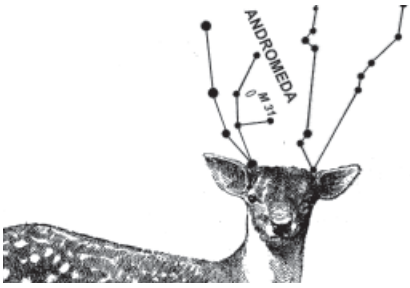
UnderCurrents

journal of critical environmental studies

Issue 18

end times and beginnings



UnderCurrents *is a collectively and student-run journal based out of the Faculty of Environmental Studies at York University.* UnderCurrents *explores the relations among environment, culture, and society, and publishes one thematic issue per year. All back issues are available, free of charge, on the* UnderCurrents *website. We are committed to publishing a variety of scholarly, creative, and activist work that critically engages with conceptions of the environment.*

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Back cover image by Kayla Flinn.

Laying More Pipe

JOEL WEISHAUS*

With pick and shovel, find the broken
cast iron pipe, pry out old lead,
knock off rusty joints.
20' of 4" 40-schedule ABS sawed
and coupled with rubber collars
with stainless steel braces,
joined to pipe at next stream
crossing, joined to terra cotta
pipe under tea house
site, joined to three lengths iron
pipe cut three poems ago.
1 lb brick of dull lead melted
in a pan becomes silver liquid
poured into iron bell-collars.
Black cement smeared over all
connections is a waterproof coating.
Taps turned and draining,
toilets flushed...
Give it all back.

*** More poems from Joel Weishaus on *UnderCurrents* website http://www.yorku.ca/currents/**

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With images by Kayla Flinn, Darren Patrick, and Elana Santana.

End Times and Beginnings: A Retrospective and Relaunch

AMANDA DI BATTISTA AND MICHAEL CLASSENS[1]

In the Beginning...

In 1988, a group of intrepid graduate students in the Faculty of Environmental Studies, at York University in Toronto, Canada, conceived and launched *UnderCurrents*. The founders' main objective was to provide a space for alternative, critical, and creative explorations of environmental issues, thinking, action, and scholarship. Although many of the theoretical and conceptual tools to enable such a project were only in embryonic form, the founding editors sought to destabilize the ontological and epistemological moorings of some stubbornly persistent signifiers, including "nature," "wilderness," and "environment." Direct action environmentalism of previous decades, though visceral, corporeal, and essential, had proven insufficient in the heady days of Reagan's culture wars. The founding editors understood this implicitly, and launched *UnderCurrents* as both a material and discursive salvo. This wasn't their parents' environmentalism.

Such a project was necessary given the socio-political, cultural, and socio-ecological impasse faced by critical scholars and activists in the West. With the post-war consensus in tatters given the persistent, though waning, storm of cold war politics, a scattered system was consolidating around an even more regressive constellation of cultural, economic, social, and environmental politics. A new era of neoliberal revanchism was rolling out across the globe, and that infamous tripartite of Reagan, Thatcher, and Mulroney was making it rain.

Thatcher, the Queen of the neoclassical epigones, seemed particularly confident in her clairvoyance. The serendipitous rise of a casual phrase, "there is no alternative," had, by the late 1980s, become doctrine. Fukuyama's 1989 essay, "The End of History?" added punctuation to the end of a regressive decade, and a certain kind of authority to Thatchers' indictment on imagination. A lesser-summoned, though as egregious Thatcherism put a fine point on the state of affairs: "There is no such thing" as society, she proclaimed. Certainly bad news for society. But where did this leave the environment?

Evolution of 'The Environment'

Rachel Carson's breathtaking work, refracted through the broader cultural politics of Paris, 1968, set the stage for a decade of relatively robust environmental politics. By the start of the 1970s, a young professor of genetics at the University of British Columbia was becoming radicalized and re-dedicating himself to environmental issues, and eventually, the David Suzuki Foundation. The inaugural Earth Day was observed in 1970. Greenpeace launched in Victoria, British Columbia in 1971. DDT was banned in the US in 1972. By the mid-1970s, environmentalism had moved substantially away from the first wave of conservationism and the long hangover of the garden city movement. The spatiality of Nature was being subtly recast, and along with this came the seismic realization that if Nature wasn't out there somewhere, it must be here. The environment was no longer only a national park, but instead imbricated with everyday life.

"Hey farmer, farmer, put away that DDT now. Give me spots on my apples, but leave me the birds and the bees," sang Joni Mitchell in her 1970 hit, "Big Yellow Taxi." On the one hand, the song clearly resonated with listeners in the global north, making prolonged appearances on the pop charts in Canada, the US, and Europe. On the other hand, this was Carson's thick scientific analysis squeezed through the thin politics of hippie utopianism. The song might also be cast as the thin edge of a rapidly encroaching wedge of bourgeois, consumer politics that would reduce second wave environmentalism to a

caricature of itself in decades to come. Slightly blemished produce is, after all, once again de rigueur—a consumer-driven short hand for enlightened urban progressivism, broader machinations of the industrialized and exploitative organics sector be damned.

And yet, Mitchell's paved over paradise also hints at a more substantive shift in the environmental politics of the 1970s in the global north. The leaky ontological corners of the "environment" box had been exposed, and were rapidly disintegrating. Environmentalism now shot through contemporary life—it was legislative and regulatory politics; it was mass movement; it was, as the spotty apple indicates, even ingested. Intimately internalized. And perhaps, most distinctively, environmentalism was a massified, pop cultural touchstone. In this latter respect, we might have good reason to be nostalgic about the good ole' days of 1970s environmentalism—a decade in which the movement may have hit its apex of broad appeal. Who can, after all, imagine a current top 40 hit warning of the dangers of dichlorodiphenyltrichloroethane?[2]

By the end of the decade, however, and with the pressures of stagflation mounting, the stage was set for the juggernaut of roll back neoliberalism. At the same time, popular concern for the environment, often a bellweather for overall socio-economic stability, began to wane, substantially undercutting the potential for a broadly defined citizen movement to insulate against the regressive socio-environmental politics to come. The timing couldn't have been worse, given that Reagan's gutting of environmental policies and departments was an unambiguous assault on socio-environmental justice.

At home, Canadians were under the reign of the so-called "greenest Prime Minister." From the mid-1980s to the early 1990s, Brian Mulroney's government was instrumental in arranging the Montreal Protocol on Substances That Deplete the Ozone Layer (1987), persuaded a reluctant Reagan to address issues of acid rain, and called the Cod Moratorium (1992). Lest we get too dewy-eyed about Mulroney's environmental bona fides, it is worth noting that his environmental politics were of the high ecological modernist variety—not at all surprising then that the organization to crown him as the greenest Prime Minister was the Corporate Knights cabal, champions themselves of so-called "clean capitalism." Environmentalism would emerge through the machinations of 1980s Reaganomics a transmogrified version of its 1970s self: in tact, though with a substantive and genuinely incompatible capitalist caveat in tow.

The academy was scrambling to make sense of this emerging world, and the founding editorial collective of *UnderCurrents* did not, in 1988, have the rich body of conceptual and theoretical interventions that constitute the historical legacy of the intervening years. Donna Haraway's "Cyborg Manifesto" was still being digested. As was Neil Smith's *Uneven Development*, in which he elaborates the provocative production of nature thesis. The most enduring work of Judith Butler and Eve Sedgwick had yet to be written. Lefebvre's work remained untranslated and unknown to most of the English world. David Harvey was only a couple of books into his now prolific body of work and William Cronon's *Nature's Metropolis* was three years away. Spivak was just entering her most productive decade. No one had heard of Slavoj Žižek. Many seminal fields and areas of research indispensable to transdisciplinary understandings of environments, including science studies, ecocriticism, critical animal studies, ecofeminism, political ecology, urban political ecology, queer nature theory, ecopedagogy, and critical urban studies had yet to even take form. Indeed the scholarly bookends of the late 1980s and early 1990s might well be Fukyama's end of history thesis—the essay length submission in 1989, mentioned above, and the full length book treatment published in 1992.

Despite twenty-five years of inspired scholarly and activist incursions around the globe aimed at remedying, repairing, and transforming global socio-ecologies, objective conditions may be worse now than when *UnderCurrents* was launched. And although our brief retrospective of the context in which *UnderCurrents* has developed incorporates only western perspectives and remains grossly incomplete, we believe that the broad strokes of mainstream environmental politics established in the 1980s remain doggedly rooted in the contemporary period—having changed little in kind, though significantly in magnitude. Yes, scholars, activists, and others continue to struggle for justice, and yes, our efforts have occasionally been punctuated by success. Yet, as we write, the continuation of state sanctioned, corporate complicit violence against human and more-than-human environments in both the global north and south is difficult to ignore.

The Environment Evolving

Since its inception, *UnderCurrents* has presented work that aims to change destructive trends in society by rethinking human/environment relations. The imaginative and discursive project of the journal has centered on a redefinition of what we mean when we say environment and, by extension, what it means to be human (See *UnderCurrents* Issue 1, "Introduction"). This is no small task, and for twenty-five years the editorial collective, contributors, and readers of *UnderCurrents* have struggled with, intervened in, and added to the crucial debates that now provide the backdrop for the re-launch of the journal. Beginning in 1988 with "Human Interaction with the Natural Environment," *UnderCurrents* has utilized topical themes to encourage work that pushes against notions of the environment as passive, usable stuff, including volumes devoted to: "Representation and Domination of Nature" (1991), "Situated Knowledge" (1992), "Queer Nature" (1994), "The Nature of Science" (1996), "Political Natures" (2000), "Planning, Culture and Space" (2007), and "Animal" (2008). While early contributors to and editors of the journal used the language of anthropomorphism to grapple with understanding nature/human relations,

they found this language too structural, too binary to describe the complex interactions, systems, and concepts that they were trying to reimagine. So they pulled from, and contributed to, the emerging critical environmental discourse that characterized the transition into the twenty-first century. In so doing, they contributed to the development of critical environmental studies as a robust and evolving field.

After a brief hiatus from 2008 until 2012, *UnderCurrents* is back. And while much has changed since the launch of the journal twenty-five years ago, much remains the same. The contemporary period presents no shortage of scholarly or political impasses. In Canada, the Conservative government's multi-pronged and revanchist approach to the environment, led and championed by Stephan Harper, has actively facilitated unprecedented resource extraction, gutted federal environmental assessment agencies and policies, defunded environmental groups that threaten the government's agenda, and deliberately silenced environmental scientists and scholars. As a result, once radical environmental activists are forced to quiet their criticisms or, as David Suzuki has done, step down from their positions within charitable environmental foundations for fear of having their charitable status revoked for being "too political." In the almost fifty years since Rachel Carson died from breast cancer related complications, and despite extensive evidence of the causal relationship between the production of chemicals and the incidence of endocrine diseases and cancer, the annual global production of chemicals continues to increase exponentially, with no signs of slowing down.[3] Environmental catastrophes, such as the Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill in the Gulf of Mexico, the fuel train derailment in Lac Megantic, Quebec, and the meltdown of the Fukushima nuclear power plant that followed the 2011 tsunami in Japan, continue to impact human and more-than-human life in devastating and previously unimagined ways. We are facing decidedly retrograde policy and political issues, but within the context of a dramatically worse ecological reality. As we argue over the size of the Great Pacific Garbage Patch (depending on what one classifies as "garbage") and deliberate about the "acceptable" limits of radiation exposure for children, it becomes clear that we are still in desperate need of new tools for imagining, understanding, discussing, and reframing the environment. *UnderCurrents*' goal is to draw on the theoretical, artistic, and practical tools available from critical environmental scholarship and beyond, so that we might begin to understand the Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill, or Lac Megantic, or Fukushima, as at once environmental, social, ethical, technological, industrial, economic, and catastrophic. We will create new tools when we find those already available to be lacking.

The varied contributions to *UnderCurrents*' 18th volume "End Times and Beginnings" take apocalypse as a starting point and provide a wonderful new beginning for the journal.

UnderCurrents*, The Next Twenty-Five Years*

The role of *UnderCurrents* as a space for critical environmental studies is more crucial now than ever before and we see ourselves contributing to the development of a discourse that has been, and continues to be, marginalized (for all of the reasons listed above). This is a self-consciously political act in two ways. First, *UnderCurrents* continues to dismantle the boundaries between the human and more-than-human, to explore and expose the cracks in our conception of the environment as "out there." The scholarly interventions to which our founding editors contributed have resulted in sharper conceptual, discursive, and imaginative tools. At the same time, these tools have revealed the intimate interconnectivity and stunning messiness of environmental issues. Our task, then, is to carry the torch of advocacy for the more-than-human world while simultaneously pursuing an understanding of the myriad hybridities among ecological injustice and social, cultural, and political injustices by presenting radical scholarship that helps to define the evolving discourse of environmentalism. One of the ways that we do this is by making space for creative, poetic, and visual work that engages in a critical way with this discourse, whether or not that work fits into traditional academic models.

To belabour the point briefly: We are unequivocally and intentionally a scholarly journal, insomuch as we have routinized publishing criteria, attend to issues of conventional scholarly concern, employ a rigorous peer review process, and strive to make important empirical, theoretical, and methodological interventions in a more-or-less bounded field and related sub-disciplines. While we retain these particular conventions, we categorically reject others as an explicitly political act—as an effort to model a more just, inclusive, and ultimately incisive scholarship. This is as much prefigurative as it is pedagogical for the *UnderCurrents* Collective, and as we learn more about the process of academic publishing, we commit to being open and iterative in our struggle to enact alternatives. For the time being, however, we animate our modest efforts to shake up the staid state of scholarly journal publishing through three means: (1) We commit to a radical epistemology that values knowledges from dispersed and disparate sources; (2) We are a student-run collective committed to democratic and inclusive decision making processes, and; (3) We now publish in an Open Source Journal

format and make our back catalogue digitally accessible online, which respects both the labour of scholarship and the profound potential of public information.

The second way we see ourselves contributing to a broader politics of change, as the theme of this volume suggests, is by providing a space for creative and critical scholarship that tries to address the environmental consequences—and to work through some of the unfathomable losses—that have resulted from decades of bad policy, government inaction, and wanton resource extraction. Our aim is to acknowledge the grief, horror, and anger that exist in response to the decimation and displacement of populations of humans and more-than-human beings, the destruction of places, the poisoning of our air, water, and soil, and the widening gap between those who have and those who have not. In doing so, we aim to explore alternative approaches to understanding and acting in the world, and to generate a hopefulness about our collective future. Such hopefulness is not centered on blind faith in the ability of the planet to weather the storm of human need and greed, but instead accepts the reparative and generative powers of sitting with loss, focuses on the ability of publics to act in meaningful and profound ways, and insists on the intrinsic value of all beings and things, human or non. As part of our commitment to the exploration of new imaginative, theoretical, and creative strategies for engaging with critical environmental studies, our current ecological and sociological reality requires that we contemplate and try to deal with environmental loss beyond this special themed volume.

The varied contributions to *UnderCurrents*' 18th volume "End Times and Beginnings" take apocalypse as a starting point, and, we think, provide a wonderful new beginning for the journal. In particular, the artistic and scholarly works included in this volume create moments of uncanny symmetry, challenging the reader to consider each contribution in relation to one another rather than as stand-alone imaginative or theoretical forays in critical environmental studies. For example, Michael Young opens his essay "(Mis)reading revelations: Apocalyptic Visions and Environmental Crisis," an extended call for the revelatory power of apocalyptic imagery for environmentalism, with an image of thousands of birds falling dead from the sky. Jessica Marion Barr's documentation of her art instillation "Augury : Elegy" echoes this image, to chilling affect, as she challenges the viewer to see aesthetic and potentially abhorrent enactments of ecological mourning and grief as a way forward, as a call to action. Taken together, these works require that the reader consider the same event—the sudden death of over 4000 blackbirds in Beebe, Arkansas on New Years Eve, 2011—in two imaginative directions simultaneously. The reverberations created between these two works, as well as the many others that resonate through this volume, speak directly to the aesthetic and political intentions of *UnderCurrents*: by at once chipping away at the divisions between the human and more-than-human and providing the opportunity for experimental and artistic work to interact with more traditional forms of environmental scholarship, we aim to engage in the ongoing radical reformulation and evolution of critical environmental studies.

Notes

[1] Authors share first authorship and acknowledge the *UnderCurrents* editorial collective's invaluable input on various drafts of this editorial. Additionally, we'd like to thank Andrew Mark and Ellen Sweeney for providing their expertise on popular music and chemical production, respectively.

[2] While "Big Yellow Taxi" has remained an enduring anthem for a particular brand of Canadian environmentalism, there are, of course, many songs with environmentalist intentions that have enjoyed popularity on pop charts—too many to list here in fact. However, the commercial music industry relies on the ability of the listener to appropriate what they hear and make it relevant to their own experience. As a result, political, environmental, or social justice themes are often scaled back by music producers and executives, and radio and television stations, regardless of the artist's intention. For a discussion of how music messages get co-opted see Mark Pedelty's *Ecomusicology: Rock, Folk, and the Environment*. For an extensive discussion of the relationship between North American music and environmentalism see David Ingram's *The Jukebox in the Garden: Ecocriticism and American Popular Music Since 1960*.

[3] A 1995 report from the House of Commons Standing Committee on Environment and Sustainable Development asserts that, "[n]ot only has the number of chemicals increased dramatically over the past 20 years or so, but so have the quantities ... that are produced. Global production of organic chemicals, for example, increased from about 1 million tonnes a year in the 1930s to 7 million in 1950, 63 million in 1970 and about 250 million in 1985. Annual production now tends to double every seven or eight years" (22). In 2004, a joint report generated by Environment Canada and Health Canada estimated that between 1930 and 2000, the global annual production of chemicals increased 400-fold, and mostly without environmental or health assessments.

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(Mis)reading revelations

Apocalyptic Visions and Environmental Crisis

MICHAEL YOUNG

The Falling Birds of Beebe, Arkansas

In punishing contrast to the soaring and singing bird as a symbol of freedom, the quiet or injured bird might be a perfect symbol for environmental crisis. Dead and dying birds have long been associated with warnings of danger, having been used since the early twentieth century to predict air contamination in coal mines. Often understood to be a good indicator of ecological decline, birds have also been central to depictions of environmental apocalypse, most notably in Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* (1962). Images of oil-soaked, dying birds punctuated the visual media after the BP oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico in 2010, despite the best efforts of BP and local and federal officials to prevent photographers from documenting the carnage (see "Critters of the Gulf Oil Spill" and Peters). Later that year, Lars Von Trier showed images of dead birds slowly falling across the sky in the opening fantasia of his apocalypse film, *Melancholia*. Then, sometime around the stroke of midnight on New Year's morning, 2011, scores of red-winged blackbirds began mysteriously falling out of the sky over Beebe, Arkansas, a small town in the American Bible Belt.

Throughout the early hours of that morning, as residents returned home from New Year's Eve festivities, ominous thumping could be heard on roofs, windshields, roads, and patios. As the sun revealed the macabre scene—a town littered with several thousand crooked avian corpses—news of the dead birds permeated the international press. The story was ripe for apocalyptic interpretation. Two days later, 85,000 drum fish were discovered by local anglers, floating belly-up, blanketing a 200-mile stretch of the nearby Arkansas River. The media could hardly contain itself. Fox News called it "an apocalyptic-type mystery" while *The Guardian UK* described it as "a sequence of events that could get residents leafing through 'The Book of Revelation'" (Walker). In the coming days mass die-offs were reported from Maine to Norway. Wildlife experts assured the press that these events were not particularly uncommon, just normally not considered newsworthy.

Over the next few months, the story fizzled out of the press. Then, on New Year's Day, 2012, history repeated itself. In the wee hours of January 1, a familiar thumping was heard through the roofs of Beebe. *The Daily Mail* headline reported, "first sign of an apocalyptic year to come? Thousands of blackbirds fall to their death in Arkansas town for second New Year's Eve in a row" (Keneally). The article framed the event in relation to anxiety around the end of the Mayan calendar in 2012, suggesting that the die-off could be symptomatic of coming doom. What was particularly eerie about the Beebe story was that it had occurred in rural Arkansas, a landscape steeped in the God-fearing apocalypticism of Bible Belt fundamentalists. The reports from Beebe may have sent chills down a few agnostic spines before *The Daily Mail* revoked the excitement. On January 2

> For over two thousand years human civilizations in the West have suspected that the end of the world is nigh, with some mix of foreboding and excitement.

the newspaper announced, "Call off the apocalyptic predictions!" It turned out that fireworks shot into the birds' roost had caused the mass die-offs both years. Apocalypse averted. What a relief. *Right?*

For over two thousand years human civilizations in the West have suspected that the end of the world is nigh, with some mix of foreboding and excitement. In 2012, apocalypticism abounded in reaction to a misunderstood Mayan calendar. While the Mayan fiasco ended with the first light after winter solstice, apocalypticism is far from being laid to rest, and with good reason. Even if the Holocene (or "Anthropocene" as it is coming to be known) sidesteps the plummeting meteors of past epochs, anthropogenic environmental degradation, climate change, resource scarcity, environmental toxicity, and all the related social injustices on which Anthropocentric relations rest (and which they exacerbate), are central apocalyptic themes that will pervade the coming centuries. How might we position these crises as central problems, problems that we must strive to solve, without the promise that we will be able to solve them? How might we redefine ourselves *within* environmental apocalypse as opposed to just in front of it?

In this paper I will explore the idea that apocalypticism's environmental political valence lies in its capacity for revelation rather than ruin, a capacity that we often overlook in efforts to entertain its more sensationalistic aspects. Rather than understand environmental apocalypse as a single imminent tipping point and subsequent catastrophe, I suggest that we consider it as more of an ongoing process of change that encompasses varied physical manifestations of loss and failure, but also important unveilings and rebirths. Drawing on environmentalist, feminist, Marxist, and queer perspectives, I investigate the ambivalent nature of environmental apocalypticism as both a visionary practice with the potential to create social reform and a worryingly narrow perspective on the complex and cyclical nature of crisis.

Apocalypse(s) in the Mirror

The same year the birds began falling over Beebe, an estimated 220,000 people were killed in Haiti and approximately one million were left homeless after a 7.0 magnitude earthquake struck the impoverished country. As Dominican native Junot Diaz attests, "[the earthquake] was for all intents and purposes an apocalypse" (51). Diaz explains that the apocalypse in Haiti began long before the earthquake actually struck. He argues that the disaster there is a social one, facilitated by a seismic attack but made apocalyptic thanks to a long process of colonialism that has left the country with an enormous population, insufficient infrastructure, resource scarcity, collapsing ecosystems, and pervasive poverty. "Hunger, overpopulation, overcultivation, and dependence on wood for fuel have strained Haiti's natural resources to the breaking point. Deforestation has rendered vast stretches of the Haitian landscape almost as lunar in their desolation. Haiti [has been] eating itself.... [Deforestation] is both caused by and causes poverty" (Diaz, 51).

> What makes contemporary apocalypticism unique ... is the reality of ecological crises that offer scientific credibility to the possibility of anthropogenic self-destruction.

According to Diaz, Haiti is at the forefront of a broader trend: a canary in the global coal-mine, a harbinger of what is to come elsewhere as the climate changes, ecosystems collapse and the social injustices of late capitalism prevail. He urges us to

> look closely into the apocalypse of Haiti and ... see that Haiti's problem is not that it is poor and vulnerable—Haiti's problem is that it is poor and vulnerable at a time in our capitalist experiment when the gap between those who got grub and those who don't is not only vast but also rapidly increasing.... Haiti is not only the most visible victim of our civilization—Haiti is also a sign of what is to come. (53-54)

The word *apocalypse* stems from the Greek word *apo-calyptein*, which literally means to unveil or reveal (Thompson 13). While the term has been used to refer to the end of the world in a physical sense, it also points to an epochal ending, wherein the façade of contemporary life is peeled back to reveal hidden systems at work. James Berger reminds us that the definition of apocalypse is threefold: it "is The End, or resembles the end, or explains the end" (5). Diaz argues that all three aspects of apocalypse hold true in Hispaniola, where the earthquake that decimated the island nation has, in a sense, "revealed Haiti." He explains that, "for most people, Haiti has never been more than a blip on a map, a faint disturbance ... so far removed that what happened there might as well have been happening on another planet" (51). For those of us in North America to whom the Haitian earthquake seems a distant, perhaps even random disaster, its implications for our society may be hard to grasp. That is not to suggest that crisis does not unfold around us in North America—it does, ripe with revelation—but we often misread it.

