all about. Later Guha and Martínez-Alier extended this idea and elaborated on the difference between the "Full stomach environmentalism" of the developed countries and the "Empty belly environmentalism" practised in the poor countries of the Global South. According to Guha and Martínez-Alier, whereas "Full stomach environmentalism" is preoccupied with affluence, luxury and aesthetics and quality of life, "Empty belly environmentalism" is a survival imperative for local people who depend upon their immediate surroundings for shelter and sustenance. As represented in Mangad's novel, the poor endosulfan victims stood against the resource-intensive, context-insensitive and socially unjust monoculture plantation and the unprecedented use of toxic pesticides in it for their survival needs. They raised their collective voice against an unholy nexus between pesticide industries, political leaders and government officials. However, they were concerned with neither improving the quality of their lives nor protecting the beauty and sublimity of nature. Their resistance to state-backed appropriation and pollution of the local environment and the health risks associated with it was actually motivated by their deprivation of basic sustenance requirements. The destruction of beehives due to pesticide poisoning deprived the poor beekeepers of the area of their livelihood needs:

> Pointing to the beehives that hung on the jackfruit and poovathil trees on the bank, he (Subba Naik) continued: 'B'for' ther' wa' som' hun'red 'ives 'ere. We us'd to live on thi'. All the bees are dea' now, and ther's no honey…But not a drop of honey had been found t'ere for quite some time now. (94)

In the meeting of honey growers and honey collectors, it was deduced that it was the chemical that caused the death of the bees and stalling of honey production. The poisoning of land and water bodies and the corporeal collapse in the area led the subsistence people of Enmakaje to unite and fight against environmental crime. They formed an "environment committee that would fight the ills that had beset Swarga" (117). In fact, it was because of consistent protests by local people and the representation of the case by ESPAC and other organisations that the government of Kerala issued an order to suspend the use of endosulfan in the state in 2001. Mangad,

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[21] Postmaterialist value thesis posits that people become concerned about the environment only after their material needs are fulfilled, and that environmentalism is all about enhancing the quality of life.

who was at the forefront of the anti-endosulfan agitation, gives voice to the victims and their struggle by recording the real incident of how local people united under the leadership of people like Leela Kumari Amma against the toxic intervention in their Swarga.[22] By referring to the dependence of local people on biomass resources for sustenance in the far-off forest area, Mangad tries to foreground how the local people's 'environmentalism from below" is inspired less by an urge for environmental protection and more by the loss of their usufruct rights to their immediate environment.

The disproportionate exposure of the poor and powerless Enmakaje people to pesticide pollution also addresses the issue of environmental injustice that "arose from the fact that some communities or human groups are disproportionately subjected to higher levels of environmental risk than other segments of society".[23] Environmental injustice refers to the unfair distribution of environmental harms on the basis of "race, color, national origin, or income" (Bullard 1994). As we see in *Swarga*, it is the poor, underprivileged and unrecognised people in the periphery whose lives are at stake because of adverse environmental conversions and pesticide-induced contamination. The environmental and ecological injustice deprives the poor people of their customary rights to the local environment. The "poison network" (180) pays no heed to the sufferings of local people because of their marginalised social and economic status. These "dispensable citizens" (Jalais 11) have been abandoned to die a gradual death in the poisoned land, and the bureaucrats and politicians maintain a "criminal silence" (192). Mangad's text points to the necessity of linking together issues of unprecedented development, environmental degradation and human rights in a world where customary rights of local people to their immediate environment have been ignored in favour of cash crop production. As represented in Mangad's narrative, in Enmakaje there was no law, and what reigned supreme in the land is injustice–social, economic and environmental. Thus, the intertwined themes of vulnerability, fragility and unequal power relations in the novel are complemented by a kind of survival environmentalism where the poor victims of environmental injustice raise their voice not for enhancing the quality of life but for their shelter, sustenance and survival. The references to water sources being polluted (112), sugarcane containing endosulfan (127), jackfruits containing the poison (136), presence of the poison in cow's milk, fish eggs, vegetables and other foodstuffs (143), mother's milk being contaminated (143), women's menstrual cycle being adversely affected (146), and bioaccumulation of endosulfan in the grass,

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[22] As Mangad himself was actively involved in the anti-endosulfan agitation in Kerala, he has drawn heavily on the real movement in the story, and certain details about the anti-endosulfan movement towards the end of the novel have been drawn from his own experience. To know more about Mangad's involvement in the anti-endosulfan protest and the origin of *Swarga* in his experiences of it, see his interview in *The Hindu* (April 29, 2017). https://www.thehindu.com/books/books-authors/it-is-not-just-art-but-an-act-of-protest/article18302952.ece

[23] This quotation is taken from the official website of the Environmental Justice Organisations, Liabilities and Trade (EJOLT) project. See http://www.ejolt.org/2013/02/environmental-injustice/#:~:text=The%20concept%20of%20environmental%20injustice,than%20other%20segments%20of%20society.

shrimp, pin fish, stripped mullet (233) - all highlight how the local people's environmentalism was a struggle for survival in the face of capitalist intervention.

Conclusion

In 2009, on the 25th year of the Bhopal gas disaster, Indra Sinha reanimated the character Animal of *Animal's People* in the short story "Animal in the Bhopal". In the story, Animal moves beyond the decimated city of Khaufpur for the first time in his life and comes to know about many places like the imagined poisoned city in the novel:

> 'There are many places like Khaufpur,'…'Some look much like our city, others quite different, but in each the suffering of people, the diseases, and the causes, are the same.' He rattles off a list of names I've often enough heard before – Minamata, Seveso, Chernobyl, Halabja, Vietnam, Hiroshima, Nagasaki, Toulouse, Falluja. (Sinha n.p.)

This list of places affected by human-caused chemical disasters indicates the chemical-caused environmental violence which is no more an unusual phenomenon in this age where the chemical industry is one of the indicators of modern development. The Kerala endosulfan disaster is one such chemical disaster induced by capitalist causes, and Mangad's representation of the hydra-headed ramifications of the disaster in *Swarga*, although strongly rooted in a particular locality, becomes synecdochic for understanding pesticide poisoning-induced chemical environmental disasters and the violence they inflict in an incremental way, particularly upon the poor and marginalised populations. The significance of the novel moves beyond the particular setting when ESPAC announces that their "struggle is not just against endosulfan. It is against all pesticides that lead to earth's desertification" (177). The text, in fact, serves as a metaphor for understanding the reality of how industrial capitalism induces environmental collapse and how environmental breakdown leads to social chaos, economic discrimination and bitter conflict between the powerful state-capitalist sector on the one hand and the disempowered subsistence people on the other. Mangad's representation of individual experiences of pesticide poisoning in imaginative literature renders the impersonal and empirical data on the dire impacts of the Kerala endosulfan disaster perceptible to the human mind. Although the novel uses abstract, sensationalist images in telling the story in exciting and melodramatic plotlines, it ends up bringing the pesticide disaster into the popular imagination and engaging readers with the seriousness of the issue. The story of suffering and resistance, in fact, makes *Swarga* a disaster narrative, and this sort of imaginative space is certainly necessary for imagining and perceiving the different forms of the disaster facing humanity today.

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Emplacement and Narrative Identity in Tomas Bannerhed's *Korparna*

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Abstract

In Tomas Bannerhed's *Korparna* (*The Ravens*, 2011), birds and trees not only function as backdrop and setting but contribute toward forming the characters' narrative identities and sense of place. In this article, I explore historical and literary sources from Småland—the historical province in Sweden where *Korparna* is set—to assess how Bannerhed interprets and elaborates on cultural values and traditions. Drawing on Forrest Clingerman's concept of "emplacement," I explicate the interplay between conflicting environmental interpretations, recognizing that places can be described based on the historical record or on ornithological and botanical data, but that folklore and mythology also contribute to local meaning-making. In the context of *Korparna*, I argue that birding can be a meaningful way of engaging with a place, a form of naturalist enthusiasm that fosters deep local knowledge. Finally, I show that relations with nonhumans can be constitutive of a variety of conflicting but partly overlapping environmental identities.

Keywords: birds, emplacement, environmental hermeneutics, Tomas Bannerhed.

Resumen

En *Korparna* (*Los Cuervos*, 2011) de Tomas Bannerhed, las aves y los árboles no solamente funcionan como telón de fondo y escenario, sino que contribuyen a formar las identidades narrativas y el sentido del lugar de los personajes. En este artículo exploro las fuentes históricas y literarias de Småland, la provincia histórica de Suecia donde está ambientada *Korparna*, para evaluar cómo Bannerhed interpreta y elabora los valores y tradiciones culturales. Basándome en el concepto de "emplazamiento" de Forrest Clingerman, explico la interacción entre las interpretaciones ambientales conflictivas, reconociendo que los lugares pueden describirse basándose en el registro histórico o en datos ornitológicos y botánicos, pero que el folclore y la mitología también contribuyen a la creación del significado del lugar. En el contexto de *Korparna*, sostengo que la observación de aves puede ser una forma significativa de relacionarse con el lugar, una forma de entusiasmo naturalista que fomenta el profundo conocimiento local. Finalmente, muestro que las relaciones con los seres no humanos pueden ser constitutivas de una variedad de identidades ambientales conflictivas, aunque a la vez parcialmente superpuestas.

Palabras clave: aves, emplazamiento, hermenéutica medioambiental, Tomas Bannerhed.

Introduction

Set in a rural landscape undergoing large-scale changes, and packed with references to birds and plants, Tomas Bannerhed's debut novel *Korparna* (*The*

Ravens, 2011)[1] would seem to lend itself well to ecocritical readings. Yet, despite winning the prestigious August Prize and being made into an award-winning feature film, it has received scant attention from literary scholars. While *Korparna* can be read as a coming-of-age novel and has some attributes of a historical novel (enacting and problematizing processes of cultural change), it is above all a psychological novel, and can function as an entry point for examining different interpretations of place and landscape. In this article, I examine how the main characters' interactions with nonhumans are mediated by norms, values and traditions that foster different ways of reading the environment.

Environmental hermeneutics takes as its starting point that we assign meaning to nature through historically situated processes of cultural interpretation (Drenthen 170). Of particular relevance for this study is Forrest Clingerman's concept of "emplacement." Analogously to how Paul Ricoeur, in his narrative analysis, resolves the paradox of temporality in narrative through "emplotment," Clingerman applies this approach to place, arguing that our interpretations of nature must account for how we are spatially and temporally situated within it (21). Even though we are clearly "part of nature," in our interpretation we rely on culture and philosophy to approach nature as an object, so that, paradoxically, we are "simultaneously transcending and situated beings" (19). Emplacement involves ecology, aesthetics, resources and community, and none of these categories on its own is sufficient to provide a full view of our situatedness in nature (23).

Reading *Korparna* as a narrative of emplacement, I explore how the character Klas and his father Agne are emplaced in contrasting but partly overlapping ways. Though these are round characters, who cannot be reduced to types, their differences refer to generation conflicts, at least to some extent, as socioeconomic conditions have changed and cultural values have shifted. Where labor and utility were once paramount, and still are to Agne, the rise of environmentalism, which informs Klas's worldview, calls for a cultural shift from needing to have control over nonhumans to striving for coexistence with them. Since Klas is a birder, I also consider how ornithological practice relates to emplacement, drawing on the work of the cultural anthropologist Michael Hundeide.

I begin with a brief presentation of the novel's setting and context, then move on to explore how emplacement in *Korparna* relates to (1) birding, (2) folklore, mythology and symbolism; and (3) cultural heritage and biodiversity. Finally, I place Clingerman's theory of "emplacement" in dialogue with John van Buren's critical environmental hermeneutics in order to analyze the environmental identities and values that emerge.

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[1] *Korparna* has been translated into English by Sarah Death and published as *The Ravens*, but, considering that her translation at some points diverges from the original in significant ways, I refer to the original Swedish text, and all translations are mine.

Setting and Context

Korparna is narrated by Klas in the first person, mostly in the past tense but occasionally shifting to the present tense for brief sections of inner monologue or dream-like sequences, some of which are italicized. Events are narrated chronologically, with references to the past mostly presented in the form of dialogue where characters refer to past experiences.

The novel is set in a rural area in the historical province of Småland in southern Sweden during the 1970s, where twelve-year-old Klas is set to inherit the farm Undantaget from his aging and increasingly unstable father Agne and dreads it. In Swedish, the term *undantaget* usually refers to a smaller house separate from the main farmhouse where, traditionally, the farmer's grandparents or other relatives would live. Calling an entire farm, with fields and all, Undantaget, thereby suggests that it was once part of a larger farm and consists of marginal land.[2]

On the whole, Klas is clever, curious and quick to learn, but he is wary of work, unable to summon any enthusiasm for mundane tasks like sowing and reaping the crops. The thought of spending his life working on the farm strikes him as crushingly boring, and besides, it is dubious whether the farm is even economically viable, as the plot of land is simply not large enough to be competitive. While Agne cannot face up to this, Klas is torn between his longing to get away and his eagerness to please his father. Migratory birds arriving from far-off corners of the world nourish his dreams of escape.

Klas builds a kite modeled after the dimensions of a white-tailed eagle—supposedly "the only bird that can't be killed by lightning" (*Korparna* 406)[3]—and when he flies it, he imagines that he himself takes wing, though another part of him hopes that his father is watching (403). Gazing at an aspen leaf, he sees its veins as "rivers flooding a foreign country" (8)[4] and falls into a daydream of distant lands. He lets it fall into the stream and thinks of its long journey to the ocean, all the landscapes it will pass through, until he can no longer see it in his mind's eye (12). "The aspen and me," thinks Klas. "We who tremble at the slightest thing" (8).[5]

As Lawrence Buell has pointed out, freeing oneself from "the curse of purposefulness" can be a path toward engaging more directly with place, to the extent that the materiality of one's environment can be experienced as continuous with one's self (Buell 154). The act of questioning "the validity of the self as the primary focalizing device" and daring "to imagine nonhuman agents as bona fide partners"—be they an eagle or an aspen—is a form of literary ecocentrism that can allow the ego

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[2] Translated directly to English, *Undantaget* means "the Exception," as in an exception from the rule or something that holds an exceptional position. *Undan* can mean "away," "aside," or "out of the way," while *taget* suggests something that has been "taken" hold of or "gripped." It is implicit that, one way or the other, the farm has been "set aside."

[3] "den enda fågeln som inte kan dödas av blixten" (*Korparna* 406).

[4] "floder som spred sig över ett främmande land" (*Korparna* 8).

[5] "Aspen och jag, tänkte jag. Vi som darrar för minsta lilla" (*Korparna* 8).

to be subsumed by its environment, of which it is already a part (179). Klas finds meaning in his encounters with nonhumans, though there may also be an element of escapism involved.

Birding as a Form of Emplacement

Birds are Klas's great passion, but it is not made clear how he gained his extensive ornithological knowledge. Some of it could perhaps be traced to his father—who knows the birds that come and go on the farm, though he does not share Klas's obsessive enthusiasm for them—but much of it is obviously from ornithological literature. It appears somewhat unrealistic that a twelve-year-old would be as proficient a birder as Klas: his identification skills suggest not only knowledge, but extensive field experience that would normally take several seasons to acquire. Klas keeps paging through his bird book and—based on a direct quote, placed in quotation marks, that Bannerhed includes about the challenges of identifying different races of yellow wagtail (*Korparna* 231)—it is evident that the book in question must be a volume by Delin and Svensson (probably from one or other of their Swedish titles, but see *Philip's Guide* 208). Since these are well-known, influential bird experts, not only in Sweden but in Europe as a whole, mentioning the source is unnecessary, and avid birders familiar with the literature might nod in recognition.

New horizons open for Klas when he meets Veronika, recently arrived from Stockholm, who lived in East Africa when she was younger and has a cosmopolitan orientation. Her parents are intellectual, well-read and artistic, in sharp contrast to the people Klas interacts with in his daily life. Veronika has traveled the world, experienced foreign cultures and met a wide range of people. For her, Småland is boring, but she is not attuned to what is going on there, neither to changes in nature nor to human intrigue. Where Klas harbors a close familiarity with the place, including the various bird species that inhabit it and the plants that grow there, Veronika is not invested in it at all. She tells Klas stories of the African bush, and Klas is captivated. He would certainly embrace the same kind of adventure if it were available to him, but he is where he is, and as long as he is trapped there, whether he likes the place or not is beside the point.

Klas takes Veronika to a lake, Madsjön, where they listen to birds calling at night, a precious opportunity for him to share his world. As they follow the distant booming of a bittern, they happen to flush a female bittern at close range in the torchlight, and find her eggs, a once-in-a-lifetime experience made all the more magical by Veronika's presence (*Korparna* 170–75). He succeeds in showing her that Småland, too, holds potential for meaningful experience. Veronika, however, goes off to the French Riviera with her parents for summer holidays, and then, to Klas's huge disappointment, moves back to Väsby to live with her mother while her father stays behind in the village. As Veronika's parents separate and her father's drunkenness gets the better of him, it becomes clear that her family, too, is dysfunctional. This casts the comparison with Klas's family in a different light, suggesting that existential restlessness entails risks, that there might be something to be said for the predictability of tradition and the security of a solid base.

For Hundeide, increased knowledge of one's local patch through ornithological practice involves an aspect of what Heidegger and others have conceptualized as "dwelling": being at home in a place, inhabiting it actively (132). In times past, family affiliation was often crucial in determining where we cast our existential lot, and this still holds true to some extent. Nevertheless, in recent decades, the tendency to move more frequently, never settling down entirely, has led to a so-called rootlessness, or even "placelessness,"[6] which, in *Korparna*, is exemplified by Veronika and her family. This may lead to a desire to belong, reflected in attempts to compensate for the lack of local attachments through engagement with place, for instance through field experience with local flora and fauna backed up by scientific knowledge (Hundeide 132). The modern disruption of local attachments does not entail a disruption of attachments per se, but it appears that attachments have become dispersed, perhaps even compartmentalized. If Agne's insistence on subduing the landscape through labor, on carrying forward his forefathers' legacy, is no longer relevant, Klas's mastery of bird calls and pursuit of rarities may be a legitimate alternative—an ecologically informed, less anthropocentric way of engaging with place.

Hundeide conceptualizes birding as a form of "natural historical enthusiasm" ("naturhistorisk entusiasme"), a dynamic process that requires creativity and involvement, so that the birder can achieve a state of "flow," where the mind, body and senses are engaged in the experience of nature (396–97, 434). Considering that this enthusiasm is often driven by a quest for novelty, leading to a sense of discovery, it could also be described as a form of Deleuzian "becoming" (Hundeide 396–97). Where "dwelling" is centered on a home or a base, "becoming" involves movement, even if only locally (398). Applied to *Korparna*, it is obvious that Agne is a dweller who can no longer imagine living anywhere else, but it is not yet clear what Klas will become; his options are still open, and though he has a strong attachment to Undantaget and to Småland, he is drawn to the nomadic existence Veronika has experienced. "Dwelling" and "becoming" are not mutually exclusive: on the contrary, "becoming" can follow from "dwelling," as an expansion of it. The nomadic can begin with the local; in some contexts, "dwelling" can even be a prerequisite for "becoming" (Hundeide 397).

Even more significant than the concepts of dwelling and becoming may be that of familiarity. The Norwegian ecophilosopher and mountaineer Nils Faarlund coined the phrase "familiarity leads to friendship,"[7] which Hundeide applies to birding, arguing that familiarity based on perceptual engagement not only facilitates identification of regular species but also makes it easier to notice the rare species that stand out (117–19). When birders acquire a certain level of familiarity with and knowledge of the birds on their local patch, this can in turn lead to care. Moreover,

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[6] "stedløsheten" (Hundeide 132).

[7] "kjennskap fører til vennskap" (Faarlund qtd. in Hundeide 117).

this also holds true for place, as the species birders encounter in a given area are inextricably bound up with their "emplacement" (Clingerman 23). In *Korparna*, this is reflected in how Klas and Agne have widely different interpretations of the same patch of land, Klas seeing it for its biodiversity, Agne for its utility. Though some may dismiss the pursuit of rare birds as esoteric, it can be a means of understanding the landscape—of increasing its resolution, in a sense, so that it can be viewed in full. It enriches Klas's life and, in the cases when he succeeds in conveying its significance to others, also the lives of those around him.

Folklore, Mythology and Symbolism

Places are not only defined by the creatures that inhabit them but also by the stories that are told there. While places can be described based on the historical record, there are also literary, folkloric and mythological records that can be taken into account, which contribute to local meaning-making and form part of the fabric of residents' lived experience. Barely a page of *Korparna* passes without a reference to some bird or plant, but in addition to ornithology and botany, the text is informed by tradition and folklore. Several species play symbolic roles, and the ravens that the novel's title refers to are portents of impending disaster. Agne suffers auditory hallucinations in which he hears ravens crowing, and points out that, from the Vikings to the Romans, people have known that ravens flying across farmsteads are forewarnings of death (*Korparna* 113). As habitual scavengers and opportunistic predators (113), ravens are easy to condemn, but Klas takes their associations with Odin and death less seriously, and when he hears a raven crowing, interprets it as a greeting (252).

In bringing near-forgotten beliefs about trees and birds back into the light, showing how they can complement scientific knowledge and influence environmental values, Bannerhed reinvigorates the folklore of Småland. For Agne, the arrival of migratory birds in spring signals shifts in the weather, foretelling how the farming season will play out. As technical solutions have gained sway, these traditional ways of interpreting nature have all but disappeared, but for Agne, in the 1970s, it is still a living tradition and is not romanticized. Nor does he seem to be aware of any contradiction between reading the landscape through the language of birds and plants while relying on modern agricultural machinery and pesticides. Straddling traditional and industrial rurality, Agne epitomizes his time, and this appears to be one of the main causes of his woes and anxieties.

Cuckoos are rarely seen, but everybody knows their call (*I starens tid* 73). When Klas does a cuckoo imitation, a cuckoo comes flying, lands in a robin's nest, shoves an egg out and lays its own. Realizing that he is complicit in the failure of the robins' breeding attempt, Klas is aghast, and considers removing the cuckoo egg or destroying the nest so the robins will give up on it and build a new nest elsewhere

(*Korparna* 63–66).[8] Agne talks about there being a morning service celebrating the cuckoo's return up at the village house, an annual tradition on Ascension Day, but Klas thinks to himself that there's "not much to celebrate about someone who lives off of others" (83).[9] Klas feels an affinity with the cuckoo, and this fills him with shame: after all, he, too, is dependent on others, and reluctant to do his share of work. In this instance, it seems that Klas, not entirely unlike his father, has incorporated tradition into his worldview, and though he does not confuse it with science, he is on the verge of taking it as a moral guideline.

In his later non-fiction book *I starens tid*, Bannerhed elaborates on the cuckoo's role in Swedish culture, pointing out that its return is still celebrated with a morning service in May in some parts of Sweden (72). Ushering in the spring, cuckoos are associated with "sun and budding greenery,"[10] though they also carry ominous, supernatural associations, having the ability to foretell not only the weather and the harvest, but also how long a child will live, when a farmer will die, and the circumstances of a maiden's future marriage (73). A newborn cuckoo is a prime image of voraciousness, quick to kill its foster siblings, soon outgrowing its foster parents. Raised by other species, in whose nests it will in turn lay its eggs, and rarely interacting with its own kind except for mating purposes, the cuckoo's life is an existential mystery (74, 77): "how does the cuckoo know that it is a cuckoo?" (74).[11] Aside from his feeling like a parasite, Klas's identification with the cuckoo can thereby be linked to a quest for identity.

Trees such as rowan, aspen and alder are present throughout the text, forming part of the backdrop but also functioning as signifiers and at times as forces, if not exactly characters. A *flygrönn*—"flying rowan"—is a rowan that grows from the fork of another tree, a phenomenon that has been associated with a range of superstitions since at least the Viking age. In *Korparna*, the dowser ("slagrutemannen"), Alvar, goes searching for one to make a divining rod. Veronika and her family are in the process of moving in, and Alvar has been given the task of trying to locate a well on their property up at Lyckanshöjd. He laments that flying rowans are hard to come by these days, as people no longer keep track of them (*Korparna* 67–68), yet another example of a form of traditional knowledge that has almost been lost. Scientifically, dowsing doesn't work, and flying rowans are just rowans.

Today, biodiversity is mapped in more detail than ever, but the information is stored in databases rather than in collective memory, based on specialist, or at least citizen scientist, knowledge, rather than that of local communities. One of the most striking aspects of *Korparna* is that it draws on both science and folk tradition without pitting these knowledge systems against each other. While tacitly assuming that his readers will be able to distinguish the scientific from the folkloric, Bannerhed adheres

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[8] Bannerhed does not mention it, but in the folk tradition of Småland, one should avoid imitating the cuckoo's call, as this could excite the bird to spit blood (Karl Salomonsson cited in Svanberg 56–57).
[9] "Inte mycket att fira en som lever på andra" (*Korparna* 83).
[10] "sol och spirande grönska" (*I starens tid* 73).
[11] "hur vet göken att den är gök?" (*I starens tid* 74). Also see *Korparna* 313.

to standards of scientific accuracy in his descriptions of birds and plants; yet he also allows room for myth and superstition, recognizing the fascination they continue to hold and acknowledging their place in the cultural imaginary.

Flying rowans take root when birds eat rowan berries and excrete the seeds up in trees; they are therefore associated with birds, and, considering that they are not rooted in the ground like other trees, also with flight. Alvar says that the flying rowan was "Frigg's tree"—referring to the goddess, the protector of mothers, in Norse mythology—and that providing a house with water found with a flying rowan will lead to fertility and protection from harm for those who live there, as the home will then become a holy place (*Korparna* 69). However, he also refers to the mythological first woman on Earth, Embla, and claims that she was created from a rowan (69), leading the reader to doubt his narrative, as this contradicts the well-known theory that Embla originated from an elm.[12] It is clear that the anecdotes Bannerhed refers to need not be taken literally, that some of them have been playfully embroidered upon. Alvar's warning that "[p]utting a flying rowan in a jar is like burying a raven alive,"[13] and that such a deed will not go unpunished (69), can lead us to think of flying rowans as a wild and unmanageable force that is not meant to be cultivated. Late in the novel there is a disturbing scene where Agne tries to get his family to eat rowan berries. His wife Gärd—accompanied by Klas and his younger brother Göran—has just picked him up at the hospital where he recovered from his collapse, and driving back home, they stop for a break. When Agne wanders off, his wife and sons fear he has lost his mind again and eventually find him proffering a fistful of the bitter berries, which he urges them to eat (270–71).

Another folkloric motif that plays a significant role in *Korparna* is that of the *lindorm*,[14] a mythological serpent or dragon that purportedly preys on livestock and feeds on human corpses. It appears in legends from various parts of Northern and Western Europe, but holds a special place in Småland, where alleged sightings of giant snakes—up to at least three meters long, sometimes with a horse-like mane—were reported as late as 1885. Gunnar Olof Hyltén-Cavallius, a scholar from Småland, collected eyewitness reports of the feared creature, and offered a reward to anyone who managed to collect a specimen. Stories circulated of men who had fought and killed particularly aggressive individuals, and when no specimen was ever collected, this was said to be because *lindorm* carcasses decay exceptionally fast and exude an unbearable stench that can lead to serious illness (Meurger 87–88).

