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A Journal of Literature Theory and Culture

No. 14 [2024]

■ DWELLING AND BELONGING

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DWELLING
AND BELONGING

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The Challenge and Gift of Being-in-the-World: The Hermeneutics of Dwelling and (Be)longing

> "The Greeks had a very interesting word that one can find in Plutarch and that exists in the form of a noun, a verb, and an adjective. It is the word *ēthopoiein*, which means making *ēthos*, producing *ēthos*, transforming one's way of being, one's mode of existence."
>
> (Schmidt 43)

We might say it all comes back to dwelling, save for the fact that nothing ever breaks free from the tether of dwelling in the first place. That we must dwell is granted us with our being-in-the-world yet how we dwell and indeed how well or poorly we dwell and what enhances, prohibits, or makes dwelling a struggle belong to those circumstances that are at once historical, fated, and the consequences of our freedom to engage them. Each in its own way, the essays collected here interrogate these ideas by showing how our thrownness into this rather than another place to undertake the inescapable task of dwelling has consequences that, when taken together, we might call life itself. Thus, when read as a collection of essays, we encounter in this volume dwelling's universality and its situated particularity—an always tension-filled negotiation with what it might mean to belong—that is to say, what it means to already always belong to both the particular and the universal sense of dwelling. Furthermore, it is out of the universal character of dwelling that many factors, both welcoming and inviting (for some and not for others) or exiling and prohibiting (again, for some and not others) determine our ability and desire to belong. Whether this interrogation of dwelling and belonging is undertaken in the manner of critical empiricism or in the reading and

interpretation of various forms of art—from photographs and paintings to novels and poems—these works provide a multifaceted articulation of the consequences of our being-with-one-another-in-the-world.

Although not taken up in these pages *per se*, a rich reading awaits anyone who might begin an interpretation against the backdrop of one of the fragments of Heraclitus so dear to Martin Heidegger *viz.*, *ethos anthrōpoi daimōn*. Following hints from Heidegger's famous interpretation of this phrase in his "Letter on Humanism," we suggest that this phrase announces and provides the occasion for our thinking about the fundamental nature of dwelling (*ethos*) and our historically-situated fatedness (*daimōn*). As fated and free, we depart from this dwelling and initial historical belonging to fashion a life, which, although "ours," is never anything less than a series of determinative relations to others and to the world(s) around us. To focus on dwelling and belonging—of which we might say are both the out-of-which and the for-the-sake-of-which that we exercise our freedom—is to be open to thought every aspect of the human condition. In other words, what might initially appear to be a disparate collection of texts, offers, on the contrary, a rich variety of thinking the "same" (i.e. dwelling and belonging) across a host of perspectives and situations handed down to us by tradition (e.g., geographical, environmental, and aesthetic).

We have grouped the essays that follow sometimes by a more overt connection and at other times by a more felt affinity of tone. Nonetheless, each essay in this volume stands in a hermeneutic relation to the others, each an experiment or foray into thinking dwelling and belonging, each attempting to say something significant concerning our ever-changing historical situatedness. As dwelling and belonging cover the entire scope of human concerns, we have in this volume, unsurprisingly, a vast array of studies addressing a wide range of topics and positions. Consequently, we have grouped the essays under subheadings, thus allowing for them to appear near those that they are related to in a more specific manner, in addition to the relation they have to the issue's overall theme.

The essays in our first grouping, titled "The Human Self and the Philosophy of Dwelling," take a broad philosophical approach, and each contributes to our general understanding of dwelling and belonging. In "Dwelling and Departure: Beginning Disputes between Arendt and Heidegger," Adi Burton and Barbara Weber open the volume, providing a thoughtful set of reflections on dwelling by considering the similarities and a key difference between two thinkers whose work understands being as dwelling *viz.*, Martin Heidegger and Hannah Arendt. Although Weber and Burton note the similarities between these two thinkers, they ask us to focus our attention on the differences that arise when Heidegger's thought makes homecoming a central concept while Arendt thinks dwelling from the standpoint of

natality and departure. All scholars whose work takes dwelling seriously will find much to consider in this tension between homecoming and departure and the authors' suggestion that we find dwelling (and thinking) more social in Arendt's thought.

The opening section concludes with an essay by Szczepan Urbaniak, "Belonging and Longing: The Question of the Subject in Renaud Barbaras and Jean-Luc Marion," thus addressing the second of the issue's two major themes. Urbaniak undertakes this task by engaging the work of Renaud Barbaras and Jean-Luc Marion. In this hermeneutic phenomenological engagement with these two thinkers, Urbaniak investigates the concept of desire (here "longing") by examining it via the decentralized subject. In the process of this study, the author argues that, if thought in this manner, longing and belonging go in tandem and, so understood, are central aspects of human situatedness; thus, they do not—as is often thought in popular discourse—find themselves in hopeless antagonism. We believe that the essays in this first section, along with our words above, provide a fitting opening to the volume as a whole.

Exploring intersections of belonging and memory, homecoming and grieving, Małgorzata Rutkowska's "Back in the Old Country: Homecoming and Belonging in Leonard Kniffel's *A Polish Son in the Motherland: An American's Journey Home* and Kapka Kassabova's *To the Lake: A Balkan Journey of War and Peace*" reveals the interpenetrating power of the past and the present in creating a sense of belongingness. Rutkowska avers that Leonard Kniffel and Kapka Kassabova—the authors she studies—escape the facile oscillation between nostalgia and unbelonging in their rendition of the complex issue of *homecoming*. In the two homecoming narratives that Rutkowska explores, the midlife return to one's ancestral country is portrayed as a crucial turning point in a life path and one that is pregnant with the symbolic meaning of completion and rejuvenation.

The redefinition and rearticulation of notions of identity, home, and belonging in the context of bereavement is the focus of Katarzyna Małecka's article, "'*This house is so lonely!*': Home, Belonging, and Identity in Memoirs of Loss and Grief." Małecka ponders the seminal and often dramatic changes that loss can entail, such as relocation, uprootedness, change in domestic routines, and the acute feeling of being a stranger in once familiar places. The next essay, Agnieszka Łowczanin's "Cathartic Paths of the Gothic in *Ciemno, prawie noc* by Joanna Bator," draws our attention to the narrative possibilities that arise from employing the Gothic for cathartic purposes. Interrogating the question of belonging and non-belonging, this paper shows how the Gothic in Bator's novel helps to (re)articulate the past. Breaking through imposed silence grants a chance for traumas of expulsion, dispossession, and resettlement to heal.

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The question of how we can retrieve memories and redefine personal identity is also the subject of the last essay in this section, Simge Yılmaz's "Filling the Gaps in Broken Memory while Renewing the Cityscape: Navigating Belonging in Orhan Pamuk's *The Red-Haired Woman*." Yilmaz addresses belonging through the lens of a father-son conflict, arguing that the emotional situation of the protagonist in Orhan Pamuk's novel offers an opportunity to investigate the connection between memory and urban space. The article reveals that a deliberate alteration of physical surroundings can serve to fill in the fissures in communicative and cultural memory. The contributions in this section honor our human capabilities of resilience, connection, and restoration.

The relationship between cityscape and belonging provides a bridge to the next section entitled "The Anthropocene, Urban Habitations, and the Digital Landscape." This part of the volume opens with Satarupa Sinha Roy's paper "Dwelling in the Urban Liminal: A Phenomenological Consideration of Saul Leiter's Street Photography." Sinha examines the viability of living in the urban liminal by juxtaposing Leiter's reinterpretation of liminality with Heidegger's notion of *wohnen* expounded in "Building, Dwelling, Thinking." Interrogating street photography by Leiter, this essay delves deeply into the ways the visual depiction of liminality contributes to and opens new vistas in our understanding of states of transition.

The three subsequent essays address intersections between dwelling and identity by focusing on an exploration of problems related to urban and environmentally endangered areas. Examining Jemisin's novel series *The Great Cities*, Małgorzata Sugiera's paper, "Cities and Their People: Dwelling in the Anthropic Time of N. K. Jemisin's New York," demonstrates that urban subjectivity both absorbs and elaborates on non-human features. Sugiera argues that urban subjects share sociality with animal, geological, and technological forces. Mateusz Borowski's paper, "How to Dwell in Garbage Patches? Waste Communities in the Aftermath of Ancestral Catastrophe in Chen Qiufan's *The Waste Tide* (2013) and Wu Ming-yi's *The Man with the Compound Eyes* (2011)," seeks to locate models of collective memory and living that transcend the anthropocentric concept of memory as a product of the individuated self. While doing so, Borowski examines the issue of living in regions impacted by environmental problems through the prism of the narratives of the studied novels.

Mateusz Chaberski's article, "Building Liveable Futures: Dwelling as Collaborative Survival After Climate Change," examines three examples of modern speculative projects: the installation *Refuge for Resurgence* (2021), the multimedia project *Pending Xenophora* (2020–22), and *The Anthropocene Museum* (2020–ongoing) at the nexus of architecture, design, and performative arts that picture various strategies of building for more-

than-humans as well as with more-than-humans. To do so, the author uses the findings of environmental (post)humanities and more-than-human geography.

With the backdrop of our human belonging to language, the world, and the body, the final paper in this part of the volume, Katarzyna Ostalska's "*Nine Billion Branches*: A Digital Poem by Jason Nelson—the Home of Objects," takes the issue of dwelling to the digital milieu. The essay investigates the idea of digital objects in Nelson's poem, demonstrating how reading and interpretation are impacted by the internet environment. Ostalska ascertains that readers can experience the ever-changing digital paths in the poem as a never-ending web of interactions between the digital objects and themselves.

Insofar as dwelling takes place everywhere we are, we take dwelling with us, as it were, when we travel, move around, and/or find ourselves in new and sometimes (for a while at least) unfamiliar places. In addition, and as concerns this special issue's themes, although belonging is universal with respect to the human condition, it can, however, be tension-filled when we appear in different places e.g., cities, countries, continents, and indeed even future times as sci-fi time travels allows. The essays in the next section, "The Phantasmagoric and the Real Home: Between Utopia and Materiality," provide various explorations of the issues arising when we find ourselves either elsewhere or embracing by design where we have been and remain.

In "Breaking the Promise of Perfection: Imperfect Utopias in Marge Piercy's *Woman on the Edge of Time*," Elise Poll addresses how technology and what Heidegger calls calculative thinking play a decisive role in our sense of dwelling and belonging, and how such relations to technology can be set into relief by utopian thinking, which she defends against its varied opponents, many of whom quite mistakenly equate perfection and utopia. One way to encourage and make space for utopian thinking is provided by the time-traveling afforded in the genre of science fiction. Poll deftly shows how Marge Piercy's sci-fi novel *Woman on the Edge of Time* uses time travel to disclose how our imaginations, that faculty so essential to hermeneutical thinking, are nourished and set free to think critically and creatively about our present state-of-affairs. Poll also demonstrates how the novel helps us make sense of how we might experience technological advancement without it having a frenzied hold on us and thereby bringing our dwelling to ruin.

The imagination also plays a role in "Radiant Futures: Utopian Art as a Phenomenology of Home-Seeking," in which Jordan Huston furthers our understanding of this faculty by thinking with Paul Ricœur and our understanding of homecoming by engaging Heidegger. He does this in

order to provide a hermeneutic reading of Susan Sontag's novel *In America*. Against the backdrop of the essay's hermeneutic and philosophical opening, Huston names the Sontag novel "utopian art," which he suggests does more than simply imagine a preferable and possible future. To wit, such art—and this novel in particular in Huston's account—discloses the power of the imagination (exemplified here by the experiences associated with work in the theater) to shape consciousness, and by doing so allows us to find those dreams for which it is worth living.

In "The Regional Impersonal as a Mode of Dwelling: Structures of Embodiment in David Jones's *The Anathémata* and Basil Bunting's *Briggflatts*," Lucie Kotesovska turns our attention to poetry, in particular the lasting influence of the modernist poetry of T. S. Eliot as exemplified in his classic *The Waste Land*, to show how David Jones and Basil Bunting further this project in their major poetic achievements by embracing "poetic impersonality." Kotesovska argues that both poets address dwelling and belonging by exploring and accepting their belonging to specific cultural affiliations, and shows how this acceptance shapes the consciousness of each writer. This embodiment of consciousness, which displaces the too-egotistical poetic voice, invites into the space opened up by this displacement a variety of voices, as shown through their poetic works.

Moving from the fiction of novels and poetry, Sanghamitra Dalal addresses the power of the memoir, in this instance, *I Belong Here* by Anita Sethi, to further our understanding of longing, belonging, and home(coming). Dalal's essay "Longing to Belong in One's Own Homeland: Tracing the Topophilic Cartography in Anita Sethi's *I Belong Here: A Journey Along the Backbone Of Britain*" reveals how the memorialist's work also engages creatively with both hermeneutics and the imagination; indeed, in a manner akin to the fictional works addressed in the preceding texts. By employing Bachelard's concept of topophilia, Dalal's reading of Sethi's memoir demonstrates that, in responding to a "race hate crime" by walking the "backbone of Britain" (the memoir's subtitle), Sethi is able to overcome alienation by responding creatively to the beauties of the changing landscapes.

Although imagination plays an important role in the articulation of the manifold issues pertaining to dwelling and belonging in the essays grouped in the previous sections, the human capability of imagining appears to be the core of the papers in the last section, "Imaginary, Haunted, and Aesthetic Dwellings." This part of the volume begins with Kamila Drapało's paper, "Imagination and Dwelling in *The House that Jack Built*." Drapało aptly uses Lars von Trier's film to explore the issues of dwelling and imagination against the backdrop of the interweaving paths of ethics and aesthetics. She ascertains that imagination enhances our efficient interaction with

others and, thus, is intrinsically ethical. Dwelling is made possible by the fundamental human ability to be creatively imaginative.

Reflection on the human capacity for imagination—the leading thread of this section of the volume—spurs penetrating insights into the problem of dwelling, which cannot be reduced to the tangible physicality of human habitation. Interrogating the transitory nature of our being-in-the-world, Carlos Gutiérrez Cajaraville and Ana Calonge Conde's essay, "Silent Voices: Dwelling with our Specters through *Palimpsesto* (2017), by Doris Salcedo" illuminates the profound nature of human dwelling by embracing the issue of transitoriness. The authors delve deeply into the narrative of Salcedo's *Palimpsesto* to unravel the intricate character of human presence in absence. The spectral presence as a legitimate space of dwelling calls on us to imaginatively reconsider notions of dwelling and belonging.

Sensitizing us to the vacillating boundaries between the real and the ideal, Adam J. Goldsmith's essay, "'If I Could but See a Day of it': On the Aesthetic Potential for Belonging and Action," makes the case that a utopian sense of belonging that could aid in the material realization of this potential may be enhanced by the potential freedom revealed within aesthetic experiences of beauty. Based on his interpretation of Friedrich Schiller, Goldsmith claims that aesthetics allows us to imagine freedom but cannot grant it to us on its own. He then interrogates aesthetic freedom's utopian quality by drawing on the work of Herbert Marcuse to examine how longing can support the need to be-long, illustrating this through a close reading of Kim Stanley Robinson's *The Ministry for the Future*.

Our journey through the ontological, aesthetic, ethical, and imaginative aspects of the manifold realities evoked by the notions of dwelling and belonging is rounded out with Małgorzata Hołda's essay, "'I have forgotten your love, yet I seem to glimpse you in every window': The Hermeneutical Aesthetics of (Be)longing." The paper explores the interweaving of belonging and love, in the context of three selected works of art, each of which features a female figure standing at a window. Following the precepts of H. G. Gadamer's phenomenology of art as play, Hołda considers the space of an artwork as one that elucidates the interplay of longing and (be)longing. This interaction is recognized as the foundation of our human condition, of our rootedness in love, which makes us both capable and vulnerable.

The essays in this collection, which have responded to the challenge to undertake an exegesis of works of art and literature, cogently testify to Heidegger's conceptualization of poetic dwelling, which draws upon a line from Hölderlin's poem, "In Lovely Blue": "Full of merit, yet poetically, man dwells on this earth" (qtd. in Heidegger, ". . . Poetically

Man Dwells . . .” 224). Our human belonging conveys simultaneously our dwelling in a place we name *home* and our longing to be dwelling in *home*. The hermeneutic tension that pertains to our experience of belonging rests on the continuous interplay of certitude and uncertainty, familiarity and strangeness that arises from the profound and, perhaps often acute awareness that we are finite beings whose fate can be and is precarious. The essays that are more specifically focused on the conceptualization of human belongingness and rootedness, in both mental and physical, tangible and imagined reality, are intriguingly expressive of the paradoxical nature of (be)longing.

It is with the proper hermeneutic humility demanded by the finitude attendant to dwelling, that we express our gratitude for the opportunity to present these essays to the international and interdisciplinary readership of *Text Matters*. We are, of course, extremely thankful for the timely and thoughtful work of many reviewers, whose anonymous peer reviews offered evaluations and suggestions that enhanced each essay in the volume. Permit us a word or two more to conclude this introduction, and then we shall leave these essays to the readers of the journal to make their own interpretations of them.

Following Heidegger’s argument that “[p]oetry is what really lets us dwell” (215), explicated in his lecture beginning with the pivotal words “. . . poetically man dwells . . .” we understand that to “dwell poetically” cannot connote a mere addition of poetic splendor to lives that are otherwise considered harsh or even unspeakably dramatic, as if dwelling and poetry came after something more essential and not as the condition for its possibility. Heidegger’s notion of poetic dwelling makes use of the meaning evoked by the Greek word *poiesis*, which refers to an act of creation—bringing into life something that did not exist. In our epigraph it is this word that Schmidt, following Plutarch, links with *ethos*—reminding us that our dwelling is something we are responsible for creating out of our granted condition. The human being pays homage to the divine creation (our granted condition) and participates in self- and world-creation. Human poetic dwelling is not only something that happens in places that are conducive to poetic beauty, taste, and refinement. Rather, as the essays in this volume show, it occurs wherever a human being is. Drawing a demarcation line between inner human sacredness and the possible impurity of a place of dwelling is a fool’s errand and always to no avail. After Heidegger, we can disavow the cheap romanticized distinction between the beauty of the spiritual and poetic space and the mundane and often crude reality, evocatively exemplified by innumerable literary texts, even if instances of such disparity sensitize us to different modalities of our human condition.

As is fitting to the demands of hermeneutics, we yield here to the ever-openness of questioning and resist the desire, bred by calculative thinking, to provide a definitive conclusion. Instead, we refer to Heidegger's provocation from the end of his essay "Building, Dwelling, Thinking." In this essay, Heidegger avers:

> The real plight of dwelling is indeed older than the world wars and their destruction, older also than the increase of the earth's population and the condition of the industrial workers. The real dwelling plight lies in this, that mortals ever search anew for the nature of dwelling, that they *must ever learn to dwell*. What if man's homelessness consisted in this, that man still does not even think of the real plight of dwelling as *the* plight? Yet as soon as man *gives thought* to his homelessness, it is a misery no longer. Rightly considered and kept well in mind, it is the sole summons that *calls* mortals into their dwelling. (161)

Thus, we are called on to think dwelling and belonging as the thought most essential to our precarious epoch. Such a summons is issued to us not because we ignore or deny how bad things are at present but precisely because we understand all too well how precarious things are today. This, then, is our closing word meant to open us to thinking, which must remain ongoing and to which these essays are a contribution and—we hope—a catalyst for a broad range of thought. This thinking about the same and the varied is necessary because poetic dwelling embraces the entirety of human existence as a meaningful site of the revelation of the divine (itself variously understood). In our need to belong and our incessant pursuit of an accomplished dwelling, we vacillate between the exigency of our desire for completion and our inherent sense of being always fated to our incompleteness.

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THE HUMAN SELF
AND THE PHILOSOPHY
OF DWELLING

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Dwelling and Departure: Beginning Disputes between Arendt and Heidegger

ABSTRACT

In "Letter on Humanism," Martin Heidegger juxtaposes the notion of homelessness (*Heimlosigkeit*) with home-coming (*Heimholung*), i.e. the reawakening to our original relationship to Being. This focus on dwelling in Being represents an interesting modification from his earlier study of "incipience" (*Anfang*), which emphasizes departure. We follow the critique of this shift in thinking in Hannah Arendt's work, beginning with a short allegory titled "Heidegger the Fox" (1953). We suggest that reading this allegory in the light of Arendt's decades-long debate with Heidegger illuminates the tense relationship between dwelling and incipience (or in her terms, "natality"). Though we do not attempt a complete analysis of Heidegger and Arendt's works here, we aim to draw out specific movements of their thinking. We suggest that Arendt's concept of natality, which, though partly influenced by Heidegger, ultimately challenges the authenticity of Heidegger's solitary, silent thinker who dwells in the House of Being. In the back and forth between their thinking an unresolvable tension between dwelling and departure arises as the existential fissure.

Keywords: Arendt, Heidegger, natality, dwelling, thinking, exile.

"We live our lives, forever taking leave."

(Rilke, "Eighth Elegy")

1. SITTING WITH THE FOX'S TRAP: OR, CONFRONTING THE EXISTENTIAL FISSURE IN BEGINNINGS

In his essay "Über den Humanismus" ("Letter on Humanism") Martin Heidegger juxtaposes the notion of *homelessness* (*Heimlosigkeit*) with *home-coming* (*Heimholung*), i.e. the reawakening to our original relationship to Being. This focus on dwelling in Being represents an interesting modification from his earlier contemplations of "incipience" (*Anfang*), where he writes: "Incipience is the taking-on of departure . . . [because] the essence of Beyng is not Beyng, but the beginning incipience" (*Über den Anfang* 19).

Heidegger's student and lifelong correspondent Hannah Arendt highlights the significance of this shift in his thinking in her critique of Heidegger following his activity in the Nazi party, which we argue is reflected in an allegory she titled "Heidegger the Fox." "Nobody," Arendt says of Heidegger, "knows the nature of traps better than one who sits in a trap his whole life long" (362). We suggest that reading this allegory in the light of Arendt's decades-long dispute with Heidegger illuminates the tense relationship between dwelling and incipience (or in her terms, "natality"): Arendt sees Heidegger's dwelling as a trap, constructed by a notion of incipience imagined in the withdrawal from the public "They" (Man) and confined to the poetic house of words within Being.

By contrast, Arendt (herself an exile) reminds us that it is in being thrown into the unknown that a new incipience (*An-fang*, or catching on) might arise: it entails both un-dwelling and becoming a stranger. We also experience this when we take initiative: we exit into the unknown place (*Ferne*). Once set in motion, no action can be undone, no past can be changed. Instead, we are exiled into the arrival of an undetermined future. We therefore ponder if maybe it is exodus and not home-coming that describes one of the most fundamental moments of human existence, always hinting at the possibility to begin anew, while exiled into Otherness.

In the following, we will begin by discussing Heidegger's development of thinking as incipience, dwelling, and ad-vent(ure). In "Letter on Humanism" he writes: "The thinking is an adventure not only through the searching and questioning beyond that what remains unthought. . . . Thinking is oriented towards the Being as what is to-come (*l'avenant*)" (240–42/193–94).[1] We

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[1] Page numbers refer first to the English translation and then to the original German text.

will mainly focus on his text *Über den Anfang*[2] (1941), as well as "Letter on Humanism" (1946), "Building, Dwelling, Thinking" (1951), and "What is Called Thinking?" (1951–52). We will then explore the relation between Arendt's notion of natality and her critique of Heidegger's fundamental ontology, particularly in "Heidegger the Fox" (1953), "Martin Heidegger at Eighty" (1969), and *The Life of the Mind* (1978). Though we do not attempt a complete analysis of Heidegger and Arendt's works here, we aim to draw out specific movements of their thinking. We suggest that Arendt's concept of natality, which, though partly influenced by Heidegger, ultimately challenges the authenticity of Heidegger's solitary, silent thinker who dwells in the House of Being. In the back and forth between their thinking, an unresolvable tension between dwelling and departure arises as the existential fissure.

2. ON MARTIN HEIDEGGER

2.1. DWELLING IN MOVEMENT

Martin Heidegger's profound concern about the "growing thoughtlessness" (*zunehmende Gedankenlosigkeit*) of modern times is front and centre of his 1955 *Gelassenheit* address (45/519). This "*flight from thinking*" refers to "meditative" (*das besinnliche Nachdenken*) rather than "calculative" thinking (*das rechnende Denken*); calculative thinking is goal-driven and races from one aspect to the next, fleeing the present and avoiding involvement with Being (46/520). It thus emphasizes speed and simple explanations at the expense of sustainability and complexity. The word "explanation" contains the idea of unfolding something complex into a "plain surface" to make it "pleasing" and devoid of any problems.[3] Heidegger further argues in "Letter on Humanism" that scientific and philosophical explanations and justifications bolster the common assumption that the "truth of being" can be reduced to cause and effect (199/150).

By contrast, "actual" thinking constitutes our relatedness to Being. In his 1951–52 lectures "Was heißt Denken?" ("What is Called

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[2] At the time of this writing, there was no published translation in English; the authors were unable to review Peter Hanly's translation (*On Inception*), which was published by Indiana University Press in September 2023 as we finalized the text. Excerpts included here were translated by Barbara Weber.

[3] Literally "pro-blem" means to throw (*gwele*) forth (per) something into the way, e.g., a fence or barrier. We owe this connection to John T. Hamilton, Harvard University, and his talk on "Life in the Middle Voices," given at the "Dialectic of Seeing" International Seminar, 1 December 2022, International Institute of Hermeneutics.

Thinking?"), Heidegger argues that the present moment is unlocked in the awareness of our mortality. In this *Er-eignis* (or event-ing), we may disclose an authentic relationship with Being: we are being pulled into this world, into the presence-ing of the moment as this authentic *Dasein*. Such *Er-eignis* relates to the older meaning of er-äugen, with äugen (meaning *eyes*). The German "*es er-eignet sich*" can thus be read as "to show itself." However, "[o]nly when we are so inclined toward what in itself is to be thought about, only then are we capable of thinking. In order to be capable of thinking, we need to learn it first. . . . We learn to think by giving our mind to what there is to think about" (*What is Called Thinking?* 4/1). Here, Heidegger takes up Saint Augustine's argument in his *Confessions* (bk. 11) that we only ever live in the present, where we experience the past as present memories and the future as present expectation. Therefore, a life in the past or in the future is impossible. However, "present" is not understood in chronological terms, as an ever-disappearing millisecond, but rather it unfolds at its fringes when we become entangled with Being—"with tiny waves on the edges of each leaf (like the smile of a wind)" (Rilke, "Ninth Elegy" 333). It is only in this relation with Being that the quality of the present can expand and deepen, like a painting or a piece of music.

For Heidegger, thinking arises from this moment when we are pulled into this abyss of existence, where we become a question to ourselves—"*Mihi quaestio factus sum*," in Augustine's words (bk. 10, sec. 33). Picking up on this Augustinian notion (as Arendt does), Heidegger writes: "We are thinking. To say it more circumspectly, we are attempting to let ourselves become involved in this relatedness to Being. We are attempting to learn thinking" (*What Is Called Thinking?* 86/5). In this *er-eignen* of the present, we are face-to-face with the abyss of Being, the groundless groundedness of existence. To this question of existence, we can only respond[4] as *Dasein*[5] in the present. And this experience of the present can be understood in three different ways: we are in this moment (the present), we are attentive (being present), and something is offered as a gift (a present). The dwelling in this moment of becoming a question is called thinking (Kohan).

However, there seems to be a tension between the dwelling in the moment and the departure *into* thinking. We will first explore the interconnection between dwelling and building, before returning to the notion of incipience, question, and departure.

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[4] The term "respond" comes from the Latin "*spondere*," to pledge, to promise, and "re," in return.

[5] *Dasein*, a term Heidegger uses instead of Human, emphasizes the intensity and irreplaceability of the "being thereness."

2.2. BUILDING, DWELLING, AND THINKING WITH LANGUAGE

At the beginning of his 1951 essay "Bauen Wohnen Denken" ("Building, Dwelling, Thinking"), Heidegger explores the close relationships between the three verbs in the title. He starts with the word "to build" (*bauen*), which means "to nest" or "to settle" in an environment to which we plan to return. While the Old-German word "*baun*" means to stay, to linger, it also has a verb (time-quality) engraved in it, as "*bauen*" also means "am" (*bin*) (144–45/147–48). Heidegger writes:

> To be a human being means to be on the earth as a mortal. It means to dwell. The old word *bauen*, which says that man *is* insofar as he *dwells*, this word *bauen* however *also* means at the same time to cherish and protect, to preserve and care for. . . (145/149)

Moreover, the word "to dwell" (*wohnen*) is connected to "*wunian*," which is "to remain," "to stay," "to be in peace," "to be free" (*Friede*, *Frei*) (147/149). Thus, for Heidegger, building, dwelling, and thinking are interrelated, as it is through lingering that we unlock the present as event (*Er-eignis*) and become entangled with Being. And while the architect creates relationships between things in nature through structures (e.g., a bridge connects river and shore and brings out a possibility), through language we create a home in Being by letting something appear as something—phenomena (*phainetai*)—in relationship to its surroundings and to us. Heidegger writes: "Only if we are capable of dwelling, we can build" (157/162).

Thus, to build means to dwell, which means to think, i.e. to let become present (bring/draw out into the present) and spread time into a field, where in the creation of relationships space is timed, while time falls into space. Consequently, for Heidegger, in order to learn to think, we have to learn to dwell again:

> What is man's homelessness consisted in this, that man still does not even think of the *real* plight of dwelling as *the* plight? Yet as soon as man *gives thought* to his homelessness, it is a misery no longer. Rightly considered and kept well in mind, it is the sole summons that *calls* mortals into their dwelling. But how else can mortals answer this summons than by trying on *their* part, on their own, to bring dwelling to the fullness of its nature [essence/Being/*Wesen*]? This they accomplish when they build out of dwelling, and think for the sake of dwelling. (159/164)

And while Heidegger's essay on "Building, Dwelling, Thinking" expresses a feeling of coziness, homecoming, and lingering, in "Letter on Humanism," there is also the sensation of departure through his emphasis on existence: an idea that can be found in most of his writings on thinking.

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2.3. FROM DWELLING AND LANGUAGE TO EXISTENCE AND DEPARTURE

"Letter on Humanism," one of Heidegger's first publications in the post-war period, further emphasizes the connection between dwelling and thinking:

> Metaphysics closes itself to the simple essential fact that man essentially occurs only in his essence, where he is claimed by Being. Only from that claim "has" he found that wherein his essence dwells. Only from this dwelling "has" he "language" as the home that preserves the ecstatic for his essence. (204/155)

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This is the essence of ex-sistence, that we create a house through language. "Such standing in[to] the [clearance] of Being I call the ek-sistence of man" (204/155). In other words, we stand into the light as the "*Da*" of Being. Standing into this clearance or clearing, we have the possibility to stand into the truth of Being. Language is the light-giving arrival of being in itself. And the Human is being thrown from Being itself into truth (210/162), as Heidegger elaborates:

> According to this essence language is the house of Being which comes to pass from Being and is pervaded by Being. And so it is proper to think the essence of language from its correspondence to Being and indeed as this correspondence, that is, as the home of man's essence. But man is not only a living creature who possesses language along with other capacities. Rather, language is the house of Being in[to] which man ek-sists by dwelling, in that he belongs to the truth of Being, guarding it. (213/164)

This is interesting, as Arendt criticizes this "House of Being" as a trap, where Heidegger entangles himself in a monologue of his thinking that does not leave its own "*Behausung*" (house/dwelling) anymore. Arendt's criticism comes from her intuition that Heidegger's relationship to language remains idiosyncratic, trapping him in his monolithic relationship with Being.

And yet, there always seems to be this door into the *ex-* of ex-sistence. Heidegger calls the human an "*ek-statisches Wesen*" (ex-static Being) that may dwell in Being as a mortal. But how can the Human stand out, while at the same time dwell and remain? This is both a spatial and temporal question: as embodied, the Human stands out from being while being plunged into the material world. They are made of the same fabric, and yet fundamentally set apart, therefore occupying a place in the world. The question is also temporal, because the Human is able to linger while they depart with every moment into the future. All we ever

have is the present.[6] Heidegger writes that the "[Human] is the neighbor of Being," literally meaning that he *lives next* (spatial) to Being and *was born* (temporal) after Being (222/173). Thus, again the spatial and temporal coincide. Being becomes apparent through language (literally it "appears," i.e. becomes *phaenomenai*); at the same time language is what cares for Being and creates permanence in the river of time (239/191–92).

At this point in the text, Heidegger hints at the notion of adventure:

> But thinking is an *adventure* not only as a search and an inquiry into the unthought. Thinking, in its essence as thinking of Being, is claimed by Being. Thinking is related to Being as what arrives (*l'avenant*). Thinking as such is bound to the advent [arrival] of Being, to Being as advent. . . . Thinking gathers language into simple saying. In this way language is the language of Being, as clouds are the clouds of the sky. With its saying, thinking lays inconspicuous furrows in language. They are still more inconspicuous than the furrows that the farmer, slow of step, draws through the field. (240–42/193–94)

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Thus, Heidegger sees existence as the being there and now, and simultaneously, the invitation to think arises through question and departure. Do we have to think "departure and beginning" differently from a chronological understanding of time? Is it the departure from the "Man" (they)? Or is it a departure from the present, thereby creating an opening in order to remain attentive and hospitable to what is to come (*advenire*)?

This tension nags at Heidegger since the 1940s. In his book *Über den Anfang*, he tries to set apart "*anfangen*" (to catch on) from "*beginnen*" (to begin). While *Beginn* is a predictable and measured point in chronological time, *An-fang* starts with the "catching" of something that continues, like the end of a rope (as opposed to catching a self-contained object). In this sense, *anfangen* stands in correspondence with Heidegger's other term "throwness" (*Geworfenheit*). We are thrown into this world, into this appearance, into this situation, into this conversation, etc., and it is now on us to "*fangen*" (to catch) the beginning of the beginning. What we find here is a sense of playfulness. Heidegger writes: "Throwing and catching / The throwing toward 'of' being / The rejection 'of' being / The throwness of Dasein / The pro-jection of beings[7] / The throw and the more initial beginning. / The throw and the *physis* (nature). / The throw and the event" (106, translation mine).[8] The throw as

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[6] See Wolf and Weber for Weber's elaboration on the embodiment aspect of this argument in connection to Merleau-Ponty.

[7] See in Latin: *iacere* = throw.

[8] In the original: "Der Zuwürfe »des« Seins / Die Verwerfung »des« Seins / Die Geworfenheit des Da-seins / Der Entwurf des Seienden. / Der Wurf und der anfänglichere

thrownness into Dasein is derived from the throw of Being itself as an event (108). Of course, we can always re-ject: such a rejection introduces a difference and allows us to project this difference into the future of a new beginning. Therefore, *Anfang* is the unique historical presencing of the beginning in its irreplaceability. The beginning that Heidegger is pondering is neither a rule nor a law; it is neither a predictable nor an identifiable point in time. Instead, "*Anfängnis*" (incipience) is the event as its fissuring as well as a singularity of fundamental difference.

In Exodus 13:4 it is written: "Today you are going out, in the month of the New Grain." There is an intense urgency in these words, which are both a command and an invitation to the Hebrews departing Egypt. How are we able to leave every moment, departing into what is to come and yet dwell and remain attentive to the present? It seems that a different time quality arises from this awareness, which sees being present as movement and in opposition to a quantitative understanding of time, where the moment disappears in the squeeze of measurability of chronological time.

We have shown the tension between thinking as dwelling and building (i.e. not to leave this moment in order to derive an answer or a goal), as well as the call to think as the departure from the moment into what is to come as adventure (*advenire*). We have shown that, for Heidegger, in order to build, we have to dwell. And yet, dwelling is not a synonym for remaining forever. By contrast, thinking is the adventure to being attentive to what is present-ing itself to us. Or in other words: we create the present by *being* present, which means to be attentive to what is coming towards us from the "ad-vent" (future): allowing for it to dwell with us in this present, enriching and expanding it. In this attentiveness, we draw out what is within and thereby build a house in language that "times," i.e. is not static. In the following we will show that while Heidegger errs on the side of dwelling, Arendt attends to the dangers of staying at home, which, without the leap into departure, can become a trap.

3. ON HANNAH ARENDT

3.1. NATALITY AND BEGINNINGS

Natality is, in Arendt's view, inherent to the human condition; every newcomer born into the world "possesses the capacity of beginning something new, that is, acting" (*Human Condition* 9). Intimately

Anfang. / Der Wurf und die [*physis*]. / Der Wurf und das Ereignis" (106). See also Rainer Maria Rilke's poem called "Der Ball."

connected to action, natality describes the capacity to "set something in motion," without knowing what will come from it (177). In terms of Arendt's political theory, however, the natality of the newcomer is far from the late Heidegger's lonely home-coming; indeed, beginnings (including action) can only be initiated in the public space of appearances, where we are not alone but among a plurality of others. "Since action is the political activity par excellence, Arendt writes, "natality, and not mortality, may be the central category of political, as distinguished from metaphysical, thought" (8–9).

While Arendt's encounter with Heidegger on the topic of natality often appears in the text obliquely (as in the juxtaposition between natality and mortality, above), we argue that a close reading of her analysis of Heidegger's conception of thinking as an essentially solitary experience draws attention to the spatial-temporal tension in Heidegger's works that finds, as Arendt shows us, a troubled resolution in "dwelling." The next sections will discuss three texts spanning more than two decades in which Arendt addresses these topics before returning to the notion of natality as it emerged in the 1950s.

3.2. THE FOX'S TRAP AND THE THRACIAN GIRL'S LAUGHTER

In 1953, just a few years after she resumed correspondence with her former teacher Heidegger, Arendt wrote a short parable in her *Denktagebuch* ("thought journal") titled "Die wahre Geschichte von dem Fuchs Heidegger" ("Heidegger the Fox"). It describes "the true story of Heidegger the fox . . . who was so lacking in slyness that he not only kept getting caught in traps but couldn't even tell the difference between a trap and a non-trap" (361/403). Furthermore, due to a problem with his fur, "he was completely without natural protection against the hardship of a fox's life" (ibid.). After years of exposure, the fox withdraws into a burrow, which is really a trap. The fox knows that the burrow is a trap, but in his ignorance believes that everyone else's burrows are traps too. When other foxes avoided his trap (seeing the fox caught inside), he "decorate[d] his trap beautifully" and drew many visitors, who stepped into the trap "to visit him where he was at home" (362/403–04) but, of course, could step out again. Proud of his perceived success, he declares himself "the best of all foxes," and Arendt concedes at the end that "there is some truth in that, too: Nobody knows the nature of traps better than the one who sits in a trap his whole life long" (362/404).

Scholars like Facundo Vega and Kimberly Maslin have referred to this sardonic allegory in order to elucidate Arendt's critical engagement with Heidegger's ontological project, which extends across her life's work and

emerges from precise philosophical concerns. We aim to add to that set of interpretations here.[9] What does the trap signify? What kind of "natural protection" did Heidegger lack? Why can he not tell the difference between a burrow and a trap? Who are the visitors, and what about his trap is so beautiful as to draw them into it with him? Lastly, what does it mean for him to stay in the trap, or to make it into a burrow, or, for that matter, for others to leave it?

The 1969 reflective essay "Martin Heidegger ist achtzig Jahre alt" ("Martin Heidegger at Eighty") provides some context for the setting of the parable. Arendt begins by clarifying that her essay in fact commemorates not Heidegger's eightieth birthday but the fiftieth anniversary of his entry into public life, "as a university teacher." Based in part on her own experience as a student, she vividly describes the allure of the young Heidegger's popular lectures and describes him as the "hidden king" in the "realm of thinking." "I have said that people followed the rumor about Heidegger in order to learn thinking," Arendt writes, "[w]hat was experienced was that thinking as pure activity." While Arendt has been criticized for her flattering portrayal of Heidegger-the-teacher in this text, to focus on the sensationalist story of their personal relationship is to fall into another kind of trap, one which misses the specificity of Arendt's concern. Indeed, rather than continue to praise Heidegger's exceptional capacity for thinking, the purpose of the essay centres on the critique that what is actually "extraordinarily rare" about Heidegger is his disturbing belief that, in thinking, he goes beyond the "faculty of wondering" (which is common to all)[10] to the "faculty of 'taking up this wondering as one's permanent abode.'"

Here, the tension between dwelling and departure (or as Jacques Taminiaux puts it, "belonging and withdrawal") emerges again: Arendt

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[9] Maslin's recent book, *The Experiential Ontology of Hannah Arendt*, presents several readings of multiple "traps" in the first chapter, including "the trap of worldlessness" (withdrawing from the world, especially the common world); "the trap of stillness" (isolated from others); and "the trap of universal guilt" (his early allegiance to Nazism and aspects of Nazi ideology thereafter). Maslin also notes that the fox in the parable refers to the Ancient Greek proverb "a fox knows many things, but a hedgehog knows one big thing," which Isaiah Berlin had discussed in an essay published the same year (1953) as "The Hedgehog and the Fox: An Essay on Tolstoy's View of History" (Maslin 5–6).

[10] Thinking is one of the faculties of the mind shared by all; the significance of this point in Arendt's critique of Heidegger is elaborated upon by Taminiaux (see esp. 21–22) and Vega, who points out the central importance of natality for political pluralism ("Bad Weather"; "Fox Traps"). Vega writes: "In the face of current theoretical perspectives that advocate a return to ontology in order to account for the 'exceptional' origin of life-in-common, I propose that Arendt invites us to recognize the 'principle of anarchy' innate to 'political beginnings'" ("Bad Weather" 230).

points out that for the post-*Kehre* Heidegger, "where" we go when we think—away from what is immediately near and towards what is distant in thought—becomes a part of the everyday world (a permanent abode), withdrawing from the very activity of withdrawing into thought; and further, entailing a "withdrawal from the world of human affairs" altogether.