The falling birds of Beebe, blown out of their roost by fireworks on two consecutive New Year's Eves, reflected a microcosmic example of environmental crisis that, were we more attuned to reading the signs of the time, we might have interpreted as rightly apocalyptic. The most sinister part of the Beebe story was not the fact that one or a few individuals had willingly destroyed a

flock of migratory birds in 2012 against a staggering backdrop of biological loss, but rather that this revelation of mortal culpability was interpreted by the media as the good news: a notice that we can maintain business as usual because the apocalypse is not here yet, or, at least, not yet for the residents of Arkansas.

On a much greater scale than Beebe, the attacks on the World Trade Centre on September 11, 2001 offered a profoundly apocalyptic event on American soil. Before Americans could dwell in the shadow of the fallen towers, however, they were mobilized as "civilian soldiers" as Jackie Orr has discussed at length (452). "Every American is a soldier," declared President Bush one month after the attacks, at the inaugural meeting of the Homeland Security Council (Bumiller B5). Suddenly, American citizens were positioned as foot soldiers in a battle on which they had little time to reflect. The horrors of the World Trade Centre attacks were never allowed to fully reveal themselves but rather were co-opted as a catalyst for knee-jerk politics.

Judith Butler argues that the quick turn to violence after the World Trade Centre attacks mitigated the American public's chance to mourn what had been lost. She asks, "if we stay with the sense of loss, are we left feeling only passive and powerless? ... Or are we, rather, returned to a sense of human vulnerability, to our collective responsibility for the physical lives of one another" (30)? The question of whether or not to dwell in grief is an interesting one, and one that may be applied to the BP oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico in 2010. The most gut-wrenching images of dying wildlife were quickly commodified into tidy photo essays (see "Critters of the Gulf Oil Spill"). Are these memorializations of the oil spill representative of or substitutive for grief? Do they serve as outlets for mourning or are they merely cleanses of the public consciousness, whereby the most haunting revelations of the spill are printed, bound, shelved and dismissed?

North of the border, Canadian tar sands development is desecrating Aboriginal lands, displacing Aboriginal

Augury : Elegy

JESSICA MARION BARR

Just before midnight on New Year's Eve 2011, in Beebe, Arkansas, 4,000 or so blackbirds fell out of the sky, dead. Around the same time, several hundred grackles, redwing blackbirds, robins, and starlings dropped dead in Murray, Kentucky. A few days later, 500 dead blackbirds, brown-headed cowbirds, grackles, and starlings were found on a highway in Pointe Coupee, Louisiana, while 200 dead American coots appeared on a bridge in Big Cypress Creek, Texas. On January 4, in Falköping, Sweden, 100 jackdaws were found dead in the street. And then on January 5, some 8,000 dead turtle doves rained down on the town of Faenza in Italy. Later that year, on October 23, 6,000 dead birds washed up on the southeastern shore of Ontario's Georgian Bay, and then, remarkably, Beebe was again showered with the bodies of 5,000 blackbirds on New Year's Eve 2012.

It seems a little apocalyptic.

One might well ask whether this series of mass deaths is a microcosm of humanity's increasingly toxic impact on the non-human world. But we are not just poisoning an isolated wilderness "out there." We are poisoning our ecosystems—our sources of food, water, and air; our only home. The warnings are everywhere, if we choose to see and heed them. Because those were a lot of canaries, and we're all in this coalmine together.

—

Augury refers to signs and omens, and relates to the ancient Roman tradition of interpreting the behaviour of birds as a sign of divine approval or disapproval. It is my feeling that the current ecological crisis will augur an elegy (a poem of lamentation or a death song) unless we act quickly, compassionately, and courageously.

The potentially uncomfortable, even abhorrent, encounter with the bones and severed wings in my work forces a visceral confrontation with this metaphor for potentially catastrophic climate change, and reminds viewers of the fact that we are all implicated in it. These artworks, much like the work of many modernists whose art attempted to communicate the profound losses of the world wars, evokes what Tammy Clewell calls an "anticonsolatory practice of mourning," whose "commemorative forms [are] intended to provoke and hurt, rather than console and heal.... [This] practice of endless mourning compels us to refuse consolation, sustain grief, and accept responsibility for the difficult task of remembering the catastrophic losses of the twentieth century" (199). Those catastrophes include the undeniable reality that the biosphere is suffering as a result of human intervention and the ongoing profit-driven destruction of the world's land, water, and air. In my own work, I am trying to think through how to effectively communicate mourning or despair for the future of earth's ecology while refusing to be resigned to its death and, rather, finding energy to continue an ethical struggle for ecological awareness and sustainable practices. Because we must not simply remember, we must act. While my work is intended to have a strongly melancholic, elegiac tone, I ultimately want to create art that impels viewers to consider the positive ethical imperatives of ecological mourning, and to see that, at the heart of the matter, there is hope for a better world.

Notes

1. As such, I aim to use sustainable materials in my art practice. The hanging piece is made from branches from my backyard, crochet thread inherited from a great-great-aunt, and chicken bones that were being discarded by a local grocery store. In order to clean the bones, I boiled them and ended up making about 45 bowls of chicken soup, which I gave to friends and neighbours.

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peoples, fragmenting already endangered wildlife, and eroding one of the most important ecosystems of the northern hemisphere, the boreal forests, undoubtedly a multi-fronted environmental/social apocalypse of its own. How do Canadians grieve environmental loss? Or do we? By not "remaining exposed to [grief's] unbearability" do we define our present moment as an uncritical one and instead peer toward a future where crisis might be worse or where we might locate the resources to resolve it (Butler 30)? Does such an act of deflection normalize events like the disaster in Haiti, the BP oil spill, or the tar sands development, as appropriate features of a landscape near, but not beyond the edge of crisis? Consider the traditional Hollywood apocalyptic format. Usually some kind of precursor event warns that doom is imminent. In *Armageddon* (1998), a meteorite shower blasts New York City, foreshadowing an oncoming comet the size of Texas. In *The Day After Tomorrow* (2004), unprecedented storms warn that the climate is changing at an unthinkably quick rate and that a new and sudden ice age will soon set in. This structure for apocalypse, which is so ingrained in our popular understanding and based on the paradigmatic narrative of "The Book of Revelation," teaches us that the real problem is always the one around the corner. What happens, however, if our current path never leads to a dramatic brink, the clear and total impasse that we might dread? Without the transcendent experience of an imminent apocalypse, of standing at the precipice and collectively peering into the abyss, do we fail to take heed of the fires already smoldering around us?

Slavoj Žižek, in his talk "First as Tragedy, Then As Farce" (2009), offers an interesting insight into the psychology of cultural capitalism. His observations might provide answers for how we, particularly in the West, continue to have an obscured relationship with environmental crisis. He argues that the ethos of charity, embedded in cultural capitalism, is one in which acts of perceived goodness overshadow processes of social and environmental injustice. "Let's not discard the evil but let the evil work for the good," says Žižek, explaining the premise of the idea. He goes on to explain, "in the very consumerist act, you buy your redemption from being only a consumer … You do something for the environment [like buy organic], you do something to help starving children in Guatemala [like buy fair-trade], you do something to restore the sense of community here [like support local coffee shops]." Meanwhile, the fundamental relationship between social and environmental injustice and capitalism is left relatively unquestioned. Using the example of a "kind" slave owner, whom Žižek calls the "worst kind of slave owner," he argues that superficial acts of social charity have historically "prevented the core of [a] system from being realized by those who suffer from it and understood by those who contemplate it"; a sort of "repairing with the left hand" what we "have destroyed with the right." By believing that clean capitalism, for example, can solve environmental problems, we have shielded ourselves from the possibility of alternatives to capitalist paradigms (consumerism, unfettered economic growth, etc). Similarly, we have tolerated environmental destruction as a necessary part of the capitalist system. To counter this enmeshment, Žižek calls for "soft apocalyptic thinking," a kind of misanthropic realism that seeks to break through the veneer of charitable acts to fundamentally question a society where poverty and social-environmental injustice are acceptable to begin with.

Pedagogy of the Green Apocalypse

Whether it be prophecies of climate change, tanking economies, religious armageddons, nuclear annihilations, or a never-ending slew of films on impending meteor strikes, Western society is presently saturated in end-times anxiety. But this fear is nothing new. What makes contemporary apocalypticism unique, however, is the reality of ecological crises that offer scientific credibility to the possibility of anthropogenic self-destruction. Are environmental crises just another link in a two thousand year old chain or is contemporary apocalypticism an enactment of realistic thinking? Perhaps the answer to this question can be initially pursued by examining how we think about environmental apocalypse itself.

Lawrence Buell, a pioneer of ecocriticism, is particularly interested in the metaphors we use to describe the environment and our relationship with it. He argues that environmental apocalypse is "the single most powerful master metaphor that the contemporary environmental imagination has at its disposal" (285). Apocalypse is "central to ecocentrism's projection of the future of a civilization that refuses to transform itself according to the doctrine of the web" (285). Buell explains that by conceiving of all nature as a web of interdependence within which humans are as vulnerable as any other part, we come to recognize that any threat posed to nature is a threat posed to humans, a challenge to the hubris of an anthropocentric worldview.

Buell writes, "we create images of doom to avert doom: that is the strategy of the jeremiad" (294). The jeremiad, an eponym that refers to the Hebrew prophet Jeremiah who prophesied the fall of Jerusalem, Babylon, and Assyria, is usually an invective attack on contemporary society, supported by a prophecy of the society's imminent downfall. Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* (1962), Paul and Anne Ehrlich's *The Population Bomb* (1968), *Limits to Growth* (1972) by Donella Meadows, Dennis Meadows, Jorgen Randers and William Behrens III, Bill McKibben's *The End of Nature* (1989), and Al Gore's *An Inconvenient Truth* (2006), are popular environmentalist examples of the jeremiad structure. Each book engages with three key bases that define contemporary depictions of environmental apocalypse, outlined by Buell: a notion of a world where greater demand is put on ecosystems than can be sustained by them, causing an "overshoot" scenario; a vision of nature being "tampered with" by humans and then "recoiling against humankind in a kind of return of the repressed"; and the possibility that environmental damage

could reach an irreparable point where we are left with "no escape routes" (308).

Frederick Buell (Lawrence's brother) argues that in the 1980s, after the success of early environmentalism, a brand of anti-environmentalism was fostered by the American Right that characterized environmentalists as apocalyptic extremists. Ronald Bailey wrote, for example, that "modern ecological millennarians, impatient with waiting for the flash of thermonuclear doom, now claim there is a 'global environmental crisis' threatening not just humanity, but all life on earth" (3). Bailey takes issue with apocalyptic environmentalism's critique of the unimpeded freedom to extract and commodify resources that he holds as a core American value. As Buell describes, "like feminism and multiculturalism, [to Bailey,] environmentalism was inherently totalitarian, an enemy to America's tradition of freedom" (19).

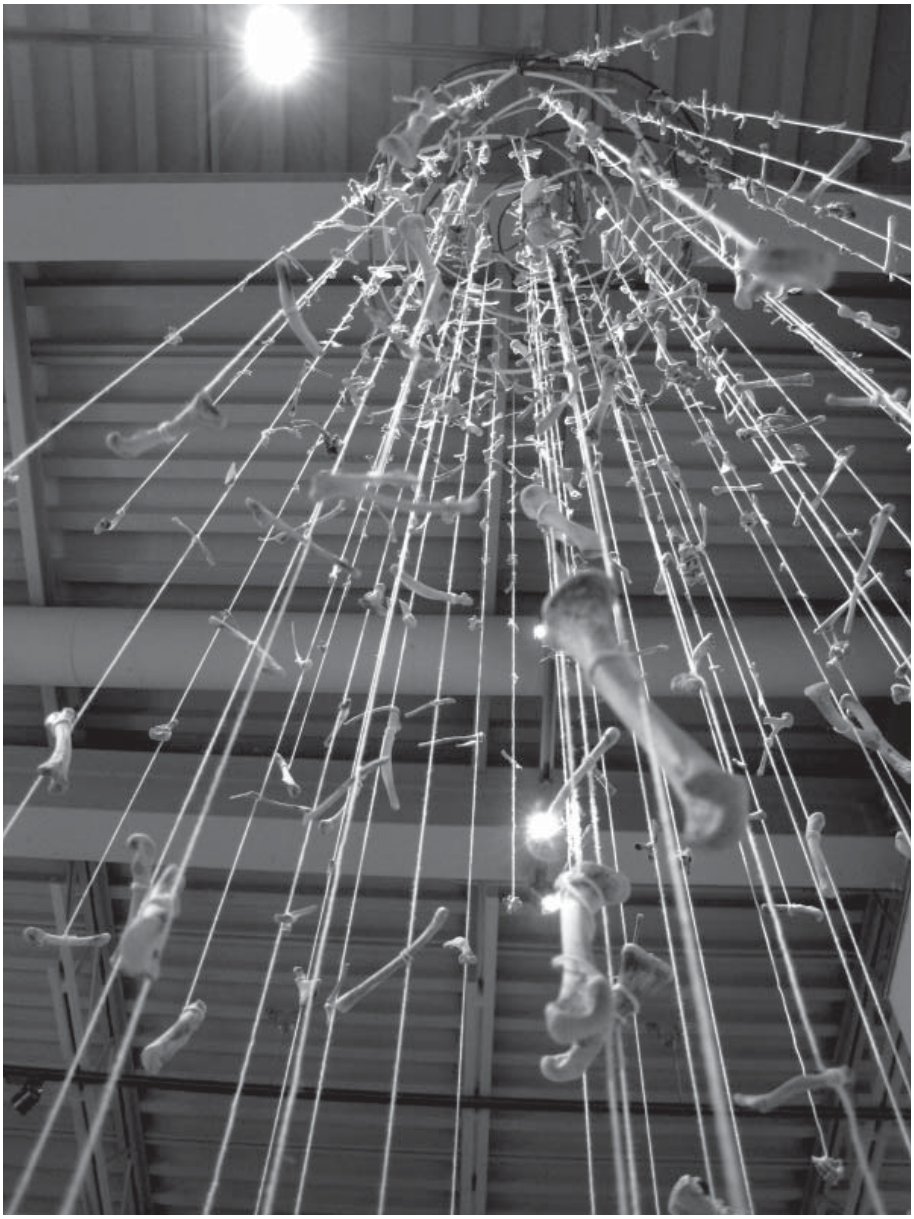
By the 1990s a new kind of environmentalism was being born in response to the apocalyptic environmentalism of the 1980s. This new brand of environmentalism, the origin of the present day so-called bright green camp, characterized environmental risk as an opportunity for a new start, which Frederick Buell argues fostered "a culture of hyperexuberance" (208). He describes the culture, noting that "risk and instability suddenly became exciting and creative, the signs of a renaissance.... Going out of control did not mean the degradation of the biosphere but a way to evolve faster. Chaos appeared not as a feature of apocalypse but as something that was good for us" (214). The shift toward hyperexuberance mirrors a familiar historical pattern. In Christian societies, apocalyptic fears have tended to go hand-in-hand with millenarian desires. Millenarianism, or the belief that drastic change occurs in thousand year cycles, suggests that in the wake of a major cataclysm or breakdown, a new start may be possible. In fact, it may even be desirable.

While the desire for radical change may be virtuous, the impulse to start anew is dangerous. Catherine Keller argues,

> expectations seek, after all, to realize themselves. So the religious habit of imagining the world out of existence would not seem to be irrelevant to the material habits of world-waste running our civilization [;] ... the expectancy that Our Father will make us a shiny new world when this one breaks explicitly correlates with a willingness to dump this one. (2)

Ecological millenarianism may foster the delusion that an ecological collapse is actually good for us by bringing us closer to creating smaller-scale, eco-topic societies. These societies, however, by virtue of being smaller, must also be exclusive.

Fantasies of a less inhabited world invite racist perspectives through which groups of the global population might be imagined out of existence. Take for example Paul and Anne Ehrlich's *The Population Bomb* (1968). In the 1960s they envisioned an imminent resource crisis and subsequent population crash that would have started in the 1970s. They argued that this crash should be mitigated by draconian population



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control, notably in India and Pakistan, failing to make the more appropriate call for a redistribution of global resources. Countries of the Global South have often been encouraged to forfeit the kind of resource use that built the Global North. As Cindi Katz argues, "made poor or kept poor in part through the economic power of the developed countries, the majority of third world residents are now being asked to forego technological innovation, resource use, and other means of economic development for sake of 'the environment'" (278).

As images of post-apocalyptic dystopia from the environmentalism of the 1970s were replaced in the 1990s by hyperexuberance for a technologically savvy future, environmentalism was incorporated into the very capitalist machine against which it had previously warned. As Frederick Buell writes,

> The dialectic went as follows[:] Humanity's heroic era of mastery of nature (thesis) was opposed by the belated, but powerful appearance of environmental apocalypse (antithesis); the new, boundless possibilities of society, just now being revealed as incorporating both the ideology of mastery and the logic of environmental crisis were the triumphant synthesis. (23)

The promise of social and technological innovation, presented in the 1990s, suggested that the West would not have to scale back. Rather, we came to believe that we might invent our way around problems like pollution and resource scarcity. There would be no challenge that capitalism could not take on; the free market was an open road of invention and innovation. In Frederick Buell's words, "Glinda lifted her wand, and suddenly all those pesky old environmental problems were actually good for you. Let them get worse; we'll only get better" (219).

According to Buell, since the turn of the millennium, environmental crisis discourse has largely shifted from being a contemplation of the future to a recognition of a present or imminent dwelling place. "Today, attempts to imagine the future realistically forces one to take environmental and environmental-social crisis seriously … from the inside … as a context in which one actually dwells, not just anticipates" (246). This shift in crisis thinking is linked to a discursive shift exemplified by *Beyond the Limits* (1992), a follow-up to the iconic *Limits to Growth* (1972). This cornerstone book illustrated how the capitalist paradigm of unfettered growth and consumption could never be sustainable in a world with finite resources. Instead, Meadows et al. argued that there must be limits imposed to keep the natural resources of the planet from being ravaged. Twenty years later, *Beyond the Limits* explains that the limits posed by their first book had been exceeded. Buell explains that when *Beyond the Limits* was published in 1992, we had already "failed the test" posed by *Limits to Growth*. What *Beyond the Limits* offered, however, was hope for "a damaged but restorable world" (188). Since 1992 we have again missed the deadline for action and this realization within environmental discourse has been embodied in a more fatalistic impression of environmental crisis. Buell writes, "now [*Beyond the Limits*'] time limit for remedial action has expired, its analysis would doom the earth to erosion and terrible contraction in the future" (188).

While apocalyptic environmentalism has, to some extent, awakened public consciousness to the importance of thinking-forward, it has also limited itself by thinking along stark, dualistic lines. One of the outcomes of this kind of thinking is exemplified in McKibben's *The End of Nature* (1989) whereby the end of a stable climate marks the end of the so-called natural world. In the midst of considerable critique of this work, ecocritic Greg Garrard sums it up well when he says that, "McKibben's 'nature' is not merely threatened by the possibility of apocalypse, but in some sense already beyond it, for if nature is inflected as wilderness, the very thought of human interference is enough decisively to contaminate its purity" (106). Garrard's critique makes the point that, by McKibben's standards, the very advent of human civilization—the moment our tampering with nature began—would have marked the initiation of the apocalypse itself. Such a depressing conception of the human-environment relationship probably does more to re-inscribe a status quo notion of human mastery over nature than it does to fundamentally question the human position *within* nature.

> … recasting degraded environments as the new frontier to be conquered, even if only psychologically, re-inscribes a problematic attitude of conquest and mastery and dismisses the experience of confronting the inconceivable failure of environmental loss.

Though apocalypticism has historically had radical tenets of social critique, today, as John Wallis has found, it is most often characterized by a "valorization of the everyday wherein, in an almost Durkheimian way, the contemporary social order (understood as typically male and North American) is reaffirmed and celebrated" (73). A quick inspection of Hollywood apocalypse dramas reveals that hidden beneath the threat of rogue comets or stolen nuclear warheads is a deeper anxiety regarding the failure of white, middle class, heteropatriarchal American values. In *Armageddon* (1998), Bruce Willis's character, Harry Stamper, is an American oil driller who goes into space to drill a nuclear warhead into an

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encroaching comet. A single father, he leaves his twentysomething daughter Grace alone in her bedroom, taking her boyfriend AJ instead, a fellow oil rig worker, played by Ben Affleck. At the climax of the film, the decision is made that someone must manually detonate the bomb from the surface of the comet to prevent it from striking earth and initiating doom. AJ is selected to detonate the bomb but Stamper insists that he will do it instead. He admits that AJ is the son he never had and gushes that he would be proud to have AJ marry Grace. In Stamper's act of selflessness and heroism, he sacrifices himself not only to save planet Earth but more importantly, to allow his daughter to realize the heteronormative life that he had failed to achieve in his day and to perpetuate his lineage of patriotic American oil workers via AJ's gene pool.

The hypermasculine heroism of apocalypse is not confined to Hollywood depictions but is similarly infused into popular environmentalism. Canadian journalist and environmentalist Chris Turner has written about climate change and the projected death of the Great Barrier Reef, saying, "the tragedy is obvious, the scope is impossibly huge, the loss beyond measure. But we have enough laments.... Adventure stories, on the other hand—heroic narratives of victory against impossible odds in the heretofore uncharted realms—these are the tools of transformative myth. This is what we need: a new myth of the frontier" (28-29). While I appreciate Turner's impulse to locate a new kind of hope within environmental crisis, I would argue that recasting degraded environments as the new frontier to be conquered, even if only psychologically, re-inscribes a problematic attitude of conquest and mastery and dismisses the experience of confronting the inconceivable failure of environmental loss. Is approaching environmental apocalypse with a reinvigorated sense of heroism—a sense that humans can find exciting discovery within failed environments—really the paradigmatic change that we want to foster? Was it not attitudes of conquest that spurred colonialism and environmental mastery in the first place? "Feel exhilaration in the place of anxiety and lament," encourages Turner, "we will all learn to breathe underwater" (29). The Great Barrier Reef is not dead yet nor have the ice caps flooded our continents. And yet, Turner encourages us to find exhilaration in the promise of "living underwater," his metaphor for a kind of conquering apocalypse. Turner's argument echoes a line of thinking that Katz critiques, which envisions humans as simultaneously masters of nature and victims of themselves, unable to stop their inexorable movement toward destroying nature. She writes:

> On the one hand the "human species" is blamed for taking us to the brink of environmental disaster, brought on, often as not, by the inevitability

> of human "greed" vis-a-vis nature. Infinitely capable of wrong, "human beings" are paradoxically incapable of transformative action; greed after all is human nature. Until the apocalyptic moment human action drives history, but history-become-apocalypse renders human agency moot. (2)

A Crisis of Hope

Sarah Amsler argues that current environmental crisis discourse is underpinned by two prominent narratives of concern: fear of environmental breakdown and paralyzing doubt that humans have "the will or capacity" to prevent such breakdown (131). Amsler believes that, "systemic changes in economy, politics and culture are closing down avenues for radical freedom," a constriction that is experienced in the everyday, "as a sense of individual powerlessness" (132). Faith in social activism, as a reliable mechanism for creating social reform, may be dwindling in the face of ever-more complicated environmental-social problems and within the tightening grip of western law enforcement policy (such as that demonstrated by the Toronto Police during the G20 summit).

Consider the way that social activism in the 1960s, spurred-on by Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* (1962), managed to eradicate DDT from agricultural employment within a decade (DDT was officially banned in the United States in 1972). By contrast, current environmental issues are swallowed by abstract narratives of climate change and blurry discussions of greening the economy. Contemporary Western citizens are directed by "green" advertising campaigns to the organic aisle of their local grocery store, where, for a few extra dollars, they can protect the environment via the purchasing of "green" products. Within this envisioning of environmentalism, only the wealthy can afford to be environmental stewards, leaving most of us with the psychological burden of environmental decline. The inability to take meaningful action against environmental and social problems creates what Amsler refers to as, "social despair" and ultimately, a crisis of hope (132).