Hyltén-Cavallius introduces his treatise on the lindorm by referring to the dragons or serpents of Norse mythology (3), the most iconic of which is Jörmungandr, the Midgard Serpent, which encircles Midgard with the length of its body, holding the world together. When it loosens its grip, however, chaos and destruction will ensue; it provides security, while also carrying the threat that that security might be lost. The

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[12] See for instance Nedkvitne and Gjerdåker 162.

[13] "Sätta en flygrönn i krukka är som att begrava korpen levande" (*Korparna* 69).

[14] While the Swedish *lind* means "snake" but can also refer to linden trees (*Tilia* sp.), *orm* can mean either "snake," "dragon" or "worm."

Midgard Serpent is pursued by Thor, god of lightning and thunder, and during Ragnarök, the two will do battle and slay each other. In *Korparna*, this is echoed in the way that the lindorm has the ability to attract and swallow lightning.

Bannerhed also links the *lindorm* to the linden tree. When Gärd, Klas and Göran take shelter in the car during a thunderstorm, Gärd tells them a story about an old linden tree by her mother's parents' home which they called "the thunder-linden" ("Åsklinden") because it had blocked a ball lightning from striking the house. This was due to the *lindorm* that lived "down between the roots" and "drew the lightning strikes down into the earth and swallowed them" (197).[15]

In Hyltén-Cavallius's account, a *lindorm* is "thick as a man's thigh" (4),[16] and in *Korparna*, Bannerhed reveals his source, embroidering on it, when he has Gärd say that the *lindorm* "was seven meters long and as thick as my thigh" (197).[17] It would attack its enemies with a venomous sting, Gärd tells the boys, but could also bite its own tail and roll off "like a great wheel" (198).[18] Again, this is clearly based on the attestations collected by Hyltén-Cavallius, where the "Lindorm" or "Drake" (Swedish for "dragon") is also known as "Hjulorm," "wheel-snake" (6).[19]

The image of a snake biting its tail and rolling like a wheel is suggestive of an ouroboros, a symbol of cyclicity associated with archaic traditions such as alchemy. It can be seen as an embodiment of the turning of the seasons and generational cycles, the "thousand years in Småland" of which Elin Wägner writes, where ages merge into each other as traditions are abandoned only to resurface centuries later, rendering the concept of progress or even linearity problematic (Wägner 20). Applied to *Korparna*, this might be the vicious circle Agne is trapped in, bound by a generational pact that has become a curse for him.

There is no biological basis for stories of the *lindorm*, and none of the characters in *Korparna* really believe in it, but Bannerhed weaves it into the narrative so that it forms part of their experience, if only as a story they relate to. It is a part of their mythos, and even if science has rendered it obsolete, it is characteristic of mythologies that elements may be forgotten or overlooked for considerable stretches of time only to be brought back into the light and interpreted in new ways. Michel Meurger has pointed out that when Hyltén-Cavallius set about documenting the existence of the *lindorm*, in the hope that his findings would be recognized by the scientific community, his motivation was not primarily biological, but cultural. Since serpents or dragons in various forms feature prominently in Old Norse iconography and in medieval folklore, proving the veracity of the tales of the *lindorm* could have

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[15] "nere bland rötterna. […] Den drog ner blixtarna i jorden och svalde dem om de slog ner i närheten" (*Korparna* 197). This is consistent with one of the eyewitness accounts Hyltén-Cavallius collected, where the *lindorm* is found near a large hole at the foot of an old linden tree (22–23).

[16] "tjock som ett mans-lår" (Hyltén-Cavallius 4). This detail of its girth being comparable to that of a man's thigh is confirmed by many of the eyewitness reports (6, 13, 14, 27, 30, 31, 34, 42).

[17] "Den var sju meter lång och lika grov som mitt lår" (*Korparna* 197).

[18] "som ett stort hjul" (*Korparna* 198).

[19] In one of the eyewitness reports, the belief that it could roll like a wheel is dismissed as superstition (Hyltén-Cavallius 29).

provided a "natural bond with the past," functioning as evidence of cultural continuity while exonerating the people of Småland, proving "the validity of an antique way of life, now confined within the bounds of a parochial enclave" (Meurger 96).

Korparna is not a celebration of Småland, but it is an attempt at doing justice to the place. Bannerhed depicts its natural beauty and the richness of its history, and despite Agne's madness and the pervasive air of pettiness, the community is above all characterized by stability. Bannerhed's portrayal is ambiguous but finely balanced, allowing readers to draw their own conclusions. Though the landscape has been drained and ditched, it has also been a place of flying rowans and has been seen as the last redoubt of the legendary *lindorm*.

Lightning is a recurrent motif in *Korparna*. Alvar has warned Klas that lightning tends to strike old oak trees because their deep roots "seek the groundwater"; this gives them a higher conductivity than "all other trees," causing them to attract lightning "like a magnet."[20] If one is struggling to detect water with a dowsing rod, one can supposedly go to an oak and start from there, where the source is (*Korparna* 69). Again, there is an implicit reference to Norse mythology, where oaks were associated with Thor.[21] It is unclear whether Alvar is reciting ancient wisdom or just making up stories (70), but later, during the storm that drives Gärd and the boys to seek safety in the car, "the Crown Oak" ("Kroneken") at Undantaget does get struck by lightning, and two heifers that have taken shelter beneath it are killed, one of them pregnant, the other the best of their milk cows (204).

The references to lightning are too numerous to dismiss as incidental, yet their significance is not explained, apart from lightning being a source of fear, especially for Klas. Though it can be linked to mythology and folklore, it mostly functions as a representation of the primal forces of nature, of the elements. While the land and the animals are managed by humans, lightning is beyond their control, a dangerous, unpredictable, awe-inspiring force. As one never knows exactly where it is going to strike, it is a reminder that there is no such thing as total security.

Klas is camping in the woods at night when a storm takes him by surprise, rain and wind tearing at his tent. He imagines that the bog is finally about to split open and reclaim the farms and the forest (*Korparna* 321), or that perhaps the *lindorm* has "awoken to life"[22] and emerged to watch the lightning flashing one last time (322). Impulsively, in defiance of all good sense, he proceeds to pick a bunch of fly agaric, chopping the poisonous mushrooms up and mixing them with some cold pine needle tea, which he proceeds to drink in little gulps (324). He makes himself sick, punishes himself for never lending a hand, for being "cuckoo-like," a "meaningless creep";[23] he pushes himself to the limit in order to be purged of all this uselessness (327). It appears to be a catharsis of sorts, a way of proving to himself what he is willing to risk, how far he is willing to go, in the hope that things can get better. Then again, such reckless, manic behavior also suggests that Klas might be susceptible to the same kind of delusions that plague his father.

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[20] "ekrötterna går djupt, söker sig till grundvattnet, vilket gör att eken leder elektricitet bättre än alla andra träd. Den drar till sig blixten som en magnet" (*Korparna* 69).

[21] Though Bannerhed does not mention Thor in connection with oaks, he refers to Thor's role as the bringer of thunder and lightning elsewhere in *Korparna* (406).

[22] "vaknat till liv" (*Korparna* 322).

[23] "gökaktigt"; "meningslösa kryp" (*Korparna* 327).

Cultural Heritage and Biodiversity

Though some of the traditional notions about trees and birds presented in *Korparna* are suggestive of a pagan past, the Swedish farming community Bannerhed writes about is deeply embedded in Christian, capitalist and even industrial systems of thought. As in other parts of Scandinavia, wetlands in Småland were drained with ditches during the nineteenth century. By 1875, it was reported that the fens and bogs in eastern parts of Småland had been replaced by farmland, the forests gone, while several bird species that were once abundant had all disappeared (Svanberg 15). The farming tradition Agne represents is by no means a pastoral idyll; on the contrary, it has long been dominated by an economic drive toward industrialized agriculture.

On one level, Agne is engaged in a futile struggle against the changing times, yet on another, he is wholly reliant on the destructive technologies of agroindustry, which he does not seem to question. DDT had already been banned in 1970, after causing severe declines in populations of predatory birds such as peregrine falcon. Agne, however, wears a cap with the brand name "Hormoslyr" printed on the sides (*Korparna* 180), functioning as a walking advertisement for another chemical—a herbicide whose main active ingredients are the same as those of Agent Orange—which would be banned in Sweden in 1977, as it was found to cause cancer and birth defects. In their different ways, Klas and Agne are both entangled in conflicts not only between tradition and science but also between traditional and industrial agriculture. *Korparna* reveals contradictions and paradoxes that result in friction between generations; at times, this comes across as nostalgia for what has been, but tradition is also revealed to be inadequate, necessitating changes in both agricultural and lifestyle practices.

Today, old stone fences around fields might strike us as scenic features of a time-worn cultural heritage landscape, but Agne is preoccupied with what a backbreaking task it was to remove the stones from the ground with a spade and digging bar, pointing out that his grandfather was unable to finish the task even though he was hard at it all his life (*Korparna* 184). He calls it "slave labor" ("slavgöra") and finds a cruel irony in the fact that people now tend to think that the stones are there for aesthetic purposes (185). Ranting on, he compares it to war, says that it was about survival back then (185); he never tires of emphasizing that the farm they live on is the result of generations of toil. Decades of hard labor have almost destroyed him, have worn him out physically and left him with severe psychological problems.

Agne doesn't want to talk about it, at least not in front of Klas, but during a quarrel, Gärd lets slip that his grandfather, Klas's great-grandfather, drowned himself when Agne was a young boy (*Korparna* 186). Agne's father, on the other hand, was dragged away to a nursing home against his will and died there (373). "There was no one that could handle a scythe like father," says Agne (188), and tells Klas all about the techniques his own father used for cutting the grass and sharpening the scythe (189). The story repeats itself, as Klas and Agne appear to be replaying scenes that once played out between Agne and his father. In the library, a retired schoolteacher tells Klas that Agne, in his youth, was bookish and promising, that he could have gone far but had problems at home (95). We understand that Agne is bitter because he had to take over the burden of his father's responsibilities at a young age, and that he is desperate to justify his path in life, to himself and to his son. Meanwhile, Gärd is a source of stability, a levelheaded counterweight to the darkness and obsession that have taken hold of Agne.

Bearing in mind that the reader's impression of Agne is filtered through Klas's gaze, we might do well to treat it with skepticism. Yet, if anything, Klas's reading of Agne's moods and behavior is more generous than an outside observer's would likely be. Through Klas's observations of Agne's actions and gestures, we perceive that Agne is obsessive and distracted, at times shockingly inconsiderate, so self-absorbed that he seems to have lost the capacity for empathy. Nevertheless, throughout the novel, Klas's gut reaction is to hold out hope that Agne will pull through, that he is not as crazy as some of the villagers would have him. When Klas finds the text "AGNE HEADED FOR THE MADHOUSE"[24] spray-painted in large, bold letters across the wall of the morgue by the church, his immediate reaction is one of denial, before he tries to surmise who might have done it and makes plans to remove it (*Korparna* 131–33).

Through the novel, crisis follows crisis, building up to a seemingly inevitable turning point. When Agne finally commits suicide by drowning, it is hardly a surprise (*Korparna* 409–14). The Canal ("Kanalen"), along with the danger of falling into it, is introduced as a motif at the very beginning of the novel (*Korparna* 7, 9), so when Klas receives a phone call from Alvar about having found Agne's cap down by the Canal (409), he rushes down to investigate while the realization of what has happened sinks in. Along the way, he is accosted by a "swarm" ("svärm") of lapwings, screaming and scolding, whisking through the air around Klas's head with their dark, scythe-like wings like "messengers from death itself"[25] warning him to turn back (410).

Readers familiar with northern lapwings will realize that they are probably defending their nests, but it is fitting that lapwings would warn of Agne's death as they represent the way of life that dies with him: a farming tradition, a certain way of reading the landscape. They are at home in these damp, low-lying fields, characteristic of the environment Agne was emplaced in. Lapwings have in recent years come to be seen as emblematic of traditional Scandinavian cultural landscapes, but are also in sharp decline due to habitat loss as a result of industrialized agriculture. "Näiii, näiii!" they wail, almost a "no," a bleating, insistent cry of denial (*Korparna* 410). Whether Undantaget is incorporated into a larger, industrial-scale farm, or whether it is left untended and reverts to thicket and shrub, the lapwings are likely to disappear along with their habitat. It is unclear what Klas will decide, but if he does end up trying to keep the farm running, chances are that he will do it out of concern for the lapwings and other species that thrive in tended landscapes. In a world of monocultures bisected by highways, the cry of a lapwing can appear as archaic and nostalgic, but also as a warning, an alarm call, alerting us to the loss of biodiversity.

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[24] "AGNE PÅ VÄG TILL DÅRHUSET" (*Korparna* 131).
[25] "varnande sändebud från döden själv" (*Korparna* 410).

Conclusion: Emplacement and Environmental Identity

On some levels, *Korparna* is an easy read, a story of different generations, of a young boy who is reluctant to take on the burden of toil his father has carried, while there are also the beginnings of a love story. Some readers might flip quickly past the ornithological and botanical details, but if one stops to consider the themes and context, these details are instructive elaborations on various aspects of Småland's culture and environment. Those familiar with Småland might find it particularly interesting, but even for locals some of the references are likely to be obscure.

As mentioned in the introduction, emplacement relates to ecology, aesthetics, resources and community, all of which contribute toward shaping our relations to nature (Clingerman 23). While the ornithological science Klas draws on in his interpretation of local birdlife would hold limited interest without the aesthetic dimension, traditional folk beliefs deepen his understanding of the birds' cultural significance. These folk beliefs, along with common knowledge about local flora and fauna, would once have played a significant role in cultural practices, for instance with the communal celebration of the cuckoo's return. Today, environmentalism and natural historical enthusiasm have the potential to play a comparable cultural role but can be divisive when they come into conflict with resource use. The resource perspective is at odds with the ecological perspective in that birds—serving as ecological indicators—are threatened by industrial agriculture. The place is still relatively rich in birdlife, but would have been richer in times past, and large birds of prey, such as the white-tailed eagles Klas models his kite on, are conspicuous by their absence.

In concert with Clingerman's concept of emplacement, John van Buren's critical environmental hermeneutics provides a means of explicating the environmental perspectives expressed in *Korparna*. Seeking to disentangle the "underlying epistemological, ethical, and political issues" that come into play in different environmental interpretations (261–62), van Buren sketches out four criteria for interpretation—biophysical, technical, historical and ethical-political (268)—which allow us to distinguish between the objective and the relative in order to achieve a balance between them (273). In this light, we might say that the objective characteristics of Undantaget are that it consists of low-lying land that has been drained and converted from marsh to farmland, and that it is home to a variety of plants, birds and mammals. What is at stake in our interpretation of it, however, relates to its relative characteristics: for Agne it is valuable because of the food it can produce, and he sees its cultivation as a prime intergenerational goal that affirms the narrative bequeathed to him. For Klas, on the other hand, it is valuable for its biodiversity, while the drudgery of cultivation is abhorrent—not only boring and unhealthy but harmful to the environment. Hence, there is a clash of values at play that cannot be solved with simple reference to scientific or historical fact.

During the nineteenth century, and well into the twentieth, Scandinavian farmers were engaged in a battle against nature, striving for control, for assurance of security. Today, food scarcity is not a major issue for most people in Scandinavia, but increasing numbers of people are worried about extinction and ecological degradation. Concurrently, the "war" Agne still appears to be living in has given way to a kind of nostalgia in the space that has been left behind as this war has become unnecessary. Tradition forms the frame of reference against which new understandings of nature, and humans' place in it, are renegotiated or reconstructed, and as traditional knowledge is superseded by science, this can evoke nostalgia among those who remain rooted in tradition.

Agne's values can hence be linked to a struggle to rise out of poverty, while Klas's can be linked to environmentalism and a more individualistic social context characterized by upward mobility. In his youth, Agne would watch the trains go by and collect old tickets and timetables down by the station (*Korparna* 81); he obviously dreamed of getting away, but over the years, he changed. One of the reasons why it is an overriding concern for Agne that his son should take over the farm is that he himself has had to make enormous sacrifices and now fears that it will all come to naught. As for Klas, even though he readily absorbs new knowledge, recognizing undreamt-of possibilities, he is firmly emplaced, with deep local knowledge and correspondingly strong local attachments. At the novel's ending, after Agne's suicide, it remains unclear whether or not Klas will finally break the circle, but it is implicit that his internal struggle will continue, that his task will be one of balance and compromise, trying to honor Agne's life's work without letting go of the opportunities available to him, opportunities that Agne too would probably have taken had he been in Klas's place.

Perhaps Klas's environmental identity can be considered ecocentric, Agne's anthropocentric, but it is misleading to think of these as polar opposites.[26] Rather than pitting them against each other, we might achieve a fuller understanding if we consider how relations with nonhumans are essential to both. Klas might draw inspiration from ecocentric perspectives, but he is neither willing nor able to disentangle himself fully from the culture he is embedded in; on the contrary, he clings to a desperate hope that the environmentalist ideas that resonate with him can somehow be reconciled with the tradition represented by his father. Agne's measured folk wisdom may appear antithetical to Klas's naturalist enthusiasm, but even though Agne is more concerned with nonhumans' utility to humans, this does not necessarily

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[26] See for instance Utsler 174.

entail a denial of their intrinsic value. On the contrary, he takes them for granted as integral constituents of the place where he has always lived.

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Zoomorphism and Human Biology in Barbara Kingsolver's *Prodigal Summer*

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Abstract

This article explores the conceptual difficulties that arise when fiction explores humankind's primordial ties to nature, specifically regarding gender representation. I examine how an emphasis on biology demonstrates humankind's innate connection to nature, while simultaneously perpetuating a problematic, essentialist view of gender. Using Barbara Kingsolver's *Prodigal Summer* (2000) as a case study, I present two perspectives from which to interpret her ecofeminist approach. Firstly, I argue that Kingsolver employs zoomorphism as an effective strategy to override essentialist representations of sexuality. Secondly, I use Hans Gumbrecht's theory of presence to contextualise the representation of biology and claim that *Prodigal Summer* attempts to dilute a much broader conceptual binary between humankind and nature.

Keywords: Barbara Kingsolver, *Prodigal Summer*, zoomorphism, climate fiction, ecofeminism.

Resumen

Este artículo explora las dificultades conceptuales que surgen cuando la ficción explora los vínculos primordiales de la humanidad con la naturaleza, específicamente en lo que respecta a la representación de género. Examino cómo el énfasis en la biología demuestra la conexión innata de la humanidad con la naturaleza, al mismo tiempo que perpetúa una visión problemática y esencialista del género. Usando *Prodigal Summer* (2000) de Barbara Kingsolver como ejemplo, presento dos perspectivas desde las cuales interpretar su enfoque ecofeminista. En primer lugar, argumento que Kingsolver emplea el zoomorfismo como una estrategia efectiva para anular las representaciones esencialistas de la sexualidad. En segundo lugar, uso la teoría de la presencia de Hans Gumbrecht para contextualizar la representación de la biología y afirmo que *Prodigal Summer* intenta diluir un binario conceptual mucho más amplio entre la humanidad y la naturaleza.

Palabras clave: Barbara Kingsolver, *Prodigal Summer*, zoomorfismo, ficción climática, ecofeminismo.

Introduction

The relationship between humankind and the environment is often characterised by human dominance. In today's climate, however, as ecological upheaval manifests itself through mass extinction, extreme weather events, and rising temperatures, it is imperative that humankind collectively challenges the fundamental assumption of our dominion over nature. For the first time in human history, it is *necessary* for our future that we consider human existence in line with our status as a species and that we imagine new animal natures. There is a challenging paradox in considering the human subject within the Animalia kingdom, however. The consideration of species surpasses human politics, history, and culture—it occurs in deep history, where the complexities of the human experience are a mere moment in the context of the planet. In her 2016 *Imagining Extinction,* Ursula Heise evokes Homo sapiens as a species, recognising their position on the International Union for the Conservation of Nature's Red List as a species of 'Least Concern' in terms of extinction risk. "This inclusion", she notes, is a "significant gesture politically and philosophically in an age that is now referred to as the Anthropocene" (85). To understand humankind as species is a significant cultural challenge and requires posthumanistic consideration; as Dipesh Chakrabarty notes, the idea of species "may introduce a powerful degree of essentialism in our understanding of humans" ("The Climate of History" 214). The development of human cultures and the nuances of human identity are, indeed, related to our notion of species generally; and yet to see humankind beyond the limits of its own anthropocentric documentation is to lose aspects, unavoidably, of the individual human experience. A degree of essentialism, it seems, is inevitable. Thus, the question for representing the relationship between humankind and their environment becomes one of process: How can we explore our grounding in nature without resorting to outmoded or essentialist concepts of social and cultural paradigms?

This article uses Barbara Kingsolver's *Prodigal Summer* (2000) as a case study to evaluate representations of white American female identity and human biology through an ecocritical lens. Written and published during the tail end of the essentialist ecofeminist movement, Kingsolver's novel retains a gender binary based upon human biology as a way to represent the broader dichotomy between humankind and their environment. In this way, *Prodigal Summer* operates within a pivotal issue in the humanities, that "environmental humanists and eco-critics have not found a coherent theoretical ground on which to conduct their work of re-evaluating cultural traditions in light of environmental concerns" (Westling 2). The lack of coherent theoretical grounding is, of course, no longer applicable as the field of ecocriticism has expanded and become increasingly nuanced. *Prodigal Summer*'s publication date, however, positions it as an experiment in environmental fiction (and environmental scholarship more broadly) in the Anthropocene. I examine components that are potentially problematic on the surface, with a mind to explore the question: how can humankind learn to conceive of itself as part of a broader system after millennia of human dominance driving the development of human identity?

I examine Kingsolver's careful communication of "a handful of important ecological principles" against the portrayal of the human individual, critically evaluating the novels' approach to portraying "whole systems" (Kingsolver, "FAQS" n.p.). I begin by situating *Prodigal Summer* within an ecofeminist framework, before examining how the novel uses human biology as a defining feature of female identity.

I argue that humankind's mammalian origins are used deliberately to override social constructs and position the human experience through the lens of its fundamental and "primal" roots. This promotes an understanding of the human experience that is based on animality, rather than perpetuating a narrative of human superiority over animal kind.

Secondly, I will examine the essentialist binary enforced as part of this biological approach. While a study of male characters would certainly provide insight into the effectiveness of Kingsolver's ecofeminist approach, this study examines the representation of female characters. Although characteristic of the essentialist ecofeminism contemporary to the novel's publication, there are issues in Kingsolver's portrayal of the female body, specifically in the context of gender and identity; that is, an essentialist binary can present identity as relatively fixed and pre-determined. I use Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht's theory of presence to demonstrate how contemporary understandings of performative gender identity are informed by social constructs rather than physical biology. While this recognises the complexity and diversity of human identities, it contributes to disparity between notions of selfhood and the physical, animal-self. This creates conflict between human understandings of identity, and the need to overcome the sense of human dominance over the environment.

Finally, I examine how these issues arise from a dichotomy between the self and the physical body, and how the ecofeminist strategies employed by the novel are a by-product of a broader mission to envision humankind in the context of species.

Ecofeminism and the Challenge of Anthropocentrism

Ecofeminism is a field straddling this theoretical challenge. In a broad sense, ecofeminism sees equity play a key role in driving academic inquiry into perceptions of nature, where the concepts of both sex and gender inform ideas of the relationship between humankind and the environment. In other words, ecofeminism "analyses the interconnection of the oppression of women and nature" (Bressler 236). In practice however, examples of ecofeminist scholarship vary in focus, ranging from emphasis on "identifying source[s] of oppression" based on the perceived correlation of mutual oppression of women and of nature (Sargisson 69), to representations of "communion with the earth" (Sargisson 57) which assumes a spiritual connection between women and the environment.

At the time of *Prodigal Summer*'s release, a dichotomy between male and female was inherent in many iterations of cultural ecofeminism, perpetuating a problematic gender binary that has been disputed by gender theorists and queer theorists. This characteristic of some branches of ecofeminism has resulted in criticism of the field's "essentialist, biologist" approach, and its "lack of political efficacy" (Sargisson 52). Sigridur Gudmarsdottir, for example, explores the metaphor of "rape" as it is applied to sexual assault and to violations against nature. She claims that this shared terminology "without an acute awareness of genuine suffering" serves neither "justice for women nor nature" (211), concluding that the symbolic woman-nature connection is more harmful than helpful. Ultimately, as Greta Gaard claimed in 1993, "the literature and the history that purport to record the interactions of human consciousness with the nonhuman world are in fact the record of male consciousness [and] the women [are] white, middle-class, college-educated, physically unchallenged, and heterosexual, hardly a cross-section of America" (119). Exposing dualisms between the oppression of women and the disregard towards the natural world have served ecofeminist scholars by drawing out consistencies in oppression and impacts of patriarchal cultures. However, these approaches have tended to prioritise predominantly white, heterosexual perspectives, and often failed to "locate animals as central to any discussion of ethics involving women and nature" (6). A significant contribution to these inconsistencies is in the continuous anthropomorphism in some earlier applications of ecofeminism, characterised by a desire to deconstruct the way humankind sees itself as separate from Nature at the same time as upholding anthropocentric power structures.

Gaard goes on to say that an effective ecofeminist approach "must challenge [...] dualistic constructions" and "attempt to establish a different system of values in which the normative category of "other" (animals, people of colour, "Third World" people, the lower classes etc.)" (Gaard 80). More recent ecofeminist scholarship takes this up and has progressed significantly beyond the "dualistic constructions" Gaard identifies. Today, queer ecologies seek to dismantle these issues, and "challenge our heteronormative assumptions about the "natural life" of animals, and fundamentally call into question both the distinction between animal and human and the separation of nature from culture" (Arons 566). A concept with several variants, queer ecologies recognise kinship between all living – and in some cases material – things based on the premise that all things are contrived of the same matter. Stacy Alaimo introduces her *Exposed: Environmental Politics and Pleasures in Posthuman Times* (2016) claiming that "the [A]nthropocene is not time for transcendent, definitive mappings, transparent knowledge systems, or confident epistemologies" (3). To restrict ecological enquiry to established cultural or theoretical underpinnings is to underestimate the complexity of both human experiences as well as climate upheaval. Donna Haraway expertly navigates the system of entanglement that is the natural world, dismantling the anthropocentric dominance even in the titles 'Anthropocene' or 'Capitalocene' in favour of the 'Chthulucene'; "Living-with and dying-with each other potently in the Chthulucene can be a fierce reply to the dictates of both Anthropos and Capital" (2). This, of course, echoes Heise's examination of humankind as species, and proposition of a "multispecies ethics and politics" (86) which would build elements of cultural complexity and specieshood into natural law. Other recent ecofeminist scholarship Douglas Vakoch and Sam Mickey's *Women and Nature?: Beyond Dualism in Gender, Body, and Environment* (2018) seeks to move beyond its predecessors' dualistic theories and practices, positing ecofeminist approaches that recognise the complexities and diversities of human identities. Mickey's later collection *Literature and Ecofeminism: Intersectional and International Voices* (2018), as the name suggests, actively pursues diverse, international voices in its examination of ecofeminist literary practice. This same intention is reflected in the 2023 edition of *The Routledge Handbook of Ecofeminism and Literature* edited by Douglas Vakoch.

With these caveats in mind, *Prodigal Summer* is a literary experiment of ecofeminism that effectively challenges the concept of human dominance over nature through female perspectives and relationships with the non-human, yet arguably retains a problematic binary that prioritises the perspectives of educated, white women characteristic of some branches of ecofeminism at the turn of the century. This makes the novel a useful case study to explore how fiction can navigate the complexity around human specieshood and social values. Kingsolver's representation of biology, and approach to anthropomorphism is a useful starting point.