Indeed, Arendt notes that this position of radical isolation is found "documented with some degree of certainty only in Plato, who expressed more than once and most drastically in the *Theaetetus* (173d–76) on the dangers of such a residence" ("Eighty"). Her analysis compares Heidegger to the figure of Thales in Plato's dialogue, of whom Socrates says:

> [T]hey say Thales was studying the stars, Theodorus, and gazing aloft, when he fell into a well; and a witty and amusing Thracian servant-girl made fun of him because, she said, he was wild to know about what was up in the sky but failed to see what was in front of him and under his feet. The same joke applies to all who spend their lives in philosophy. (174a)

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Socrates then mocks Thales the philosopher for his "constant ignorance and lack of resource in dealing with the obvious," listing examples ranging from the painfully awkward to the outright contemptuous (174b–75b). That is, while laughable, Heidegger's "absent-mindedness"[11] is not a joke.[12] His lack of "common" sense is a sign that, like many deep thinkers, he has lost touch with or sense for the common world; but like the fox caught in the trap, Heidegger's withdrawal has frightening implications; as a professor of thinking, he takes pride in his trap and invites hosts of visitors to dwell with him in its dangerous confines. But what makes the trap so dangerous, and for whom? In order to elaborate on this critique, we turn to Arendt's later writings.

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[11] As Arendt writes in *The Life of the Mind*, "[t]o put it quite simply, in the proverbial absentmindedness of the philosopher, everything present is absent because something absent is present to his mind, and among the things absent is the philosopher's own body. Both the philosopher's hostility toward politics, 'the petty affairs of men,' and his hostility toward the body have little to do with individual convictions and beliefs; they are inherent in the experience itself" (1: 84–85).

[12] Arendt defends the "laughing Thracian child" from the philosophers and men who, when belittling her understanding of "higher things," "have obviously not discovered what laughter is good for. . ." ("Eighty"). It is interesting to read Arendt's comment in light of Heidegger's commentary on the story from "What is a Thing?", which Taminiaux quotes: "The question 'What Is a Thing?' must always be rated as one which causes housemaids to laugh. And genuine housemaids must have something to laugh about" (1). Arendt elaborates on the story of Thales again in *The Life of the Mind* (1: 82–85).

3.3. TURNING POINTS: TWO READINGS OF HEIDEGGER'S *KEHRE*

Unlike Thales, Heidegger did not merely fall into a well and appear foolish, nor is the danger of the trap theoretical. A section of Arendt's posthumously published work *The Life of the Mind*, titled "Heidegger's Will-not-to-Will," addresses his Nazism in historical and philosophical terms. Her extended analysis centres on the *Kehre*, a term used to describe his "turning against" Nietzsche's will to power in the 1940s; "[i]n Heidegger's understanding," Arendt reflects, "the will to rule and to dominate is a kind of original sin, of which he found himself guilty when he tried to come to terms with his brief past in the Nazi movement" (2: 173).[13] What concerns Arendt about the *Kehre*, as attentive readers like Taminiaux and Dana R. Villa have shown, is that in his repudiation of the faculty of the will, which in her own political theory is "the spring of action" and the "faculty of being able to bring about something new and hence to 'change the world'" (2: 6), Heidegger radically alienates thinking beings from the common world and into a metaphysical fallacy where the thinking activity constitutes the most authentic form of action. In doing so, Villa writes, Heidegger commits an "'error' both more grotesque and more tragic than Plato's misguided attempt to transform a run of the mill tyrant into a philosopher-king" (237), trapping himself inside the realm of thought and away from the possibility of taking action or facing the judgement of the others who inhabit the common world with us.[14]

It is this part of Arendt's multifaceted argument that we attempt to trace through the text, which can be summarized as follows: whereas the question of Being is asked by a being thrown back upon itself by the question, in the later configuration, "when, thrown back upon himself, he raises the question Who is Man?, it is Being, on the contrary, that moves into the foreground; it is Being, as now emerges, that bids man to think" (*Life of the Mind* 2: 173). The task is then for the thinker to listen obediently to "the silent claim of Being" that, in thinking with language,

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[13] Since Arendt's death in 1975, decades of scholarship, including the publication of the Black Notebooks that only began in 2014, have shed more light on Heidegger's private thoughts about Nazism, antisemitism, racial doctrines. Though it is impossible to know how that body of work might have changed Arendt's criticisms, it is important to note that her description of "his brief past in the Nazi movement" refers not to his personal beliefs (however reprehensible and enduring) but to the ten-month period of his political involvement at the University of Freiburg and subsequent withdrawal from public life. It is his (re)interpretation of that time that is the subject of Arendt's theoretical study (and ours).

[14] As Taminiaux tells it, Arendt's "reversal" of Heidegger's "reappropriation" of *praxis* as a completely private phenomenon "is the very fundament of her political thought" (17). He presents a detailed analysis of Heidegger's reading of *praxis*, *poesis*, and *theoria* in relation to Plato, Aristotle, and Husserl (ch. 2).

becomes speech (2: 174). Furthermore, it is only through a passive thinking (expressed through language and *Gelassenheit*, "letting be") in response to the claim of Being that the History of Being (*Seinsgeschichte*) is actualized: not through the actions of people in the world, but through the thinking of the Thinker, which in "Letter on Humanism," Arendt specifies, "is the only authentic 'doing' (*Tun*) of man" (2: 175, 2: 180–81); not in response to the call of conscience (as in the early Heidegger) but in response to the ghostly call of Being (2: 186–87). In short, Heidegger's *Kehre* includes a reconceptualization of the will in which (in Arendt's words) "man is willed by the Will to will without experiencing what this Will is about" (2: 49), and this Thinker, rather than Hegel's *Zeitgeist*, is now the incarnation of Being, who "remains the '*solus ipse*' in 'existential solipsism,' except that now the fate of the world, the History of Being, has come to depend on him" (2: 187).[15]

As she follows the shifts in his thinking that culminate in the solitary thinker who acts/appears by withdrawing into thought, Arendt draws attention to what she calls a "variation" of Heidegger's teachings. Like "Letter on Humanism," *Der Spruch des Anaximander* (*The Anaximander Fragment*) was published in 1946 (though written in 1942); by reading these two texts together, Arendt is able to interpret the *Kehre* as a genuine "turning point" that presented more than one path forward. In contrast to the rest of Heidegger's body of work (and "Letter on Humanism" in particular), *Anaximander*—perhaps in a manner similar to *Über den Anfang* (written in 1941 but unpublished in Arendt's lifetime)—provides "haunting hints at another possibility of ontological speculation" through a "strictly phenomenological description" of the subject in which the subject "'lingers' in the present 'between twofold absence,' its arrival and departure" (*Life of the Mind* 2: 189). The lingering in the present that Heidegger describes, and the spatial-temporal tension of thinking, which both initiates in a withdrawal from what is close at hand, and a drawing near towards what is distant, is an essential characteristic of the thinking activity and a "key to which everything [in his whole work] is attuned" (Arendt, "Eighty").

In Arendt's analysis, the being who lingers in the present stands in contrast to the obedient thinker who responds to the call of Being by taking up residence in its house (language). Arendt writes that "[i]n the exegesis of the Anaximander fragment, unconcealment is not truth; it

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[15] Taminiaux draws a comparison between Heidegger's escape into "thought" and Adolf Eichmann's thoughtlessness (136). For a reading of Heidegger's "error" of loneliness (trapped alone in thought) against Arendt's critique of Eichmann's thoughtlessness, see Burton (167–72).

belongs to the beings that arrive from and depart into a hidden being" (*Life of the Mind* 2: 190). She summarizes Heidegger's argument:

> [T]he coming and going, appearing and disappearing, of beings always begins with a disclosure that is an *ent-bergen*, the loss of the original shelter (*bergen*) that had been granted by Being; the being then "lingers for a while" in the "brightness" of disclosure, and ends by returning to the sheltering shield of Being in its concealment. . . . everything we know has become, has emerged from some previous darkness into the light of day; and this becoming remains its law while it lasts: its lasting is at the same time its passing-away. (2: 190–91)

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In other words, in *Anaximander* the subject is not only coming home, but also departing or venturing out from its "original shelter"—which in this case is death itself, pitted against the everyday world of becoming. Although Arendt identifies several other problems in *Anaximander,* she concludes that in it, Heidegger provides "a kind of history with a beginning and an end" for the ontological separation of Being and beings, in which Being begins by disclosing itself in beings and thereby initiates both the withdrawal of Being back into itself and the venturing out, briefly, into the "realm of error," or, in Arendt's re-interpretation, "the sphere of common human history" (2: 191–92).

3.4. FROM THE POLITICAL CONDITION OF LONELINESS TO FREEDOM

In the final analysis, the question Arendt posed at the beginning of her discussion of the Will—"whether men of action were not perhaps in a better position to come to terms with the problems of the Will than the men of thought" (2: 6)—seems affirmed, and she turns to other sources to ponder the "problem of beginnings," i.e. that the founding of a new beginning always carries "in itself an element of complete arbitrariness," and further has to contend with the contradictions of becoming in a world that already existed (2: 6, 2: 207). "Professional thinkers, whether philosophers or scientists," Arendt writes in reference to Heidegger and others, "have not been 'pleased with freedom' and its ineluctable randomness; they have been unwilling to pay the price of contingency for the questionable gift of spontaneity. . ." (2: 198).

On the other hand, "men of action," who initiate something that could have been otherwise and who understand that what they do cannot be undone, face the "abyss of freedom" that is liberated from the bonds of necessity and causality. "In the normal time continuum every effect immediately turns into a cause of future developments," Arendt explains, "but when the causal chain is broken . . . there is nothing left for the

'beginner' to hold on to" (2: 207–08). And she knows of only one thinker who accounted for these problems of freedom and beginnings, namely Augustine:

> According to him, as we know, God created man as a temporal creature, *homo temporalis*; time and man were created together, and this temporality was affirmed by the fact that each man owed his life not just to the multiplication of the species, but to birth, the entry of a novel creature who *as* something entirely new appears in the midst of the time continuum of the world. The purpose of the creation of man was to make possible a *beginning* . . . The very capacity for beginning is rooted in *natality*, and by no means in creativity, not in a gift but in the fact that human beings, new men, again and again appear in the world by virtue of birth. (2: 216–17)

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Arendt's invocation of Augustine in establishing the ontological position of natality speaks to the close links between her central concept and her critique of Heidegger.[16] But rather than juxtapose natality against Heidegger's mortality, or life with death, the inverse concept of natality— that which destroys new beginnings—is loneliness.

Like natality, Arendt treats loneliness as a political condition, and it is this condition that may best describe the fox's trap. As Miguel Vatter traces through Arendt's writings, Arendt's notion of natality reaches full maturity around 1958 with the publication of *The Human Condition* and the second edition of *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (Vatter 141). In the final paragraphs of the newly-written concluding chapter of the latter ("Ideology and Terror"), Arendt invokes Augustine once again in response to the terrifying peril posed by "organized loneliness" under totalitarianism, which "threatens to ravage the world as we know it—a world which everywhere seems to have come to an end—before a new beginning rising from this end has had time to assert itself" (*Origins* 478).[17]

Here, Arendt returns to the figure of the philosopher, for whom solitude (the experience which allows one to "be with oneself" in thought) is a familiar terrain; loneliness, on the other hand, is an "uprootedness," the "experience of not belonging to the world at all, which is among the most radical and desperate experiences of man" (475).[18] Without both one's own

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[16] Others have noted that the word "natality" can be read as a deliberate choice to avoid Heideggerian language; indeed, Arendt translated the term into German as "Natalität," a term that does not appear in Heidegger's work (Vatter 139; see also İlhan DemïRyol 128).

[17] Her description, including the invocation of Augustine, echoes her articulation of action in *The Human Condition* (177–78).

[18] See Maslin (ch. 2) on the role of "rootedness" in both Arendt and Heidegger; see also Vatter (141–42).

company and the world of experience, what is left is the kind of logical reasoning that manages to hang on to self-evident truths in a deserted plane. To trust in nothing but truisms like "two and two equals four" is to diminish thinking to a "strict self-evident logicality, from which apparently there is no escape," and further, a "deducing process which always arrives at the worst possible conclusions" (477).[19] What is more, under conditions of totalitarianism, the lonely person is especially vulnerable to what

> looks like a suicidal escape from this reality . . . the strict avoidance of contradictions that seems to confirm a man's identity outside all relationships with others. It fits him into the iron band of terror even when he is alone, and totalitarian domination tries never to leave him alone except in the extreme situation of solitary confinement.[20] (478)

Natality constitutes the antithesis of the terror which fits a person like an iron band; "Beginning, before it becomes a historical event, is the supreme capacity of man; politically, it is identical with man's freedom" (479).

4. DEPARTURE

In this paper, we have tried to show how the story of the fox's trap, though just a short journal entry at a crucial moment of Arendt life, can draw together Arendt's complex critiques of Heidegger's existential solipsism, in which "taking up wonder as one's permanent abode" sets one apart from the very world that constitutes the place in which we linger between birth and death. While texts like *Anaximander* and *Über den Anfang* gesture towards a phenomenological description of Being as involving both "coming and going," arrival and departure, Heidegger ultimately shies away from the exilic aspects of Being—and of the faculties of the mind: thinking, willing, and judging—as beings who sojourn in a world of appearances, embodied and visible to others, not just in silent speech but aloud in words and deeds.

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[19] In such a light, the fox making himself at home in his trap appears as a pathetic character. This is only highlighted further in other passages, as in *The Human Condition* where Arendt notes that "lonely figures . . . remain outside the pale of human intercourse and are, politically, marginal figures who usually only enter the historical scene in times of corruption, disintegrations, and political bankruptcy" (180).

[20] Vega highlights the significance of Arendt's critique of Heidegger in elucidating this point, explaining that "for Arendt the post-totalitarian political crisis could not be understood if the crisis of philosophy was not tackled, and Heidegger blatantly manifested that theoretical and political quandary" ("Bad Weather" 231).

In contrast, Arendt shows that we are authentic in being "called out" from the private and into the public world, to respond through our actions that go beyond our control and are thus in *ex*-ile. As Taminiaux writes,

> Arendt's denunciation of what she calls the "metaphysical fallacies" does not consist at all in denouncing the paradox of belonging to and withdrawing from appearances, but quite on the contrary in putting value upon it and assuming it. There is a fallacy when the paradox, far from being recognizes as such, is covered over. This paradox is that of the human condition. . .[21] (132)

It is the vocation of the human to depart from what was and thereby open up for what is to come: giving rise to a future that is undetermined, and continues to arrive (*l'avenir*) rather than be predicted and controlled.[22] Or in yet other words: a predictable and controlled future is not an actual future, but rather a continuation of the past, denying for future to arrive.

Being "provoked" to think, thus, means nothing else than being "called upon" to live. Not any life, and certainly not the life of "das Man" or the "they" (man). Rather, we are called upon in our own groundlessness from which we stick out in this awkward way. Standing face-to-face with the question of our own existence, no one can give this response for us— we are this incipience. The danger, however, is that this house of Being becomes solipsistic, because we remain inside or carry it on our back to strange lands, like a snail. Thinking alone is never enough; so easily we can become trapped in our desire to create permanence and eschew change. For as long as we linger in this world, thrown into time, we live in a state of someone "forever taking leave" (Rilke, "Eighth Elegy" 331), and therefore capable of new beginnings.

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[21] Villa takes a similar view, writing that "[f]or some, this state of affairs may be a source of untempered regret; for Hannah Arendt, however, it signifies both loss and hope" (270). See also Vega on the "paradox" posed by beginnings/*Anfang* ("Bad Weather" 240–41).

[22] Through our relationship with and rootedness in Being, the poet (dis)closes its (re)veiling character as we respond to what comes toward us in our advent(ure) into the future. Starting with the exodus from the womb into the world, the departure from each moment into the next, and finally our last departure as we leave our mortal body behind, farewell and beginning are the two faces of human existence.

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Belonging and Longing:
The Question of the Subject in Renaud Barbaras and Jean-Luc Marion

Abstract

The philosophy of Renaud Barbaras and Jean-Luc Marion departs from the transcendental role of the subject. No longer is the subject regarded as its own foundation, nor does it own or constitute its objects. Instead, it originates from some other principle and source. In order to comprehend why the subject loses its transcendental role, we first examine how the two phenomenologists perform the phenomenological reduction and to which more primordial instance than the subject itself it leads them. Consequently, we outline the tension inherent in the new understanding of the subject as one who receives itself from the givenness (Marion) or as life in the world and the desire of the world (Barbaras). The central theme of our study on the decentralized subject revolves around the concepts of belonging and longing. It can be argued that the essence and belonging of the subject lie in its desire and longing. Barbaras and Marion both consider the dimension of desire and love to be crucial for the subject. This essay seeks to highlight the commonalities and the reasons for the differences in their understanding of desire.

Keywords: Renaud Barbaras, Jean-Luc Marion, subject, love, desire.

INTRODUCTION

Phenomenology seeks to return to the things themselves through *epoché*, but we also observe a zigzag motion in the way it proceeds: "We search, as it were, in zigzag fashion, a metaphor all the more apt since the close interdependence of our various epistemological concepts leads us back again and again to our original analyses, where the new confirms the old, and the old the new" (Husserl, *Logical* 175). Due to "the essential correlation between appearing and that which appears" (Husserl, *Idea* 69), i.e. the "universal a priori of correlation" between a given thing and its subjective modes of givenness, this zigzag specifically moves between the terms of this correlation.[1] Thus, through *epoché*, Husserl leads to a new understanding of the subject reduced to the realm of immanent lived experiences of consciousness, which is nevertheless transcendental, intentional, and intrinsically related to the objects constituted by it. This hermeneutic zigzag can also take the form given to it by Heidegger in *Being and Time*—the clarification of the sense of being requires the clarification of the sense of being of the "subject," now understood as being-in-the-world and ek-sistence.

One could say, then, that at the heart of phenomenology lies the question of the role of the subject and its relation to the world or the other. To help us describe the subject in phenomenology a pair of concepts—belonging and longing—can be taken as a certain heuristic and hermeneutic guiding thread. For the question of the subject's dwelling, of its own "essence" (belonging), paradoxically seems to lead to its transcending nature (longing). Furthermore, there is a tension between these two aspects that is fundamental to the question of the subject. The preservation or resolution of this tension has significant consequences for a given philosophy.

The phenomenology of Jean-Luc Marion and Renaud Barbaras exhibits a similar tension. The aim of this article is to highlight both the similarities and differences in their approaches to the subject's role. The common thesis of both philosophers is the paradoxical notion that the essence of the subject, its belonging, is its longing and desire. The difference lies in the interpretation of the nature and "object" of this desire. This difference, however, arises from the distinct phenomenological principles and the

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[1] The importance of this correlation is indicated, for example, by the following comment by Husserl: "The first breakthrough of this universal a priori of correlation between experienced object and manners of givenness (which occurred during work on my *Logical Investigations* around 1898) affected me so deeply that my whole subsequent life-work has been dominated by the task of systematically elaborating on this a priori of correlation" (*Crisis* 166).

results of the reduction. Marion reduces the subject to givenness, which serves as the manifestation principle of the phenomenon. In contrast, Barbaras reduces the subject to the horizon of life and the world, leading to metaphysical and cosmological considerations.[2]

THE ABSOLUTE AND THE RELATIVE

Phenomenological reduction leads to an irreducible principle that is considered absolute. Unlike Husserl, Marion and Barbaras claim that the transcendental subject itself is not this absolute principle and must undergo reduction. Marion says: "The reduction thus always first reduces the one who operates it—and it is by this recoiling on itself that the phenomenological validity of each attempt at reduction is measured" (*Excess* 47). However, Marion argues that although phenomenology has progressed beyond Husserl's transcendental "I," another instance often assumes the equivalent role of the transcendental subject—"*Dasein*, the face of the other, flesh" (46). To comprehend the reason for the changes in the understanding of the subject, it is necessary to inquire about the starting point and irreducible principles of Barbaras's and Marion's phenomenological reflection.

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The starting point of Barbaras's phenomenology is the aforementioned "correlative a priori" and the question of perception. He argues that the only way to truly understand perception is to avoid reducing it to one pole of correlation, resulting in naïve realism or idealism (even a transcendental one). What makes this understanding of perception possible in Barbaras's approach, which seeks to overcome the primacy of the transcendental subject, is the horizon of the world in which the phenomenon appears (Barbaras, *Dynamique* 243). Hence the ultimate threefold structure of manifestation, according to Barbaras following Patočka, is the world, the one to whom the world appears, and the "how of manifestation," i.e. the interrelation of the two (Barbaras, *Introduction* 86).

Maintaining this position is not easy, since the subject cannot simply be juxtaposed with the world, nor *vice versa*. For a thing to appear to the subject, to be given to him "in person" (*leibhaft* is Husserl's actual term) (Husserl, *Ideas* 181), the subject must be flesh in the world, or rather must be as living flesh (not only as physical body) part of that world (and, as Merleau-Ponty notes, the world must thus also be related to the flesh).

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[2] On the question of subject in Barbaras and Marion, see Pommier—in our paper we focus more on the role of desire. On the question of subject after its metaphysical and transcendental understanding, see Cadava, Connor, and Nancy.

On the other hand, Barbaras reproaches Merleau-Ponty, arguing that the manifestation of phenomena would not occur if the subject belonging to the world were not somehow, in the manner of being, different from it. Barbaras summarizes the problem as follows: "The subject is a being that is unique because it is enveloped by what it conditions, involved, so to speak, in a spectacle that it stages" (*Introduction* 92, translation mine). At this point, the key technical terms for Barbaras are "belonging" and "cobelonging" (*Desire* 63). The subject belongs to the world and the world belongs to the subject:

> The body envelops the world, that is to say makes it appear, only to the degree to which it is enveloped by it, so that the manifestation of the world *for* the body is at the same time manifestation of the world *by itself* within the body, so that the body's constituting power coincides with the phenomenalizing potency of the world. This intertwining reveals therefore an ontological continuity between the body and the world, a cobelonging deeper than their opposition; and it is this cobelonging that the concept of Flesh receives. Flesh designates nothing more than the element itself of appearance insofar as it has, as constitutive moments, the appearing world and a subject that is on the side of what it makes appear, and is consequently incarnated. (Barbaras, *Desire* 159–60)

How can we understand the world that the subject belongs to? A thing that appears in the world appears thanks to the world. The world is an excess that allows appearances, but never itself appears in its entirety as an object of perception. This understanding of the world as a horizon can be traced back to early Husserl. Barbaras deepens this understanding by drawing on the life-world of the late Husserl, as well as on Merleau-Ponty and Patočka. In addition, Barbaras refers to Rilke to further develop this concept. The world is referred to as "the Open" (*l'Ouvert*) (Barbaras, *Introduction* 243). It is the origin of life, movement, and nature, from which the living subject emerges and to which it returns through death. The world is the ultimate belonging of the subject but, at the same time, its longing—the subject is separated from the world, and therefore lacks the fullness of the world. This lack itself makes the subject constantly transcend the things of the world in the desire for the world, which is also the dynamic of phenomenalization (of the correlational a priori).

In his earlier work, Barbaras points to the absolute point of manifestation as the "there is" ("*il y a*," "*es gibt*"):

> The only absolute is phenomenality itself—"there is" something—and like the world the subject is relative. . . . Thus one is confronted with the heretofore unknown situation of a condition that can be conditioning

only by being situated alongside that of which it is the condition, a transcendental that is delayed with respect to itself or that has always already preceded itself, such that it is necessarily enveloped by what it constitutes, . . . there is a subject of the world only if it is inscribed in the world, only if it is incarnated. (*Desire* 82)

Although the cited text prioritizes manifestation and relativizes both the world and the subject, in *Dynamique de la manifestation* (2013) Barbaras presents a slightly different perspective. He puts into question the a priori of the correlative a priori. Therefore, he is not merely claiming the mutual presupposition and constitution of the subject and the world, starting from the absolute dimension of phenomenality. Instead, he is questioning what this situation presupposes (Barbaras, *Dynamique* 12). Therefore, this is a matter concerning the a priori of phenomenology and phenomenality itself, which goes beyond phenomenology and towards its metaphysics. In this new view, there is not one, but two absolute principles: the archi-movement and archi-life of the world and the archi-event of subjectivity. For this to be the case, the world must retain its "anonymous appearance"—it must own its appearance (Barbaras, *Dynamique* 256): "[T]he subject receives, gathers and grasps an appearance which is first anonymous—appearance for nobody, as being the world's work—and changes it in a 'subjective' appearance, that is, a perception" (Barbaras, "Exodus and Exile" 51). The event of the subject, being intrinsically unpredictable and without reason, cannot be reduced to the world. However, this event is precisely the subject, and therefore the desire, which is nothing other than the desire of the world.

Let us now turn to Jean-Luc Marion. The starting point of Marion's phenomenology is the absolute character of givenness, to which the subject is relative. Relative to the givenness is even the manifestation itself. Therefore, Marion says: "[T]he given also gives itself in the figure of the abandoned when it is deprived of intuition, either by shortage or by excess . . . if all that shows itself must first give itself, it sometimes happens that what gives itself does not succeed in showing itself" (*Being Given* 309). Marion proposes a new definition of phenomenon as that which saturates our concepts, giving more than we can grasp or withstand with our perception.

Establishing a new principle in phenomenology—"[s]o much reduction, so much givenness" (Marion, *Being Given* 3)—he grapples with the problem imposed by the very notion of principle and method. He argues that a method cannot a priori determine the extent of the reduction to givenness and proposes the notion of a "counter-method." Marion also refers to the "zigzag" and "turn" of the reduction in this context: "All

the difficulty of the reduction—and the reason it always remains to be done and redone, with neither end nor sufficient success—stems from the swerve it must make, one where it inverts itself ('zigzagging' along)" (*Being Given* 10).

In summary, both Barbaras and Marion begin with the primacy of manifestation, although they understand its dynamics differently. Marion emphasizes the absolute primacy of givenness, while Barbaras emphasizes the cobelonging of the world and the subject. They both reject the transcendental role of the subject, proposing its new understanding. The transformations of the subject can now be examined more closely, following the guiding thread of belonging and longing.

THE SUBJECT'S BELONGING

Barbaras claims that the subject's belonging to the world is only possible if the subject is alive.[3] Living flesh enables the subject to be in and of the world and to phenomenalize it. Although life appears to involve empirical determinations like metabolism and needs, its true phenomenological determination is desire. For only desire has the capacity to relate to the infinite world, opening itself to its excess, allowing it to appear not so much as an object, but precisely as the world: "Indeed, the characteristic of desire is that it delivers a presence in a way that excludes intuition: to desire is to move towards a given liberated from seeing, it's aiming for that which exceeds all presentation" (Barbaras, *La vie* 26, translation mine). Another characteristic of desire is that "the object that satisfied it intensifies it to the exact degree that it satisfies it, so that satisfaction signifies the reactivation of desire rather than its extinguishment" (Barbaras, *Desire* 110).

The living subject thus constantly receives itself from the world through desire. Moreover, desire is the very essence of the living subject. Desire is lack that can be filled by the world, but unlike a need, it grows as it is fulfilled (Barbaras, *Dynamique* 252–53). The subject's being is ecstasy, transcendence, openness, dynamism, and desire. In other words—its belonging is the same as its longing and desire. Barbaras claims:

> Thus to say that something affects me is to recognize that an indeterminate aspiration opens up a field of originary transcendence; the activity characteristic of passivity is desire. . . . It possesses only what dispossesses it; it is rejoined only in being called by an other. The birth of a "self" and the emergence of a pure exteriority do not constitute an alternative. (*Desire* 113)

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[3] On Barbaras's phenomenology of life, see Gély; Riquier.

In Marion, we see a similar transformation of the subject.[4] If it is the givenness that comes first, then in relation to the subject it constitutes a "pure call," in relation to which the subject finds itself "concerned," "summoned," "puzzled." Marion says: "In classical terms, one will say that the derived and secondary category of relation, which in principle should not apply to the first category, substance, not only applies to it but subverts it; the *interloqué* discovers itself as a subject always already derived starting from a relation, a subject without subjecti(vi)ty" (*Reduction* 201). Similarly, Barbaras states that the subject's life is "essentially a life of relation: As Patočka says, the flesh's being is that of a relation and not of a thing" (*Introduction* 111, translation mine). Barbaras also refers to the world as a "pure call" (*Introduction* 238) (although "the call" does not play here such an important theoretical role as in Marion's case, who additionally insists on resisting identifying the source of the call other than givenness).

Starting from the absolute principle of givenness, Marion reduces the subject and in *Being Given* refers to the "one who comes after the subject" as "the gifted" (248). The gifted can no longer own or create a phenomenon. The gifted is just a "strict consequence of the givenness of the phenomenon" as one "to whom/which alone what gives itself shows itself" (252). Similarly, Barbaras says: "It is not because it enters into relations with a subject that the world appears; on the contrary, it is because it appears in itself that it is capable of entering into relation with a subject, of giving itself to a recipient" (*Dynamique* 234, translation mine). The gifted, like a "screen," is the place where what is given appears (Marion, *Being Given* 265). Moreover, the gifted receives itself from what he or she receives. The act and the passivity of receiving constitutes the subject itself and the phenomenalization of the given at the same time. On the screen of the subject/gifted, who is also part of the world (Barbaras), who is also given (Marion), is reflected the light of the given phenomenon that thus appears together with the subject. The screen analogy highlights the subject's passivity, while also acknowledging that the phenomenalization process depends on the gifted response. In both Marion and Barbaras work, the opposition between passivity and activity in the subject is blurred.

Another important characteristic of the subject in Marion's thought is the concept of "counter-intentionality." This concept challenges the traditionally understood intentionality and refers to the idea that the gifted is not the one constituting the phenomenon but is instead "constituted" by it as a "witness" (Marion, *Being Given* 313). The gifted is always "late" in the face of givenness: "I am without myself, late and lagging behind myself" (Marion, *Self's Place* 79). The radicality of the delay can be seen,

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[4] On this topic, see e.g., Gschwandtner; Martis.

for example, in the simple facts of birth and receiving a name, where the gifted always has already received and receives itself (Marion, *Reprise* 142). This is why Marion can say that with the gifted

> it is no longer a case of understanding oneself in the nominative case (intending the object—Husserl), nor in the genitive (of Being—Heidegger), nor even in the accusative (accused by the Other—Levinas), but in terms of the dative: I receive myself from the call that gives me to myself before giving me anything whatsoever. (*Being Given* 269)

THE SUBJECT'S LONGING

If the subject receives itself from what it receives and therefore receives itself from the other, then one can question the dynamics and meaning of this receiving, which can be described as desire. According to Marion, receiving oneself from the other is ultimately receiving oneself from another "gifted." The supreme phenomenon, then, is the phenomenon of love. Similarly, Barbaras, who argues that desire is the essence of the living subject in the world, states: "Clearly, if the feeling of love can shed light on the essence of Desire, which is its condition of possibility, then conversely our phenomenology of living, insofar as it is centred on the concept of Desire, can nourish our understanding of the amorous relationship" (*Introduction* 287, translation mine). First, we will examine the role of desire in Marion, followed by Barbaras's approach. This analysis will allow us to highlight the differences in their concepts of desire.

Reduction to givenness imposes a logic of giving and receiving on phenomenalization itself, by affecting the one making the reduction. Marion claims that the elaboration of the phenomenology of givenness raises a new question: "[W]hat becomes of the gifted, when the given that he receives by receiving himself, instead of remaining a being of the world, also turns out to be another gifted?" (*Prolégomènes* 10, translation mine). He describes a "phenomenological situation" where the primary concern is not only ethical but also involves facing the Other in his "unsubstitutable particularity . . . This individuation has a name: love" (*Being Given* 324). He uses the term "erotic phenomenon" and indicates the univocality of the concept of love, which would incorporate what tradition has distinguished and even contrasted in the concepts of *eros* and *agape*.

In *The Erotic Phenomenon* Marion argues that the search for truth is not only a theoretical quest but also a personal one. He suggests that the certainty of knowledge regarding the subject itself is elusive due to

a certain excess, since we are not the object we constitute, but rather living flesh. Therefore, all possible objective knowledge "does not concern us" (*Erotic* 17). Marion poses a question that initiates an "erotic reduction." The question challenges even the "certainty" of one's own existence: "what's the use?" Marion argues that vanity, manifested in boredom and melancholy, undermines the metaphysical quest for certainty (*God* 115). The choice to love, as a means of overcoming the impasse of vanity, constitutes a certain "erotic possibility" that is indispensable to being human: "I myself can only be, from the very first, according to possibility, and thus according to radical possibility—the possibility that someone loves me or could love me" (Marion, *Erotic* 21).

Marion rejects the possibility of self-love. Love can only come from elsewhere, just as the subject receives himself from elsewhere. However, arriving at love takes place as a decision, and therefore as a desire, to love first. It is important to note that in this decision to love, according to Marion, the erotic phenomenon overcomes the two aporias of the transcendental "I" and the related problem of intersubjectivity, namely lack of individuation and solipsism. He argues that it is only through the other, who is given (giving itself) originally through the erotic phenomenon, that one can escape solipsism and achieve radical individuation. Love opens access to the other, who in turn only gives place to the self:

> The ego is not itself therefore by itself—neither by self-apprehension in self-consciousness (Descartes, at least in the common interpretation) nor by a performative (Descartes, in a less commonly accepted reading), nor by apperception (Kant), nor even by autoaffection (Henry) or anticipatory resoluteness (Heidegger). The ego does not even accede to itself *for* an other (Levinas) or *as* an other (Ricœur); rather, it becomes itself only *by* an other—in other words by a gift; for everything happens, without exception, as and by a gift . . . (Marion, *Self's Place* 285)

Let us now explore the concept of desire in Barbaras's philosophy. It is important to note that the topic of love is closely related to the dimension of desire, which is the central aspect of his phenomenology of life: "Love and desire are therefore rigorously indissociable . . . love provides the horizon for desire, or rather it is its very horizon, that kind of excess of desire over itself that allows it to move forward, that compass that never stops pointing it the path" (Barbaras, *Désir* 231, translation mine). Like Marion, Barbaras argues that love gives individuation to me and the other and highlights the ambiguity of the concept of love while rejecting premature categorization of different "types" of love (*Désir* 219).

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According to Barbaras, desire leads us beyond mere objects and towards the world and life itself. It plays a central role in his phenomenological, metaphysical, and cosmological considerations:

> So, the condition of the subject difference, that is, negativity, is also the condition of its belonging to the world: as movement, the subject both inseparably differs from the world and is inscribed within it. From the same viewpoint, that of mobility, the subject is rooted in the world and foreign to it and this is why it can make the world appear. . . . This way of existing is, of course, that of desire . . . desire is always a quest for identity, a search for a restoration. This quest is necessary because the subject is separated from itself, because its identity lies outside, in otherness. (Barbaras, "Exodus and Exile" 49–50)

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However—and this represents an important difference compared to Marion's philosophy—desire, and therefore love, is for Barbaras always: 1) a desire for the world: "The other can be an object of desire insofar as, in its very difference from intramundane being, it initiates us into the world" (Barbaras, *Désir* 211, translation mine); 2) desire is a desire for the self, since the subject receives the self in the other and the world; 3) desire as such is never fulfilled:

> [D]esire is not a return to the self by means of the other, but a search for the self in the other. This is why it is doomed to dissatisfaction: if the other is the place where the self emerges or is fulfilled, it is nonetheless the other and not the self. . . . the insatiability of desire, insofar as it is desire for the self, corresponds precisely to the fact that the other presents the self only as always absent. (Barbaras, *Introduction* 304, translation mine)

Let us compare these features of desire in Barbaras with analogous features in Marion: Ad 1) In Marion we also find references to the flesh and the world in the context of love. However, the focus is ultimately on the other as such. And it is not only the world but also the flesh that the other gives me. The flesh of the other in love phenomenalizes itself according to a particular mode, which is radically different from the usual mode of autoaffection, for normally I feel myself, my flesh, encountering resistance from objects. Now, however, the situation is reversed—the flesh of the other does not resist, and so gives me my proper place, "freeing me" and "allowing me to become myself" (Marion, *Erotic* 114). Marion discusses the eroticization of the flesh, which involves more than just touching an object in the world. It is a form of caressing that involves the "non-resistance of another passivity, more powerful than every activity" (*Erotic* 119). The

condition of possibility and the meaning of my flesh, and therefore of my very immanence, is the flesh of the other: "From that point forward, the other gives me what she does not have—my very flesh. And I give her what I do not have—her very flesh. . . . Each discovers him- or herself the depository of what is most intimate of the other" (*Erotic* 120–21).

In Marion's philosophy, it is not the world but the other in love that gives me my flesh. Additionally, the other also gives me the world—in reflecting on the signification of the erotic phenomenon Marion states:

> Signification does not come upon me here in a way that is like that of all the other phenomena, from the ground of the unseen and thus from the world and from its original opening; signification, when it consents to put itself into play, issues from another world—or better, not even from the world, but from the other more exterior to me than any world, because the other, too, defines the world (or indeed, henceforward he or she is the first to do so). (*Erotic* 103)

Ad 2) Marion's approach involves receiving the self only after the act of giving without reserve. In this view, the other cannot serve as an intentional intermediary to reach the self or the world. However, it is worth noting that Marion acknowledges the figure of the third person (and not the world) as a witness to love (a motif taken from Levinas's philosophy).

Ad 3) Although Marion also acknowledges that desire intensifies as it is fulfilled, it can be said that in love, or rather in its truth as "revelation," from "elsewhere" comes a certain fulfilment (see Marion, *D'ailleurs*; Marion, *Das Erscheinen*). The very question of erotic reduction—whether love is possible—and the answer as a decision to love first, is ultimately a response to the call of the other who loves me first: "In fact, for me it is never a matter of knowing if someone loved me, loves me, or will love me, but of knowing who and when" (Marion, *Erotic* 216).

CONCLUSION

Regarding the guiding thread of belonging and longing, it is important to note that the subject in the phenomenology of Barbaras and Marion differs greatly from its transcendental understanding. The role of the source and principle lies elsewhere than in the subject itself—in the principle of life, in the world, and as archi-event in Barbaras and in the principle of givenness in Marion. The focus is not on the subject constituting and possessing objects, but on the subject receiving itself, whether from the world or from givenness. The ultimate figure of this paradoxically active receptivity of the self is love and desire. The belonging of the subject is its longing, and

reciprocally in love its longing is its belonging. Although this paradoxical structure is not new—it can already be seen in Heidegger's notion of the "subject" as being-in-the-world and being-with-others—both Marion and Barbaras point out the aporias and shortcomings of Heidegger's approach, since *Dasein* carries some remnants of the transcendental role of the subject (Marion, *Being Given* 259–62; Barbaras, *Introduction* 39–46).

The difference in understanding desire between the two philosophers results in a certain difference in the interpretation of love (despite many similarities). Barbaras believes that desire is an essential characteristic of the living subject coming from and being separated from the world, while Marion views desire as a feature of erotic reduction within the horizon of givenness. For Barbaras, the other is like a window to the world and, at the same time, a window to the self. For Marion, the other is the one who, in love, reveals the true self to the subject—to use St. Augustine's formulation, to which Marion refers—*interior intimo meo et superior summo meo*. Marion argues that the world, flesh and self of the subject opened and given by the other are the result of an act of love on the part of the subject—however, this act is made possible because the subject has always already received love.

The difference between Barbaras's and Marion's understanding of the subject and desire ultimately depends on preliminary considerations regarding the absolute dimension of phenomenological reduction—whether it pertains to the world and life or to the givenness. The importance of the "zigzag" pattern of phenomenology is once again highlighted. For Barbaras, the subject is never fulfilled desire of the world—it is "negativity" in comparison to the fullness of the world and at the same time the "archi-event of separation of the world from itself" (Barbaras, "Exodus and Exile" 45). For Marion, the principle of the fullness of givenness, that gives the world, life, the subject, and every other given thing, transforms the subject "with no other *subjectum* besides his capacity to receive and to receive himself from what he receives" (Marion, *Being Given* 4). In Marion, the concept of subject, desire, and love is interpreted in the horizon of giving and receiving, rather than in the cosmological and metaphysical horizon as seen in Barbaras.

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Back in the Old Country: Homecoming and Belonging in Leonard Kniffel's *A Polish Son in the Motherland: An American's Journey Home* and Kapka Kassabova's *To the Lake: A Balkan Journey of War and Peace*

Abstract

Homecoming travel narratives are typically written by first-wave immigrants, their children, or grandchildren. Usually, homecoming books are accounts of emotionally charged travels that oscillate between nostalgia and idealization of the ancestral land on the one hand and a sense of grief, loss and unbelonging on the other. The present paper examines two homecoming travel narratives that sidestep such pitfalls: Leonard Kniffel's *A Polish Son in the Motherland: An American's Journey Home* (2005) and Kapka Kassabova's *To the Lake: A Balkan Journey of War and Peace* (2020). For both authors, a starting point of the journey is a deep bond with their late maternal grandmothers, whose stories of "the old country" have shaped their sense of identity. Neither Kniffel, a Polish-American author, nor Kassabova, a Bulgarian-born writer writing in English, has ever lived in the countries their grandmothers left as young women—Poland and Macedonia. Return travels not only allow them to better understand the interplay of past and present in their immigrant family history but also to accept their homeland as a complex historical, cultural, and personal legacy. Thus, in both books, returning to the ancestral homeland, undertaken at mid-life, is represented as an essential stage in one's life journey, which results in a symbolic sense of closure and restoration.

Keywords: homecoming, homeland, travel books, non-fiction, travels, Poland, Macedonia.

INTRODUCTION: HOME AND HOMECOMING IN TRAVEL WRITING

The concept of home is crucial in travel writing for two main reasons. Firstly, "home" serves as a point of reference in travel literature, as opposed to "abroad." For instance, Terry Caesar argues that "the textual production of abroad in [American] travel writing has enabled the representation of home; moreover, enabling this domestic representation has finally been the purpose of the travel" (5). In essence, many American writers view foreign travel as an opportunity to explore their national identity and contemplate their connection to home (Caesar 2). While some Americans may become too preoccupied with issues related to their homeland while abroad, travellers of other nationalities also tend to compare and contrast the foreign reality with their familiar home culture.