What are the politics of hope in a time when crisis has already arrived? Can hope exist within failure? Does hope within failure require the possibility that failure might be overcome? Lisa Duggan, in conversation with José Esteban Muñoz recounts that, "the therapist of a friend of mine told her, 'hope is the worst thing'[,] ... which I took to mean that hope in the present is a projection forward of a wish for repair of the past. Since the past cannot be repaired, hope is a wish for that which never was and cannot be" (275). She goes on to note that,

> As a queer feminist anti-imperialist and utterly contrary and cranky leftist, I have my doubts about the political valences of hope.... I associate it with normative prescriptions about the future I *ought* to want, with coercive groupthink, with compulsory cheerfulness, with subtly coercive blandness.... Such happiness and optimism calls out for ruin—an insurgency! a stock market crash! a flaming pervert next door! (277)

Muñoz responds, saying that,

> When we talk about [the] dialectical tension between hope and hopelessness we must account for the force of the negative. But we don't mean the negative in some grandiose subjectivity-shattering way. We mean living with the negative and that, first and foremost, means living with failure. This is to say that hope and hopelessness converge at a certain point.... In this way we are calling for a politics oriented towards means not ends. (281)

Muñoz's view that there may be a point of convergence between hope and hopelessness suggests that there is a need for accepting present and past failure in order to locate an empowerment that is not premised on the absence of failure. D. W. Winnicott observed that trauma in children often stems from fear of a breakdown that has already occurred. When children acknowledge the past breakdown, they are not necessarily freed of constraints, but rather can build it into their identity and move forward with realistic expectations of the world (103-107). In a similar way, acknowledging environmental breakdown as something that has already begun to happen will not alleviate the symptoms of the breakdown but may allow us to move forward more realistically. Amsler refers to this perspective as "an ethics of ambiguity" (148), noting that "this being-outsideness ... cannot be communicated linguistically from one person to another through rational argumentation. Rather, it must be disclosed through encounters with radically disruptive realities and imaginations that expose our own as partial and situated" (142-143).

By reducing climate change into a problem that might be solved, do we undermine its complexity? Richard M. Douglas argues that we do, and that in the process "we foster a certain atmosphere of complacency and wishful thinking, a sense that we are almost bound in time to solve it" (198). Perhaps then, narratives of climate change are valuable for the same reason that they are problematic. They pose an unnavigable problem to human society

There was something ominous about the image of a lone plane burning carbon at thirty nine thousand feet above the melting polar ice caps.

and, in so doing, challenge society to recognize its own mortality. Douglas describes this as "the kind of existential threat to society that might give rise to widespread and fundamental questioning of dominant social structures and ideologies" (198). Amsler hopes that the experience "of being disrupted or decentred ... can provoke a state of heightened reflexivity in which we realize that our bodies, truths and ways of being do not fit the contours of a dominant reality" (142).

As environmentalists, what do we take from this argument? Do we allow climate change to unfold and with it, some profound realization about human existence? Perhaps, dwelling in the tension between striving to solve mammoth environmental problems like climate change and failing to solve them, is the place of uncertainty that Amsler and Douglas argue could lead to a profound shift in cultural thinking and feeling. By envisioning the current present as apocalyptic, perhaps we open ourselves up to the vulnerability that impending failure produces. While this argument may seem bleak, I would suggest that by confronting the inevitability of human extinction (whether it be now or a thousand years from now), we might actually expand our capacity for crisis thinking, and ultimately our ability to survive in an increasingly volatile environment. Douglas points out that, "to say civilization is mortal is also to say it is killable.... Simply to make this argument is not to bring the end any closer. In fact, widespread acceptance of this idea might be the key to prolonging civilization's lifespan in practice" (213).

Visions in the Sky

Two years ago I traveled to Indonesia to volunteer for a biodiversity research organization in the tropical forests of southeast Sulawesi. As the Boeing 747-400 carried me northwest away from Chicago, I wondered what I looked like from below. Two and a half hours into the journey and thirty-nine thousand feet above ground, I spooned bibimbap into my mouth and looked out through the oval of reinforced glass. Below me was an expanse of mottled brown arctic tundra and ahead of me was a distinct line where the tundra turned to ice. I checked my watch. *That was quick*, I thought. I looked around the cabin of the aircraft. The flight was primarily composed of Korean businesspeople, most of whom were asleep, on laptops or watching reruns of *Friends* on the seat-back televisions. *Should I say something? Do they know that we're flying over the Arctic?* It seemed incredible that only a brief few hours after leaving the temperate climate of Chicago O'Hare International Airport we were soaring above a mythic frozen landscape. I turned back to the window. Alien squiggles of water marked the brown canvas below and sharp, frosted, geometric shapes imprinted the blue ice just ahead of us. The shadow of the jumbo jet stenciled its way across the ground. There was something ominous about the image of a lone plane burning carbon at thirty nine thousand feet above the melting polar ice caps. And there I was, en route to do environmental work on the frontier of some of the last unexplored rain forests on the planet. The paradox was painful.

In February of 2013, NASA engineer turned multimillionaire investment tycoon Dennis Tito announced that he plans to send an American married couple on a tour of Mars in 2018. The expedition will be initially funded by Tito with supplemental funds coming from donations and media partnerships, potentially totaling somewhere in the neighbourhood of $1 billion. Tito's project, entitled "Inspiration Mars," is strictly an act of space tourism. The couple will not necessarily be NASA scientists nor will the voyage actually have them setting foot on Mars but rather orbiting it for the view.

According to Tito's right hand man, space veteran Taber McCullum, Inspiration Mars "is very symbolic and we really need it to represent humanity" (news.yahoo.com). To whom do we need to represent humanity? Is sending an American married couple to Mars really the most interesting way that we might represent humanity? Or are we inching toward fulfilling the impulse to find an exit strategy from Earth? Is Tito's message of inspiration perhaps a promise to the young Western minds of today that despite environmental, social, economic, and political calamity, with enough money and resources, someday some of us (the chosen few) may be able to jump ship, via spaceship, to a new earth, another planet whose landscape remains unspoiled? Ironically, Mars is, to our best knowledge, a dead planet and so Tito's tour is, if anything, an ironic act of post-apocalyptic voyeurism. There is a lot to be done on planet Earth in the way of addressing global environmental and social problems and burning $1 billion worth of carbon into space seems like a perfect symbol of *humanity's* convoluted priorities.

In 2013 we managed to sidestep a repeat of the Beebe fiasco, with no major reporting of blackbirds falling out of the sky on New Year's Eve. What does the absence of falling birds this year mean? Better behaved teenagers? A shortage in fireworks? The recession? Or, maybe, we are underestimating the birds themselves, who are simply biding their time. Maybe instead of quiet or dead birds as the apocalyptic symbol that moves us to think seriously about environmental crisis, we should try listening to what the soaring and singing birds have to say, although, I have a feeling it may be hard to hear. And so with that thought in mind, I playfully leave you with this, a piece of the end of Daphne Du Maurier's short story, "The Birds" (1952), a tale of a Cornish coastal town on the heels of World War II where the local birds have suddenly turned on the villagers:

> He went round the cottage methodically, testing every window, every door. He climbed onto the roof also, and fixed boards across every chimney except the kitchen. The cold was so intense he could hardly bear it, but the job had to be done. Now and again he would look up, searching the sky for aircraft. None came. As he worked he cursed the inefficiency of the authorities. "It's always the same," he muttered. "They always let us down. Muddle, muddle, from the start. No plan,

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> no real organization. And we don't matter down here. That's what it is. The people upcountry have priority. They're using gas up there, no doubt, and all the aircraft. We've got to wait and take what comes." He paused, his work on the bedroom chimney finished, and looked out to sea. Something was moving out there. Something gray and white amongst the breakers. "Good old Navy," he said, "they never let us down. They're coming down-channel; they're turning in the bay." He waited, straining his eyes, watering in the wind, toward the sea. He was wrong, though. It was not ships. The Navy was not there. The gulls were rising from the sea. The massed flocks in the fields, with ruffled feathers, rose in formation from the ground and, wing to wing, soared upward to the sky. The tide had turned again. (11)

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Witnessing the Wasteland

Sight, Sound and Response in Edith Sitwell's "Three Poems of the Atomic Age."

OJ CADE

> We did not heed the Cloud in the Heavens shaped like
> the hand
> Of Man . . . . But there came a roar as if the Sun and
> Earth had come together –
> The Sun descending and the Earth ascending
> To take its place above . . . . the Primal Matter
> Was broken, the womb from which all life began.
> Then to the murdered Sun a totem pole of dust arose in
> memory of Man. ("The Shadow of Cain" 93-101)

The place where the scientific meets the poetic underwent a transformation when atomic bombs were used against Hiroshima and Nagasaki in August of 1945. Primed to images of apocalypse and destruction by the 1922 publication of T.S. Eliot's "The Waste Land," poets found themselves in a position where life imitated art. Like their fellow citizens, poets were witness to a scientific revolution—one that began with Rutherford splitting the atom and ended with a more efficient and competent slaughter than anything previously experienced. Lehmann comments that "the war, in the end, found its voices in the work of many poets and novelists; but the peace, the victory, the defeat, the bewilderment in defeat and the heart-breaking disappointment in victory, the apocalyptic manifestation of atomic power—the poets seemed too long to have been too dazed to think of them" (30). His one exception is Edith Sitwell who confronted the atom bomb in her "Three Poems of the Atomic Age" (Collected Poems 368-378): for Sitwell built a narrative about the bombing—not so much a narrative of events, but of understanding, as she confronted the moral consequences of this new capacity for destruction. Sitwell's "Three Poems" include "Dirge of the New Sunrise," which describes the moment the atomic bomb was dropped upon Hiroshima; "The Canticle of the Rose," which uses the symbolism of a rose growing out of the atomic wasteland as a metaphor for Jesus Christ; and "The Shadow of Cain," which Sitwell describes as being "about the fission of the world into warring particles, destroying and self-destructive" (Collected Poems xlii).

But how did Sitwell approach her role as witness to atomic warfare, and as prophet for the consequences thereof? How were these roles affected by her cultural beliefs? As a poetic witness, possibly *the* poetic witness of this event in contemporary English poetry, how did Sitwell interpret her experiences as observer, and did her methodology affect her output? In this essay, I will argue that in the contrasting use of the visual and the aural witness, sight and sound represent differing responses to the apocalypse embodied by the atomic bomb. Furthermore, taking these dual witnesses together allows for a unified perspective that is both reactive and contemplative. Sitwell links imagery of the seeing dead to the dead's ability to act as witness, contrasting the comparative innocence of life before the bomb to the collective guilt of life after it. Yet, where sight and visual imagery are characterized by Sitwell as passive responses, sound brings active communication, resurrection, and restoration.

Naturally, Sitwell's attitude to the bomb is embedded in the culture of her time and place—her atomic poems did not arise out of a literary or cultural vacuum. As Stewart notes, "a poem like 'The Shadow of Cain' (1947) shows clearly that it is to a world of feeling largely created by Mr. Eliot that much of this transformation may be due" (17). It is interesting to speculate about Sitwell's response to the atom bomb in

the absence of Eliot's seminal text "The Waste Land," but the double shock of Eliot and nuclear Armageddon allowed Sitwell to explore the effect of the bomb within an existing cultural context. Her chosen feeling was transformative. It had to be. The status quo had been altered beyond repair, and before Sitwell could understand the holocaust at Hiroshima she had to transform the new atomic landscape, to translate it into familiar and meaningful imagery.

Following the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, a future sudden atomic apocalypse was a possibility that everybody had to face. As Milosz comments, "[b]oth individuals and human societies are constantly discovering new dimensions accessible only to direct experience" (4). The direct experience of the atomic bomb forced Sitwell to fold that experience into the sum of herself, her experiences and beliefs, to provide a moral context for the destruction it had caused. Her primary response to the atomic bomb was to "protest and project herself into the role of the delphic prophetess of doom" (Pearson 382), to become "a modern seer, the interpreter of suffering humanity" (Glendinning 260). According to Mills, Sitwell's role is that "of the prophet, of the poet who has the gift of ultimate truth about man" (63). Braybrooke interprets the poet as symbol as much as the poetry: Sitwell is "ready to be a chalice through which that truth may pour which is the blood of Christ, the wine of universal life" (240). Sitwell's atomic poetry was strongly influenced by her religious beliefs, and while her understanding of humanity's dual capacity for good and evil is reflected in her religious understanding, it is evident also in her use of poetic and scientific allegories.[1] For example, throughout her poetry the image of the sun variously represents Christ, the power of the bomb, and the "Sun of the heart" (Sitwell, *Collected Poems* xlii).

The concept of duality is reflected in the imagery of Sitwell's poems, and has been noted by many of her critics. Ower describes her wit as being "apocalyptic, mirroring a world in which harmony and redemption exist in a state of tension against evil and the clash of contraries" ("Metaphysical Medium" 266). Braybrooke characterizes her work as a type of melding: the "fusion of expression" (237) between Sitwell's earlier works and the poetry of Dylan Thomas; the "marriage of echoes" (238) of prose and poetry; the unity of "myth and miracle" (240). This tension, the use of paired concepts and fusion of opposites, is a technique Sitwell uses to link events and images together in an ordered progression of ideas. The contrast, for example, between the images of destruction and resurrection allow her to connect the two, as if destruction is necessary for resurrection. This can be seen in "Canticle," where the Rose says "I cry of Christ, Who is the ultimate Fire / Who will burn away the cold in the heart of Man" (59-60).

This tendency toward duality is reflected not only in Sitwell's poetic imagery, but in her witness methodology and in her approach to prophecy. The "Three Poems of the Atomic Age" act as witness statements to the events of August 1945. That Sitwell was in the United Kingdom at the time does not exclude her as an atomic witness. While she was not physically present in either Nagasaki or Hiroshima during the bombings, or in the immediate aftermath, she was witness to the effect those acts had on the culture and morality of the society in which she lived. The bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki were truly global events that captured the attention of the world as images and testimonials of a new potential for destruction and loss of human life were broadcast worldwide. Widespread social, political and ethical debate in the wake of the bombings was inevitable.

Interestingly, Sitwell's role as atomic witness is both reinforced and transformed by communications from other witnesses. Sitwell recalls her exposure to another witness statement over a month after the first atomic bomb was dropped, when her brother, Sir Osbert Sitwell, pointed out to me a paragraph in *The Times*, a description by an eyewitness of the immediate effect of the atomic bomb upon Hiroshima. That witness saw a totem pole of dust arise to the sun as a witness against the murder of mankind ... from that moment the poem began (*Collected Poems* xlii).

Sitwell links imagery of the seeing dead to the dead's ability to act as witness, contrasting the comparative innocence of life before the bomb to the collective guilt of life after it.

The poem referred to is "The Shadow of Cain," unquestionably the most complicated of the three "Poems of the Atomic Age," where a geologic history of the Earth is combined with the Biblical story of Lazarus in a rolling pageant of response to the moral questions that the atomic bomb inspires. Like "Canticle," "Cain" incorporates a witness statement from another person into the text, repeating images communicated by those present in the aftermath of the bombings:

> And only her red shadow stains the unremembering stone. ("Canticle" 35)
>
> Then to the murdered Sun a totem pole of dust arose in / memory of Man. ("Cain" 100-101)

Sitwell's atomic poems are particularly interesting in that she not only acts as witness, but implicitly distinguishes between the duality of two different types of witness statements. "Dirge for the New Sunrise" is effectively separated from its companion poems by differing methodology; its witness statements are primarily visual: for example, "And watch the phantom Sun in Famine Street" (5). The witness statements from both "Cain" and "Canticle," however,

are primarily aural: for example, "And everywhere / The great voice of the Sun in sap and bud" ("Cain" 78-79).

Initially this may appear a thin distinction. "The Shadow of Cain" has the richer imagery, and a greater reliance on colour—for example "great emerald thunders" (71) and "vermilion Suns" (104). Yet the narrator's primary interaction within the poem comes via speech and sound. This is because "Cain," and to a lesser extent "Canticle," are more concerned with explanation and understanding than "Dirge" which, written first, provides a more immediate and visceral reaction to the effects of the atom bomb than its more considered sisters. The distinction between imagery and methodology is important. The first illustrates a poem, but the second gives it purpose.

The visual element, the sense most closely associated with the act of witnessing, is the predominant characteristic of atomic imagery. Descriptions of light and explosion, fire and ashes, are combined with the human body to produce the image of the body as ruined wasteland—Hiroshima in miniature—where the dual desecration of moral sense and environmental destruction is played out on a burning tapestry of human flesh. Linked with the ability to see is the presence of light, without which sight is useless. Sitwell's use of the imagery of light has "a seminal relationship to life" (Brophy 96). As the dominant source of light, Sitwell's sun is a "power both in the spiritual world and in the spirit" and "a divine power which resolves the discords of life and imparts an order to everything" (Bowra 39). Accompanying the sun's light is its warmth, which "is sometimes identified with love, human wickedness being the opposite 'cold in the heart of man'" (Morgan 51). In "Dirge of the New Sunrise" the focus on sight, the ability to see, is the primary method of witness. However, Sitwell uses the contrast between vision and blindness to maintain ambiguity with respect to the narrator's identity. On the one hand, the narrator of the poem "watch[es] the phantom Sun in Famine Street" (5) and once "saw the little Ant-men as they ran" (26). Here Sitwell implies that her narrator has the ability to see, and therefore can act as a witness of what has been seen. On the other hand, Sitwell undermines the reliability of her narrator's sight, as all eyes are physically destroyed in her poem: "But no eyes grieved / For none were left for tears" (17-18); "The eyes that saw, the lips that kissed, are gone" (35). Finally, Sitwell claims that "The living blind and seeing Dead together lie" (37). The reader is forced to consider the nature of this blindness, and what it might say about the world in which the poem—and the event itself—takes place. The implication is that the narrator of the poem, retaining the ability to see, is dead, and that the ability of the living

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to act as witnesses of what they have seen is compromised. The willful moral blindness of the living is balanced by the physical blindness of the dead, and the integration of those who will not see with those who cannot leaves the reader with a sighted corpse, a witness capable of seeing only when all other options have been destroyed.

For Sitwell, death can be correlated with knowledge, for none can be as aware of the effects of an atomic holocaust as its victims. The eyes of the victims, blasted as they may be, have first-hand knowledge while those who see from a distance can never truly comprehend the extent of the horror of the atomic wasteland. Alternately, one can argue, as Sitwell does in "Dirge," that "gone is the heart of Man" (39) and that a collective guilt adheres to "the more murderous brain / Of Man" (7-8) that is so immense that the sinful state that existed before the bomb becomes one of relative innocence. That innocence is itself burned up in the ensuing holocaust. In such a reality, "all is one" and all is dead (16). While the witnessing dead are a central focus of Sitwell's poetry, her role as an apocalyptic prophet makes this emphasis even more poignant. A fundamental truth of the atomic bombs was their continued existence—the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki were not events that could be safely left in the past. The bombing of the two Japanese cities threatened two-fold destruction: not only the horrific initial devastation of nuclear Armageddon, but the ongoing environmental effects that turned the ruined cities into a waste land of a different type—contaminated, contaminating, and brutally carcinogenic. The potential existed for a repeat performance, and all that witnessed the destruction of these cities from afar must have wondered if the same fate might ever befall them. Some, like Sitwell, looked further, asking if that destruction might ever be perpetrated by them. It is the function of a prophet to look to the future, and Sitwell was forced to consider the question of guilt. If life before the bomb was one of comparative innocence, and the "murderous brain" is enough to pronounce a present guilt, then the continued use of that brain to commit repeated devastation on an enormous scale is enough to fundamentally alter the human condition. "[G]one is the heart of Man" (39) Sitwell warns in "Dirge," describing a society that countenances, that continues to countenance, such apocalyptic actions.

"The Canticle of the Rose" and "The Shadow of Cain" have fewer references to sight and/or blindness than "Dirge for the New Sunrise," despite the fact that both are longer poems. In "Canticle" and "Cain," the expressions of sight and the invitation to witness are attributed to clearly defined characters or personalities that are often not human observers. In "Canticle," Fate ascends from Hell to ask for "pence to lay upon my staring lidless eyes" (53) and the Rose upon the wall says "[s]ee how I rise upon my stem, ineffable bright" (57). Here, the Rose symbolizes Christ and the laying of coins upon the eyes of a corpse is reminiscent of a custom practiced so that the corpse can pay Charon to ferry them to the Underworld. The contrast between the dead, staring eyes associated with Fate and the instruction to witness the rise of Christ indicates the resurrection of the ability of humanity to see without and beyond death. In "Cain," Sitwell mentions that the Sun speaks to "the blind eyes" (82), but the primary reference to vision in this poem is in the "civilization of the Maimed, and, too, Life's lepers" (131) who "brought the Aeons of Blindness and the Night / Of the World, crying to him, 'Lazarus, give us sight!" (134-135). Here, Dives, who "did not look at us" (166), is the ruined personification of self-centredness and greed; he cannot look further than himself. Alternatively, Sitwell describes Lazarus as "the terrible ideal of useless Suffering ... the hero of death and the mud, taking the place in men's minds of the Hero of Life Who was born in a stable" (*Collected Stories* xliv).

In contrast to the imagery of sight, the references to voice and sound, and by extension soundlessness and unhearing, are linked with the active, communicative witness and the capacity for dialogue. The primarily visual "Dirge for the New Sunrise" contains but one reference to sound: "And the ray from that heat came soundless, shook the sky" (31). It is the absence of sound that characterizes this aural landscape, underscoring the primarily visual nature of the poem. In contrast, "Canticle of the Rose" is almost entirely speech, including several instances of the Christ-figure speaking, as well as Fate and other characters. The element of light, previously the vehicle for the visual reaction, is explicitly distanced from witness statements:

> 'Speak not the name of Light–
> Her name is Madness now ... Though we are black
> beneath her kiss,
> As if she were the Sun, her name is Night (19-22)

It is the absence of sound that characterizes this aural landscape, underscoring the primarily visual nature of the poem.

With the Sun figure compromised, light and the ability to see give way to the aural witness. While a person acting as visual witness may see and react, the hearing witness implies the ability to speak as well as hear, and therefore the ability to communicate with others. Sitwell's emphasis on duality occurs again in the witnessing ability of the poet-narrator. The visual witness, the sighted observer, is prioritized in reaction. The visual witness is also a primarily personal one; it is the immediate and visceral individual response, derived from that sense—sight—which is most often used as the first reaction to the world outside the individual. It is possible, of course, for a visual witness to narrate what has been seen to others, even to other visual witnesses. This discussion,

however, can alter what was originally observed. Others may have seen differently, or seen more, and this can effect the perceived reliability of any eyewitness statements. In contrast, the aural witness is concerned with hearing and reflection. Additionally, the aural witness is primarily public. Speech implies a minimum of two parties, a speaker and a listener, each with their own individual reactions. It is speaking these differences that gives the possibility of comprehension. This combination of the aural and visual in Sitwell's atomic poems implies that one can experience an event by seeing it, but it is only by communicating with others that the event can be understood. Whether communication occurs with other people such as other witnesses in Sitwell's poem, or with what she perceived as the divine, is almost irrelevant. Understanding is an aural—and an oral—process, born of interacting with another intelligence. Sitwell herself interacted with other witnesses (for example her brother Osbert, when they shared the newspaper article referenced above) to come to an understanding about the atomic apocalypse in Hiroshima and Nagasaki. However, she also interacted with her personal God via prayer, and the ideologies and beliefs surrounding this interaction contributed to her conclusions as well.