"You're nature, I'm nature": Human as Animal

Authors of environmental fiction share a challenge of how to represent the connection between the human subject and the natural environment without appearing "too contrived" (Van Tassel 91), "heavy-handed", or self-righteous (Leder 228). Anthropomorphism is a strategy employed in several environmental novels to induce empathy with the nonhuman plight. Works such as *We Are All Completely Beside Ourselves,* Margaret Atwood's *Year of the Flood* trilogy (2003-2013), Lydia Millet's *How the Dead Dream* (2007) and Richard Powers' *The Overstory* (2018) all exemplify various environmentally minded approaches to identify human characteristics in animals and plants, and establish a sense of shared experience between the human and the nonhuman. In the context of environmental writing, Lawrence Buell notes that the more humanised an animal becomes, the more likely it is to garner empathy from the public (*Endangered World* 202), a phenomenon which has resulted in numerous advertising and awareness campaigns, animated films, and personification strategies that utilise face-on photographs of various animals, endangered or otherwise. Buell likens the emotional connection resulting from eye-to-eye contact to the building of a sense of responsibility towards the other, as explored by philosopher Emmanuel Levinas. Levinas saw the act of identifying with another as the basis of human ethics and claimed that the "trace" of the human existed in the eyes. For Levinas, engaging in eye-to-eye contact is the "activator of one's responsibility for another" (213). From this perspective, human ethics and sense of responsibility for the other is based on the observation of a shared humanness. The effectiveness of the advertising Buell identifies therefore depends on the human viewer being manipulated into seeing human qualities in the photographed animal. Without this sense of kinship, a sense of responsibility cannot be established.

This take on responsibility becomes problematic in the space of human and nonhuman relations, as the implication is that the human subject requires a human-like connection with a nonhuman to warrant a deeper connection. From a sociological standpoint, this means that "only if nature is brought into people's everyday images, into the stories they tell, can its beauty and its suffering be seen and focussed on" (Buell *Endangered World* 1). The dominance of the human subject over nature is necessarily reiterated in each of these instances, as nature must come into the perspective of humans. The effectiveness of anthropomorphic nonhuman figures is predicated on the role of the human as inherently and unquestionably superior. Only when the inferior subject, the nonhuman, gains categorically human characteristics are they then granted the potential recognition associated with hardship or struggle. This disconnection is only deepened by the way nature has been actively incorporated into human civilisations. Cultivated gardens and agricultural farming situate nature as something that serves an aesthetic and functional purpose for the benefit of humankind. As Buell prefaces, "human transformations of physical nature have made the two realms increasingly indistinguishable" (3). The delineation between human culture and nature itself, even before the anthropomorphising of nonhuman beings, is an anthropocentric construction in which a cultivated version of nature takes the place of the wilderness. These refined versions of natural landscapes replace the primeval wilderness in a re-conception of what it means to be "of nature," asserting humankind as the cultivator and facilitator of nature.

Historically, the relationship between humankind and nature in the West is one based on dominion and control. In the late nineteenth Century, Frederick Turner famously emphasised dominance over nature as forming American identity. Turner claimed that it was the expansion and identification of the frontier in the American forests that saw America achieve its independence from the European homeland. In a public address to the American History Association in 1893, Turner said "the peculiarity of American institutions" is that they have had to adapt to "an expanding people—to the changes involved in crossing a continent, in winning the wilderness, and in developing at each area […] into the complexity of city life" (*The Significance* 199). This historical narrative of American independence not only establishes the continent's autonomy but establishes a fundamental sense of ownership and control over the American forests as being characteristic of white American identity. In a more contemporary context, Robert Pogue Harrison explores the relationship between humankind and the forest as one of dominance in his study of forests and civilisation, describing how the "neolithic revolution" (197) made agriculture a way of life. It "was a means of cultivating and controlling, or better, domesticating, the law of vegetative profusion which marked the new climatic era" (198). This influence was perpetuated by Europeans during the Age of Discovery upon their arrival in America, ensuring that triumph over forests and natural landscapes became a core component of national identify and progress. This cultivation of the forest remains essential to understandings of human civilisation, where enforcing the binary between human and nature has historically contributed to identity formation and remains representative of human progress. In anthropomorphising the nonhuman, an acknowledgment is made wherein the nonhuman is given value only through its likeness to humankind.

Kingsolver's novel does not reflect the dominance established in these historical paradigms. Indeed, Peter Wenz boldly christens *Prodigal Summer* as "Leopold's novel" (2003), for its ascription to "Aldo Leopold's call for 'a land ethic

[that] changes the role of *Homo sapiens* from conqueror of the land-community to plain member and citizen of it'" (106). In Kingsolver's novel, the reader is constantly reminded of the protagonists' creaturely drives and their place within a complex ecosystem of living beings, subverting a long-established binary between humankind and nature. *Prodigal Summer* invites readers to consider "whole systems," looking beyond themselves to the biodiversity of Zebulon Mountain, where the novel is set. It follows a year in the lives of Deanna, Lusa and Garnett, residents of a small town in Appalachia. More importantly, Kingsolver situates each character as being within a living, changing ecosystem, as active agents in a living landscape.

Kingsolver focuses her readers' attention to human biology to draw out aspects of the connections between humankind and animal. Kingsolver's approach includes the reoccurring zoomorphism of the human subject. That is, rather than superimposing human characteristics onto nature, Kingsolver emphasises the animal characteristics of her human characters. Within the confines of literary fiction, Kingsolver's strategy is quite unique in its commitment to a zoomorphic approach. Characters conceive themselves as part of a living system rather than only a human community, respond to sexual urges based on scents, and on several occasions, menstruation appears to determine how male characters respond to female characters. While zoomorphism is used frequently in literature, Kingsolver's overarching application of the technique exemplifies the theory of Darwinian evolution in a way that differs from other environmentally minded approaches to literary eco fiction.

In theorising *Prodigal Summer,* Kingsolver concludes that "a biological novel will have to be full of sex" ("Frequently Asked Questions" n.p.). The emphasis placed on animal copulation in addition to the sexual relationships between human characters works to draw parallels between the two groups. Deanna hears the "fierce, muffled sounds of bats mating in the shadows under her porch eaves" (8), sees mating red-tailed hawks nearly fall from the sky in "senseless passion" (19), and observes that "in the high season of courting and mating" the sounds of the birds is like "the earth itself opening its mouth to sing" (53). Correspondingly, organic, earthy language is used to describe sex between Lusa and her late husband Cole, with reference to "damp places" like "fresh earth toward the glory of new growth" (40), It is imagery of the landscape that pervades their union more so than the meeting of bodies, or the fruition of a complex human relationship.

Just as human characters are described using organic imagery, the mountain itself takes on reciprocal human characteristics. Lusa describes how "the mountain's breath began to bear gently on the back of her neck [...] insistent as a lovers sigh" as Zebulon becomes "another man in her life, larger and steadier than any other companion she'd known" (34). The anthropomorphising of the mountain against the zoomorphism of human characters creates a more neutral space from which to examine the biodiversity of the mountain. As the spring turns to summer, "everywhere you looked, something was fighting for time, for light, the kiss of pollen, a connection of sperm and egg and another chance" (10-11). The human characters are included in this fight, and at the conclusion of the novel bear no more significance than any other living being upon the mountain. Concluding through the eyes of a female coyote, Kingsolver finishes on an expanded view of the mountain itself, an ecosystem of which the humans on the mountain are a small part.

The representation of human solitude is, therefore, a method by which Kingsolver emphasises the absurdity of conceptual binaries between humans and non-humans. The impossibility of solitude frames the representation of complex ecosystems in the beginning and the end of the novel: "Solitude is a human presumption. Every quiet step is thunder to a beetle underfoot, a tug of impalpable thread on the web pulling mate to mate and predator to prey, a beginning or an end. Every choice is a world made new for the chosen" (3, 446-7). The very idea of being isolated despite being a part of an active and diverse ecosystem negates the value of the nonhuman. When characters are zoomorphised, the idea of isolation becomes absurd as characters are explicitly represented within a diverse conglomerate of living things. The image of the beetle underfoot, the brazen reference to the thread of a spiderweb connecting "predator to prey" establishes a space in which to examine the human interactions in the novel through the very same lens each protagonist uses to examine the creatures around them; creatures that each have an impact on the behaviours and lives of others. Suitably then, each character is connected to one other by various degrees of separation, and although the closest interaction between protagonists is by telephone, their relationships and family connections form a web, bringing together all the people in the valley. Binaries are revealed to be unnatural, and an oversimplification of "humans' inextricable connectedness with the material world" (Arons 569). If all things are iterations of the same matter, the act of anthropomorphism becomes more akin to an identification of structural similarities than the diminishing of otherness. Undermining this connection between Kingsolver's representation and queer ecologies, however, is the connection drawn between environmental awareness and education.

Kingsolver makes a connection between education and the ability to recognise and incorporate broader ecological systems into worldviews. The titular allusion to the parable of the Prodigal Son positions environmental education as a redeeming feature. Characters who are more "reckless" in their farming practices or ignorant of ecological processes are guided by the novel's protagonists, and subsequently achieve a form of redemption, and a new perception of their place within the broader environment. Deanna holds a degree in wildlife biology and a thesis "on coyote range extension in the 20th century" (61). As an employee of the US Forest Service, she is responsible for the upkeep of trails throughout the mountains and impeding illegal hunting in the area. She is suitably matched with Eddie Bondo, a young coyote hunter. Entomologist Lusa becomes a carer for her sister-in-law's children and is shocked by their ignorance as they express amazement at the way in which honey is made. Lusa despairs for "all the things that people used to grow and make for themselves before they were widowed from their own food chain" (296) and takes on Crys and Lowell's agricultural education. Through their interactions, the reader is informed about the life cycles of small insects and bugs, and the ecosystems within the forest that contribute to the biodiversity of the mountain, and ultimately, to food production. Nannie Rawley "went to college once upon a time, and it was *after* they discovered the Earth was round" (281), and educates her neighbour, Garnett, on ecologically friendly farming. At times, these characters are more akin to mouthpieces for ecological principles than rounded characters. Their pairings with such prodigal individuals and educational roles facilitate learning about the complexities of biodiversity and the role of different animals in supporting the ecosystem, not only for their respective protegees, but also for readers. This is a strategy Kingsolver also employs in her later novel *Flight Behaviour* (2012), where the protagonist, Dellarobia, meets Ovid, a scientist studying the movements of the endangered monarch butterfly. As a scientist, Ovid is limited in his capacity to educate the community by the limitations of his profession—"scientists who address the public are ridiculed by their colleagues for being imprecise or theatrical" (Trexler 227)—but on a personal level, his personability enables the exchange of knowledge between himself and the novel's protagonist. *Prodigal Summer* similarly crafts its own parable, where the wisdom of select individuals enlightens characters and teaches moral lessons.

Kingsolver contrasts her two strong female protagonists with Garnett, a religious widower who is working to produce a blight-resistant strain of the American chestnut. Despite pursuing his own form of ecological repair, Garnett is reflective of the conventional farmer, upholding the traditional farming practices of the community in the valley. In his own words, "sometimes horsepower can do what horseflesh cannot" (84) and spraying pesticides is "county right-of-way" (87). While Garnett pursues the development of a blight resistant tree, he sprays herbicide along his fence line to prevent weeds (90-93) and orders his trees in neat rows. He represents a perspective wherein nature is mediated through cultivation, and what is acceptable in nature is determined by what nature can offer agricultural activity. Garnett's ecological interest, therefore, indicates a well-intentioned yet misguided approach to sustainability. Unlike the more activist pursuits of Deanna or the academic interest informing Lusa, Garnett's reluctance to consider Nannie Rawley's organic farming methods are clearly represented as a product of ignorance. Fundamentalist religious dialogue and a value for the "old ways" firmly characterise Garnett as the archetypal elderly man driven by the very binary that Kingsolver is subverting. Thus, the trio of educated matriarchal figures is rounded out with Nannie Rawley, "Garnett's nearest neighbour and the bane of his life" (84). Rawley becomes a mouthpiece for the science behind organic farming and land preservation, challenging Garnett's perceptions around the use of herbicides and God-given dominion over nature, ultimately educating him on the benefits of organic farming for both profit and sustainable practice.

The positioning of educated characters as those who quietly inform those around them of ecological diversity highlights an interesting paradox. On the one hand, the novel draws attention to humankind's fundamental, primordial links to other living beings. Yet on the other, it requires engagement with the institutions of knowledge that have historically separated humans from animals, to become aware of these innate connections. Formal education is the key to understanding the human connection to nature yet is also a product of humankind's move away from their animal nature. Adam Trexler notes that in *Flight Behaviour,* Kingsolver's realism is "underpinned by an account of Anthropocene economics for the poor," and a complication of the "stereotypical certainty of scientists and the ignorance of rural southerners when unpacking cultural nuances of contemporary climate change" (228). A similar narrative exists in *Prodigal Summer*, where characters who have had the privilege of higher education are more deeply connected to and aware of their animal natures. It is not, therefore, through a sense of earthly connection to the land that these characters become educators of biodiversity and natural systems, but through discussion, debate and academic discourse. For example, when Garnett quotes Genesis to Nannie Rawley, she retorts with a recontextualization of the passage alongside the Volterra principle (218, 278). Later, she outlines to him the ongoing debate between intelligent design and evolution. Despite being the more comedic storyline in the novel, the discussions and letter writing between Garnett and Nannie Rawley follow popular lines of debate about the relationship between humankind and nature. Similarly, Deanna attempts to have Eddie Bondo read her Master's thesis to understand the important role of predators. In all of these discussions, scientific and philosophical principles describe the networks existing between different animals and their behaviours, with each individual narrative expanding outwards until its effect on humankind is made apparent. Kingsolver does not do this to demonstrate the ways humankind is impacting their environment, per se, but to highlight humankind's position within a complex, interdependent ecosystem. Human action is an active part of the processes described, and an inherent part of the broader system. What does it mean, then, if awareness of this complex system in the novel is dependent on a privileged education?

The zoomorphising of humans in the novel is therefore complicated by the explicit methods of sharing its ecological message; while in some settings characters are encouraged to consider humans in the context of their animal nature, their ability to do so depends upon a level of intelligence that is categorically human. The novel seems to suggest a process of unlearning, as higher education serves to override evolutionary lessons that place the human subject in a position of superiority over their environment. Paradoxically, the subject must learn in order to unlearn, must engage more deeply with the higher levels of institutional knowledge in order to escape a culturally established truth. This is further complicated, however, by Kingsolver's emphasis on the biology of the human body.

"Sex […] the greatest invention life ever made": The Female Body

Physicality becomes a key component of the human experience in *Prodigal Summer* through the emphasis on biology alongside the physical impact that humankind has on nature. The novel's biological focus, however, also draws attention to the way that concepts of selfhood have informed humankind's relationship with the environment. If, as Gumbrecht posits, Western culture is a meaning-culture, then the reality of biology informing identity can be a challenging concept, as the Cartesian notions of selfhood that define Western thinking of identity typically negate the significance of the physical body. Gumbrecht's meaning-culture sees the subject's desire for presence as a reaction to "an everyday environment that has become so overly Cartesian during the past centuries" (116). He posits that "aesthetic experience may help us recuperate the spatial and the bodily dimension of our existence" (116). In other words, a presence-culture would see both spiritual and physical existence integrated in conceptions of self and identity, both individually and communally. According to Gumbrecht, Western theory has "made the ontology of human existence depend exclusively on the movements of the human mind" (17), with theoretical movements that saw "the loss of any non-Cartesian, any non-experience-based type of world-reference" (43). Thus, the physical body has been better likened to something the transient self operates from within, rather than a physical manifestation of the self that exerts overt influence on thought and behaviour. I perceive this as an idea reminiscent of the modernist revelation of the subjective self, and one that continued to define much of postmodern thought, where "concepts and arguments have to be 'antisubstantialist'" (Gumbrecht 18). In practice, social media, distance communication, and virtual reality see the self becoming omnipresent, embodying "the dream of making lived experience independent of the locations that our bodies occupy in space" (Gumbrecht 139). The anti-hermeneutic turn sees this theoretical landscape challenged, and the body is recontextualised as the vehicle through which the subject experiences the world around them.

Prodigal Summer is a novel that focuses on the body, specifically its biology, and emphasises how physical presence informs identity. The experience of Being in the world re-establishes the subject's primordial links with the physical world, situating the self as part of a living system. Biological function actively informs the feelings and behaviours of its characters. As relationships develop, emphasis on sex in the context of its biological value suggests that Kingsolver employs sexual practice as a method of re-establishing the conceptual bond between humanity and their nonhuman counterparts, rather than as a mechanism to explore psychological connection between people or to represent enjoyment. Already by page five of the novel, we see the staunchly independent Deanna corrupted by the much younger Eddie Bondo. She is zoomorphised, and her cautionary response to him strikes a delicate balance between that of a human and of an animal. Clearly accustomed to being alone on the mountain, Deanna answers his banter in the "way of the mountain people in general – to be quiet when most agitated" (5). He approaches silently, catching her sniffing a stump as she tracks the path of an animal. She remains defensive as she considers his manner, weapons and potential threat before concluding that the term "*predator* was a strong presumption" (6). The interaction is recorded almost as one between two animals, as language alluding to the innate "fight or flight" response is employed to describe their meet-cute. Long silences stand between clipped verbal interactions, as each considers the other between vocalisations. Verbs such as "bite", "intruding," "tensed," "watched," and "measured" characterise Deanna as a cornered animal judging the potential threat in her territory. It is this instinctual, biological drive that characterises the relationships and behaviours of several characters in the novel, drawing physicality into their characterisation.

Biology is the fundamental link between humankind and their environment, providing space for the zoomorphism of the novel's human characters to occur and blur the lines between human and animal. At a fundamental level, presence is innate to human development, where awareness of the body and utilisation of the senses has allowed for human survival in the wilderness. Gumbrecht speaks of this evolution, positing that earlier societies upheld presence cultures through the vision of the human subject as being "a part of and surrounded by a world" (25) considered to be God's creation. This sense of presence is maintained throughout medieval thought, where "spirit and matter were believed to be inseparable" (25). As the concept of the contemporary self develops, so too does a detachment from the body and the physical, as notions of selfhood are increasingly associated with the psychological self. Indeed, the postmodern self is characteristically fragmented and decentred, with no connection to the body at all. Contextually, white American identity comes to be informed by a fundamental separation from nature, and entry into a cultural environment that is primarily meaning based.

In the context of Gumbrecht's theory of presence, *Prodigal Summer* demonstrates how the disembodied notion of selfhood comes into conflict with the sensory experience of the physical body. Kingsolver emphasises the sensory experience and innate physical drives of her characters. These challenges the foundations of humankind's intellectual development, specifically the versatility of the self that meaning culture has allowed individuals to derive. Prominent references to pheromones, scents, and menstruation are used to blur the delineation between the abstract, psychological self, and the physical body. The physical experience is a clear informant of understanding and interpretation, re-establishing connections between the body and world-appropriation. Deanna, for example, "knew some truths about human scents. She'd walk down city streets in Knoxville and turn men's heads […] on the middle day of her cycle" (94), while Lusa and Cole court "with an intensity that caused her to ovulate during his visits" (41). Kingsolver's emphasis on these biological characteristics challenges personal agency where humans are so clearly and powerfully influenced by their bodily responses and physicality. Lusa's ovulation changes to suit the courtship of a male; she attributes men's attraction to her fertility ("No wonder men were fluttering around her like moths: she was fertile" (232)); and Eddie Bondo allegedly finds Deanna on the trail when he "sniffed you out, girl" (94). Kingsolver frames the biology of the female body as the driving force behind sexual attraction, shaping human relationships in the novel as being more effectively defined by their biological components over notions of kinship, social connection or identity. In this way, Kingsolver uses sexual desire as humankind's fundamental, long-lasting link to their biological selves, or their animal selves, using this perspective to emphasise the shared biological processes between animals and humans. In the same way that Gumbrecht seeks to re-establish presence as a defining characteristic of human experience and understanding, Kingsolver emphasises how physicality has a significant influence on the individual's behaviour and psyche.

Biological influence is seen and recognised across the animal kingdom as an explanatory agent for animal behaviour. However, social and cultural progress in the West sees sexuality as a personal faculty, and a characteristic of individual identity. This is not to say that sexuality is chosen, but that its expression is inherently personal. To factor biology into this equation contradicts the developed sense of individual agency over sexual expression. For example, the idea that a human female's cycle is impacted by the mere presence of a male contradicts popular perceptions of bodily autonomy. The functions of the body serve the purpose of establishing each character's connection with their biological, animal selves. It is these biological processes that are then used to evidence budding relationships in the novel, instead of the more complex, emotional, and psychological connections typically employed.

A key bodily function that Kingsolver leans upon is menstruation. As Lauren Rosewarne discusses in her 2012 book *Periods in Pop Culture*, menstruation has long been considered a social stigma for women. Rosewarne cites numerous sociologists and psychologists who identify menstruation in Western culture as a "private event not to be talked about in public" (14), where "emphasis on secrecy" (11) perpetuates a mentality of shame around menstruation and the body. It follows that reference to menstruation is "strikingly absent" (11) from popular media, and it would be fair to say that in fiction, the menstrual cycle is rarely mentioned if at all. By drawing attention to biological process, Kingsolver launches an ecofeminist dialogue around the female body and re-establishes the significance of physical presence as an informing part of the human experience. As Sargisson argues, "Ecofeminism speaks in terms of natural bodily functions" where such references "attempt to articulate the politics of exclusion noted by other forms of feminism" (58). In Kingsolver's representation, the body resurfaces as a depoliticised working object, demonstrating how physicality does, in fact, bear impact on selfhood and identity. Simultaneously, however, the logic of this depends on a dualism based on sex, which is regressive in terms of representing the diversity of women. Her approach, therefore, highlights a disparity between biological and social understandings of human identity.

As this point, I have demonstrated that there are two main perspectives from which to examine the relationship between the human subject and the environment in *Prodigal Summer*. The first examines the way in which human agency has created a division between the subject and their primordial origins. From this perspective, the novel explores the somewhat more familiar use of anthropomorphism by contrasting it with the zoomorphism of the human subject. The second approach to Kingsolver's representation of the human subject is in regard to physical experience, where the novel offers a contrarian interpretation of human existence as if it were essentially defined by biology and animality. This provides a useful point from which to consider human identity, and to critically evaluate the effectiveness of leaning on humankind's animal nature to re-establish bonds with the natural environment. In a sociological context, there are disadvantages to such a representation that are important to consider. Characters such as Deanna and Nannie Rawley see their worth as intrinsically linked with the body and its ability to reproduce, where species survival takes precedence as the core goal of the individual. Deanna expresses concern about her age, describing menopause leading her to become an "obsolete female biding its time until death" (333). The "flows, cycles, and rhythms" (Sargisson 58) that ecofeminist texts typically connect with the cycles of nature are manipulated here to signify Deanna's biological redundancy. Biology is not strictly related to physicality, but to function. There is a sense of an ending when Deanna is made redundant by her inability to bear children and her failure to find a mate. Similarly, Nannie Rawley claims that in their mature age, she and Garnett are biologically "a useless drain on our kind" (375) without the ability to reproduce. Though clearly the subjective view of each character, these perspectives serve as a reminder of the female individual's perceived biological value in the context of their specieshood.

When the dominant lens is human as species, the intricacies of interpersonal relationships and individual identities are overridden by the primal imperative to reproduce. Effectively, *Prodigal Summer* becomes a contrarian interpretation of human existence as being defined by biology and animality. Even as Deanna's worst fears are allayed by a pregnancy, her narrative continues to be demonstrated through the "enthusiastic cycle of fertility and rest" (*Prodigal Summer* 333). Copulation is described as "the body's decision, a body with no more choice of its natural history than an orchid has, or the bee it needs" (26-7). There are two notions in play here that, in a contemporary setting, are problematic: firstly, the notion that biological urges are equal to consent, and secondly, the presentation of reproduction as an inherent responsibility. According to Pamela Geller, "the hegemonic bodyscape at work in contemporary Western science is in large part informed by biomedicine. In its representation of certain bodily differences, the biomedical bodyscape conveys heteronormative notions about sexual divisions of labour, gendered identities, and intimate interactions" (512). While contemporary bodyscape research queries the sex binary, *Prodigal Summer*'s representation of heterosexual, cisgender, white women, fails to demonstrate a diverse representation that may allow for a queering of the biological self. As such, female character identities appear to be intrinsically tied to their biological function.

While this representation of female identity is certainly present, it also contributes to the exploration of humankind as an intelligent and self-aware species. Leder recognises sex in the novel as not only being tied in with characters' biology, but also the "conscious human processing of that biology" (230). This is most evident in moments where characters become explicitly aware of their biology and attempt to dissect its influence on their psychological responses, and subsequent actions. Leder offers the example of Lusa dancing with her nephew Rickie. As Lusa dances, she observes that in the animal kingdom, dancing is a "warm-up for the act". Humans, on the other hand, can "distinguish a courtship ritual from the act itself" (418). The social and cultural aspects of human civilisation create "contexts and assign meanings" (Leder 230) to biological behaviours. However, whilst humans in the novel are aware of the role of biology, there is little occasion for more diverse or socially complex urges to be represented, and the essentialist binary remains.

"I don't love animals as individuals [...] I love them as whole species": The Self Becoming Animal

While *Prodigal Summer* could be read as a call-back to essentialist ecofeminism, I suggest that a broader perspective reveals Kingsolver's novel as providing a more nuanced representation of the disconnect between humankind and the environment. *Prodigal Summer* highlights a key challenge for environmental fiction and its mission to reconstruct an ecocentric relationship between humans and the natural world. The representation of "whole systems" is achieved by the interrelationship of anthropomorphised landscapes and animals, and zoomorphised human characters. The final chapter of the novel prominently and finally demonstrates the conflation achieved by this strategy throughout, as the reader follows a coyote along the same tracks Deanna follows at the beginning of the novel. The reader experiences a full anthropomorphisation of the coyote female, as she enjoys the smell of the air after rain, feels restless away from her children, and tracks the trail of another animal. Her biology is referred to subtly, in a way that reveals her species only to the reader paying close attention. The first indication that she is not human is when she "lowers her nose to pick up speed" (444-5), which, in the context of the passage, is a faint indication of her animality against her very human emotions and observations about the surrounding landscape. The coyote mirrors Deanna's movements in the first chapter, coming full circle and rounding out the novel's brief capture of the ecosystem of Zebulon Valley. As the coyote is anthropomorphised through the mirroring of Deanna's actions, Deanna is once again, and perhaps more powerfully, zoomorphised as her actions are contextualised by the movements of a wild animal.

The success of this representation is based on the emphasis of commonality, the biology and behaviour shared by humankind and animals. As Buell says, "if the passage from society to environment is dramatized by the plot of relinquishment, the bond between the human and the nonhuman estates is expressed through the imaginary of relationship" (*The Environmental Imagination* 180). The imagined relationship in *Prodigal Summer* is somewhat more complicated, in that it is based on shared biological experience. At the level of species, the novel represents not strictly an *imagined* relationship, but a shared experience based on the biological imperative to survive. It is at the individual level that this representation begins to show flaws, where the evolutionary and biological aspects of the human experience clash with individual experiences and perceptions of identity and autonomous selfhood. We can therefore see two different approaches to navigating modern estrangement between humankind and nature. Kingsolver achieves something unique on the level of species by zoomorphising humankind, an approach that challenges human dominance over nature by reducing human agency and the perception of difference between humans and animals.