Secondly, a person's "home" or homeland may also be the destination of a journey. In accounts of "'home travels' . . . writers variously celebrate, lament or poke fun at their compatriots, and at the state of their own nation" (Thompson 17). Within this subgenre of domestic travels, one can further distinguish homecoming travel books that describe journeys made across one's homeland after many years of residence abroad. Henry James's *The American Scene* (1907), Henry Miller's *The Air-Conditioned Nightmare* (1945), Norman Levine's *Canada Made Me* (1958), and Bill Bryson's *The Lost Continent* (1986) all belong to this category. Homecoming books may have a range of tones, from bitter to humorous, but they all share certain common elements. The writers reflect on how the passage of time has affected landscapes, people, and places that are familiar to them. Considering the significance of these changes, travellers often vacillate between nostalgia for the past and idealization of their childhood home, on the one hand, and a sense of grief, loss, and not belonging, on the other (Rutkowska, "American" 46).

While the motif of a happy return home is to be found more frequently in popular fiction (Bida 3–4), non-fiction travel books present homecoming as a much more complex process, one fraught with difficult emotions. In her seminal study, Svetlana Boym writes about nostalgia as "a longing for a home that no longer exists or has never existed" (xiii), a spiritual yearning "for an absolute, a home that is both physical and spiritual, the Edenic unity of time and space before entry into history" (8). André Aciman extends this definition to include "*nostophobia*, the fear of returning; *nostomania*, the obsession with going back; *nostography*, writing about return" (7). All these elements, in various combinations, can be identified in accounts of return journeys, which offer forays into personal and national pasts, memory and identity. In some travelogues, revisiting the mother country after years of

absence has a quasi-therapeutic function. For example, Henry Miller, an expatriate returning to the USA at the outset of WWII, expresses a need for reconciliation: "[U]nlike most prodigal sons, I was returning not with the intention of remaining in the bosom of the family but of wandering forth again, perhaps never to return. I wanted to have a last look at my country and leave it with a good taste in my mouth" (10). André Aciman, returning to Alexandria, where he lived as a young man until his Jewish family was exiled from Egypt in 1965, declares: "I had come not to recover memories, nor even to recognize those I'd disfigured, nor to toy with the thought that I'd ever live there again; I had come to bury the whole thing, to get it out of my system" (9). Thus, for Miller and Aciman, the homecoming journey is to provide them with a sense of closure; they neither wish to renew the bond with symbolic home nor think it possible, they rather wish to get rid of the past which haunts them.

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The present paper analyzes two contemporary travel books which constitute less typical examples of homecoming narratives as they describe journeys made not by the immigrants or exiles themselves but their grandchildren. Leonard Kniffel in *A Polish Son in the Motherland: An American's Journey Home* (2005) and Kapka Kassabova in *To the Lake: A Balkan Journey of War and Peace* (2020) describe journeys to Poland and Northern Macedonia, the countries of origin of the authors' maternal grandmothers. Kniffel is of Polish-American descent and Kassabova comes from a Macedonian family which first immigrated to Bulgaria and next to New Zealand. The writers' hyphenated identities reflect the experiences of many people living in diasporic communities and postcolonial societies.

In fact, some researchers attribute the growing popularity of genealogy and "personal heritage tourism" (Timothy 118) to the increasingly mobile and fragmented postmodern reality. People living in indigenous and traditional societies do not need to inquire into their origins as "their history seems as much a part of their lives as eating, sleeping, shopping, and going to work. They know who they are because they know where they come from. They acknowledge and thank those on whose shoulders they stand, who passed on their genes, culture and wisdom" (Fein qtd. in Timothy 117–18). In contrast, many descendants of immigrants, exiles or refugees living at present in Western societies lack this sense of rootedness and feel the need for attachment to particular territorial locations as "nodes of association and continuity, bounding cultures and communities" (Rustin 33). Viewed in a wider cultural context, the books analyzed in this paper can be interpreted as accounts of homecoming where "home" is both foreign and distant from one's usual place of residence, yet also familiar due to the idea of "the old country" being ingrained in the traveller's psyche. The writers aim to establish a personal connection with their ancestral homeland, relying on the guidance

of their grandmothers during their travels, whose recollections they have preserved in memory. In other words, the journeys are motivated by a desire to experience "continuity of being through continuity of place" (Kassabova 34). In their travel books, Kniffel and Kassabova represent homecoming to Poland and Macedonia as journeys to "the source," to the origins of family history, as well as a homage to their ancestors. On a psychological level, these journeys function as personal pilgrimages. The authors not only aim to connect themselves to specific places but also to gain a deeper understanding of their desires, anxieties, and aspirations within the context of their family's immigration history.

METAPHORS AT THE POINT OF DEPARTURE

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For both authors, the trips they make as middle-aged adults—Kniffel is 53 and Kassabova is 40 at the time of the journey—can be traced back to childhood experiences. As children, Kniffel and Kassabova were strongly connected to their late maternal grandmothers, whose stories sparked their curiosity about "the old country" and whose sense of loss they had symbolically inherited. Neither Kniffel, a Polish-American librarian, living in Chicago at the time of his journey, nor Kassabova, a Macedonian writer, born in Bulgaria and now living in Scotland, have ever lived in the countries their grandmothers left as young women: Poland and Macedonia. They are familiar with these countries through their grandmother's stories, old photographs, and family mementos. Both feel that a decision their grandmothers took in the distant past as young women has had a profound influence on their present-day lives.

Before the journey described in the book Kniffel had been to Poland only once, accompanying his mother on a short visit. This time he returns with a specific objective in mind:

> So I have returned to Poland, this time not to pass through but to live here, where my grandmother lived, to see if any threads of Polishness still dangle from that severed connection. What happened to the people in the few old pictures and letters I have packed in my suitcase? And why did they stop writing fifty years ago? I want to know what I missed by being born in America, to understand what it means to lose two thousand years of history in the time it takes to buy a ticket on a ship leaving "the old country" for the new. (Kniffel 4)

Interestingly, the metaphor Kniffel uses in the passage suggests how painful this symbolic break or rupture which happened in the past is for him personally. Dangling threads evoke violently torn material, or even a deep

wound with tattered blood vessels that will not heal on its own. It needs to be tended. The first step is learning Polish, the language of his ancestors, that he never spoke. Next, Kniffel travels to Nowe Miasto Lubawskie, a small town in the north of Poland and lives there for a few months, searching for relatives, learning to cook Polish food, and participating in religious and national festivals.

At the beginning of her book, Kassabova, similarly to Kniffel, resorts to a metaphor to represent how she feels about the legacy of migration. She recalls the story of a massive earthquake which left the Republic of Macedonia in ruins in 1963. To this day, the clock at Skopje's central railway station is stopped at the hour of the earthquake to commemorate this tragic event:

> Sometimes, I feel like that clock. It's an irrational feeling, out of joint with the present: ruins all around, stuck in a long-ago moment of disaster. I knew this stopped clock legacy had come down from my mother but I wanted to find out where that came from and how others carried it. I wanted to know what creates cultural and psychological inheritance, and how we can go forward with it. (Kassabova 6)

The image of a frozen clock suggests stasis, an inability to move forward in life. Another image, frequently evoked in the first pages of the travelogue, is a recurrent dream of flood in which Kassabova is either helplessly watching the disaster from the shore or swimming desperately, trying to save those still alive. Both the frozen clock and the water dream are evocative of death, loss and uncertainty, caused by powers beyond human control.

Thus, in both travelogues a sense of uprootedness caused by the grandmothers' immigration also results in longing and nostalgia in their grandchildren. Their mid-life journeys in search of belonging become a necessary step to mend what has been broken. As Kassabova claims: "Some places are inscribed in our DNA yet take a long time to reveal their contours, just as some journeys are etched into the landscape of our lives yet take a lifetime to complete" (1). Incidentally, both travelers begin their visits in spring, perhaps believing this to be the best season to embark on a journey aimed at searching for answers and starting a new stage of life.

"HOME IS WHERE YOU CAN BE RECOGNIZED"

A staple scene in many homecoming narratives presents an exile returning to his or her home town. There is initial excitement at finally being back, joy at being able to revisit the old haunts, there are also the tears. Inevitably, the

author evokes "the big themes: the return of the native, the romance of the past, the redemption of time. All of it followed by predictable letdowns: the streets always much narrower than before, buildings grown smaller with time, everything in tatters, the city dirty, in ruins" (Aciman 1). While such negative emotions are commonplace in accounts of first-generation diasporic returnees, first impressions are quite different if the traveler has no personal memories connected with the place he or she visits. That is why joy and exhilaration expressed on the first pages of *A Polish Son* and *To the Lake* is not tinged with nostalgia, regret or sadness. "The old country" seems oddly but assuredly familiar. Even though Kniffel and Kassabova have just arrived, they feel a sense of connection and familiarity, which comes from the awareness of their own biological and cultural allegiance to this land. They do not feel themselves to be tourists but rather a native son and daughter returning home after a long time.

Moreover, both authors emphasize the generational circularity of their journeys—after 80 or 90 years they return to exactly the same towns, villages and roads their ancestors once left behind, thus performing, symbolically, "the return of the native." Looking at the old buildings in Nowe Miasto Lubawskie, Kniffel wonders, excited, whether his grandmother walked past them as a girl when she came to town from her small village on market days. The local people look and act in a familiar way: "Everyone reminds me of a cousin in America" (Kniffel 7). He notices an old woman who resembles his grandmother—"toothless, her wrinkled face encircled by a floral babushka"—and is surprised by his reaction: "I want to stop her, hug her, and tell her I am home here with her" (Kniffel 165). At some point he realizes he could easily pass for a native.

A similar sense of "genetic" belonging is recorded by Kassabova in her account. Even at the airport in Skopje she feels "dunked in a genotype soup: all the men looked like my cousins" (28). During her first week in Ohrid she is repeatedly stopped by the elderly people and asked a quintessential Ohridian question: "Whose are you?" It seems her physical appearance betrays her origins, she is immediately identified as a descendant of the old Ohridian family. She visits relatives and finds new ones, discovering with surprise that she is probably related to most old families in the town.

Thus, in both travel books, ancestral land is, from the very beginning, represented as the space where the traveler naturally belongs because of his or her biology/genealogy. Obviously, in the broader, socio-political context, the concept of "natural belonging" to a particular nation or ethnic group may be contentious. As Guelke and Timothy point out,

[a]ncestry is a fundamental basis for citizenship in nations that wish to limit immigration or, alternatively, to repatriate individuals with

the accepted ethnic identity. . . . Ancestry defines the parameters of contested space in volatile political hotspots: who has a right to occupy a particular place by virtue of birthright, and who is an interloper or "new immigrant." (9)

Though such a concept of genealogy-based ancestry may be used in some nations' policies to exclude groups of people on the basis of their origin, for the individuals engaged in a personal identity quest it is quite a useful tool in forging a sense of belonging to a place.

As Kassabova and Kniffel walk the streets their grandmothers once walked they do not feel like outsiders, and neither are they perceived as strangers, whose presence may provoke a hostile gaze. Many non-Western immigrants returning to their native land immediately feel the difference in how they are perceived in the public sphere. Since in the home country they are physically similar to the people on the streets, they finally become free from condescending gazes reserved for the outlanders. "Home is where you can be recognized (as the particular person you are and as one of the category of normal persons) by others" (Morley 47). Kniffel and Kassabova feel "at home" in Nowe Miasto Lubawskie and Ohrid, respectively, because people from these local communities recognize them and offer warm welcome, sharing an occasional story, a meal or a small gift with them.

However, after a week, the lack of anonymity begins to bother Kassabova; she even starts avoiding certain lanes in the Old Town because "you felt as if you were watched by the houses" (70). On the one hand, she enjoys a sense of kinship with the Ohridians, seeing them and herself as living traces of the Christians and the Muslims, who inhabited the lake region for ages. On the other hand, she rebels against the concept of the "Balkan fate," expressed by one of her interlocutors in a simple statement: "You can't run away from family" (Kassabova 56). Kassabova realizes that her strong-willed, creative, temperamental grandmother was, as a young woman, forever torn between her obligations towards the family and a desire to be free. Anastassia did escape the stifling, patriarchal, provincial Ohrid to live in more cosmopolitan, urban Sofia but she missed her original home for the rest of her life and conveyed this longing to her granddaughter. Staying in Ohrid and talking to its inhabitants, both her relatives and strangers, allows Kassabova to observe the clearly prevailing gender roles in Balkan families. This is also a part of the genetic and psychological legacy that she has to recognize as a part of her family's internal landscape.

Unlike Kassabova who never lost contact with her relatives still living in Ohrid, Kniffel comes to Poland with no telephone numbers or addresses. It seems his main motive behind looking for an extended family

is simply loneliness. His grandmother and mother are long dead; he has neither siblings, nor a spouse or children. During his stay in Poland, Kniffel manages to find many descendants of his grandparents' brothers and sisters, to visit them and to fill in the gaps in family stories, disrupted by immigration. This patching up of broken ties is symbolized in the text by a recurrent scene of sitting at the table and looking together at old family photos, letters, and postcards. Every Polish family he visits owns a box of family memorabilia, functioning much like "a window onto the past." Personal memories of places, people and historic events associated with them not only make the author familiar with lives of distant relatives but also allow him to feel a welcomed part of an extended family, someone who deserves to know these stories. The act of sharing Polish and American family stories over boxes filled with old photos becomes a symbolic affirmation of common roots.

WALKING THE OLD ROADS, RECREATING THE PAST JOURNEYS

In homecoming narratives, travel routes are typically based around visiting towns, places and landscapes which constitute the background to family stories. According to Basu, who studied the experiences of Scottish diasporic returnees and heritage tourists, the desire to trace the physical remnants of the family past represents a "spatialization of memory" as sites come to function as "sources of identity" (45). Visiting ancestors' graves, the ruins of their houses or even walking the same roads becomes a way of reimagining the family past. What seems to matter most in such travel experiences is sensory engagement, actual setting foot on the soil, seeing the landscapes, touching and smelling the ancestral land (Timothy 121). The significance of a visited site or admired landscape rises in proportion to its connection with family history. That is why, for example, the ruin of Kniffel's grandmother's house is literally "the best ruin" he has seen in Poland. The old school, which his grandmother must have attended, the old path leading to it, the old parish church in the village—all these sites function as "sacred personal spaces" in his narrative (Timothy 120).

Another strategy that both travelers use to make connections between the past and the present is retracing parts of their grandparents' immigration journeys. Kniffel recreates the journey his grandmother made as a young girl going from her native Pomeranian village of Sugajno to Bremerhaven where she boarded the ship to America. In Bremerhaven Kniffel visits the local museum with an exhibition devoted to the Great Migration and tries to act as a tourist but, unexpectedly, finds it difficult.

> In Bremen I walk the affluent streets, where friendly locals are eager to take my money, to answer my questions, smile, and proudly show off their English. Such a civilized place, this Germany of the twenty-first century. "Who won the war after all?" I wonder. Certainly not Poland. You had to be on the "wrong" side to be a winner in the postwar half-century. I walk the streets of Bremen and have everything in common with these people, even a German name—their fashion flair for black, their taste for middle-eastern food, their liberal politics. (Kniffel 114)

The underlying question here seems to be "Where do I belong?" For an American visitor with a German surname, it is a relief to be back "in such a civilized place," among people who can speak good English, whose fashions and lifestyles are comfortingly familiar. And yet, while feeling at ease, Kniffel also feels alienated. There is deep irony in the remark about the necessity of being on the wrong side to be a winner in the war, a remark which betrays not only his knowledge of Eastern European history but also cultural and emotional allegiance to Poland.

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The passage quoted above is followed by a scene in the hotel where he overhears Polish maids "chattering in the hall as [they] scurry away to earn a few precious marks making German beds, no doubt grateful for the opportunity to take whatever money they can earn back home to Poland" (Kniffel 115). No authorial comment is offered, but it is hard not to see history repeating itself. At the beginning of the 21st century, Polish women are still forced by economic circumstances to leave their country and seek work abroad, just as his grandmother in 1913 was compelled to seek a better life in America. These Polish maids and other immigrants make the prosperous and comfortable lives of the citizens of Bremen possible. Their presence is taken for granted. To acknowledge this presence and ponder its historic significance, even between the lines, is to identify oneself as an outsider in the Western world. Unsurprisingly, while leaving Germany, Kniffel has "a sense of 'coming home' to Poland, to my land, my people, for better or worse" (116). Thus, the experience of retracing his grandmother's immigrant journey reinforces his own sense of belonging in the ancestral homeland and a sense of kindship with Poles, victims rather than winners.

Similar experiences of following ancestors' footsteps are recorded in Kassabova's travelogue. She walks the streets of old Ohrid with an awareness that her "grandmother had known every single lane, every hidden chapel. I wanted to rekindle some of that intimacy" (Kassabova 34). On another occasion she retraces a boat journey that her great-grandfather Kosta once made in 1929, having to flee Macedonia for political reasons. After sailing across the lake she makes a point of walking back to town on foot—a 7-hour-long walk in hot weather—because after 4 years of exile,

Kosta returned to his home town in this manner. While walking she reflects on family history, noticing a pattern repeating itself: "[O]f absent men and women left behind, unbending women who dislocated themselves and their loved ones out of shape trying to right what had gone wrong with the family, the world, life itself" (Kassabova 95).

In both books, the authors' acts of retracing their grandparents' past journeys have an important function. The travels of the past provide a scenario for the present, and despite all the political and historical changes which have shifted borders and rewritten the maps of Poland and Macedonia, the land itself—its rivers, mountains, valleys and lakes—has remained unchanged. In this landscape hallowed by memories of their ancestors, Kniffel and Kassabova tread as pilgrims following a prescribed route, performing a personal ritual of reattachment to the old country.

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RETURNING TO THE SOURCE

As I have already mentioned, homecoming journeys in *A Polish Son* and *To the Lake* are also represented as therapeutic ventures. The trope of travel as self-therapy, usually performed after a traumatic event in one's life, is fairly common in autobiographical travel writing at the turn of the 21st century (Rutkowska, "Encounters" 100). Such journeys are usually planned as long, solitary hikes in demanding terrain, because physical effort is believed to be conducive to reflection and mental healing. Though neither Kniffel nor Kassabova make their journeys deliberately demanding or strenuous, there is a sense, in both texts, of returning to the symbolic center or source of energy. For Kassabova such a site is the Ohrid Lake, where her ancestors were born, lived, traveled, worshipped and died since the 17th century. As she travels and walks along its shores, she tries to sketch a "deep map" of the lake and its environs, considering its geology, archaeology, history, folklore and literature.

In Kassabova's narrative, the Ohrid Lake is not only represented as a physical body of water but also as a metaphysical reservoir of light and energy that seems to welcome and accept her—body and soul. Having read about the geological origins of the lake, Kassabova knows that it existed long before first humans started living on its shores. This fact amazes and fascinates her; the lake seems both primordial and everlasting, endowed with the ability to cleanse and renew itself thanks to the springs which continually bring new water, new life to it. As if sensing the powerful spiritual energy of the site, countless generations living on its shores offered thanks to God and venerated numerous saints in the chapels raised around the lake.

The final leg of Kassabova's journey takes her to St. Naum Monastery of Ohrid, the place that her grandmother loved dearly and frequently visited. St. Naum, the first Bulgarian early medieval saint, has always been venerated in the Balkans as a healer of mental afflictions. In the monastery's hotel room the traveler begins to experience lucid dreams, feeling the uncanny calming presence of a luminous lake that engulfs and cleanses the self: "[T]he entity was eventually all around me or I was part of it—not as myself, but as what remained of me once my dying self was out of the way . . . I began to feel that I was being dreamt by the lake" (362). Her personal ritual of healing involves the sojourn at St. Naum's and daily swimming in the cold waters of the lake. The book concludes with a description of the final swim that becomes a symbolic letting go of the past, of her own sense of guilt, of sadness and fear.

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> Past and future fell away . . . The further out I swam, the more it felt as if I was flying, and the lighter everything became . . . All is one. Don't let me forget this . . . Forgive them, forgive me, forgive us . . . Every possibility is still at the source . . . wade in and free yourself of the burden you've been carrying for centuries, become anything. (Kassabova 372)

The passage functions as a farewell to her ancestral land, as a prayer, and as a message to herself and to the reader. Vowing never to forget what the lake has taught her—"All is one"—she feels happy, strong and free. Returning to the essential source of energy, epitomized by the lake, has allowed her to claim a form of continuity with her ancestors but also to bury the past and move on with her life. Thus, the travelogue is concluded with a metaphysical, revelatory experience.

In contrast, Kniffel's narrative offers no such grand, climactic closing scene. For him, a sense of identity and belonging is achieved gradually in quotidian ways: speaking Polish on a daily basis, searching for archival records and distant relatives, cooking traditional Polish food, participating in religious festivals. All these activities help him to assimilate parts of his genetic and cultural legacy and, in this manner, mend the metaphorical "severed connection" that brought him to Poland in the first place. Extensive genealogical research culminates in the realization that he belongs to the big clan of descendants of his grandmother and her siblings, scattered across the world. The narrative ends with a vision of a family gathering in Cracow, the historical capital of Poland, the heart of the ancestral homeland:

> I dreamed of a family reunion here in this ancient city, with enough relatives to fill the entire Sukiennice—cousins from America, all of the grandchildren of Helena Bryszkiewska and Antoni Brodacki, and

all the grandchildren of their brothers and sisters, from France and Germany and England, Canada and Australia, not separated by language but understanding one another's stories. What a gathering that would be. (Kniffel 228)

Though such a reunion remains only a dream, Kniffel leaves Poland with a sense of mission accomplished. Paying homage to his beloved grandmother, "a Polish son" visited the homeland she could never return to, found material records of family history and dutifully preserved it all in the book. Thanks to his efforts, distant relatives on the two continents have learned about one another's existence and were able to complete the missing bits and pieces of their shared family past. Catherine Nash, who researched the significance of the practice of genealogy, observed that for some individuals it can become "a means of doing family":

> This is in the sense of the making of new or renewed family relationships socially around the sharing of genealogical interests and information within or between generations and within and beyond the immediate family. Individuals practice their own place in those generations as custodians of genealogical knowledge and weave new members into the family through genealogical gifts of knowledge and labor. (5)

Indeed, Kniffel's book makes it clear that gathering data on family history through archival search and oral history becomes for him "a practice of making relations" (Nash 5). Living in Poland makes the author realize that his home is both in Poland and in the United States. The last chapter of his book ends with the words "And now, for me, czas do domu. It's time to go home" (Kniffel 226). Significantly, Kniffel uses both Polish and English in this final good-bye to emphasize that he feels "at home" in both languages, in both cultures and in both countries.

CONCLUSION

Journeys to the land of ancestors described in *A Polish Son* and *To the Lake* offer an interesting perspective on what might be termed "inherited memory."[1] These travels would not have been made if it were not for the recollections of the writers' grandmothers, whose love for the mother country has become a part of their grandchildren's own sense of self. Since their immigrant grandmothers could not return to the countries of their youth, their grandchildren enact the symbolic return on their behalf.

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[1] I am grateful to an anonymous reviewer of this paper for this suggestion.

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These journeys become for them a form of self-analysis. Focusing on the symbolic content of these inherited memories, the writers make pilgrimages to "the old country" hoping to affirm their identity in the historical and geographical context. The past offers a key to understanding the present; in the dedication to her book Kassabova writes that "The dead open the eyes of the living." Continuing the mission of their grandmothers, who, throughout their lives, remained faithful custodians of ethnic heritage and national identity, both writers assert that discovering one's roots has enriched them and brought them closer not only to understanding their "grandmother's people" (Kniffel 160) but, first and foremost, to understanding themselves.

In most travel narratives, which follow the circular pattern of a heroic journey, the traveller returns home with "messages of self-knowledge . . . rebirth of the self, and improved relationships" (Lackey 133). Following this tradition, Kniffel and Kassabova represent homecoming as a venture which results in self-discovery, enabling a symbolic sense of closure and restoration. Paradoxically, it seems that such a positive outcome of the journeys is possible because, as grandchildren of immigrants, the writers can, on the whole, avoid the disillusionment experienced by the first-generation diasporic returnees. When the latter return home and write about it, they can neither recreate the past nor accept the present. In contrast to them, Kniffel and Kassabova have no past memories of their own to confront with the reality of Poland and Macedonia. In the travelogues, the authors subject their grandmothers' recollections to literary and psychological analysis, adding their own experiences and observations. They use family memories, oral history, and encounters with relatives and with the land to create a sense of historical and geographical belonging. Home is what they make it to be.

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"This house is so lonely!": Home, Belonging, and Identity in Memoirs of Loss and Grief

ABSTRACT

This analysis explores select autobiographical representations of relationships the bereaved develop with their surroundings in the context of a major death-related loss. After a significant loss, the concepts of home, belonging, and identity are redefined, and the grieving self needs to revise its assumptive worldview to adjust to these changes. Drawing parallels between bereavement research and grief memoirs, three main themes are analyzed: 1. How hitherto familiar spaces feel both welcome and unwelcome to the bereaved; 2. How loss influences culinary settings and domestic routines; and 3. How financial factors and relocation uproot the griever's identity and sense of belonging.

Keywords: belonging, grief, home, identity, memoir, mourning.

INTRODUCTION

Losing a loved one can profoundly disrupt our life. On the Holmes and Rahe Social Readjustment Rating Scale that lists forty-three stressful and illness-conducive life events, "death of a spouse" and "death of a close family member" rank as number one and five, respectively (Holmes and Rahe 213–18). After a major death-related loss, the bereaved may feel out of place within familiar community structures and "no longer at home in the greater scheme of things" (Attig xlvii). Additionally, primary loss entails multiple secondary losses such as loss of physical contact, of the routines associated with the deceased, or of financial support and security. The relationship between the bereaved and their place of habitation changes as well. Hitherto familiar spaces become less welcoming or may be the only place in which the bereaved feel safe. The concepts of home, belonging, and identity are redefined, and the grieving self needs to revise its assumptive worldview to adjust to these changes.

This analysis explores select memoirs of loss and grief that look at the relationships the grief-stricken develop with their home in the context of a major death. Since the late 1980s, memoir, in a much more confessional form than ever before, has become a dominant life-writing genre, rivaling "fiction in popularity and critical esteem" and surpassing it "in cultural currency" (Couser 3). The genre has been periodically dismissed as the literary equivalent of talk shows, for which "no remembered episode is too sordid, no family too dysfunctional, to be trotted out for the wonderment of the masses" (Zinsser 3). Relevant as such assessment may be in regard to some texts, various critics and memoirists agree that imposing a written structure on recollections, experiences, and emotions, some more traumatic than others, can and does result in sophisticated, artistically rewarding narratives with healing side-effects for writers and readers alike (see Berman, *Companionship in Grief* 16–18; Birkerts 7–8, 55; Fowler 525–49; Małecka 12–40). Like therapy, the writing cure involves "telling and retelling stories, examining experience from multiple points of view, exploring complex and often contradictory motivation, analyzing one's assumptive world, and revising interpretations to discover healthy and constructive ways to engage reality" (Berman, *Companionship in Grief* 18). As grief remains "the most general of afflictions" (Didion 44), the egalitarian, self-reflective, and commemorative nature of memoir writing is of particular importance in bereavement. In many Western cultures, in which the display of prolonged mourning is less customary or acceptable than it used to be in the past (see, e.g., Ariès 559–601), grief memoirs function as mourning rites, providing a safe, communal space for the bereaved who need to bare, discuss, and process their losses at their

own pace (Małecka 18–19, 36–37, 63–69, 72). An important feature of the modern memoir is the way in which the author crafts the relationality between the narrating self and others, both within and without the narrative (Couser 20; Fowler 540; Małecka 15–18, 63–69). Thus, a closer look at the relationships between the bereaved and their surroundings can resonate with readers not only during our trying moments of grief but also in our everyday life in which we seldom pay attention to how familiar spaces and rituals performed within them will inevitably condition our future losses.

The theme of relationality between the grieving self and its dwelling place in modern grief memoirs, particularly as a primary focus, has not yet been extensively addressed. The expository nature of the discussion below aims to make it more relatable to non-academic addressees, especially to those who during their mourning may continue to feel lost in their former places of refuge. In the time of grief, examples of how other mourners experience the displacing force of loss and struggle to re-adapt to hitherto safe spaces may be consoling, even if the feelings of non-belonging and confusion persist. Thus, to benefit a wider circle of readers, particularly the bereaved who might seek support in literary sources, this discussion is set in the context of select bereavement studies yet abstains from esoteric language and theorizing. Apart from the psycho-social jargon in which they are at times formulated, most contemporary grief approaches are relatively transparent in their main premises and do not demand extensive side notes for the purpose of this analysis. For instance, the meaning-reconstruction approach states that a traumatic loss disrupts our life story, which, in turn, results in a loss of meaning that needs to be reconstructed (Neimeyer 312–16). Methods of reconstructing the disrupted narrative vary from grief approach to grief approach, including the telling and retelling of one's grief story. Literature provides multiple examples of this meaning reconstruction as evidenced, for instance, by the centuries-old elegiac tradition and the outpouring of grief memoirs in recent decades. Thus, in this discussion, references to bereavement research serve to support grief memoirists in their efforts to present and normalize the new relations that develop between the bereaved and their dwelling spaces. These altered attachments play an important part in integrating the death into the griever's post-loss reality. Conversely, grief memoirs shed light on bereavement studies, providing researchers and the bereaved with literary case studies as an alternative source of knowledge and support in the process of coming to terms with various aspects of grief. The following analysis focuses on three main themes that recur in grief memoirs: 1. How the previously familiar spaces make the grief-struck feel both welcome and unwelcome; 2. How loss influences culinary settings and domestic routines; and 3. How financial factors and (prospective) relocation uproot

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the griever's identity and sense of belonging. With one exception, the examples of how the bereaved interact with their surroundings come from memoirs devoted to partner loss. Yet, the issues are by no means limited to this type of loss. The selection was primarily dictated by editorial space and, to some degree, by the fact that most memoirs of partner loss address the above themes with notable regularity.

(UN)FAMILIAR (OFF-LIMITS) SPACES

After a devastating loss, certain hitherto familiar spaces may evoke ambivalent feelings in the griever who may avoid them because of painful associations with the deceased as well as may be drawn to them for the same reason. Below, reflections from two memoirs of spousal loss illustrate these complex connections. Regardless of where the death took place, both memoirists point to the fact that their living spaces have been transformed, with a notable exception of the bedroom.

In *The Year of Magical Thinking*, the classic of the grief memoir genre, Joan Didion reconstructs the circumstances of her husband's sudden death several times across the narrative. One of these accounts reads:

> Nine months and five days ago, at approximately nine o'clock on the evening of December 30, 2003, my husband, John Gregory Dunne, appeared to (or did) experience, at the table where he and I had just sat down to dinner in the living room of our apartment in New York, a sudden massive coronary event that caused his death. Our only child, Quintana, had been for the previous five nights unconscious in an intensive care unit at Beth Israel Medical Center's Singer Division . . . . (6–7)

Didion's factual reconstructions help the narrating self get a stronger grasp on the post-loss reality that continues to elude her, as the memoir's title indicates. In the early days after her husband's death, Didion remembers she could not face the blood on the living room floor where he fell. It is the only detail of the story she consistently omits from the retelling of the event to others. Death at the dining table is exceptionally "up close & personal" (the couple wrote a script for the movie with this title). "*Life changes fast. Life changes in the instant. You sit down to dinner and life as you know it ends*," Didion re-chants throughout the memoir (3). These "fast" changes take place in the most "ordinary" of settings (Didion 4), triggering the writer's magical thinking about the reversibility of death, which is a common reaction to significant deaths (Worden 39–40). In the weeks following the loss, the writer's apartment fills with friends and relatives who bring food and keep her company. While they occupy other

rooms, Didion retreats to the couple's bedroom with the hope that, if she is there alone, her husband may come back. She refers to the space as "*our* bedroom, the one in which there still lay on a sofa a faded terrycloth XL robe bought in the 1970s at Richard Carroll in Beverly Hills" (5, emphasis mine). The bedroom becomes a haven in which the griever can still feel safe, as if nothing has changed.

Accepting the reality of loss is one of the tasks that the mourner is supposed to complete to adjust to their new life successfully (Worden 39–43). Although Didion's magical thinking delays this particular task, her involuntary memories successively expose her to doses of reality. As the reconstruction of pre- and post-loss events progresses, the writer thinks of multiple other places in which the couple and their daughter Quintana used to live in the past. Tied to particular locations, each of those memories is an important touchstone in the griever's journey, leading to a gradual acknowledgement of the loss. When the first anniversary of John's death approaches, Didion revisits the living room:

> There are colored Christmas lights on the quince branches in the living room. There were also colored Christmas lights on quince branches in the living room a year ago, on the night it happened, but in the spring, not long after I brought Quintana home from UCLA, those strings burned out, went dead. This served as a symbol. I bought new strings of colored lights. This served as a profession of faith in the future. (212)

Descriptions of other domestic and non-domestic spaces precede this image. For instance, Didion extensively documents her stay in Los Angeles and visits to the UCLA Medical Center where her daughter is hospitalized due to another health emergency. While in LA, Didion remembers locations where the family used to reside in the past. She avoids them on her way to the hospital not to trigger the "vortex" of painful recollections that break through regardless (Didion 107–13, 130–33). Her trips to yet another clinical setting, interspersed with the memories of past homes, make her gradually admit that changes are unavoidable. As Didion states at the beginning of the memoir, the narrative is her attempt to make sense of the loss, "of the period that followed, weeks and then months that cut loose any fixed idea [she] had ever had about death, about illness, about probability and luck, . . . about grief" (7). According to bereavement specialists, when faced with change, "[o]ur first effort . . . must be to interpret the change in the light of our old assumptions" (Parkes and Prigerson 104). Didion's narrative reconstructions aptly illustrate the psycho-social process of integrating the loss into "one's set of assumptions about the world" or modifying "those assumptions if need be" (Parkes

and Prigerson 88; see also Janoff-Bulman's study *Shattered Assumptions: Towards a New Psychology of Trauma*). The recollections of familiar settings that feature the loved one, who is now absent, help the bereaved revise her "fixed" ideas "about the ways in which people do and do not deal with the fact that life ends" (Didion 7). Didion remains distrustful of the future (212), yet, with symbolic gestures, such as hanging the new Christmas lights in the living room, the writer revisits the space and begins to take in the reality of what has happened there (cf. Parkes and Prigerson 104).

For many grievers, returning to an empty house can be both comforting and terrifying (Deits 22–23). Such conflicting feelings are not uncommon and can influence the griever's sense of security and belonging. In *A Widow's Story: A Memoir*, Joyce Carol Oates struggles with the fact that her husband, Raymond Joseph Smith, died in a hospital, among strangers. Smith had been hospitalized due to pneumonia and died from a secondary infection a week later. Over the course of that week, after one of her vigils at her husband's hospital bed, Oates is thrilled to return home:

> Returning home! What happiness—what relief—returning home! As if I've been gone for days not hours. As if I've traveled many miles not just a few. . . . I am so eager to get inside this place of refuge, I feel faint with yearning, I could weep with relief, exhaustion. . . . The smell of the hospital clings to me . . . . I am eager to get inside the house and tear off my contaminated clothing—I am eager to take a shower—to scrub my face, my hands—my hair that feels snarled, clotted . . . . (39–40)

The vision of domestic relief is disrupted by Oates's sudden fear of being alone in the house: "[T]he house is so very dark—a cave—a sepulcher—like a crazed woman who has thrown off her manacles I run through the rooms of the house switching on lights—living room lights! dining room lights! hall lights! bedroom lights!" (40). Oates cleans the house frantically, as if "rehearsing" her husband's homecoming (40). Four days later, at 12:38, she is woken up "by a phone ringing *at the wrong time*," and "a stranger's voice" informs her that her husband "is in 'critical condition'" (54). Smith is pronounced dead before Oates arrives at the hospital. Between the call and her homecoming from the final trip to the ward, the house transforms into even more of "a cave." "Returning to the lightless house beyond Princeton I feel like an arrow that has been shot—where?" Oates recounts (78). Her first thought upon entering the house as a widow is about how she used to greet her husband when he would come back home: "*So happy you're back home, honey! We missed you here*. By *we*, I meant the cats and me" (78). Confused and uncertain about her new status as a widow, she finishes this homecoming episode by stating: "For the widow inhabits a tale not of her

own telling. The widow inhabits a nightmare-tale and yet it is likely that the widow inhabits a benign fairy tale out of the Brothers Grimm in which friends come forward to help" (81). This ambivalent thinking extends to the house which Oates continues to inhabit as well as avoid.

As the widow's tale unfolds, Oates's apprehension about the house increases, even though it remains her only space of comfort. "*This house is so lonely! It's almost unbearable*," she writes to Daniel Halpern two days after her husband's death (85). Three days after the death, she emails Edmund White: "*The days are not too bad, it's the nights and the empty house that fill me with panic*" (115). Oates is anxious when she is alone, yet she wants to be alone: "[T]he empty house is terrifying to me yet when I am away from it, I yearn to return to it" (94). Similar reflections resurface throughout the rest of her memoir. "Ghost rooms! One by one they are overtaking the house," Oates writes, only to add in the next line: "There is no volition in me, only in the rooms of this house"; and then again: "Most of the rooms are off-limits to me, I dare not enter them, nor even glance into them" (144). The (un)familiar spaces make Oates imagine that "*Ray might be in the next room, or in his office—he might have stepped out of the house*" (105). Additionally, she experiences survivor's guilt connected to the house: "A nobler gesture would have been to erase myself. For there is something terribly wrong in remaining here—in our house, in our old life—. . . when Ray is gone. . . . [T]here *is* something ignoble, selfish, in continuing to live as if nothing has been altered" (128). To escape the sense of guilt, Oates spends time driving around, which creates an illusion of not belonging to the "old life": "[T]here's a kind of free-fall no-man's-land inside a car—in which one is neither *here* nor *there* but *in transit*" (129). When she finally comes home, she tries to slip "into the bedroom without having to pass through most of the house" (129).

As it does for Didion, the bedroom likewise becomes a haven for Oates, sheltering her from the facticity of her loss that becomes unbearable in the other rooms. The bedroom and "the nest," as Oates calls the couple's bed, cushion her from the world that expects the widow to move on: "In the nest, there is anonymity. There is peace, solitude, ease. There is not the likelihood of being asked *How are you, Joyce?*—still less the likelihood of being asked, as I am beginning to be asked *Will you keep your house, or stay in it?*" (135). In the nest, she spreads "Ray's published work" and rereads his critical essays (140). The grief-stricken often direct attention to the parts of the environment that are most intimately associated with the deceased, and the widowed in particular may feel drawn towards places and possessions associated with their spouses (Parkes and Prigerson 59–60). Secure in the nest and reluctant to leave it, Oates, however, complicates this textbook scenario. She constantly reminds the reader that feeling safe

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can be deceptive. She continues to detail her introspective, conflicting attitudes towards the rest of the rooms in her house—the "ghost rooms"—that haunt her with their emptiness, escalating survivor's remorse (Oates 128, 144–50).

The acknowledgement that our places of habitation may feel less familiar while at the same time remaining a source of comfort is an important part of adaptation to life after a loss. It is common for many grievers to be "pulled in two directions"—to move away and then come back to the places associated with the deceased (Parkes and Prigerson 61). If the griever realizes that such reactions are natural, they may find it easier to accept the conflicting feelings. Addressing the interaction between the grieving self and dwelling spaces, Didion and Oates, each at their own pace, try to face what happened and make sense of why the unreality of death persists, why some spaces feel safe while others do not, and what place the dead continue to occupy in the grievers' ongoing life. According to the meaning-reconstruction approach, the bereaved have to face two narrative challenges after a major death-related loss: 1. they need "to process the event story of the death in an effort to 'make sense' of what has happened and its implications for the survivor's ongoing life"; and 2. they need "to access the back story of the relationship with the loved one as a means of reconstructing a continuing bond" (Neimeyer 312; see also Silverman and Klass 16–20; Silverman and Nickman 349–51). Didion and Oates offer their own perspectives on this approach as they process the connections the grieving self develops with their surroundings that, to a large extent, remain linked with the deceased. Both writers closely examine the continuing bonds with the places of dwelling, both past and present, and report the implication of these bonds for their ongoing life (cf. Silverman and Klass 16–20). By recognizing the ambivalent relationship that the bereaved develop with their dwelling spaces, grief memoirs can help other mourners feel less isolated in their efforts to adjust to their post-loss surroundings.

RITUALS IN SECULAR SPACES

In *A Grief Observed*, pondering where he feels the absence of his wife most acutely, C. S. Lewis recalls how he was initially "very afraid of going to places" in which they had been both happy, such as their "favourite pub" or "favourite wood" (11). "But I decided to do it at once," he writes, "like sending a pilot up again as soon as possible after he's had a crash" (11). Unexpectedly, his wife's absence "is no more emphatic in those places than anywhere else" (11). The loss is "not local at all" (11)—it is omnipresent. "I suppose that if one were forbidden all salt one wouldn't notice it much

more in any one food than in another. Eating in general would be different, every day, at every meal. It is like that," Lewis rationalizes the feeling (11). In this culinary metaphor, illustrating the sense of abandonment, Lewis touches upon another domestic deprivation that some grievers experience. In the aftermath of a loss, household routines such as preparing meals and eating, and the spaces where these activities take place, change as well.

In times of crisis, people often neglect their sleep, proper eating habits, medical needs, appearance, or family, which can severely compromise one's health and coping strategies (see, e.g., Attig 87; Parkes and Prigerson 40, 59). Due to the intensity of her grief that triggered survivor's guilt and severe depression (cf. Berman, *Writing Widowhood* 9, 12, 17, 20–27), Oates could hardly eat in the months following her loss. She lived on "bottles of Odwalla fruit-blend drinks," "spoonfuls of yogurt," or "a handful of (stale) cereal," all "hastily dumped into bowls" (Oates 149). She could not face the spaces where her husband prepared food and had his last meal in the house: "I can't any longer 'prepare' meals in the kitchen. I am not able to eat anything that isn't flung together on the counter. . . . The prospect of sitting at the dining room table for any meal is repellent" (149). Clinical psychologist Therese A. Rando advises that in the time of grief one "must maintain adequate nutritional balance and eating habits" (55). "Inadequate nutrition," Rando explains, "will only compromise your ability to cope with the loss, meet the continuing demands of your daily life, and overcome the physical symptoms generated by the stress of your grief" (55–56). Yet, for some grievers, the routines of selecting and preparing food become "the demands" of their daily life. With the solution being part of the problem, the grief-struck are often confronted with one more deprivation: the inability to sustain a healthy lifestyle (see, e.g., Stahl and Schulz 736–55). Oates's narrative details this collateral loss that may manifest in a variety of poor eating habits during bereavement.