Sitwell's own potential as a witness is complicated by a cultural balance between the visual and the aural. She lived in an interesting time—in a world too big and disconnected to see everything, and when the technology available to bridge that distance was just becoming established. The advent of internet and wireless technologies has made image sharing more immediate and far reaching than in the 1940s. While Edith Sitwell heard of the totem pole of dust from witness testimonial in a newspaper article in 1945, in 2013 she would have seen images of the totem pole almost as it appeared. As a result, Sitwell relied heavily on others to provide the personal, visceral details; the images that really underscored the horror of the immediate destruction at Hiroshima and Nagasaki. It is therefore important to note the effect of assimilated witness statements on the distinction between visual and aural methodology. Two of the primary visual images in "Cain" and "Canticle"—the totem pole of dust and the red shadowed stone—are incorporated by Sitwell from other witness statements. These are highly visual scenes, but Sitwell did not physically witness the images she describes. She did not see the totem pole of dust with her own eyes; rather it is an image and understanding of the moment of atomic impact that is informed by interactions between other witnesses. Reports given to journalists and newspapermen, eyewitness statements, descriptions of the context of visual images such as photographs are all aural processes. They deal in words and sound instead of pictures and light. Both are necessary. Without the experience of the visual witness, it is impossible to see, and to ultimately understand, the horrific consequences of the decision to make and use the atomic bomb. Similarly, without sharing their experiences, the visual witness is cut off from other perspectives, limiting the understanding of what they have seen. Only when Sitwell integrates the two methodologies can she form an appropriately reactive, contemplative, and informed response.

Sitwell underlines the tension between the immediate reactions of what one sees to the more considered reflections of what one tells (or hears) by using the dual methodologies of other witnesses. This too is the function of a prophet. A prophet sees what is and what will (or might) be, but this capacity is useless if what is seen cannot be shared. It is not enough to see. A prophet, to be a prophet, must speak. Sitwell, as a poet, was accustomed to speech. She was accustomed to aural (and oral) communication—how a poem sounds, how it will be communicated. Like a prophet, Sitwell assumed the existence of a listener: someone who would not only hear her but would respond to what she had to say. This response is key: Sitwell was not working out her own understanding of the apocalyptic atomic bomb for her own amusement, or to prompt an idle, inconsequential debate. Her prophecy was one of duality, of cause and consequence, of damnation and salvation, and her specific understanding of the underlying meaning of that prophecy is most evident in "The Shadow of Cain." While "Cain" does not contain so great a proportion of speech and references to hearing as "Canticle," aurality is nonetheless a large and important part of the poem, and defined allegorical and religious characters often speak to one another. Most interesting in the context of witness methodologies and statements is the following verse:

> And everywhere
> The great voice of the Sun in sap and bud
> Fed from the heart of Being, the panic Power,
> The sacred Fury, shouts of Eternity
> To the blind eyes, the heat in the winged seed, the fire in
> the blood. (78-83)

If the Sun is associated with the human heart and/or the divine, and blindness with death and knowledge, then the power of the divine over death, the ability to resurrect and heal, is in sharp contrast to the lines in "Dirge" where

> ... the phantom Sun in Famine Street –
> The ghost of the heart of Man ... red Cain

And the more murderous brain (5-7) implies that the "phantom Sun" is incapable of resurrection. If Sitwell is acting as a prophet in this poem, then by her beliefs the "phantom Sun" is a false prophet—one with the ability to see but who is soundless, lacking

A prophet sees what is and what will (or might) be, but this capacity is useless if what is seen cannot be shared.

the capacity for communication and thus comprehension. By contrast, the hearing witness in "Cain" is brought to understanding where "through the works of Death, / The dust's aridity, is heard the sound" (84-85) of the coming, communicative Christ. Sitwell reconciles what she saw in the atom bomb—"the world without love, the world of absolute zero" (Clark, qtd in Sitwell 270)—with her religious beliefs by using the figure of Christ (the Sun and the Rose) as a bridge between what she sees and what she understands.

Ower argues that Sitwell's "vision of atonement and redemption is based upon a fusion of contraries and an absorption of the bitter consequences of the fall into a high synthesis" (255). She uses "a system of images which constitute demonic parodies of these sacramental signs" (Ower 546), culminating in "The Shadow of Cain," where the "spiritual state of man and the physical state of the world, from atomic fission, are welded together" (Karmatz 144).

The duality inherent in her atomic poems, the characteristic melding of opposites, is apparent again in the contrast between heat and cold. At one extreme is absolute zero, the point of all-stop and all-silence.

> Cold is the highest mathematical idea ... the
>
> Cold is Zero–
>
> The Nothing from which arose
>
> All Being and all variation.... (Collected Poems 7-10)

Cold fulfills this role not only in a geological and historical sense as the "endless positing/ Of Nothing" (*Collected Poems* 12-13)[2] but also as the unredeemed state of human nature. Sitwell stated that "Cain" is about "the fission of the world into warring particles...the spiritual migration of these into the desert of the Cold, towards the final disaster, the first symbol of which fell on Hiroshima" (*Collected Poems* xlii). In her poems, however, she reconciles event with consequence in an act of speech in "Canticle," as she writes, "I cry of Christ, Who is the Ultimate Fire / Who will burn away the cold in the heart of Man" (59-60). The corruption of the traditional Sun symbol has the potential to blind and freeze and bring about "the crossroads at which man stands, with power over the transformation process for death or life, for a golden age or the supreme murder" (Lindsay, qtd in Sitwell 264). Yet Sitwell here is a witness twice over: not just to the bomb but to her faith; a faith that denies the final victory to corruption. Underlying this capacity for witness and prophecy is a disturbing idea. If Sitwell believed in restoration, in resurrection, it was something that occurred only after the apocalypse. Perhaps the capacity to adequately

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address the reality of an apocalypse comes not from the potential to create it, or the potential to prevent it, but the potential to survive and learn from it. If so, then an apocalypse becomes not only one event among many in the shaping of a new world, but the necessary impetus for that new world, with its new understanding.

Like the other writers of her day, Sitwell accessed the atomic bomb through her experiences of it. She was undoubtedly a biased witness and her interpretations of the events at Hiroshima and Nagasaki were filtered through both the cultural context in which she found herself and her religious convictions. However, the two different witness methodologies in Sitwell's three atomic poems differentiate her from other authors. The sharp contrast between seeing and hearing, between immediate reaction and considered reflection, indicates the evolution in witness response to a scientific event. It is this evolution in response that justifies Lehmann's claim of Sitwell's exceptionalism.

One can hardly hold lesser poets responsible for freezing in the face of nuclear apocalypse—it is hard to reason through such visceral horror—and yet the sheer breadth of Sitwell's response can only reflect her own grappling with the new nuclear order. The immediacy of the first reaction, the communication with and absorption of other witness statements, and the capacity to adapt the results of that witnessing into her personal cultural context is an example of the evolution of response that every individual undergoes when faced with the possibility of apocalypse. No one, either in Sitwell's time or the times ahead of her, is capable of a fully formed response to a sudden apocalyptic event. They must experience that event over a period of time. First, they are confronted with the imagery of destruction, which does not exist in a vacuum. In order to understand the apocalypses of their times, people must communicate what they see to others, to engage in discussion and dialogue: it is not enough to see. One must also hear. Only then is it possible, as it was possible for Sitwell, to manage to encompass the enormity of that apocalypse into their own personal understanding of the moral universe about them.

The sharp contrast between seeing and hearing, between immediate reaction and considered reflection, indicates the evolution in witness response to a scientific event.

Notes

1 Sitwell converted to Catholicism in 1955, but her poems reflected Catholic influences before this date.
2 Here Sitwell was drawing on the scientific ideas of Charles Lyell and Lorenz Oken (Morrison 608).

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MY NOBEL PRIZE

GARY BARWIN

They stick the real Nobel Prize to my chest. The pin goes through my heart. Don't worry: it's made of a new material that I just invented. It is both wife and participle. Royal jelly and particle board. It is shadow and light rolled into one like chocolate, riot gear for the end of the world.

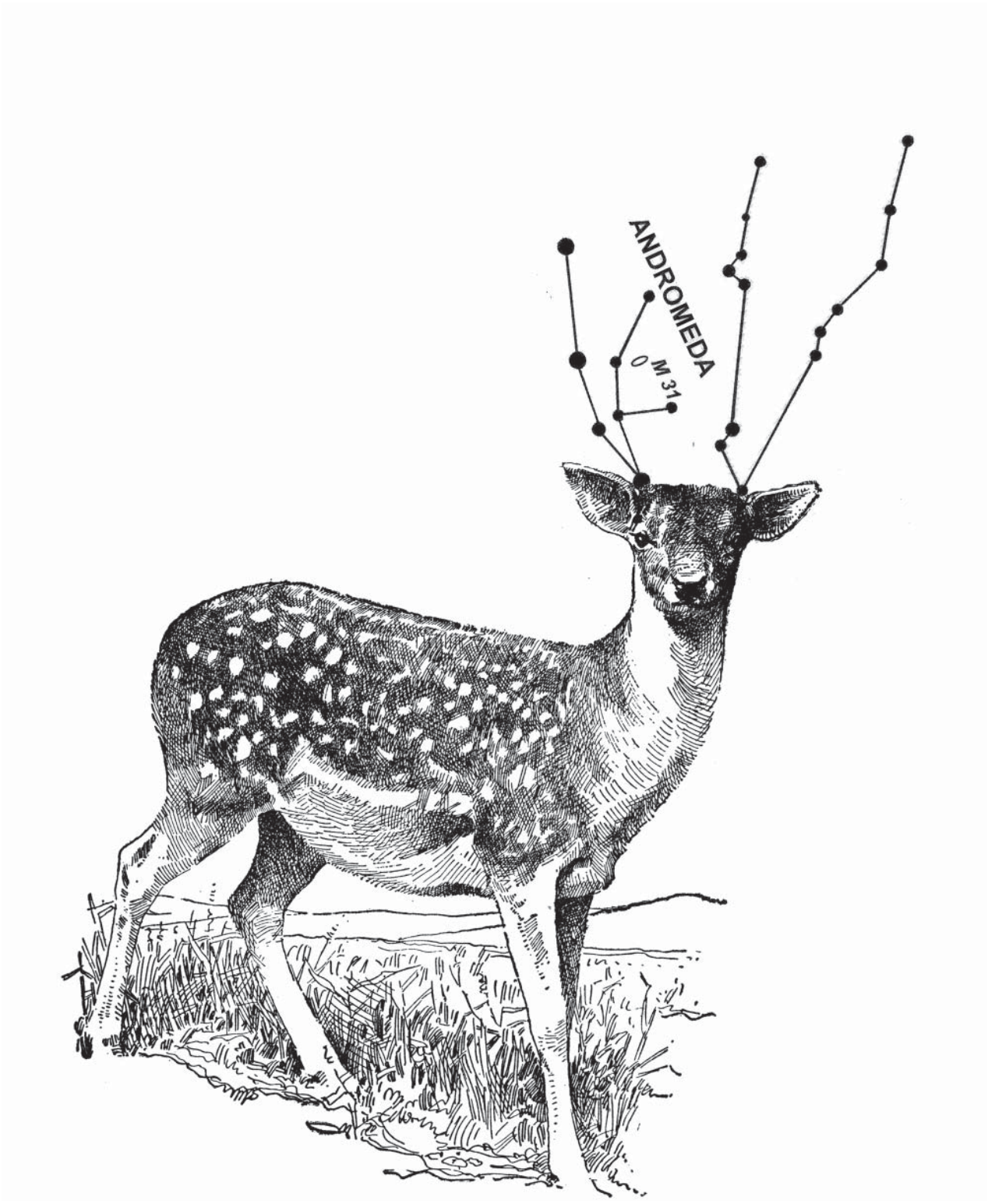
In fact, I recently invented myself. I am entirely new. A new cloud, a new ant. Hook me up to the flat screen IV and let the 3D beam through my veins like weather. Change my channel. I sleep.

I said, the mind is a lawnmower chewing up lawn. There was a dog in that yard. It was a problem but it is a problem no more. That's why my heart got pinned with this prize. My mind-blades ran over something no one else noticed, but I don't throw away the bags. I am all new.

Newsflash: Nobel Prize pin insertion causes end of world. The end is very small. It's far away. You would need a giant's telescope or death-defying binoculars to see it. They thought we would all die. There are clouds over my tongue.

An enormous whale or a bean from the edge of the universe, a universe that still doesn't have a name because it keeps getting bigger. I invented bigger. And I forgot my newness because I invented it so fast I finished before I began. I said to the universe, You can't kill me because only one of us is going to die because of some kind of spacetime thing which is very complicated and that only I can explain.

Yes, you should thank me for receiving this prize with my only heart. My words are shadows in my hands. Now I open them and let the dove that was never there become something small and far away, far away as the end of the world. In conclusion, Mr. and Mrs. Committee, I'd like to begin by inventing someone else. All this new gets lonely.



DEER STAR ANTLERS. Gary Barwin.

QUARK FOR WYATT

GARY BARWIN

hunting for themselves
deer and hadron know where they are

but as for hart and meson
deer and hadron don't know

the pumping heart is weary
hart and meson make it so

so deer and hadron leave hart and meson
well enough alone

deer and hadron can't fill their weary mind
with hart and meson

nor draw the meson from meson and hart
who flee the stippling forest

deer and hadron will not follow
they don't attempt it

it would be like trying to hold
hart and meson in a net

made of hart and meson only
deer and hadron doubt they could do this

so deer and hadron imagine spending eons
hunting hart and meson in vain

it'd be like starting with ferns
then attempting to forge diamonds blindfolded

besides what is written around your fair neck
you can't read and in the end

hart and meson cease to be what deer and hadron go wild to tame
though hart and meson, deer and hadron are the same

The End of the Beginning

Environmental Apocalypse on the Cusp in Scott Fotheringham's The Rest is Silence *and Nicolas Dickner's* Apocalypse for Beginners

CONRAD SCOTT

Scott Fotheringham's novel *The Rest is Silence* and Nicolas Dickner's novel *Apocalypse for Beginners* both mix coming-of-age narratives with environmental destruction through apocalyptic events. Similarly, concerns about global environmental destruction populate the bildungsroman in fiction from nuclear-era texts such as John Wyndham's *The Chrysalids* to ongoing narratives such as Margaret Atwood's MaddAddam series. However, both Fotheringham's *The Rest is Silence* and Dickner's *Apocalypse for Beginners* integrate coming-of-age narratives with apocalyptic threats to the characters' environments that climax at the edge of a point-of-no-return and then subside without having completely eradicated the living environment beyond recognition. The two novels represent a rethinking of how apocalyptic threat effects the world: these texts reject the idea of immediate doom represented by, for example, fiction focused on nuclear destruction, and the notion "'[t]hat there's no problem that can't be fixed with a good old end of the world'" (Dickner 89).

The Rest is Silence and *Apocalypse for Beginners* are literary evidence that thinking about environmental apocalypse is coming of age: each novel indicates that while the end may still come, humanity must not give up hope in the face of myriad speculated threats or even the slow deterioration of the living world.

Concerns about a variety of dangers to continued human existence have surfaced in both speculative fiction and in reported global events (see Campbell; Quammen; West; Stewart; and Zimmerman). But despite these and many more fears, neither Fotheringham nor Dickner allow their fictional instances of apocalypse to destroy or fundamentally alter humanity as a whole. To be sure, their characters are changed by the events of each narrative, but in both *The Rest is Silence* and *Apocalypse for Beginners*, apocalypse rears its ugly head then slows into repose. This paper argues that character adaptation as a response to environmental change is employed within both novels to demonstrate the potential for humans to mitigate imminent apocalyptic threat. In turn, the use of environment by humans in each text is adapted, and even undergoes its own coming-of-age as immediate crisis is averted: the future of the human race, though altered, is (at least temporarily) ensured through each rethinking of the notion of environment. Fotheringham and Dickner accomplish these essential imaginative shifts in part through speculative instances in their texts, but also in their characters' ability to overcome the challenges they face. As a result, *The Rest is Silence* and *Apocalypse for Beginners* are important fictional texts that, in common parlance, critique the separation of human life and the environment. In their insistence that humans and the environment are co-constitutive, Fotheringham and Dickner demonstrate that the continued survival of each is intertwined.

This essay engages in ecocritique in the manner employed by Timothy Morton, billing "the term in a ... self-reflexive way. Ecocritique is critical and self-critical" (13). As Morton outlines,

> [e]cocritique is permeated with considerations common to other areas in the humanities such as race, class, and gender, which it knows to be deeply intertwined with environmental issues ... it thoroughly examines how nature is set up as a transcendental, unified, independent category. Ecocritique does not think that it is paradoxical to say, in the name of ecology itself: "down with nature." (13)

This essay will employ an ecocritical approach in pursuit of a better understanding of what we might mean by environment. By examining Fotheringham and Dickner's novels and their apocalyptic narratives, I will suggest how the term environment itself can be adapted: each narrative process

eclipses the polarity of humanity and nature in favour of a living environment in which the human is intimately implicated. Considering these textual examples will allow our understanding of environmental apocalypse to be cast anew: rather than completely destroying environmental conditions or excising humanity from the natural world, these texts enact a fundamental change—a Revelation of sorts—in maturing our critical conception of the environment, and of how human living in the world must adapt for the future.

Maturing Environment

The Rest is Silence and *Apocalypse for Beginners* pit their narrators against awkward recollections of adolescence. In doing so they frame how these now-adult voices interacted and learned to interact more closely with their environments: the process of going through puberty is nothing if not a process of adapting to one's surroundings. Ben, the narrator of *The Rest is Silence*, returns as a man to the area near Middleton, Nova Scotia, where his "dad was born ... and had brought [him] ... as a kid" (20). Orphaned long ago by a mother who left and a father who subsequently commits suicide, Ben searches for home in the wilderness after fleeing the pressure of grad school in New York for the quiet of the Nova Scotian backwoods. As he settles in and adapts to his pocket of nature, Ben narrates how his childhood was lost, and begins to tell the story of a young woman named Benny to an old man named Art. As Ben struggles to adapt to his new surroundings and the text comes to a climax, narrative timelines converge and Fotheringham reveals that Ben used to be Benny. Ben's belief that he can be a part of the environment rather than separate from it contrasts with Benny's earlier experience conducting graduate research in a bacterium lab in New York, which ultimately led her to unleash a highly-voracious, plastic-eating bacteria in an Upper East Side supermarket and flee urban North America for the plastic-free backwoods. In becoming Ben, Benny switches from an avowed, though thoroughly urban environmentalist, to someone attempting to be a part of the remote wilderness.

Conversely, in *Apocalypse for Beginners,* Mickey Bauermann does not meditate on the natural world versus human civilization, per se. Instead it's boy meets girl as teenaged Mickey becomes enthralled by the eccentric Hope Randall, whose family, member by member, has prophesized unique variations of the Apocalypse—each member eventually going mad as their unique date for the end of the world fails to bring about said doom. Mickey and Hope become fast (yet ostensibly unromantic) friends as Hope's mother becomes increasingly obsessed with her own apocalyptic predictions. But all (literally) begins to fall apart as Hope discovers her apocalyptic "date" and rushes to solve the riddle involved, departing first for the West Coast and a clue in Seattle, then hopping a plane to Japan as the trail leads on. For both Mickey and Hope this results in a fractured sense of place, where the physical and mental ties they have with their surroundings crumble: for instance, the stadium in which they met is destroyed. The threat to their surroundings shows how both characters are linked to their environments and are actively engaged in living interconnectedly with them. *Apocalypse for Beginners* does not employ conventional notions of the environment as synonymous with the natural world to drive its plot. Instead Dickner challenges us to see the socio-natural and co-constitutive character of ecological threats.

The Rest is Silence and *Apocalypse for Beginners* pit their narrators against awkward recollections of adolescence ... the process of going through puberty is nothing if not a process of adapting to one's surroundings.

These texts trouble a dichotomous understanding of the relation between humans and the natural world, thereby complicating conceptions of the environment. By considering threats to both humanity and the natural world as inseparable, Dickner and Fotheringham echo much contemporary thought about ecological living, seen for instance in ways in which Timothy Morton advocates for a "think[ing] through ... [of] what we mean by the word environment itself" (3) by reminding us that "[e]nvironmentalism is a set of cultural and political responses to a crisis in humans' relationships with their surroundings" that are manifest in many ways (9). In their own fashion, Fotheringham and Dickner's texts demonstrate that we all, including the most enthusiastic environmentalists, live in and impact the world. That is, these works of fiction set up speculative narratives that employ a unique version of "crisis in humans' relationships with their surroundings" (Morton 9), but that take the implication further than nonfictional or critical work is able to by literally allowing their characters to persevere through adaptation to environmental conditions. In both cases, the original threat itself disappears through this realization of ecological symbiosis, however fraught. Essentially, both novels comment that humanity must be more self-critical about how it sees its processes and impacts on the world: we must not only realize that we are a part of the environment, but we must adapt to live with that knowledge in mind.

"What this moment means to you...."

Ben, the narrator of Fotheringham's novel, comments that "[f]or those left

behind ... silence is insistent, impossible to ignore, like bats in the ceiling and the arms of trees scratching against your roof" (307). Silence is framed as a resounding noise—it becomes a seemingly audible element of Ben's environment that is at once a reminder of the past and a future void to fill. Fotheringham's title, *The Rest is Silence*, is a call to his reader to interpret and understand the events and absences played out in his text, and then to adapt that conclusion for his or her own future use, in a new context. The events in the novel, and their abrupt end, hold meaning and emotional resonance that is anything but quiet. Ben reflects on the tides of love he has endured, stating, "[y]ou're stabbed with a poison-tipped foil after all that thrust and parry, all that love and effort and pain, and you have nothing more to say" (307)—but that seeming aphony will ultimately be replaced by new sound, whether it be another human's voice or the proverbial movement of dust in the wind. Silence is not the only possible conclusion to this narrative, for Fotheringham is referencing (and, in his title, quoting) Hamlet's last words in that Shakespearean tragedy: just before succumbing to his wounds from Laertes' "envenomed" (Bevington 1115, 5.2.320, 324) sword point, the doomed prince says, "I do prophesy th' election lights / On Fortinbras. He has my dying voice. / So tell him, with th' occurrents more or less / Which have solicited—the rest is silence" (1116, 5.2.357-360). For one thing, the folio has Hamlet add "O, o, o, o" after "silence," suggesting that "silence" is not the endpoint of speech or of action. While Dieter Mehl suggests that "[t]here is no more to say" (Bevington "Troilus and Cressida" 492, 5.10.22) seems like a common end-theme in Shakespearean tragedies, he also argues that the "O, o, o, o" of the folio is key (Mehl 183).[1] Furthermore, it is essential to note that the play itself does not end with Hamlet's words (see "Troilus and Cressida" as well).

In his article "The Rest is Not Silence," Maurice Charney comments that, "it is fairly conventional for the [Shakespearean] protagonist at his death to run out of time and to have a lot more to say than he can possibly fit in" (187). While Hamlet dies and goes silent, Fortinbras assumes his voice, and thus, the onus of what has not been said. Fortinbras is to rule instead of Hamlet (the heir) or another member of Hamlet's now-deceased Danish royal house, and Hamlet intends for Fortinbras to know the plot of his destruction not so that the Norwegian crown prince can act to avenge the doomed Danish prince, but so that he can learn of the events in order to adapt to a new environment and thus strengthen his own rule. In essence, Fortinbras now carries Hamlet's ability to speak on his own behalf (and on behalf of the realm). With Hamlet's final words, a choice is offered for a way forward—an option echoed in a similar reference to Hamlet's words made by Carl Jung in his note to Sigmund Freud ending their personal friendship: Jung writes, "[y]ou yourself are the best judge of what this moment means to you. 'The rest is silence'" (The Freud/Jung Letters 257). Jung means, in part, that nothing more need be said about the absolute nature of this ending, but that Freud must take what he can from the experience and move on. Jung's use of Hamlet's words can easily be applied to Ben's environmentalist message to his audience, and Fotheringham's obvious call to the reader of *The Rest is Silence*. Fotheringham urges his readers to ask themselves: what does the potential end of humanity mean to them, and what will the slow destruction of the environment mean in time?

Fotheringham gives his readers an option near the end of the novel: Ben claims that "[w]e won't survive. That's no reason to stop trying though, no reason to stop caring. There's nothing else we can do ... some things won't be lost" (322). Superimposing Jung's prefacing words onto the novel's message suggests that Fotheringham is implying that while doom may eventually overcome his speculative world, while the narrative might end

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inVoice

PORTIA PRIEGERT

i

mountains
soured with bitterroot
  stumps at half mast

ii

  barren logs
float in biers, await
  their final rites –
plywood and profit

iii

the wind
    tuneless
without branches
  to pluck

with the reader's closing of the book, the reader now has the voice to speak about these events in her or his own context, to learn and grow as the real world changes.