Recontextualising a relationship that has historically been based on dominance and the perseverance of a binary between human and nonhuman without losing a fundamental sense of human identity is difficult, as it works against fundamental values of contemporary selfhood. As Buell argues, "one motive for the personification of nature [is] to offset what might otherwise seem the bleakness of renouncing anthropomorphism" (180-1). In other words, it seems more coherent for the subject to consider nature in an anthropomorphised context, than to consider the self outside of the bounds of being human. But this implies that the value of the nonhuman is only apparent if some semblance of humanity is recognisable in it. The frequent strategy of anthropomorphising the animal is therefore inherently problematic in that it purports that the only way for something nonhuman to have inherent value is to make it appear human. We can see in Kingsolver's novel an example of the reverse, where the human subject is reconnected to their biological function and aligned more closely with their animal counterparts. By envisioning the individual as a single entity within a broader living dynamic, Kingsolver promotes an understanding of humans as non-exceptional, integrated parts of an ecological system.

Whilst zoomorphisation has the effect of challenging contemporary convictions around the malleability of gender and individual identities, it is an approach that also challenges some of the cornerstones of the perception of human dominance over the natural world. *Prodigal Summer* is a novel that contributes to a broader conversation around the perceived binary between humankind and the environment, a conversation that faces the challenge of re-envisioning humankind in a changing world. According to Trexler, the "rise of realist fiction in the Anthropocene shows a wider transformation of human culture" (233). Environmental fiction is a particularly focused narrative environment where the way humankind is perceived in and as part of the world can be dissected, explored and reconfigured. Through its evident authorial intent, realist environmental fiction particularly often draws parallels between facts and fiction, where new literary methods offer platforms from which to re-examine the human experience and human purpose. Kingsolver's novel reminds its readers of humankind's origins, representing humans not in the context of their achievements, of progress, or even as part of human societies, but as a species.

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Hacia una historia cultural, literaria y natural del coyote hispanoamericano en los siglos XVI–XIX

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Resumen

Este trabajo lleva a cabo un primer acercamiento a la historia cultural, literaria y zoológica del coyote hispanoamericano, una importante figura mítica desde tiempos prehispánicos que ha desempeñado el papel de trickster en cuentos y leyendas a lo largo de Latinoamérica, perteneciente a una especie extraordinariamente adaptativa que se ha expandido por los territorios americanos en los últimos años. Aunque ya ha habido algunas aproximaciones al estudio del rol cultural del coyote en la literatura especializada, y sobre todo en el ámbito norteamericano, este esbozo histórico se centrará en el coyote de Hispanoamérica y se fundamentará en la perspectiva de los estudios de animales o *Animal Studies*, prestando atención a la relación del ser humano con este cánido en los textos analizados. El enfoque de esta investigación resulta interdisciplinar en la medida en que combina diversas fuentes y géneros (historias naturales, crónicas de Indias, libros de geografía, un tratado de caza, fabularios…) que comprenden una ventana temporal de cerca de cuatro siglos (desde el siglo XVI hasta el XIX), y también por la intención de interpretar, cuando ha sido posible, el comportamiento, los significados y los hábitos otorgados al coyote en estos documentos desde un punto de vista que tenga en cuenta conocimientos zoológicos sobre la especie y que no remita solo al simbolismo o a atribuciones antropomórficas. Esta forma de estudiar a los animales —y en el caso que nos concierne, al coyote— nos permitirá advertir qué han supuesto estas criaturas para nosotros, cómo las hemos utilizado en nuestras culturas y sociedades y cuál ha sido el trato que les hemos dispensado a lo largo de la historia.

Palabras clave: Coyote, estudios de los animales, Hispanoamérica, fábulas, historia natural.

Abstract

The research discussed in this article takes a preliminary approach to the literary and zoological history of the Ibero-American coyote. As an important mythical figure since pre-Hispanic times, the Ibero-American coyote has commonly played the role of trickster in tales and legends throughout Latin America. As a biological species, it has demonstrated extraordinary adaptability in its expansion throughout the American territories in recent years. While the cultural role of the coyote has been variously considered in previous studies, especially its role in North American literature, this historical sketch focuses specifically on the Ibero-American coyote. The research takes an Animal Studies approach, in that it analyzes the relationships between humans and this species of canid in the texts discussed. It is also interdisciplinary in combining various sources and genres (natural histories, Indian Chronicles, geography books, a hunting treatise, fables...), covering a period of nearly four centuries (from the 16th to the 19th). The intention is to read, where possible, the behaviour, meanings and habits given to the coyote in these documents from a point of view that takes into account zoological knowledge about the species, and not just its symbolism or anthropomorphic attributions. This approach to studying animals—and in the case that concerns us, the coyote—allows us to see what these creatures have meant to us, how we have used them in our cultures and societies, and how we have treated them throughout history.

Keywords: Coyote, Animal Studies, Ibero–America, fables, natural history.

Tras las huellas del coyote. Introducción

El coyote (*canis latrans*) es un actor fundamental de la fauna americana. Este cánido lleva a cabo un rol indispensable como regulador de las poblaciones de herbívoros y de roedores, su principal presa (Flores 9), aunque es quizá más conocido por sus altercados con los humanos: por el robo de gallinas y de reses jóvenes, así como por sus ataques a mascotas. En la cultura de los países mesoamericanos el coyote ha jugado un rol importantísimo desde tiempos prehispánicos, figurando en códices, en diversas representaciones iconográficas, en topónimos y nombres propios, y protagonizando leyendas y cuentos folclóricos. La abundancia y la amplia distribución geográfica de los coyotes, radicados en Norteamérica y en Centroamérica, y que en los últimos años han comenzado a expandirse al sur (Ramírez-Albores y León-Paniagua 69–70), unidas a su competencia para la caza y la supervivencia, podrían explicar la relevancia y el interés que ha suscitado este animal en las sociedades nativas.

El objetivo de esta aportación consiste en contribuir a la construcción de una historia cultural y literaria del coyote hispanoamericano, una tarea que ya fue iniciada por otros en el pasado,[1] aunque en nuestro caso la acometeremos desde el punto de vista de los estudios de los animales, en los que ya se han llevado a cabo algunos acercamientos críticos a esta clase de cuestiones, pese a que sus investigadores han prestado más atención al estudio cultural de la fauna europea y norteamericana que a la latinoamericana (Tortorici y Few 5).[2] Esta corriente académica, cuya trayectoria resumió acertadamente Marrero Henríquez (87–88), conforma un espacio interdisciplinario en el que se explora la implicación de los animales en las esferas culturales humanas y nuestras interacciones con ellos (DeMello 4). Por nuestra parte, esta interdisciplinariedad se sustenta en la diversidad de las fuentes que hemos escogido y en nuestro intento de, cuando ha sido posible y pertinente, especular sobre una potencial explicación zoológica de las conductas, fabulaciones, descripciones, acciones, simbolismo y cualidades atribuidas a los coyotes de nuestros textos.

Ahora bien, existe una dificultad adicional que ilustró Morgado García. En su opinión,

> habría que superar las barreras disciplinares, por cuanto los estudios animales requieren la consulta de un amplio espectro de fuentes, tales obras de la Antigüedad griega y romana, bestiarios medievales, tratados zoológicos, iconografía, hagiografía, literatura emblemática, libros cinegéticos, cuentos infantiles, literatura de creación,

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[1] Véase Rodríguez Valle (78–113), que explora la presencia del coyote en la literatura oral mexicana.

[2] Pueden verse al respecto los estudios del volumen colectivo *Centering Animals in Latin American History* (2013), nacido de un esfuerzo conjunto para remediar esta desatención.

> legislación, prensa, comic, cinematografía, e, incluso, el recurso a la historia oral. ("Una visión cultural de los animales" 18)

Debido a la inmensa cantidad de fuentes que se deben considerar, nos centraremos solamente en unas pocas, que en el caso particular del coyote servirán para brindarnos un primer acercamiento al que ha sido su papel en la cultura, en la ciencia y en las letras hispánicas, y en las que se advierte su relación con el ser humano: las historias naturales, las crónicas de Indias, un tratado de caza y otras fuentes con noticias históricas y geográficas valiosas para el estudio zoológico desde el siglo XVI al XVIII; y las fábulas escritas, desde las traducidas al náhuatl hasta las publicadas en el siglo XIX. Pero no en todas las regiones hispanoamericanas habita el coyote, de modo que enfocaremos nuestras pesquisas en documentos relativos o procedentes de México y de los países de Centroamérica.

Antes de emprender este cometido cumple decir algo del coyote norteamericano, identificado como *trickster* en las tradiciones nativoamericanas y estudiado—entre otros—por Paul Radin. Para Lévi-Strauss el *trickster* es "un mediador, y esta función explica que conserve en parte la dualidad que por función tiene que superar. De ahí su carácter ambiguo y equívoco" (249), una dualidad que define a los *tricksters* animales como carroñeros, pues "son como los depredadores (consumen alimento animal), pero también como los productores de alimento vegetal (no matan lo que comen)" (247), y como ejemplo refiere—con escasa precisión zoológica—al coyote, que es también cazador y no solo rapiñador. Más ajustada a la labor cultural y literaria del coyote—y también de nuestro coyote hispanoamericano—nos parece la síntesis de las propiedades del *trickster* de Hynes (34–45). Juzgamos que la clave de la actuación del coyote como *trickster*, y el motivo de la elección de este animal para desempeñar este rol, se debe entre otros factores a su variada dieta y a sus flexibles y astutas tácticas de cacería.[3] Para Flores esa es una de las razones de su extraordinaria capacidad de adaptación: el hecho de que pueda actuar en solitario o de forma gregaria en función de las presiones del entorno y de la disponibilidad del alimento (35–36). Esta cualidad, que podríamos considerar *oportunista*, también se refleja en su nutrición omnívora y en sus hábitos potencialmente carroñeros (Flores 106), y nos recuerda a las palabras de Hyde acerca de los *tricksters*, que son capaces de aprovechar en su favor las contingencias (97).

Por último, se debe reconocer la importancia del coyote en la cultura náhuatl prehispánica. Flores menciona a los dioses aztecas Coyotlinauatl, asociado con las artes musicales y la poesía, y al hechicero y cambiaformas Coyotlinahual (10); y en los augurios nahuas de fray Bernardino de Sahagún el coyote es una de las formas que adopta Tezcatlipoca, en señal de un porvenir poco venturoso (Rodríguez Valle 81). No obstante, quizá la deidad coyote más conocida sea Huehuecoyótl (o Coyote Viejo), a quien Olivier concede la función de dios de la música y sugiere que este atributo podría ponerse en relación con la aptitud vocálica del coyote (115–116), que ha sido destacada en numerosas ocasiones por los naturalistas (Bekoff 79) y que le mereció su nomenclatura latina como *canis latrans* (perro ladrador). Otras de las facetas de Huehuecóyotl enunciadas por Olivier tienen que ver con la guerra, sus tendencias chismosas, el hecho de que siembre discordia entre los seres humanos (121) y su carácter lúbrico (118–119). Estas dos últimas propiedades nos recuerdan a una de las características del *trickster* que fijó Hynes—que son subversores de situaciones y del orden establecido (37)—y también al impulso de la lujuria, que, junto con el apetito, es uno de los motores del *trickster* para Hyde (8). Esta asociación de los coyotes con la sexualidad podría fundamentarse en el “alto potencial reproductivo y hábitos oportunistas” (Ramírez-Albores y León-Paniagua 70) de una especie que, pese a los intentos de exterminio, ha logrado proliferar en América.

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[3] Como a propósito del *trickster* indicaron Alberto y Aitana Martos García: "El engaño, la trampa, la invisibilidad, el camuflaje, la persuasión o la intimidación, todas ellas son estrategias entre la presa y su depredador" (146).

El coyote, animal pernicioso y de ambigua clasificación en la historia natural

Según Morgado García, en el periodo abarcado entre 1550 y 1650 (y en siglos anteriores) había predominado una visión emblemática de la naturaleza, “un mundo en el que los animales constituían un aspecto más de un intrincado lenguaje de símbolos, metáforas y emblemas” (*La imagen del mundo animal* 21), pero la llegada de las historias naturales americanas y la atención prestada a la fauna por los cronistas de Indias comportó un cambio de enfoque que habría de echar los cimientos de una nueva forma de interpretar a los animales. La dificultad para recurrir a una tradición simbólica previa propiciaría la emergencia de una incipiente actitud empirista que cristalizaría en siglos sucesivos. Aunque estas nuevas historias naturales se sustentaban en modelos clásicos que se remontan a Aristóteles y a Plinio, varios de estos autores, como José de Acosta y Fernández de Oviedo, hicieron hincapié en haber visto o experimentado lo que describían (Asúa y French 89), una diferencia notable con la tradición naturalista pretérita, de un marcado carácter libresco y compilatorio, muy apegada a la autoridad de los antiguos. Domina en algunos de estos registros, que a veces ocupan un papel esporádico o digresivo en las crónicas de Indias, una sensación de maravilla ante la novedad y la diversidad de la fauna y flora del Nuevo Mundo (Urdapilleta Muñoz 11–12), un esfuerzo por amoldarla a los saberes europeos, así como la incorporación de los conocimientos sobre el mundo natural de los indígenas (y noticias procuradas por esta clase de informantes), sin perder de vista los objetivos utilitarios, morales y estéticos que habían caracterizado a la historia natural anterior (19–20).

En cuanto al coyote, son dos las soluciones adoptadas por los autores que estudiamos: su asimilación a animales conocidos en el Viejo Mundo, como el lobo, el adive (o chacal) y el zorro; o su identificación como una especie nueva, aunque a menudo contrastándola, haciéndola descender o hibridándola con las otras tres antedichas.

Del primer modo opera el autor, toledano y sacerdote, de *Crónica de la Nueva España*, compuesta en la segunda mitad del siglo XVI, aunque publicada mucho después. Afirma Francisco Cervantes de Salazar que

> Hay otro animal del tamaño y figura de zorra que los indios y los nuestros llaman adibe, no menos dañoso al ganado ovejuno que los lobos muy encarniszados de España, y porque destos animales hay tantos que no basta con armarles lazos, el remedio es echarles pedazos de carne con cierta hierba que nasce en esta tierra, que, comiendo della, luego mueren. (25)

En *Historia verdadera de la conquista de la Nueva España*, cuyo manuscrito se terminó hacia 1568, el soldado Bernal Díaz del Castillo, cuando relata los animales que encontraron los españoles en la casa de fieras de Moctezuma, probablemente confunde al coyote con los lobos, "que en eſta tierra se llaman Adiues" (69r). En otro manuscrito compuesto entre 1571 y 1574, la *Geografía y descripción universal de las Indias* de Juan López de Velasco, este autor dedicó un apartado a la fauna indiana, apenas un párrafo, en el que reconocía la existencia de "adives, que son como lobos" (20).

Identifican al coyote por este nombre (o por una variante gráfica del mismo) autores como López de Gómara. En el capítulo LXXXIV de su *Historia de la Conquista de México*, compuesta hacia 1552 e inédita hasta mucho más tarde, el sacerdote Francisco López de Gómara enumera los animales que cazaba Moctezuma estando preso de Cortés y de los españoles, y entre ellos figuran "venados, corzos, lobos, zorros y otros animales, así como coyutles" (163). En *Historia de la Nueva España*, del jurista granadino Alonso de Zorita, que tampoco se publicó hasta bastante después de su composición en el siglo XVI, encuentra Galeote (340) una referencia a los *coyutles*, que aquí son asimilados a los lobos. En el capítulo XLIX de su *Crónica mexicana*, formada hacia 1598 e inédita por mucho tiempo, Hernando de Alvarado Tezozomoc también nombra al coyote como uno de los presentes entregados al rey Axayácatl a su llegada a Tenochtitlán (407–408). En la década cuarta de *Historia general de los hechos castellanos*, el cronista Antonio de Herrera y Tordesillas se refiere a los coyotes como adives y los sitúa en Chiapas (282), que hoy en día integra México, limítrofe con Guatemala; mientras que en Honduras, en cambio, afirma que el demonio se les aparece a los nativos en forma de león, de tigre, o de coyote ("coyte") (198). No pasa de ser una alusión, en calidad de prenda de cuero que visten los indios, en *Historia de Nuevo León*, del militar y explorador Alonso de León (64), escrita en el siglo XVII. También pasajeras—aunque geográficamente atinadas—son las menciones a los coyotes en *Compendio y descripción de las Indias Occidentales*, del padre carmelita Vázquez de Espinosa, compuesto probablemente a principios del siglo XVII (aunque no fuera publicado hasta mucho más tarde), que resultan igualados en dos ocasiones con los lobos europeos y ubicados en el Obispado de Yucatán, en México (145), y en la villa de Sonsonate (157), localizada en el actual El Salvador.

Escrita hacia el 1541 (aunque se publicó muy posteriormente), la *Historia de los Indios de la Nueva España* del franciscano fray Toribio de Benavente o Motolinía refleja en su capítulo octavo los sacrificios que realizaban los indígenas mexicanos, que salían un día al año a cazar "de todas animalias y aves para sacrificarlas al demonio" (45). Entre estas criaturas se encuentran los coyotes, "unos animalejos entre lobo y raposa, que no son ni bien lobos ni bien raposas, de los cuales hay muchos, y muerden tan bravamente, que ha de ser muy escogido el perro que le matare diente por diente" (45). Mejor conocidas son las referencias al coyote en *Historia general de las cosas de Nueva España*, compuesta en el siglo XVI (y publicada siglos más tarde), del franciscano Bernardino de Sahagún, quien en el capítulo primero de su libro undécimo dedicado a los animales hizo del "coiotl" (coyote) un animal "el cual algunos de los españoles le llaman zorro, y otros le llaman lobo, y según sus propiedades á mi ver ni es lobo ni zorro, sino animal propio de esta tierra" (154). Además de describir su apariencia física, de referir adecuadamente sus hábitos alimenticios (carne, maíz, cañas, pan, miel y gallinas), de indicar cómo se le abate y de resaltar su sagacidad en la cacería, relata Sahagún la fabulosa historia de cómo echa el aliento a sus presas para aturdirlas y afirma que "es diabólico este animal", pues se venga de los que le quitan la caza matando a sus gallinas y a otros animales domésticos, o amedrentándolos con sus ladridos, solo o en compañía de otros de su especie (154–155), un dato que se adecua a lo que ya sabemos acerca de la flexibilidad del coyote en la composición de sus grupos sociales. Pero también sabe el coyote ser agradecido y lo argumenta el fraile con una fabulilla acerca de un coyote al que un hombre salvó de una culebra que lo estrangulaba y a quien este pagó llevándole unos gallos a su casa (155).

Otro autor que escribió sobre el coyote, y cuya descripción presenta similitudes con la de Sahagún, fue el médico toledano Francisco Hernández, autor de *Historia Natural de la Nueva España*, compuesta durante la década de 1570 y recogida en ciertas partes por otros autores de la historia natural como Juan Eusebio Nieremberg, quien reprodujo su información sobre el coyote. Hernández se refiere a este animal ("Coyotl") como zorro de Indias y de él afirma que algunos de los españoles opinan que es una zorra y otros, un adive (4). Señala sus rasgos físicos y su parecido con la raposa, así como que posee un tamaño intermedio entre esta y el lobo (4–5). Da testimonio de su ferocidad—pues mata ovejas, ciervos e incluso al ser humano—y de su astucia, como también del hecho de que se venga de los que le arrebatan la caza (5). Muestra gratitud con quienes le obsequian algunas gallinas, perdonando a las demás, su cola calma el dolor de dientes, vive en lugares de clima no muy extremo, se nutre de maíz, de animales más débiles y de cañas de azúcar, y cuenta, por último, cómo se le atrapa (5). En el capítulo LXVIII del libro noveno de *Historia del Nuevo Mundo*, compuesta en 1653 y publicada por primera vez a finales del siglo XIX, el jesuita Bernabé Cobo dijo que otros lo llamaban adive, destacó sus semejanzas con el lobo, el perro y la zorra, y una cualidad que se corresponde con la enorme capacidad vocálica de este animal: que "da grandes voces y aullidos tan parecidos á los del Perro, que en oyéndolo aullar los Perros, le responden aullando también ellos" (336). Cobo indica que inflige tanto daño en el ganado como el lobo y que parece descender de esta especie y del perro, "pues á su semejanza suelen llamar *Coyotes* á los mestizos nacidos de español y mujer india" (336).

El coyote es asemejado a la zorra en una obra casi un siglo posterior, *Geographia Historica. Libro IX*, del jesuita y misionero Pedro Murillo Velarde, centrada en América, quien considera a los coyotes "eſpecie de Zorras" (25). Sucede lo mismo en el tomo primero de *Noticia de la California*, que fue escrita en 1739 y publicada casi dos décadas más tarde. En este texto el padre jesuita Miguel Venegas sitúa los coyotes en California y los hace "eſpecie de Perros monteses, que pueden equivaler à las Zorras, y Vulpejas de Eſpaña; pues en los Coyotes ſe hallan las mismas aſtucias, y habilidades, que ſe cuentan de las Zorras" (44), aunque no se parezcan en la figura. Por su parte, el también jesuita y novohispano Francisco Javier Clavijero en su *Storia Antica del Messico*, publicada en italiano en 1780, obra muy citada y de gran valor historiográfico, que no se imprimió en español hasta comienzos del siglo XIX, hace del coyote una fiera semejante al lobo en la gula, en la perspicacia a la zorra, en la hechura al perro y en el resto de propiedades al adive (76), aunque afirma que se diferencia de todas ellas porque es más pequeño que el lobo y más enjuto que un mastín, y su voz mezcla el aullido del lobo con el ladrido del can (77). Además de señalar que se trata de uno de los cuadrúpedos más comunes de México, y uno muy pernicioso para los rebaños, refiere que ataca a las manadas, que agarra a las ovejas del cuello y que las carga y las lleva adonde desea golpeándolas con la cola (77). Persigue ciervos, ataca a los seres humanos (según este autor) y su trote es tan ligero que no lo alcanza un caballo al galope (77). Y aunque lejos del registro de las crónicas y los libros sobre geografía o historia, e inscrito dentro de una tradición de literatura venatoria, en 1868 el cazador Pedro Blázquez en *El cazador mexicano o el arte de la caza en México*, reproducirá casi palabra por palabra el texto de Clavijero, enfatizando el provecho que se obtiene de perseguir a animales como el león, el tigre, el lobo o el coyote, "el mas pernicioso […] porque es el que mas abunda en nuestro territorio" (291), pese al escaso interés que ofrece su caza, ya que "como animales voraces y carniceros hacen notables perjuicios en los ganados de las haciendas" (291).

De lo expuesto hasta aquí podemos extraer algunas conclusiones. En lo tocante a su filiación zoológica, el coyote es referido en una ocasión como adive (Herrera y Tordesillas) y como adive o lobo lo identifican dos autores más (Díaz del Castillo y López de Velasco). Otros autores lo asimilan a los lobos (Zorita y Vázquez de Espinosa), a los zorros (Velarde), lo sitúan entre el lobo y el zorro (Motolinía) o lo hacen equivaler al zorro y al perro (Venegas). Hernández lo contrasta con el lobo, el adive y la zorra, y el padre Cobo, que insinúa su condición de animal mestizo, lo hace con el lobo, el perro y la zorra. Clavijero, que afirma su singularidad, lo compara con las cuatro especies antedichas en distintos rasgos y para Sahagún, es su propia especie. Así pues, en las fuentes históricas estudiadas, el coyote fue por mucho tiempo un animal residente en la confluencia entre el zorro, el lobo, el adive y el perro. No se ceñía del todo a los modelos establecidos por las especies consignadas en las historias naturales europeas, pero al mismo tiempo, presentaba un indudable aire de familia con varias de ellas. Las dudas que provocaba su clasificación quedan plasmadas en los textos, que disienten a la hora de juzgarlo un lobo, un adive, un zorro o una especie intermedia. Se radica el coyote en una encrucijada taxonómica propicia para el rol cultural del *trickster* y que redunda en dos facetas que indicó Hynes para esta categoría de personajes míticos: su ambigüedad y su liminalidad (34–35), el hecho de que transgredan fronteras—en este caso, zoológicas—y de que se resistan a ser encasillados.

Por otro lado y desde la perspectiva de los estudios de animales, no podemos evitar apreciar los comentarios acerca de la utilidad del cuero de coyote en calidad de prenda de vestir (Alonso de León), la práctica de su caza entre los indígenas por razones sacrificiales y tradicionales (López de Gómara y Alvarado Tezozomoc), y la estimación mayoritaria de que se trataba de un animal perjudicial para los ganados del hombre y para sus mascotas (Cervantes de Salazar, Cobo, Sahagún, Hernández, Clavijero y Blázquez), de carácter diabólico en algún caso (Sahagún), y del que incluso se creía que podía hostigar o agredir a los humanos (Sahagún, Hernández y Clavijero), aunque no parece haber evidencias de que estos incidentes sean muy habituales[4]. La generosidad del coyote solo la recogen Hernández y Sahagún. Este último aduce al respecto una historia de corte fantástico y sin visos de veracidad zoológica.

En todo caso, lo que nos interesa subrayar es el hecho de que, de forma mayoritaria y cuando menos en las épocas en las que se fechan nuestros textos, el coyote era tenido por una alimaña o fiera perniciosa para el ganado, un estigma que compartían en España otros cánidos como el lobo y el zorro, cuya erradicación fue perseguida durante mucho tiempo en este país (*La imagen del mundo animal* 234–240). El coyote o *canis latrans* es comparado constantemente en los documentos que hemos consultado con estas dos especies, lo que nos permite postular una equivalencia de pareceres en lo atinente a su valoración y a su relación con el ser humano, definida en estas épocas por la hostilidad y por la aversión. Si se tienen en consideración las medidas legales que desde España se habían impulsado para el exterminio de zorros y lobos—como poco desde el siglo XVI[5]—, se puede intuir cuál debía de ser la postura oficial ante los coyotes y cuál fue el destino que se les reservó a estos animales, cuyas muertes, en un tratado de caza del siglo XIX (Blázquez), eran juzgadas provechosas por el daño que estos y otros predadores como el león (puma) o el tigre (jaguar) causaban a los ganados.

En general y como se indicó más arriba, existió en estos textos una voluntad de adaptar los nuevos descubrimientos zoológicos a los saberes europeos sobre los animales, de ahí que afloren las comparaciones entre el coyote y otras especies conocidas en el Viejo Continente con las que este cánido presenta similitudes en su apariencia física y hábitos (ladrar, aullar, perseguir a las reses…). Estos datos cobran especial sentido cuando se tiene en cuenta quiénes eran los receptores de algunas de estas primeras crónicas e historias naturales. Al mismo tiempo, si bien a veces se despoja al coyote de parte del ropaje simbólico que había caracterizado a la fauna en documentos zoológicos previos y se proporciona un testimonio más descriptivo de su conducta (por ejemplo, Cobo), las apreciaciones culturales importadas de Europa

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[4] Flores comenta el único caso registrado de un humano adulto asesinado por coyotes en Norteamérica, que se produjo en 2009 (209).