The household routines that change with the primary loss become an additional source of disorientation and depletion for the grieving self. In *Epilogue: A Memoir*, Anne Roiphe reflects upon the evening ritual she used to share with her husband Herman:

> H. returned home from his office around seven each evening. I would stand at my window on the fourteenth floor and watch him walking down the street. . . . He was coming toward me. He would have his drink and we would talk. . . . We talked in shorthand, whole paragraphs were left out but understood . . . . We listened to the evening news. Then he would fix dinner. I stood at his elbow while he chopped or stirred. Now I don't know when it's time to eat. I don't know what to eat. The day has no appointed end. It drifts off into the night. (14–15)

Daily routines shape our identity and structure our life, and so do the spaces where those routines take place. When a close person dies "a whole set of assumptions about the world that relied upon the other person for their validity are suddenly invalidated" (Parkes and Prigerson 101). The griever inhabits a new world in which new habits need to be developed and adjustments to the old ones need to be made. For Roiphe, the kitchen was not only the center of the culinary ritual but also the place where her husband stocked all the food after he did the shopping, and where the couple were intimate, "lean[ing] into each other," while he was preparing the meals for which he carefully "clipped" recipes from food magazines (54, 112). "Now that he is gone I have discovered that I am the world's worst shopper. I buy things I think I want to eat and then they sit in my refrigerator ignored until green mold appears" (54), Roiphe reflects on the aspect of her self she was unaware of until her loss.

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For the bereaved, the practical adjustments to new roles and the modification of their assumptive worldview have no prescribed timespan. Also, different methods of coping with the changes are explored. To eliminate the stress of feeding herself, Roiphe resorts to takeout food (54). "The thing about takeout food is that when it is removed from the kitchen of its origin it loses its balance. It becomes all curry or cumin or soy. . . . My taste buds are complaining," she assesses her efforts to adapt (55). Indeed, our taste buds can suffer deprivation due to loss as well. Most people also associate certain smells and tastes with concrete places. In *Comfort: A Journey Through Grief*, Ann Hood recollects her culinary adjustments after the sudden loss of her five-year-old daughter Grace. In the chapter "Comfort Food," Hood reflects on the non-linear nature of grief that, for her, is "disjointed"—a "jumble" (53). This perspective influences her narrative and her routines: "Stories demand order, someone told me. But I no longer live an orderly life. I used to. For example, every day at five o'clock I cooked my family dinner" (53). With gusto and tenderness, she proceeds to recollect how she cherished the evening food preparations, such as Grace's favorite "pasta . . . with butter and freshly grated Parmesan cheese" (53–54). "Sam [her older child] and Grace both helped me. They layered the potatoes for potatoes au gratin . . .; they peeled the apples for apple crisp, the carrots for lentil soup," she writes (54). Proud of her Italian heritage that ingrained the love for food in her, Hood stresses: "I believe in . . . good food, the sounds of forks against plates, the perfect blend of flavors" (132). The kitchen is the temple where she celebrates those beliefs (55, 130–32). After Grace's death, however, she begins to feel "uncontrollably" cold in the house, even though the April weather remains "warm and sunny" (55). Other people bring a variety of food to their doorstep, but the ritual of eating has changed: "We sat, the three of

us left behind, and stared at the dinners that arrived on our doorstep each afternoon. We lifted our forks to our mouths. We chewed and swallowed, but nothing could fill us" (56). Three months after the loss, Hood re-learns "the steps for cooking pasta": "The process that had once been automatic had turned complicated. . . . Yet soon the water was at an angry boil, the sauce simmered in a pan beside it" (57). She repeats the procedure the next day. "That night," she remembers, "as the three of us sat in our still kitchen, the food did bring us comfort" (57). However, it took Hood two years to revive and enjoy the routine of preparing evening meals for her family again (131–32). Apart from reclaiming the kitchen as her comfort zone, Hood also notes how other spaces begin to re-engage the family's attention. For instance, they rearrange the family room and "decide to paint the living room green" (133). For Hood, such simple acts reinstate a sense of spirituality and belonging within the spaces transformed by loss.

In modern death-denying cultures, the progressive disappearance of mourning rituals can complicate matters for the bereaved and their support networks (Ashenburg 1–2). A lack of reliable social and private rituals becomes even more perceptible after death disorganizes the customs that the bereaved relied on daily before their loss. Day-to-day rituals and places where they are practiced structure our lives and are an important source of consistency, soulfulness, and support (Kuile). People may or may not be religious, but our drive to ritualize our lives in non-secular spaces is what keeps us going (Kuile). The more crucial is the modification of pre-loss routines or the establishment of new ones. "We have a biological need to belong," writes Dacher Keltner, and belonging relies on communal connections and rituals that we "seek out and create . . . with alacrity and force" (par. 9). Hood believes in "good food," as it brings comfort to her and her family, and she gradually regains this belief after her daughter's death. Roiphe finds a temporary replacement for former cooking rituals in takeout food. Her interactions with the courteous "deliverymen" (55) provide a semblance of communality. Oates tosses the simplest ingredients into a bowl and eats hastily in those spots in the house that remind her of meals with her husband the least— not an ideal soul-boosting routine, but it keeps her alive (cf. Oates 416). After a major loss, preparing meals requires additional energy that the bereaved may not have, especially if they have a bigger family to look after (Silverman 157–58). However, as food is a necessity, grievers appear to adapt to new eating habits more organically than to other kinds of deprivation caused by primary loss, such as social isolation or financial instability. In the culinary spaces or the spaces that replace them, the three memoirists rehearse their new meal routines that help them integrate the primary loss into the "jumble" created by grief.

DWELLING ON FINANCES AND RELOCATION

In memoirs of loss, the ability to sustain the former lifestyle constitutes another consistent theme. While people may prefer not to talk about money, the time of grief seems to be a notable exception to this rule. The memoirists selected for the purpose of this analysis are relatively well off, and their financial concerns appear to be connected to their general apprehension due to losing the source of emotional stability in their life. While one may wonder if it is not this sense of relative economic comfort that allows them to deliberate on such matters at length, their observations are nevertheless valid as they address issues concerning most bereaved individuals.

Loss not only causes alarm for the bereaved due to the sudden disappearance of a source of protection, financial and non-financial, but also exposes them to "novel situations and problems" for which they "may be quite unprepared" (Parkes and Prigerson 39). Those who have lost a partner are often forced to take on additional responsibilities that the deceased used to take care of, such as paying bills, shopping, or cooking. All these acts demand time and money. Such chores may seem undaunting to someone who attempts to master them because they simply choose to. For the bereaved, however, they can increase the feeling of being trapped, threatened, and lost (cf. Parkes and Prigerson 116, 142, 187). Not infrequently, the newly bereaved are also asked about the upkeep of their homes. Consequently, questions about selling the house or relocating to a smaller space become part of post-loss conversations, a topic that few grievers are happy to discuss. Oates realizes that the question *Will you keep your house, or stay in it?*" is "a perfectly reasonable question to put to a widow," but it still makes her "quiver with rage and indignation" (135), which, in turn, is a perfectly reasonable reaction to another major deprivation looming in the air.

Grief memoirists note that enquiries about relocation should never be made lightly or too soon after the loss. This is a very vulnerable time for the grief-struck, even when they are financially stable. Their identity and social footing have already been shaken and so has their sense of belonging to their prior social and spatial constructs. In *When Things Get Back to Normal*, M. T. Dohaney resents her new status as a widow: "I have been daughter, sister, wife, mother. These labels covered only part of me, yet increased all of me. Widow covers all of me and decreases all of me. . . . [T]he word widow is derived from the Latin *viduus*, meaning empty" (20). The sense of depersonalization weakens the griever's self-confidence and practical functioning when it comes to the basic tasks of daily life (Attig xlii). The self can be additionally "decreased" by post-loss social and legal

requirements. Dohaney reflects on how the list of energy-depleting but necessary tasks "lengthens" every day:

> Get the death certificate. Send in the insurance forms. Cancel memberships here and there. Close out bank accounts. . . . Change over Medicare coverage. Change car registration. . . . Then too, the vultures are circling. Will I be selling the house? Lawnmower? Snowblower? Tools? Am I interested in a monument? If I place an order for a monument before Christmas but agree not to have it installed until the frost goes out of the ground, I can take advantage of a special bonus: my name and age engraved for free. (22–23)

Such procedures can be overwhelming at the best of times. When the bereaved are overly preoccupied with "practical matters" and have limited time to grieve, the delayed reactions to the loss can exacerbate stress and depression (see, e.g., Corden et al. 23–28; Parkes and Prigerson 186–87). The social pressure of dealing with things and moving on, as if the loss could be magically transformed into a thing of the past, and the prospect of leaving the place in which hitherto the bereaved felt safe may delay their adjustment to their new life. The bereaved may feel there is no room for their primary loss in a society that, with all the "practical matters" and procedures in place, rushes them in their grief (see Juth et al. 129–48).

Conversations about relocation can trigger an increased sense of danger, deprivation, and non-belonging. Home harbors memories that have been formed and nurtured in it. It shelters the keepsakes of the deceased that are often a painful yet invaluable element of post-loss adaptation. Dohaney voices common concerns the bereaved have about the loss of continuing bonds with the deceased that may result in the diminishment of their identity. For instance, she writes:

> Someone called last night about buying the house. My heart dropped to my toes. Sell my home! Our home! . . . How can I sell this house when so much of us is entangled within every board and sod? I lost so much of my identity when you left that I'm afraid the last of me will disappear if I sell this house. If I do disappear with the house, I know I won't have the strength to raise myself from my own ashes. (52–53)

Becoming a widow is one thing. Becoming a widow who does not know where she belongs increases a sense of depersonalization and insecurity. Studies assessing the effects of relocation (e.g., compulsory rehousing from slum areas or resettlement of refugees) show that those who have moved to a different place often experience similar psycho-social reactions to those who have experienced a meaningful loss through death.

Responses to relocation include, but are not limited to, "the feelings of painful loss, the continued longing, the general depressive tone, frequent symptoms of psychological or social or somatic distress, . . . the sense of helplessness, the occasional expressions of both direct and displaced anger, and tendencies to idealize the lost place" (Fried 359–60). Many relocated individuals have also reported feelings of personal mutilation, as if some "pieces" of their psyche or body were missing (Fried 360–61). Those who lost a partner have been observed to experience a similar "psychological mutilation" that, to many, felt "just as real as the mutilation experienced by the amputee" (Parkes and Prigerson 111, 261). According to the Holmes-Rahe Life Stress Inventory, major changes in finances, living conditions, and residence pose significant health risks (213–18). The sum of the relative weights assigned to each of these three stressors is greater at 83 points than the amount of stress triggered by the death of a close family member at 63 points (Holmes and Rahe 213–18). Faced with financial strains and the prospect of moving, on top of their primary loss, the griever's identity and sense of belonging are much more likely to be profoundly disoriented or diminished, leading to stress-induced health problems. Grief memoirists assign their own narrative weights to all these issues, with consistency and expressiveness that merit a corresponding inventory.

CONCLUSIONS

In the post-loss world, the grieving self changes and so do its closest surroundings. Grief memoirists can effectively inform systematized grief research with longitudinal, storied experiments that individualize such transitions. After a loss shatters our foundations, there is no prescribed trajectory to feel at home again. Towards the end of her memoir, Oates contemplates "Ray's garden" that she has neglected in the early spring: "Now in May 2008 my choice is: to allow Ray's garden to revert to weeds, or, what seems equally undesirable, for me to plant a garden in its place. When an avid gardener dies, his family must make this choice" (365). Unlike Ray who "planted only annuals," Oates decides to buy perennials, "exclusively," because they "bloom for much of the summer," require "a minimum of work," and are "guaranteed to survive" (366). She is proud of her horticultural modification: "*In this way, unwittingly, and against the grain of her temperament, the widow has made a very good decision. The widow has made a brilliant decision*" (366). By trial and error, grief memoirists test what helps them adapt to their surroundings and what doesn't. They create their own tasks of mourning in spaces of their choice.

Issues similar to those discussed by grief memoirists are also addressed in scholarly bereavement literature, albeit in a less intimate and soulful manner. The utilitarian language of grief researchers may relate to more practical mourners but leave those who seek more individual and emotional acknowledgement of their loss deprived of the feeling of belonging to the larger community of grievers (cf. Fowler 541). Thus, the two registers work best together as the current discussion exemplifies. The bereaved have two compatible territories to explore in their quest to locate or modify a place of belonging in the aftermath of a devastating loss.

POST SCRIPTUM

On 14 February 2024, during the final revisions of this manuscript, our 17-year-old beloved family dog Zora had to be put to sleep due to declining health. She had been refusing food for 10 days and was visibly in pain. Zora was a dear companion to my mom who lives by herself. Every day, she greeted Mom with a nudge of her cold nose, which usually meant that she wanted to be let out onto the balcony to air out her very thick fur before going for a walk. After Zora's death, we came back to my mom's, and we both burst into tears. Zora's bed, bowls of uneaten food, and loads of her fur were still there. We spent the next 5 days at my place. We could not face the deafening emptiness of my mom's apartment. Zora owned and filled that space with her unconditional love, proud presence, and stubborn demeanor. Her bed is still where it was the day we left for the vet's office. Another one is on the balcony. The space has lost its soul. It feels sad and, yes, so lonely.

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Cathartic Paths of the Gothic in *Ciemno, prawie noc* by Joanna Bator

ABSTRACT

The aim of this paper is to investigate how the Gothic is employed in Joanna Bator's novel *Ciemno, prawie noc* [*Dark, Almost Night*]. I frame my analysis on the author's assertion that "Poland is a horror," exploring firstly how the Gothic serves as an aesthetic framework that intertwines different time periods and family histories within the narrative. Secondly, I examine its role in grounding these temporal layers within the specific geographical location of Wałbrzych, which itself assumes a villain-like presence in the novel. I argue that Bator adapts the Gothic tradition for cathartic purposes, particularly in narrating transgenerational traumas. This approach enables the expression and understanding of a fractured past, potentially fostering a process of healing.

Keywords: Joanna Bator, the Gothic, new urban Gothic, trauma, catharsis.

INTRODUCTION

Kinga Dunin, a critic of contemporary Polish literature, begins her review of Joanna Bator's novel, *Ciemno, prawie noc* [*Dark, Almost Night*], with a question: "Does the convention of a Gothic novel fit a book about contemporary Poland? Perfectly. Because Poland is a horror" (translation mine). This assessment is a direct quote from the author herself: "According to Joanna Bator, one of our most talented novelists, contemporary Poland can only be described as a horror" (translation mine), reads the opening of Przemysław Czapliński's review of the novel. According to Dunin, the horror of contemporary Poland consists of a plethora of "Polish fears" which she outlines as familial, historical and political. However, if fear is defined as an intense emotional response to perceived threats of danger, accompanied by a sense of anxiety, it seems more appropriate to say that what makes Bator's story Gothic is the way it deals not so much with fears—as these come from factual but also imagined threats—but with real-life horrors in the spheres Dunin has outlined.

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Firstly, Poland is a horror on the level of the family. Families are depicted in Bator's novel as traumatized by past horrors, as destroyed by drink, abuse, crime, and the consequences of social erosion. Hidden from public view and happening behind closed doors, family horrors do not transpire in the novel as direct accounts of traumatized victims or eye-witnesses, but as scraps of memories, altered by the passage of time, extracted by the narrator who gathers various stories and pieces of information from different sources within the narrative. Secondly, Poland is a horror because of the atrocities which took place on its territories during WWII. The memory of these psychologically devastating events haunts individual characters and affects families and whole communities. This is the case with the narrator's mother, whose untreated and therefore unhealed exposure to wartime crimes leads to the dysfunction of the whole family. At the community level, many of the region's inhabitants exhibit latent symptoms of transgenerational trauma stemming from past uprootedness, relocations, and expatriations, but some are also affected by the awareness of the massive scale of wartime crimes committed on the land they now call home. In all these cases, trying to reconstruct the past is difficult: recollections are unreliable, memory fails, some people do not want to return to the past. But the past intrudes into the present and demands to be told. Finally, the novel offers an insight into the horrors of the post-communist period of transformation from communism to free-market economy in Poland, a limbo-zone for the majority of the region's inhabitants, which resulted in high levels of unemployment and crime, and in the deprivation of entire neighbourhoods.

The novel begins when a journalist, Alicja Tabor, is sent from Warsaw to her hometown of Wałbrzych to do reportage on the unsolved cases of three missing children. She leaves behind her recently gained security and comfort, and undertakes an unsettling return home to carry out a journalistic investigation away from the capital, in a border town close to Germany. In this way the opening of the novel follows what Victor Sage has identified as a "paradigm of the horror-plot: the journey from the capital to the provinces" (8). The task becomes emotionally charged because Alicja returns to her desolate family home for the first time after fifteen years of absence, and, as she resettles in her bedroom, childhood memories start flooding back; weird events that she remembers but never understood and shreds of mysteries from her family's past vie for attention as they, too, demand her investigation. The novel is structured on these two intertwining plot lines: while investigating the mystery of the missing children, Alicja pieces together her family's history and finds that both are tightly bound up with the troubled past of this border region.

Published in 2012, *Ciemno, prawie noc* received Poland's most prestigious literary award, the Nike Prize, in 2013, and was branded as "a thriller drawing on the conventions of the Gothic novel" ("Nagroda Literacka," translation mine). Although its structure has many affinities with a detective story with elements of a psychological novel, it is most heavily, and very knowingly, indebted to Gothic tradition interlaced with elements of horror in both of its plot lines. The Gothic mode plays a triple role in the novel. Firstly, it is the aesthetic framework that allows the author to marry different time spans and family histories. Since it invites the evocation of the expected range of emotions, the Gothic allows the narrative to meander between the fragmented past and the mysteries of the present, and to effectively convey horrors of the social consequences of economic and political transformations of the early 2000s in Poland. The Gothic provides Bator with language, imagery and metaphors to reconstruct the precarious situation of unprotected civilians and the end of WWII, and to depict the social consequences of the directionless, post-industrial transition period following the fall of communism. Secondly, since Gothic aesthetics rely on a prescribed set of technical conventions—such as the castle, a haunted house, the forest, underground labyrinths, ghosts and revenants—they are used in the novel as an effective tool to anchor the two time spans in a specific geographical location, in a very real topography of a city and its vicinities which house the memory of the past and remain its silent living reservoirs. As in many classic Gothic novels, location—here the city of Wałbrzych with its troubled multicultural history—becomes a character in its own right, a dormant ghost which does not allow the past to be

forgotten, but is also a medium through which catharsis, reconciliation and healing are possible. Moreover, whether dealing with secret wartime crimes, or exploring the dark aspects of present-day reality in Poland, Bator uses the Gothic mode to grapple with problems of an ethical nature. Because of its potential for horror and prescribed departure from realism, the Gothic has, since its literary inception, been used not only as a vehicle to explore and expose the nature of evil, but most importantly as "the force that returns us to the status quo" (Punter, "Introduction" 7), provided that the status quo refers to a world where human decency and morality prevail—a world spared from ethical transgressions and horrors of Gothic provenance. The Gothic, therefore, disrupts normality but, in line with the early Gothic novels, which all "end well," it also has the capacity to heal:

> [I]t is precisely in Gothic that the whole issue of catharsis becomes focused to its most intense point, where the possibility of being "healed" by surviving atrocious experience is perpetually challenged by the alternative possibility of being overwhelmed by that experience and swept off, like so many Gothic heroes, into the abyss, far away from any available map or compass. (Punter, "Introduction" 7)

I suggest that Bator's novel demonstrates that, despite past and present atrocities, catharsis and healing are possible.

POST-INDUSTRIAL, POST-TRANSFORMATIONAL GOTHIC

The Gothic mode is firmly anchored in the setting. From its inception, the delineation of defenceless Gothic heroines was charted using spatial paraphernalia, which enhanced their sense of isolation, intimidation and mental confinement, and were synonymous with the villainy of their oppressors. With economic and demographic changes and the transfer of Gothic settings from aristocratic strongholds in the countryside to the cities, these classic Gothic tropes morphed to absorb the obscurities of dark alleys, urban squalor and decay. "The relocation of the Gothic in the modern city," Robert Mighall reminds us, "involved the city itself, or at least part of it, being Gothicized" (*A Geography* 31). When the critic called Charles Dickens a Gothic writer—the greatest "in the history of the Gothic during its supposed sabbatical"—he justified his claim saying that it was Dickens who transferred the Gothic to the contemporary urban landscape of Victorian England whilst still staying in tune with its original obsessions "with the historical past and how this affects the present," with its emphasis "on unwelcome vestiges from the past" (Mighall, "Dickens" 82).

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Avoiding any comparisons between the two writers, I suggest that Bator similarly successfully claims the Gothic as a mode suitable for contemporary Polish literature to convey the horror of individuals trapped in the turmoil of history's turning points. Bator's novel gothicizes Wałbrzych for literary effects, though the city and its vicinities have many features of an inherently Gothic setting, beginning with its landmark and most iconic Gothic trope: the grand medieval castle of Książ dominating its skyline.

Solving the mystery of the disappearance of the children takes Alicja to the neglected sections of the city, where squalor and misery chart a story of the aftermath of political and economic transformations. Once a coal mining hub of the region and the second largest centre of mining industry in communist Poland, in the early 1990s the city experienced a rapid decline when its five mines were closed down and over 50% of the city's population lost their jobs. Within a few years, from a prosperous mining centre bustling with life, Wałbrzych turned into a forgotten border ghost town, following the path of other industrial regions in this part of Europe, where long-anticipated political changes accelerated the transition to the post-industrial era, the brutality and rapidity of which no one expected. Before the economic potential of the city could be redefined, for the majority of its inhabitants the years following the so-called "transformation" of 1989 meant unemployment, inertia and poverty. The ghostliness of the neglected industrial sections of the city, coupled with the debilitating deprivation of the ex-miners' living quarters constitute the novel's contemporary Gothic web, its post-industrial, post-communist new urban Gothic setting. These passages of the novel abound with descriptions of urban landscapes that have been "so soaked with inequality and toxicity as to become 'anti-landscapes,'" with outsiders and newcomers such as Alicja, rather than the apathetic inhabitants, responding to them with "dread, foreboding and aversion" (Millette 2).

While the late-Victorian urban Gothic emphasized "the alienation engendered by the metropolis," depicted "living conditions of the industrialized city—the unlit streets, factories, overcrowded dwellings, and proliferation of vice and crime," all by-products of a culture formed by capitalist dynamics of industrial expansion (Alder 704–05), new urban Gothic focuses on its aftermath: stagnation and decay caused by deindustrialization. The urban Gothic of the 19th century captured the consequences of the cities' expanding populations and overcrowding, and attributed degeneration and social injustice to the effects of unregulated growth. By contrast, in Bator's post-industrial novel, the new urban anti-cityscape emerges as one of unregulated decline, desolation and emptiness rather than expansion, unemployment and idleness rather than exhaustion

caused by overworking. Bator digests these post-industrial flavours, depicting a region in which precipitous economic decline drives many frustrated inhabitants to seek various risky jobs, such as bootleg mining and smuggling. Lack of regular employment, a power vacuum, collapsing social structures and the birth of makeshift free market economy create a fertile ground for the flourishing of crime. The locals, however, harbour a suspicion that their current economic malaise, culminating in the disappearances of their children, is due to their underprivileged social position:

> It never rains but it pours for the poor. . . . Nobody cares about us. Everyone just ignores us. . . . There are those who would poison us like cockroaches. They would burn us out. . . . How can I know who? what do I know? Politicians, the rich . . ., the newcomers. It didn't use to be like that . . . But they got rich, so they come, poison the water, poison the air, they prey on people, they suck our blood, I know what I'm saying. Black water, horrible water, black hair in tap water. Chinese hair in Polish water. Chinese chemicals in Polish milk. . . . it's about some force that is against us. Very harmful. Hateful to us. . . . To us, to Polish mothers. (Bator 106–07)[1]

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Evil takes the undefinable form of the hateful Other who is blamed for unemployment, for shutting down local businesses and for the invasion of super- and hypermarkets flooded with cheap textiles, industrial food and Made-in-China goods, seen as the epitome of the new era. Applying convoluted logic that even its followers cannot fully comprehend, the underprivileged blame "the rich," "the powerful" and "the Chinese" for being the malefactors responsible for pollution, the economic collapse of the region, the closure of local coal mines, and the ruin of the local industry. The Other in all shapes and guises threatens the wellbeing of the region and looms large in the stories Alicja collects as she interviews the locals. In their view, all evil resides in the moneyed Other who is home-bred for some, and foreign for others. For the elderly who remember the post-war years, the Other takes the form of a fraudulent Jew who cheated them out of their gold coins. For some, the Other lies in wait just across the border with Germany. Yet, for many, the Other materializes as "a Gypsy gang" accused of kidnapping their children (Bator 52).

As she traverses the derelict parts of the city, Alicja realizes they are the residues not only of poverty but also of crime bred by the consequences of the post-communist U-turn. The economic situation of this region harbours

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[1] Joanna Bator's *Ciemno, prawie noc* has not been translated into English. All the quotations from the novel are mine.

a truly Gothic liminal territory: post-communist and post-industrial but without a clearly defined direction for development. Coal mines closed down, and with them went many shops, restaurants, and most of the cultural institutions previously supported by the state. This shift opened the door not only to new pastimes in the loud and flashy supermarkets selling inedible but cheap food-like products, but also to new cults, such as the rise of a new prophet, Jan Kołek. Bator's novel provides a subversive social commentary by capturing the locals' sentiments of nostalgia for the "good old communist days" amidst the decay and malaise paralyzing their city. They reminisce about a time when industry thrived and everyone had a job, viewing memories of smoke belching from the chimneys and soot accumulating on the brick walls of their tenement houses as metaphors for the city's former prosperity. Though they live in the present, the unemployed inhabitants of the city's run-down quarters belong to the past.

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On the train, as she nears her hometown after years of absence, Alicja encounters visible physical symptoms of the chasm between the capital she is coming from and the economic vulnerability of the region she grew up in. The countenances of the people around her set the tone of despondency and become embodiments of the death of the previous era. Their deteriorating physiques epitomize their social demise and in a way justify their nostalgia for the communist past which is equated in their memories with material stability. Their appearance and their material deprivation turn them into almost Gothic monstrosities. Alicja observes: "[P]enury sounds the same everywhere, and one of its noises is the sucking up of the remains of food from the cavities, from under the badly made dental caps" (Bator 9). Deprivation acquires physical features and its formidable ubiquity debilitates and devours the characters. Destitution muzzles their bodies, dominates the smells of their dwellings with "the odour of mildew and decomposition" (19).

EVOKING THE SHADOWS OF THE PAST

A completely different residue of the Gothic is connected with the past, encapsulating the history of the narrator's family. When Alicja returns to an empty home, with all her family members long deceased, the objects around her evoke memories of her childhood. She realizes that these unused household items have preserved the past, linking her to her childhood and triggering the awakening of memories. This return inevitably plunges her into the secretive web of her family's past through her own fragmented memories, which begin to haunt her with every glance at a familiar yet long-forgotten object. Over the years, she has internalized the past she

now, initially involuntarily, revisits. This past has been distorted by her reinterpretation of the events that she experienced or witnessed as a child.

David Punter reminds us: "Everything to a small child is 'supernatural'; everything is natural. Everything is assumed; nothing is explicable. Infancy is a Gothic condition" ("On the Threshold" 305). But the Gothic state of infancy, the state of not knowing, is also connected with curiosity, and that is the state that homecoming awakens in Alicja. She succumbs to her childhood memories, to a state of childlike inquisitiveness and exploration. As she unravels her family secrets, the intimate family story expands, situating the past within a larger canvas of the history of her city, region, country, and beyond.

Exploring her family's past forces Alicja to confront the silenced truths about civilian life at the end of WWII, when the defeated Nazis were retreating and the advancing Soviets were replacing them as occupiers of Poland. As she pieces together fragments of accounts from her family's friend and reflects on her own disjointed childhood memories of events she could not fully comprehend, she gains an opportunity not only to understand the enduring horrors of the past, which manifest as devastating psychological generational trauma, but also to delve deeper and learn history beyond the textbooks. She uncovers undocumented facts censored by communist authorities and stories silenced throughout the post-war decades when Poland was in the Soviet-dominated communist bloc. In the aftermath of the war, the horrific events witnessed or experienced by civilians as the Red Army marched west were stored in the memories of the survivors. Despite being widely known, these events were seldom acknowledged and thus rarely entered official records. During the communist era, post-war Soviet crimes were a taboo topic.

Joanna Bator's novel is one of the first attempts in contemporary Polish literature to address the atrocities experienced by women at the hands of Soviet soldiers.[2] She adopts the Gothic as a language to convey both the haunting consequences of these past horrors and the impossibility of reconstructing events which happened decades ago. The Gothic, with its reliance on ambivalence, ambiguity, and perplexity, effectively captures events from the past that underwent natural processes of subconscious emotional transformation and distortion, as well enforced silencing and eradication in official historical discourse. The Gothic, with its capacity "to tell a 'different' story" resurfaces in Bator's novel to assimilate the past and "emerges as the challenger to all the biased histories" (Punter, "On the Threshold" 304).

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[2] Since the publication of *Ciemno, prawie noc* in 2012, other novels addressing this unacknowledged aspect of history have been published. The novels which explore atrocities perpetrated on women during and after WWII include, among others: *Kolonia Marusia* (2016) by Sylwia Zientek, *Nieczułość* by Martyna Bunda (2017), *Toń* by Ishbel Szatrawska (2023).

Alicja's family history is intertwined with the political changes that occurred after WWII, when, following the Potsdam Conference, the borders of Poland and Germany were significantly redrawn. To compensate for the loss of its eastern territories to the Soviet Union, Poland incorporated German territories in the east, known as the Regained or Recovered Territories. The shift of its western borders was portrayed in post-war communist propaganda as a righteous move, a morally justified form of retribution against the German people for the atrocities of war. It was greeted with applause, and also justified for historical reasons, as these territories were considered native Polish lands, and therefore officially declared to have been rightfully returned to the Polish homeland. However, for the thousands of people inhabiting these territories, it was much more than a cartographic move. This decision led to massive population shifts: over one million Poles were forced to relocate from the eastern territories that Poland lost to the Soviets, and approximately eight million Germans were expelled from their homes in the territories that became part of western Poland after the war (Eigler 2).

The daily existence of the large numbers of people traumatized by six years of total war, dispossessed, and then relocated from the east to the west of the country, was a profound challenge. They had to build new lives in houses which had only recently been hastily abandoned by their former owners, furnished with German objects and equipped with utensils bearing German inscriptions, which, in the minds of the newcomers, were associated with Nazism, war, and death. "Houses were post-German, public buildings, factories, roads, churches, cemeteries, objects of everyday use: dressers and wardrobes, tables and chairs, plates and crockery, clothes, paintings on the walls, and preserves in the cellars. . . . In one word: everything" (Kuszyk 8, translation mine). With time, however, as the newcomers from the east settled in and rebuilt their lives, the post-Germanness of their everyday existence became assimilated and familiarized. Many of them, still grappling with the unacknowledged traumas of the recently ended war, adopted survival strategies that dictated they not focus on the emotional effects of living in other people's homes, among other people's objects, or sleeping in other people's beds, but rather move on and continue living. Nevertheless, this created a haunting Gothic effect of the lingering and inerasable material presence of the former inhabitants, who were, after all, wartime enemies. They were now perceived as malevolent spirits—individuals no longer physically present but whose existence was felt everywhere, in the consciousness of the new inhabitants and in the memories of the elderly:

> This district, stretching acrosss Parkowa Góra and Niedźwiadki, was originally built as a luxurious and modern part of Wałbrzych, but after the war, it fell into disrepair. One of the most beautifully situated and interestingly designed housing estates that Poland acquired second-hand was slowly becoming a slum. Yet, Nowe Miasto still retained the charm of a wasted body stretched over nobly formed bones. People fled from here in an incomprehensible rush to the terrifying prefabricated blocks of flats, as if the ghosts of the previous owners had driven them away from these beautiful houses. (Bator 93)

When Alicja enters her house the night she arrives, objects immediately bring back memories from her childhood: "Tiled stoves, double-glazed windows sealed with cotton wool for the winter, and wooden floors full of cracks, from which I used to pick out post-German needles, buttons, nails and hairs" (20). She remembers her sister frowning at these discoveries: "'You've dug up a German from the floor again, silly'" (ibid.). "Crack, grave, dirt" are the words that wake her up on the first morning at her family home, at the bottom of Książ Castle (ibid.).

Digging into her family's past, Alicja uncovers scraps of details about her mother's childhood spent in Wałbrzych during the final months of the war. She used to hide in the forest surrounding Książ Castle, in the vicinity of which the Nazis had established a labour camp for prisoners from the Gross-Rosen concentration camp. Their presence there was top secret, and information about them leaked to the locals in the form of scraps of distorted stories passed on by word of mouth. Alicja's family friend remembers that

> [t]he bravest whispered about what was going on in Książ Castle, about the underground laboratories created for medical experiments, where German scientists used prisoners from the Gross-Rosen camp. They might have needed a child and decided that a German girl could be sacrificed for the glory of the Third Reich. . . . that's what the castle's scullery maids gossiped in the kitchen . . . "blood oozes from underground." (157)

REPRESENTATIONS OF TRAUMA

Alicja learns that their mother's true name was Rosemarie and she was a German orphan. As the war drew to a close, the retreating Nazis were replaced by advancing Soviets, creating a period of chaos and power vacuum, with hundreds of soldiers stationed in the territories inhabited by unprotected civilians. During this tumultuous time, Alicja's mother, a German-speaking

orphan girl, was left entirely on her own when the Soviets arrived and took over the castle in the months following the war. When she was found after the retreat of "the red plague" (Bator 286) in one of the devastated chambers, "[s]he was about eight years old and didn't speak any language. She could only scream. She was naked, her whole body was covered in dry blood and scabs that left her with scars. I am not sure if anyone attempted to help her, after the war people thought that everyone had gone through something dreadful" (225). Alicja's mother was subsequently taken to an orphanage, given a new identity as Anna Lipiec, and only years later regained her ability to speak. The narrator's older sister remembered that she "spoke Polish, but in a very strange way, as if this language was merely a cover for some other one, hidden underneath" (226).

Their mother never fully recovered from the physical abuse and emotional wounds inflicted by the Soviets; these traumas lingered for decades, secretly affecting the entire family. She had no language in which to understand or speak of the horrific violence inflicted upon her body as "the little German Hitler's whore" (287). Although she survived the war and recovered physically, as Cathy Caruth reminds us, "the history of survival . . . takes the form of an unending confrontation with the returning violence of the past" (*Unclaimed* 69). The abuse Rosemarie endured at the hands of the Soviets turned her into a silent, undercover bedroom monster. Because her body had become a site of a cruel post-war revenge, she perpetuated this pattern on her own daughters. As a child, Alicja repeatedly saw blood-stained knives and her sister covered in cuts. She recalls her mother screaming abusive words in both Polish and German. "Fear was our brother," as her sister explained in a letter Alicja retrieved years later (Bator 231).

When Alicja returns to Wałbrzych as an adult woman, she gathers more facts about her family's past and pieces them together, gradually uncovering a cohesive narrative. In a process fraught with Gothic uncertainties and horrors, she explores her mother's morbid psychology through her own distorted recollections and fragmented accounts from an elderly neighbour. Through this journey, she constructs a portrait of a family haunted by a cycle of abuse and generational trauma, culminating in her sister's suicide, her mother's confinement in a mental hospital, and her own emotional detachment and inability to form stable relationships. Alicja's mother exemplified psychiatric symptoms of PTSD, which refers to "a response to an event 'outside the range of usual human experience'" (Caruth, "Introduction" 3). Often, this response is delayed and manifests as "repeated, intrusive hallucinations, dreams, thoughts or behaviors stemming from the event" (ibid.). The American Psychological Association identified several groups of symptoms resulting from trauma exposure,

such as re-experiencing symptoms: flashbacks and reliving the trauma as if it were occurring in the present (McNally 9). Later, sexual abuse in childhood was recognized as a causal factor and added to the list of stressors causing PTSD, with the victim's inability to recall the event considered a symptom of the traumatic disorder (8). These symptoms arise because the traumatic event is "not assimilated or experienced fully at the time, but only belatedly, in its repeated possession of the one who experiences it" (Caruth, "Introduction" 4). This was the case with Rosemarie, when decades later, the sexual abuse she experienced resurfaced, and "from a damaged girl grew a woman who destroyed everything," especially her own daughters, whom she subjected to the same violence she had endured (Bator 291). When the narrator's older sister, Ewa, ultimately wounded her mother in a fight to prevent further harm to them, resulting in their mother's permanent confinement in a mental asylum, her greatest trauma was the persistence of her fear. Ewa recognized that she had been irreversibly damaged, as a part of her mother remained within her like a parasitic presence, *kotojady*, "cateaters," the term she coined to describe the evil forces which eventually destroyed her, causing her to commit suicide.

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Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok posit that "what haunts us are not the dead, but the gaps left within us by the secrets of others" (171). They argue that individuals may manifest symptoms derived not from their own life experiences, but from the traumas or undisclosed secrets of their parents or ancestors. Abraham introduces the concepts of "phantom," "haunting," and "phantasmatic haunting," employing the Gothic rhetoric of ghosts to suggest an alien presence within the self (170–76). In Bator's novel, this is manifested in the imagined haunting experienced by the second generation. One of the coping mechanisms that Alicja's sister, Ewa, developed for dealing with their abusive mother was playfully tormenting her sister with stories about thousands of Jewish prisoners from Gross-Rosen who had been buried in the nearby forests and whom she imagined rising from the dead. During the war, the Nazis used them to construct underground tunnels, and it was well known that anyone sent to Książ from Gross-Rosen would inevitably perish. Stories of this distant past and supernatural occurrences fuelled Ewa's imagination. She lived with the awareness of past crimes and unmarked graves in the forests near their home, and repeated tales of an evil force thickening beneath the castle, causing hordes of semi-transparent figures to rise from the dead, emerge from the forest, crawl into houses, bang on the floors, and creep into the cellars of the post-German houses in their residential area (Bator 87).

Rosemarie's individual tragedy resonates with the history of an entire generation of abused wartime victims, whose traumas were exacerbated

both by the displacements caused by border shifts and the political upheavals of the post-war era. Paul Ricœur defines collective trauma as a wounded collective memory. He argues that while individual trauma is often caused by personal loss, collective wounds may result from the loss of territory or painful experiences endured by entire communities (78). These may fall into the category of generational trauma, although the term was originally developed to deal with the descendants of Holocaust survivors. The wartime wounds endured by individuals like Rosemarie, never worked through and therefore passed on to the next generations, turn the inhabitants of Wałbrzych into unhealed victims, depicted in the novel as succumbing to what can be described as "victim culture." The narrator delves into the personal stories of the families of the missing children, all of whom are economically fragile and bear scars from the past, such as Barbara Mizera, who continues to blame a fraudulent Jew who deceived her grandmother when she resettled from central Poland to Wałbrzych. Individuals like her are part of a community that hurls abuse at one another in internet chat rooms and venerates the self-proclaimed prophet Jan Kołek. Some nurture wartime wounds inherited from their ancestors, while others attribute their social decline to the transformation period. In collective scenes, Bator portrays a community steeped in violence, populated by individuals who view the past—whether the distant wartime era or the more recent decade following the fall of communism—as a haunting curse, attributing their current struggles to external causes beyond their control.

One way in which this generational trauma surfaces in the novel is through the language used by some of the locals, reflecting the horrors embedded in their minds, expressive of past traumas, present-day disillusionments, and fears of an uncertain future. Their language is often disjointed, incoherent, composed of slogans, clichés, and laden with colloquialisms and vulgarities. It is a source of horror, which takes the form of a monstrous amalgamation of profanities and expressions of hatred, conveyed through torrents of abuse on the internet and outbursts of religious devotion at gatherings led by the local fraud-turned-prophet.

Following Roger Luckhurst, Susana Onega notices that "Western culture is dominated by the trauma paradigm" and is "full of more or less overt allusions to the unspeakable experiences and memories of victims of collective or individual traumas" (91). However, as Timothy Snyder points out, the history of Eastern Europe, especially in the context of WWII, differs significantly. Poland endured two occupations and two totalitarian regimes, suffering from wartime atrocities, post-war crimes, executions and deportations that remained unrecorded or openly admitted for

decades (Snyder 7–9). Many of the atrocities endured by Polish civilians were never officially acknowledged, and their traumas went unaddressed. Consequently, the legitimacy of their suffering was not recognized, and they were denied the right to victimhood. This denial constituted a double violation: first, at the hands of their oppressors, and second, through the imposed policy of denial and silence. These victims were deprived not only of the opportunity to process the effects of their trauma but also of the right to talk about their experiences, even in medical settings, leaving them to doubt the validity of their own suffering.

CATHARTIC POTENTIAL OF THE GOTHIC

Joanna Bator's *Ciemno, prawie noc* demonstrates that trauma is capable of perpetuating violence unless it is addressed. In "Remembering, Repeating and Working Through" (1914), Freud addresses the challenges of processing such blocked memories, highlighting the patient's compulsion to repeat the wounding action. He notes that "the patient repeats instead of remembering" (155). While the patient's illness should be approached "not as an event of the past, but as a present-day force, . . . as something real and contemporary," Freud emphasizes that therapeutic work should largely involve "tracing it back to the past" (151–52). In essence, for the process of healing to occur—which means breaking the cycle of repeating the traumatic actions—there must be a process of unearthing and remembering without "acting out." Otherwise, as Cathy Caruth aptly phrases it, the past events become an "unclaimed experience," resonating both personally and collectively (*Unclaimed*).