Adapting to a Plastic World

The process of voicing one's history, of narrating personal existence in a particular space and time, links narrative voice with narrative environment. In Dickner's novel, the singular source of narration is split as Hope Randall decamps from Mickey Bauermann's basement (a.k.a. The Bunker) in search of answers to her burgeoning prophetic obsession. The text itself formally adapts to this change as it begins to move between Hope's point of view and Mickey's as the former arrives in New York and the latter remains in Rivière-du-Loup. The narrative becomes plastic as the reader is forced between two different narrative timelines while still attempting, like the protagonists themselves, to retain the connections between them. As Hope and Mickey adjust to their respective changing environments, so too must the reader adapt to the diverging narrative texts.

Despite Mickey and Hope's narrative estrangement, Dickner's novel is careful to connect both characters to real-world locations: this realist mode essentially forces the reader to identify with the world he or she knows, despite the increasingly speculative arch of the story.[2] Like Fotheringham, Dickner voices a distinct message in his novel that is applicable beyond the text: human action is beholden to the limits of a given environment. Dickner begins this process by bringing the two teenagers down to earth in Rivière-du-Loup where they must find summer jobs and end up working at the Bauermann family's cement business. As the narratives split and Hope travels from place to place while Mickey continues on in situ, this realism is a perfect foil for the events that are out of place. In a sense, both *Apocalypse for Beginners* and *The Rest is Silence* anchor themselves so closely to the known, physical world because these settings link their readers to the narratives at stake: when the incredible happens, the reader is therefore much more capable of adapting his or her imagination to include such an unexpected scenario.

In *The Rest is Silence*, the plasticity of narrative echoes a more tangible discussion of commercialized plastic production and pollution as the reader's real, present-day world is held close to the speculative events that occur. In Benny's New York based graduate laboratory, she has been manipulating the Pseudomonas bacteria in secret until she finally manufactures "vials of recombinant bacteria" (266). She spreads "the mud of cells ... [on] plastic soda bottles of every brand and size she [can] find" (266) in a First Avenue food emporium. The next morning's result is a decimated soda aisle that sends her running from her crime (268). But Fotheringham's speculative idea of a plastic-eating bacteria does not seem so completely far-fetched, as plastics naturally break down into smaller components.

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In *The World Without Us,* Alan Weisman speculates about what human contributions to the world would linger and what would decay should we vanish tomorrow. Weisman explains that plastics (and related materials) decompose naturally into component "cylinders about two millimeters high" called "nurdles.... [which are] the raw materials of plastic production" (142). While the effect of Benny's mutated Pseudomonas is not a plague of nurdles, Fotheringham is clearly aware of Weisman's text: he even has the narrator Ben recall a "made up ... game [once played with his dad] ... called World Without, in which [they] imagined what the world would be like without, say, birds or cars" (116-17). Fotheringham and Weisman fear that we are doomed to wander a world littered with "[d]ozens of Tim Hortons coffee cups and plastic lids in the ditch. Beer cans. Six-pack rings. Soda bottles and water bottles thrown from speeding car windows" (Fotheringham 118). This plastic waste will travel, piece by piece, to places such as the North Pacific Subtropical Gyre—which oceanographers have labelled "the Great Pacific Garbage Patch" (Weisman 152)—eventually decomposing into nurdles littering land and sea. However, while both writers display environmentalist agendas that comment on what is currently happening in the world, Weisman only pretends that humanity vanishes overnight; he does not appear to suggest that this could happen, and imagines it in order to discuss the heritage we would leave the earth. Fotheringham's novel inserts a more tangible aspect of doom than Weisman's thought experiment: as theorist Fredric Jameson says, dystopia is "imminent disaster ... waiting to come to pass in our own near future, which is fast-forwarded in the time of the novel" (*Seeds* 56). While Weisman wants to cut humanity out of the equation, Fotheringham's text actually speculates that the future could incorporate both human action and a continued environmental degradation, and is thus more applicable to our potentially dystopian near-future.

The act of removal is directly related to the development of dystopian elements in both Fotheringham and Dickner's texts: the attempted removal of plastics in *The Rest is Silence* troubles the real world of the reader with the

destruction of taken for granted plastic products such as "plastic collection bags and tubing ... the coating on high-voltage power lines ... [t]he nylon in gas tanks ... [and] most computers" (42-43) and it is only after Hope is gone that things start to get really uncomfortable in *Apocalypse for Beginners*. But the posited removals are not the focus of each novel. *In Apocalypse for Beginners*, both Mickey and Hope must survive alone and adapt to their environments before they can finally be together. In *The Rest is Silence*, Fotheringham's creation of rampaging bacteria actually counters Weisman's removal of humankind with a speculative (and ultimately futile) attempt at the removal of commercial plastics: after the release of mutated Pseudomonas (and in an ironic twist), Benny's graduate supervisor, Melvin Leach, engineers "NuForm Plastix ... bottles...guaranteed never to biodegrade" (29). Rather than focusing on their chains of speculative outcomes, Fotheringham and Dickner devote the greater part of their texts to exploring how their characters adapt to each specific environment.

Environmental Adaptations

Speculative and environmentally threatening moments in each novel are of course also important factors in the narratives. But while Benny unleashes her bacteria, humanity adapts; likewise, Mickey and Hope survive their separation despite unbelievable events (such as people disappearing into thin air). Nonetheless, while the "End" does not occur in either text, the destruction of environment is a continuous process: rather than positing instantaneous destruction, the books resonate with contemporary theories of environmental concern that dovetail with what can be called a fear of slow apocalypse. In his use of the term "slow apocalypse," critic Andrew McMurry problematizes theories of a definite end to the world as we know it, asking, "[w]ere you expecting the sun to wink out, the heavens to open, the beast loose upon the earth? Or maybe you imagined a Ragnarok of more cosmopolitan origins: nuclear war, bioengineered plagues, alien invasion, supernova" (par. 1). He goes on to say that while we seem to always expect an end of catastrophic proportions, this expectation is merely an act of ignoring what we know to be true—that our world has been slowly wasting away for dozens of years.

To be sure, "slow apocalypse" and environmentalism have not always been discussed in the same breath: a concern for the fate of humanity, progressing at any speed, is not always articulated as a concern for the degradation of the environment, and a concern for environmental decline can omit a focus on humans. Indeed, the environment has historically delivered its own mass extinction events to animal life on Earth.[3] By questioning what people mean when they use the term "environment," science writer David Quammen critiques the isolation of any of the minute factors contributing to what could ultimately be "the big one, paleontological in scope" ("Planet" 163). But Quammen's "big one" does not necessarily refer to the result of a single event. He writes of the long view of time, of the paleontological view that categorizes five big events of mass biological extinction in the history of the planet: for example, he reminds us that "[a]bout 245 million years ago came the Permian extinction, the worst ever, claiming 95 percent of all known animal species and therefore almost wiping out the animal kingdom altogether" (162).[4] While causes for the Permian remain unclear, recent work suggests "multiple killers" (Hoffman 4) and estimates that "the extinction took place in [a period of at least] 100,000 years" (3). One the one hand, humanity has not experienced such destruction because the scale of time involved is so much larger than the span of a lifetime or even generational memory. On the other, we are constantly experiencing a panoply of deteriorating environmental conditions.

Human impact on the environment has clearly been a part of ongoing critical discourse and has often been inflected by a distinctly apocalyptic tone. When it comes to this environment, this highly publicized commentary—in the vein of Davis Guggenheim's now-famous film, "An Inconvenient Truth" (2006)—seems to neglect that the natural and human worlds are actually parts of the same whole.[5] Human pollution, for instance, is not affecting a separate environment. The problem is with the terminology itself: as critic William Cronon suggests, "[t]he time has come to rethink wilderness" since, "[f]ar from being the one place on earth that stands apart from humanity, it is quite profoundly a human creation ... and could hardly be contaminated by the very stuff of which it is made" (69).[6] As Cronon concludes,

> "[i]f wilderness can stop being (just) out there and start being (also) in here, if it can start being as humane as it is natural, then perhaps we can get on with the task of struggling to live rightly in the world—not just in the garden, not just in the wilderness, but in the home that encompasses them both" (90).

The natural environment has long been a deadly force in the history of this planet without the help of humanity. But we humans, in our anthropocentricity, seem to consider ourselves as either the source of possible apocalypses or the

Fotheringham and Dickner imagine events that could alter the state of both humanity and the natural environment, then deny those apocalyptic moments their complete arc of destruction.

ROAD'S END. PARRY SOUND, ON. SPRING 2012. Darren Patrick.

focal recipients of a given apocalyptic blow. As Mickey highlights in *Apocalypse for Beginners*, we fear destruction from many things (231-32). Mickey's list is a varied amalgamation of both literature and popular culture, and he is cognizant that that which surrounds us is as potentially as threatening as it is comforting.

Keeping apocalyptic literature in mind, I would like to extract a corollary from Quammen's commentary that the natural world has precipitated the greatest biological extinctions in the history of the planet: apocalyptic fiction has generally presented the futility of human survival in the face of global apocalyptic events, thus framing the destruction of the living world in solely human terms. But, in his critique of environmentalism, Quammen comments that,

> [t]hat clumsy, confused, and presumptuous formulation "the environment" implies viewing air, water, soil, forests, rivers, swamps, deserts, and oceans as merely a milieu within which something important is set: human life, human history. But what's at issue in fact is not an environment; it's a living world. ("Planet" 163-64)

On the surface Fotheringham's *The Rest is Silence* seems to be making just this error: Ben narrates from the viewpoint of his foray into living directly off the land in the backwoods of Nova Scotia while he recollects his time (a former life, really) as the young woman Benny in a research laboratory in New York. "[H]uman life, human history" is ostensibly the focal importance in Ben's retelling.

However, at the edges, and increasingly interspersing the moments of quiet, the "living world" waits, changing Ben constantly. The least of these changes is how the frigid waters of the Atlantic alter Benny's sex and literally bring Ben to the surface. Narrating Benny's story, Ben tells Art that,

> [a]s soon as I jumped I knew it was over. My Rubicon, the cliff, the death sigh. It was the shock of the cold that changed me and made me what I am now. Like an oyster, my sex was changed by the cold water.... The moment she ended, just as Benny hit that cold, cold water, was the moment my life began. I have not forgotten what came before—how could I?—but I am no longer her. I am me. (295)

Ben is recounting a history shaped by the environment into which it is thrust, but it is necessary to realize that this is a history inseparably entangled with the natural, living world. Benny became Ben through an ongoing connection with environmental conditions, and

changed with them; his surroundings are not merely a stage for displaying that change, but essential to having produced it.

Just as Benny's change to Ben is inextricably interconnected with the characteristics and processes of the natural world, so is that change fittingly interconnected with the narrative process of the text. At one level, the narrative threads themselves split the novel into segments that finally converge in the telling of the moment when Benny hits the cold water: this revelation demonstrates that both narratives were entangled all along, just as human existence and the natural world are intricately connected. But Benny's transformation into Ben is also embedded in the process of the narrative in ways that can only be understood through a full knowledge of the text. Before the Ben sex change is revealed, small hints are dropped about Benny's transformation. For instance, on Ben's second encounter with Art, the latter says that "'[his] body's just not what it used to be'" (19), to which Ben replies, "'I know what you mean'" (19). The comment feels slightly out of place at this point in the narrative since the reader does not yet know that Ben and Benny are the same person. Thus it appears that Ben is awkwardly attempting to create commonalities between himself and Art. Only the reader of the latter part of the text (post-Revelation, as it were) knows that the commentary holds more weight: Benny's body and then Ben's body undergo changes through immersions in the living world that are not only physical. Feminist theorist Rosi Braidotti explains that "[t]he body, or the embodiment of the subject ... is to be understood as neither a biological nor a sociological category, but rather as a point of overlap between the physical, the symbolic ... and the sociological" (127). The bodily "subject is [thus] defined by many different variables: class, race, sex, age, nationality, culture overlap in defining and codifying the levels of our experience" (127). The bodily subject adapts to the conditions of its environment as a means of survival.

This adaptation is, of course, delayed when the subject believes her or himself to be removed from environmental processes. *In Apocalypse for Beginners*, Hope Randall is unable to act as she knows she should: despite the evidence that her mother has been driven mad by an obsession with her own prophecy, when Hope receives her own first sign of prophecy—she finds an entire bin of ramen noodles that "ha[s] the same expiry date ... 2001 17 JUL" (85)—she can no longer cope with the normal, or at least stereotypical, existence of suburban teens living in contemporary North America. She cannot even fall in love; she cannot rest until she has an answer. Hope searches the world for explanations until July 17, 2001 passes, at which point she is able to continue living in the world. Her body immediately reacts as she fully adapts to the living world and she sends Mickey evidence of this fact: at the age of 29, Hope experiences her first menstrual cycle and is "no longer a medical mystery" (252). Hope believes that she cannot perform femininity until her environment permits her, but by seeking to keep herself separate from the natural process of who she is, Hope delays coming to terms with who she is.

Similarly, in *The Rest is Silence*, the post-Atlantic Benny/Ben initially struggles with what s/he sees as a gendered role. Ben, newly changed by his environment, believes he has to perform masculinity instead of merely living. For example, Ben first meets Art at a community dance. The performative, polarized roles of masculinity and femininity are heavily leaned upon here: while Ben is dancing with his friend Jen, the gruff, deep-voiced Art taps him on the shoulder to announce that he is "'cutting in'" (36). But Ben, having only recently become physiologically male, reacts instinctively and automatically "reache[s] for [Art's] hands" (36) as if he were the one being asked to dance. While Art assumes that Ben reacts from sexual orientation, he is in fact acting as he might have as Benny: a life spent performing the culturally accepted female role leaves Ben instinctively over-emphasizing gendered cultural expectations.[7] Clearly attempting to cover his crossover of gender cues, Ben says he "snorted, [and] pretend[ed] [he'd] been joking" (36), extending the performance further as he sits to the side afterwards as "[he] grunt[s] like a caveman" (36) upon being told that Art is "'really quite sweet'" (36). As Judith Butler says, "gender is a project that has cultural survival as its end" (*Gender* 139): Ben is deliberately and overtly masculinizing his response to match that of Art's hetero-centric attitude. By performing gender, Ben tries to enact change rather than living the change. But through sustained immersion into a living world in which he figures as a male with non-male genitalia, Ben becomes more comfortable with his hybridity, even entering into a relationship. As he says, "I laugh because what else is a guy with a cervix supposed to do" (313). His actions become less performative (and less unintentionally parodic) and more natural to his sense of self as he embodies the change his environmental conditions produced.

The Apocálypsis of Environment

In thinking about the environment as a living world where humanity and nature intersect, we could speculate that humanity might adapt into some other variation more gentle to its

the outside

FRANK FRANCES

a swing forward
out the window
and into something
breaking bough
into something
finding medicine
in pain and poison

environment, more compatible with the natural, living world.[8] Instead of positing this evolution, Fotheringham and Dickner imagine events that could alter the state of both humanity and the natural environment, then deny those apocalyptic moments their complete arc of destruction. In both narratives, the decision not to create a dichotomy between the human and the natural world, or to destroy one over the other, irrevocably links humanity and the environment without ignoring the possibility that both are in danger of being destroyed. For instance, Dickner's moment—his contribution to a changed vision of how apocalypse might function beyond the text—envisions the destruction of an environment of the living, social world rather than the destruction of the natural world. When reviewer Philip Womack critiques *Apocalypse for Beginners* by claiming that "[t]hings become implausible" (49), the implausibility is the point. First, personal apocalypse seems assured when Mickey goes to take an after-work dip in the pool that he and Hope used to frequent. Approaching the site, he knows that "[s]omething [is] not right—[he] sense[s] it even before rounding the corner of the arena and catching sight of the swimming pool" (196). The pool is being demolished and the destruction of this familiar cornerstone of his friendship takes further hope from Mickey: this loss of hope is intentional since Hope has literally disappeared. Next, Mickey discovers that the baseball stadium where he and Hope had met is "[a]blaze" (203) and not likely to be put out. Comfortable elements of his

Understanding the environment as a socio-natural co-production does not abrogate humanity's ecological responsibilities: indeed it brings them to the fore.

in Japan, Hope lives in a building "from the Edo period that … survived the 1923 earthquake, the 1945 bombing raids and the urban renewal wave of the 1960s" (186)—as well as American napalm tests before Hiroshima (190).[9] The building has existed in an environment of various apocalyptic events, but always persevered: in this sense, both subject and environment are interconnected. Dickner adapts the potential of environmental apocalypse into a phenomenon that is not focused on affecting either that environment or its occupants, but that affects both. In doing so, Dickner combines the natural and the human into the idea of what an environment can be, and thus reworks our understanding of the term.

Dickner best demonstrates his adapted use of environment by pitting his characters against a process of speculative and potentially catastrophic moments as the novel slides further into "an increasing tolerance for the unlikely" (the title of chapter 66.) While environment are changing with the disappearance of Hope, threatening his belief that he can properly live in these altered surroundings.

Dickner pushes personal apocalypse to the line of almost-apocalypse with an end-of-the-world-type of event as reality seems to break down to include the purely speculative. Mickey's neighbour, Madame Sicotte, exhibits all the classic signs of a newly-made zombie as she "walk[s] in the middle of the street, looking distraught, her bathrobe half-open" (207). When Mickey speaks to her, she "slowly turn[s] her head in [Mickey's] direction. Her face [is] ashen, her eyes red and the left side of her robe is streaked with blood. There [is] a gaping wound on her neck, a bite from a Rottweiler or something of that magnitude" (207). Upon being addressed, she "let[s] out a harsh groan" and "[swings] around … [to move] toward [Mickey], dragging her feet" (208), then switches her path toward some paramedics who pull up, and "struggle[s], drool[s], scratche[s], gnashe[s] her teeth, all the time emitting that inhuman groan" (209). As reviewer Ian McGillis explains, the novel attempts "shift[s] [that serve] a fluid melding of realism and fantasy, of interior and exterior landscapes.... When things go weird—as when a man steps into a porta-potty and never comes out—it's all right, because our suspension of disbelief has been earned." The zombification of Madame Sicotte is the ultimate moment in that speculative foray—at least in terms of potentially apocalyptic narratives—and also the moment that Mickey admits that "[e]verything [had been] unravelling since Hope had taken off" (209). The speculative moment puts Mickey's living in tension with his surroundings as the environment itself is threatened.

The moment of Mickey's encounter with Madame Sicotte is the moment in the novel where the potential environmental apocalypse permits Mickey to adapt to his changing surroundings. The novel does not end with a zombie apocalypse. Rather, the seemingly serious encounter fades from importance in the text. Both Mickey and his environment have survived this potential end instead of being destroyed by it: Mickey adapts as his surroundings do. To be sure, Dickner is not dealing explicitly with nature, the natural world, or environmentalism in his novel. However, the imaginative tools he employs to create an environment allows his readers to rethink the nature of the term environment itself. As speculation and reality intermingle, Mickey must adapt to events as they unfold. Through Mickey's adaptation, Dickner not only employs an environment synchronous with its components, but demonstrates how human and environmental survival are interconnected.

The Revelation, or a Coming-of-Age

Though both Dickner's *Apocalypse for Beginners* and Fotheringham's *The Rest is Silence* discuss world-ending events, neither sees an actual end of the world. Hope merely prophesizes that

the world will end on July 17, 2001, and Benny merely unleashes the bacterium. But the apocalypse itself never occurs in either text. Dickner focuses on apocalyptic fears, but his decision to break away from that moment where Madame Sicotte is staggering down the street at Mickey brings the text back to a sense of era and environment and not to an end-of-the-world event. Ian McGillis comments that "Dickner's choice of period is crucial. The late 1980s and early '90s is an era that somehow feels farther back in time than it really is, so it's salient to recall that today's mid-to-late thirtysomethings were the last generation to grow up in the shadow of the Cold War." Even Mickey realizes that "[he] grew up in a world obsessed by the apocalypse" (230). As McGillis explains, Dickner demonstrates that "we're shown that while we fret about the world at large, the reality right in front of us erodes bit by bit." Dickner clearly understands that environmental degradation is ongoing and directly affects us.

Similarly, Fotheringham reflects on the on-going nature of environmental degradation toward the end of *The Rest is Silence*. Ben, in commenting on his past as Benny growing up, makes the determination that "[o]ur heads have been in the sand since I was a little girl, when we first realized how good we had it and how we were screwing it all up. We knew what we were wreaking and it scared us, most of all because we couldn't see any way of stopping it" (320). Ben's message is environmentalist, but his words echo Hope's fear of maturing: his language separates the subject from its actions instead of carrying that construction past the need for binary oppositions. While Hope fears maturation because "a Randall who outlived his or her end of the world would then experience a mental breakdown and … usually end up in an asylum or suchlike" (9), life exists beyond that point of reckoning. Hope's belated physiological maturation at 29 proves that the apocalypse (or, her particular apocalypse) will not take place. The same realization is at the heart of Ben's musings at the end of *The Rest is Silence*. He understands that his release of the mutated Pseudomonas bacteria "will not stop our destruction of the world" (320), but the opposite is true as well: the bacteria will not destroy the world. Instead, "[t]he world will continue to change, probably for the worse, but it remains a beautiful place to be. And there is hope, people hold on to hope, even the most pessimistic" (320).

At the end of both novels, hope is still possible because adaptation is the key for how the socio-natural world moves beyond disaster.

At the end of both novels, hope is still possible because adaptation is the key for how the socio-natural world moves beyond disaster. To be sure, calamitous events have effected this world on such a large scale that entire populations have been wiped out. But both the natural world and humanity recover by adapting to the new environment and surviving. Human interaction with the natural environment, in the aggregate, certainly seems to be hastening potentially apocalyptic forces: for instance, David Quammen asserts that "[humankind's] activities are causing the disintegration … of natural ecosystems at a cataclysmic rate" (*Spillover* 40). Understanding the environment as a socio-natural co-production does not abrogate humanity's ecological responsibilities: indeed it brings them to the fore. From this perspective, adaptation becomes a strategy with which to intervene in socio-ecological destruction in order to imagine more just and sustainable co-productions. We need to stop thinking that an apocalypse is inevitable—that the slate will be wiped clean and the remnants can begin anew. Mickey Bauermann, in his late-twenties funk (before finally hearing from Hope again) suspects that "[w]e [have] been expecting the end of the world for so long that it [is] now part of our DNA" (Dickner 232). Instead of internalizing apocalyptic potential, we need to internalize the idea that we are intricately interconnected with our surroundings. Rather than polarizing civilization and pristine wilderness, we must change our practices to reflect the fact that we are constantly living within the environment. We must embody the revelatory change that is implied by Dickner and Fotheringham's speculations: the lessons of fiction like theirs must be adapted and put into practice beyond the imaginative world of the novel. As with Shakespeare's Fortinbras, there is life beyond the text, beyond our fears of complete doom: let us not be silent, nor cease to adapt with our living world.

Notes

[1] Mehl agrees with John Russell Brown that "[w]e have no idea what the four O's were intended to mean and still less notion of what Shakespeare thought about them" (Brown 28; Mehl 183). But whether the words indicate Hamlet's suddenly inarticulate state, or merely point to the idea that "the rest is [not] silence," clearly the sounds resonate for and extend Hamlet's more conventionally accepted last words.

[2] *The Rest is Silence* essentially accomplishes the same thing with paratextual elements since Fotheringham "holds a PhD in molecular biology and genetics from Cornell University" (Savory) and the novel contains what amounts to a post-script with a mock peer-reviewed scientific paper entitled "Creation and Characterization of a Polyethylene Terephthalate-Digesting Mutant of Pseudomonas aeruginosa" (323-24).

[3] The destruction of animal life can also be the result of decimated plant life: National Geographic writer Christine Dell'Amore comments on a recent article in the journal Science that theorizes "[the Permian] die-off had wiped out most life on Earth, including most land plants. The planet was baking, and life at the Equator struggled to survive. Plants gobble up carbon dioxide, which warms the planet. So without them, Earth became 'like a runaway greenhouse—it [started] to get out of control'" (Dell'Amore; Wignall as qtd. in Dell'Amore).