[5] La legislación que promueve la eliminación de estos depredadores se remonta en España, al menos, a 1542, con la normativa de Carlos I titulada *Facultad de los pueblos para ordenar la matanza de lobos y zorros, dar premio sobre cada uno, y hacer sobre ello las ordenanzas correspondientes*.

siguen presentes en su interpretación, cifradas como referencias, cuando se lo parangona con el lobo y su gula o con la zorra y su astucia (como se observa con nitidez en autores como Clavijero o Venegas), dos atributos refrendados por las tradiciones animalísticas occidentales. Estas alusiones edifican la mirada a partir de la cual se entiende a este animal: la perspectiva del colonizador, que intenta traducir lo que encuentra y conoce de aquel Nuevo Mundo a términos comprensibles para él y para sus lectores, en un acto de amaestramiento—a través de la ciencia y de la historia—de la naturaleza indómita americana, que, simultáneamente, aplica y traslada la visión hegemónica, cultural e histórica, occidental.

El coyote, su sagacidad y sus trampas en la literatura fabulística

El siguiente hito en nuestro rastreo del coyote pasa por las fábulas esópicas en náhuatl que fueron encontradas en el manuscrito de *Cantares Mexicanos*, compuesto de una serie miscelánea de textos escritos hacia el final del siglo XVI, algunos de ellos debidos a la autoría o al impulso de fray Bernardino de Sahagún (Torres López 46–49). Según Torres López, estas fábulas en náhuatl fueron copiadas en otro manuscrito, *Santoral en Mexicano* (51), y también transcritas hacia 1800 por José Antonio Pichardo en lo que se ha denominado *El Manuscrito mexicano 287*, custodiado en la Biblioteca Nacional de París (53). En cualquier caso, las fábulas presentes en el volumen original poseyeron en un primer momento una funcionalidad pedagógica y con tal propósito fueron utilizadas por la orden franciscana en el Colegio de Santa Cruz de Tlatelolco (Sanchis Amat 79–80). La particularidad que nos atañe, y que las vuelve relevantes para nuestra exposición, es que en estas fábulas se llevó a cabo un "proceso de resemantización de algunos de los célebres animales protagonistas de los originales esópicos" (Sanchis Amat 82), cuyo propósito era aproximar los referentes animalísticos europeos a la realidad vivencial de los estudiantes mexicanos. En otras palabras, suponen una operación de traducción inversa respecto de la que se efectuaba en las crónicas y en los documentos históricos estudiados en el apartado anterior, si bien el coyote y la fauna representada en estos textos continúa remitiendo a los códigos significativos europeos (en este caso, a las fábulas grecolatinas) y validando y respaldándose en visiones occidentales de los animales.

Hecha esta indicación, emplearemos la traducción al español de Torres López (258–351) de las fábulas presentes en *Cantares mexicanos* e iremos comentando cada texto en el que figure el coyote de manera singular y señalando su equivalencia con las fábulas grecolatinas en las que se inspiran, según la clasificación de Rodríguez Adrados (*History of the graeco-latin fable*), que anotaremos entre paréntesis. Más tarde los valoraremos todos en su conjunto.

La fábula 1, "La cabra y el coyote" (259), sigue un relato esópico en el que la zorra (aquí el cánido americano) engaña a la cabra para salir del pozo montándose en ella (H. 9), y en el cual la estupidez del herbívoro resulta penalizada. La fábula 2, "El coyote y el puma devorador de personas" (261), enfrenta a estos dos animales—en la versión esópica, una zorra y un león (H. 10)—y vuelve al coyote temeroso del puma hasta que se decide a dirigirle la palabra. La fábula 3, "Los coyotes" (263), es la conocida historia de la zorra que perdió el rabo en un lazo y que intentó que las demás que se lo cortasen (H. 17). La fábula 4, "El caimán y el coyote" (265) (una zorra y un cocodrilo en la fábula esópica), reúne en parlamento a estos dos animales y es el coyote el que advierte la trampa en el alardeo del caimán, que presume falsamente de su linaje (H. 20). En la fábula 6, "El coyote" (269), "la zorra y la máscara" en la fabulística griega (H. 27), el coyote denuncia la vacuidad del corazón de la talla de madera de una mujer. La fábula 24, "El perro y el gallo macho" (305), también trueca a la zorra de la tradición esópica (H. 268) por el coyote, que pretende engañar al gallo para que baje del árbol, pero este es más listo y consigue que el coyote despierte a un perro que viajaba con él. La fábula 26, "El puma devorador de personas y el asno y el coyote" (309), se corresponde con el relato clásico de la parte del león (H. 154), en el que el coyote (originalmente una zorra) aprende a repartir la caza que ha abatido con los otros dos animales por el funesto ejemplo del asno. En la fábula 27, "El puma devorador de personas y el lobo" (311), el coyote—aquí escarmentado en la moraleja—desempeña un papel propio de la zorra y se aprovecha de la lucha entre el puma y el león por una presa, arrebatándosela cuando están débiles (H. 152). En la fábula 45, "El guardaovejas y el coyote", el coyote sustituye a un lobo (H. 225), y aunque es criado desde cachorro junto a un rebaño de ovejas, se convierte en su asesino, lo que le acarrea la muerte a manos del pastor. Por último, la fábula 46, "El león devorador de personas y el lobo" (349), relata la venganza del coyote (en la fábula esópica, una zorra) hacia un lobo que nota su ausencia ante el puma enfermo (H. 269). El coyote afirma saber cómo remediar su mal y le receta la piel de su enemigo, el lobo, cuyo proceder castiga la lección moral.

En las fábulas náhuatl de los *Cantares mexicanos* el coyote, uno de los personajes más comunes y que más textos protagoniza, ocupa el papel del vulpino en nueve ocasiones y de su pariente lupino, solamente en una. Rasgos que se corresponden tanto con los hábitos del zorro como con los del coyote, como el oportunismo alimenticio (fábula 27) o su potencial depredación del ganado (fábulas 24 y 45), aparecen reflejados en unas pocas ocasiones, pero lo que predomina es el antropomorfismo del personaje. Su rol, como el del zorro esópico, es el de *trickster*: aunque no siempre con éxito, miente a otros animales para conseguir sus objetivos—a menudo, alimentarse—(fábulas 1, 3, 24 y 46) y gracias a su inteligencia advierte peligros y engaños ajenos en múltiples ocasiones (fábulas 3, 4, 6 y 36),[6] además de revertir las condiciones desventajosas para él (fábula 46). Estas facetas cuadran con dos de las características apuntadas por Hynes para el *trickster*: que sea engañoso y use trucos (35), y que invierta las situaciones en que se encuentra (37).

En estas fábulas el coyote merece una consideración ética no siempre negativa. En total, es modelo de sabiduría y astucia cuatro veces (fábulas 2, 4, 6 y 27). En la fábula 3, algunos coyotes obran acertadamente y otro, con malicia. En otras fábulas el coyote opera con sagacidad y la moraleja ni lo alaba ni lo censura (fábulas 1 y 46), sino que se enfoca en la reprimenda de los otros animales. En tres textos, por último, es de algún modo condenado en el epimitio o escarmentado en la acción narrativa (fábulas 34, 27 y 45), con independencia de si tiene éxito o no. Haciendo un balance general, entendemos que la evaluación moral de los coyotes literarios de las fábulas náhuatl debía de ser ambivalente, otra de las cualidades ya aludidas del *trickster*. Este aspecto puede ponerse en vinculación con sus valoraciones como animal perjudicial para los ganados en los documentos históricos que comentamos más arriba.

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[6] Uno de los papeles típicos del zorro en la fábula esópica es el de desvelar las falsedades, apareciendo a veces al final de la fábula para apuntalar la lección moral (Zafiropoulos 52), un rol liminal, de árbitro o comentarista, que lo sitúa en un espacio intermedio de la diégesis del relato, conveniente a su condición de *trickster*. Aquí, el coyote realiza idéntica función en las fábulas 4 y 6.

A continuación, dirigiremos nuestra mirada a las fábulas hispanoamericanas de los siglos XVIII y XIX. Este tema lo estima Lorente Medina desatendido por la crítica desde el trabajo de Camurati en 1978 (112), y aunque

> podría pensarse que la carencia de estudios dedicados al tema se derivaría de la práctica inexistencia de fábulas y de fabulistas durante el período emancipador [. …]. Pero en cuanto se penetra en la poesía de la época surgen numerosos hombres de letras que cultivaron la poesía didáctica en la forma de las fábulas. (108–109)

En los últimos años, Lorente Medina ha estudiado a los fabulistas mexicanos de estos siglos en diversas aportaciones. Por nuestra parte, hemos examinado la obra de casi todos los fabulistas mesoamericanos que en su antología listó Camurati (167–337) y que han estado a nuestro alcance, y aunque hemos advertido elementos de la fauna y de la flora locales, como chuparrosas (colibríes), zopilotes (buitres), cenzontles, fríjoles, etcétera, la presencia del coyote en estos documentos es casi testimonial. En los fabulistas cuyos textos hemos revisado los que más abundan son los animales de las fábulas esópicas frente a los autóctonos del continente americano, con diferencias en las proporciones dependiendo del autor. Por tanto, parece razonable suponer que estos fabulistas hispanoamericanos no se despegaron en exceso de los modelos fabulísticos previos, al menos en lo tocante a las especies animales que figuran en las narraciones.

En *Fábulas del Pensador Mexicano*, el periodista y escritor mexicano José Joaquín Eugenio Fernández de Lizardi incluye su fábula XXXIII, “El Coyote y su hijo” (95–98), en la que un coyote adulto insta a su hijo a no robar, pero se comporta de forma hipócrita al asaltar un gallinero. La cría lo imita y el padre la reprende, pero esta se defiende denunciando la hipocresía de su progenitor, a quien también censura la moraleja. Fernández de Lizardi añadió una nota a pie de página en la que afirmaba desconocer si este animal era la zorra europea, asemejándolo al perro y apuntando que “es dañoso no solo á las gallinas sino á las sementeras de maiz” (95). Estas palabras nos recuerdan a lo que expusieron otros autores como Hernández y Bernardino de Sahagún sobre los hábitos alimenticios del coyote e insisten en esa vacilación en la clasificación de la especie a la que ya nos referimos en el apartado anterior. En todo caso, las significaciones del coyote en este texto son plenamente negativas en cuanto que simboliza la hipocresía y la mentira, como históricamente también lo han hecho la zorra y el lobo en las tradiciones animalísticas europeas.

Las fábulas del escritor y jurista guatemalteco—aunque nació en Ecuador—Rafael García Goyena (1766–1823) suponen el segundo hito en el que nos detendremos. El coyote participa en total en tres fábulas debidas a la pluma de García Goyena. La fábula XXV, "Los Animales congregados en Cortes" (74–82), de carácter político, en la que el coyote aullando y otras especies de la fauna local representan a la "ínclita parte americana" (76) en una asamblea en la que los animales—que en varios casos son acusados de hipócritas—proyectan sublevarse contra el dominio del hombre, si bien el protagonismo lo ostentan los animales típicos de la fabulística esópica. También el coyote es mencionado y acude al rey león, sin mayor relevancia argumental, en la fábula XXVII, "Los Animales en Cortes" (84–87), asimismo de talante político, en la que los animales se declaran iguales, pero ninguno accede a desarmarse. Finalmente, en la fábula XXXIII, "El Coyote y la Oveja" (115–117), un coyote hambriento engaña a una oveja para que salga de su redil bajo promesas de libertad, lo que concluye con la muerte de esta y con la reprensión del cánido en el epimitio. Dejando de lado los mensajes políticos, nuevamente apreciamos las significaciones perversas y dañinas del coyote en la última fábula, en la que se comporta como un *trickster* fraudulento (como la zorra esópica), en tanto que en las otras su implicación no pasa de ser una alusión.

El último texto que comentaremos fue publicado por el médico y político Pedro Molina en *El Editor Constitucional* de Guatemala, periódico a su cargo, el lunes 28 de agosto de 1820 (213), y fue—según sus palabras—traducida por este autor del idioma cachiquel (224), una etnia nativa del sur de Chiapas y del occidente de Guatemala. Se titula "El lobo y la oveja" (224–225) y el actor principal de la misma (el presunto lobo) es Tío Coyote, un personaje folclórico de los cuentos de animales mesoamericanos del que "los muchachos saben muchos cuentos" (224). Aquí Tío Coyote le propone matrimonio a la oveja, que se niega porque su dueño humano la cuida muy bien. Tío Coyote la desengaña y le revela—en un papel que evoca a cierto tipo de zorra fabulística—que en realidad, si se encarga de ella, es porque en algún momento pretende devorarla. Este cuento, que nos recuerda remotamente a cierta fábula griega que contrapone a un lobo libre con un perro esclavo del hombre (H. 294), presenta a un coyote que se vale de su perspicacia para exponer la falsedad del ser humano y su trato utilitario y cruel del ganado, que reserva para satisfacer su apetito y sus necesidades. Este coyote se distancia del que suele ser el papel de Tío Coyote en otros cuentos de animales mesoamericanos que conocemos: un animal tonto, y a veces vil, con frecuencia burlado por el personaje *trickster* de Tío Conejo, y que nos resulta más parecido al lobo de las fábulas y los cuentos de animales que al zorro.

Parece, en definitiva, que el papel que le ha tocado representar al coyote en las fábulas que hemos analizado se encuentra más próximo al del zorro esópico y se adecua al carácter del *trickster*. Tampoco podremos pasar por alto los significados negativos que acumula (la hipocresía, su glotonería y su escasa fiabilidad)—tópicos, por otro lado, dentro del alegorismo de este y de otros géneros relacionados que convierten a ciertos animales en exponentes de vicios y virtudes—y los daños al ser humano que se le atribuyen. Su enjuiciamiento moral resulta menos severo en las fábulas náhuatl y se acentúa en los escasos testimonios que hemos localizado de la fabulística del siglo XIX, lo que probablemente se debe al papel del zorro en los textos grecolatinos en los que se basan las fábulas náhuatl, pues este animal no fue representado como propiamente malvado en la fabulística hasta tiempos medievales (Rodríguez Adrados, "'La zorra y el cuervo'" 358). En cambio, las fábulas posteriores, que no reelaboran viejos relatos esópicos, reflejan una interpretación distinta del coyote, más acorde con las aprensiones que suscitaba esta especie en las fuentes históricas aludidas en el anterior apartado.

El legado del coyote. Conclusiones

Desde las primeras fuentes históricas que hemos cotejado el coyote ha sido asimilado, medido o mixturado con otros cánidos como el lobo, el adive, la zorra e incluso el perro. El intento de aproximarlo a especies europeas conocidas, a fin de comprenderlo, refleja las dudas del científico e historiador occidental en torno a su clasificación zoológica, que se prolongaron por mucho tiempo, y también el afán de incorporar a una especie como el coyote en una visión europea de los animales, que condicionaba la mirada que se le aplicaba por medio de estas comparaciones. Esta ambigüedad taxonómica puede relacionarse con su papel cultural como *trickster*, que podría haber llevado a cabo desde la época prehispánica y que se corresponde con su actuación en las fábulas náhuatl de *Cantares mexicanos* y en la fabulística del siglo XIX, en las que ostenta un rol generalmente reservado a la zorra, la *trickster* esópica por antonomasia.

Los documentos que hemos consultado señalan no pocas veces—cuando pasan de ser una simple mención—la calidad del coyote como un animal perjudicial para el ser humano y para sus ganados, pero también es tenido como ofrenda, como objetivo de caza, y su cuero es apreciado para las vestimentas de los nativos. Puntualmente se refleja algún rasgo o conducta veraz de la especie corroborados por la literatura científica contemporánea (especialmente, en lo tocante a sus emisiones vocálicas y a su dieta omnívora), tanto en estas fuentes como en atribuciones antiguas, y que en ciertos casos puede ponerse en vinculación con su actuación como *trickster*. En cualquier caso, la consideración de bestia dañina era compartida en España por el lobo y por la zorra, dos de las especies con las que más se ha comparado al coyote y a las que sustituye en las fábulas náhuatl. Teniendo en cuenta la intensa persecución que estas criaturas han sufrido en España, al menos desde el siglo XVI, no cabe esperar un trato distinto para el coyote. Por lo demás, las evaluaciones éticas negativas del coyote aparecen en la literatura fabulística con más intensidad en la producción del siglo XIX (en la que la presencia de este cánido resulta testimonial), aunque la ambigüedad moral es otro signo de su función de *trickster*. En estas últimas valoraciones repercutió la visión española y occidental de animales dañinos como los zorros y los lobos, así como la relación del ser humano con el coyote mesoamericano en los siglos que abarcan nuestros textos, caracterizada por la oposición y el recelo.

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Editorial
Creative Writing and Arts

Contemporary Collapse: New Narratives of the End

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Living in an age of ecological collapse is daunting. Landscapes are undergoing large-scale alterations, biodiversity loss is increasing, environmental threats are omnipresent. It comes as no surprise that contemporary collapse, in its various manifestations, is ever more intensely present in our cultural imagination. While some ecological changes are abrupt and lead to calamitous destruction, such as the recent earthquake in Morocco, present times are also marked by invisibilized processes that are equally responsible for gradual ecological decline. Falling under the category of slow violence are, for instance, the manifold effects of factory farming, such as climate apartheid and global warming, and green capitalism, masked as a mitigating solution but in reality complicit in the exacerbation of production and consumption growth.

Within this tumultuous context, the arts may serve as a portal into new ways of reading the present apocalyptic fears beyond feelings of impotence and survivalist discourses. In fact, besides helping us confront the enormity of the global issues, they hold the potential to produce an epistemic shift in how we perceive the future. In fact, it is worth noting that collapse does not preclude recovery and restoration; decay and renewal indeed go hand in hand. Collapse may thus be elaborated beyond narratives of destruction, and more as a transition that gives birth to new, alternative states of being.

Echoing Ansgar Nünning's definition of narratives as "cultural ways of worldmaking," the contributions included in the creative writing and arts section expressly attempt to "generate possible worlds and exert performative power" that can wield an influence in contemporary society (194). Diana Lelonek's poignant cover image participates in this epistemic reframing by inviting us to acknowledge the vitality of never-ending life processes as well as the extent of the adaptability of living organisms to plasticized environments. The object portrayed in the cover image is part of an exhibit collected in the Center for the Living Things, a research para-institution founded in 2016 that examines, collects and popularizes the knowledge concerning new humanotic nature forms (Lelonek). As a symbol of petroculture, the worn-out plastic bottle inevitably carries toxic legacies and traces of persistent environmental trauma. Yet, it is no longer a commodity. By blurring the line between the synthetic and the natural, its semiotic value is reinvented. The establishment of this intimate, hybrid relationship represents a lively refusal to subside to uselessness in exchange for new becomings.

In a similar vein, Nnenna Okore demonstrates the power of the arts to be itself regenerative, especially in a world consumed by human overproduction. Drawing on new materialism and African animist theories, Okore's artistic practice gives new life to discarded materials, rescuing them from ending up in capitalist wastelands, forgotten. By experimenting with waste and bioplastics, Okore creates fluctuating visual poems that closely resemble organic matter. In so doing, she establishes visionary ways of making kin. The intricate textures, the vibrant colors, and the mindful juxtaposition of light and shadow, all contribute to animating the static and to capturing the rhythms of life, thus expanding our understanding of impermanence. By shifting attention from *emergency* to *emergence*, waste "is no longer abject, rather it becomes precious objects deserving of care and meaning" (Okore). In Okore's creative practice, then, waste itself becomes a powerful storyteller that not only disrupts our idea of inescapable end, but also defeats widespread fatalistic nihilism.

With Yaxkin Melchy Ramos' poem, readers are encouraged to question the ethics of genetic engineering of more-than-human animals and to consider alternative multispecies futures to current exploitative systems disguised as progress, particularly in the context of food production. As the author explains in a footnote, the poem was written as "a strategy of poetic immersion for ecocritic/ecopoetic research." Inspired by a visit to the Tsukuba-Plant Innovation Research Center in 2021, the poem may be interpreted as a meta-reflection of this experience, which occurred during an interdisciplinary exchange dedicated to livestock and literature. The operations of the center, specialized on conducting agricultural research, are described in terms of capitalist efficiency in that the future of food is entrusted to robots and technological solutions. According to the poet, in this place, the severity of human effects on the planet is so evident that environmental awareness is amplified, actualizing the epistemological condition that Lynn Keller has named "self-conscious Anthropocene" (1-2).

The peak of moral questioning is reached only once the participants meet the hens used for biotechnology experiments. After discussing in group the cultural construction of animals in texts such as the Kojiki and the Genesis as a means to investigate our troubled relationship with domesticated animals, suddenly, the reality of ecological collapse becomes real: the participants are surrounded by rows of crowded cages, each one containing two hens laying eggs who are trapped in dark, tiny spaces "encrusted with dust and dirt." Each person in the group gets to hold a hen in their arms, to sense their body temperature, and to hear their "endless cries" fade away as their individuality emerges. Once they become entangled in such an emotional embrace, it is impossible to continue to ignore their pain. As the poem progresses through a series of questions imbued with Christological imagery and

Biblical references, Melchy forces his readers to pause, to pay attention, and to scrutinize the trajectory of our current actions.

José Manuel Marrero Henriquez carries on the inquiry into alternative modes of interspecies relationality with a short story from the series of newspaper columns entitled *Antiviral Writings*, which takes place in the intimacy of the home during the Covid-19 confinement. The author is known for developing the ecocritical theory called *The Poetics of Breathing*, which he defines as "a poetics that considers breathing a powerful metaphor concealing the rhythmic character of life that culture and nature share," as he writes in his artist statement. In such aesthetic and ideological frame, *The House Pet* invites readers to breath along with nature against the anthropogenic currents that lead to the exhaustion of life, and to reflect on animal ownership and on species discrimination in order to instigate hope infused with tangible solutions for multispecies flourishing.

Stuart Cooke elaborates on these themes in his two poems *Helm* and *Fathom*, which elude fantasies of extinction by asking what kinds of relationships might we discover, or recover, by leaping beyond the species boundary and what kinds of languages would these relationships require. These questions permeate Cooke's creative and scholarly writing, which includes a poetry collection, *Lyre* (UWAP, 2019), the translation into English of Gianni Siccardi's *The Blackbird* (Vagabond Press, 2018) and the volume *Transcultural Ecocriticism* (Bloomsbury, 2021), of which he is co-editor. The two poems published in *Ecozon@* are both immersed in aquatic realms: the first, by dynamically alternating a darker and lighter text color, visually mimics a wave-induced motion, as if readers were peeking under the surface of water; the second, teems with whales and rivers, yet presents references to Australian wildfires, which offer a jarring elemental counterbalance. Within this context, the poet explores liminal spaces of interspecies encounters that urge to relocate the divine within emergent networks of relationality. Hence, with the decline of the Human, rather than upholding misanthropic principles, the idea of heaven turns from a human-centered abstraction to being "carved into mud" and made "of eggs and nests."

In the attempt to examine ecological collapse beyond the human experience, it is necessary to also grasp the concept of deep time and to find ways to effectively translate this temporal scale into intelligible narratives. After all, "to live in the so-called Anthropocene is to think in geological time, recognizing that human activity now constitutes a major geologic force" (Vogelaar, Peat, Hale, 2). Both Laura op de Beke and Start Flynn tackle this very difficult task in their poems. In *Ticking Like a Mountain – or the Bezoszoic*, the peace and quiet of a mountain "somewhere in Western Texas," on land owned by Jeff Bezos, is disrupted by the construction of the Clock of the Long Now, a monumental scale mechanical clock designed to keep time for ten millennia. The "throbbing pain" provoked by the persistent ticking noise, "and in time, a car park and a gift shop," awakens long gone memories of past landscape configurations. Even if the mountain must endure yet another man-made trauma, she will survive this too.

In *15,000 Metres Above Time*, the poet tries to capture the eerie sense of time stopping inside the eye of a cyclone, when everything is still, but it is still possible to sense the menace about to erupt. The poet, who has experienced firsthand the devastating force of Australian cyclones, recognizes the struggle for survival of those more directly and immediately impacted by the effects of climate change. However, he also subtly recognizes the intrinsic ability of natural systems to adapt and even transform themselves. After all, the end itself is a slippery concept, especially when guided by anthropocentric beliefs that lead us to believing that the end of the human species implies also the end of the vegetal and animal worlds, that is the end of Earth. Yet, as Guido Morselli writes in his postapocalyptic novel *Dissipatio H.G.*, "no eschatology considers the permanence of humans essential to the permanence of things. We admit that the world existed before us, but not that it can end after us. […] The world has never been so alive" (54, *translation is mine*).

Closing the creative writing and arts section are three images by Rowan Kilduff, which echo many of the topics raised already in the poems, from deep time and survival to slow violence and the search for more peaceful co-habitation. Mainly, though, they explore the role of the arts in processes of ecological transformation. The first artwork makes an overt visual reference to the horses depicted on the parietal walls of the Lascaux Cave, in France, estimated to be approximately 17,000 years old. The title, *What Will Last Another 40,000 Yrs?*, plays an important role in offering contextual information and aesthetic engagement, namely to trigger a reflection on the permanence of human and nonhuman cultures, a concept that takes inspiration from Sierra Nevada poet Gary Snyder and the whitewater poet Nanao Sakaki. In the photo collage titled *littleboy*, spatio-temporal planes overlap by combining Japanese lanterns that represent ancestral spirits, part of a photograph Kilduff took of a street-artist/activist in Nepal while painting during a protest for freedom of expression, and the planetary nebula NGC6781. While these interacting planes of existence are all connected by the threat of nuclear weapons, the chosen arrangement gives to artivist practice a prominent role in opposing and keeping this threat under control. The third and last image is an example of Kilduff's poster art. The combination of very few basic brushstrokes depicting a mountain and the motivational slogan "handle with care" conveys a message of collective responsibility in safeguarding the environment.

In order, then, to nourish a deeper sense of care, it is essential to visit the root causes of ecological collapse and to challenge the systems that support it. In fact, while the etymology of the word "collapse" indicates "falling together," this collective descent is not universal, but rather based on socio-economic factors that perpetuate multispecies inequalities, reinforce exploitative practices, and create uneven exposure to ecological hazards. To counteract the pervasive effects of systemic injustices, the artistic contributions featured in the current issue take up an existential stance that promotes resilience and critical thinking, at times by raising awareness, and at other times by proactively contributing to the solution. Unanimously, they prompt a reconsideration of the concept of "end" beyond anthropocentric narratives of annihilation. As T.J. Demos affirms in his recent book on radical futurisms, “addressing these questions requires politicizing time itself, disrupting its naturalizations and seeming inevitability” (9). What better than the imaginative power of the arts to give rise to alternative imaginaries that reframe the future through the lens of radical hope and multispecies solidarity?