With the passage of time and the gradual blurring of details, in Bator's novel the Gothic helps uncover, convey and thus digest these obscured yet never forgotten past events. "Gothic reminds us of the uncertainties of history, that history is only, really, documentation, and, simultaneously, that most if not all documentation is forged" (Punter, "On the Threshold" 304). The process of collecting stories and uncovering the truth about Alicja's family's past is intertwined with the debunking of historical falsehoods. For the protagonist, this journey destabilizes her sense of identity and belonging. Bator challenges the assumption of the homogeneity of Polish identity by revealing its falsity when Alicja discovers she is actually half-German, while her neighbour, Albert Kukułka, is of mixed German and Roma descent, and Zofia Socha, the grandmother of a missing child, is a Jewish survivor "hiding from herself," who concealed her heritage out of fear, settling in a district ironically referred to by the locals as "Palestine" (Bator 181). *Ciemno,*

prawie noc follows the Gothic narrative pattern to resurrect a haunting past that cannot be suppressed or silenced indefinitely. In this sense, as David Punter reminds us, the Gothic "might have a truly distinctive role to play in this gradual exposure of the falsity of history" ("On the Threshold" 304). However, echoing the experience of Holocaust survivors and victims of other war crimes, Cathy Caruth posits that "perhaps it is not possible for the witnessing of the trauma to occur within the individual at all, it may only be in future generations that 'cure' or at least witnessing can take place" (*Unclaimed* 136). And this is precisely what the novel's ending provides: for Alicja's mother and her victim, Ewa, her own daughter, there is no cure. Instead, it comes for Alicja, the younger sister, who chooses to adopt one of the recovered children, Kalinka, who, like Alicja herself, is an orphan. The novel concludes with the two of them walking hand in hand, suggesting a reconciliatory path to healing for both.

The healing potential of the subversive Gothic layer of the novel permeates the narrative through its depiction of social outcasts, referred to as *babcyjki*. These figures are portrayed as enigmatic, witch-like women who are devoted to cats and appear as though they have stepped straight out of a Gothic narrative. They possess a profound knowledge of regional mysteries, have an uncanny ability to sense evil and appear whenever someone is in need of assistance. Throughout the novel, they save Albert and provide aid to Ewa and Alicja. Timeless, altruistic, and involuntary, these characters demonstrate that the potential for goodness resides in the hidden corners of reality.

The Gothic genre fragments and splinters reality, unsettling it by summoning ghosts from closets and the recesses of our memories. It disrupts our sense of belonging by rendering the familiar unfamiliar, making the home unhomely, creating a space where belonging and not-belonging converge, prompting a questioning of identity and an awareness of its fragility. However, in doing so, the Gothic can be viewed as a reconciliatory practice, providing a language to confront the ghosts of the past that must be addressed in order to facilitate individual and communal healing. In Joanna Bator's novel, the Gothic serves as an aesthetic form and a language to articulate the unspeakable and unclaimed past, which the author retrieves from the past of her characters, just as Alicja retrieves a letter written by her sister from a copy of M. G. Lewis's *The Monk*. Despite, or perhaps thanks to, the unspeakable horrors and incestuous crimes they depict, both novels, in the vein of classic Gothic, create a territory for catharsis and provide a resolution imbued with healing, eschewing an apocalyptic vision of a world devoid of hope.

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Filling the Gaps in Broken Memory while Renewing the Cityscape: Navigating Belonging in Orhan Pamuk's *The Red-Haired Woman*

Abstract

The Red-Haired Woman, one of Orhan Pamuk's post-Nobel novels, is a concise, fable-like narrative that delves into the complexities of father-son conflicts. The novel parallels the journey of the protagonist, Cem, with the broader socio-cultural context of modern Turkey. It highlights Cem's struggle between two ideologically contrasting father figures and draws a compelling analogy between his fragmented memory and Turkey's cultural memories influenced by both the East and West. This paper explores the application of various memory types in the novel, scrutinizes the reliability of its narrators, and analyzes the depiction of urban space in relation to both individual and national memory, with particular focus on the contractor protagonist.

Keywords: memory, Turkey, urban space, Orhan Pamuk, *The Red-Haired Woman*.

THE RED-HAIRED WOMAN AS A "FICTION OF MEMORY"

Within Orhan Pamuk's post-Nobel oeuvre, *The Red-Haired Woman* (originally published in Turkish as *Kırmızı Saçlı Kadın* in 2016) stands out as his briefest work of all. Yet it adheres faithfully to Pamuk's signature style, both in terms of its textual and contextual aspects. Textually, this is achieved through a layered narrative structure, the narrative situation, and an intricate web of intertextual, inter-temporal, and inter-spatial connections. Contextually, the novel delves into the complexities of Turkish modernization, particularly exploring the intricate interplay between East and West that shapes individual life paths.

The Red-Haired Woman centres on Cem. In the aftermath of his father's departure from home, the adolescent Cem becomes the apprentice of a well-digger for a summer season to finance his university ambitions. Cem's apprenticeship to Mahmut, an experienced well-digger, takes place in an unpopulated area within the fictitious town of Öngören. Cem's parental home initially provides a sense of belonging. However, this connection is shattered when his father departs from the family. He then develops deep affection for and devotion to his master, Mahmut. One day, Cem happens to watch a theatrical performance in a tent theatre. It is through this exposure that Cem realizes that a mysterious red-haired woman, whom he had already glimpsed from a distance while seated in a coffeehouse one evening is, in fact, one of the theatre's actresses. Cem has sex with the red-haired woman one fateful night. He becomes overwhelmed by his emotions of love and desire. This leads to a weakening of the bond with his master. Tensions arise within their relationship, which eventually acquires a complex dynamic akin to that of a father-son relationship. One day, when Mahmut is at the bottom of the well, Cem refuses to extend a rope to rescue him, and instead hurls a bucket down the well, leaving his master stranded below. After this, Cem departs for Istanbul alone. He harbours concerns that he may have caused harm to or even fatally injured Mahmut with the thrown bucket. Eventually, Cem manages to dispel the lingering notion that he might have caused his master's death.

He studies geology, finds employment in the construction sector and ultimately rises to the position of contractor. In this period, he meets and marries Ayşe. To distract themselves from their childless marriage, they immerse themselves in reading ancient narratives and cultivating a shared interest in their profession. They name their contracting company "Sohrab," alluding to the poignant father-son narrative in the Persian epic *Shahnameh*. Ironically, this common business eventually leads the couple to accept a lucrative project in Öngören. There, a startling fact is discovered:

Cem's ephemeral liaison with the red-haired actress left her pregnant, and she gave birth to a son, the now 26-year-old Enver. Therefore, Cem's return to Öngören as a contractor confronts him both with his unintended murder of a father-like figure and with his unknown son.

The present study examines the depiction of several types of memory and the tension between disconnection and belonging in *The Red-Haired Woman*, while also regarding the novel as an allegory of modern Turkey. The investigation is conducted within the theoretical framework of individual, regional, and national memory. The domain of memory studies is currently marked by its high productivity and dynamism, and it offers a wide array of techniques and conceptual, as well as theoretical, perspectives that are applicable to various fields, including politics and culture. In this study, I incorporate concepts from memory studies. However, here they are applied by being placed within the context of methodologies and approaches characteristic of literary and cultural studies.[1] Generally speaking, the exploration focuses on Jan Assmann's theoretical concepts of cultural memory and communicative memory.

Expanding Maurice Halbwachs's concept of collective memory, Jan and Aleida Assmann have developed the notions of cultural memory and communicative memory. Cultural memory, as the two authors delineate it, represents the memory that is shared by a community and contributes to its collective identity (Assmann 110). Cultural memory frequently manifests itself in oral myths, written narratives, and festive performances. In sum, it continuously serves as a source of illumination within a changing contemporary context. In the realm of cultural memory, the distinction between myth and history becomes less pronounced (113). Cultural memory is characterized by its longevity and resistance to rapid change (110). In contrast, communicative memory diverges significantly; unlike cultural memory, it is transmitted informally from one generation to the next. This means that its lifespan is inherently limited to the generations it directly influences, and it typically spans a duration of 80 to 100 years (111).

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[1] Considering that the present paper is grounded in a fictional work, I would like to note that concepts such as memory, space and belonging are not examined here in relation to their physical or neurological features. In this paper, I employ these concepts "metaphorically," following Astrid Erll's insight: "Societies do not remember literally; but much of what is done to reconstruct a shared past bears some resemblance to the processes of individual memory, such as the selectivity and perspectivity inherent in the creation of versions of the past according to present knowledge and needs" ("Cultural Memory Studies" 5). This methodological constraint implies that a detailed analysis, while treating the novel under scrutiny as a thought experiment highlighting a specific tension in Turkish culture, could well be the subject of another paper.

As for the aspects of literary theory that come into play at this point, it should be taken into consideration that many literary "texts portray how individuals and groups remember their past and how they construct identities on the basis of the recollected memories" (Neumann 333). In *The Red-Haired Woman*, the theme of Cem's collective memory and the selective inclusion and exclusion of elements within the narrative of Turkey's foundation surface as narratives addressing questions such as "Who am I?", or, collectively speaking, "Who are we?". Such stories have aptly been characterized as "fictions of memory" (Neumann 334).

Before exploring the analysis of memory projections in the novel, I will address the initial and most conspicuous layer of the narrative structure in *The Red-Haired Woman*. This layer presents itself as a metanarrative, running parallel to the narrative universe within the story world. While depicting Cem's story, the tragedies of Oedipus from *Oedipus Rex* and Rostam from the *Shahnameh* are consistently quoted, remembered, read, and retold as representative texts of two opposing cultures. This establishes the fundamental intertextual connection in the novel.[2] Cem, who has been abandoned by his father Akın, a leftist intellectual, develops a complicated sense of empathy with, and admiration for, his master. Importantly, Mahmut adheres to a worldview which is deeply rooted in religious and traditional values. This mindset is imbued with Eastern legends and Islamic themes represented in the novel through quotations from the *Shahnameh*. Cem naturally becomes the recipient of narratives that result from Mahmut's views, perceiving both his own life and Republican Turkey as projections of mythological archetypes. Thus, while contemplating his position between his father and his master, he also confronts the memory of Turkey caught between the East and the West. The fable-like tone of the novel serves to underpin the importance of its central narrative, which connects with both Western and Eastern mythologies.

FAULTY CONSTRUCTIONS OF COMMUNICATIVE MEMORY

The Red-Haired Woman is divided into three main chapters, each narrated in the first person. The two initial chapters appear to be recounted by the protagonist Cem. The first chapter concludes with Cem's abandonment of his master at the bottom of the well, and his subsequent departure. In

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[2] In his analysis, Julian Rentzsch views *The Red-Haired Woman* as an urban epic with universal traits (363), continuing the traditions of Greek and Persian epics (333). He focuses on themes of blindness, wrath, repentance, and destiny, and considers the myths mentioned in the novel as hypertexts.

the second chapter, events reach a pivotal moment when Cem, following a meeting with landowners in Öngören, wants to revisit the well he and Mahmut had dug years ago. It is during this visit that he comes to the startling realization that the young man accompanying him is his son. Eventually, Enver kills his father Cem near the well.

The narrator of the third chapter, Gülcihan, the red-haired woman, references the novel written by her son Enver, whom she persuaded to document his father's story. This narrative shift makes Enver an implied author "positioned between the real author and the fictive narrator in the communication structure of narrative worlds" (Schmid 161), who endeavours to persuade us, the readers, that he is recounting Cem's story from Cem's own perspective. As Türker Gümüş points out, the inverse is also possible: "[U]sing the power of writing, Enver has managed to make his father think like himself" (239). When Gülcihan implies that what we are reading is the book written by Enver, the connections between the various narrator perspectives no longer constitute a difference in points of view within a shared universe. Instead, it evolves into an interplay of narrative levels. Structurally, the story Gülcihan tells does not adhere to a framed narrative; it is solely the final chapter of the novel. However, contextually, it serves to frame an inner story. If, as Gülcihan suggests, we are reading Enver's book seemingly narrated by Cem, the narrative structure becomes intricate. Even though Enver is not the narrator, he occupies an intradiegetic position between the level framed by Gülcihan (extradiegesis) and the level conveyed through Cem's voice (metadiegesis). In terms of narrative structure, the implied author assumes the role of an intradiegetic narrator without narrating a story but occupies a space in the narrative universe between the storytelling of the extradiegetic and the metadiegetic narrators. The narrative complexity intensifies as Gülcihan emerges as an unreliable narrator, casting doubt upon whose story the readers are truly engaging with. This focalization becomes more perplexing when one considers that if (or as long as) Gülcihan lies, manipulates, or selectively narrates the story, the entire universe becomes somewhat absurd.

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Indeed, the red-haired woman who assumes the narrative voice in the third chapter, appears in the role not only of an unreliable narrator, but also a manipulative character. In a fashion characteristic of Pamuk's "postmodern" style, the narrator directly addresses the reader: "[T]he account you will find here is complete and unequivocally true" (Pamuk 245). The concept of an unreliable narrator, often interpreted as "the reader's recognition of textual or normative inconsistency" (Neumann 338), lends an element of instability to the narrative, perpetually leaving the reader on precarious ground. Concurrently, this narrative device serves to prompt a re-evaluation of individual and societal pasts, as it shapes the narrative of Cem's personal history and that of Turkey's social past.

A closer look leads us to actually question the presence of another implied author. Gülcihan proudly tells us how she got her son to write the book we are reading:

> Remembering the stories I had heard from Ayşe and read in books she'd mentioned, I would try to explain everything to my son as if the ideas and the fantasies had been my own. Enver didn't like hearing about ancient myths, since they reminded him of his crime, and often he would pretend not to understand the point I was trying to make. (Pamuk 250)

And, after Enver finally decided to write the book, she continues to get involved: "I came to suggest that he start an account of his life, perhaps even working the entire story, now nearing its end, into the form of a novel. I made sure to check on his progress during those social visits" (251). We are thereby reading a novel that was written by Enver, but conceived and designed by Gülcihan. It is not clear whose imagination is more at the forefront. The events do not take place in a single universe; the story is told by more than one narrator of questionable reliability. The reader is unable to determine whether the characters are as they are described in the novel. We cannot get a clear impression of the characters' personalities, motivations, or perspectives. As Vera Nünning aptly points out, readers need to decide "how they want to evaluate and position themselves" in relation to this ambiguity in the narrative (101). "Personalised unreliable narrators," such as Gülcihan, "provide insight into their strange minds, their values, delusions, emotions, and, finally, into their (sometimes twisted) ways of thinking" (100). This way of telling stories, as the red-haired woman does, indicates "how narrators cunningly concoct lies in order to achieve personal gain" (101).

The female narrator presents her story as though she serves as the storyteller and as the story's architect. Her narrative perspective appears to transcend the characters' realm, creating an impression of meta-awareness and conveying an intimate knowledge surpassing that of other characters. For instance, during her time in Öngören, she recognizes Cem while he is still a minor: Cem's father had sought solace in meeting her when he left his family. In doing this, Gülcihan establishes the red-haired woman as a factor that has contributed to Cem's fatherless upbringing and his sense of estrangement during childhood. Overall, she exerts a seductive influence on both father and son. While she could have potentially given birth to Cem's sibling, she instead bears his son, thereby positioning herself as the central figure that bridges not only the divide between father and son but also among grandfather, father, and son. In essence, her presence disrupts the customary transmission of communicative memory typically confined to three generations.

The narrative structure of the novel, which ostensibly appears as a conduit for the transmission of communicative memory, in fact also operates paradoxically because it hinders the establishment of such memory. Notably, each character assumes the role of storyteller. Mahmut imparts religious stories, Cem narrates his own experiences, and Gülcihan, who both performs on the theatrical stage and communicates the events of the unfolding story, fills the gaps in a manner that remains perpetually open to scrutiny and mistrust. Some of these narrators exhibit an Eastern perspective, while others adopt a Western viewpoint. For instance, the portrayal of the father-son conflict, which constitutes the foundational tension of the narrative, draws inspiration from two archetypal sources; Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex* and Ferdowsi's *Shahnameh*. These sources are recurrently echoed and refracted within the narrative realm, and in the process manifest mirror images of each other. In its simplest rendition, the overarching message conveyed is as follows: in the West, exemplified by Oedipus, sons kill their fathers, while in the East, i.e. in *Shahnameh*, fathers kill their sons. Consequently, Western protagonists emerge as emancipated figures liberated from traditional codes, while their Eastern counterparts find themselves constrained by tradition resulting in stunted growth.

Due to the intricately layered structure of the narrative, the female narrator's storytelling approach encompasses the content of the initial two chapters narrated by Cem (or cited by Enver), thereby filling the gaps omitted by Cem either intentionally or unknowingly. For instance, Gülcihan bears witness to Cem's hasty departure from Öngören. We learn that she promptly visits the well and this leads to Mahmut's rescue and facilitates his timely recovery from his injuries. She prevents Cem from committing patricide. Since the circle of friends that she and her husband frequently visit resides in Öngören, she raises her son Enver under the guardianship of Mahmut, Cem's surrogate father.

We may look at these narrative strands from the perspective of the theory of communicative memory. According to Jan Assmann, as already stated, communicative memory "lives in everyday interaction and communication and, for this very reason, has only a limited time depth which normally reaches no farther back than eighty years, the time span of three interacting generations" (111). Consequently, the red-haired woman not only disrupts the transmission of communicative memory between Akın, Cem, and Enver, which could be provided through familial coexistence and the sharing of familial, cultural, social, and economic experiences (Assmann terms this "interacting"), but also endeavours to establish a parallel, though partial, communicative memory by means of her storytelling.

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Neither Gülcihan's husband, Turgay, nor Enver's father, Cem, manage to forge a father-son relationship with Enver. Like Cem, whose relationship with his own father remained incomplete, Mahmut provides Enver with emotional and spiritual guidance similar to that of a father, but unable to replace a father. Consequently, Gülcihan plays a pivotal role in introducing both Cem and Enver to traditional and religious codes through her connection with Mahmut. Mahmut, who does not have biological offspring, functions as a common surrogate father, contributing to the establishment of a form of communicative memory. However, as he represents only one facet of this memory (i.e. the traditional and religious one), he also contributes to the family memories remaining incomplete, fragmented, and discontinuous.

The red-haired woman derives a Dionysian pleasure from positioning herself as the predominant agent within the entire narrative of the novel, revelling in the Olympian position she assumes. However, Gülcihan's perspective undergoes a transformation when she experiences abandonment by Cem's father Akın, when she is in her twenties. Simultaneously, as a new coup d'état unfolds in Turkey, her political milieu and friendships disintegrate. In reaction, she articulates her disillusionment in a manner reminiscent of a female rights advocate, almost misappropriating the struggle for women's rights in the process. She gleefully notes, during her time with the theatre company, that she personally takes the initiative to incorporate lines from *Farhad and Shirin*, *Asli and Karam*, and *Rostam and Sohrab*, as well as from Rumi's *Masnavi*, into the monologues (Pamuk 231) to counteract the subtle shift toward a left-wing orientation in the plays following the 1980 coup d'état. It becomes evident that she relishes being in the foreground where she is the primary agent. She emphasizes the impact of her intervention on the male spectators: "The moment I stepped back onstage as Sohrab's mother, Tahmina, and shrieked at the sight of what my husband had done to my son, every single one of them . . . would fall into a ponderous, unnerving silence" (232). She astutely observes that "young provincial men identified with Sohrab, not his powerful, overbearing father, Rostam" (232). Moreover, she extends her insights beyond this context, implying that Turkish modernization does not form a monolithic entity but is akin to the arabesque style, which is characterized by patchwork, fragmentation, and overlapping patterns:

> Trying to find something to balance the scene with the weeping Tahmina, we introduced a reenactment of that moment when the prophet Abraham prepares to cut his only son's throat to prove his submission to the will of God; I played a woman crying in the background and later the angel who walks onstage carrying a toy lamb. In fact, there was no

real room for women in this story, and I wasn't making much impact. So I reworked Oedipus's exchange with his mother, Jocasta, for my monologue. The notion that a son might kill his own father by accident was met mostly with emotional detachment, but at least it stimulated the audience intellectually. That should have been enough. How I wish I'd left out the bit about the son sleeping with his red-haired mother. . . Today I can see what an ill-fated choice that was. (233)

There are two Eastern narratives at play here: one revolves around Tahmina, whose son Sohrab is tragically slain by her husband Rostam, a tale extracted from the Iranian national epic, *Shahnameh*. The second narrative centres on Abraham, a common archetype within the three monotheistic religions and is therefore of Middle Eastern origin. In the Islamic version of this narrative, Abraham is willing to sacrifice his son Ismail. However, these narratives, steeped in their masculine themes, prove incongruent with Gülcihan's sensibilities. In response, she endeavours to incorporate *Oedipus*, a foundational text of Western civilization, into her monologue. Still, she remains unsatisfied with the outcome. Consequently, Gülcihan, who could be characterized as a half-educated Turkish leftist, finds herself unable to gratify either herself or her audience with the pastiche she creates with elements from both the East and the West.

GAPS IN CULTURAL AND REGIONAL MEMORY

At this juncture, it is pertinent to consider the insight offered by the literary scholar Erdağ Göknar, famous also as the translator of *My Name is Red* into English. Göknar directs our attention to a comparison between *The Red-Haired Woman* and the narratives of Oedipus and Sohrab, remarking that "Greece and Iran today are Turkey's Western and Eastern neighbors." This lucid statement serves as a pivotal point of reference[3] for analyzing the geographical and thematic dimensions of the novel.

Believing he killed his surrogate father Mahmut, Cem identifies himself as Oedipus and gradually relegates the notion that he might be a murderer to the recesses of his mind. However, when it becomes apparent that Mahmut is not actually deceased, the factual inaccuracy of Cem's self-

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[3] Pamuk employs *Oedipus Rex* and the *Shahnameh* as archetypes at opposite poles in the novel. While Turkey possesses a distinct cultural background that may, at first glance, appear to challenge Göknar's identification of Turkey's position between them, Pamuk indeed underscores this very in-betweenness. In terms of physical space, however, the Greek cultural heritage that inspired *Oedipus* emerged in the Eastern Aegean region— not modern-day Greece—and *Shahnameh* originates from the ancient Persian culture that spanned, among others, Afghanistan and Tajikistan—not present-day Iran.

narrative manifests itself. As it turns out, Mahmut has played an active role in the upbringing of Cem's son, Enver. Also, it becomes evident that Enver has been raised on narratives of Eastern origin, favouring Sohrab over Oedipus. In spite of his self-identification with Oedipus, Cem is not able to fully embrace a Western identity because he failed to commit patricide. In contrast, Enver, despite his preference for Eastern traditions, right-wing ideologies, and religiosity, is successful in committing patricide. Significantly, both grapple in the well. Their struggle culminates in Enver's killing of Cem when he could have died instead.

In sum, Enver's aspiration to be Eastern and traditional remains incomplete, just as Cem's desire to become Western and progressive cannot set him free from his Eastern roots. Therefore, by analogy, *The Red-Haired Woman* opens a gateway to analyzing Turkey's position in the perpetual deadlock between Oedipus and Sohrab, patricide and filicide, Greece and Iran. Amidst this intricate narrative Turkey finds itself unable to unequivocally align with either side, all the while being imbued with its national memory as a post-imperial nation-state. As Neumann aptly notes, fictions of memory serve as "imaginative (re)construction of the past in response to current needs" (334) and, just as in *The Red-Haired Woman*, they underscore the selectiveness of our memories, revealing that the act of recollection often says more about the rememberer's present, their desires and denials, than it does about the factual events of the past. This phenomenon holds particularly true for the sphere of cultural memory which involves a deliberate act of fashioning to a greater extent than individual memories (333).

In *The Red-Haired Woman* the selective nature of memory, the reconstruction of the past in accordance with contemporary trends, and the unreliability of the novel's narrators coalesce with the depiction of Turkey as a form of meta-narrative in the background. This convergence allows the novel to be interpreted as an allegory of republican Turkey. The modern democratic Republic was one of the nation-states that was established in the period when empires disintegrated after World War I. It embarked on the task of forging a new state that was independent of the previous monarchical history.

Throughout his literary work, Pamuk consistently directs his attention to the multifaceted and contentious facets of Turkey's republican modernization, offering various perspectives on it.[4] *The Red-Haired Woman*

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[4] Pamuk's novels can thus be considered as manifestations of the east-west tension that tightly constricts the human psyche. These recurring motifs permeate works such as *Cevdet Bey ve oğulları* (*Cevdet Bey and His Sons*, not available in English yet), *Silent House*, *The White Castle*, *My Name is Red*, and *The Museum of Innocence*. The mental strain and profound sense of alienation resulting from the east-west dichotomy are vividly portrayed in *Cevdet Bey ve oğulları* through the melancholic man that becomes estranged from family

encapsulates this recurring motif, which has already evolved into a leitmotif, within the framework of a memory fiction. Just as communicative memory remains discontinuous for the individuals in the novel, there is discontinuity within the cultural memory shared by broader communities, which is capable of lasting for millennia and providing individuals with a collective identity. For instance, "like most Turks" Cem was also unfamiliar with the *Shahnameh* (Pamuk 135) and couldn't find a translation of "Ferdowsi's thousand-year-old epic in Istanbul," because "after two hundred years of striving to Westernize, no one in Turkey was interested any longer in this profusion of tales" (137). This discontinuity arises due to the critical examination of Turkish modernization within Pamuk's novels, which revolves around the problematic construction of cultural memory understood "as the interplay of present and past in socio-cultural contexts" (Erll, "Regional" 305).

In this context, I propose to embark on an analysis of modern Turkey from an additional perspective. If we start from a macro-level view of republican Turkey, examining the national, i.e. cultural memory, and then shift to a micro-level analysis focusing on the settings, we encounter the Öngören-Istanbul-Gebze axis. Historically, Istanbul was the capital not of the nation-state, but of the Ottoman and Byzantine empires. When Cem's father departs from home, Cem and his mother embark on a journey to Gebze, where the mother's relatives live. Gebze is a small city located to the east of Istanbul. Conversely, Cem journeys to Öngören, which, by way of its (fictitious) position on the western outskirts of Istanbul, is situated on the European continent in the direction of Edirne at a considerable distance from the bustling urban centre. It is here that Cem works alongside Mahmut, forging an affectionate bond that compensates for his broken father-son relationship. However, he severs this connection with Mahmut, gets involved with the red-haired woman, and subsequently flees to Istanbul. Yet, as Öngören does not exist in reality, the "west" remains no more than a conceptual construct, an idea, while the desired and sought-after relationship with it fails to materialize. The Öngören-Istanbul-Gebze axis "as a 'mnemotope,' as a space of remembering" (Erll, "Regional" 309)

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ties. *Silent House* illustrates this tension through the story of an educated man who cheats on his traditionally religious wife. In *The White Castle*, the blending and dissolution of eastern and western identities, akin to doppelgangers, is a central theme. *My Name is Red* delves into the murder of an innovative painter within the same context, while *The Museum of Innocence* explores the fragile psyche of a man caught between the superficial and western facets of Turkish modernization, ultimately succumbing to a madness fueled by love. In this regard, these narratives collectively explore the complexities of masculinity. In his seminal monography, *Orhan Pamuk, Secularism and Blasphemy* (2013), Göknar explores the interplay between religious tradition and the secular state as they emerge as two conflicting yet mutually reinforcing political forces within Pamuk's novels.

can be considered a manifestation of regional memory that reflects the projection of cultural memory in the novel:

> Regional memory operates on both levels of collective remembering, the individual and the social and media. On the one hand, events, persons, stories, myths, and images associated with a certain region are transmitted and circulated through social interaction and media representations (from oral stories to books and to internet platforms). On the other hand, to the very extent that regions thus become collective constructs, they also function as *cadres sociaux* for individual remembering. (308)

The orally transmitted stories and myths within the novel are inherently part of cultural memory, as they have been shared across nations, generations, and centuries. Simultaneously, the Eastern epics and myths narrated by Mahmut to Cem and Enver also constitute a form of communicative memory, albeit one that lacks cohesiveness within the context of family relations. However, although these stories are relayed, enhanced by vivid mental imagery (for instance, envisioning the grieving mother beside her deceased son), and transformed into different media through theatrical performances, they occur within the realm of social interaction. It is worth noting that the archetypal motifs featured in the novel also contribute to a regional memory for Turkey, situated between Iran and Greece. These motifs originate from the Iranian national epic *Shahnameh* and the Greek tragedy *Oedipus Rex*, a fundamental text within the European-Western cultural tradition. The novel recounts not only geographical but also cultural liminality, reshaping modern Turkey into a landscape where "the interrelations between cultural remembering and regional integration" (Erll, "Regional" 309) unfold for its inhabitants. In this regard, Cem finds his place in a parallel drawn between *Oedipus* and the *Shahnameh*, manifesting a tendency to prefer regional memory to national memory. Within the narrative, Cem's personal recollections are depicted through themes such as paternal abandonment, the death of his master, and the act of being killed by his son. These memories are constructed against the backdrop of the broader coming-to-terms struggle with history and republican Turkey's role within its larger context. This regional locus of memory takes shape as a cultural, regional, and historical critique of modern Turkey within the novel.

MEMORY SITES VS. CONSTRUCTION ACTIVITIES

Throughout various cycles of construction, demolition, and reconstruction, which bring about changes in the urban landscape, Cem himself plays a role in these transformations. He exacerbates the discontinuity in memory by

causing harm to the places of his memory just as Istanbul expands and engulfs all the smaller surrounding cities, including Öngören. In Cem's words, "Istanbul had by now grown to the point of swallowing up Öngören; Master Mahmut and his well were lost somewhere in that metropolitan morass" (Pamuk 144). While Öngören is fading from Cem's memory, he hopes that the burden of having murdered his master will likewise fade into oblivion. Yet, despite Öngören's receding presence in his mind, Öngören is not entirely forgotten; on his journeys, Cem attempts to spot Öngören from an airplane (129). For instance, he observes that the agricultural lands between Istanbul and Öngören are now adorned with "industrial plants, warehouses, and factories, all of them dull and black as coal from the air" (130). Simultaneously, these lands are being opened up for development, and they expand at a disconcertingly rapid pace, very much like the city itself. The urban landscape is continually evolving due to government construction policies with areas for habitation, commerce, and construction constantly shifting. Öngören is not immune to this construction frenzy, which leads to a rise also in the value of the plateau where Mahmut and Cem dug the well. The beneficiaries are not only the locals but also "members of the new, motorized rich contemplating a home purchase in this rapidly developing area" (195). Everyone is fervently constructing, seeking to capitalize on the rental opportunities. This frenetic transformation of the city and its urban fabric, including the remote, sparsely inhabited Öngören, does not perturb Cem in the slightest. He has embraced a kind of apathy, bordering on aloofness, that extends beyond his endeavour to rid himself of his personal memory, namely, his burden of remorse. Far from preserving the memory of the city, he initiates new construction projects. The urban spaces he alters with his construction activities represent actions that disrupt both cultural and communicative memory. For instance, before Cem's company Sohrab embarks on the Öngören project, Cem travels to Öngören by train, just as he did years before. He describes his arrival in the city as follows: "As the train slowly pulled into Öngören, I couldn't distinguish our plateau for the countless concrete buildings" (193). He fails to find any traces of his own within the memory sites of the city centre:

> The moment I walked out of the station, I knew that the old Öngören was gone . . . Retracing the same steps I followed so frequently in my memories, I started walking automatically from the Station Square to where the Rumelian Coffeehouse had stood, and specifically toward the spot on the pavement where our table had been, but I found nothing to remind me of all the cups of tea we'd had in that place. All the people who'd once been here, and all the homes in which they'd lived, had since disappeared, replaced by new buildings inhabited by new people. (193–94)

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Therefore, the rapid construction initiatives, urban transformations, land zoning, and other developments not only distort Cem's memory but also affect the memory of all urban residents. These changes, in addition to altering the memory spaces that hold significance for individuals, communities, and societies also impair the spatial function of memory preservation. The place "isn't Öngören now; it's Istanbul" (199). Cem has already come to terms with this reality. However, he does not lament this transformation; rather, his focus is on the fact that a portion of communicative memory is erased in the process. While he does not wish to obliterate memory elements such as his relationship with Mahmut, the stories he gleaned from Mahmut or the cups of tea they shared at the coffee house in Öngören, he is concerned about being labelled a murderer in the city: "[N]obody in Öngören knew who I was anymore, and so there was nothing much to fear" (195).

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Cem, who is willing to risk the transformation of the entire urban space and the associated memories in order to escape from his own crime and the guilt of being his surrogate father's murderer, begins to question the continuity of communicative memory when he discovers that he has a son. For example, "[h]ad the Red-Haired Woman told our son, Enver, that his grandfather was a romantic idealist who'd gone to prison for his political convictions? It was mortifying to think that my son might picture me as some superficial and morally corrupt version of his grandfather" (206). Cem is deeply concerned about the perception of his biological father in the eyes of his own biological son. However, he remains unaware that Gülcihan was his father's lover, and her knowledge of Cem's father extends beyond what Cem has shared with her.

The location where this fragmented memory cycle finally receives a new rupture is the well originally dug by Mahmut: "I sensed that we were getting closer to our well, and that I was nearing the end of the quest I'd spent my life on" (209). The well represents the culmination of this quest, the final destination of a lifelong journey. Although Cem's memory gradually fades and it becomes increasingly difficult to recall the details due to physical changes in the surroundings, Cem gradually begins to recognize geological details of the area as he approaches the well:

> I saw the same weeds and nettles from thirty years ago growing on empty lots and in the cracks in the pavement. I thought briefly of being reunited with that wrinkly-necked tortoise and of venturing, as in the old days, some musings on life and the nature of time. Here we are, thirty years on! the tortoise would say. *An entire, wasted life for you. A blink of an eye for me*. (206)

In fact, as Cem learns—while preparing for the project he initiated in Öngören—that Mahmut is not dead, he no longer carries the burden of feeling like a murderer. His son, who makes a sudden appearance, now forms a father-son relationship with Mahmut. For instance, Enver says to Cem: "Master Mahmut told me everything. . . . You left him at the bottom of the well because you are vain, and you thought your life was worth more than his. Your school, your university dreams, and your life were more important to you than the existence of that poor man" (220). Enver reminds Cem that his sin is not forgotten, even though the places that hold the memory have been destroyed. When memory is passed on, it is often interpreted by the recipient. Enver narrates Cem's act of leaving Mahmut in the well as the act of a secular person deeming a traditional person worthless and abandoning him at the bottom of the pit. Consequently, just as the imaginary west assimilates Istanbul, when Cem passes away, his descendants will remember him not as he truly was but as his son recounts him.

In conclusion, *The Red-Haired Woman* serves as a representation of memory reconstruction in terms of both communicative and cultural memories. While urban transformation alters spaces, construction activities do not always succeed in erasing memory. This is due to the presence of transnational, trans-spatial, and trans-temporal archetypes perpetuated by cultural memory, as well as the transfer of secrets, fears, and memories among families through communicative memory. In the realm of construction activities, the cityscape undeniably undergoes transformations akin to the perceived loss of regional memory. However, the obliteration of memory does not equate to its complete erasure. When the Republic was founded, traditional narratives persisted as archetypes in the collective memory even though cultural memory suffered damage. In a similar vein, as construction activities increased and gentrification began, the urban space of Istanbul underwent significant changes. Change is a constant, and the forms of memory instituted subsequently are dynamic, undergoing continuous transformation.

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THE ANTHROPOCENE, URBAN HABITATIONS, AND THE DIGITAL LANDSCAPE

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Dwelling in the Urban Liminal: A Phenomenological Consideration of Saul Leiter's Street Photography

Abstract

In this essay, I present a phenomenological exploration of the "urban liminal" in the context of Saul Leiter's street photography. In gauging the possibilities of dwelling in the urban liminal, this essay brings into dialogue Heidegger's notion of "wohnen" (as delineated in "Building, Dwelling, Thinking") and Leiter's re-presentation of liminal places (and liminality). As transient spatialities, liminal places are not typically considered suitable for dwelling, meaning living or settling. But as neither space nor time is immutable and is always—whether evident or not—in a constant state of flux, it is useful to re-assess and re-imagine from time to time our relationship with place (*and* time) and, in the process, to reappraise the questions of identity and belongingness. In its investigation of the latencies of liminal places in Leiter's street photography, this essay poses questions such as: is it possible to dwell (or *be at home*) in liminalities? How might the visual representation of liminality help deepen our understanding of transitional states and of change? How does Leiter's stylization of liminality connect with our lived experience of these places? By examining Leiter's depiction of urban liminality from a phenomenological perspective, this essay aims to show how liminality can be a useful concept for reimagining the relationship between the self and the world.

Keywords: liminal, Saul Leiter, Martin Heidegger, wohnen, dwelling and belonging, phenomenology.

"Man lives always on the verge,
always on the borderland of a something more."

(Wheelwright 18)

THE "LIMEN"

The word "liminal" (from Latin "limen" or threshold) implies a transitional phase/space characterized by uncertainty, ambiguity, and often a sense of mystery bordering on the unknown.[1] French ethnographer Arnold van Gennep's conceptualization of the term in the context of ceremonial rites of passage as observed in certain societies and tribes offers a useful analogy to understand liminality as applied to space/place and to thereby re-imagine our relationship with it.[2] Rites of passage or initiation ceremonies constitute three stages: separation (the dissolution of a former state), transition (the transformational stage or the liminal zone), and incorporation (a state of visible transformation and growth, signalling the formal initiation of the individual into a new state/group). As the quality attendant on an in-between state, liminality encourages openness. The British anthropologist Victor Turner describes liminal spaces as being "betwixt and between" and characterized by "ambiguity and paradox" (97)—attributing "a change in being" (102) to the threshold situation. The inherent in-betweenness of the liminal position involves ambiguity and a blurring of boundaries. However, inhabiting (as opposed to merely occupying) the space of liminality can lead to a heightened and a more nuanced understanding of (our) identity and belongingness (to the world). "In understanding the world," writes Heidegger, "being-in is always also understood. Understanding of existence as such is always an understanding of world" (*Being and Time* 146). Since to dwell also implies a transcendental awareness or understanding of place in its specificity, liminal places—as agencies capable of intensifying and deepening that understanding—are *always already* implicated in dwelling. The liminal connects. Its presence is essential to continuity, to the gathering of places along a continuum. Without an acknowledgement or adequate understanding of it, we risk dissolving space (and time) into an undifferentiated, homogeneous, exclusionary, and ultimately alienating expanse.

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[1] While the concept of liminality may, with equal salience, be applied to both space *and* time, this essay focuses only on liminal places or the urban liminal in the context of Saul Leiter's street photography.

[2] Arnold van Gennep's pioneering study on the individual's transition in society through ceremonial rites (the rites of passage), *Les Rites de Passage*, was first published in French in 1909 and was subsequently translated into English in 1960.

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LEITER'S NYC AND THE URBAN LIMINAL[3]

As its title suggests, this essay is concerned with the urban liminal and the possibilities of dwelling in and through it. But what exactly is understood by the expression "urban liminal"? To put it simply, the urban liminal may be defined as the in-between places—that are neither here nor there—embedded in the "tangible, built environment" of the city.[4] Zukin situates the concept of liminality in the urban situation; liminality, according to her, "captures the *simultaneous advance and decline of economic forms*, the sense that as the ground shifts under our feet, taller buildings continue to rise" (5, emphasis mine). Leiter's New York fits this description in ways more than one—it is a city in flux, at once opening out to the world and retreating in it. But the fact that it maintains itself in the transcendence and that Leiter remains focused on the *letting be-ness* of the city and its liminal spaces underscore the simple truth of change being constant and essential to the onward flow of life. Even when Leiter executes the defamiliarization of the familiar in his conceptualization of the urban liminal, he seems to be doing so by inviting us (the audience of his photographs) to partake in the multifariousness of the material world.

The city denotes a physical space, a location; its objectivity may as well be received and understood as such. But a city is much more than any specific geographical location. For instance, one may legitimately go on to ask: how is the city shaped by the people who populate its space and the commuters that traverse its streets and liminal pockets? How do such spaces feel to the ones engaging with or experiencing them? What about the numerous transactions, exchanges, and events that unfold every day across the space of the city? Do these events affect our perception of the urban liminal? And then, again, what about the various sensory experiences of the users of the city—the same users, whose behaviours, routines, and everyday mundane transactions (performances) create the perceptual

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[3] Saul Leiter (1923–2013) was born in Pittsburgh and became widely known as a fashion photographer in New York. Leiter was originally trained to be a painter so his photographs bear palpable traces of painterly techniques. Leiter photographed the streets of New York extensively in the 1940s and 50s, and even afterwards, in a style that may be described as "slices of life." Working in an era when fine art photography was decidedly monochrome, Leiter used colour blocks in his photographic compositions in a striking way, often calling to mind the art of contemporary painters, particularly Piet Mondrian and Mark Rothko. Leiter's deeply humane art is rooted in and foregrounds the everyday alike, in its brilliant immanence and impermanence.