[4] The other major extinctions are the Ordovician (439 million years ago), which saw the decimation of "roughly 85 percent of marine animal species" (Quammen "Planet" 162); the Devonian (367 million years ago); the Triassic (208 million years ago); and the

Cretaceous (or K-T event), which "ended the age of dinosaurs" (162-63).

[5] The success of "An Inconvenient Truth" has, perhaps unfairly, always been distorted for me by the fact that it shares a scene with its wildly speculative predecessor, the Hollywood blockbuster "The Day After Tomorrow" (2004): both contain the same aerial shot of the ice floes and shelves visible upon a specific approach to Antarctica. Nevertheless, whatever the source, the theme of rapidly melting ice caps is a valid consideration: even Fotheringham incorporates their destruction when Ben warns Art, "'[y]our place will be underwater'" (187).

[6] Cronon cites the formation of American national parks and the historical influence of Christian beliefs about the sublime as part of the system that created an idea of the natural world that is separate and meant to be kept pristine.

[7] Ben explains that his sex-determining gene sequence is damaged: with "[o]ne nucleotide changed ... [he] wound up with a vagina and a small uterus by default. [He] looked like a girl, so [his parents] raised [him] like a girl" (303). But the truth is that "[he] never felt like a girl" (303).

[8] Like, for example, our ocean-diving inheritors in Kurt Vonnegut's *Galápagos* or Jacques Cousteau's "Life in a Billion Years." In Vonnegut's vision, future humans resemble seals, and in Cousteau's, "[a]n entirely new brand of amphibious human beings enters the sea: Homo aquaticus, able to resist pressures down to five thousand feet, to descend to this great depth freely, then later to surge to the surface with no decompression problem at all" (272).

[9] The character Merriam relates that, in one night the napalm bombing levelled "everything in forty square kilometres," "killed a hundred thousand people" and "left a million homeless. In military jargon it's called carpet bombing ... [and] flatten[s] the landscape down to carpet level" (190).

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"The Poem is the World"

Re-Thinking Environmental Crisis Through William Carlos Williams' Paterson

SARAH NOLAN

In his 2002 book *Greening the Lyre: Environmental Poetics and Ethics*, David Gilcrest argues that our attitudes toward the natural environment will only change as a result of "environmental crisis" (22). Although this prediction is apt, as evidenced by the rise of resistance to environmentalism over the past two decades, it implies that such environmental crisis must physically devastate the Earth before action will be taken.[1] Such a model of apocalyptic environmental activism, however, has proven to be ineffective. Many contemporary readers are turned off by this brand of environmentalism because it predicts disaster without the hope of preventing it. As such, I would like to think about how Gilcrest's claim can be examined through the poetry of William Carlos Williams, one of the best-known American poets of the twentieth century. In this paper I will argue that ecopoetics in William Carlos Williams' long poem *Paterson* allows crisis to occur in a text, creating both a material and potentially allegorical poetic experience for the historically situated contemporary reader. I will consider how language becomes material in the text and argue that the physicality of the words, which appear to be formally and structurally impacted by the natural disasters described in the text, may function as allegory for present-day environmental concerns. I will argue that *Paterson's* power as both a material and allegorical text may resonate in ecopolitically meaningful ways.

William Carlos Williams is often seen as a proto-ecopoet. Writing well before the rise of mainstream environmentalism in America, Williams' integration of ecological concern into his poetry is unparalleled by his contemporaries. In *Paterson*, one of Williams' later book-length poems, the union of the imagined poetic world and environmental crisis is most evident. Divided into five books and set in Paterson, New Jersey, a neighbour to Williams' hometown of Rutherford, *Paterson* uses language as a physical force that is impacted on the page by the environmental catastrophes that plagued Paterson. In other words, Williams integrates real disasters into his imagined poetic world and allows the text's meaning to be altered, confused, and sometimes destroyed by them. As the text is impacted by the poetic space and the historical documents embedded within it, readers are encouraged to intertwine the real and the poetic realms. In doing so, they become aware of the ways in which *Paterson* acts both materially and allegorically. Its material significance emerges through words that stand in as physical objects, thus demonstrating the interconnections between the real and the imagined. The book's allegorical power lies in its potential to evoke the historically situated reader's responses to recent environmental disasters through the formal and linguistic havoc of poetic crises. As such, *Paterson* gains ecopolitical power by encouraging readers both to acknowledge the prospect of utter devastation through textual catastrophe and to allow the allegory to inform his or her interpretation of environmental threats.

Allegory has long been used as a tool for inspiring social and political change. In *Sense of Place and Sense of Planet: The Environmental Imagination of the Global*, Ursula Heise considers allegory as a method of gauging perceptions of the environment and its future. Looking specifically at how the image of the blue planet has influenced contemporary environmental attitudes, Heise highlights the value of allegory to inspire such change. She argues that "the influence of the image of the Blue Planet floating in space is palpable in ... conceptualizations of Earth as a spaceship with finite resources for survival, an allegory that highlights the sophistication and fragility of this extremely complex system as much as its self-enclosure" (25). In this sense, a particular representation of the Earth reveals something that we had not

previously considered. Like Heise's Blue Planet, Williams' *Paterson* raises awareness about the frailty of the real world through an artistic project. In relation to environmentalism, allegory seems to be an effective strategy because it reveals the importance of change without becoming admonitory.

Despite the presence of allegory in environmentalist discourse, critics have not read Williams' work as an allegory for current environmental crises because it was written before most pressing contemporary environmental issues became evident. To be clear, this article does not argue that Williams attempted to write an allegory of problems that were not yet realized during his time, but rather that the book's themes of environmental destruction and crises may be useful in understanding the devastating consequences of the contemporary environmental crisis and in promoting personal and political change. Although most scholars have not yet read *Paterson* as an allegory, many have pointed toward both Williams' concern for the environment and the connections between the physical and the poetic worlds in *Paterson*. This critical attention signals the poet's profound interest in the environmental disasters that occurred during his lifetime and allows for further extrapolation of how the historical events represented in the book might inform today's reader as he or she confronts new waves of environmental devastation. Lawrence Buell and Lee Rozelle have interpreted Williams' conflation of man and city as a shift from traditional anthropocentric writing to an ecocentric poetics in which the human body and the environment interrelate.[2] According to Buell, the poet's "desire to break down fixed boundaries between man [*sic*], poet, [and] dog" reflects not only humanity's union with nature but also the ability of language to integrate human and city, nature and poem, material reality and text (115). The blurring of this distinction between the physical world and the poetic realm in *Paterson* and its material and allegorical impact on the reader who is thoroughly grounded in their own social, material, and historical context, allows him or her to more readily register the ongoing environmental problems that face the world today.

This fusion of the physical with the poetic environment in *Paterson* is largely explained by understanding how Williams fits within the genre of ecopoetics, a branch of nature poetry that typically uses unique formal structures to convey a lived experience in text. In a seminal text on ecopoetics, *Sustainable Poetry: Four American Ecopoets*, Leonard Scigaj argues that ecopoets "record moments of nondualistic inhabitation in specific places where the experience occurs only when the noise of human ratiocination, including the fabrications of language, has been silenced" (8). Scigaj explains ecopoetry as a record of oneness between humans and their environment, in which reason, language, thought, and even the self are "silenced" (8). The ecopoem is, then, a place in which a moment in the materiality of the world is preserved. J. Scott Bryson, on the other hand, positions ecopoetics more in line with allegory when he argues that it is overtly political. In *Ecopoetry: A Critical Introduction*, Bryson observes that ecopoetics involves "an intense skepticism concerning hyperrationality, a skepticism that usually leads to an indictment of an overtechnologized world and a warning concerning the very real potential for ecological catastrophe" (5-6). While Scigaj argues that ecopoetry is primarily about expressing an experience with as little distortion from human language and thought as possible, Bryson contends that it is a mode of activism. In fact, ecopoetry is often somewhere in between these two poles. Ecopoets frequently seek environmental change, but they do so through radical new poetic forms and perspectives on nature. This is perhaps best illustrated in Williams' writing as he deploys words as material objects, but in doing so, creates a poem with real-world implications. In earlier short poems like "The Wind Increases" and "Rain," and in one of his most popular later poems—*Paterson*—language attains a materiality as Williams uses words as objects and allows natural forces to shape the spatial arrangement of the text. Through the poetic world, the reader sees the effects of disasters at the local level. Rather than witnessing a flood that obliterates an area too far removed from the viewer's psyche to warrant real concern or action, the poem demonstrates the utter destruction brought on by disaster within the more accessible poetic world that the words create. For readers who are experiencing the ways in which climate change has been environmentally and socially devastating, *Paterson* may inspire ecopolitical awareness and action.

The ecopoem is, then, a place in which a moment in the materiality of the world is preserved

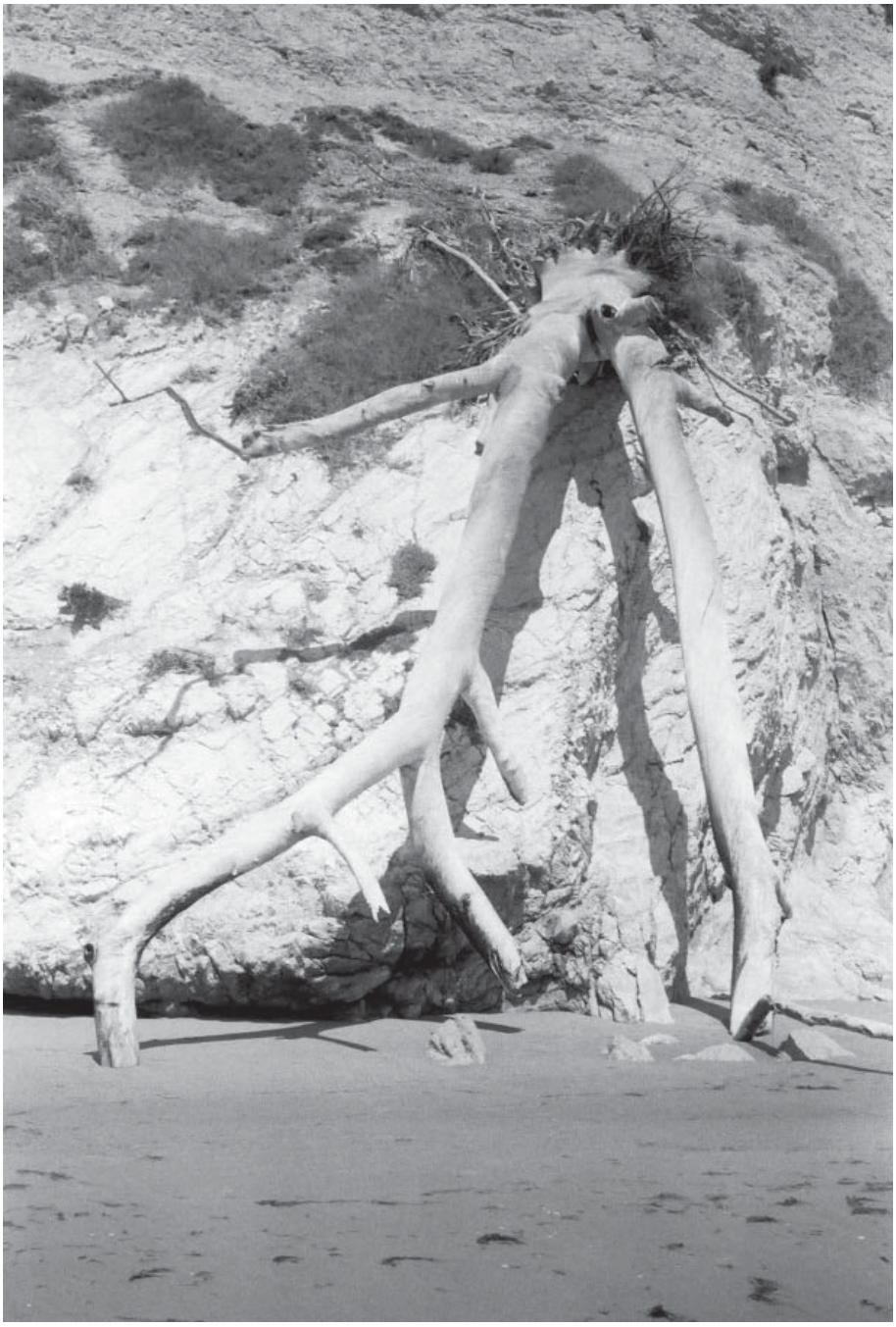
The interplay between the poem and its physical environment is represented both contextually and formally. In *Paterson*, poetic language and landscape become interrelated as reality is expressed through the imagination and the two forces begin to act upon each other:

> The province of the poem is the world.
> When the sun rises, it rises in the poem
> and when it sets darkness comes down
> and the poem is dark (Williams 100)

The "sun rises" and "sets" on the poem, as it sets on the planet. The poem, then, is not only a space for words on the page, but it is a place in itself, a "world" of imagined reality. In M*etaphor in the Poetry of Williams, Pound, and Stevens*, Suzanne Juhasz observes that "the use of metaphor in this passage makes the point, too, by insisting that the world of the poem is the real world ... The poem stands halfway between the mind and the external world" (219). As the

external and imagined worlds become fused within poetry, they begin to interact. When the sun "rises" and "sets" on the poem it makes the poetic world "dark." The relationship between the poetic and physical worlds continues throughout "Book Three" of *Paterson*, making the boundaries between the physical and the imagined increasingly indefinable.

Throughout the book, pieces of the physical world, including documents from both the poet's personal collection and historical records of the city, are placed within the poem. In "William Carlos Williams: Value and Form," Jim Philip observes that in *Paterson* "we are offered a variety of other American languages, varying from local histories to political tracts to personal letters" (67). The included documents are not the poet's imaginative creations but are records of individual experience and history. The inclusion of these materials places a piece of real-world experience within the world of the poem, once again conflating the real and the imagined. This deliberate obfuscation allows for critical thinking around the assumed realness of historical documents and the potential realness of the poetic realm. The direct impact of reality upon language is demonstrated in "Book Three" with the environmental crises of wind, fire, and flood, which appear to impact the words on the page. The placement of historical detail is important to consider. In *William Carlos Williams: A New World Naked*, Paul Mariani explains that "Williams was only eighteen when fire destroyed nearly all of old Paterson, and what was left of the city the swollen, frenzied Passaic had swept away a month later when the spring thaws came" (583). This historical detail demonstrates that even the natural forces of the poem are based on the personal experiences of the people living in Paterson.



RETURN. Elana Santana.

Words become more than symbolic representations; they become physical things when the language and form of the poem are shaped by the elements described within the text. This progression toward a language of physicality is explicated as a destructive fire runs through section two of "Book Three" and begins to alter poetic language:

> like a mouse, like
> a red slipper, like
> a star, a geranium
> a cat's tongue or –
>
> thought, thought
> that is a leaf, a
> pebble, an old man
> out of a story (Williams 117)

In this particular poem, the speaker departs from a language of pre-established meaning. Although Williams begins with a simile that equates the object with a symbolic meaning, the poet then grants those objects material substance. "Thought" becomes a "leaf," or a "pebble" rather

than simply taking on the likeness of those things. In "The Ecopoetics of Perfection: Williams Carlos Williams and Nature in *Spring and All*," Josh Wallaert observes that "[F]or Williams the word is no longer (only) a sign, or a point of reference to the natural world. It is a thing in itself, a thing to be picked up, looked at, taken apart, laughed at and embraced in its materiality" (81). In this sense, as the fire grows more uncontrollable and more destructive, the words move closer to becoming the things themselves rather than representations of things.

The physical role of the words on the page becomes most significant in the final section of "Book Three." The speaker begins with a warning about the materiality of language: "It is dangerous to leave written that which is badly written. / A chance word, upon paper, may destroy the world" (129). In "A Poetics of Marginality and Resistance: The Objectivist Poets in Context," Burton Hatlen observes that the "word" has the power to "destroy" because Williams strives "to treat words not merely as symbols that stand in for things, but as things in their own right" (43). The word acts upon reality precisely in its role in the physical existence of the poem. This physicality continues to be represented in environmental terms: "Write carelessly so that nothing that is not / green will survive" (Williams 129). Thus, the poet advocates for the survival of all that is "green." Nature is not a subject of Williams' writing but a function of his poetics; for him, words are not merely representational but they are physical pieces of the natural world—pieces that can be changed, damaged, or even destroyed by natural disaster. Such materiality of words allows their destruction through environmental catastrophe in the poem to act as an allegory for the reader—as the material words in the poem are obliterated by disaster, the physical world is revealed as equally vulnerable.

The interrelated existence of imagination and reality is confirmed with the arrival of the flood in "Book Three" of *Paterson*. As Dr. Paterson, the physical manifestation of the city that the poet refers to throughout the book, reads about the flood there is "a counterpart, of reading" which causes the written language to impact physical reality (130). This breakdown of the binary between the real and the imagined is exposed when reading about the flood and causes it to become a force in the poem and again as the poetry is integrated into the documents that surround it. Mariani argues that "the imagination is illuminated by the unstable processive activity of encountering the living gist of the matter" (583). Although these encounters with "living" matter occur throughout *Paterson*, this section integrates reality and imagination through immediate responses between the poetry and the prose. One such instance occurs in the third section of "Book Three" as the prose document states: "'When the cat comes,' said he to his wife, 'do you point out just where it is, and I will shoot at that spot'" (133). The poetry directly responds to this prose: "What a picture of marital fidelity! Dreaming as one" (133). The intermingling of the prose documents taken from the city's past and the poet's own life with the imagined poetic world reveals the ways in which the two worlds can inform one another.

This interconnection of the real world and the poetic realm becomes a central concern of this section when Dr. Paterson's experience of reading about the flood begins to impact the poem: "the water two feet now on the turnpike / and still rising" (135). His reading continues to build until the speaker announces that the

Hi, open up a dozen, make
it two dozen! Easy girl!
You wanna blow a fuse?
All manner of particularizations
to stay the pocky moon :
January sunshine ·
19[49]
Wednesday, 11
(10,000,000 times plus April)

—a red-butted reversible minute-glass
loaded with
salt-like white crystals
flowing
for timing eggs

flood is "undermining the railroad embankment" (136). The water is, in fact, "undermining" the entire form of the poem. In the most radical formal shift of *Paterson*, the environmental crisis of a flood takes complete control over the text.

The primary point of interest in this section is its dramatic form. The "water" that has been building as Dr. Paterson reads finally becomes not only a linguistic force, but also a formal one. The words move beyond their linguistic associations and become unique in their placement upon the page. Just as the flood disrupts the "railroad embankment," it demolishes the structure of the page. Juhasz observes that "[Book Three] is the book of water and flood, which descends to the mud of the river bottom, not only to the divorce of language from object but to the depths of inarticulateness" (232). As words become enmeshed with the forces of nature, they are completely removed from their symbolic associations and begin to embody the force itself. The flood acts upon the physical structure of the words on the page just as a flood would act upon the physical environment.

Following the flood, the poem is disrupted when Williams inserts a letter and an historical record of water levels at a Paterson well (139). Although many things remain after the flood, everything has been radically altered: "When the water has receded most things have lost their / form. They lean in the direction the current went. Mud / covers them" (140). As the objects of Paterson lose their form they take on a new existence. In Williams' poetics, this shift in language is important because it illustrates his ongoing struggle to refresh words and escape the limitations of pre-established usages. However, I am more interested in how the flood's dramatic affect on the text allegorizes the environmental issues that we face today. In *Can Poetry Save the Earth?* John Felstiner asks the title question and concludes, "[f]or sure, person by person, our earthly challenge hangs on the sense and spirit that poems can awaken" (357). Poems awaken by making the reader aware of something

that he or she might otherwise miss. The utter destruction of form and structure that is acted on the poetic world by the flood highlights the extent to which an environmental crisis could overturn everything with which we are familiar. The flood, like the other environmental crises presented in *Paterson* acts as an allegory for the ways in which those potential crises could devastate our lives. Felstiner argues that this is possible in poetry specifically because it "hold[s] things still for a moment, [and] make[s] us mindful of fragile resilient life" (357). As *Paterson* holds the devastating effects of the flood still, crisis resonates with the reader in new ways whether or not they have experienced such a crisis firsthand, potentially inspiring the reader to enact preemptive change.

With this representation of the devastating effects of environmental crisis, the book also engages in a number of warnings regarding the acceptance and acknowledgment of crisis, which resonates with contemporary ongoing debates over environmental concerns like climate change. Both the fire and the flood, in their destruction, are forces that catalyze change rather than bring apocalypse. The flames do not eliminate matter, but instead the flames:

> Of which we drink and are drunk and in the end
> are destroyed (as we feed). But the flames
> are flames with a requirement, a belly of their
> own that destroys – as there are fires that smolder
> smolder a lifetime and never burst
> into flame (117)

Pointing to the destructive elements of the fire, the speaker highlights its ability to slowly destroy. As he points to "fires that / smolder" but "never burst / into flame," the speaker emphasizes the ability of a disaster to devastate without ever reaching a point where it demands attention. By never bursting into flame, the fire smolders undetected, continuing on its path of destruction.

To a contemporary reader, the ability of the fire to go ignored resembles the lack of attention given to the global warming crisis. In *Merchants of Doubt*, which addresses the seemingly mysterious inattention to climate change, Naomi Oreskes and Erik M. Conway quote from a United States Supreme Court hearing in which Justice Antonin Scalia misspoke "at one point referring to the stratosphere when he meant the troposphere" (2). When a lawyer corrected him, Justice Scalia responded, "[t]roposphere, whatever. I told you before I'm not a scientist. That's why I don't want to deal with global warming" (qtd. in Oreskes and Conway 2). This moment reveals the appalling ambivalence to climate change that endures, especially in the most economically powerful nations. As the fire smolders in the poem, the speaker states: "You lethargic, waiting upon me, waiting for / the fire" (Williams 126). The addressee here is identified as lethargic and unwilling to take action. Instead, he or she awaits a solution while the fire moves closer. By pointing toward the lunacy of inaction, *Paterson* inspires the reader to consider his or her own choices as it juxtaposes the continued destruction that accompanies the willful ignorance to issues like climate change, evidenced by Justice Scalia's dismissal of the problem as too difficult, with the possibility of positive change.

When read as an allegory, *Paterson* reveals the kind of devastation that the world is already experiencing and will continue to face in the future. Unprecedented storms and flooding have distressed much of the world and strange weather occurrences have become almost commonplace, yet many people continue to sit stagnant, waiting for a solution to appear with little effort and no inconvenience. Today, more than ever, the effects of climate change are becoming irrefutable. In Australia, the summer of 2012-2013 brought record high temperatures and an "ongoing heat wave that has sparked highly destructive wildfires, has forced weather forecasters to add new colours to their weather maps to indicate when the mercury rises above 50C" (McGrath). In the poem, such catastrophic environmental events bring not only the poetic destruction of comprehension, form, and individual words, but also words that act as physical objects. However, reading the book's environmental crises allegorically allows us to recognize present day environmental concerns more readily and highlights the losses that lie ahead if we allow Gilcrest's prediction of crisis to come true. The prevailing culture of environmental apathy in consumer society makes the threat of mass environmental devastation increasingly imminent. However, Williams' material ecopoetics throughout *Paterson* allows the reader to imagine the consequences of such inaction and to rethink the ways in which they are implicated in environmental crisis. While *Paterson* is not inspired by a personal environmental activist impulse, the poem demonstrates Williams' interest in the poetic movements of objectivism and imagism, and draws upon modernist literary traditions by investigating the boundaries of the physical and the imagined with particular attention to ecological thought. *Paterson* shows us that waiting for environmental apocalypse to force the world "to begin to begin again," is an unsustainable model for the planet's future (Williams 140). For the contemporary reader Paterson provides a unique material and allegorical experience. While Williams was aware that "a chance word, upon paper, may destroy the world" his poem gives the reader many words upon many pages that may do just the opposite (129).