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The Bioplastic Art and Fiber Art: Eco-art

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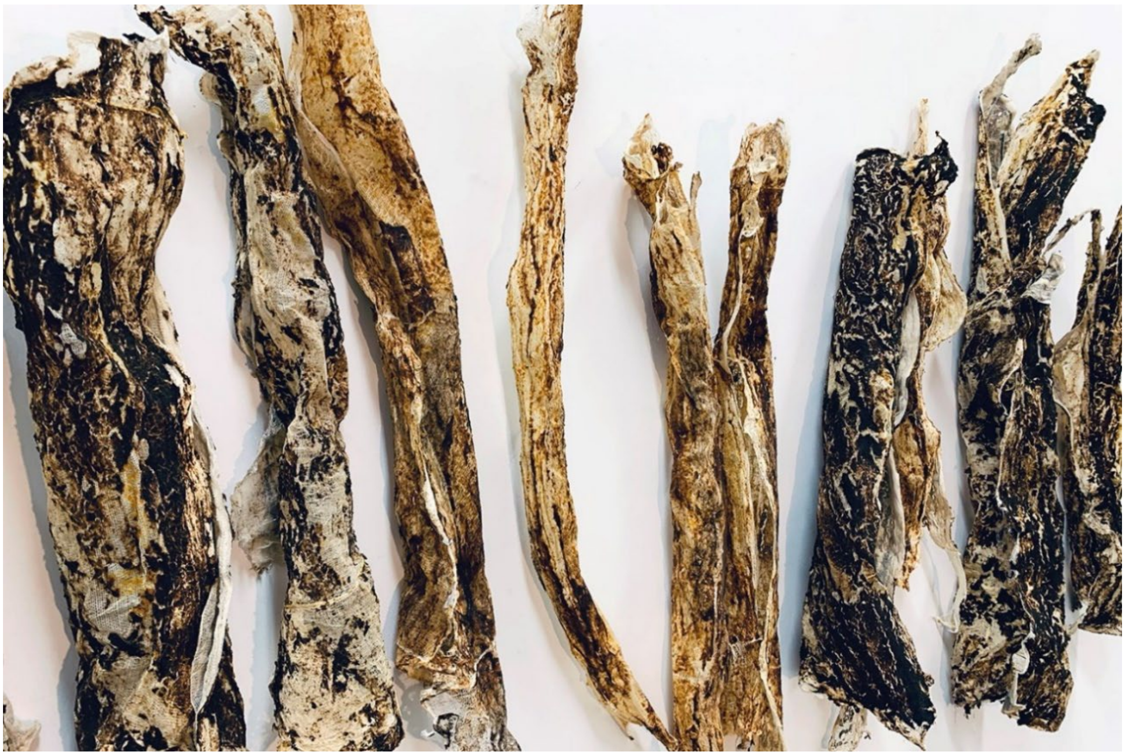
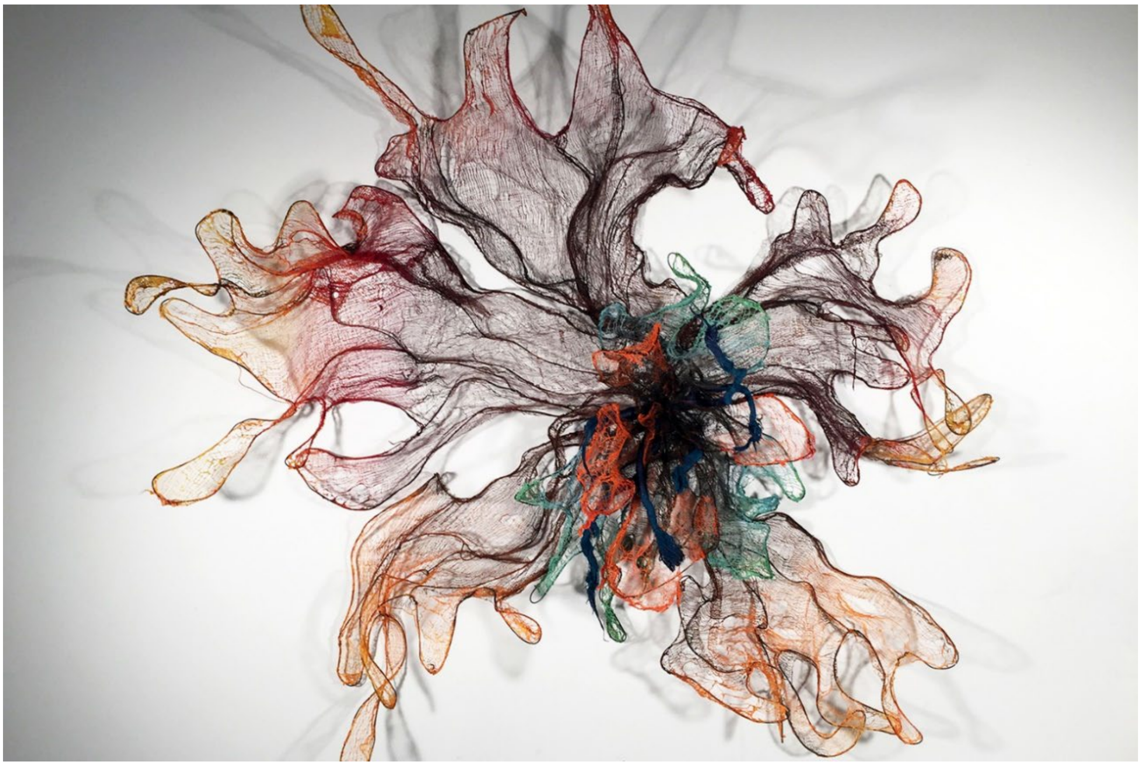
My work broadly focuses on ecological concerns specifically related to waste, carbon emission, and energy consumption. Using plant-based materials (in particular, food scraps and food waste), I create bioplastics made into large sculptural forms and art installations. By using biodegradable materials derived from food waste in my work, I not only aestheticize or problematize the waste issue, I also contribute to its solution, by making materials that procure less waste, and pose little risk to the environment. To further extend the dialogue about waste with the public, I invite dialogue that generates learning, creative encounters, and ecological awareness. In so doing, I enable narratives, and experiences to intersect with my creative and material practice, in ways that are illuminating, informative, and transformative for me and the participants.

Consumed



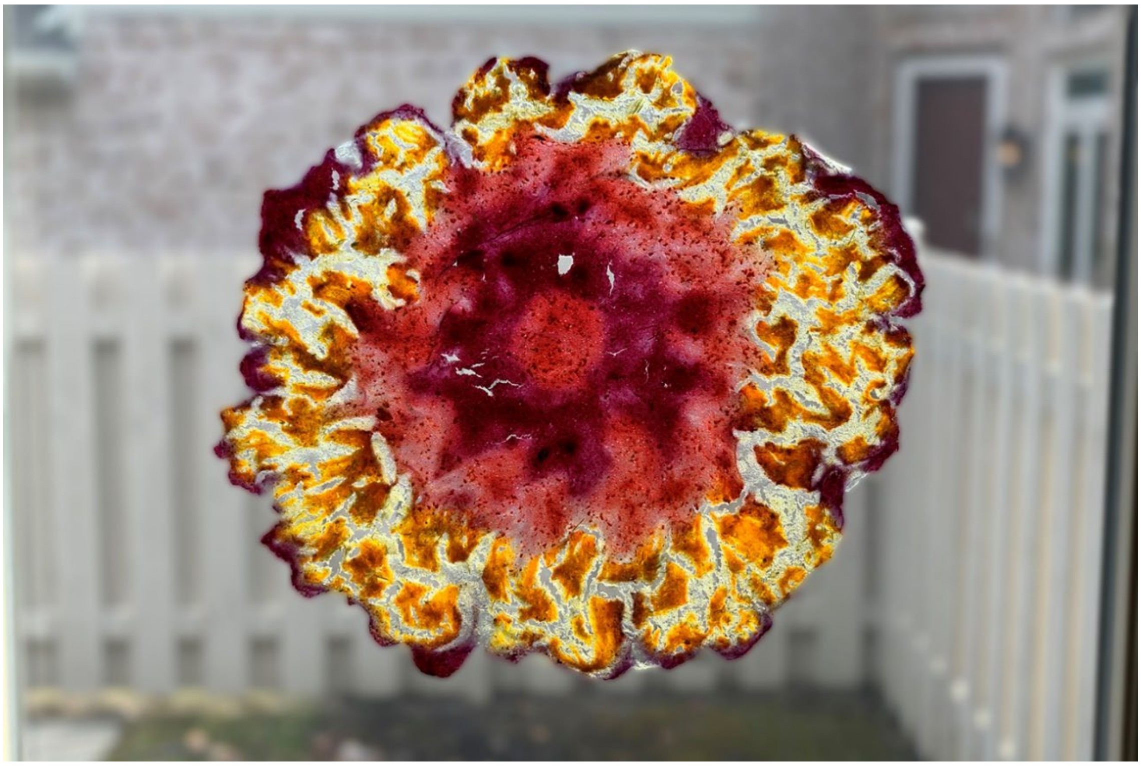
'Consumed'. Bioplastic, wire, and cheesecloth. 48"x84"x12". 2021.

Here and Now



'Here and Now'. Cheesecloth, jute string, dye, and wire. 80"x82"x13". 2017.

Matter of Time



'Matter of Time'. Bioplastics. 18"x18". 2022.

Cristo y las gallinas de la siguiente generación transgénica[1]

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> "¡Cuántas veces quise juntar a tus hijos, como la gallina junta sus pollitos bajo las alas, pero no quisiste!"
>
> Mateo 23:37

Es hora de mirar al frente
y con el corazón
De reconocer la responsabilidad
De corregir algo
De palpar el sufrimiento
y abrazar

Ayer fuimos al T-PIRC
llamado el laboratorio de la siguiente generación: 次世代

Aquí, donde crecen los tomates modificados genéticamente
no sé si hay Antropoceno autoconsciente[2]
u otras cosas por el estilo

Aquí, en el corazón mismo del producto transgénico
y del livestock
lo que hay es la siguiente generación

Y aquí se habla de eficiencia y reciclaje
de robots y de técnicas de alimentación
de los animales-recursos

---

[1] Este poema fue escrito como una inmersión poética para la investigación ecocrítica/ecopoética. La idea de este poema surgió durante el intercambio interdisciplinario titulado "Ganadería x Literatura @Granja T-PIRC"—「畜産×文学 トーク @ T-PIRC農場」que se llevó a cabo el 17 de marzo de 2021 en el Tsukuba-Plant Innovation Research Center, coordinado por los profesores Maki Eguchi (江口真規) y Atsushi Tajima (田島淳史) de la Universidad de Tsukuba. Página del T-PIRC https://farm.t-pirc.tsukuba.ac.jp/en/

[2] "Antropoceno autoconsciente" (Self-conscious Anthropocene) es un término acuñado por la crítica Lynn Keller para nombrar al fenómeno de la consciencia cultural y crítica de la escala y severidad de los efectos de la acción humana sobre el planeta.

Y se habla de cómo suplir la demanda
    creciente de carne, desmedida,
    de pollo, lácteos y huevos, todo el año
    y el desafío de la falta de humanos
    que mañana se hagan cargo
    de los animales que son
    esa carne, lácteos y huevos

Y se habla de las dificultades
    como de importar forrajes desde los EUA
    o de nutrir con puros granos y soya
    a quienes originalmente comen pastos

Y entonces aparecen las soluciones tecnológicas
    los cargamentos
    las máquinas
    las investigaciones
    todo ello, lo que ayuda a sortear
    los problemas de la siguiente generación

Y se sortean los problemas

    Y sin embargo...

¿Por qué nos hemos juntado hoy a hablar de “Ganadería x Literatura”?
    ¿Qué sentido hay detrás de todo esto? Profesores

¿Quizá esa “x” significa
    un anhelo
    de intercambio
    o de multiplicación fecunda?

Aquí están nuestros dos guías:

    Tajima sensei
    Eguchi sensei

Y el profesor Tajima (investigador del ganado y la avicultura)
    nos expone una comparación numérica
    de las especies

que aparecen en el *Kojiki* (El libro de las antiguas crónicas japonesas)
y las especies
que aparecen en el libro de *Génesis*

Kojiki 古事記	**Génesis**
Pájaros 鳥43	Cordero 55
Caballo 馬34	Vaca 32
Gorrión 雀34	Burro 24
Jabalí 猪30	Pájaros 24

Y nos revela lo que aclaran las palabras antiguas:
en el libro japonés
predominan los animales salvajes
en el libro de Israel
predominan animales domésticos de granja y pastoreo

La profesora Eguchi (literata)
nos expone su investigación de las ovejas,
borregos, carneros,
corderos y cabras,
una diversidad lingüística
hasta llegar al *agnus dei*

Y nos revela la escasa presencia de los ovinos y caprinos
en la historia de la alimentación del Japón
y una reciente presencia de los corderos
en la literatura del Japón moderno

Y yo pienso en el cristianismo
en qué hace
el cordero de Dios
en estas islas

Luego, la profesora Shimizu (filósofa)
nos expone el caso de un artista
al que le dicen el "hombre cabra"
porque anda, imita y medio vive como cabra
en alguna zona del continente europeo

Luego vamos todos a conocer a los animales y luego vamos todos a sentir la realidad

Y la realidad empieza
con el borrego experimental
y pasa
por las vacas experimentales
y termina
con las gallinas y los pollos experimentales

Y allí, se convierte
en una *chō-riarity* (una cruda realidad)

Después de proveernos de batas, botas, capuchas y
y desinfectante
el *sensei* nos guía por cuartos en penumbra
con jaulas atiborradas de gallinas
frente a jaulas atiborradas de gallos
En las hileras de dos pisos de jaulas diminutas
dos gallinas por jaula comen y ponen huevos
rodeadas de paredes oscuras como cavernas
cubiertas con costras de polvo y mugre

Escucho el cacareo nervioso
el grito incesante, siento

¿Hay aquí dolor,
Cristo?

Entonces el profesor nos lleva al fondo de las jaulas
y nos pone a cada uno
un pollo entre las manos
—agárralo bien firme de las patas
y luego abrazándolo te lo acercas al pecho— nos dice
y nosotros así hacemos
y el pollo se tranquiliza
y siento el calor de su temperatura
y el profesor nos dice
—el calor corporal de los pollos es mayor al nuestro
alrededor de 40 a 41 grados—

Entonces con el pollo sostenido
comprendo nuestro pecado:
entre el calor

    y las granjas avícolas
    a gran escala
    están los virus

Luego regresamos los pollos a sus jaulas
    ¿Hay aquí dolor,
        Cristo?

Ésta es la cruda realidad —nos dice—
    y nos explica sobre sus investigaciones
    con los huevos y los pollos
    y las máquinas incubadoras autorreguladas
    —costosísimas—
    que empollan huevos por cientos
    y nacen los pollos en estas máquinas
    los 365 días del año
Y yo pienso de dónde viene la energía
    para los pollos y las incubadoras
    y el pecado otra vez
    se me aparece
    como un rayo eléctrico
    que va desde una planta de energía nuclear
    a la pechuga de pollo
    rellena de vegetales y queso
    que me comí sabrosamente en el almuerzo

Hay mucho por hacer
    parece decir el profesor
    con sus investigaciones,
    y yo hago mi parte, literatos
    ¿tú,
    eco-poeta
    qué dices
    frente a la realidad de la vida?

Ayer me he preguntado por el día de hoy
    ¿a dónde ir,
        Dios?

¿Hay también un Cristo que diga
    dejad que los animales vengan a mí?

Y entonces veo una escena

la de Cristo recién nacido en un establo
rodeado de los animales
ovejas, burros, vacas, pollos
y los humildes pastores
que celebran al rey
de la esperanza
y el perdón

Y veo una luz
como la de una estrella
pequeña que relumbra
con persistencia:
es la historia de mi amigo Shinnosuke en Saitama
con sus gallinas
es la de Raúl en Santa Clara de Yarinacocha
con sus pollos
es la de Ámbar en San Cristóbal de las Casas
con sus gallinitas de guinea
es la de Carlos y Sandra en Santa María Zacatepec
con sus patos y guajolotes

Y pienso y siento, Dios
sí, *hay muchísimo que hacer*, *hermanos*
la cuestión es
¿cuál es el primer paso?

Marzo, 2021. Ichinoya, T-PIRC (Tsukuba-Plant Innovation Research Center), Japón.

The House Pet

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It's hard for a forced shut-in to refuse to have a puppy in the house. It is not that he wants to have a pet, in fact, he does not want to have any, let alone a dog, which smells and has to be taken out several times a day to pee and poop. If he lived in the countryside or in a house with a garden, still, but in a flat in the city, no way. It's hard for a forced shut-in to refuse to have a dog in the house because his daughter asks him so insistently, in the morning, at noon, in the afternoon, at night, in the early morning.

"Oh, with a little animal in the house this confinement would be more fun," cries his daughter. The forced shut-in doesn't answer, but wonders if she's right and if a dog would be more fun. The forced shut-in does his calculations. With a pet, he will have to go out at least twice a day for the animal to relieve itself, and he will be able to stretch his legs in the meantime. Because it is clear that it will not be his daughter, who is a girl, nor his son, who will be busy building bridges and aqueducts, who will take the little animal out into the street; he will be the one to walk the puppy, willingly or not, first thing in the morning and last thing in the afternoon, maybe even at noon, and it will be he who will have to take care of pouring water with detergent over the pee-pee, picking up the poop with a glove and throwing it away.

The forced shut-in would like to get out, but with the purpose to wander around aimlessly, to run around the mountain freely, to water the papaya, fig and medlar trees, to swim to the reef and back, not to clear pee-pees or to collect the poop of an animal that has not asked for it. Perhaps inside the house, the doggie will be able to entertain the children while the forced shut-in works and carries out projects. But that's only one possibility, the best of possibilities, because it's likely that the dog will become attached to him (the one that will take him out for a walk and pee and poop) and start moaning inconsolably in front of his studio door demanding his attention. And, of course, he, who is kind, will not be able to bear the crying and will let it in and interrupt his work and end up playing with the dog and rolling on the floor like a child.

This image of playful abandonment is so touching to the forced shut-in that he is about to give in to his daughter's wishes, but then he remembers that, although clean, dogs smell, that they sometimes bite shoes, doors, mattresses and armchairs, leaving everything full of hair, hairs that can make their way into the bathrooms, the bedrooms, the kitchen, the living room, the terrace, the study, maybe even through the cracks in his computer to end up spoiling and ruining the memory, the feelings and the works that the forced shut-in holds inside his hard drive.

Thus the forced shut-in concludes that not even in his dreams will he bring home a puppy, and he is very sorry for his daughter, who wants it so badly. The forced shut-in makes this decision just as his daughter interrupts him: "Careful, Dad! What's that black dot moving across the floor?” The forced shut-in looks and sees a spider, one of the little ones that jumps around. In the corridor the spider's life is in danger and the forced shut-in springs to its aid: " Watch out, don't step on it, I like it a lot!" "Why?" asks his daughter. "I don't know," replies the forced shut-in, "I've always liked jumpy spiders. So, from now on, this will be the house pet."

Poems

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Helm

I stand at the helm / my shell
spews light onto depth

bound in stillness, ‘we’ goes nowhere
our stalemate’s scratched with

drizzle / what can I see, beyond the
shadows, below the horizon’s

(enormous nests of creatures who have grown from the earth
gigantic basins and domes of such nests, and

the rocky tails of sleeping titans
whose slow breathing sends waves through the crowds)

nothing / if I reach, they’ll recoil
if I stop, they’ll recover, but there’s

a sense, from somewhere down there
where one valley might fold

into another, down beneath the faintest
line against / what

(sloping without seam
to the point where sight becomes expectation

and even dream) there’s a sense (or is it a thought)
of welcome

into the laws they offer, waiting for my will
to see / to submit

Fathom

the land's black
whale
emerges from the mist and
crickets
frogs
a full river clatters
below

low grey
weather in my balcony's light
what pleasure
to stand perfectly still

to the north
Brisbane smoulders
and embers scatter
down the coast
only Beechmont burns
like the core of the earth

closer to hand, the moon's
seedy attic could
be on an old TV set
or on DVDs I've kept
of a series I watched once
on an old TV set

canyoned with
yearning, the rest
cries dark

after breeching, whale
sinks back into fog
what a dream
to follow
but half my compass
leads to inferno

of all the buried mirrors
which will be uncovered
by the tide
which
will melt
in the next fire

into a little slit
of nothing in the eye
of the python
who carves a mud
flat into new
heavens of eggs
and nests

Ticking Like a Mountain – or the Bezoszoic

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In 2018 The Long Now Foundation started construction on a clock that is supposed to run for 10.000 years as a monument to long term thinking. The building site is inside a mountain in Western Texas, on property owned by one of the project's main sponsors: Jeff Bezos. "Look we're not in the Anthropocene so much as the Bezoszoic," quipped Darshana Jayemanne on Twitter (@ShirazHaderach, May 10 2020). This poem is inspited by this tweet, as well as Aldo Leopold's essay "Thinking like a Mountain."

Ticking Like a Mountain – or the Bezoszoic

Somewhere in Western Texas a mountain cannot sleep.
In all its years of slowly rising, 20 million give or take,
It hasn't seen activity like this,
So furious and desperate.

At times there was a tickle on top, very pleasant
Between the scrub oak and the juniper bush
Which kept the grazers in their place,
Safe from their own too-much.

But the current itch is subterranean
Causing old memories to resurface,
From when the mountain was a reef
Bordering an inland sea.

She is a mass of bones,
The mountain thinks,
Of corals and crustaceans
And they're just adding to the pile.

Nothing not to tolerate,
If only for the sound
Of that incessant ticking noise

Disturbing the grave-like silence of her gut.

A mechanical pulse, a throbbing pain
And in time, a car park and a gift shop
But all this business cannot last
Not in this heat.

It was a late-Permian dream
When she held hands with her cousins
Carlsbad to the North
And sister Guadalupe.

A shadowy half-moon, visible from space
Is all that's left of their embrace of the ancient basin,
That and the carbon in the air
Which were neighbouring algae once.

There will be another dying, soon.
For that is how it went before.
We all strive for safety, prosperity,
comfort, long life, and dullness.

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15,000 Metres Above Time

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In the eye of the cyclone
the most important event
has never taken place. Stillness
holds the world in narcissistic trance:
silent greyness contemplating itself
under a dead star of spider dreams
in a galaxy you cannot escape.
You hold your breath without daring to whisper.
This eternity may be your last;
nature cannot die, so must suffer longest.

Sketches/Poster Designs

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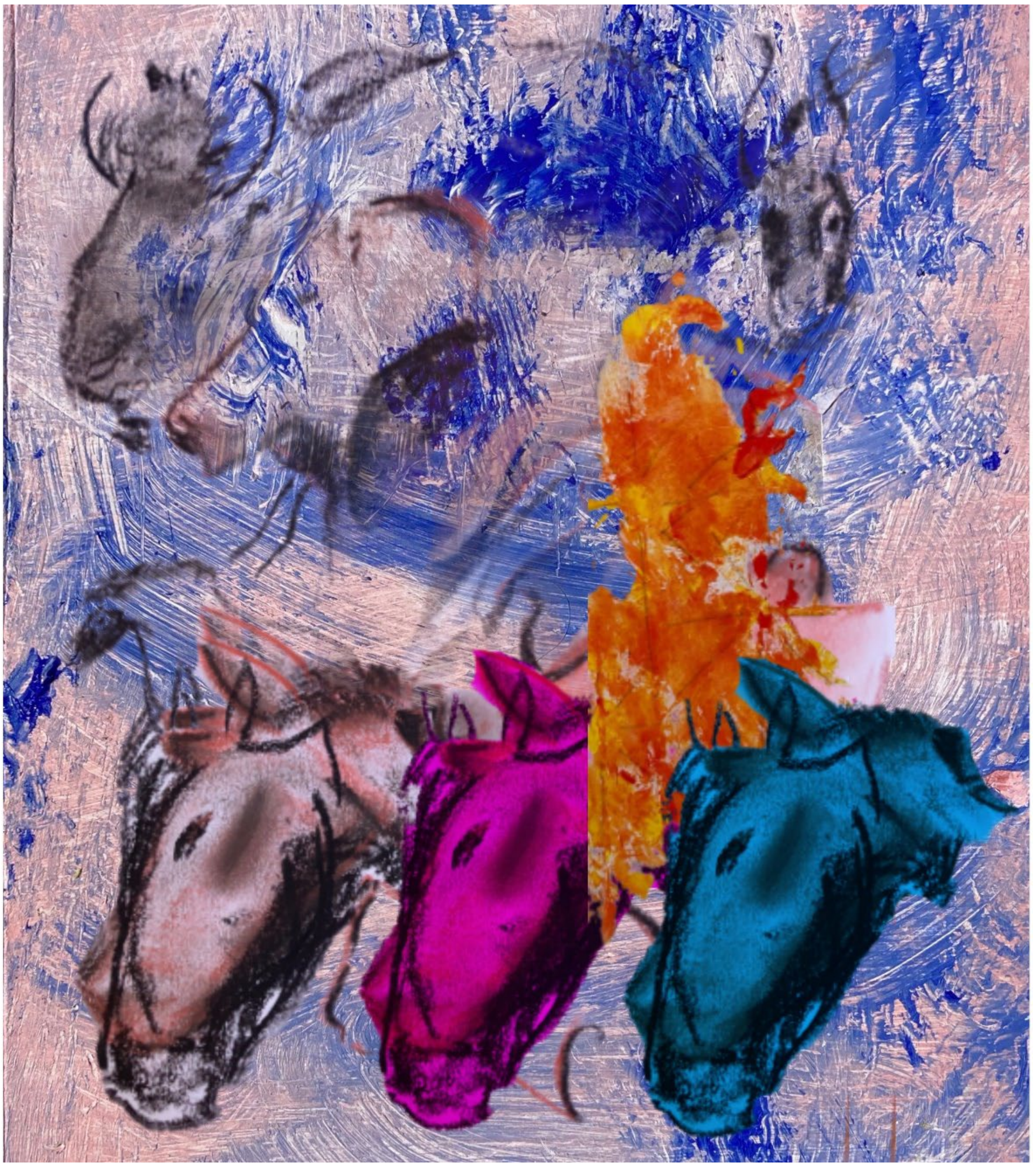
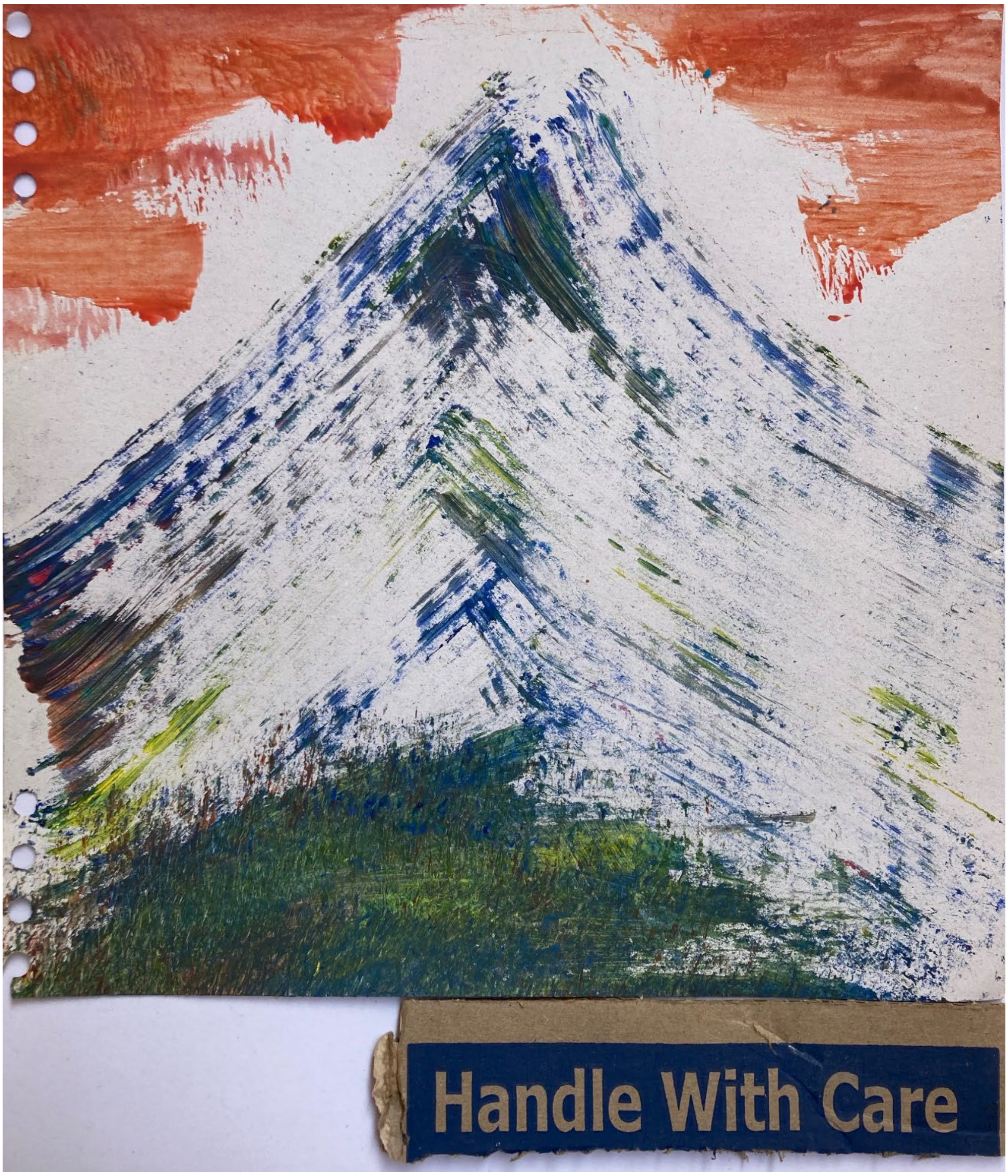
DOI: https://doi.org/10.37536/ecozona.2023.14.2.4771

What will last another 40,000 years?