[4] Harvey defines the city as "a tangible built environment—an environment which is a social product" (96). His emphasis on the city as a tangible social construct seems to have a definitive bearing on the way(s) dwelling is actually practiced/realized within its mutable (and continually mutating) space.

experience of the urban or urbanity (or, the *performance of* urbanity)? How do we—as the audience and purveyors of Leiter's photographic portrayal of the space of urbanity—re-construct these spaces in our mind, not just visually but also through the senses of touch, hearing, smell, and taste? For the phenomenological understanding of these spaces will require all these sensory experiences to come together, converge and participate in the process of perception. Merleau-Ponty draws our attention to the sensoriality of perceptual experience:

> One sees the hardness and brittleness of glass, and when with a tinkling sound it breaks this sound is conveyed by the visible glass. One sees the springiness of steel and the ductility of red hot steel, the hardness of a plane blade, the softness of shavings. . . . We see the depth, speed, softness and hardness of objects—Cezanne says we even see their odour. (229)

Leiter's work emphasizes and brings to focus our lived-experience, directing our attention to the nature and essence of things and our everyday encounter with those things. In an attempt to enhance our phenomenological understanding of the city, it makes sense to ask how the audience of Leiter's photographs (depicting the street life of New York) participate(d)/ engage(d) in that very street life through the act of seeing/reading. The city that unfolds across the distinguished and expansive body of Leiter's photographic art is hardly the outcome of the machinations of the machine age. It is not the postcard NYC with its signature skyline. On the contrary, Leiter's city—often glimpsed through gaps in the curtain or from under a canopy or as reflected in a puddle after the rains—consists of texts and traces that can be both intimate and distant. For instance, in "Through Boards" (1957) Leiter depicts a street scene, glimpsed presumably from the interior of a boarded-up shop. Like a frozen strip of film, the scene—comprising the prow of a car, a passerby on the sidewalk and two men standing in front of a shop—advances the idea of the street, caught *in medias res*, as a continually unfolding story, a narrative not only of the city's becoming and being but also of the individual's.

If one considers Leiter to be an ethnographer of New York urban street culture he, himself, may be said to occupy a liminal position as one who is both participant and observer, yet never completely either. This convergence of the seer and the seen is further evident in "Paris" (1959), a cafe scene capturing the urban liminal, shot through glass. The slight reflection of the photographer on the glass is barely visible; as both the observer and the observed, he occupies a liminal space. Being a material that is transparent, reflective, and invisible, glass is a useful metaphor for liminality. Armstrong argues that "transparency encourages a simple dualism, or, what is the

opposite form of the same thing, the collapse of seer and seen into one another" (11). Glass represents the transitory space where the visible and the invisible converge. This quality of glass shares an obvious resonance with Merleau-Ponty's concept of embodied consciousness according to which the world comes alive to us (in the act of perception, that is) through a synergy of the visible body and the invisible mind, bound inextricably to each other. Glass features recurrently throughout Leiter's oeuvre and in works, such as "The Boy"/"The Boy in the Window" (1950), "Graffiti Heads" (1950), "Snow" (1960), "Window" (1957), "Rear Window" (1950), "T" (1950), "Wet Window" (1960), etc. Leiter's use of glass may be interpreted as a way of articulating one's relationship with/belongingness to the world. "The Boy," for example, is shot through a glass window. On the surface of the glass, the seer (the boy) and the seen (reflection of the city's buildings) converge into layers of superimposed images and reflections. The transparent glass pane of the window functions as a threshold, marking the dissolution of the inside and the outside, the seer and the seen, the self and the other. It is a place of latencies, disclosure, and reflection (both literally as well as metaphorically). The 1960 photograph titled "Snow" is also a case in point. This photograph featuring a man standing on the snow-covered street outside, as only partially seen through the misted glass pane of the window, marks the convergence of the visible and the invisible. Leiter's expression of the urban liminal is often routed through ephemeral elements of the weather, particularly rain and snow. His visual reflection on liminality, as these photographs seem to suggest, implies an abiding relationship between the subject photographed and the surrounding place/locale. It is perhaps because of this interconnectedness that Leiter's conceptualization of the liminal does not unsettle or alienate.

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As a melting pot of cultures and the seat of the Harlem Renaissance, NYC in the first half of the 20th century could be described with a fair degree of accuracy as a liminal city. A city consists of architecture, fragments of memories, and often failed prototypes of utopian ideations. Leiter's rendition of New York's liminality *feels* intimate—a structure comprising interiority and nearness as opposed to exteriority and distance. His gaze is what David Michael Levin might have described as "the alethetic gaze" that, instead of seeing from a single vantage point, embraces a multitude of perspectives and is inclusionary, participative, empathetic and firmly anchored in the lifeworld or the "flesh" of the world.[5] One might even go so far as to say

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[5] Levin differentiates between the "assertoric gaze" and the "alethetic gaze" in his book, *The Opening of Vision: Nihilism and the Postmodern Situation*. While the assertoric gaze is narrow, rigid, exclusionary, and dogmatic, the alethetic gaze is essentially pluralistic, tolerant, and accommodates a wide range of perspectives (qtd. in Pallasmaa 36).

that what Picasso and the Cubists achieved through the superimposition of forms and perspectives in their paintings, Leiter did through the medium of photography. Leiter's New York is a palimpsest of traces of the city's history and performativity—a narrative of its becoming, appearing, and being.

Even to the most casual audience, Saul Leiter's photographs of the streets of New York are unlikely to come across as objective records of everyday life in the city. Leiter's purpose—if there is one at all, strictly in the utilitarian sense of the term—is not to record or to document but to offer an experiential account of everyday life as it is lived by real people in a real place. It is noteworthy that Leiter's experiential narrative, as apparent in and through his photographs of the streets of NYC, appears to privilege a specific mode of seeing that can only be accomplished meaningfully through a combined effort of the senses, not just the visual. A street (or a stretch of a road, or a corridor, or a stairwell, for that matter) is not merely portrayed as such, but as a threshold situation, a transformational zone connecting two discrete and differentiable places/states/spatial realms. In this sense, Leiter's photographs may be said to embody worlds within a world, inasmuch as they not only contain and preserve within their frames a slice of the world frozen in time but also, in their doing so, assert their status as cultural products caught in the act of a perpetual becoming (in the eyes of the audience). In this latter function the photographs themselves may be said to occupy a liminal space, positioned "betwixt and between" creation and being.

Notably, Leiter appears to challenge the hegemony of the visual and its troubling tendency to write over and suppress the experiences of all the other senses. One way he seems to be doing this is by paying a closer attention to peripheral vision. As Pallasmaa notes: "Unconscious peripheral perception transforms retinal gestalt into bodily experiences. Peripheral vision integrates us with space, focused vision pushes us out of the space, making us mere spectators" (13). There is a conscious and discernible shift of focus to the margins or to things traditionally considered marginal. For instance, Leiter's photographs of windows— whether taken from the outside or from the inside—privilege a layered vision (as opposed to a single subject dominating the frame), underscoring and reflecting the multifariousness of the material world of things. Leiter's art puts us back in touch with human rootedness in the world through a thoughtful combination of sensory perceptions. We do not see these photographs merely with our eyes but also (begin to) experience them texturally/haptically (as in the misted-over windows), aurally (as in the silence pervading liminal spaces and in the mute bustle of the streets), olfactorily (as in the anticipation of the nostalgic odour of past occupancies and presences hanging over empty stairwells and alleys), and gustatorily (as in a cafe with its seductive allure of gustatory opulence).

APPROACHING THE URBAN LIMINAL PHENOMENOLOGICALLY

In *Logical Investigations*, Husserl urges us to go back to the "things in themselves" if we are to glean anything meaningful from our practice of phenomenology—i.e. our attempts to make sense of the nature and the attendant complexities of our lived experience. Wary of the innate ambiguity and arbitrariness of language, Husserl insists that we perform the epoché or bracketing—the suspension of all preconceived notions, ideas, assumptions, and prejudices so that we may turn to the *thing-ness* of the things we experience, undistracted and unhindered by the weight of our theoretical assumptions and predispositions. To experience something phenomenologically in the Husserlian sense would therefore be to focus on the phenomenon (or *thing*) under consideration as we experience it. It invites a certain openness to the world around us as we set out to experience it—not just *see* it, but approach it synergistically from a multitude of perspectives.

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With his unwavering focus on the present—the very moment in which the world unfolds and appears to us—Leiter draws our attention to the *thing-ness* of the material world. His approach, as evident in his portrayal of the street life of NYC, is not an objective account of a specific place or time. In fact, it is quite far from it. While his visual narrative remains resolutely focused on the ordinary and everyday realities of a rapidly growing urban centre, yet it privileges a specific way of apprehending the ordinary that can only be realized meaningfully through embodied experience. Just like in Merleau-Ponty's philosophy, the human body in Leiter's photographs—whether visible or not—occupies a central position in the world. It is through the material presence of the(ir) body that his subjects (and by extension, the audience of his photographs) come *to be* or dwell in the world, and it is again through the(ir) body that the world dwells *in* them. All formal modes of thinking (and seeing) stand suspended during this process of meaning making since the rigidity of logic and rationality is simply not conducive to the embodied experience of the world.

As it follows, Leiter's liminal places are particularly amenable to a phenomenological analysis given that they can be experienced more wholly, consummately—albeit, vicariously—in terms of the sensory richness they embody. Leiter's photographs are therefore best described as re-presentations of sensory impressions in which a thing or a place is not merely what it is, but is also—and more accurately—a palimpsest of impressions converging into a holistic experience *of* the thing or place photographed.

Leiter's rendition of liminal places and liminality therefore exhorts us to question our conventional understanding of the essence of place

itself. His urban liminal, hardly, if ever at all, comes across as unsettling or terrifying. While one might not "dwell" in a stairwell in the same sense as one would, say, in a house or in a room, yet Leiter humanizes these places to the extent that they do not evoke the dread commonly associated with the disturbingly strange or "unheimlich." In this context, it is useful to consider Heidegger's example of the bridge as an analogy for a liminal place: in "Building, Dwelling, Thinking," Heidegger writes: "The bridge gathers to itself in its own way earth and sky, divinities and mortals" (151). The bridge (joining/gathering the two banks of a river) is a connector; it joins two places bearing distinct identities. It is an in-between place, a threshold. But it is only in the presence of this threshold that the non-liminal emerges and becomes meaningful. Just like Heidegger's bridge, Leiter's liminal places also enact a gathering of places.

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Phenomenologically speaking, the urban liminal in Leiter's photographic art is far less about location than it is about a *letting be-ness*, articulated visually. As Malpas points out, the idea of dwelling seems to be rooted in Heidegger's idea of authentic existence in *Being and Time*. According to Malpas, dwelling in Heidegger's philosophy ensues from the idea of "authentic existence" and that to live an authentic life may be considered equivalent to dwelling.[6] Besides authenticity, as Malpas makes it clear, Heidegger's idea of dwelling seems to be closely linked to that of identity and belonging. Given that by authenticity Heidegger actually points towards "an openness to the happening of place" (Malpas 14), to belong to any specific place would mean to identify *with* it and be completely attuned to it. To belong to a place, to dwell in it actively (as opposed to merely occupying it) in the Heideggerian sense would automatically imply that we are *at home* and *at peace* in it and that it "opens us to the world and the world to us" (15). Leiter's rendition of the urban liminal, reminiscent of the Japanese ukiyo-e or "pictures of the floating world," frees the everyday into its own being.[7] In his portrayal

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[6] See chapter "Rethinking Dwelling" in Malpas.

[7] The word *ukiyo* embodies the Buddhist idea of the transitory nature of life. Unlike the Pure Land (heaven), "ukiyo" (this world) is transient and fleeting. This quality (the flowing, fleeting nature of the world), characterized by a certain uncertainty or unknowability engulfing the material world of things (a sense of mystery) is evident in Leiter's work. At around the end of the 19th century (the Meiji Restoration), a fascination for Japanese aesthetics (Japonisme) began to be felt across Europe and the United States of America. Japanese Ukiyo-e prints by Hokusai, Hiroshige, and Utamaro made a great impact on the artistic imagination of European and American painters in terms of technique, composition, and use of color. Leiter was greatly influenced by the French artist Pierre Bonnard (also nicknamed the Japanese Nabi) who incorporated elements from the ukiyo-e aesthetic in his art. Influences of Japanese art—particularly, ukiyo-e—are also evident in Leiter's composition. Pauline Vermare, the curator of Leiter's first show in Japan,

of the everyday life of urban NYC, Leiter seems to draw our attention towards the mystery that lies at the heart of the mundane. Works such as the 1950 series "From the E," "Graffiti Heads" (1950), "Shirt" (1948), etc., are cases in point. These works capture everyday life *in medias res*—often defying compositional conventions. "Shirt," for instance, is a deceptively simple yet enigmatic image of a neatly-folded shirt on display outside what appears to be a glass-fronted shop doorway. The image calls our attention to the tacit interaction between the narrative of the place and that of the body (as represented by the shirt). In this case, the shirt occupies a liminal position, linking the biological body to the social being. Furthermore, the meander motif on the floor, placed at the threshold between the public and the private, seems to suggest the eternal flow of things.[8]

According to Leiter, the real world is less about what can be seen than what lies hidden—the unseen, the untold, the unknowable.[9] The experience of the urban liminal in Leiter's portrayal of the everyday often evokes the notion of Japanese space (or, *ma*).[10] The liberal use of negative spaces in works such as "Through the Boards," "Canopy," etc., conveys the idea of "meaningful" absence, encapsulating possibilities of disclosure—a sort of openness to and opening of the world. Leiter's photographs can therefore be seen as a visual representation of Heidegger's idea of world-disclosure that seems to occur at two levels: first, the disclosure of a world in which we find ourselves, that which is *always and already* interpreted (the mundane everyday world); and second, the disclosure of hitherto unknown or hidden horizons of meaning. It is to this latter sense of disclosure of the world that Leiter's images are most unreservedly attuned. They invite viewers to perceive the city not as an objective or static space but as a dynamic, lived experience. Concomitantly, by examining Leiter's work through a phenomenological lens, this essay explores how his photographic art captures the essence

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quotes Jun'ichiro Tanzaiki to underline the influence of Japanese art on Leiter's work: "'We love things that bear the marks of grime, soot and weather, and we love the colours and the sheen that call to mind the past that made them.'" See https://www.saulleiterfoundation.org/latest-news/loeil-de-la-photographie

I am indebted to Vermare's article (the edited version of an essay published earlier on the occasion of Leiter's first exhibition in Japan) titled "Saul Leiter, the New York Nabi" (*Blind Magazine*, 2023), which is a nuanced account of the Japanese influences running through Leiter's art.

[8] The meander motif is also known as the Greek key or Greek fret. In ancient Greece, the meander motif often suggested the eternal flow of things. For more on this, see Kappraff, Radović and Jablan.

[9] See Tomas Leach's documentary film *In No Great Hurry: 13 Lessons in Life with Saul Leiter* (2013).

[10] See Vermare.

of dwelling in an urban context, where individuals navigate the city and its liminal spaces. This connection underscores the idea that even in the bustling, ever-changing urban environment, there is a possibility for a sense of "wohnen" or dwelling—a feeling of being at home in the world. Instead of evoking discomfort or dread, commonly associated with liminal spaces, Leiter's liminal city embodies the idea of infinity in its openness. It is precisely within these liminal spaces (of the city) that this attunement to the world comes across as most perceptible. Leiter's work, therefore, provides a visual narrative that complements and enriches the philosophical exploration of Heidegger's "wohnen."

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CONCLUSION

In order to arrive at any conclusion regarding the possibility of dwelling in liminality or in liminal places, we must first confront and address the problems posed by the essentially deterministic and exclusionary logic of place. For dwelling to occur in liminal places, the subject must first be at home/in peace with her being and second, be aware of and in peace with her embedded-ness in/belongingness to the world. Therefore, it may be said that if and when liminality is perceived/experienced as something that obfuscates or unsettles our relationship with ourselves and the world, dwelling cannot occur or be realized. For dwelling to occur the "limen" must, of necessity, preserve the being and receive it as such. On the other hand, the self, in order to be at home in itself must be aware of itself, for awareness of the self about itself implies room for reflection and disclosure. The self opens out to the world in Leiter's liminal zones. The "I" extends itself to the *other*— cultivating and preserving, at the same time, its own integrity and sapience.

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Cities and Their People: Dwelling in the Anthropic Time of N. K. Jemisin's New York

Abstract

The article starts with Martin Heidegger's 1951 essay "Bauen Wohnen Denken," recently rethought by Jeff Malpas in his book *Rethinking Dwelling* from today's perspective of urban and metropolitan dwelling. However, while defining dwelling relationally, the Australian philosopher still thinks about the human as a being-in-place in a traditional, human-centred way. Thus he overlooks how tightly humans are entangled with more-than-humans: with biological, geological, and technological entities and agencies. For this reason, the article tackles a further rethinking of dwelling beyond human sociality, or even queering it beyond binary thinking to better depict what it proposes to call urban subjectivity. Reading N. K. Jemisin's recent novel duology *The Great Cities*, the article argues that urban subjectivity is a distributed phenomenon, which both incorporates and elaborates on more-than-human elements. In so doing, urban subjects share a sociality not only with the animal and geological but also with technological forces and their territorial exorganic functions as an agency of anti-entropic locality (Bernard Stiegler's "anthropic life"). Thus, creatively approached technology as a pharmakonian form of organogenesis and Derridian *différance* may help us keep the entropic and neganthropic forces in balance, as pertinently demonstrated in Jemisin's duology.

Keywords: dwelling beyond human sociality, anthropic time, urban subjectivity, anti-entropic locality, N. K. Jemisin's *The Great Cities* series.

RETHINKING DWELLING[1]

In his recent *Rethinking Dwelling* (2021), Australian philosopher Jeff Malpas returns to Martin Heidegger's 1951 essay "Bauen Wohnen Denken," translated into English as "Building, Dwelling, Thinking" (1975), to reflect upon architecture as a mode of both thinking and making. There is a reason why I focus on Malpas's topological inquiry. The author not only offers a new reading of Heidegger's essay but also situates it in an in-depth comparison of foundational terms in English translation—and in almost all subsequent English-language discussions—with their original German equivalents, starting with the key-word "dwelling." Contrary to "wohnen," a common notion in everyday language used by Heidegger, "to dwell" is less widely employed, although it denotes remaining in a habitable or inhabited structure. Also, the English verb has quite a different etymology than "wohnen," and as a consequence, different connotations. Many of them are regarded as obsolete or archaic today, as Malpas demonstrates with reference to a comprehensive quotation from the *Oxford English Dictionary*. Therefore, as he emphasizes, because the English translation features an unfamiliar notion, which sounds like a technical or even poetic term, it fails to repeat the basic Heideggerian philosophical gesture—the gesture of employing as the key-term a word that readers think they understand all too well, and to put this understanding in question. Moreover, there is no single English verb or noun which matches the German "wohnen." Nevertheless, fully-aware of the embeddedness of "dwelling" in the English-language literature, the author of *Rethinking Dwelling* offers "living" or "inhabiting" as a far better solution to translate Heidegger's key-notion to preserve the broadest range of meanings possible. It is with these two English words in mind that Malpas rethinks dwelling as the basic mode of relational situatedness, of attending and responding to place, by putting the spotlight on "the fundamental character of human being in the world and the structure of possibility by which it is shaped and conditioned" (35).

In Malpas's book the eponymous dwelling remains, therefore, a basic form of articulation of human presence in the world. As the author writes, "dwelling brings to the fore the way in which place and the human are implicated with one another" (6). In other words, following Heidegger's idea, Malpas conceives of architecture as "a mode of engagement with the world and with the happening of world, as that which occurs in and from out of place" (185). It is for this reason, as he emphasizes, that the human

and place should be comprehended and articulated in their relatedness through which they also participate in a larger landscape. In articulating the human mode of being-in-place, architecture allows the human to ask about their own being and the limits of that being, to grasp "one's own being-somewhere as a belonging-to and an apartness-from" (187). Significantly, Malpas reads Heidegger's essay from today's perspective of urban and metropolitan dwelling as well as the experience of mobility and displacement which make this mode of dwelling an ongoing task. For, contrary to many readers of Heidegger before him, Malpas deliberately does not associate the German philosopher's idea of being-in-place with the traditionally agricultural, settled way of life, which has become obsolete. Although dwelling seems almost impossible in the current condition, the notion still may be used to capture our increasingly problematic sense of being at home. As Malpas explains, dwelling "does not name *one* mode of being as opposed to *another*, but instead refers to *the* way human being, in an unqualified sense, is 'in' the world" (42, italics in the original). Therefore, the life of each human being is anchored in human history in dialogue with their eco-logical and social environment with which they bodily and topologically engage. That being so, it seems pertinent to ask how to dwell in the Anthropocene, the time when our species turns out to be entropically self-destructive and, as such, destroys life in general.

However, by defining the main function of architecture as a necessary externalization, or extension, of a topological understanding of the human, Malpas markedly distinguishes the human from other modes of being which lack an equally high level of self-awareness and openness which the human has as its inherent feature. Hence, despite his critical rethinking of Heidegger's essay, Malpas still clings to the basic difference upon which human superiority and mastery over the world has been premised at least since the so-called "long 16th century." Precisely in the context of the Anthropocene as the era of humans' unquestionable dominance with increasingly visible catastrophic consequences, I posit that the Heideggerian conceptual apparatus needs to be more decidedly challenged and reshaped in a queering perspective to decentre humans and unthink their mastery. From this point of view the human and place should be understood not only as implicated with and related to each other but rather as constantly and dynamically defining each other, or even always attuning one to the other (and to many other more-than-human entities). Understandably, this is too ambitious a goal to attain in this article. Therefore, in what follows I take a closer look at the relationship between dwellers and their cities, understood as the highest form of human sociability, to demonstrate how the typical way of seeing their relationship could be reversed to assign the city more agency. To this aim, I offer a close

reading of the urban speculative duology *The Great Cities—The City We Became* (2020) and *The World We Make* (2022)—written by N. K. Jemisin, a well-known Brooklyn-based Black writer of science fiction. Significantly, in the author's note to the second instalment Jemisin calls the two novels "a fantastical paean to a real city" (355), today's New York in a speculative rendering. At stake in my argument is, therefore, not a city as a dwelling place of humans, but that which passes both between themselves and between them and the city, holding them together or forcing them apart. That is why I start with a definition of what could be called an urban subjectivity in the context of those contemporary exorganic processes of psychic, collective and technical individuation, which condition the form of life of humans as biological and noetic beings. This will allow me to reshape and queer the concept of dwelling in a posthumanist perspective of emergent human and more-than-human entanglements—biological, geological, and technological—within and through which we are living in the critical stage of the Anthropocene.

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BEYOND HUMAN SOCIALITY

Jemisin's duology *The Great Cities* depicts a speculative version of today's world in which major cities have already become sentient through their human avatars, characterized as "amalgamated gods sprung whole from the fusion of belief with reality" (*The World We Make* 10). Both novels focus on an alternative vision of today's New York and its denizens. They are involved in a rather complicated process, full of existential dangers, of attuning to each other in order to achieve sentience as a possible heterogeneous entity while facing powerful decompositional forces of entropy. In this respect the duology differs considerably from the author's well-known SF trilogy *The Broken Earth*, even though both depict a similar condition of constant geo-ecological precarity. Particularly in *The City We Became* the events unfold to demonstrate the difference between new emergent lifeforms and nonlife of generalized entropic degradation, typical of late neoliberal capitalism. One of the main characters explains the phenomenon of a sentient city in all its complexity: "We who become cities are evolving, dynamic entities, constantly adjusting to the needs of our citizens, endlessly pushed and pulled by state politics and international economies" (*The World We Make* 10). In the finale of the second instalment the action even reaches a multiversal dimension, because the cities of our world and their dwellers that partake in a global actualization of entropic cosmos institute a new postanthropic era. However, as I have already pointed out, to reach this stage in the history of Earth and humans a slightly different approach to

the concept of dwelling is needed—one which extends far beyond simple, exclusively human sociality and proves operative in analyzing critical changes from an anthropic to a postanthropic city. Everyday urban life in Jemisin's exemplary New York undergoes these critical changes step by step. That is why in my reading I treat this fabulated city as a kind of speculative materialization of Elizabeth A. Povinelli's sociology of potentiality, defined in her *Economies of Abandonment* (2011). In this book the American anthropologist shows how to write about alternative social worlds from the point of view of today's social projects which offer possible embodied futures, such as the one in Jemisin's *The Great Cities*.

Povinelli's *Economies of Abandonment* is the middle part—beside *The Empire of Love* (2006) and *Geontologies* (2016)—of a trilogy that she entitled *Dwelling in Late Liberalism* in an online interview "On Biopolitics and the Anthropocene" (2014). The series develops an "anthropology of otherwise" by focusing critically on neoliberal discourses about alternative social worlds to demonstrate "a *collapse* of our understanding of being (entities) into our understanding of a particular kind of being, a life being" ("On Biopolitics and the Anthropocene," italics in the original). It is in this context that Povinelli also touches upon *Being and Time* to point to Heidegger's decisive turn away from the problem of life (Leben) to the problem of being (Dasein). Understood in this way, the problem of being determines, as I have already demonstrated, not only the Heideggerian concept of dwelling but also the way Malpas proposes to rethink it in his recent study. For despite emphasizing relationality and the in-placeness concept, despite being rethought, Malpas's approach remains centred more around a universal definition of human being than an embodied and locally determined sociality of human and more-than-human entities. Contrary to Malpas, in *Economies of Abandonment* Povinelli emphasizes her interest in a kind of being which needs to be understood "in a specific historical context, in specific agencements—arrangements of connecting concepts, materials, and forces that make a common compositional unity" (16). These specific historical contexts and *agencements* which need to be taken into consideration while rethinking and decentring human dwelling have clearly influenced her concept of a sociology of potentiality. It extends "far beyond simple human sociality" to "include humans and a host of other modes of existence being composed and decomposed" (*Economies of Abandonment* 7).

To demonstrate how important it is to recognize the role of geographical/geological materials in biographical possibilities, in all the works that make up *Dwelling in Late Liberalism* Povinelli draws mostly on one example of indigenous politics and sociality within the settler colony of northern Australia. Moreover, in *Economies of Abandonment* she does

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so in "the wake of the legitimacy crisis of the postcolonial world and a new post-9/11 crisis" (79). By contrast, Jemisin wrote her series *The Great Cities* during the markedly different conditions of the COVID-19 pandemic and the health, economic and social crises that it brought about. Although those crises did not directly impact her New York and its people, her novel has captured the relationship between human bodies and geontological place which co-constitute each other. In so doing, the author intended to foreground the miraculous moment when new life emerges from within the unliveable architecture and urban landscape. Yet this does not mean that in focusing on possible futures, Jemisin marginalizes the legacies of colonialism and racism and the still dominant ontology of (white) Man as a self-identical, self-enclosed being who apparently masters the world and himself. As she claims, "to think about crisis is to think about how the infrastructure and environment of crisis are historically contingent" (Ivry 112). In particular, both novels demonstrate complex, complicated and localized relationships between New York boroughs and their avatars who are the catalysts of the city's survival or destruction in the long shadow of settler colonialism.

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   Although after becoming a sentient city New York is about to join a great number of already living and thinking cities—some as ancient as Paris, Istanbul, Tripoli, and Faiyum—its birth turns out to be unique in many ways. It is the first American city to reach this point. Also, even if the end of the first instalment shows the city eventually born, its fate will not be decided until the finale of the second when other living cities eventually side with New York against a common Enemy, savvy at multiversal manipulation. For Jemisin shows her speculated New York as a battleground where a fight is waged against cosmic forces of entropy. Those forces materialize as a Lovecraftian totally alien city of R'lyeh, created by the Ur, which threatens to annihilate and take the place of New York. It is not only Donna J. Haraway who has recently referred to this iconic American writer of weird fantasy and horror fiction from the early 20th century, best known for his creation of the Cthulhu Mythos. In her *Staying with the Trouble* (2016), Haraway defines the coming Chthulucene as an epoch of entangled "myriad temporalities and myriad spatialities and myriad intra-active entities-in-assamblages" (101). Through a different spelling she sets this new era in opposition to "Lovecraft's misogynist racial nightmare monster Cthulhu" (101) which undoubtedly symbolizes the current Anthropocene. In addition, Matt Ruff's novel *Lovecraft Country* (2016), published in the same year as Haraway's book, explores the long-hidden conjunction between Lovecraft's horror fiction and American racism in the era of Jim Crow laws in the 1950s. The novel was popularized by the eponymous HBO

series which premièred in August 2020. In a sense, both Haraway and Ruff paved the way for Jemisin who equated the Lovecraftian R'lyeh with inimical cosmic forces of entropy. Already Jemisin's earlier novels "decisively reject the Lovecraftian dehumanization of nonnormative subjectivities" (80), as Moritz Ingwersen rightly noticed. However, in Jemisin's duology even the characters themselves identify the racist and misogynist writer with the currently operating global powers of destruction. No wonder that a representative of the city of R'lyeh, named the Woman in White, calls cities "an endemic problem of life" and explains: "Lovecraft was right. . . . There's something different about cities, and about the people in cities" (*The City We Became* 341). That is why—and contrary to the way Haraway differentiates Cthulhu and the diverse chthonic, tentacular powers on which her Chthulucene will be premised—in Jemisin's duology the Lovecraftian enemy of the living cities takes on the features of natural earthly forces, depicted according to New York's specific geographic locality. Moreover, it threatens the city with a flood, an increasingly real danger in the time of global warming.

Nevertheless, in today's critical phase of the Anthropocene the author of *The Great Cities* series not only materializes cosmic entropy as natural forces causing various calamities. She also highlights the contexts of globalization and algorithmic governmentality, typical of informational capitalism, which effectively change the place of dwelling into an automated, "dead" city. In a similar manner Bernard Stiegler—the late French philosopher and Jacques Derrida's student—considers life and survival on our planet after the thermodynamic question and characterizes the way in which in the mid-1990s the Anthropocene crossed a significant threshold when global digital networks were created. Importantly, in his articles gathered in the volume *The Neganthropocene* (2018) Stiegler not only equates the recent and critical phase of the Anthropocene with a state of emergency which affects the entire biosphere, threatening every form of life. He also emphasizes the capacity of the living to temporarily and locally defer entropy through "bifurcation emerging from *différance*, whether vital or noetic" (200, italics in the original). In the next section I return to his concept of anthropic life that can no longer be thought on the basis of biology alone. It forms a new anthropotechnological configuration in which technology has transformed from a destructive into a constructive power. However, before that I focus on what Stiegler identifies as a crucial new element to which Heidegger paid hardly any attention, although it had been brought to light by Schrödinger in the early 1940s, namely negentropic function of locality. Both Schrödinger's quantum theory and the vital function of locality recur in Jemisin's duology as important factors that make it possible to fight against entropy.

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There is a reason why the author of *The Great Cities* series made her New York special by assigning not only one avatar to embody the entire city, as in the case of other metropolises. Also, each of New York's boroughs has its own representative, even though it significantly complicates their tasks. In Jemisin's duology each avatar has to attune itself to their respective borough and to the others so that a dynamic, heterogeneous life-being (as Povinelli calls it) can emerge. Thus, in the first instalment the author fabulates the avatars' quest to get together and then to find Neek, who embodies the whole city and awaits their consolidation in a deep coma after his first encounter with the inimical power. As the title *The City We Became* emphasizes, the way the events unfold allows Jemisin to demonstrate the differences between the districts, their respective pasts and current materialities which have to interpenetrate with the biographies and individualities of their avatars in order to make New York alive. Neek is a poor, hungry and homeless Black boy, a self-taught street artist whose ancestors' bones repose under Wall Street. The avatar of Brooklyn, a serious, level-headed Black mother of a teenage girl, sits on the city council and earns her living by renting out vacation property in one of the brownstones belonging to her family. By contrast, Bronca, a Lenni-Lenape Indian lesbian who once fought against the police at Stonewall, is about to become a grandmother. She embodies the Bronx and runs a publicly funded Bronx Art Centre which desperately tries to remain independent from private donors who want to change its cultural policy of representing the full range of this borough's diversity. Contrary to them, the avatar of Staten Island is a young white woman of Irish origin, brought up by her racist, misogynistic, homophobic father, a macho policeman. That is why, despite the palpable pull of the city, she is afraid of taking a ferry across New York Bay and until the last moment sides with the Woman in White representing the inimical city of R'lyeh. Her hesitancy as to which side of the global conflict to join not only complicates the action, but also permits the Woman in White, an embodiment of entropic forces, to lay out her reasons for fighting against all forms of difference characteristic of all living entities.

However, Jemisin is far from identifying locality with being in place and originally of that place. Like Malpas, who—as I have already pointed out—reads Heidegger's essay in the context of today's experience of mobility and displacement, she emphasizes that modern cities are built to incorporate newness. Therefore, the avatars of Manhattan and Queens are clearly not rooted in boroughs by which they have been chosen as their respective embodiments. A dark brown Tamil girl, Padmini Prakash, is not even a US citizen, and came to New York on a temporary student visa. Nevertheless, Queens, where many like Padmini dwell, likewise

hating that place, has chosen her as its avatar. Also, Manny, a good-looking but definitely non-white American, has never been to New York before. However, he is granted the possibility of choosing whether he wants to become Manhattan's avatar or not. No wonder that it is him who happily finds out: "The city needs newcomers! He belongs here as much as anyone born and bred to its streets, because anyone who wants to be of New York can be!" (*The City We Became* 47). Jemisin introduces Manny as somebody suffering from a total memory loss at Penn Station, although memory loss is not part of the normal process of becoming an avatar. In this way Manny's example shows the inexplicable compulsions and phantom sensations the city keeps feeding him and the other avatars in order to make them function as its vectors, giving them strength which they have to figure out how to use and weaponize.

Clearly, in *The Great Cities* the urban mode of dwelling is presented as a complex, performative and ever-present task of mutual obligations between people and places that demonstrates in what ways potentiality emerges from actuality. In the same manner Povinelli, in *Economies of Abandonment*, depicts her beyond-human sociology of potentiality. No wonder that Jemisin fabulates New York's avatars as no longer fully human. Rather, they are composite entities—human and more-than-human agencies which I approach in what follows as a kind of urban subjectivity, conceptualized as a form of anthropic life that is no longer thinkable on the basis of biology only, as Stiegler would have it. This is why the title of the present article reverses the common order of belonging—cities and their people instead of people and their cities—to demonstrate an alter(ed) model of subjectivity which I focus on in my reading of Jemisin's duology.

URBAN SUBJECTIVITY

The Great Cities series starts with a prologue, in which Neek sprays a hole on a rooftop in Chinatown; a hole "like a throat that doesn't start with a mouth or end in lungs; a thing that breathes and swallows endlessly, never filling" (*The City We Become* 4). All he knows at this very moment is that he needs to open up this throat. After finishing his graffiti, Neek suddenly hears the painted throat sigh behind him, and feels how "a big, heavy gust of moist air tickles the hairs on my skin" (4). Yet, when he turns back, everything he sees is just a painted hole. Nevertheless, this is how the city of New York is born out of a feedback loop, due to the mediation of graffiti as an incarnation of today's urban art, which provides a site and mode of sensibility for engaging with the temporal and material conditions of the anthropic city. The mediation also entails a peculiar re-centering of

Neek's awareness when he learns that the city has its own will and knows how to get what it wants. The re-centering reveals multiple origins of his subjectivity as both interior and prior to the emergence of identity which is always in excess of itself. From this moment onwards Neek starts to feel himself not as a self-centred, discreet and bounded entity anymore. Rather, he becomes an ever-emerging and ever-shifting configuration of other, more-than-human urban modes of existence here and now. This experience is shared by all other avatars. Thus, at this juncture I would like to draw on Kathryn Yusoff's concept of distributed geologic subjectivity as a new conceptualization of ecological arrangements, capable of dismantling the boundaries between a living entity and its (supposedly non-living) environment. This concept should help me identify a more contemporary materialization of the more-than-human urban subjectivity of today's metropolitan city dwellers which Jemisin's novels constitute and speculatively fabulate.

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In her article "Geologic Subjects: Nonhuman Origins, Geomorphic Aesthetics and the Art of Becoming *In*human" (2014), Yusoff, a British expert on inhuman geography, examines the conceptual and corporeal genealogy of what she calls geologic subjectivity, pertinent to geological politics of the Anthropocene. Significantly, she does it within the framework of an experiment in the geologic imagination through an inquiry into symbolic images. Trying to understand "what it is to be a subject in the context of a broader field of ecological life; and the role of aesthetics as a site of ontological differentiation for subjectivity within this ecology" (384), Yusoff focuses on two instances of prehistoric rock art: the "Birdman" from Lascaux in Southern France, and the *Gwion Gwion* figures from Kimberly in Western Australia. Importantly, both her examples show composite entities with human and animal features. However, she reads those artefacts not as typical artworks, made to be presented in an art gallery and interpreted by critics. She treats them as images that stimulate cosmic energies, opening "a space of experience that holds relations of nonhuman force between phenomena to blur boundaries and cross inhuman timescales" (384). Clearly, she focuses on the interrelation of nonhuman and inhuman forces involved in the prehistoric process of becoming human to reveal them as a forgotten surplus in our identity formation. In so doing, she investigates the archaic origins and model of this identity to think beyond the subsequent anthropocentric image of Man and its humanistic normative arrangements. With the aim of doing something corresponding to Yusoff's speculative questioning of cave art, Jemisin arguably undertakes a slightly different thought experiment. As I will demonstrate, she looks for another kind of a forgotten surplus. What is important is that as in Yusoff's examples of prehistoric rock art so in

Jemisin's speculated New York a similar space of experience opens up. In the prologue to *The City We Became* it literally opens up like the big throat that Neek has sprayed on the rooftop as if it were a wall of a contemporary cave. It also generates enough energy to awaken both the city of New York and its avatars which increasingly become aware of their inhuman—or more-than-human—condition; of their going beyond the anthropocentric image of Man.

Moreover, the manner in which Yusoff reads the two examples of cave art also allows her to move beyond the boundary-work of hybridity to argue for the consideration of a queer ecology which decentres the traditionally defined human (Man). Therefore, a more-than-human subject emerges here not as a discreet, self-contained entity but rather as a dynamic constellation and dynamic assemblage of inhuman time, nonhuman forces, and geologic materialities. Hence, the geologic subject is inherently performative. For, as Yusoff explains in her article, "it is the gathering up of these communities into an entity that is discontinuous with itself because it contains nonlocal elements" (398). Significantly, urban subjects in Jemisin's novels have similar queer genealogies and cofounding origins. However, this case of a forgotten surplus of subjectivity needs a closer examination. By showing that identity is always in excess of itself, and that this excess is not only of social nature, Yusoff focuses mainly on biological and geophysical forces. Yet, as Jemisin aptly demonstrates, in today's cities other forces are also at play—the forces of (digital) technology. Despite Heidegger's fear of the power of modern technology, which in his view threatens the groundedness of human being, those forces carry out the formation of subjectivity of city dwellers, too. They also take part in the urban sociality as an event of non/inhuman kinship, as Yusoff would have it. For this reason, the concept of dwelling urgently needs a similar queering reconceptualization in contrast with Malpas's more human-centred rethinking of Heidegger's idea.

Highlighting the specific relationality between New York's boroughs and their avatars, I have already demonstrated that the avatars function as their respective borough's vectors. In this way the city gives their avatars the power which they have to figure out how to use and weaponize. Therefore, it is crucial to explain in a more detailed way how the avatars use that power. Depending on their individual abilities and competences they also need what Jemisin calls a talisman, an artefact, or a construct to more precisely channel the city's power. Once again, Manny's example comes in handy. During a walk in Inwood Hill Park and knowing close to nothing about what kind of enemy he has to confront and how to do it effectively, Manny encounters the Woman in White. First, he learns experientially that a specific site of the first real estate swindle of the soon-to-be New

York, located in the park Shorakkopoch, has become an object of power beyond the reach of the enemy. Second, quickly recalling that this city is built on the concept of land ownership, he comes up with an idea to use his credit cards to secure symbolically, albeit only temporarily, more land under his feet free of the influence of the entropic forces. Obviously, a construct is not necessarily an object, such as Manny's credit cards. It could also be an idea, a mathematical formula or even an imaginary vision of an underground station at rush hour. However, I refer to the scene in which Manny uses the right combination of things/ideas summoning the city's power, because I want to argue that to adequately identify a surplus in question it is useful to refer to Jacques Derrida's concept of supplement. One more reason to do so is the fact that in the already-mentioned volume *The Neganthropocene* Stiegler has rethought the Derridian concept as organogenesis and neganthropological *différance* within the framework of thermodynamics. As Peter Lemmens and Yuk Hui explain: "Neganthropy as a thermodynamic concept very briefly refers to the order as well as potentiality in a system or process, whilst entropy means disorder and loss of potentiality" (2017). Jemisin also unfolds the events in her duology within the thermodynamic framework.

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In his *Neganthropocene*, Stiegler emphasizes that to draw the most viable consequences from today's critical phase of the Anthropocene "a new geopolitics of exosomatization" (125) needs to be elaborated. For—as he emphasizes, in contrast to Heidegger—psychic and collective individuation have always been already inseparable from technic(al) individuation. Hence what we call evolution, since the birth of life has also been an evolution of the exosomatic itself in which our exosomatic organs have continually played the role of pharmaka, depending on the way humans put them to use. To demonstrate that, Stiegler comes back to the paleo-history of the Derridian supplement. In so doing, he recalls what Georges Bataille, while looking at the paintings of Lascaux, called the birth of art in the caves of the Upper Paleolithic, from which the noesis as such stems. At this juncture Stiegler meets Yusoff, despite all the differences in their respective theories and terminologies. This convergence allows me to think jointly about her concept of geologic subjectivity and his notion of supplement in order to find a forgotten surplus upon which a concept of urban subjectivity in Jemisin's duology may be premised.

Regardless of whether it has been inspired by Stiegler's ideas or not, Jemisin's *The Great Cities* can be effectively read as an attempt at imagining and implementing the new geopolitics, the new stage of Derridian *différance* which has remained to be worked out since Stiegler intuited it. As the French philosopher himself emphasizes, for Heidegger to think carefully is to think the ontological difference of being and being. Contrary to that,

Stiegler writes the word "care-fully" with a hyphen to highlight the sense of taking thoughtful care not only about a subject but also the process of thinking as such. As he explains in *The Neganthropocene*, "[f]or us, coming *after* Derrida, this means to think care-fully about *différance*, and to make it, and to do so in supplement(s)" (249, italics in the original). What is important in the context of this article is that Stiegler counts cities among those supplements: that is, as exorganic processes of psychic, collective and technical individuation which condition the form of life of noetic beings. As he argues, each city is "the social concretion of a society individualizing itself exorganically" (121). This institutes a kind of soul (a sense of place). This soul, according to Stiegler, is founded on diversely symbolized history as well as forms of learning a territory capable of thinking and territorializing—thinking care-fully and making negentropy of noetic bifurcation. This is also the main task of New York's avatars in *The Great Cities*. They not only have to fight against the ancient enemy of living cities and life as such. They also have to fight against the city's legacies of racism and bigotry for a better future in which life is changeable and constantly bifurcating to create lively new formations of dwelling that de-center humans.