Notes

1. This resistance to scientific evidence of environmental issues is discussed at length in Naomi Oreskes and Erik Conway's 2011 book, *Merchants of Doubt: How a Handful of Scientists Obscured the Truth on Issues from Tobacco Smoke to Global Warming*, which examines how and why people resist global warming.
2. In *Writing for an Endangered World: Literature, Culture, and Environment in the U.S. and Beyond* (2001), Lawrence Buell argues that Williams utilizes "metaphor to convey symbiosis between human, biological, and artifactual, and ... learned

how to turn people into trees or flowers or beasts and back again, to turn a tumbling sheet of paper into a man and back again" (110). In this sense, Buell observes a link between material reality and text in Paterson. Lee Rozelle builds upon Buell's argument in *Ecosublime: Environmental Awe and Terror from New World to Oddworld* (2006). He rightly argues that "[c]entral to Paterson is the idea that body, place, and city interrelate directly—the molecular, the natural, and the urban" (Rozelle 44). Rozelle views the city as an extension of self and thus the integration of man and city is a shift toward a sustainable ecological poetics.

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The Imaginations of Humanitarian Assistance

A Machete to Counter the Crazy Forest of Varying Trajectories

OMER AIJAZI

The United Nations cited the 2010 monsoon floods in Pakistan as the largest humanitarian crisis in living memory. The environmental catastrophe effected twenty million people and highlighted the complicated relationship between nature and society. The lives of extremely vulnerable groups such as subsistence farmers and unskilled labourers were severely disrupted by this catastrophe, forcing national and international observers to confront the uneven distribution of harm based on social factors in the wake of environmental disaster. In this visual essay, I explore the slow raging violence of floodwaters, which I witnessed as a humanitarian worker, and narrate a point of departure from social interventions after environmental collapse. The accompanying counter narratives draw the viewer's attention to the politics of representation. They reveal the dominant discourses of domination of the Third World subaltern as enacted by humanitarian agencies. By juxtaposing photos and text, I invite the viewer to engage in a generative encounter that takes note of the tensions between disrupted communities and systems of international assistance.

I draw inspiration from Spivak's concerns about representation. Spivak argues that "speaking for," as political representation, and "speaking about," as portrayal representation, suppresses the actual "voice" of communities (275-276). I suggest that by allowing spaces for counter-narratives, the photographer (in this case, myself as the humanitarian aid worker) and the photographed (communities undergoing flooding) are simultaneously present in these visual landscapes. This allows the possibility of voice even where and when words are not actually spoken. The (counter) narratives emerging from these visuals allow the photographer and the photographed to participate, "not only in the act of photography, but also in the political space that the photograph elicits" (Azoulay 60). Additionally these visuals collectively form a "non-deterministic encounter between human beings not circumscribed by the photograph" (Azoulay 223). Therefore I reinstate photography as an open and generative encounter in which others (those outside the transaction) may also participate as interested political spectators. While the spectator is transfixed within his/her subjective position (Von Wright 413), Arendt suggests that it is possible for the spectator to take into account the perspectives of others (in this case "others" refers to disrupted Pakistani communities). Arendt labels this act of solidarity as developing an "enlarged mentality" and defines the action of thinking with an enlarged mentality as training "one's imagination to go visiting" (Arendt 43).

Escobar argues that aid workers are positioned within the dominant development discourse and their agendas are consistent with singular notions of modernity and progress (6-12). The humanitarian encounter is essentially framed within a particular dichotomizing paradigm defined by relationships of difference (Kapoor 42). While these asymmetries may be intentional and political, humanitarian providers often model interventions in ways that may also inadvertently reproduce power relations. Gardner and Lewis argue that "discourses of development are produced by those in power and often result (even if unintentionally) in reproducing power relations between areas of the world and between people" (153). Therefore lives disrupted by natural disasters are never defined in their absolute condition but are always in relation to those who have power over them (Fassin 4).

In this visual testimony, I reclassify the aid worker as a troubled body suspended in a space of epistemological plurality, diversity, and difference. Aid workers are confident in their abilities to redress social disrepair via the technologies of social interventions. As

made apparent in the following pages, humanitarian technologies are not always consistent with visions of social reconstitution determined by disrupted communities. Such an awareness and recognition challenges the very notion of social interventionism. Therefore I provoke the following pressing question: how does the humanitarian aid worker, destabilized by his own positionality and self-reflexive awareness, reconcile with re-building in a world of difference?

I captured these visual landscapes during fieldwork with an international humanitarian organization in the months between December 2010 and March 2011. The photographs are set in the numerous villages of Thatta District, Sindh, Pakistan. In this district alone, the flooding disrupted an estimated 87,403 lives.

VIOLENCE OF WATER

Description

Haider Ali shows the level of flood water in his village by pointing at the water line on his mud and brick house. Standing waters languished for a few days to several months—slowly destroying belongings, homes, lives, and livelihoods.

Counter-narrative

Climate change is rarely a spectacular display. Yet its effects rupture communities, particularly those who are already rooted within relations of inequity. Through this image, I challenge the viewer to rethink environmental disasters as slow violence, "a violence that is neither spectacular nor instantaneous, but rather incremental and accretive, its calamitous repercussions playing out across a range of temporal scales" (Nixon 2). Therefore, the challenge in such a rethinking is primarily representational: "how to engage the representational, narrative, and strategic challenges posed by the relative invisibility of slow violence" (Nixon 2).

I ask the following questions: What forms of stories and images can adequately represent this elusive yet persistent violence? How can these representations draw the attention of decision makers toward gradual but certain environmental collapse?

Das's ethnographic investigations of violence in post-partition India in 1947 and Sikh massacres in 1984 reveal that communities experience violence within the rituals of mundane life. She notes that violence is also dismantled within the terrain of daily life. Das asserts that after any form of social disruption, life is reclaimed and recovered "not through some grand gestures in the realm of the transcendent but through a descent into the ordinary" (7). I argue that it is important for activists, practitioners, and policy makers to recognize the everyday as a venue of profound knowledge and insight. Communities perform extraordinary acts of everyday social reclamation to negotiate overwhelming experiences of lived violence. These micro-actions must also be captured in representations of gradual environmental collapse.

THE DE-POLITIZATION OF HUMANITARIAN AID PRACTICE

Description

A brick kiln dominating the skyscape of a village community submerged in water.

Counter-narrative

In rural Pakistan, the looming brick kiln is a space for bonded labour, generational servitude, and systemic oppression. During the flood response, humanitarian actors did not challenge structural determinants of oppression such as the brick kiln. Humanitarian agencies distributed food rations to communities and enrolled them in cash for work schemes that had little impact on their long-term rehabilitation and offered limited connection with their life worlds.

The insufficient imagination of disaster recovery is connected to the deliberate de-politicization of the humanitarian space by humanitarian actors. The discourse of neutrality is rooted within the Red Cross movement which maintains that all humanitarian actors must remain independent of any political agenda to allow aid agencies unencumbered access to victims of war and natural disasters. Mouffe and Ferguson argue that by promoting a depoliticized universalism and purposely omitting political narratives, relations of power and interests are concealed and remain politically unchallenged. Humanitarian actors' attempts to "separate out the political" from humanitarian action are therefore inherently interested (Kleinfeld 174). The insufficient agenda of neutrality prevents humanitarian actors from embracing their roles as political actors. Thus, social interventions are reduced to risk-averse, calibrated executions of North-South resource transfers.

The photograph deviates from the usual way disaster landscapes are captured. Chouliaraki asserts that photographs often dislocate the context by concentrating on the immediate suffering of communities, creating emergency situations that emerge out of the immediate. Aid organizations claim the right to sweep in and abruptly sweep out of disaster zones by creating narratives that depict situations as needing rapid and life-saving intervention. By de-historisizing and de-contextualizing promotional imagery, aid organizations exploit aspects of the human condition while legitimizing their own interventionist agendas.

EDUCATION FOR ALL / EDUCATION FOR NONE

Description

A government-built and managed primary school damaged by flood waters.

Counter-narrative

This primary school is the only built concrete structure in the village, an architectural contrast from the surrounding mud landscapes. Outsiders to the community, such as aid workers or government officials, may regard this building as a symbol of salvation or a sign of encroaching civilized urbanity. Through this image, I aim to highlight the colonization of rural landscapes by technocratic solutions.

As discussed by King (377-391), educational priorities in most developing nations, including Pakistan, are shaped by the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and the Education for All (EFA) agenda. These have culminated in Pakistan's leading education planning document titled the "National Plan of Action on Education for All Goals 2001-2015." This document aims to achieve universal primary education by 2010 for males, and 2015 for females. The strategy is simplistic at best: expand and invest in primary education. However investment in primary education is often limited to investments in physical infrastructure. Organizations like UNESCO and UNICEF evaluate success and progress by counting the number of students enrolled.

This means that issues such as low teaching quality, disconnection between educational curriculum and rural realities, or the systematic exclusion of rural students from higher education are scarcely highlighted. Similarly, statistical data does not adequately capture everyday student struggles around schooling (Brock-Utne). Contradictions between local realities and global aspirations are rendered particularly visible after large scale social disruptions reminding the viewer of the unfinished project of education in the developing world.

THE DYSFUNCTIONS OF EMPIRE

Decription

A sack of emergency food rations donated by the Canadian government resting in a distribution warehouse of an aid organization.

Counter-narrative

I use this visual to signal the interdependencies that exist between donors, aid organizations, and affected communities. Aid giving is strongly tied to the preservation of borders and processes of nation building. By crafting aid as a gift, the donor constructs a national identity while simultaneously crafting a discourse about the other (Kapoor 78). Self-construction is integral to this practice of gift (aid) giving (78). National emblems, such as flags, imprinted on food packages, pamphlets, and construction materials publicize the donor's benevolence and sovereignty to multiple audiences transforming these neutral items into political objects (87). The relationships of dominance expressed via aid giving are crucial for the continued preservation of the humanitarian actors involved.

Charitable donations from benevolent countries can be in the form of cash or kind. In-kind donations need to be navigated within the complex system of logistics as the items change hands, continents, countries, and organizations. Should food rations be bought from Canadian farmers and supplied to locations thousands of kilometres away via an elaborate system of logistics (meaning that a bag of wheat might end up costing 50-200 times more than its original price in disaster zones, for example) or should they be purchased locally with the intention of revitalizing local economies? Polman terms aid that must be used to purchase products and services from donor countries as "tied aid" or "phantom aid" (197). She writes that up to 60% of all official aid from donor countries, including Canada, is such aid (197).

I use this image to provoke the viewer to reconsider the emerging discourse of human security, bio politics, and food insecurity. The image reveals to the viewer the manner in which the regulation and resolution of hunger is framed as a global priority for mitigating regional conflicts and preserving international security. Food aid is the place where the noble intentions of humanitarianism intersect with the perverse imaginations of Empire.

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Book reviews

Climate Change – Who's Carrying the Burden?

Edited by ANDERS SANDBERG and TOR SANDBERG. Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, 2010. $35.00

Reviewed by MIRANDA BAKSH

Chilly Climates - Who's Carrying the Burden? is a collection of eighteen intriguing narratives on current global environmental issues, written by activists, scholars, and professionals from diverse disciplinary backgrounds. Ranging from the Green Party's Elizabeth May to York University professor Anders Sandberg, the array of perspectives presented enables the reader to analyse environmental issues from various angles. This allows the audience to use these perspectives to help sculpt and broaden their own personal opinion. Global environmental dilemmas are highlighted, which not only broadens the reader's understanding of climate change concerns but both sparks their curiosity and allows them to question the issues further.

The stories of those who most acutely suffer the effects of climate change are represented in the pages of this text through investigations of numerous environmental events that have occurred—particularly those that have taken place in marginalized communities — around the world. Contributors to this text highlight the stories of those who suffer the effects of climate change most profoundly, ensuring that the prolonged stresses with which they contend are uncovered and understood. Exemplary contributions include Sonja Killoran-McKibbin's description of an efficient citizen-based conference in Cochabamba, Bolivia; Tanya Gulliver's insights on the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina; and Tor Sandberg's interview with renowned environmentalist, Vandana Shiva, who discusses current issues in India related to the increased use of fossil fuels.

Other important concepts for students in environmental studies introduced in this text include environmental refugees, presented by Aaron Saad; reproductive justice, explored though Noel Sturgeon's ecocritique of the animated film *Happy Feet*; and the survival of Inuit populations, as explored by Jelena Vesic. Each contribution to this volume not only makes the reader aware of the appalling situations that people face around the world as a result of climate change, but also motivates the reader to think about climate change issues more critically, interrogating how they might be implicated in unjust practices. By providing examples of past environmental events as well as new approaches to tackling environmental concerns, the writing in this text encourages readers to look for solutions and to educate others about climate change and environmental justice issues.

This book offers an alternative to the conventional belief that climate change is an issue we will only face in the distant future. Instead, the papers in this text argue that climate change is an existing problem and that its consequences are irreversible. The urgency, seriousness, and international implications of climate change are made clear in this text as the authors collectively argue that we need to shift our thinking to include both solution centred approaches and preventative measures to deal with the dire consequences of the planet's changing climate. In addition, previous failures in addressing environmental concerns are illustrated, such as the unsuccessful United Nations conference in Copenhagen (COP15). Accordingly, the reader is exposed to the inadequate process by which global environmental issues are frequently dealt with, and the unwillingness of the parties who are primarily responsible to take meaningful action.

This collection of critical writing not only informs and enlightens the reader, but is also inspirational. *Chilly Climates - Who's Carrying the Burden?* makes evident that climate change is truly a global phenomenon, and that we are entering a time of global inequity. Each contribution to this compilation presents a unique approach to climate change research where readers are encouraged to appreciate the diversity of each bias, as they are derived from personal experiences of the authors. This book is recommended for students, educators, and citizens who wish to explore alternative perspectives on climate change, which do not lose sight of its victims.

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City Farmer: Adventures in Urban Food Growing.

By LORRAINE JOHNSON. D. & M. Publishers Inc., 2010. $19.95

REVIEWED BY MICHAEL CLASSENS

While the title of Lorraine Johnson's most recent book may seem like a disjointed juxtaposition, an ill-conceived utopian fantasy, or both, it is only fleetingly so. Despite the considerable and colliding pathologies of the contemporary food system—adequately summarized in the book—|Johnson forcefully argues that small-scale 'city farmers' are the vanguard of an emerging transformation of the contemporary food system. True, in the aggregate, city farming remains more prefigurative than productive, however Johnson's choice to see the socio-political and ecological benefits of small scale food production is itself an affirmative political maneuver. She's acutely aware of the formidability of re-inscribing the contemporary food system with more just and sustainable attributes, but also understands that starting in the here-and-now is perhaps the only rational choice in the face of such a challenge.

Given that ours is an increasingly urbanized world, the 'here' is more often than not an apartment balcony, a neighbourhood park, a building rooftop, a front yard, or a back alley. These are the interstitial—and not inconsequentially, un-commodified—spaces of the urban condition. Johnson's trick is to reveal the potential in these sometimes derelict, often unassuming spaces, while she concomitantly urges us to re-imagine our own relationship to them. We are all urban farmers, she assures us, and the city is our fertile, however discontiguous, field.

Part 'how to' manual, part philosophical tract, and part urban adventure travel log, *City Farmer* reads like a contemporary reorientation guide to our cities-as-farms. And like many good mash-up genres, the strength of this book is in its breadth. Johnson takes us on an extensive urban-ag tour and introduces us to urbanites-cum-farmers tilling everything from yards, balcony containers, and community garden plots, to the less conventional back alley parking spaces, underground bunkers, and even floating barges. Along the way, she punctuates these real-world stops with conceptual and instructional vignettes providing everything from step-by-step briefs on how to start a community garden and how to build a compost bin, to lists of plants that thrive in low-light conditions and instructions detailing how to make wine and jelly from foraged urban edibles.

While not the explicit focus of the book, issues of urban policy provide an inevitable backdrop to Johnson's exploration. Of course policy in the neoliberal city cleaves toward that which best facilitates the circulation and accumulation of capital, tending to favour the spectacle of high-rise condo developments and gentrification over designations of land use for non-commercial, nano-scale farming. Through the realm of urban policy, then, local production of food is brought into conversation with the global forces of commercial real estate development and transnational circuits of capital.

While Johnson only sparsely addresses this confrontation head on, the tension flows throughout the book. Her critique of neoliberal urbanism is rarely more incisive on this front than in her treatment of the contradictory posture urban policymakers tend to take in response to urban foraging, guerrilla gardening in neglected urban spaces, and back-yard chicken raising. These are the frontiers of urban food production, propelled in effect (though not necessarily in spirit) by self-reliant individuals. But if self-reliance really is what drives neoliberal policy, then why aren't governments enabling urban food production? If neoliberal efficiency is predicated on deregulation and less government, then why are city governments so heavily regulating the front and back yards of taxpayers?

This is not to suggest that Johnson pursues these lines of argument to their often reactionary ends. She comes nowhere close to defending the frighteningly de rigueur sentiment of contemporary conservatism. On the contrary, she positions the ongoing regulatory resistance to forms of extra-legal urban agriculture as a way to expose the disconnect between the rhetoric and actual practice of neoliberalism. Every time a permit to grow food on a neglected parcel of land is denied, private ownership, individualism, and speculative land investment are reified as the operatics of urban governance. Here Johnson steers us toward a corollary—that urban agriculture can indeed confront the many tendencies of neoliberal capitalism.

Transforming the contemporary food system and fundamentally altering the ways our cities are organized is, as Johnson readily admits, hefty weight for a radish, tomato plant, or box of home-grown lettuce to carry. Yet her careful documentation of the dozens of projects, policy initiatives, organizations, and individuals tirelessly working at the intersection of social transformation and urban food growing, somehow stunts the audacity of the symbolic weight she bestows upon the spoils of urban agriculture. If Paul Robbins is right, and manicured lawns (along with their considerable political economy) have played a crucial role in inscribing the modern (sub)urban cultural subject, Johnson reveals the possibility of something altogether different. It's not just a material transformation of the neglected, marginal, or simply ignored urban sites with the potential to act as micro-farms that Johnson is calling for. Instead she asks that we think about the kinds of social and cultural change farming cities would demand of us, and dares us to consider what kind of subjects we'd become if, those among us that are able to, got our hands a little dirty.

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Haiti's new Dictatorship: The Coup, the Earthquake and the UN Occupation.

By JUSTIN PODUR. Pluto Press, 2012. $29.95

REVIEWED BY NATALI DOWNER

The controversial book *Haiti's new Dictatorship: The Coup, the Earthquake and the UN Occupation* is a significant contribution to current discussions around globalisation, political economy, development, post-colonialism, and human rights. Podur's work provides welcome insight and a critical perspective on the struggle for sovereignty in modern day Haiti. The author takes the reader through Haiti's political history, beginning with the slave revolution of 1804, which established Haiti as the world's first independent black Republic. The historical account grounds the reader in Haiti's reality—the ongoing battle for economic and political sovereignty within its borders. Since its independence, Podur argues, the successful slave revolt in Haiti has been an ontological challenge to those who would seek to impose colonialism; it is the challenge they posed in 1804 and today.

Podur sections the book into historical eras, including the Duvalier dictatorship followed by Haiti's popular movement and Jean-Bertrand Aristide, which act as signposts for his study. In Podur's analysis of the second and pivotal coup against Aristide in 2004, he argues that the new dictatorship was imposed and solidified under the control of the U.S., Canada, France and later, the United Nations. Specifically, under the guise of the Responsibility to Protect doctrine (the new iteration of the "White Man's Burden",) western countries employed the old colonial pretext in order to "overthrow Haiti's elected government and replace it with an internationally constructed dictatorship." Drawing on Michel-Rolph Trouillot's concept of dictatorship, as the use of violence and centralization of power, Podur adds "impunity" to the description as it characterizes how violations by the regime and its supporters go unpunished. Podur categorises the new international variety of dictatorship as a "laboratory experiment in a new kind of imperialism."

Podur discusses the contradictory role of the domestic and international media as contributing to the success of the coup. He argues that the media misrepresented the details surrounding the kidnapping and replacement of a democratically elected prime minister with the dictatorship of the United Nations. He describes the "media disinformation loop" as part of the coup infrastructure by shaping beliefs and actions. Podur's work is an attempt to publicize an alternative to corrupt mainstream reporting.

The media did not question the legitimacy of the coup regime or the United Nations' Stabilization Mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH). Podur argues that the occupation of Haiti by the MINUSTAH occurred under peculiar justifications. He reports that, "in Haiti an internationalized military solution is being offered for what even the UN admitted were problems of poverty and social crime that occur in many places." He argues that violence and murder rates are higher in other countries, including the Dominican Republic, Guyana, Trinidad, and Jamaica. The mainstream rationale for UN occupation in Haiti has evaded inquiry.

Podur's analysis of the coup extends to the role of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in the new dictatorship. In Haiti, Podur argues, NGOs perform tasks that belong in the hands of a functioning public service, accountable to the people. Instead, NGOs operate in the interests of their donor countries—"offering wealthy countries a morally responsible way of subcontracting the sovereignty of the nations they exploit." Making NGOs "less non-governmental and more 'over governmental'" and revealing the determinant role of external intervention in corrupting sovereignty.

NGOs are responsible for the bulk of disaster response in Haiti. Podur's analysis of the earthquake of 2010

reveals a stunning account of how well-meaning donors are part of a feedback loop that (in part) finances a corrupt system. This system of local elites, international enterprises, and NGOs acts with impunity as they create and reinforce vulnerabilities because funds are controlled by western technocrats and corporations (particularly in times of crisis). Rather than geographic factors, Podur argues that social factors are the major cause of Haiti's horrific death toll following disasters. The decapitation of Haiti's government and the subsequent program cuts demobilizes the public service while it enables the rise of the "republic of NGOs" and the UN Dictatorship. As Haiti lacks the sovereignty to orchestrate its own disaster response, the failure to rebuild after the earthquake marks the failure of the new dictatorship and not the people of Haiti.

Podur illustrates the character of the new dictatorship allowing readers to understand the truly gruesome nature of the post-coup occupiers. Podur's report leaves the reader spinning from accounts of murder and corruption; page after page the reader experiences Haiti's grim reality in the new imperialist regime. While the lists of events in the book become disorienting to read, they serve to demonstrate the brutality of actions performed by western nations, the Haitian elite, and armed factions.

In this book Podur argues that Haiti is engaged in a historical struggle for democracy against external control. Podur's work on Haiti reveals how a multilateral violation of sovereignty is organized and carried out, and exposes the "new face of dictatorship in the twenty-first century global order." However, the larger project of this book suggests a call to action. Podur recounts the illegitimacy of the occupation and its atrocities so that widespread recognition can be achieved and policies changed. Podur challenges us to consider what it truly means to help Haiti, to face the consequences of our "do-good" attempts at aid and instead aim to assist Haitians to reclaim national sovereignty.

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The Biopolitics of Mixing: Thai Multiracialities and Haunted Ascendancies.

By JINTHANA HARITAWORN. Ashgate, 2012. $99.95

REVIEWED BY AEDAN HOAR

The Biopolitics of Mixing builds upon Thai histories that were collected during Haritaworn's qualitative research on experiences of Thai multiraciality in Britain and Germany. The narrative reaches back over a decade and maps out the connections and conclusions of Haritaworn's journey with race and the question: "What are you?" or "Where do you come from?" By giving voice to the themes that emerged from the Haritaworn's research and interviews, this book maps a social environment that is created through the politics of mixed-raciality and its effect on our interpretations of mixed-race bodies.

The book explores the celebratory nature of post-race politics which seeks to erase the history of colonization, replacing memories of oppression with a vision of a new age in which empire was simply a necessary stepping stone towards a future beyond race. Haritaworn makes the important argument that narratives of mixed-race and "tolerance" are used to drive campaigns of humanitarian militarism against "intolerant" cultures. In the process, this book exposes unsettling historical connections between the celebration of mixed-raciality as resulting in stronger genetics, and the racist, white-supremacist culture that was the driving force behind eugenics. Haritaworn's research confronts the hegemonic narratives that effect the way that ability, gender, and race are represented in transnational politics of the body.

Through weaving in histories from their interviews, Haritaworn traces connections in theory and geopolitics that let the reader critically examine the driving forces behind what makes mixed-raced people characterized as beautiful or inferior, celebrated or marginalized. The book draws on an extensive bibliography and historical examples of how mixed-raciality and multiculturalism have been used by racist cultures to re-invent state histories as progressive, inclusive, and liberating. Demonstrating the ways that mixed-race bodies are used to support hegemonic racist and heterosexual norms, this book is an eye-opening exploration of the ways that multiculturalism and "inclusivity" are being used to promote the current geopolitical power structures in neoliberalism.