Chalks, collage w/acrylic & tempera on paper. A4. AprIL 2022.

Handle with Care



Tempera and acrylic on handmade paper. 9'' x 11''. 24 Mar 2022.

littleboy

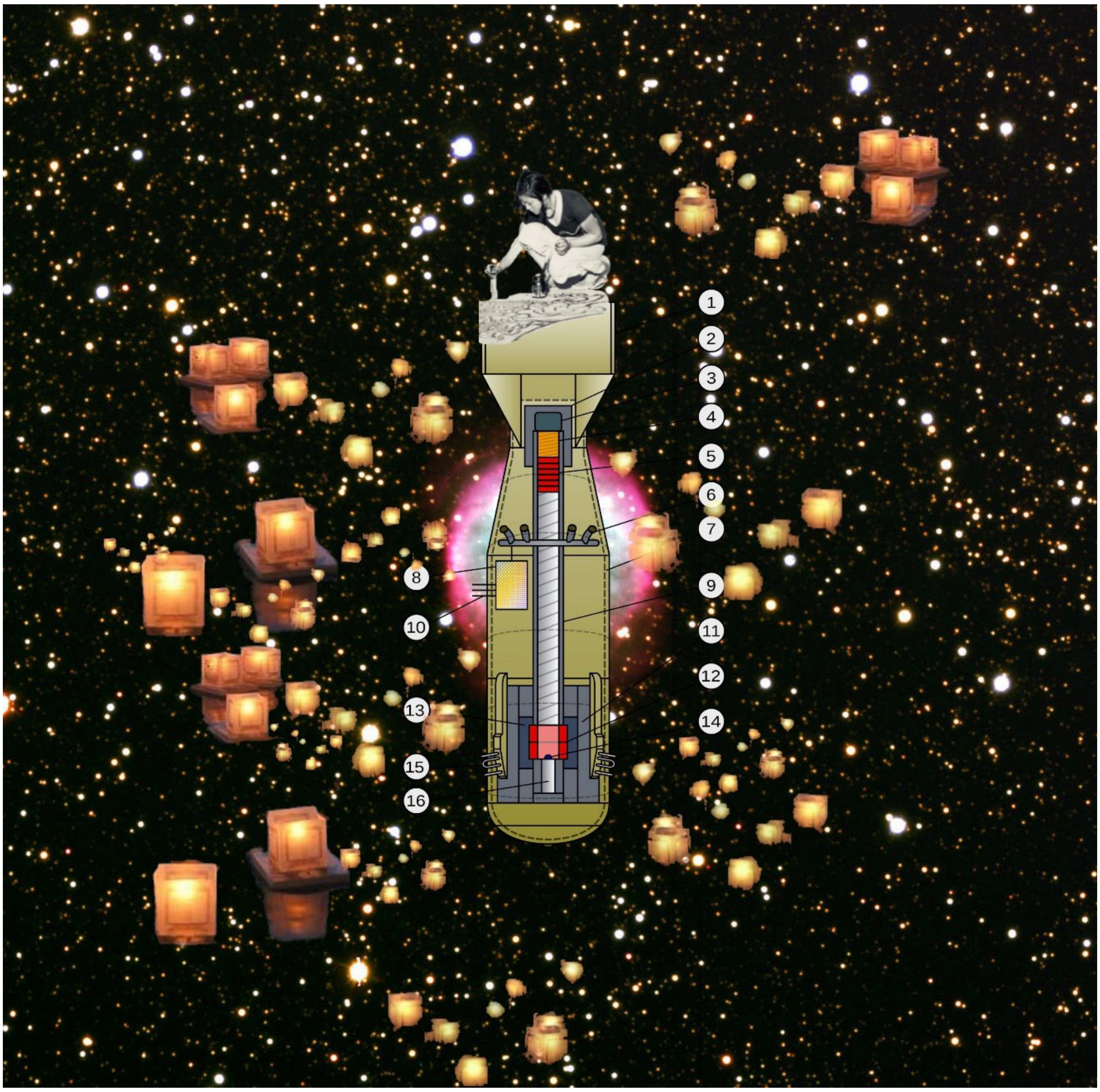


Photo collage: little boy diagram (wiki commons), Japanese lanterns "toro-nagashi", NGC6781 (nasa open source) and a photo I took of a street-artist-activist in Nepal painting for freedom of expresion during 2021 protests. 2022.

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Scott Slovic, Swarnalatha Rangarajan, and Vidya Sarveswaran, eds. *The Bloomsbury Handbook to the Medical-Environmental Humanities* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2022), 416 pp.

DOI: https://doi.org/10.37536/ecozona.2023.14.2.5120

The Bloomsbury Handbook to the Medical-Environmental Humanities by Scott Slovic, Swarnalatha Rangarajan, and Vidya Sarveswaran, the first of its kind at the intersection of the titular fields, is a timely and welcome contribution to bridge the gap between medical, environmental, and literary-cultural studies. Containing wide-ranging understandings of (un)health, this volume sophisticatedly brings together diverse medical and ecological theories and practices in this newly emerging scholarship, especially in individual chapters' provoking dialogues with one another. With its ambitious content in four parts, it provides mostly material and affective ecocritical insights into complex matters in the field of medical-environmental humanities that have gained an unprecedented impetus, especially after COVID-19.[1]

In the Introduction, the editors explain the rationale for the urgency to envision further how entangled the humanities are in the post-pandemic era. This way, they expose parallelisms between human, nonhuman, and environmental health, and the collection—with thirty chapters in total—demonstrates the versatility and potency of inter/trans-disciplinary humanities, especially when dealing with the health crises of non/humans and environments all around the globe. Focusing on the vulnerability of the natural world and humans *vis-à-vis* ever-escalating techno-sciences, the editors underline the holistic perspective adopted by all the contributors in their diffractive and contextual analyses of the multispecies storytelling of natural-cultural (un)wellness. Different from conventional handbooks following a trajectory from historical and theoretical perspectives to chapters on individual works, regions, or cases, this collection lets us read each chapter individually, despite the four subtitles in its part division. For this reason, this review will work through three common themes in introducing some chapters: relational ontology, crisis, and cure.

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[1] Despite the initially low number of books in the field like Jankovic's *Confronting the Climate: British Airs and the Making of Environmental Medicine* (2010), Brown et al.'s *Contested Illnesses: Citizens, Science, and Health Social Movements* (2012), and Houser's *Ecosickness in Contemporary U.S. Fiction: Environment and Affect* (2014), many edited collections came out after the recent pandemic: see, for example, Smith and Ram's *Transforming Global Health: Interdisciplinary Challenges, Perspectives, and Strategies* (2020), Ağın and Horzum's *Posthuman Pathogenesis: Contagion in Literature, Arts, and Media* (2022), and Braverman's *More-Than-One Health: Humans, Animals, and the Environment Post-COVID* (2023).

The primary outstanding characteristic of many chapters is their emphasis on "relational ontologies," how entangled non/human lives have been, and how nonhuman subjects enact their agencies in material-semiotic meaning-making processes. In the opening chapter, Eric Morel sets the handbook's tone, unveiling the multidisciplinary dynamics between narratology and medical-environmental humanities. Broaching citizen econarratology and narrative medicine in correspondence with avian and human mortalities, Morel explicates the project of the Coastal Observation and Seabird Survey Team in Northwestern America and advocates the significance of local eye-witness narratives about non/human (un)health. In her alluring chapter, Maria Whiteman, through individual and communal experiences with fungi, displays the convergence of arts, sciences, and health humanities. Drawing on the "subterranean rhizome" of mycelium (55), Whiteman demonstrates the interconnectivity of species, the matter of "becoming-together-with," and the relational architecture of life. The only comprehensive history in the handbook, by Z. Gizem Yilmaz Karahan, delves into the narrative capabilities of nonhuman materialities across a wide spatio-temporal spectrum. Like Whiteman, Yilmaz Karahan spotlights the transdisciplinary crossroads of diseases, environments, and non/humans, and contextualizes viral contagions in accounts ranging from Ancient Greek, Mesopotamian, and Mesoamerican civilizations to British, Ottoman, European, and Far-Eastern realms in new materialist perspectives. Lars Schmeink also retains this relational axiom and resorts to critical posthumanism, object-oriented ontology, and disanthropocentrism in grey ecology to dethrone the human. In this attempt to dehierarchize onto-epistemological relations, Schmeink analyzes zombie-themed fictions, movies, and videogames to expose the human's unprivileged position.

Another distinct facet in many chapters is the reconfiguration of several local and global "crises" as crosscutting foci of medical-environmental concerns. Tathagata Som handles the climate crisis and its affective impact on mental health in his chapter on seeking ways to encounter the crisis-induced senses of apathy and despair and achieve political activism. In a similar way, Samantha Walton discusses the psychological effects of adverse experiences due to anthropocentric environmental crises and approaches literature as a method of trauma recovery. Racism is also considered in its crisis-imbued relations with the environment by Heather Leigh Ramos. Environmental injustice and systematized racist praxes are interwoven just as medical-environmental inequalities are observed in Audre Lorde's *Cancer Journals* (1980). Robin Chen-Hsing Tsai addresses another unfairness in socio-political and medical-environmental interrelations, disclosing state indifference toward air pollution as a natural-cultural concomitant of hyper-industrialization and sprawling urbanization. Studying Taiwanese documentary texts to enkindle the matter of trans-corporeality between the bodies and health of non/human beings, he proposes to name this type of (auto)biographical works "ecopathodocumentary" because "human health is" always already "embedded in environmental health" (132). Just as the handbook reflects upon our contemporary medical-environmental conditions, Chia-ju Chang ponders on the COVID-19 pandemic and discusses what racial, socio-political, health, and environmental segregations it has triggered to submerge throughout the pandemic.

What Morel and Walton suggest as ways to "cure" medical-environmental conditions resounds in several subsequent chapters in the handbook. Françoise Besson addresses alternative, nondualistic solutions for healing while interpreting *The Plague* (1947) by Albert Camus and *The First Eagle* (1998) by Tony Hillerman. She finds those alternatives as plant-centric ceremonies practiced by North African and Native American people in both works. Complementing Besson, Animesh Roy introduces his coinage "ethnoecomedicine" while locating alternate onto-epistemologies of disease/cure in the analyses of treatment techniques in South Asian and African texts. Jorge Marcone's contribution echoes uniquely in the volume while providing an insight into the conservation project of human microbiota in the Peruvian Amazon. Attempting to preserve the wellbeing of indigenous communities, this project is regarded as an opportunity to eliminate the medical adversities to which those communities might be exposed by intercultural contacts and inter-ecological chains. Marcone's concentration on diversity via microbiomes is amplified within the chapters of Part IV, which individually explicate and scrutinize several indigenous eco-centric practices of alternative medicine. As Besson, Roy, and Marcone expose, local/global actors of environmental and medical thoughts converge at an intersection of becoming-together outside the binarism of hegemonic health structures. Part IV offers varying lenses from Indian, Amazonian, Chinese, Turkish, and Irish traditions to observe the probabilities of indigenous routes to take while managing regional/global medical-environmental matters.

The handbook stands as a valuable source of research and teaching when curricular shifts are reconsidered in post-pandemic times. In its successful efforts to materialize the abstractions in literature/arts/cultural studies from almost all the regions on the earth and avoid post-disciplinary liaisons in the medical-environmental humanities, the volume ends with an epilogue of the editors' narratives about their personal and professional experiences during the pandemic. Despite presenting opportunities to contemplate our relations enmeshed with other species and nature, the book fails in its ambition to narrow the chasm between the two fields when 27 of 30 authors are academics from language and literary studies (mostly in English). The diversity of their geographical/institutional/career backgrounds gets eclipsed for the want of scholars, activists, and policymakers in health and natural sciences in the work's interdisciplinary cooperation between fields and researchers. This absence, therefore, puts the claimed multi-/transdisciplinary interactions at stake. Albeit this risk in the collection, the medical-environmental humanities have its new reference guide for graduate students and scholars in the field.

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Pramod Nayar, *Nuclear Cultures: Irradiated Subjects, Aesthetics and Planetary Precarity* (New York: Routledge, 2023), 198pp.

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Pramod Nayar's *Nuclear Cultures: Irradiated Subjects, Aesthetics and Planetary Precarity* is a comprehensive contribution to the fields of ecocriticism and environmental humanities. The book establishes a "nuclear culture" by compiling an array of different literary-cultural texts ranging from literary fiction to survivor accounts, reportage, manga and auto/biography. It reads these "literary-cultural texts that make up the nuclear cultures" as "present[ing] an unrelenting prognosis of nuclear harm to the entire planet" (9). Hence, the threat of nuclear disasters to the survival of the planet is constantly foregrounded throughout the book, which steadily builds towards a concluding theorisation about our precarious planetary position. Nayar's work is a timely intervention in the growing field of nuclear criticism. It elaborates upon Robert A. Jacob's notion of the "global hibakusha"[1] (2022) by claiming that "we are all, in a sense, nuclear subjects" (55). Nayar's understanding of "nuclear subjects," however, differs slightly from Gabriele Schwab's recent definition in *Radioactive Ghosts* (2020). *Nuclear Cultures* focuses on reading accounts of nuclear disasters through an aesthetic lens, rather than analysing, as Schwab's text does, the psychic harm that emerges in response to the material dangers of nuclear power. Yet, in its engagement with thinkers such as Ursula Heise and Lisa Lynch, *Nuclear Cultures* insists on figuring the planet through a model of anti-nuclear eco-cosmopolitanism.

"Nuclear cultures" exists as a "subset of what has been termed the 'nuclear humanities'," and is concerned with the fate of "nuclear subjects" (2). In keeping with much of the existing work on nuclear criticism—which is often positioned between deliberating over the potential threats of nuclear warfare and accounting for disasters that have already occurred—Nayar assembles a "nuclear culture" comprised of different literary-cultural texts, each of which features a "prognosis of planetary precarity" (2). However, despite this shared prognosis, the book's eclectic corpus of texts sometimes lacks clear direction. For example, chapter three argues that the

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[1] "Hibakusha" is a Japanese term originally used to describe the surviving victims of the atomic bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. However, more recently, the term has been broadened in its usage to include anyone who has been exposed to radioactive particles, whether it be through nuclear testing, production, or disasters like Chernobyl and Fukushima.

biographies of J. Robert Oppenheimer should be read as critical resources. Nayar contends that these texts "produce a persona" of the "maker-of-the-bomb" and therefore should be read as "scientific and cultural work[s]" (96). Yet, it is not clear how the move towards reading the biographies of atomic scientists as cultural works enables us to combat the threat of planetary precarity. Nor is it clear how these cultural works comply with the more convincing concept of an "irradiated aesthetics" that is otherwise central to the book (103).

The concept of an "irradiated aesthetics" is developed in chapters two and four, and provides a framework for understanding the effects of nuclear disasters beyond their initial occurrence. An "irradiated aesthetics" is attentive to "the image—visual, verbal—of the scarred, burned, injured bod[ies]," and "the toxic somatography of atomic trauma [that] captures a constant play of visible/invisible, inside/outside when speaking of the injured and the dead in atomic disasters" (18). By navigating this double bind between "visible/invisible, inside/outside", an "irradiated aesthetics" captures "a state of *permanent crisis*, whose scale is at once visible/visual (…) and invisible" (102, 103). Nayar's use of the double bind here is critical. An "irradiated aesthetics" enables one to begin to materialise the "invisible" scale of nuclear disasters, and consistently emphasise the catastrophic threats inherent to the nuclearization of the planet.

This leads to the final chapter of *Nuclear Cultures* which culminates in an urgent call to address our position of planetary precarity. Nayar claims that "there are *no* safe places or safe times from nuclear disaster and all parts of the planet are linked in entangled histories of nuclear precarity" (142). He concludes by claiming that we should reconsider the function of "extinction iconograph[ies]"—such as the Doomsday Clock and the radiation symbol—as "signal[ling] a planetarity" where our "future (time) remains linked to the rest of the planet" (171, 179). This reading of nuclear extinction iconographies aims to capture the constant threat of nuclear annihilation by establishing easily identifiable symbols of the planetary stakes at play.

One limitation of *Nuclear Cultures* is its singular insistence on the catastrophic dangers of nuclear power. As a result, all nuclear scenarios are reduced to their devastating possibilities, without a sustained consideration of the potential for harnessing nuclear power as a productive source of energy. Though there is a brief reference to Oppenheimer's original view that the goal of atomic energy should be the enlargement of human welfare, this is quickly overshadowed by a reiteration of the exploitative "terror of nuclearization" (93). Additionally, although Nayar is alert to the environmental threats of nuclear disasters, his project is largely human-oriented. Hence, there remains room for a developed consideration of the more-than-human as constituting nuclear subjects, especially in the context of planetary precarity. Incorporating a new materialist approach, by considering an intra-active relationship between the human, the more-than-human and the planet, would extend Nayar's argument beyond an anthropocentric model.

Nevertheless, *Nuclear Cultures* is an urgent book about an issue that affects each of us. It is a book about "a planet in peril" (179). The vast range of source materials that comprise *Nuclear Cultures* demonstrates how the pervasive threat of nuclear disasters regularly informs contemporary cultural texts. Nayar's book is also alert to a variety of nuclear events, ranging from the military bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, to the nuclear spills in Chernobyl, and the displacement of indigenous peoples in the Marshall Islands. The environmental risks of nuclear disasters are often captured through the insistence of the threat of complete planetary destruction. Yet Nayar is most convincing in his aesthetic readings of nuclear effects on human bodies. These readings often materialise the immaterial force of radiation by paying attention to burns, scars and prolonged illnesses, before mapping these destructive forces beyond the body and onto the surrounding environment. *Nuclear Cultures* is thus a useful resource for researchers engaged in the fields of ecocriticism and the environmental humanities – particularly those working in nuclear humanities and/or aesthetics.

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Marija Grech, *Spectrality and Survivance: Living the Anthropocene* (Lanham, Maryland: Littlefield and Rowman, 2022), 184 pp.

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As anyone working in the environmental humanities can attest, there is perhaps no conceptual framework at once as ubiquitous and as contested as the Anthropocene. Obscure outside of Earth science just twenty years ago, the Anthropocene's meteoric rise has inspired countless essays, books, conferences—even entire journals. Predictably, dismantling the Anthropocene concept has emerged as its own subindustry: for every study proclaiming the utility of the Anthropocene for humanists, there is another that exposes flaws in the Anthropocene. In this context, one might wonder: is the Anthropocene still useful? Marija Grech contends that it *is*—just not in the ways advertised by its earliest champions. As she explains in the opening pages of her monograph *Spectrality and Survivance*, declaring that we are in the Anthropocene is a gesture of "future-retrospectivity," an act of anticipating what today's legacy will have been, as viewed by anonymous geologists many years hence. Televisual renderings of this scenario are often postapocalyptic; the camera pans empty landscapes, whose desolation (supposedly) startles the audience into pro-environment action. However, much as it is impossible to imagine what it is like to be dead, it is impossible consume the spectacle of "life after people" from a non-human viewpoint; thus, future-retrospection "does not open our eyes to something outside ourselves" but rather "holds up a mirror for us to continue to see ourselves in" (9). Worse, projecting the present onto an unknowable future "transforms this future into a reflection of the present, a reflection that serves to assert and affirm the significance and centrality of human presence upon the earth instead of radically challenging it" (10).

Spectrality and Survivance thus builds on materialist critiques of the Anthropocene's anthropocentrism. What differentiates *Spectrality and Survivance* from these studies is that it also utilizes deconstructive philosophy, drawing on Jacques Derrida to propose a materialist reinterpretation of the "rock record"—that is, the geologic strata laid down over billions of years from which today's geologic timescale is derived. This is a provocative gambit: ecocriticism has historically denounced poststructuralist theory as inattentive, or even hostile, to the more-than-human world, citing its dogmatic linguistic constructivism. However, Grech believes that Derrida's work "radically reconceptualizes notions of writing and textuality, pushing these concepts beyond any merely human, cultural, linguistic, or semiotic frame of reference" (20). In this way, Derrida points toward a rereading of the Anthropocene focused not on determining humankind's "signature [geologic] trace" but on geochemical traces themselves, "forms of non-human inscription that share a diffractive relationship with language and discourse—forms . . . that can and should be recognized as 'having significance' even though they may not *signify* anything at all" (106) from an anthropocentric perspective.

Spectrality and Survivance opens with an analysis of the "spectral times" we inhabit, an era in which the knowledge of our impending demise haunts the present. While forms of "*future-retro-vision*" (5) date to the nuclear age, this mode of thinking is exemplified by Anthropocene discourse, in which the present is always-already a future memory of itself. To put it in Derridean terms, the temporal present, like every form of presence, inevitably points to its non-presence, and is therefore constituted by a relation to something other than itself. Grech sees exciting potential in Derrida's concepts of *différance* and the "trace", ideas that invite a rethinking of presence and absence as these terms relate to time and to definitions of biological life. For Grech, Derrida's famous observation that there is "nothing outside the text" does not mean material reality is constructed; rather, Derrida's notion of *general textuality* explodes false binaries including nature/culture and human/non-human, thus paving the way toward a deconstructive materialism in which there is no separation between human language and the outside world, or between the living and non-living. A deconstructive method therefore unsettles conventional definitions of "survival": as Grech explains, survival, or Derrida's "survivance", calls attention to the ways in which "internal cycles of life and death that exist *within* an organism are always entangled in *external* intra-active processes . . . through which the organism survives and maintains itself . . ." (96). These processes include non-living matter, such as the radioactive isotopes felt by most geologists to mark the start of the Anthropocene. Ultimately, Grech proposes that instead of serving a merely semiotic function, the lingering traces of nuclear technologies enact a survivance that is both similar to and bound up in biological processes. These isotopes are not alive—but neither are they "some dead inert mark that simply points back to what was" on Earth (118). As part of "entangled cascading mutations of decomposition and recomposition" engaged in their own ongoing acts of inscription "in and with their environments," radioactive isotopes challenge us to rethink signification and difference, including the distinction between 'animacy' and 'inanimacy' that so often justifies the exploitation of natural resources, creatures, and even particular groups of humans (118).

Spectrality and Survivance is thought-provoking, and while some of it retreads territory covered by earlier studies, Grech's application of deconstruction to Anthropocene discourse is innovative. She convincingly demonstrates that the linguistic turn can provide useful tools to materialist ecocriticism, and to ecocriticism in general. Also, *Spectrality and Survivance* is well-written: Grech's explanations of Derridean thought, radioactivity, and other complex concepts are clear and efficient. If I have one quibble with this book, it is that Grech shies away from imagining how "modes of thinking, speaking, and writing that disrupt the concept of *presence* itself" might be disbursed outside the academy (130). To environmental humanists, the Anthropocene might seem passe or overworked—but, if my undergraduate students are any gage, many people are unaware of the word "Anthropocene", let alone scholars' internecine debates over when it started, what it means, and whether it can inspire global cooperation on decarbonization. I find intriguing Grech's vision of a world in which humans recognize the myriad "material, biological, and discursive entanglements" that we inhabit. I wonder whether there are, for example, experimental artists whose work points toward such a shift in values, or collective rituals that celebrate humans' entanglement in various biological and material realities. Still, Grech's argument is an important first step toward new habits of mind, and one that I anticipate other scholars will build upon.

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Douglas A. Vakoch, ed., *Transecology: Transgender Perspectives on Environment and Nature* (London: Routledge, 2022), 242 pp.

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In her 1994 essay "My Words to Victor Frankenstein above the Village of Chamounix: Performing Transgender Rage," Susan Stryker powerfully proclaimed the following declaration: "I who achieve the similitude of a natural body only through an unnatural process, I offer you this warning: the Nature you bedevil me with is a lie [...] Heed my words, and you may well discover the seams and sutures in yourself" (247). Now, almost 30 years later, when anthropogenic climate disasters are as common as anti-trans bills in the U.S., Stryker's warning and elucidatory promise informs the 2022 edition of *Transecology: Transgender Perspectives on Environment and Nature* (edited by Douglas A. Vakoch). Each writer of this collection demonstrates the interdisciplinary potentiality of the relatively new subfield of transecology, which indeed heeds Stryker's words and more. As an aspiring transecologist, I have identified four helpful, interrelated tools each contributor uses in their pieces to various degrees: genealogies of the intellectual history of queer ecology, reinterpretations of queer history itself, constructions of networks of interdisciplinary theoretical works, and showcases of what transecological media criticism looks like in practice.

Queer ecology as a recognizable critical lens arguably first came to fruition in 2010 with the publication of Mortimer-Sandilands and Erickson's cornerstone anthology *Queer Ecologies,* where each contributor sought to "prob[e] and challeng[e] the biopolitical knots through which both historical and current relations of sexualities and environments meet and inform one another" (5). Over a decade later, *Transecologies* expands and sharpens the critical aims of queer ecology by integrating often overlooked questions of gender and transness into genealogical analyses of the field of queer ecology itself. Greta Gaard's Preface offers such an elucidating theoretical history from the outset, one that leads Gaard to claim that "[t]o date, the queer ecocritical focus on sexualities has not captured the critique of heteronormative gender that trans* perspectives address" (xxii). Nichole Seymore's chapter nicely bookends the anthology with a similar genealogy that is valuable to any student of queer ecology, one that draws from thirty years of scholarship to outline "shared impulses across eco and trans frameworks, including an opposition to binaries and a concern with risk and endangerment" (191).