CITIES AND THEIR PEOPLE (A TEMPORARY CONCLUSION)

This article began with the Heideggerian concept of dwelling, recently rethought by Malpas. He proposes not only an insightful analysis of Heidegger's 1951 essay "Bauen Wohnen Denken" in the English translation, which noticeably influenced almost all subsequent English-language discussion. He also reads the essay from today's perspective of urban and metropolitan dwelling as well as the experience of mobility and displacement. However, it is my contention that while defining dwelling relationally, he still thinks about the human as a being-in-place in a traditional, human-centred way. For this reason he overlooks how tightly humans, even as today's cities dwellers, are entangled and enmeshed with more-than-humans: that is, biological, geological, and technological entities and agencies. That is why the concept of dwelling needs to be further modified beyond human sociality, or even queered beyond binary thinking. In order to depict what I call urban subjectivity, already in the title of my article I reverse the common understanding of the relationship and belonging between dwellers and their cities. For cities—once built and thought of as a human-centred second nature—have increasingly become a condition of our constant geo-climatological precarity.

Reading Jemisin's *The Great Cities*, I have therefore tried to outline urban subjectivity as a distributed phenomenon which both incorporates and elaborates on more-than-human elements. In so doing, urban subjects share a sociality not only with animal and geological forces, as demonstrated by Yusoff in her "Geologic subjects." They also share this sociality with technological forces and their territorial exorganic functions as an agency of anti-entropic locality in ways which Bernard Stiegler elaborates in *The Neganthropocene*. Thus, despite Heidegger's warning against the dominance of modern technology as a life-threatening power, technology—when properly understood as a pharmakon—does not need to implicitly be our enemy, even though today it takes the form of a mighty global closed-system of informational capitalism and algorithmic governmentality. Creatively approached, technology as a form of organogenesis and *différance* might also help us to keep the entropic and neganthropic forces in balance. Jemisin's duology not only demonstrates this, but also challenges us to rethink, queer and de-center the Heideggerian concept of dwelling, going a step further than Malpas.

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How to Dwell in Garbage Patches? Waste Communities in the Aftermath of Ancestral Catastrophe in Chen Qiufan's *The Waste Tide* (2013) and Wu Ming-yi's *The Man with the Compound Eyes* (2011)

ABSTRACT

The article approaches the problem of dwelling in areas affected by environmental crises through the lens of two speculative fabulations. Chen Qiufan's *The Waste Tide* (2013) and Wu Ming-yi's *The Man with the Compound Eyes* (2011) both depict the intrusion of human-induced catastrophes into the life of coastline communities in Southeast Asia, requiring them to work out forms of dwelling and remembering that make space for the assemblages of beings that emerge out of the devastated landscapes inherited after the modern era. Each of the novels tackles a different aspect of this problem. *The Waste Tide* shows the catastrophic effects of mass production and recycling of electronic garbage which, shipped to junkyards in the Global South, not only exacerbates the environmental pollution, but also exerts a negative impact on the local indigenous and migrant communities, threatening their economic status and social cohesion. Inspired by Martin Heidegger's meditations on poetic dwelling, *The Man with the Compound Eyes* features the so-called Great Pacific Garbage Patch, a gigantic collection of plastic waste gathering on the surface of the ocean and hitting coastal regions, wreaking havoc on local life. By investigating the two novels, I look for models of remembering and dwelling together that go beyond the anthropocentric notion of memory rooted in an individual self and offer new models of dwelling in times of catastrophe.

Keywords: waste, garbage patch, ancestral catastrophe, collective memory, poetic dwelling.

NO LONGER HOME

As Dipesh Chakrabarty points out in his recently published *One Planet, Many Worlds* (2023), in times of ongoing catastrophes the sentiment expressed in the phrase: "The earth is our home; it is made so that we can dwell on it" (3) has to be rethought. Confronted with the manifestations of the destruction of Earth systems caused by civilizational exploitation, humans are gradually forced to live, what he calls, "creaturely lives" (6). In other words, incapable of actively shaping their environment, they merely strive to survive by all means available. As numerous other authors point out, the idea that the disturbance of ecosystems on a planetary scale cannot be controlled or averted by technological advancements and scientific reasoning brings about a change in the Western imaginary, sanctioned by the natural sciences, which since the establishment of geology in the 18th century conceived of the planet as a stable and unchanging background for the development of human civilization according to the laws of historical progress (Clark and Yusoff 4). Now, the increasingly visible cascading effects of environmental disturbances put into question the Enlightenment idea of geologic processes unfolding gradually in deep time (Ghosh 19–20). The violent intrusion of climatic phenomena and elemental forces ravaging more and more regions of the world are said to only reflect the brutality of what has provoked them—"that of a development that is blind to its consequences" (Stengers 53). These figurations of more-than-human agencies, coming back with a vengeance to dethrone Man as the governor of all creation on the planet, not only replay the age-old Western conflict of humans versus nature. The age of catastrophes also calls for a reassessment of the historical roots of the current planetary predicament and for new ways of dwelling on the earth, based on less confrontational and more co-operational models of coexistence among earthly beings. If, as Amitav Ghosh argues, with reference to Laurence Buell's claim, that the current climate crisis is also a crisis of the imagination (9), then such a conceptual shift may be critical for working out a liveable future for communities inhabiting the landscapes left in the wake of unbridled exploitation of natural resources.

The search for ways of coming to terms with the ongoing and oncoming catastrophes and learning to live on an inhospitable Earth has often taken the form of a reconstruction of the past causes of the current crisis to look for solutions to today's ecologic and economic crises. Those attempts are based on the assumption that the key to a liveable future lies in the past; the past that needs to be recollected and represented so that we do not repeat our past mistakes. In other words, the wrongdoings and failures of the epoch of human domination over Earth, often forgotten or actively obliterated by the perpetrators, need to be remembered for

the sake of working out liveable more-than-human socialities. In the following paper, I will elaborate on this notion, approaching the topic through the lens of two speculative fabulations—Chen Qiufan's *The Waste Tide* (2013) and Wu Ming-yi's *The Man with the Compound Eyes* (2011)—which depict the intrusion of catastrophes caused by excessive consumption and exploitation of natural resources into the life of coastline communities in Southeast Asia, requiring them to work out forms of dwelling and remembering that make space for the communities of beings that emerge out of the devastated landscapes inherited after the modern era. I read both these novels as speculative attempts at thinking about dwelling on a damaged Earth which requires an in-depth reconsideration of the relationship between humans and the more-than-human powers that cannot be controlled by technological means.

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I have chosen these two novels not only because they are both set in the same territories and thus take up a similar scope of problems pertaining to the human-caused environmental damage in the Global South. Both can be read, in addition, as responses to a specific manifestation of this damage—the problem of excessive production of waste that threatens the well-being of communities in these (and other) regions of the world. However, each of the novels tackles a different aspect of this problem. *The Waste Tide* shows the catastrophic effects of the mass production and recycling of electronic garbage which, shipped to junkyards in the Global South, not only exacerbates environmental pollution, but also exerts a negative impact on the local migrant communities, threatening their economic welfare and social cohesion. *The Man with the Compound Eyes* employs a different trope. It features the so-called Great Pacific Garbage Patch, a gigantic collection of plastic waste gathering on the surface of the ocean, which—in this speculative scenario—hits the coastal regions of Taiwan, wreaking havoc on local life. Through a close study of the two novels, I look for models of remembering together that go beyond the anthropocentric notion of memory rooted in an individual self. In both these novels I trace the way in which a liveable future is worked out by more-than-human communities which confront their problematic past(s) as the sedimented "accursed share" (Yusoff 92) of colonial extractivism, to be able to dwell in the ruins of the modern capitalist world.

E-WASTE, OR THE ANCESTRAL CATASTROPHE

The Waste Tide (2013) takes place in a not-so-distant future, most probably in the 2020s (Healey 3), on Silicon Isle, located off China's southeastern coast. Although, as explained in the opening chapter, the

place was inhabited since the 9th century, only recently has it become a location for a huge electronic junkyard. Controlled by three local clans, the island is a major recycling factory, employing predominantly migrant workers to reassemble and melt electronic parts from all over the world to extract precious metals. No wonder that the site is of major interest to an American corporate venture, TerraGreen Recycling, which developed a technology for reusing rare elements in consumer e-waste and wants to invest in developing the infrastructure on Silicon Isle with the prospect of employing the local population. As Chen himself commented in an interview for the online magazine *Domus*, although Western culture typically frames waste as raw material for further extraction, he wanted to make visible its social agency, its ability to generate ways of being together and dwelling outside of the neocolonial exploitative order (Scarano). To take up this theme, he depicted the main location in which the action takes place, Silicon Isle, as a token of this order.

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The island is sharply divided into two areas. One, a paragon of prosperity, features grand mansions, mixing Chinese and European architectural styles, expensive cars and luxurious shops. But in the opening chapters of the novel, Scott Brandle, representative of TerraGreen Recycling, visits the e-waste junkyard, located just a few kilometers from this pristine, upscale neighborhood. In narrow alleys between dilapidated workshops, he witnesses not only the extent of the ecological degradation of the local environment, but also its detrimental effect on the health of the population of migrant workers, called by the natives "the waste people." The name refers both to their occupation and their social status, because without proper social protection and healthcare they are sacrificed in the name of progress. Despite the mask that he is wearing, he can smell the "overwhelming stench" (Chen 32) of the air that carries "particles and dust" (32). He also sees women washing clothes in water black from pollutants and children playing with junked prostheses, shipped from the West and now lying in heaps, still contaminated and containing "blood and bodily fluids, which pose a lot of potential risk for public health" (34). The life-threatening exposure to these substances only adds to the violence suffered by the migrant workers, disparaged by the native population. Chen clearly draws a parallel between the treatment of waste (discarded electronic parts, moving along international trade routes) and the experience of migrant workers (uprooted, and living away from their native villages to which they will never be able to come back). The novel indeed depicts various forms of "slow violence" which, as Rob Nixon argues, "occurs gradually and out of sight" (3) as a result of human-made environmental catastrophes and typically affects economically underprivileged social groups. As Nixon demonstrates, various forms of this kind of violence are actively sustained

by the exploitative capitalist regime, often disguised as agencies resembling the fictional TerraGreen Recycling.

The parallel between electronic waste and the status of communities that inhabit electronic junkyards can be extended even further, as has been done by Peter C. Little, in his *Burning Matters* (2021), based on research he conducted in Agbogbloshie, one of the world's largest e-waste dumping grounds on the outskirts of the Ghanaian city of Akra. Just like other authors studying the deleterious environmental impact of waste, he attributes the growing amounts of e-junk to the principle of planned obsolescence, adopted by major manufacturers of electronics since the 1980s (103). It is a practice of intentionally producing equipment with a short consumer life, so that new models can be continuously designed and distributed to replace their predecessors, which thus quickly become obsolete and end up on exponentially growing junk heaps. Interestingly in the context of Chen's novel, Little does not stop at lamenting the damage to natural environment and public health caused by planned obsolescence, but demonstrates how this leading principle of "fast capitalism" in the long run affects the way in which scrapyards are inhabited by the workers. They live among waste that is re-commodified and turned into a source of profit, owned by private companies, and therefore they are prevented from turning this area into their place of permanent residence. They experience constant displacement resulting from forced evictions and demolitions of their makeshift sheds carried out by municipal authorities without any regard for fundamental human rights. Attributing the plight of e-waste workers to the normalized rules of capitalist production, Little coins the term "violent obsolescence" to name the "direct, displacement experience and suffering of laborers engaged in global copper supply chain, fueled by the electronics industry that actively values material obsolescence" (83). Thus the active cutting of any affective ties that a community or an individual might have to this place turns the workers into another kind of waste. In his novel Chen not only depicts the condition of precarious habitation on Silicon Isle, but also addresses a problem absent from Little's account. The Chinese author demonstrates that the condition of displacement experienced by migrant workers is actively sustained by the official power which excludes them from forms of collective memory practiced among the natives.

This theme is introduced early on in the novel from the point of view of two characters, Brandle and his translator Chen Kaizong. For personal and professional reasons both turn out to be perceptive observers of the ways in which the official history-making and native commemorative practices serve the purpose of depriving migrant communities of their links to their place of inhabitation. Brandle, for whom "home had already

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become a distant and abstract concept" (Chen 258) because of a tragic death of his older daughter, is also a ruthless "economic hit man" (170), forging corporate deals that exploit the poor and the disadvantaged in the Global South. No wonder that during a tour of Museum of Silicon Isle History, he immediately recognizes that it offers a "whitewashed and rewritten history" (22), presented only in order to lure potential investors. The museum showcases how the local population advanced from fishing and farming through the industrial age to the digital era, but deliberately omits the story of migrant workers and the forms of slow violence that they suffer. Kaizong, who represents a different case of rootlessness, notices another aspect of local memory practices. For him the visit to Silicon Isle is a return to the place where he spent the first years of his life, before his parents emigrated to the United States. A professional historian and graduate of Boston University, he is particularly interested in the traditional Ghost Festival, taking place upon his arrival on the island; a celebration organized to "commemorate one's ancestors and keep alive the family's memories" (47). Kaizong recognizes that these rituals, which sustain the natives' faith in indigenous mythologies, effectively counteract the workings of history, "the process through which events are bleached of their emotional color" (51). However, despite this opposition between academically sanctioned history and the native commemorative festival, in the novel they are both shown as implicated in sustaining the forms of oppression of migrant workers from the scrapyard. The latter are not only absent from the official narrative promoted by the museum, but also, separated from their home communities, they do not practice similar forms of commemoration as the natives. What is more, as a social group living in conditions of permanent dispossession and displacement, they risk being used by the natives in divination rituals including human sacrifice, which further emphasizes their status as "waste people." Read from this perspective, Chen's novel demonstrates that workers, living in the condition of permanent violent obsolescence, are deprived of the right to remember and be remembered so that they do not claim the right to inhabit the island on equal terms with the natives. At the same time, he suggests that in order to counteract forms of violent obsolescence, it is crucial to look for ways of remembering the atrocities of the past to work out liveable communities of the future.

This theme is taken up in the storyline of the third main character—a teenage scrapyard worker called Mimi. Although she shares with Brandle and Kaizong the experience of rootlessness, she is the only one of the trio to directly experience the forms of oppression which are rampant on Silicon Isle. Having come there from a mainland village, seeking opportunities for financial gain, and holding on to waning

recollections of her former life with her parents, she learns the hard way that a "place without memories could not be called home" (175). Without the support of her community, the girl becomes particularly prone to the slow violence which is rampant on Silicon Isle. It is out of this violence that she emerges as a technological singularity, a half-human, half-technological being, "a new kind of life that crossed the boundary between biology and machinery" (331). Although consecutive chapters trace Mimi's transition to this state, it would be difficult to conclusively explain why she turns into this unique entity. The process is probably initiated when she puts on a junked helmet, which accidentally injects a synthetic virus into her nervous system, but perhaps other events catalyze her transformation (61). After all, she inhales large amounts of toxic substances when labouring in a workshop, and also heavily uses electronic hallucinatory drugs to experience a momentary relief from her constant distress. She undoubtedly crosses a significant threshold between human being and cyborg when she is violated by a gang of thugs who use a special, illegally built machine that turns her physical suffering into sexual pleasure for her aggressors (133). Or perhaps it is her participation in a healing ritual conducted by an old witch that turns her into a cyber-goddess that can easily travel between all planes of existence (203). However, Brandle futilely asks himself: "But who is her creator?" (331). The investigation that he conducts reveals that the being that Mimi becomes is actually a result of long historical processes that have been deliberately wiped out of history.

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As Brandle discovers, Mimi's fate is an unexpected result of a series of scientific-military experiments conducted from the mid-1950s in American laboratories. It is there that Project Waste Tide was initiated and carried out until 1972 by Seisen Suzuki, a Japanese migrant and biochemistry graduate who worked on a new hallucinogenic weapon, using convicts and soldiers as test subjects. When it turned out the weapon has long-term negative effects, doctor Suzuki looked for a cure, and her research was subsequently commercialized to produce viral batteries that enabled advancements in the field of digital prosthetics, but that also produced the electronic drugs taken by Mimi. Therefore Kaizong, when meditating on the unpredictability of the outcomes of historical processes, points out that "Mimi was the unlucky girl singled out from millions, touched by history" (182). He therefore suggests that the various forms of slow violence which affected her body and turned it into this hybrid are a result of what Elizabeth A. Povinelli calls "ancestral catastrophe."

In her *Between Gaia and Ground* (2021) Povinelli distinguishes this catastrophe from the one that she calls "the coming catastrophe," which emerges "out of the horizon of liberal progress," and is conceived of as

"the future event that will constitute a new beginning, a radical death or radical rebirth" (3). As Povinelli argues, from the point of view of colonized and oppressed cultures, this "ancestral catastrophe" has been happening throughout the colonial period and keeps returning in the form of environmental damage and neocolonial practices of exploitation, an example of which are e-waste scrapyards (xi). In his novel Chen not only draws a connection between the workings of "fast capitalism," the e-waste predicament and the condition of constant displacement and rootlessness, experienced by the protagonists. He also suggests that a possible, liveable future emerging out of organized resistance can be fueled by the recovery of the obliterated ancestral catastrophe that complicates narratives of progress propagated by official power. This other future emerges not as a result of the purification of collective memory, but rather by commemorating the ancestral catastrophes and their concomitant forms of slow violence as a basis for establishing local communities and tying them to their place of inhabitation on the ruins of the old world. Such a community, based on the recognition of the common predicament of natives and migrants, comes about at the end of Chen's novel as a result of Mimi's intervention.

Once revealed, the story of the abuse suffered by Mimi at the hands of the locals ignites riots by long-suffering waste people against the native clans controlling the processing workshops. However, the escalation of the conflict is prevented by a tsunami that hits the island, endangering the lives of all of its inhabitants, but predominantly affecting the affluent coastal districts restricted to natives. At this moment of natural calamity, Mimi spurs her fellow e-waste workers to help all in danger, regardless of their social status and ethnic origin. She decides to perform this act of care and solidarity across social and ethnic divides at the moment when, thanks to her hybrid status, she is capable of looking at the natives in a different way, having infiltrated the local online surveillance system called "Compound Eyes" (Chen 287). It is this technological dispositive, comprised of hundreds of thousands of cameras fitted with image recognition programs, which was used as a preventative measure to control the local population and prevent social unrest. This digital dispositive gives her a panoramic view of the affluent population on the island. They turn out to suffer in their daily lives the same distress and emotional deprivation as the waste people. Mimi witnesses scenes of addiction, self-mutilation and social exclusion among "civilisation's favorite children" (290), experienced in different ways, but just as deeply as in the case of the waste people affected by the long-term effects of ancestral catastrophes. When connected to "Compound Eyes" as a virtual body she travels around the island that she inhabited, and feels as if she "swept over streets, passed through houses, shops, bridges, parks, elevators, trains, and buses" (288). When accessed by Mimi, a digital tool of

surveillance and control enables her to experience anew the locations that she inhabited as a human being, this time seeing across the social divides imposed by the exploitative order of e-waste industry. Thus repurposed technology becomes instrumental in creating a community inhabiting an extractivist wasteland and capable of solidarity by remembering together the ancestral catastrophe, despite the attempts of the official authorities to wipe out the history of their exploitation. As the final chapter suggests, a possible solution to counteracting forms of displacement caused by violent obsolescence is to creatively repurpose the digital technologies responsible for this condition. Mimi's example proves that learning to co-inhabit spaces with machines may prove critical in the future when more communities will face disasters, living among the debris of capitalist extractivism. After all, the last words Mimi utters, before she sacrifices herself to protect her community, are: "I am only a beginning" (325).

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DWELLING POETICALLY IN GARBAGE PATCHES

That Mimi's last words portend more similar problems in the future is proven in the epilogue of *The Waste Tide* in which we meet Kaizong a year after the main events in the novel. On board of a ship, he looks for trash islands composed of plastic waste. They seem to draw great amounts of lightning which may awaken another technological singularity from the remnants of the ancestral catastrophe, and Kaizong, on behalf of an environmentalist organization, looks for it, to prevent it from being exploited by corporate agents. The theme of marine garbage patches that bring about changes in the coastal communities' way of life is employed differently in my second example, the novel *The Man with the Compound Eyes* (2011) by the Taiwanese author and artist Wu Ming-yi. It is also set in a near future, when the effects of climate change and environmental pollution affect Taiwanese coastal communities. This novel also depicts a world haunted by ancestral catastrophe, which here takes the shape of a large chunk of the Pacific Garbage Patch. Brought by the rising tide to the Taiwanese coast, plastic waste that most probably will remain there for decades reveals its agency in shaping the life world of humans. However, where Chen stressed the potential of repurposed electronic technology to disrupt capitalist flows, Wu explores the ways in which local communities, endangered by both ecological predicament and capitalist exploitation of the coastal region, try to work out liveable entanglements with non-human entities which are crucial for future survival.

From the beginning, Wu depicts this area as a place where the natural landscape has been degrading ever since a new highway was built to attract

tourists and build modern infrastructure. Although in the past this land was inhabited by aborigines, then "the Japanese, the Han people and the tourists" (Wu 17), now a few houses left by those communities have been turned into tourist attractions. Also, the local vegetation and fauna have been pushed further away from the new housing estates. As Alice, the protagonist of the novel, reflects, the place, which she compares to "a global village theme park" (18), looks as if "the artificial environment had been intended to spite the natural landscape" (18). Thus Wu depicts a different form of colonization than Chen—not inundation with waste, but landscaping for the sake of tourists and to the detriment of local peoples. But it is not only the civilizational development, propelled by the agenda of progress, that drives away local communities relying on hunting and fishing. They are also forced to abandon the villages inhabited by their ancestors due to increasingly severe effects of climate change, particularly the rising of sea level and deadly typhoons, such as Morakot, which caused the great flood in Taiwan in 2009, mentioned by Alice. This location, affected by natural disasters (a sign of which are remnants of an amusement park destroyed by an earthquake), becomes a proper background for the interweaving stories of the main characters, each experiencing the loss of their old ways of living, the connection with the ancestral past(s) and their communities (predominantly the Pangcah and Bunun peoples, Taiwanese aborigines). At the same time the novel traces the way in which the main characters, all experiencing displacement, organize their dwelling in this place, while sustaining a lively connection with their ancestral past(s).

Significantly, the garbage patch that hits the coast at the climactic moment in the action is clearly framed by Wu as a return of that forgotten remnant of consumerist societies. Alice, observing from her seaside home the steady rise of the water level, acknowledges that "[f]or the past year the sea has been like a random memory" (54). In a subsequent paragraph she adds that "[t]he sea had no memory, but you could still say that it remembered things" (55). The metaphorical framing of the garbage patch as that which has been condemned to oblivion by global capitalist culture is employed by Wu not only to criticize consumerism and depict the efforts of official Chinese authorities to use it for propaganda purposes or monetize it by launching a recycling initiative—only prolonging the current predicament. Much more significantly, it shows how the main characters make themselves at home in a landscape which cannot be purified, and therefore requires forging new ways of dwelling in the ruins of the modern world.

Wu openly admits that when creating this vision of a possible future, he was inspired by Martin Heidegger's writing on "poetic dwelling" (Tsai

871), particularly his essay "Building, Dwelling, Thinking" (1951). At the time of the article's publication the German philosopher expressed concerns about the deleterious effects of the human exploitation of the natural resources and was quite critical of the possible outcomes of technological development. He warned against identifying dwelling with wielding power over other beings or turning them into mere resources for building infrastructure. In his essay he posited that dwelling should be premised on the idea of existence that not only constructs habitats but also cultivates, nurses and nurtures "the things that grow" (149)—not necessarily biological organisms but all beings natural, technological or otherwise that humans rely on for their existence. "Mortals dwell in that they save the earth" (148), wrote Heidegger, clearly connecting the notion of inhabiting a given space with careful attention to the well-being of the world. This aspect of his thought, especially the conceptualization of the relationship between humans and their world, is becoming particularly significant in the current era of ecological destruction and large-scale environmental damage. As Onur Karamercan points out, Heidegger's topological thinking has a lot to offer to contemporary eco-phenomenology (2). What gains significance in this context is the distinction introduced by Heidegger between "the idea of place as a precise, neutral, calculable point in space and 'dwelling place' as that to which the human being belongs by having been determined by its existential boundaries" (5). In this respect the contemporary commentators on the German philosopher's work emphasize that his topological thinking involves the necessity of recognizing the boundaries of human existence on Earth to be able to work out a correlation between humans and their environment which would enable the latter to save themselves in the face of the ongoing environmental crisis.

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In his extended discussion of Heidegger's main philosophical notions Bruce V. Foltz emphasizes two aspects of the dwelling significant for my reading of Wu's novel. Firstly, as he reminds us, "dwelling is founded upon the poetic" (156), or, in other words, through language "gathering together and letting-lie-before-us" of all things and naming them "with respect to what they are" (157). In this respect Foltz refers to the idea of dwelling which Heidegger introduced with reference to a line from Friedrich Hölderlin's poem: "poetically man dwells" (Heidegger, "Poetically" 211). But, as Heidegger emphasized, his concept of poetic dwelling is premised on the ancient Greek understanding of poetry as making (*poiesis*) (212). Poetic dwelling, therefore, essentially draws on his view of language as not merely a signifying system for communicating meaning, but in a critical way a "house of Being" (Heidegger, "What" 129) which discloses nature to us and turns the world into a place of residence for humans. What follows from this is that "dwelling rests on the poetic,"

as humans experience the place only through the openness of language (Heidegger, "Poetically" 212). Foltz, clearly situating his discussion of Heideggerian philosophy in the era of environmental crises, writes that "the rift between ourselves and the environment . . . cannot be healed by additional scientific research or more efficient technological regulation, but only through a poetic reestablishing of these world regions within whose dimensions we can dwell and be at home" (159).

Secondly, Foltz refers to Heidegger's linking of dwelling with the idea of *Schonen*, which Foltz translates as "conservation" and defines as using something without inflicting harm on it and allowing it "to remain within its essence" (161) as opposed to exploiting it against its potential and capabilities. Also, Foltz emphasizes that conservation that occurs through dwelling concerns "the fourfold regions that are opened up and founded poetically" (162). Thus, as he explains with reference to Heidegger's texts, dwelling occurs through conservation of what Heidegger called the fourfold (*das Geviert*)—sky, earth, mortals and gods—"conserving them in a way that lets them be what they are" (163). Such a poetic dwelling, as Foltz argues, may provide a foundation for an environmental ethics and lead to the saving of the earth and making it our home again. However, in the context of the problems that Wu addresses in his novel, the question that needs to be answered is: how to dwell poetically in times of major environmental catastrophes, in regions of the Earth that become less and less habitable?

Situating the concept of dwelling in a more recent context of ecological problems, and referring to Foltz's analysis, Casey Rentmeester in his *Heidegger and the Environment* (2018) argues that Heidegger looked into East Asian philosophies, particularly Daoism, as sources of the ideas of the human place in the world alternative to the exploitative Western culture. Rentmeester stresses the affinity of the idea of *Gelassenheit*, letting beings "unfold on their natural terms" (89) to the Daoist concept of *wúwéi*, non-coercive actions that accord with the natural efficacy and power of things (90). No wonder that Wu was inspired by the idea of poetic dwelling, the proof of which is a community of Bunun people depicted in his novel. Located in Taitung province in the southeast Taiwan, the dwelling place on a mountain top called Forest Church is a refuge where nature's laws are respected and nature is conserved and protected against corporations. The entrance to the grounds is guarded by two banyans, called walking trees by the locals, because of their prominent aerial roots which look like legs growing into the ground (Wu 156). This natural gate to Forest Church symbolizes the growing network of connections between beings inhabiting this terrain as equals. This place, which may be treated as an instantiation of the Heideggerian idea of *Schonen*, is one of the examples

from the novel that it was informed by the concept of poetic dwelling. However, this inspiration is perhaps most visible in the main storyline—the relationship between Alice and Atile'i, a teenage boy who comes from a distant Pacific island called Wayo Wayo and arrives on the coast of Taiwan together with the garbage patch.

Wu stages this encounter between representatives of two worlds to illustrate different ways of making oneself at home in the world enduring a catastrophe. Atile'i is clearly introduced as a representative of a world that existed in isolation from other cultures and therefore preserved its cosmology and mythology for hundreds of years in an unchanged form. At the same time Atile'i shares with all characters the condition of displacement, because, as his parent's second son, he was obliged by local custom to leave forever his dwelling place which offered only limited resources to its inhabitants. Travelling across the ocean on a grass canoe, he comes across the garbage patch and, never having seen plastic debris, takes it for an island of the dead from his native mythologies, which he nevertheless tries to inhabit. In the chapter recounting his stay on the island it turns out time and again that "the only thing keeping him . . . alive was memory" (Wu 37), as he relies on his recollections of his father's lessons. He survives on the island and turns it into his temporary home, because he tries to "fill [his mind] with remembrance" (37) and record his experiences. He uses found pens "to draw the sights and sounds of the island" (41) on his body, layering them one on top of another "like a palimpsest" (41). Atile'i finds his way about on the garbage patch by going along with its unpredictable movements, feeling his environment with his body, and measuring time with the songs he learned on his home island. Thus, the act of recording his story proves critical to the way he inhabits the plastic island.

No wonder that Alice's meeting with Atile'i inspires her to finally start writing a novel and a short story, both entitled *The Man with the Compound Eyes*. This metafictional device, which makes Alice a porte-parole of Wu, who also wrote a novel and a short story under this title, testifies to the author's interest in poetic dwelling. The events in the novel are narrated from interchanging points of view of the characters, sometimes in the first, other times in the third person. Each of these stories documents the characters' efforts at practicing the non-invasive and collective ways of dwelling and becoming together with non-humans inhabiting the region. But even if Wu draws heavily on the notion of poetic dwelling, he also situates it in the context of current environmental issues to suggest that the concept needs to be extended to include the stories that let the world unfold from the perspectives of its non-human inhabitants.

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The figure of a man with compound eyes not only captures the mosaic-like structure of the book, composed of heterogeneous perspectives on different ways of inhabiting the world. As the events unfold, this eponymous creature is encountered by the characters at different, critical points in their lives. For instance, Dahu, a Pangcah aborigine, identifies this spectral presence as Kawas from Thai lore, an ancestral ghostly shapeshifter, living in the depths of the forest (Sterk 204–05). However, when encountering him, each of the characters notices his insect-like eyes, where in each ommatidium a different image flickers: "[A]n erupting undersea volcano . . . a falcon's-eye view of a landscape . . . a leaf about to fall" (Wu 276). This mosaic-like structure and the name of the creature reveals similarities with the surveillance system from *The Waste Tide*; however, the eponymous creature from Wu's novel collects memories and inspires solidarity in a different way and with a different purpose than Mimi. Chen was primarily interested in the power of a technological dispositive to channel experiences of others to seek connections despite class differences. Through the figure of a man with compound eyes Wu articulates a critique of the anthropocentric idea of memory as a solely human capacity.

In his novel he overtly mentions groundbreaking research by the American neurobiologist Eric Kandel, recipient of the Nobel Prize in 2000 for his work on the physiological basis of memory in sea slugs. In the novel some passages read like direct quotes from Kandel's works from the first decade of the 21st century. He argued that the mechanisms responsible for remembering and recollecting in humans are quite similar to those of non-human animals and it is a grave misconception to think that animal memory is markedly different from ours. Wu not only borrows this notion, but through the eponymous figure of his novel extends it to all living and non-living elements of human surroundings. As the man with compound eyes further explains, he is an embodiment of ecological memories of other living creatures and the environments in which they live. And, he continues, any ecosystem may function properly only on condition that the beings which it comprises retain their memories of their own past(s) and the past(s) of their companions. Thus, the novel answers the question of how to dwell in times of environmental catastrophes, by showing that if humans want to again make themselves at home on Earth, they should make space in their stories, mythologies and cosmologies for more-than-human memories, which they tend not to take into account and record; memories crucial for all the elements of an ecosystem to survive. For these are also memories of various ways of dealing with crises and imbalances in the face of catastrophes that may prove useful for human communities in times of predicament, such as the inundation with plastic waste that Wu's novel depicts.

CONCLUSION

It can be argued, therefore, that, by trying to prepare us for the future to come, these two examples of speculative fiction emphasize that, in a world increasingly permeated and shaped by anthropogenic waste, for the sake of working out more pragmatic approaches to the environmental predicament we must "avoid the nostalgia of reconciliation that might return us to the coherent and uncontaminated body" (Yusoff 93). Indeed, in both novels waste acts even when it is removed from view or recycled, entering ecosystems and bodies in the form of toxic substances that may alter the genetic make-up of organisms for generations to come. Chen and Wu also both depict worlds of the near future to answer the question about how to dwell among waste, one of the troubles that we are bound to stay with for centuries to come. By situating this problem in the context of new forms of remembering and dwelling, they seem to suggest that learning to live on an inhospitable Earth involves not only a search for effective countermeasures to environmental problems, climate change and health crises. They also demonstrate that dwelling otherwise requires thinking otherwise about our relationship with the fundamental and elemental powers of more-than-human agencies beyond human control.

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Building Liveable Futures:
Dwelling as Collaborative Survival
After Climate Change

ABSTRACT

Taking a cue from Tim Ingold's post-humanist reflection on building and dwelling as more-than-human practices, the article aims to revisit dwelling as a strategy of "collaborative survival" (Tsing) in the context of the ongoing climate emergency. Drawing on the findings of more-than-human geography and environmental (post)humanities, the article scrutinizes three examples of contemporary speculative projects at the intersection of architecture, design and performative arts that imagine different strategies of building with and for more-than-humans as a climate change adaptation strategy. Firstly, the installation *Refuge for Resurgence* (2021) by the Los Angeles-based design studio Superflux, a banquet table designed for humans and various species of animals, is analyzed in order to interrogate the relation between dwelling and multispecies interdependence. Secondly, the article scrutinizes the multimedia project *Pending Xenophora* (2020–22) by Mari Bastashevski, an architecture created with an endangered species of snail, to show more-than-human care (Puig de la Bellacasa) as key to surviving climate change. Finally, the article looks into the project *The Anthropocene Museum* (2020–ongoing) by the Kenyan collective Cave_bureau to unravel decolonial aspects of dwelling as collaborative survival.

Keywords: dwelling, speculative design, collaborative survival, climate change, more-than-human, the Anthropocene.

BUILDING AND DWELLING AT THE TIME OF THE ANTHROPOCENE[1]

In his seminal essay "Building, Dwelling, Living: How Animals and People Make Themselves at Home in the World," published over twenty years ago, the British anthropologist Tim Ingold convincingly argues that building and dwelling are not predominantly human practices. Analyzing different human and more-than-human[2] living structures, from temporary settlements of prehistoric nomadic tribes to beaver lodges and dams, Ingold questions the traditional paradigm of Western modernity, which understands building as an intentional process of the self-contained human subject who transforms raw materials according to a pre-formed design. The paradigm not only implies that dwelling is limited to occupying an already built structure understood as a mere container for life. It is founded on the search for an illusory threshold in human evolution, unaccounted for by empirical findings, beyond which humans became more advanced than animals in their capability of intentionally building environments for themselves. To move out of this impasse, Ingold puts forward "the dwelling perspective" (185) which holds that "the forms people build, whether in the imagination or on the ground, only arise within the current of their life activities" (154). Ingold draws directly on the Heideggerian analysis of the German verb *bauen* (to build), which etymologically means not only building and dwelling but also preserving and caring for a given place. In other words, building and dwelling are inextricably linked as they are both relational practices, emerging from human and more-than-human everyday interactions with environments they inhabit. Thus, what we conventionally understand as built environments are in fact crystallizations of the entangled relations between individuals and their surroundings.

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Whereas Ingold's aim was predominantly to challenge the binary opposition of nature and culture still dominant in Western anthropology in the 20th century, his post-humanist approach to building and dwelling is especially pertinent at the time of the Anthropocene, the new geological epoch in which humans have become the dominant geological force on Earth (Crutzen and Stoermer). In recent years, the name of the epoch has risen to global prominence, being taken up in academic and popular

[2] The term *more-than-human* has recently risen to prominence across environmental (post)humanities as an attempt to move out of the human/nonhuman binary. I am purposefully using it here instead of the terms *nonhuman* and *other-than-human* to signal that the human is only a small fraction of a vast world of agentic entities (see Jacque, Otero Verzier and Pietroiusti 6–9).

contexts, as a pointer to the ongoing multipronged ecological emergency that threatens the very existence of human and more-than-human worlds. Suffice it to mention the coastal cities and human residences, especially in the Pacific region, at risk of perishing submerged by rising global sea levels and the habitats of species living in the Amazon forest endangered by unprecedented large-scale deforestation. In this context, what is at stake in human and more-than-human building and dwelling practices is not only making oneself at home in the world, as Ingold insisted, but—more importantly—surviving the Anthropocene and sustaining liveable conditions in its aftermath.

The challenge is overtly addressed by the recent spate of transdisciplinary projects at the intersection of architecture, design, performative arts and ecoactivism which design environments that would enable humans and more-than-humans to adapt to the negative effects of climate change. A case in point are the projects presented at the 2022 exhibition *Our Time on Earth*, curated by Luke Kemp, Caroline Till and Kate Franklin at the Barbican Centre in London. For example, the project *Symbiocene* (2022) by designer Julia Watson, architect Smith Mordak and sustainability engineer Buro Happold shows how technologies of Indigenous peoples, such as floating habitable reed islands of the Ma'dan people of Iraq, might be used to build structures that would resist mass-scale flooding. On the other hand, the multi-channel audio-visual installation *2040—Sensible Zone* (2022) by the collective Territorial Agency combines aerial photographs and data analysis to explore the zone where the biosphere interacts with ocean, atmosphere and land to maintain Earth in homeostasis. The project treats the zone as a potential site of human and more-than-human inhabitation. By drawing inspiration directly from nature or from sustainable practices responding to the needs of ecosystems, those projects build liveable futures in which both humans and more-than-humans could survive after the Anthropocene.

However, the projects in question differ radically from environmental initiatives embraced by the umbrella term "nature-based solutions to climate change" (NBS) such as urban reforestation, vividly supported in recent years by national and international governing bodies as a response to the current eco-predicament. In its report "Nature-Based Solutions & Re-Naturing Cities" the European Commission defines NBS as "solutions that are inspired and supported by nature, which are cost-effective, simultaneously provide environmental, social and economic benefits and help build resilience" ("Nature-Based Solutions"; see European Commission 3). Although NBS convincingly stress the importance of nature in mitigating the effects of climate change and foreground the nexus between ecological, social and economic enhancement, most recently

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the concept has come under critical scrutiny, especially in critical human geography and conservation studies. Its critics aptly point out that NBS are still inherently human-centred. For those projects understand nature either as a passive source of inspiration for human projects which aim to mimic natural processes or as "ecosystem services" (Costanza et al. 2) that by definition concern the biophysical and/or economic benefits of natural systems solely for people. Thus, NBS not only embroil nature in a neoliberalist logic of resource-efficiency and cost-effectiveness but, more importantly, they often neglect the well-being of nonhuman species. Although NBS account for nature as an important agent in surviving climate change, the design and build (infra)structures are still oriented towards all-too-human dwelling and wellbeing.

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In contrast to NBS, the transdisciplinary projects analyzed in this paper perform what Belgian philosophers Isabelle Stengers and Didier Debaise call "speculative gestures" (4). Inspired by Alfred North Whitehead's process philosophy, the term denotes situated modes of engagement which make possible worlds perceptibly felt in the lived experience. Importantly, in the context of building liveable futures, Stengers and Debaise clearly differentiate between what is possible and what is probable. Whereas the latter is still grounded in and measured against the hitherto accepted reality, the former aims to undermine the current order and make possible the eruption of radically different modes of being, thinking and doing in the world. Thus, speculative gestures are neither about calculating risks and probabilities nor about chasing futuristic dreams in some utopian "elsewhere." They rather unravel possible alternative realities already present close-at-hand in our surroundings. The transdisciplinary projects in question specifically gesture towards dwelling understood as a strategy of what anthropologist Anna Tsing calls "collaborative survival" (*Mushroom* 4). The concept points to the encounters of humans and more-than-humans which help them survive in disrupted ecosystems. In this context survival, however, is not about the survival of the fittest known from the Darwinian theory of evolution but rather about the preservation of entire ecosystems of co-existing humans and nonhumans. Tsing proves that such co-existence is possible, for instance, when matsutake mushrooms (*Tricholoma matsutake*) growing in deforested areas break down rocks and sand to produce nutrients for themselves and their symbionts and thus contribute to the resurgence of the ecosystem. Transdisciplinary projects scrutinized in the following parts stage encounters between other humans and more-than-humans and, thus, prove that building liveable futures is inherently relational.

I will look closely at three transdisciplinary projects that put forward speculative dwelling structures that enable collaborative survival. The examples have been chosen to illustrate different tactics for building

liveable futures. First of all, I scrutinize the installation *Refuge for Resurgence* (2021) by the London-based collective Superflux, which imagines a dwelling structure built *for* a multispecies collective in order to instigate a sense of togetherness and interdependence between humans and more-than-humans. Secondly, by analyzing the Augmented Reality project *Pending Xenophora* (2020–22) I will show modes of building liveable futures *with* a particular species that enact modes of more-than-human care. Finally, I turn to the project *The Anthropocene Museum* by the Kenyan collective Cave_bureau, which clearly demonstrates that in order to collaboratively survive after the Anthropocene one must de-link from existing environmental arrangements rooted in the legacy of Western colonialisms in order to build liveable futures *within* them.