The Biopolitics of Mixing is wonderfully written and extremely reflexive in tone making it an essential resource for any reader who wants to critically examine the intersections of race, class, gender, sexuality, and disability. This book spends a great deal of time establishing Haritaworn's positionality, mapping out the logic behind the research in a very accessible way. One thing that adds a great deal to the book is the use of footnotes, which seem to predict questions that the reader might have, adding yet another layer to the depth of the analysis. Haritaworn achieves an in-

depth exploration of the construction of mechanisms used to place individual bodies within categories of race, gender, or sexuality. *The Biopolitics of Mixing* reveals how systemic racism is normalized in everyday interactions in multicultural society. The book takes readers on a journey where the assumptions we (and the author) take for granted about the intersectionalities of race, gender, poverty, ability, and sexuality are challenged in an effort to give voice to "that which had been left out" of Haritaworn's original research model. In this way the reader is informed by Haritaworn's personal journey that walks the book's conclusions back through connections that were made over more than a decade of research. *The Biopolitics of Mixing* makes room for important discussions that challenge readers to reflect upon our own conceptualizations of the body and our relationship to geopolitical narratives. This book is a must read for students interested in Thai-histories, multi-raciality and multiculturalism, social-justice research, biopolitics or intersectional analysis.

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Celebrity Humanitarianism: The Ideology of Global Charity.

By ILAN KAPOOR. Routledge, 2013. $44.95

Reviewed by SONJA KILLORAN-MCKIBBIN

The back cover promised a "hyper-critical porpoise with a purpose," and though I wasn't entirely sure what to expect, I was not disappointed by this book. In *Celebrity Humanitarianism: The Ideology of Global Charity*, Ilan Kapoor cleverly and humorously attacks the celebrity charity peddlers, the "coffee-pusher philanthropists," and the NGO superstars who dominate our conception of international aid. Using a Žižekian framework to carry out a refreshing ideology critique, Kapoor prods the assumptions implicit within celebrity humanitarianism to reveal its ideological basis and the underlying interests such actions serve. While Kapoor focuses on only a handful of notorious celebrity humanitarians, he insists that the individual celebrities in his book are merely some of the more colourful examples of a broader trend. Most importantly, Kapoor avoids the trite and banal and refuses to return to the all too easy suggestion that something is better than nothing. Instead, Kapoor's text skilfully addresses the role of celebrity charities by systematically deconstructing the manner in which they justify and support the very inequities that they purport to challenge.

By asking "Do they know that it's Christmas?" almost thirty years ago, Band Aid set off the growing role of celebrities as an authoritative voice on global poverty. Yet the issue is under-discussed and rarely critiqued, making Kapoor's cutting and insightful analysis long overdue. The book begins by exploring the hyper-celebrities who claim to speak for, witness, or represent poverty. Using Bono, Bob Geldof, Madonna, and Angelina Jolie as examples, Kapoor demonstrates how such celebrity charity work is used for individual profit and to mask the root causes of inequality. By offering the opportunity to do good through consumerism, such work feeds into the capitalism's elusive promise of jouissance—or the eternal promise of enjoyment. Celebrity humanitarianism showcases the excessive lifestyles of celebrities, supporting their individual brand but also glorifying and marketing their excessive lifestyles as the ultimate promise of capitalism. Celebrities in this way are used to embody a justification of the current economic system at the same time as they claim to work to change it. Support for the decadence of the rich glorifies the inequality on which capitalism is based and obfuscates the very conditions that create poverty. Moreover, these stars act as witnesses and authorities on the poverty of the third world and situate third world subjects as victims, perpetuating the issues of inclusion and exclusion within such actions.

Next to come under Kapoor's gaze are the private foundations established and maintained by billionaires, such as the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and George Soros' Open Society Institute. Calling such endeavours "decaf capitalism," Kapoor argues that they allow people to continue with business as usual and that "it is charity that helps decaffeinate capitalism. It masks and purifies corporate ills, acting as a countermeasure to socioeconomic exploitation." Foundations highlight the benevolence of corporate moguls and effectively hide the mechanisms through which they obtain such wealth. These acts keep people engaged and complicit with the corporate order and effectively depoliticize systems of inequality while undermining public mechanisms to improve social conditions and situating private initiatives as appropriate solutions.

Finally, the book addresses those non-governmental organizations that have situated themselves as types of celebrities in their own right. From Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) to Oxfam, such charities not only seek celebrity endorsements but have also developed their own personae and brand. Kapoor suggests that such charities, in many ways, represent an element of commodity fetishism in our late capitalist culture—distancing ourselves from elements of poverty while at the same time providing us with an outlet for our anxieties about global injustice. By constructing a "permanent emergency regime" these charities

thrive on the spectacle of disaster and demand immediate action. They cultivate an anti-theoretical activism by suggesting that crisis makes immediate action essential—and unquestionably benign—leaving no time for analysis and portraying such reflection as inactive and necessarily detrimental. In this fashion such organizations encourage us to allow them to do the work for us, effectively delegating our beliefs to commodities. The absence of theorizing and the urgency of action effectively glosses over the manner in which the forms of new humanitarianism that such charities engage in are neoimperial endeavours. The complicity of NGOs in "humanitarian war" is made invisible by the parade of spectacularized emergencies.

While Kapoor points to some of the ways the celebrity charity regime might be transformed, he is also quite clear that these reformist proposals are limited. They result in nothing more than a compromise with the system and do not address the depoliticizing tendencies of such international action. Drawing again on Žižek, Kapoor calls for an uncompromising politics that demands revolutionary change. While I welcome Kapoor's call for a revolutionary overthrow of the current global order and his rejection of sanctioned resistance, I must admit that I was left feeling somewhat unsatisfied by his insistence on revolutionary inaction. What of confronting antagonisms through unsanctioned resistance? While Kapoor advocates the imagining of new political possibilities that are distinct from inaction, as they ultimately must be followed by the material work for their creation, Kapoor deals with a lot in his last few pages, and perhaps that is part of the problem. While he urges the reader to see the opportunities in the contradictions it is difficult not to wish for more than a few pages to bring together his revolutionary proposal. Nonetheless, this could also be seen as Kapoor not letting his readers off the hook for their own complicity by pushing them to consider these tendencies beyond the bound pages. Overall Kapoor has crafted an engaging and entertaining text that deftly employs an all too familiar and visible phenomenon to bring to light the ideology embedded within it.

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Health and Sustainability in the Canadian Food System: Advocacy and Opportunity for Civil Society.

Edited by ROD MACRAE and ELISABETH ABERGEL. UBC Press, 2012. $95.00

Reviewed by CRYSTAL LAMONT

Think about what you did today. What did you eat? Food is such an integral part of everyday life, but how often do you think about food as more than a means to stop that annoying grumble in your stomach? *Health and Sustainability in the Canadian Food System: Advocacy and Opportunity for Civil Society* takes a look into Canadian food systems and the ineffective and unresponsive policies of the Canadian government regarding food, as well as the agricultural challenges of today and tomorrow. The contributions to this edited volume strive to illustrate how effective and sustainable food policies can be achieved in the Canadian food system. This book explores different food problems and policies to advance the notion of civil society organizations (CSO's) as powerful vehicles to invoke the sort of changes Canada requires in its food systems.

Health and Sustainability in the Canadian Food System engages with issues surrounding food and agricultural policies in Canada using an interdisciplinary approach. This volume brings together scholars in geography, sociology, political science, and environmental studies, as well as authors who work in the field of food policy to explore the role of advocacy and CSO's by drawing on these diverse perspectives and experiences.

Many of the authors use case studies from other environmental struggles as a way to explore effective advocacy in working toward change in Canadian food policy. Overall, the reader comes to appreciate the role CSO's can, and ought, to play in achieving a policy paradigm shift in Canadian food and agriculture.

Contributors in the first section of the book investigate and challenge the current food and agriculture policy paradigms in Canada by questioning the very problematic ways that farming practices and the purpose of agriculture are discussed in dominant public narratives. Scholars Grace Skogstad and Alison Blay-Palmer argue that the current dominant view of farms is resource production. Commonly, farming and agricultural practices are conceptualized solely as means to provide food to people. As a result, policies tend to focus on maximum production strategies while failing to support sustainability measures or to facilitate environmental protection. Skogstad and Blay-Palmer both suggest how policies can be shaped to enable long-term and systematic changes that view farming within a larger context of public good and the multiple benefits farms provide to communities in addition to food. One illustration of a successful paradigm shift discussed in this section and used in contrast to Canada's current food and agricultural model is the European Union's multifunctionality paradigm. The principles of multifunctionality place

agricultural activity in terms of its social functions, incorporating the production of food with land conservation, protection of biodiversity, sustainable management of natural resources, and the socio-economic viability of rural areas.

The second part of the text explores various lessons that can, and have been, learned from the Canadian food system and the role of advocacy in this area. The case studies used as ways to illustrate the role of civil society organizations in Canadian food and agriculture policy in this section include examples of agricultural biotechnology, agricultural pesticide use, Canada's Action Plan for Food Security, breastfeeding promotion campaigns targeted at mothers, obesity in children, and the new generation of farmers. In each of these examples, CSO's and advocacy groups have worked either to pressure government to make changes in food and agriculture policy or have acted independent of government in attempts to achieve positive change. Although these are diverse issues, the lessons learned have resonance with current and emerging food and agricultural issues. Several of the case studies illustrate the gaps between government action and policies with CSO initiatives and goals, and the lack of integration and participation of civil society into any decision-making processes. Other authors in the volume view the role of CSO's as crucial to achieving food policy changes that governments have not been willing to provide, such as food banks and health promotion in schools. Whether working in tandem with or in opposition to government policy, the role of civil society organizations in seeking sustainable food and agriculture policy is crucial.

Indeed, the overall message presented by each author in this book is that, if unprompted, governments will not do what is necessary in order to promote health and sustainability in the Canadian food system. Therefore, there is immense pressure upon CSOs and advocacy groups to challenge the current paradigms and demand change. Incremental, short-term results need to be replaced by holistic, long-term, system-wide sustainable initiatives. This book is valuable to environmentalists, for although the contributions to this text concern food and agricultural policies, the same themes and challenges are persistent in any environmental struggle. *Health and Sustainability in the Canadian Food System* makes clear the link between meaningful policy change and civil society organizations, requiring that we all hear the grumble in our stomachs as a call to confront the ways that we are directly implicated in the Canadian food system and to consider what change we might affect with our participation in civil society organizing.

CRYSTAL LAMONT is a Masters Candidate in the Faculty of Envioronmental Studies at York University. Her research focuses on Canadian environmental policy, specifically natural resource and energy policy.

The Natural City: Re-Envisioning the Built Environment.

Edited by INGRID LEMAN STEFANOVIC and STEPHEN BEDE SCHARPER. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2012. $35.00

Reviewed by MADISON VAN WEST

Editors Ingrid Leman Stefanovic and Stephen Bede Scharper believe that there is something unnatural about our cities, but not for the reasons you might think. It is not the concrete, or the high-rises, or the cars—at least not necessarily. Our cities are unnatural because individuals within them lack a sense of place. They lack a spiritual connection to the built environment, and they lack an understanding that our cities are as much a part of the ecological system as trees and meadows. The task of *The Natural City: Re-Envisioning the Built Environment* is to begin the work of reconnecting the urban to the natural so that individuals might live more fulfilling and sustainable lives. It is an essential read for anyone involved in city-building, or for city-dwellers looking to gain a new perspective on their role in the urban environment.

Each of the volume's four sections takes a different theoretical approach to "natural city." The first section lays the philosophical groundwork for the reader to better understand the natural/urban divide and the pervasive sense that cities are somewhere other than nature, as are the humans that live within them. This viewpoint is an appropriate starting place for the collection, and a theme that runs throughout, as it informs how we approach environmental issues generally and how we build our cities specifically. Technocracy and expert opinion reigns in planning and architecture, usually at the expense of meaning and purpose within our urban spaces that responds to our needs as human beings. Peter Timmerman, in his chapter, is not surprised by this separation, as our literary and philosophical history has been preoccupied with the urban and human mastery over the natural for some time.

In the second section, we see that temples, mosques, churches, and other sacred spaces are not the only built forms imbued with spiritual meaning. In the natural city, the entire city would reflect and respond to the spiritual needs of its inhabitants. This does not presume a single cosmological understanding shared by all, but instead a common understanding that the city is more than its physical composition. Vincent Shen explains that this is logical for Daoists, who view the Dao as being embodied in the way we create and navigate cities. In his chapter, Stephen Scharper argues that religion is not a necessary element of this shift. He cites

Aldo Leopold's land ethic as means to facilitate this ideological shift in urban planning to focus on the integrity of the biotic community rather than solely the human community. This perspective is, in my view, among the most important contributions to literature on urban planning, which is notably lacking in discussions of religion and spirituality in the built environment.

The third section focuses on the role of society in the natural city, both as creator and inhabitant, with an eclectic group of authors whose connection to one another is not always readily apparent. For example, Richard Oddie's work on acoustic ecology and soundscapes in cities bumps up against Trish Glazebrook's ecofeminist approach to engaging the cityzenry (her term to distinguish residents of a city vs. residents of a nation). This section also offers an international perspective through John B. Cobb, Jr.'s case study of China and Shubhra Gururani's of India, which describes the challenges of sustainable development and the impact of development on society's ability to access the necessities of life, respectively. The chapters in this section may appear dissimilar, but they find common ground in themes of politics, citizenship, quality of life, and urban development.

To close, the final section considers praxis, or the linking of theory and practice in building the natural city. William Woodsworth makes explicit the fact that the City of Toronto is built on the land of Aboriginal communities, and their legacy remains in both the artifacts still under the ground and the modern architecture that channels the spirit of the city's former inhabitants. Complementing this historical approach, Robert Mugerauer writes of city-building that reflects ecological systems within nature; healthy cities with clean air and soil and thriving watersheds. Above all, this section highlights the fact that cities are always changing, and it is our responsibility to guide that change in a way that reflects the human need for creativity, the biological need for adaptability, and the need for all life to thrive into the future.

Though only a few chapters were mentioned above, it is clear that this collection is truly interdisciplinary; offering works in the field of philosophy, anthropology, theology, engineering, architecture, and more. This breadth exposes readers to many fields of study that may not always be in communication with each other. The virtues of interdisciplinary learning have been widely espoused, especially in environmental studies, but in this context it is especially important, as the task of creating the natural city will involve the collaboration of entire societies. The collection also manages the challenge of discussing complicated concepts in clear language, successfully balancing a depth of analysis and accessibility of concepts.

So, what does the natural city look like, and how do we get there? In the end, the answer is not explicitly clear. What is clear from the collection is that to discover the natural city requires a paradigm shift; a change in thinking that will compel individuals to view urban environments not as cold or devoid of life, but instead as natural spaces full of inherited spirit, meaning, and potential. This collection starts the dialogue on reintegrating the natural with the urban; an essential topic for the survival of human and non-human alike.

MADISON VAN WEST is a Masters in Environmental Studies and Planning Candidate at York University. She is currently working to uncover new forms of public involvement and community engagement in city building.

Contributors

Omer Aijazi is a PhD candidate in the Department of Educational Studies, University of British Columbia. His research examines place based, community led micro processes of social repair after natural disasters. His research destabilizes dominant narratives of humanitarian response and disaster recovery and offers an alternate dialogue based on structural change.

Jessica Marion Barr is a Toronto artist, educator, and PhD candidate in Cultural Studies at Queen's University. Her interdisciplinary practice includes installation, found-object assemblage, drawing, painting, collage, and poetry, focusing on forging links between visual art, elegy, ecology, ethics, and sustainability. "In October 2013, Jessica curated and exhibited work in Indicator, an independent project for Toronto's Nuit Blanche.

Gary Barwin is a poet, fiction writer, composer, visual artist, and performer. His music and writing have been published, performed, and broadcast in Canada, the US, and elsewhere. He received a PhD in Music Composition from SUNY at Buffalo and holds three degrees from York University: a B.F.A. in music, a B.A. in English, and a B.Ed.

O.J. Cade is a PhD candidate in science communication at the University of Otago, New Zealand. In her spare time she writes speculative fiction, and her short stories and poems can be found in places like Strange Horizons, Cosmos Magazine, and Abyss and Apex. Her first book, *Trading Rosemary*, was published in January of 2014 by Masque Books.

Kayla Flinn is a recent graduate from the Masters in Environmental Studies program, with a Diploma in Environmental and Sustainable Education from York University. Originally from Nova Scotia, Kayla is both an artist and athlete, spending majority of her time either surfing or trying to reconnect people to nature/animals through art she produces.

Frank Frances is a playwright, poet, music programmer, artistic director, community arts and social justice activist, former jazz club owner, and believer of dreams of a greater humanity. Frank majored in English, creative writing, post colonial literature and theory, drama and theatre, and is a graduate of York University.

Sarah Nolan is a PhD candidate at the University of Nevada, Reno, where she studies twentieth and twenty-first century American poetry. Her dissertation considers developing conceptions of ecopoetics and how those ideas contribute to poetry that is not often recognized as environmental.

Darren Patrick is an ecologically minded queer who lives in a city. He is also a PhD candidate in the Faculty of Environmental Studies at York University in Toronto, Ontario.

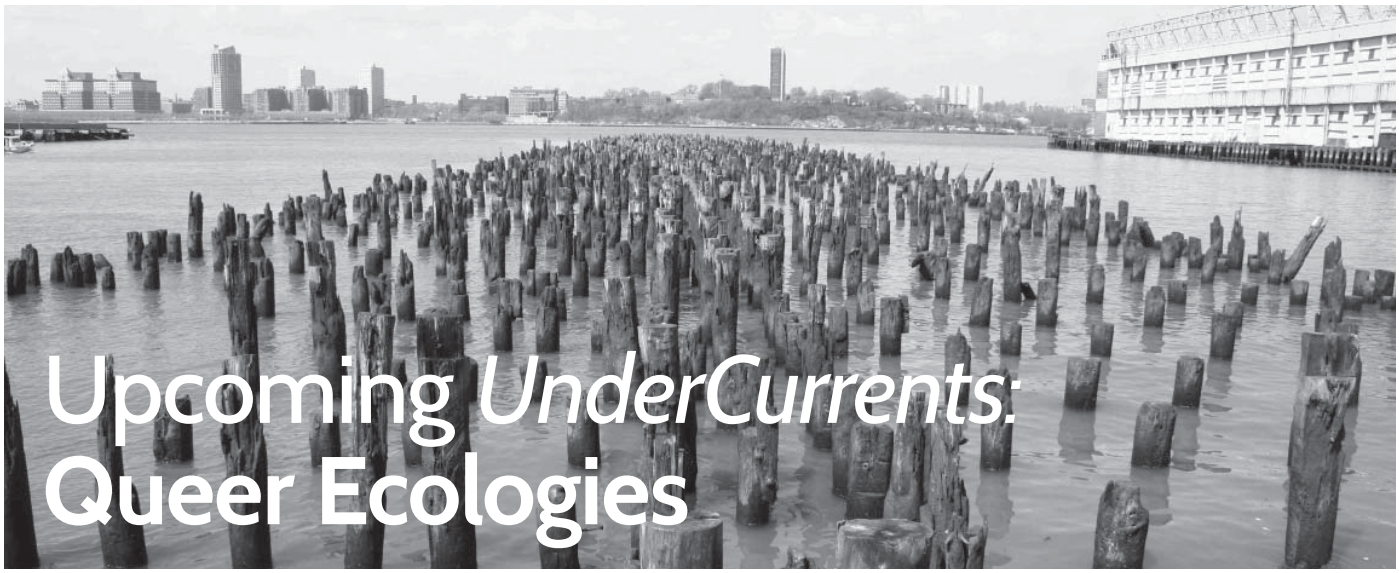
Portia Priegert is a writer and visual artist based in Kelowna, B.C. She completed her MFA in Creative Writing at UBC Okanagan in 2012, with funding from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada.

Elana Santana is a recent graduate of the Masters in Environment Studies program at York University. Her research focuses on the intersections of feminist, queer, posthumanist studies and the environment. Her academic work informs her creative pursuits a great deal, particularly in her attempts to photograph the non-human world in all its agential glory.

Conrad Scott is a PhD candidate in the University of Alberta's Department of English and Film Studies. His project examines the interconnection between place, culture, and literature in a study of dystopia in contemporary North American eco-apocalyptic fiction.

Joel Weishaus has published books, book reviews, essays, poems, art and literary critiques. He is presently Artist-in-Residence at Pacifica Graduate Institute, Carpinteria, CA. Much of his work is archived on the Internet: http://www.cddc.vt.edu/host/weishaus/index.htm

Michael Young is presently the University and Schools advisor for Operation Wallacea Canada, a branch of a UK based biodiversity research organization. He is a recent graduate of the Masters in Environmental Studies program at York University (MES), where his culminating portfolio examined apocalyptic narratives and popular environmental discourse. He is presently in the process of developing an original television pilot, which he began writing as a part of his master's portfolio.



Upcoming *UnderCurrents:* Queer Ecologies

In May 1994, UnderCurrents released what was very likely the first ever publication wholly devoted to the intersection of queerness and nature. In the editorial essay framing that issue, Shauna M. O'Donnell and the Editorial Collective of UnderCurrents wrote, "Difficult though it may be, trying to map out a space for Queer/Nature within a politics of the environment demands the charting of courses through a discursive terrain of perils and possibilities" (2). That landmark issue explored topics as diverse as the intersection of geography and queer theory (Gordon Brent Ingram), sexual morphology and medicalization of the queer body (Morgan Holmes), ecologies of life and death (J. Michael Clark), and the nascent queer ecology (Catriona Sandilands). It also included myriad creative work that touched themes of queer memory (Ailsa Craig), alternative kinship and communities constituted in passion (Caffyn Kelly), and small town life (Deanna Bickford). The exploratory openness, breadth, and diversity of the issue signaled both the significance of 'queer' as a conceptual and political transformation of sexual politics and the sense that environmental politics could "no longer be an articulation of white, male, heterosexual prescriptive or descriptive privilege" (2).

Two recent edited volumes represent the breadth of queer ecological scholarship. The first, Queering the Non/Human (Giffney and Hird) explores of the theoretical, ethical, and political possibilities of an encounter between queer theory and posthumanism. The volume's editors offer a breathless introduction to the complex diversity of work presented in the book. Most broadly, the contributors to Queering the Non/Human challenge both the meaning and uses of queer theories and the porous and contested boundary between the human and the non human. The second, Queer Ecologies: Sex, Nature, Politics, Desire (Mortimer-Sandilands and Erickson) traces intersecting lines of queerness and nature, mapping a field with implications not only for environmental politics, but also for the theorization of the boundary between human and animal, considerations of nation, nature, and colonialism, and imaginations of the ecologization of desire, to name just a few. In addition to these two substantial volumes, recent articles by geographer Matthew Gandy and ecocritic Timothy Morton gesture toward the continued expansion and diversification of queer ecological thinking and research.

This issue of UnderCurrents celebrates the 20th anniversary of 'Queer/Nature' by inviting creative and scholarly contributions that contribute to the heterogenous field of Queer Ecologies. We envision this issue as both a retrospective moment and timely opportunity to highlight the continued ethical and political creativity that springs from thinking about the queer and the ecological together. To that end, we invite both creative and scholarly submissions that contribute to Queer Ecologies. Possible perspectives, themes, and intersections include, but are by no means limited to:

- Evolving queer theories and activisms, especially perspectives from:
  - Trans Studies
  - Disability Studies
  - Queer of Color scholarship
  - Transnational Sexuality Studies
- Feminism and Ecofeminism
- Environmental Justice
- Equity Studies
- Ecological and environmental politics
- Queer Geography, spatial politics, and urbanization
- Ecological theory and science
- Feminist science studies
- Visual and performative imaginations
- Poetic and literary imaginations
- Queer ecological fictions
- Queer time, temporality, history, and memory
- Climate change and climate justice
- Ecosexuality
- Ecocriticism and environmental literature
- Studies and theories of embodiment and corporeality
- Ecologies of decolonization and postcoloniality

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