Several essays in *Transecologies* are also clearly invested in and informed by the less strictly academic histories of transness. Katherine Thornsteinson and Hee-Jung Serenity Joo's chapter explores the "(in)famous" Michigan Womyn's Music Festival (which ran from 1976-2015) in comparison to the show *Transparent* (35). The writers believe that the "transexclusionary policies" of the festival were ones built on a "biological essentialism" that was "thought to align them [cis women] more closely with Nature" - that is, until "the very idea of Nature—including assumptions about the 'natural'—forced separatist feminists to face their own limitations" (35). Mat Fournier goes even further in the past to the 1930s to discuss writer Annemarie Schwarzenbach, whose "gender incongruence" with her Swiss family and milieu drove her to a transecology that "draws from an *inhuman* nature to map new human territories" (111, 112). Such a critical attention towards what counts as "inhospitable" has been the central focus of "the 'rural turn' in queer studies," where contributors like Katie Hogan analyze the works of Carter Sickels which "embraces, even celebrates, rural heritage" in the face of queer metronormativity (133). Just as the contributors expand the theoretical histories of *Queer Ecology,* they also enrich the queer archival efforts set out by researchers such as Scott Herring, who in *Another Country: Queer Anti-Urbanism* (2010) constructs an archive that "relays a queer-based non-metropolitanism into a queer-laden antiurbanism" (10). *Transecologies* joins with Herring in combatting the latent metronormativity in queer academia and politics where rural ways of queer life "is shelved, disavowed, denied, and discarded in favor of metropolitan sexual cultures" (5).

Along with utilizing historical data and genealogies of scholarship, this anthology is filled with exemplary applications of the theoretical work that is often found in queer ecology. When Félix Guattari says in *The Three Ecologies* (2000) that "we must learn to think 'transversally'" to bridge the erroneous gaps between nature and culture (43), contributor Nicole Anae sees a connection between transversality and the ecological concept of the ecotone - the "transition between two or more communities" (165). Anae then directly ties the idea of transversality in an ecotone to that of "Stacy Alaimo's notion of 'trans-corporeality' as a 'contact zone' (2008, 238) between individuals and the environment which are continuously enmeshed" (165). Alaimo's transcorporeality is one of the most cited concepts from new materialism throughout this anthology and is a useful concept for any transecologist. In *Bodily Natures: Science, Embodiment, and the Material Self* (2010), Alaimo claims that the term is useful in not only conveying a sense of interconnectivity between human and nonhuman bodies, but also in "underscoring that *trans* indicates movement across different sites," which thus "acknowledges the often unpredictable and unwanted actions" across those bodies (2). Although neither transversality nor transcorporeality as concepts had queer studies directly in mind when originally theorized, *Transecology* is incredibly valuable in how far it pushes and refines these terms. Any transecologist would greatly benefit by turning again to Seymore's chapter which asks generative, meta-theoretical questions about the potential promises and injustices made possible by expanding "trans" as the writers of this anthology do (196-200).

Finally, such transecological interventions into the concepts above are effectively applied in the media criticisms performed throughout the book, each providing helpful exemplars and critical conversations. Wibke Straube's analysis on trans experiences with waste and pollution in the 2014 film *Nånting måste gå sönder* is one such piece: "Waste in this film is highlighted in its relationality—in how it seeps into the world, toward human and other bodies, and how it relates and resonates with the 'impure' human subjects" (66). In analyzing the 2000 novel *The Danish Girl*, Elizabeth Parker traces how the gender/character defining events of the protagonist happen on and through encounters with a bog next to the character's childhood home, causing the bog to have an intimate connection to their transition: "In re-creating this landscape in art, he is able to give some expression to Lili, which is why the task so engrosses him" (22). In both cases here and in several instances throughout, *Transecology* exemplifies what it looks like to do criticism that "thinks 'transversally'" across and between transcorporeal bodies - bodies that compose and are composed of trans people. In this way, the value of *Transecology* derives from its ability to point the way by being both an introductory signpost and thorough guide all at once.

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Kate Judith, *Exploring Interstitiality with Mangroves: Semiotic Materialism and the Environmental Humanities* (London, New York: Routledge, 2023), 212 pp.

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Mangroves take root and build land in precarious, contaminated in-between places in the tropics and subtropics where few other plants can survive. This makes them fascinating partners with whom to think about human/nonhuman relationships and the possible futures of life on Earth in the so-called Anthropocene. Like virtually every other ecosystem, mangrove forests around the world have been severely degraded by colonial schemes of land "improvement" and capitalist money-making ventures. But mangrove ranges in some regions are actually expanding as the planet heats up.[1] For instance, mangroves have recently been taking advantage of warmer winters to spread from southern Florida to salt marshes on tidal creeks near where I live, in the northeastern corner of the state. And as sea levels rise and tropical cyclones grow more and more destructive, mangrove forests' qualities as "living walls" (Judith 180) standing between coastal settlements and ocean waves have endeared them to societies that formerly tried to eradicate them. In addition to the basic fact that they thrive in intensely hot, salty, and oxygen-poor intertidal zones, mangroves' "superpowers" (Montague) include sequestering carbon, purifying polluted water, building up threatened shorelines, shielding coastal communities from much of the violence of tsunamis and storm surges, and providing habitat for oysters, fish, birds, tigers, and countless other organisms. Even as mangroves spread to some new areas on their own, people throughout the tropics are working hard to restore them in places where shrimp farms and other extractivist projects have left mangrove forests in tatters.

Given that so many environmental headlines these days are so awful, it is not surprising that many commentators have succumbed to the temptation to treat the evolving story of human/mangrove entanglements as a rare case of biocultural harmony. (For example, a 2021 children's book, part of a sustainability-oriented series sponsored by UNESCO, is called *The Children Who Saved the Mangroves*—past tense, problem solved.) To her credit, Kate Judith resists the kinds of reductive happy-ending framings of human/nonhuman interactions that, while seeming to promote less anthropocentric ways of being with other organisms, shrewdly reinforce human exceptionalism by positioning humans as eco-saviors and pegging a given ecosystem's value to the usefulness of the "services" it provides to us. The Australian mangroves with whom Judith explores interstitiality (betweenness) and questions of meaning, narrativity, difference, relationality, and ethics across species boundaries have not been saved in any conclusive sense, nor are they saving the people of Sydney. These humble, trash-strewn urban survivors grow not just in foul-smelling mud but in the shadow of a genocidal colonial project that has treated both mangrove forests and the Indigenous people who have depended on and cared for them for tens of thousands of years as noxious impediments to total White mastery of Australia's life-worlds, obstacles to boundless economic growth.

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[1] In other places, such as the Gulf of Carpentaria in northern Australia, mangrove forests have been shrinking due to droughts, severe storm surges, and other climate-crisis-related factors.

Some people, such as volunteers who go by the delightful name of "Mudcrabs," are responding to this legacy of destruction by caring for Sydney's mangroves. Other people continue to root them up and poison them. But even if the degraded mangrove forests of the urban rivers Judith focuses on, the Cooks and the Georges, were somehow to make a full recovery to pre-colonial conditions, human relationships with them would never be simple, or simply benign. A mangrove forest, like any ecosystem, is a site not just of symbiosis and rebirth but of fierce predation, sickness, decomposition, and "troubled co-becomings" (Judith 9) of species that are intimately *entangled*, yes, but far from coexisting in ecological harmony. Judith wisely devotes the middle section of the book to "monstrous relations," focusing especially on a troublesome knot of relationships that emerges between a human (herself), a wallaby, an *Aedes vigilax* mosquito, and a disease (Ross River virus) carried by the mosquito. Improvements to the health of mangrove forests, the book suggests, do not automatically translate to idyllic conditions for people. Nor, while Judith makes a strong and innovative case for regarding mangroves, oysters, and other nonhuman beings as meaningful and meaning-making entities, does "mangrove storying" (66) align neatly with human modes of communication. Under the best of circumstances, as in a mangrove estuary in Northern Australia known to the Karrabing people as Tjipel, human/ mangrove entanglement is a matter of constant negotiation, re-storying, care, and attempts to understand the other that will never result in perfect mutual intelligibility.[2] But at least, Judith argues, attending closely to such phenomena as mangrove agency and "oyster semiotics" (56) can weaken the hold of anthropocentrism on human minds in ways that could be beneficial for humans as well as mangroves, not to mention basically all other Earthlings.

It should be noted that readers who come to Judith's book expecting concrete recommendations for improving human/mangrove relationships are apt to be frustrated by the deep dive Judith takes in her first and second sections into the complexities and uncertainties of interstitiality, guided through the murky waters of semiotic materialist theory by such challenging predecessors as Karen Barad, Gilles

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[2] See 89-90, 193. Judith's account of Tjipel is based on the work of anthropologist Elizabeth Povinelli.

Deleuze, Donna Haraway, Brian Massumi, and Maurice Merleau-Ponty. On the other hand, advanced scholars in the environmental humanities will likely find her theoretical engagements sound, even-handed, clearly articulated, impressively wide-ranging, and refreshingly well-grounded in the particularities of mangrove roots and river mud in a particular place. (Readers interested in more hands-on matters, such as the ethics of mangrove restoration and what people can learn from mangroves about infrastructure design, should skip ahead to Judith's excellent third section, which brings some theories of Jacques Derrida and Michel Serres to bear on the contrast between the rigid walls and dams favored by settler colonialism and the "massive but permeable barrier[s]" formed by mangroves [180].) A gifted environmental writer as well as eco-theorist, Judith complements and tests her theoretical explorations with vivid, scientifically informed passages describing such things as the filter-feeding of oysters.

One of my few quibbles with the book is that I would have enjoyed more of these passages interspersed through the denser theoretical chapters, along with a few pages toward the end on how Indigenous Australians and non-Indigenous would-be allies of mangroves are storying and living with Sydney's mangrove forests in new ways. Judith calls for "[n]arrative tools that foster attunement" between species, and shows how scholars such as Haraway and Deborah Bird Rose have employed these tools; I hope that in the future, the ratio in Judith's work between a) shaping her own narrative tools in response to personal experience and b) evaluating other thinkers' ways of "keeping meanings open, […] storying porous boundaries," and so on (126) will tilt more in the direction of the former. Judith's narrative passages show that she is eminently qualified to do this kind of work. (Ecocritics who concentrate on literature will find it productive to put her narratives and theories in dialogue with fictional representations of human/mangrove naturecultures, such as Amitav Ghosh's powerful 2005 novel *The Hungry Tide*.) All in all, her book opens up many promising lines of inquiry for mangrove studies in the environmental humanities, and I expect Earth-oriented critics, environmental philosophers and historians, anthropologists, and others to take up questions Judith has raised here as human cultures become more and more entangled with mangrove forests in an overheating, drowning world.

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Pippa Marland, *Ecocriticism and the Island: Readings from the British-Irish Archipelago* (Maryland: Rowman and Littlefield, 2022), 276 pp.

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Between 2007 and 2015, Clutag Press published the creative writing journal *Archipelago*. The cover art showed a drawing of the British Isles from an angle rarely displayed—with Scotland and Ireland front and centre, the southeast disappearing over the horizon. On reading the title and blurb of *Ecocriticism and the Island*, this image was the first that came to mind, so it is fitting that it's mentioned by Marland in the introduction to this book, an expansion of her 2016 PhD thesis. Divided into five parts, this book uses wide ranging research, as well as personal interviews with some of the authors, to explore the ways in which island studies and ecocriticism can productively engage with each other.

Part one is an examination of Tim Robinson's *Stones of Aran* (1985) from an ecocritical perspective, taking Robinson's concept of "The Good Step" as the starting point of an examination of Robinson's Aran Diptych. Marland explores how Robinson's approach to the island of Aran can inform aspects of ecocritical debate around the Anthropocene, helping us to grapple with the "derangements of scale" (45) explored by Timothy Clarke, with the island as a mediation between the global and the local. Marland concludes with the concept of "psycho-archipelagy", noting the similarities between Robinson's approach and that of psychogeography, specifically Debord's concept of the *derive* as opposed to later interpretations of the form, while highlighting the island-specific nature of his search for total knowledge.

The second section focuses on the Welsh island of Bardsey, and two literary accounts of life there published over forty years apart: Brenda Chamberlain's *Tide-race* (1962) and Christine Evans' *Bardsey* (2008). These chapters focus more on the tensions that arise when a work is aware of the stereotypes and popular image of islands. Bardsey has a long and well-mythologised history, and Marland examines the way Chamberlain and Evans work with and around "its weighty history and the overtly conflicting evidence of animacy and mortality" (75). These two chapters examine the difficulties of writing about a place with such weight of narrative already attached, and Marland concludes that while Chamberlain ultimately loses contact with the island on its own terms and reverts to myth, Evans works both in dialogue and beyond Chamberlain – starting with the mythic but following with regeneration.

Part three comprises a close reading of a single chapter, rather than a whole work, relating to Orfordness, a shingle spit on the Suffolk coastline with the dubious honour of being both a nature reserve and a test-site for nuclear warheads. Marland examines the Orfordness chapter in W.G. Sebald's *The Rings of Saturn* (1995), showing how Sebald converses and contrasts with Rousseau's description of Ile Saint-Pierre in the 'Fifth Walk' of *Reveries of the Solitary Walker* (1782). Marland argues that Orfordness stands as a rebuff to the concept of the remote island idyll, whose invention she (perhaps reductively) credits to Rousseau, and that it is therefore the "ideal location for investigating the tropes and tensions of islandness." (122). The second half of this section is an analysis of the melancholy of Sebald, and how this relates to memory, using the Orfordness chapter as a starting point. The argument is that this examination of melancholy and memory can be applied to islands, thereby relating theories of material affect to ecocriticism and showing, in direct dialogue with Serenella Iovino and Serpil Opperman, how the material power of things can be examined in the context of the Anthropocene. It is in this chapter that Marland veers closest to demoting the island (in this case, Orfordness) to a backdrop, rather than subject, of her ecocritical examination of Sebald; nonetheless, the analysis of the melancholy of Sebald's writings in relation to memory is illuminating.

Part four deals with two texts that explore the unlikely relationship between London and two islands off the coast of Scotland. Stephen Watt's *Republic of Dogs/Republic of Birds (RD/RB)* (2016) explores parallels between London's Isle of Dogs and an island in the Outer Hebrides, while Amy Liptrot charts a path between London Fields and Orkney in *The Outrun* (2015). Marland uses these texts to emphasise the ways that 'remote' islands can have "community of memory" (151) with places as unlikely as Britain's metropolis. In her discussion of *RD/RB*, Marland highlights the parallels Watts draws between the Isle of Dogs and South Uist in the 1980s: although one is surrounded by the richest postcodes in Britain and the other by the North Atlantic Ocean, both suffer from similar levels of deprivation. Building on the discussion of memory in the previous section, Marland highlights the ways in which both Watts and Liptrot create links between seemingly different locations through their perceptions and experiences, although the section on Liptrot feels weaker, devolving into describing the text without directly engaging with it.

The final section is an examination of the unhomely and uncanny, or *unheimlich*, in islands, as a way of responding to the Anthropocene. This time, Marland uses Kathleen Jamie and Robert Macfarlane's accounts of uninhabited Scottish Islands to bring together the ideas of island time, geography, materiality, and representation discussed throughout the rest of the book. A close reading of Robert Macfarlane's description of the Sula Sgeir *guga* (gannet chick) hunt in *The Old Ways* (2012) and of Kathleen Jamie's discovery of a plastic doll's head in the sand dunes of the uninhabited Monach islands as described in her essay 'Findings' from her collection of the same name (2005) reveals the ways in which the modern and ancient can collide in unsettling ways in these spaces. Marland argues that in *The Old Ways*, modern sensibilities collide with the ancient practice of the gannet chick hunt. Meanwhile in Jamie's text, the stereotypically "ancient" island is confronted with the presence of the detritus of the Anthropocene. This chapter brings together the different strands of argument made throughout the rest of the book, combining them into an image of islands as models of flux and change, in no way stuck in amber or isolated from the rest of the world.

While Marland's arguments can occasionally lose focus, like the *Archipelago* cover art, this book repositions islands from the margins to the centre of the ecocritical map.

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Ve-Yin Tee, ed. *Romantic Environmental Sensibility: Nature, Class and Empire*. (Edinburgh University Press, 2022), 304 pp.

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A novelist, sculptor and ideological tinkerer, Ve-Yin Tee applies an imaginative mind to the curation of an engaging and eclectic volume of Romantic ecocriticism from a diverse international assemblage of contributors. Tee here takes a broader view of the Romantic canon than in his own previous targeted Romantic criticism. The volume creates a space for an open exploration of ideas about the significance of class and race in the construction of Romantic ideology and the legacy of this ideology in the aesthetic and ethic of environmentalism today.

For Tee, the concept of "nature" carries "historical baggage, freighted with an obfuscating [and class-coded] preoccupation with wilderness and beauty" and "has now become a debilitating delusion in our era of environmental catastrophe" (4). However, the idea of nature cannot and need not be eschewed altogether; rather, what is needed is a careful deconstruction of nature and an examination of its parts. The Romantic movement was dominated by upper-class writers and mired in colonial ideals. Consequently, the aesthetics of nature and environmentalism it begot remains today largely fixed in an upper-class and neo-colonial perspective, which counter-productively perpetuates ecological destruction and disenfranchisement. Perhaps through careful ecocritical examination, Tee implies, the Romantic idea of nature could be tinkered into a shape that inspires more effective and just efforts in the fight against global ecological destruction.

Tee is loosely allied, then, with other contemporary environmental historians such as Carolyn Merchant and Richard Grove, who have retraced and examined the construction of nature, and problematized its use historically as an ideological focal point for the generation or perpetuation of social and economic inequality. The two parts of the book, "Green Imperialism" and "Land and Creature Ethics," are titled in tribute to Grove and to Aldo Leopold, respectively. Tee writes, "By placing essays reflecting the diversity of Romantic environmentalism at home and abroad beside each other, it is my fervent hope to put the spirit of these two very different people in conversation" (11). He succeeds in this, as critical environmental histories of British imperialism in the first part of the book meet comparative explorations of British land ethics in the second part.

Part I, "Green Imperialism," opens with Kuri Katsuyama's close reading of early Romantic-era descriptive accounts of Chinese gardens, produced by members of a British Embassy to China. Katsuyama sets the tone for the first part of the book as she demonstrates through reflection on the aesthetic descriptions of these British visitors that "aesthetics [are] never [...] abstracted from the social and political contexts in which all of us are embedded" (18). The essays to follow in Part I continue this work of teasing out and showcasing the aesthetics of Romantic nature as they have been used to construct class-based and race-based hierarchies upon landscapes in global contexts.

As these essays take us across Chinese, Indian, American, and British landscapes and through time, the distinctness of these landscapes blurs evocatively. We find ourselves in San Francisco's "Ecogothic Chinatown," (Li-hsin Hsu) and upon British plantations in India (Rosie Dias, Romita Ray), and the reader is able to observe how concepts of nature and class on one landscape have inspired powerful aesthetic responses on others. A perfect example can be found in Laurence Williams's discussion of British gardens and their roots in Chinese upper class garden aesthetics and the values they represented, which extended and morphed within the British class imagination.

Rosie Dias takes us to British colonial India for a nuanced look at the construction of social status upon the landscape. And in a stirring conclusion to Part I, Romita Ray builds upon Dias's momentum as she traces the tiger as a symbol, both of ferocious nature, and, when beheaded for a grizzly trophy, colonial domination in the British tea plantations of Assam. With this powerfully evocative final contribution to a vivid series of imagistic and thought-provoking chapters, the reader is left at the end of Part I to contemplate independently the ideas that have been disturbed and dislodged. Part I succeeds in inspiring the reader to new ideas and a shifting perspective on the role of Romantic ideology in global imperialism. Nevertheless, the reader is left craving some synthesis; a short conclusion, perhaps, to situate the new ideas in the history of ecocriticism or articulate explicitly the questions that have been raised which warrant further critical examination.

The latter half of the volume, "Part II: Land and Creature Ethics," focuses much more narrowly upon the British landscape and British environmental sensibilities and aesthetics. It therefore lacks the sweeping scope and wildly engaging twists and turns of Part I. However, the reader benefits from a more structured and iterative pedagogical experience as the contributors deliver a focused and in-depth curriculum on the class dimensions of British nature writing. This second part brings to the fore the lesser-known writings of working-class British Romantics for long-overdue critical analysis, in service to Tee's ambition for the book to "recover an alternative, or marginal, or suppressed land ethics from the Romantic period" (7).

In his own chapter contribution in this second part, Tee returns to his roots as a critic of Romantic literature. He contributes an in-depth comparative analysis of the work of the affluent Romantic poet William Shenstone and that of James Woodhouse. The latter was a working-class shoemaker-poet who drew his inspiration from the very same manor house grounds that inspired Shenstone's better-known nature poetry. Adam Bridgen, Yuko Otagaki, and Simon J. White attend as well to the lives and literary works of lesser-known, working class poets of the Romantic period in

Britain. Together, the contributions construct a case for looking back with respect and critical attention to the working-class Romantics, whose poverty resulted in relative obscurity but also in much more direct and frequent contact with the land and living creatures about which they wrote. White highlights, for instance, in his discussion of the British upper-class compulsion to a “tidy” (235) and perhaps “sanitized” land aesthetic, that working-class writers of the period are well placed to provide alternative and perhaps more realistic representations of natural beauty. Bridgen articulates the central case of Part II most explicitly when he states that the writings of working-class Romantics provide a rich “archive” for “uncovering a more critical history of environmental exploitation” (188).

The book might have been further expanded, perhaps, into the ideological landscape of American Romanticism. It would be instructive to see connections drawn between British environmental aesthetics and their politicized American successors—for example in discussions of “public land,” “enclosure,” the image of an “unpeopled natural wilderness,” and the influence of these ideas upon the United States’ anti-indigenous land management crusades. Perhaps we might look for such analyses and more about the influence of the global diaspora of British Romantic aesthetics and ideals in future edited volumes from Tee.

This stimulating collection of chapters leaves us with many new curiosities; the volume raises more questions than it answers, and provides little synthesis for the reader, but we come away with a sense of great possibility for creatively re-assembling “nature” and environmentalism by re-examining the Romantic canon that gave them life. All of the contributors would likely agree that ecocritics must lift up diverse and counter-hegemonic portrayals of the land and its creatures, and remain conscious and vigilant of the roles of class and empire in the history and aesthetics of the environmental movement. Some conception and construction of “nature” is perhaps inescapable, but we need not subscribe to a hegemonic construction, and in fact we need not have only one Romanticism or only one nature. To quote an adage now used by environmentalists of many different stripes, “the future is eclectic.”

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Daniela Francesca Virdis, Elisabetta Zurru, and Ernestine Lahey, eds. *Language in Place: Stylistic Perspectives on Landscape, Place and Environment*, Linguistic Approaches to Literature (LAL) 37 (Amsterdam, John Benjamins, 2021), 258 pp.

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How do writers represent the more-than-human world in their work? How do their readers, in turn, make sense of these texts and the physical landscapes and places described therein? How are we to imagine these processes of encoding and decoding in theoretical terms, and how can we test these theories about linguistic representations of environments and its (non)human inhabitants? The introduction to and the eleven chapters collected in *Language in Place: Stylistic Perspectives on Landscape, Place and Environment* (2021), edited by Daniela Francesca Virdis, Elisabetta Zurru, and Ernestine Lahey, provide original answers to these questions. While this volume may seem, at first, to be of interest to only a small community of researchers also committed to exploring the intersection of ecocriticism and stylistics after the spatial turn (as well as, in the case of Virdis's chapter, animal studies), *Language in Place* is likely to be relevant for scholars not only in these two fields but also beyond. To ecocritics in particular and literary scholars in general, this wide-ranging volume can serve as an inspiration for and as a point of departure for future explorations. Moreover, the objective of and approaches brought together by the editors seem very much in line with those of emerging subfields such as econarratology (e.g. James 2015, 2023; James and Morel 2020) or empirical ecocriticism (esp. Schneider-Mayerson et al. 2023).

The contributions examine, for the most part, very different genres, national and cultural contexts, periods, or media, suggesting the potential of this general approach to analyzing representations of physical landscapes, places, and the environment. While some contributions gravitate toward the exploratory and experimental, such as Jennifer Smith's rich, multi-layered side-by-side reading of Iain Sinclair's *London Overground* (2015) and London's Shoreditch neighborhood, other chapters adopt what could best be described as a traditional empirical approach. Consider, for example, Nigel McLoughlin's "Liminal Islands: A Cognitive Stylistic Analysis of 'Beyond the Pale' and 'Rathlin' by Derek Mahon." This chapter draws on Text World Theory, which is also used by some of the other contributors, as well as Stockwell's model of literary resonance and combines methods used in stylistics and literary studies. McLoughlin's contribution is exemplary both for the accessibility, linearity, and rigor of the study's design (in theoretical, methodological, and analytical terms) and the insights derived from close readings of Mahon's lines. For these reasons, this chapter could also be used as a template for similar analyses or as a model to teach this kind of approach, probably both at the undergraduate and graduate level.

Whereas McLoughlin's engaging contribution does not seem to explicitly promote what the editors describe in their introduction as the "social and political agenda of ecocriticism" that may come to the fore in their field (4-5), other chapters demonstrate how the theories and empirical methods used in *Language in Place* can be used to challenge naturalized hierarchies and patterns of domination, marginalization, and abuse. These approaches can also reveal, as shown in Virdis's chapter, agency of nonhuman animals where one would least expect to find it. Adopting a framework including Hallidayan functional grammar and human-animal studies, Virdis examines "animal agency in a corpus of texts from the website of Battersea Dogs & Cats Home, an English charity rehoming dogs and cats, more precisely from the cat rehoming gallery" (189). For many readers, this kind of data may seem somewhat unusual and overly specific, and yet Virdis, like the other contributors to the volume, shows that her systematic approach to collecting and analyzing data and to interpreting her result in light of her theoretical assumptions allows her to achieve the three main aims of her study (190). With its emphasis on human-animal studies, Virdis's chapter is somewhat of an outlier, and it appears that one of the next steps for the field mapped in *Language in Place* would be to explore, to use Derrida's well-known phrase, "the question of the animal" (2008, 8) to a greater extent.

The collection by Virdis, Zurru, and Lahey features other compelling chapters, for example Kristin Berberich's corpus-based study of the Boston Marathon Bombing (2013) and its aftermath or Karin Christina Ryding's exploration of Arabic (or Arabic-sounding) names in Frank Herbert's sci-fi classic *Dune* (1965). As noted about, each chapter is well worth reading, even if it is only for the theories and methods used. These, it seems, have considerable potential for future scholarship, especially by ecocritics who are interested in interdisciplinary collaborations with researchers in fields that work empirically or those who seek to move beyond the linguistic representations covered here to also consider, for example, visual data (film, photography, and so on). *Language in Place* provides several excellent roadmaps for this kind of work and for future explorations of landscapes, places, and the environment.

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This journal of ecocriticism, founded in 2010, is a joint initiative of GIECO (Ecocritical Research Group in Spain) and EASLCE (European Association for the Study of Literature, Culture and Environment) and is published by the University of Alcalá as of 2014. Its principal aim is to further the study, knowledge and public awareness of the connections and relationship between literature, culture and the environment. As a virtual space, it provides a site for dialogue between researchers, theorists, creative writers and artists concerned with and by the environment and its degradation. Its pages are open to contributions on all literatures and cultures, but its special mission is to reflect the cultural, linguistic and natural richness and diversity of the European continent.

Contributions, which are subject to double-blind peer review, are accepted in five languages, in order to increase visibility and broaden the participation of scholars who are not part of the English-speaking world. *Ecozon@* publishes original research articles, in addition to creative writing, visual arts and book reviews. Publication is open to scholars interested in ecocriticism from around the world. We recommend membership of EASLCE to our contributors and readers, but it is not a requirement for either.

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