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BUILDING FOR A MULTISPECIES PLURIVERSE

The installation *Refuge for Resurgence* (2021) by Superflux, first exhibited at the Biennale Architettura, La Biennale di Venezia in 2021, directly engages with the question of what collaborative survival after climate change might actually look like. It emerged as a creative response to the biennale's main theme: "How Will We Live Together?" The question, posed by the curator Hashim Sarkis, aimed to inspire architectural imaginings of a "new spatial contract" based on the idea of togetherness, urgent especially at the time of deepening political divides and growing socio-economic injustices that result from the ongoing multiple ecological, economic and social crises. In this context, the "we" indexes both humans, for instance legal and illegal migrants as well as communities suffering literal and symbolic forms of violence, and more-than-humans, such as animal and plant species endangered by climate change. The title of the installation clearly indicates that Superflux aims to build a space that would respond to both human and more-than-human experiences at the same time. On the one hand, the term "refuge" denotes a safe space where people may find temporary shelter. On the other, it alludes to the term *refugia* introduced by Tsing to describe places in which assemblages of species may thrive after destructive ecological events, such as deforestations or flooding. Commenting on Tsing's findings, the Polish philosopher Monika Bakke convincingly argues that refugia are not only important today as zones of liveability but they also "create the conditions for adaptive changes and new alliances which must be formed if the multispecies future of our planet is to be real" (17). *Refuge for Resurgence* speculatively creates such conditions by building a new kind of refugia where humans and more-than humans may survive the climate emergency.

As the co-founder and director of Superflux, Anab Jain, explains, the installation is organized around the idea of a "deconstructed home" (qtd. in Shah) in which only the dining area and the window remain after an unspecified eco-catastrophe. When visitors enter the gallery space, they can instantly notice a vast four-metre-long handcrafted wooden table with fourteen wooden carved stools. The structure is placed beneath three suspended LCD screens arranged in the form of a three-panel window. The window opens to a devastated cityscape, most likely in a coastal area. The hyper-realistic animated film, created in collaboration with graphic designer Sebastien Tiew, played in loop on the screens, shows flooded streets, ruined buildings and urban infrastructure in tatters. However, the view is far from dystopian. Huge flocks of birds gracefully fly over the city overgrown with lush vegetation. In the background visitors can hear animated voices of children playing and noises of intensive (re)construction works. From time to time domesticated and feral animals can be seen finding their way through the vegetation. Thus, the video clearly situates the installation at the time of resurging human and more-than-human life.

As visitors navigate the installation, however, it soon becomes clear that *Refuge for Resurgence* is not about restoring pre-catastrophic anthropocentric *status quo*, since the dining space has not been built solely for humans. According to the artists' statement, this is an imagined banquet with a fox, rat, wasp, pigeon, cow, human adults and child, wild boar, snake, beaver, wolf, raven and mushroom. Each species is offered its own equal place at the table. Even with rudimentary knowledge of biology, visitors may notice that the species, although inhabiting the same European habitats, form radically different biological interactions that would prevent their meeting at the same table. For example, the fox would rather eat the pigeon than dine with them. However, Superflux is less about biological accuracy than about inciting "multispecies forms of curiosity" (Tsing, "A Threat" 11) which according to Tsing are crucial to survive at the time of the ecocrisis. Apart from the wasp's nest and a taxidermized raven placed above the table, visitors are invited to infer the identity of the species by closely inspecting the stools and table settings, which have been customized to the animals which are to use them. The pigeon's stool, for instance, is smeared with bird droppings to attract new animals, whereas the beaver's stool carries the characteristic teeth marks to invite potential guests. Moreover, each species is offered food adjusted to their diet, for instance an acorn for the wild boar and an egg for the snake.

By engaging the visitors in numerous forms of multispecies curiosity *Refuge for Resurgence* speculatively gestures towards building what, following the Colombian anthropologist Arturo Escobar, might be referred to as a "multispecies pluriverse." Escobar borrows the term *pluriverse* from

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the manifesto of the Zapatista, the militant movement of the descendants of the indigenous people of Mexico, which describes a "world where many worlds fit" (xvi). Whereas in Zapatismo the concept predominantly points to a new global social order beyond capitalism where struggles of various anti-colonial and anti-capitalist movements of the Global South may unite without losing their local specificities, in Escobar's work the pluriverse becomes one of the most pressing challenges for design. Design, however, is not understood here as creating marketable objects and (infra)structures, but first and foremost as a means of giving form to sustainable human and more-than-human ways of being and relational subjectivities. Thus, according to Escobar, designing for a pluriverse has a clear political agenda: to resist the logic of incessant development germane to Western modernity, in favour of strategies of de-growth, often inspired by the Amerindian communities such as the Zapatista. Although Superflux do not overtly reference Escobar's work, they clearly rewire his design theory—still focused on human modes of being and subjectivities—towards a multispecies co-existence. It is enough to look carefully into the very process of making *Refuge for Resurgence*.

Superflux enacts the multispecies pluriverse in the very process of making their installation. It was constructed using found, recycled or salvaged materials sourced within a hundred miles' radius from the artists' London studio. The table and stools are made of wood from an old overgrown oak acquired from farmers in Surrey. The plates are second hand, and the cutlery is made using jewellery-making techniques from plastic waste foraged from London's urban green areas and detritus combed at the river Thames. The artistic process not only aims to limit the installation's carbon footprint and foreground its close relation to local environments, but it also re-purposes pre-modern scavenging and gathering practices as viable practices of survival in the aftermath of climate change, alternative to highly sophisticated technologies proposed by environmental designers. Moreover, the project overtly references various indigenous ideas inspired by folklore and mythologies from different cultures. The plates have been adorned with illustrations by the visual artist Nicola Ferrao, depicting mytho-poetic stories specific to each creature that foreground the interdependence of species as the basis of their co-existence.

Whereas Superflux convincingly evokes a poetic sense of more-than-human togetherness as conditional for collaborative survival, *Refuge for Resurgence* also demonstrates the limitations of their tactics of building for a multispecies pluriverse. Although deconstructed, the architecture of a human home—chosen as the basis for their project—still grounds the speculative gesture in the anthropocentric idea of a dwelling. The table and stools are adjusted to human scale only and cutlery is offered even when

a dedicated species would not be able to use it. Moreover, humans still outnumber the other species, having been allocated three seats at the head of the table. Most problematically, however, *Refuge for Resurgence* treats the overgrown tree as mere material, disregarding "the future agency of the 'dead' oak wood material," as design critic Steve Santer aptly points out. For the fallen tree always already becomes a shelter for and offers nutrients to diverse life forms both over and underground. Thus, rather than offering a post-anthropocentric perspective on building and dwelling, Superflux's project provokes the question: how can a more-than-human dwelling be built according to different, more-than-human scales and values?

BUILDING WITH SNAILS AT THE TIME OF MASS EXTINCTION

This issue is tackled by the multimedia project *Pending Xenophora* (2020–22) by Mari Bastashevski, which aims to build a home not only *for* but, first and foremost, *with* a specific more-than-human species, namely snails. For the period of two years Bastashevski researched a rout of garden snails based in New York City, Berlin, Lausanne, and Rotterdam, some of which she kept in her home terrarium. Drawing on her observations and experiments, she built a multisensory Augmented Reality (AR) environment inspired by the lifeways of snails and their perception of the world and scaled according to the size of a snail. The visitors are invited into an inflatable dome-shaped tent made of semi-translucent plastic where they can interact with digital snails in a virtual multiverse and enjoy a snail-inspired smell-scape. As the experience unfolds, it becomes clear that building such an environment was clearly a response to the ongoing mass extinction to which snails also fall victim.

The title of the project refers to one of the cabinets in the Natural History Museum in London, where the AR experience begins. As Bastashevski found out during her extensive archival research, the cabinet stores marine snails of the genus *Xenophora*, some of them most likely extinct, collected in the Victorian era, that have yet to be identified and classified according to the Linnaean system. The specimens often defied the very notion of a single species, for instance incorporating foreign elements such as stones and live coral colonies into their bodies. Moreover, similarly to other invertebrates, gastropods have been historically considered inferior, uninteresting species. Writing about Hawai'ian snails in his recent work *A World in a Shell: Snail Stories for a Time of Extinctions*, the multispecies ethnographer Thom van Dooren convincingly argues that the inferior status of gastropods in biological research and collection

practices negatively impact their conservation (11–12). Although their population diminishes dramatically every year due to climate change, snail conservation is significantly underfunded as governments prioritize preserving endangered large mammals such as elephants and polar bears. In contrast, as numerous species of snails are unidentified, their extinction often goes unnoticed. In this context, Bastashevski's AR environment not only becomes a metaphorical dwelling for the endangered snails but, more importantly, it aims to instigate a sense of care for the species among the visitors that could potentially lead to a change in conservation policies in the future.

Pending Xenophora, however, differs significantly from similar speculative projects inspired by the lifeways and experiential worlds of more-than-human species. A case in point are the architectural works of Tomás Saraceno, inspired by spiders. For instance, in *Webs of At-tent(s)ion*, he brings together three-dimensional sculptures interwoven by different species of spiders that become prototypes of human living structures adapted to harsh environmental conditions. As Bastashevski succinctly argues in one of her lectures, such projects are predicated on a particular computational paradigm which perceives animals as "evolutionary fine-tuned computers" ("Unwhorl") whose ways of navigating the world might be recreated by humans in different contexts. This paradigm in turn rests on the anthropocentric mindset which always compares animal sensation to the human senses. To avoid those anthropocentric assumptions Bastashevski takes a different architectural approach by developing modes of attunement to the alterity of snail sensation which inform her AR environment.

Bastashevski's approach is a perfect example of what the Canadian designer and design theorist Ron Wakkary terms "designing-with": that is, a practice of co-creating "with humans and nonhumans in ways that are fundamentally expansive and relational" (5). Such an approach aims to move beyond the modernist and humanist paradigm of design as a clearly demarcated world-making practice aimed predominantly to improve *human* lives. For it is exactly this paradigm, embroiled in the demands of trading and consumer market, that has contributed to the current eco-predicament. In contrast, designing-with entails a radical revision of the practice of designing so that it can better respond to climate change and biodiversity loss. In this context, design is no longer a way for humans to act upon the world but is characterized by a "double movement" (Wakkary 4) whereby in humans designing the world, the world designs humans back. Thus, as Wakkary contends, designing should no longer be performed by a designer as the sole agent but rather emerge from a "constituency" (24) understood as a gathering of human and more-than-human actors that

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co-create artifacts, objects, products and solutions. However, according to Wakkary, the gathering is inherently political in the sense that while working together its members constantly negotiate overlapping and often conflicted interests which in turn (re)shape the final design (95). The frictions emerging in the work of such constituency were palpable from the very beginning of Bastashevski's designing with snails.

At the outset of *Pending Xenophora* the artist aimed to create a single snail-inspired architecture scaled according to a measure of movement, the equivalent of the human step specific to snails. To this effect, in cooperation with the multimedia artist Sam Lavigne, she devised an app under the name Unwhorl. Contrary to what its name suggests, the app was not aimed to understand the spiral pattern of the snail shells but to register their movement patterns. Unwhorl converted any touch screen into a platform that would trace the snails' interactions with its surface. Bastashevski devised a series of experiments by inviting the snails to interact with lines and circles she drew on her tablet. However, she soon realized that members of her more-than-human constituency did not act according to her expectations: they either avoided the shapes and moved around aimlessly or preferred to explore the frame of the tablet. Thus, Bastashevski had to adjust her initial idea of a snail measure unit and embrace the idiosyncrasies of each snail. Thus, instead of a single snail-inspired virtual world she designed a multiverse in which visitors could explore different worlds, with slightly different parameters. In the process of designing-with-snails, however, her more-than-human partners not only became world-builders, but also transformed from objects of study into matters of care.

The concept of matters of care was introduced by the American science and technology scholar Maria Puig de la Bellacasa to denote embodied and situated ways of producing knowledge through technology that contribute to caring for and repairing human and more-than-human worlds. Puig de la Bellacasa's argument is especially pertinent to my analysis as it does not define care as an unspecified human feeling of concern, triggered by someone's difficult situation. Referring to the findings of American feminist political philosophers Joan C. Tronto and Bernice Fisher, Puig de la Bellacasa adopts a generic definition of care, which "includes everything that we do to maintain, continue and repair 'our world' so that we can live in it as well as possible" (2). In other words, matters of care go far beyond human emotional reactions. The affective and ethical dimension of caring for the wellbeing of others must always be grounded in the concrete work we do while caring for the world. The verb "to maintain" usually denotes activities that are related to the maintenance or upkeep of basic infrastructure. This indicates that caring always involves down-to-earth

practices aimed to improve the living conditions of specific humans and more-than-humans, which, however, do not always guarantee success. *Pending Xenophora* enacts such matters of care not only in the process of designing-with-snails but also by generating intensive multisensory cognitive-affective experiences of visitors.

The AR technology used in *Pending Xenophora* allows visitors not only to look around but also to physically move around as the headset is calibrated to motion sensing technology. Once they step outside the cabinet, they may navigate a surrealist colourful landscape from a snail's perspective and pass through portals to other worlds. However, as one moves in the inflatable tent a cognitive dissonance emerges. Contrary to the visual input, the actual floor is covered with a soft material, which slows the visitors' movements down. When I visited the installation at Brotfabrik art gallery in Bonn, the visitors, myself included, began crawling like snails, without any prior instruction to do so. Feeling insecure about their position in the actual world, they also outstretched their arms, uncannily resembling snail antennae sensing their environment. However, *Pending Xenophora* does not want visitors to become snails but rather to experience a particular temporal dimension of matters of care, namely "care time." Puig de la Bellacasa puts forward the term to denote the situated practice of "'making time' to get involved with a diversity of timelines . . . that make the web of human and more than human agencies" (171). In other words, to care one needs to make time for perceiving the multiplicity of complex, often radically different temporalities in which humans and more-than-humans function. Thus, care time differs significantly from the traditional modern linear conception of time. It does not entail progressive movement from the past to the future and evades the logic of productivity, according to which every action must produce ever better results in ever shorter time.

Pending Xenophora intentionally slows visitors down so that they do not rush towards one of the portals, as they would in a typical AR experience. Instead, they are incited to roam aimlessly and notice virtual snails populating the landscape and slime trails left on the ground, which are traces of previous visitors exploring the landscapes. However, in the context of snails' accelerating extinction, the trails become visible pointers to the ongoing species loss. Slowly following them might become the first step towards caring for the less conspicuous endangered species such as gastropods. Whereas Bastashevski builds liveable futures by multiplying connections between humans and more-than-humans, the last example to be analyzed here proves that in order to imagine modes of collaborative survival one may also need the gesture of disconnection.

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BUILDING WITHIN BROKEN EARTHS

Unlike the two examples analyzed so far, the speculative gestures of the Nigerian collective Cave_bureau aim less to evoke a sense of togetherness or with-ness between humans and more-than-humans than to de-link from particular environmental arrangements. Their project *The Anthropocene Museum*, divided into two parts (1.0 and 2.0), is part of a recent spate of performative projects that question the traditional Western conception of ecology based on the principle of connection. Instead they foster what the environmental scholar Malcom Ferdinand recently termed "decolonial ecology" (3). In other words, they combine critical reflection on the ongoing ecocrisis with anticolonial, postcolonial, and decolonial struggles for the emancipation of various Indigenous, oppressed, marginalized or underrepresented communities in the former Western colonies. Although initiated in different parts of the world, the projects share a common political goal to de-link local ecologies from the colonial ways of inhabiting the Earth and living together to posit alternative, more sustainable and socially just ways of being in the world, usually rooted in Indigenous traditions.

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A case in point is Frédéric Neyrat's *The Unconstructable Earth. An Ecology of Separation*. The subtitle of his work instantly signals a radical change of perspective in ecological thinking. Neyrat argues that the ecological principle of connection must be challenged by the "counterprinciple of separation" (153). This does not mean, however, that humans should re-establish the binary opposition between active culture and inert nature, which contributed to the present eco-crisis in the first place. On the contrary, he defines separation as an onto-epistemological gesture that enables us to distinguish between different things, different beings, different naturalcultural arrangements and thus becomes a condition for the emergence of any relations between humans and more-than-humans (14). The notion serves a particular strategic purpose, especially in the context of ecomodernist discourses which have used the ecological principle of connection to effectively erase nature as an agentic force. In contradistinction, Neyrat's separation aims to foreground the Earth as an important bio- and geopower that must be considered while addressing climate change. Moreover, it slows the progress down by creating a space for withdrawing from certain naturalcultural arrangements before they actually bring about irreversible detrimental ecological effects.

As the title of Cave_bureau's project clearly suggests, the project aims predominantly to separate from the 19th-century idea of the museum which contributed to the entangled processes of environmental destruction and (neo)colonialist expansion in Africa. In particular, *The Anthropocene*

Museum is inspired by the ongoing animated discussions and budding projects, especially in former colonial empires, focused on decolonizing the museum, for instance through the restitution of artifacts stolen during colonial expeditions to their indigenous owners. Unlike those projects, however, this one is not about the ownership of land and artifacts but rather about the radical redefinition of the very concept of the museum as an architectural form and its anthropocentric scale. In their statement, Cave_bureau argue that the museum of the Anthropocene cannot be contained "in a single, self-gratifying building, which would be part of an industry that contributes over 40 percent of CO_2 emissions into the atmosphere." Such architectural form is calibrated for human, predominantly white male visitors and aims to alleviate the (neo)colonial practice of moving artifacts across the globe. Working against such a conception, Cave_bureau turn to the Kenyan caves in search of an unscalable architecture of the Anthropocene Museum.

According to Cave_bureau, caves are a natural manifestation of the museum as they have literally housed the legacy of human and more-than-human activity. A case in point is the system of volcanic caves along the Great Rift Valley of East Africa, around Mount Suswa, one hundred fifty kilometres West of Nairobi City, which has been the focal point of *The Anthropocene Museum 1.0*. On the one hand, the caves hold the prehistoric rock paintings attributed to Maasai morans, i.e. unmarried warriors who used the caves for initiation rituals. More recently, they were also a place of refuge for the insurgents during the anti-colonial Mau Mau Uprising (1952–60). On the other hand, Mount Suswa Caves have been a home to numerous wild animal species. In one of them, locally known as "Baboon Parliament" due to its amphitheatrical shape, baboons would gather each night looking for a safe place of hiding from predators. Another cave is occupied by the largest population of the giant mastiff bat (*Otomops martiensseni*), an endemic African species. Thus, the caves embrace practices of humans and more-than-humans operating at different spatial scales without subjecting them to an architectural form of the museum building.

Using cutting-edge 3D scanning technologies, Cave_bureau create models of the Mount Suswa Caves and shape them into installations and architectural interventions in actual landscapes. They also organize workshops and debates with various stakeholders during which the installations become frameworks for future environmental proposals. For example, in one of the meetings, participants came up with an idea of "Cow Corridor," a restoration of the Maasai's migratory trails through Nairobi and a harvesting of water for wildlife and nature around the caves. Thus, contrary to traditional museums, *The Anthropocene Museum 1.0* does not serve as a mere repository of the Kenyan naturalcultural heritage. It rather

rewires the curatorial practices towards (eco)activist action. Mount Suswa Caves are currently under threat from the government's rapacious energy politics which entails exploiting the site for geothermal energy, as part of the country's commitment to limit the use of coal by 2030.

The speculative gestures of Cave_bureau enact a tactics which, following the inhuman geographer Kathryn Yusoff, might be referred to as building within broken earths. In her recent lecture "Broken Earth & Built Earths: Architectures at an Inhuman Impasse," delivered at the Yale School of Architecture, Yusoff introduces the concept of broken earths, borrowed from the science fiction writer N. K. Jemisin, as a pointer to exploited, ruined and polluted landscapes and devastated lifeworlds of black, brown and Indigenous communities left behind by White (neo) colonialist extractivism. In this context, broken earths are understood as a shadow of the Western architectural praxis, regarded as independent of its geological substrate. Drawing on her extensive archival research in the state of Alabama, Yusoff convincingly argues that the vertical architecture of the modern city is an extension of the mine understood as a paradigm of entangled extraction of geologic resources and exploitation of racialized bodies. For example, the tenement houses and skyscrapers of Birmingham, Alabama, were built using fossil fuel deposits extracted through convict lease labour, mainly African American men detained under vagrancy state laws. In this context, the tactics of building in broken earths, enacted by Cave_bureau, becomes an alternative architectural practice that does not replicate the vertical imperative of the Western city but rather accounts for its colonial implications and generates potential for restorative futures.

A case in point is the project *The Anthropocene Museum 2.0*, which shifts perspective from Mount Suswa Caves to the Shimoni Caves on the Kenyan coast, eighty kilometres south of Mombasa, to address the country's colonial legacy of slavery. The Shimoni Caves played a role in the Indian Ocean slave trade mainly between Africa, the Middle East and the Indian subcontinent, which pre-dated the better known Atlantic slave trade. The enslaved were kept densely packed in narrow caverns, awaiting ships that would transport them first to Zanzibar and then to the Arabian Peninsula. However, the site embodies both suffering and hope. The Shimoni Caves are connected to a wider system of caves in Kwale county that stretch along the coast. Over the years, numerous enslaved managed to escape through the tunnels and find refuge, for instance in the Three Giant Sister Caves, situated about ten kilometres northwest of Shimoni.

Similarly to the first part of *The Anthropocene Museum*, Cave_bureau tackle the complicated histories through a programme of curated events. Using laser-scanning techniques, they gain architectural information about the caves. It is then visualized in the form of maps, etched on

leather according to local traditions and bronze models that show the volume of the caves, and narrated through short stories and practices of story-telling. The visualizations and narratives become prompts for curated meetings, held in temporary structures built by the architects within the caves around Kwale county, with local communities and other stakeholders. As Karanja and Mutegi explain, the meetings aim to create a space for "contemplation and critique about the torturous crimes that were committed against enslaved people both here and across the planet." As a result of one of the meetings with the Shimoni community, an archaeological excavation project was initiated with a view to exposing the tunnels through which the enslaved escaped, blocked by cumulative siltation over the years. Thus, building liveable futures within broken earths not only addresses the legacies of colonialism but also entails actual interventions in existing landscapes with a view to creating not only liveable but also more equitable futures.

CODA: BUILDING AS STAYING WITH THE TROUBLE

The transdisciplinary projects analyzed in this article clearly demonstrate that building and dwelling are key to imagining liveable human and more-than-human futures after climate change. The different speculative gestures employed in the projects not only challenge the received notions of human exceptionality and independence in the face of surviving the ongoing climate emergency, but also bring into sharp relief the question of scale as crucial for imagining post-anthropocentric modes of thinking and being. Whereas *Refuge for Resurgence* used the tactics of building for a multispecies pluriverse, keeping the human scale virtually intact, *Pending Xenophora* and *The Anthropocene Museum* tried to route around the problem by attuning to specific more-than-human lifeways and challenging the colonial underpinnings of the modern museum as an architectural form scaled for (white male) humans. All of the projects, however, question the logic of (re)solution which underlies the dominant architectural projects emerging as a response to climate change. They predominantly offer definite scalable measures to be implemented globally that would help humans adapt to rising sea levels and rising temperatures. Those measures are usually based on predetermined sets of values and ideas of how such adaption should look like. In contrast, speculative gestures analyzed here prove that building liveable future is not about finding one-size-fits-all solutions to human and more-than-human problems but rather, as Donna J. Haraway would have it, about conceiving better ways of "staying with the trouble" (2). The American biologist and feminist philosopher claims

that we should not aim to move out of the current eco-predicament but rather develop ways to better react to a changing environment. In this context, building should no longer be about creating fixed dwelling spaces but rather about situated practices of responding to the dynamically changing needs of humans and more-than-humans. Only then can we hope for a liveable future after climate change.

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Nine Billion Branches: A Digital Poem by Jason Nelson—the Home of Objects

Abstract

In his digital poem *Nine Billion Branches*, Jason Nelson explores various modes of belonging, which could be realized multifacetedly on corporeal, social, political, aesthetic and ecological levels. These locations range from the domestic (i.e. the bedroom, garage or living room) to the more abstract, such as the human body and language. The intricate network of relations between digital objects (rendered in the poem via a map of hypertextual links and limited interactivity) is expressed by means of kaleidoscopic, co-ordinate and not causal-effect connections. The article studies the notion of digital objects in Nelson's poem, showing how the online milieu affects the reading and interpretation processes. In this context, digital hermeneutics comes into focus, especially as regards visualizations. When discussing the selected poetic titles (their total number is 40), the article explores Harman's Object-Oriented Ontology, linking it to digitality. The article aims to analyze how following the digital paths in *Nine Billion Branches*, belonging to the world, to language, one's body and locations can be perceived as a shifting web of interactions between the digital objects and readers/players, in the everchanging text that has no beginning or end.

Keywords: digital poetry, digital hermeneutics, digital objects, Object-Oriented Ontology, Jason Nelson.

INTRODUCTION: DIGITAL OBJECTS

In *Digital Hermeneutics: Philosophical Investigations in New Media and Technologies*, Alberto Romele notices that new "technologies are self-actualizations of the digital in the world, and actualizations of the world through the digital" (11). Therefore, their mutual relations go beyond representational skills. Claiming that "hermeneutics is interpretation grown self-conscious," Ong locates hermeneutical digitalization within the new kinds and channels of information and interpretation (12–14). Following this issue further, Fickers et al. perceive the digital "hermeneutics of in-betweenness" rendering basic tenets and premises and text-oriented methods in a computerized manner, while maintaining, at the same time, divergences and places of interpretive tentativeness of both approaches in exchange (9–11). As argued earlier, digital hermeneutics is much more than a new tool for interpretation. Romele elaborates this thought:

> Digital technologies are indeed hermeneutics both in a "special" and in a "general" sense; in a special sense, they are hermeneutics because they structurally have and offer representations of the world that must be interpreted to access the world, and in a general sense, because in this field one has to be able to discriminate between the interpretive agencies of humans and non-humans. (10)

According to Romele, both humans and digital machines need to develop the competence to collaborate with one another in a non-anthropocentric manner, with the gradation of outputs, potential capabilities and limitations (143–44). In accordance with the above, he recognizes the creative input (*emagination*) and the original expertise of non-human interpretive machines (13, 143). On the simplest level, one can include in this category productive text generators. In digital hermeneutics, metaphors and symbolism are, as Romele puts it (10), operational and not only figurative, decreasing the breach between the world and what it stands for (18). According to the philosopher, digital hermeneutics moves beyond depiction, it reads and alters the world, "bridge[ing] the gap between textual narratives and material technologies," as Romele reminds one, drawing upon Coeckelbergh and Reijers (71).

Referring to digital objects, Romele introduces van den Boomen's term "material metaphors" because they are coded specifically so as to be read by machines and symbolically for people's use (101). Digital objects transcend text-image-hyperlink combinations. Yuk Hui in his study *On the Existence of Digital Objects* argues that when objects are coded into the web-based environment, they acquire an identity specific to them which distinguishes them from any other objects. This emerging

individuation process corresponds to the transition from things (*Ding*) into objects (*Gegenstand*), as pointed out by Hui with reference to Heidegger (50). As a matter of fact, Hui differentiates between two processes named by him as "*objectification of data*" and "*dataification of objects*" (50). Commenting upon Heidegger's understanding of things, Hui observes that this line of thinking along with technicality can lead to establishing "a convergence between humans and the world," where due to recognizing objects' agency, the human and the world may renegotiate their being together/apart in networked environments (41). For Hui, this turn cannot happen without recognizing the relationality of objects and Heideggerian "Dasein's being-in-the-world" which, as he stresses, is the function of belongingness (227).

188   Along with *Dasein* (being-there), Heideggerian categories of *In-der-Welt-sein* (being-in-the-world), *Mitsein* (being-with) and *Geworfenheit* (thrownness) represent different functions of belonging and modes of being.[1] In *Being and Time*, Dasein renders relationality with the world (being-in-the-world). Heidegger argues: "Dasein is never 'initially' a sort of a being which is free from being-in, but which at times is in the mood to take up a 'relation' to the world. This taking up of relations to the world is possible only *because*, as being-in-the world, Dasein is as it is" (57). Heidegger considers *Mitsein* (being-with) as a determinative condition for being-in-the-world. In accordance with the above, the philosopher states: "The world of Dasein is always a *with-world* [*Mitwelt*]. Being-in is *being-with* [*Mitsein*] others" (116). Furthermore, *Geworfenheit* (being-thrown-into-the-world) opens up a trope of speculations and interconnections; Heidegger speaks about "a mode of being in which it is brought before itself and it is disclosed to itself in its thrownness . . . *The average everydayness of Dasein can thus be determined as entangled-disclosed, thrown-projecting being-in-the-world, which is concerned with its ownmost potentiality in its being together with the 'world' and in being-with others*" (175–76). Out of these concepts being-thrown-into-the-world (*Geworfenheit*) remains the most elusive but, at the same time, in its entangled nature, seems to be most intimately related to (digital) immersion. Ryan in *Narrative as Virtual Reality 2: Revisiting Immersion and Interactivity in Literature and Electronic Media* maintains that digital immersion involves what she defines as "recentering" of potentialities into the virtual world in which interaction is a *sine qua non* condition of belonging. One could say, drawing upon Ryan's work, that digital immersion involves *being-in-the-*(virtual)*-world* and creating a network of relations within the space of mapped objects. Ryan argues that "we could not feel immersed in a world without a sense of the

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[1] See also Romele (3–5).

presence of the objects that furnish it" and appear to people in the shared digital milieu. As regards categorization of objects, Heidegger distinguishes between ready-to-hand (*Zuhandene*) and present-at-hand (*Vorhandene*) objects (Hui 16). Ready-to-hand objects are contemplated by theorizing and categorizing their essence, while present-at-hand objects exist via their interactive, everyday usability (16). This distinction with regard to objects, as Hui observes, takes into account not only relationality in logic but technicity (Simondon) as well, which has paved the way for the evolution of digital objects (16). From Heidegger's concept of *Vorhandenheit* Hui proceeds to "[d]igital objects [that] are at the same time logical statements and sources for the formation of networks" (25).

Following the same vein, Hui asks rhetorically: "What is the being-with of a digital object? Is it the screen, the keyboard, the mouse, other entities on the screen, the operating system, or the hardware. . .?", coming to the conclusion that it embraces a "totality of relations" (116). This aforementioned totality of relations is not just physical contact with the computer but overcoming boundaries implicit in thinking about digital objects as representing objects in real life. In Hui's understanding, due to their relationality, digital objects can establish milieus, systems and networks (140). Moreover, relationality becomes the first condition enumerated by Stiegler (x) when defining digital objects:

> Digital objects consist of data, metadata, data formats, "ontologies," and other formalisms that all fall within the process of grammatization, and it is as such that they form a digital *milieu* woven through these relations—alongside other objects. But this implies the possibility not just of an associated milieu but of a dissociated milieu, giving rise to new forms of both individuation and disindividuation. (xi)

Belonging rests upon relationality: the object negotiates its identification, writing itself into the network of connections with humans, their language and bodies. In the digital poem/fiction *Nine Billion Branches* by Jason Nelson, belonging is realized via digital objects to which readers/players might relate due to their assumed familiarity and recognizable location (inside the house, the human body, the public and private commercial spaces). However, the familiarity of digital objects is only apparent. As a matter of fact, objects on the screen are not the same as "ordinary objects" one can know (or claim to know) from first-hand experience or even narrated objects in the printed text. Stiegler articulates this clearly: digital objects and their environment, the computer languages in which they exist, cannot be reduced to the already known concepts (ix). Hui subscribes to this viewpoint, adding that "computation relies

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on a new type of materiality that disrupts some of the concepts that are fundamental to philosophy, for example, what is an object?" (3). Computational objects, Stiegler argues further, are "of technical essence" but they remain mysterious—"it is an object neither of experience nor of intuition" (xi). Digital objects, as claimed by Stiegler, are both created by and creating the digital environment, which, in consequence, requires different forms of interacting with the text and, in consequence, different reading habits.

In *Nine Billion Branches*, digital objects mediate between readers (players) and the text. Heim claims that "[h]ome is the node from which we link to other places and other things" (92). In his digital poem, Jason Nelson redefines the notion of "home" by offering his readers a posthuman view upon inner and outer locations, whether inside a house or human body. Nelson tells his narrative by means of objects; all the locations bear the traces of people's absence. Object-narratives in digital literature seem to draw from Object-Oriented Ontology. As if addressing this issue, Harman observes that "[a]ll objects must be given equal attention, whether they be human, non-human, cultural, real or fictional" (*Ontology* 9). He explores it further: "*Objects act because they exist, rather than existing because they act*" (260). The object narratives in *Nine Billion Branches* are defined as "local" but they gradually become entangled with home (*oikos*) ecology, fusing the home with the world. There are 40 mini-poems (called poetic tiles) linked to the objects and the reader decides which path and which story to follow. Applying a cursor and choosing a "home" path, the readers in *Nine Billion Branches* may explore the meticulously composed poetic information about objects situated in the bedroom, living room and the garage. By cursor, the audience may also choose a path of embodiment: human organs, telling their own stories, are demonstrated on an anatomical model. Finally, when going outside the house, readers may visit a mall empty of people. Following the trope of people's metaphorical and literal absence and the general reduction of human signification, gradually in the digital poem, words become objects; "the vanished real object is replaced by the aesthetic beholder herself or himself as the new real object that supports the sensual qualities" (Harman, *Ontology* 260).

Overall, the aim of the article is to study how the interactions of one's potential belonging and identifications (house, body, world) are rendered in a digital space where objects attain their agency. The structure of the article proceeds from the theoretical and methodological background, through a more detailed account of Object-Oriented Ontology via metaphors, to the interpretations of objects in the socio-political sphere and ecology.

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THE PROCESS OF INTERPRETATION AND DIGITAL LITERARY HERMENEUTICS

In the article "Towards Hermeneutic Visualization in Digital Literary Studies," Kleymann and Stange observe that the current discussion concerning digital literary hermeneutics concentrates on one main problem: how to "digitally replicate interpretive processes known from the analog world. However, a systematic effort to reflect on how the hermeneutic premises might be answered by digital technology is still missing" (sec. 19). One reason why it is missing is the refusal to acknowledge that the analog (text) and digital (works) belong not only to different media but to different modes of relating to the world. Much has been written on that subject, therefore, without going into details, let me just provide some examples. The text does not simply appear on screen to be interpreted, it can be recombined and alterered constantly, it can disappear from the screen for good after a few seconds, or it can be personally modified when camera or localizations are allowed, to name but a few differences. Reading lexia is always preceded by a sequence of movements, and if the algorithm is programmed to change the sequencing, once taken, a singular digital literary path practically cannot be reentered. All of these factors alter the dynamics of understanding the text and the context and the entire process of interpretation. Simanowski rightly argues that instead of language-centered hermeneutics, digital literature needs to focus on "a hermeneutics of intermedial, interactive, and performative signs. It is not just the meaning of a word that is at stake, but also the meaning of the performance of this word on the monitor that may be triggered by the reader's action" (32). It is hard to disagree that "[i]n terms of possibilities to reconfigure and restructure," the digital environment to a large degree allows creators freedom unattainable for analog works (Kleymann and Stange sec. 20). This freedom, as observed by Kleymann and Stange, is realized mostly in the sphere of hermeneutic visualizations; visual and auditory aspects and their relations to lexia provide the source for interpretation. What is more, Johanna Drucker in *Visualization and Interpretation: Humanistic Approaches to Display* (2020) argues that texts, graphics and music *are* to a large extent annotations themselves (62). With regard to digital objects, Drucker proposes a "nonrepresentional, . . . nonmimetic . . . and generative" (74) approach to graphical arguments, treating them as "a primary act of knowledge production" (69). Referring to the digital world and situated interactions within, Drucker points out that "[n]ot only is our view of digital objects changed, but we see the possibilities for using the digital environment to take apart the 'is-ness' of things" (61). What is more, in the understanding

of critical hermeneutics, Drucker refers to a text as "a field of potential or possibility," or "a provocation" and an act of reading/interpretation as "an intervention" (62, 4). With regard to Jason Nelson's digital poetic work analyzed in this article, this "provocation" can be aptly labelled after Ryan as "dysfunctionality," or a conscious acting against the web protocol. In *Narrative as Virtual Reality 2*, Ryan argues that dysfunctionality is always qualified but also relational in the sense that it refers to assumptions about not performing a function in relation to its usability, for instance, an aberrant application or operation of the code, tools, language, etc., in general. Dysfunctionality meticulously designed by Nelson in *Nine Billion Branches* reveals itself mostly via visualizations: the frames, red-marked graffiti made by pencil tools superimposed upon digital images; in other words, functional digitality is also deconstructed. Kleymann and Stange argue that digital visualizations under some specified conditions can become what they call a "missing link" in digital literary hermeneutics (sec. 35). Among these conditions, they underscore, drawing upon Drucker's earlier research (2016, 2018) that interpretation is not simply exhibited or represented but constructed on the screen (which itself is an "interactive and visual environment" and so is interface (sec. 36–37). What matters as well is "multiple views on the object of hermeneutic inquiry" (sec. 39), leading to multiple nonlinear and nonhierarchical relations between all digital objects involved in the process. However, as stressed by Ryan, an immersive text needs to "create a space, to which the reader, spectator, or user can relate, and it must populate this space with individuated [digital] objects." The following section will explore in detail how it is constructed in Nelson's *Nine Billion Branches.*

THE OBJECT-ORIENTED MAP OF THE HOUSE AND NAVIGATING IN-BETWEEN OBJECTS

As stated earlier, readers enter Nelson's poem/fiction via digital objects, and their multiplicity prepares them for a multi-layered "nine-billion branches" hypertextual structure. The words appear to be the see-through inscription on the interface, superimposed upon digital objects. This transparency allows access into other layers which arrange the space inside the poetry tiles. The directions are visually rendered in the form of hypertext arrows and animation. The graphics and photosensitive effects bring to mind the gaming mode of reaching subsequent levels. This association is not accidental because, apart from critically awarded digital poetry, Nelson is the author of very popular poetry games (e.g.,

Game, game, game and again game[2]). What is more, he asserts that poetry and games have much in common: for instance, the specific language that they develop. Nelson adds that in his poems, he applies strategies tested in games, such as shifting attention ("Poetic Playlands" 337, 347).[3] Further, in hotspots, readers of *Nine Billion Branches* have powers of extra zooming upon objects, studying them and observing them from a different angle. Generally speaking, employing Ryan's categorization, interactivity in *Nine Billion Branches* can be classified as predominantly external-exploratory (the reader moves in the world of objects and by exploring selected links, at their own pace, creates relations with objects but the narrative is not altered by the player's actions) and partly internal-ontological (e.g., in The Festival and "Location 4," where the player's movements in real time [or inertia] transform the environmental narrative). Overall, the interactivity of Nelson's poem's hypertextual relations might overwhelm the user with various modes, degrees and tropes of belonging.

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When studying the poem, one can follow "nine billion" hypertextual branches that might appear to arise from the giant "root-book," (Deleuze and Guattari 5) which links the code with the text. However, Deleuze and Guattari warn that the (one could say analog) "root-book" is "noble, signifying" and mimetic (5), adding that "mimicry is a very bad concept since it relies on binary logic to describe phenomena of an entirely different nature" (11). Pursuing a much more multiple, relational and heterogeneous concept of rhizome, Deleuze and Guattari explain that "the rhizome connects any point to any other point . . . it brings into play very different regimes of signs, and even nonsign states. The rhizome is reducible neither to the One nor the multiple . . . is composed not of units but . . . of dimensions. . . . directions in motion" (21). The philosophers later elaborate the notion: "A rhizome has no beginning or end; it is always in the middle, between things, interbeing. . . . alliance [whose] fabric is the conjunction, 'and . . . and . . . and . . .'" (25). Deleuze and Guattari stress that rhizome is "*a map and not a tracing*" (12). Returning to Nelson's poem, it has the form of an unranked mapping of digital objects. The poem has an intricate *database* (Ryan's category) structure with a list of locations on the homepage from which one can begin their explorations. Vectors pointing to different directions that are conspicuous on each website enable readers/players to change their route any time and at any place, hence, *database* functions like rhizome with "always . . . multiple entryways" (Deleuze and Guattari 12). The *database* structure questions the analog narrative's elements: with no linear story to unfold, no beginning or

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[2] See Tabbi (198).
[3] See O'Sullivan.

end, "and . . . and . . . and . . ." multiple possibilities. *Nine Billion Branches* does not simply shuffle the poetic files/tiles or create multiple endings, but the algorithm written according to this pattern does not by its design allow anything that can be called "the beginning" or "the end,"[4] and the visualizations assume the form of the aforementioned "directions in motion."

Even before exploring poetic tiles, viewers experience almost physically the structure of digital objects' multiple layers. Taking visualizations into account, the dynamic kinetic experience puts participants in the middle of a moving tunnel, as if they were on a ride. Vivid contrasting-color graphics surround viewers with bright red and black pulsating blocks (of data?) shifting constantly, accompanied by unnerving sound. In the interactive world of *Nine Billion Branches*, mobile images intensify an effect of in-depth immersion into the black passage leading down the rabbit hole. What is more, we are already falling down the rabbit hole "before" even activating a cursor. The optical effect of mobile "poetic tiles" only loosely and arbitrarily attached to one another ensures that the reader's narrative standpoint is constantly destabilized.[5]

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To exist, the digital poem requires active participation: should viewers not wish to meander along the navigational arrows and study more objects, the text (poem/fiction) could not come into being. Navigating an interactive path in Nelson's work is not linear but to a large extent conducted in the dark inside the carefully designed tree structure. Generally, the screen image has about two-eight active hotspots (with objects to click) to open fragments of the text. In total, *Nine Billion Branches* is made of 40 "poetry tiles"; however, the number of permutations and possible paths is much

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[4] See Punday.

[5] All the images of screenshots are placed in the text due to the courtesy and permission of Jason Nelson, for which I am grateful.

larger. Some paths intersect and bring one back to the point of departure or lead to a different tile with a new central object. The audience loses the presence of other objects only temporarily and the loss is not irredeemable. It comes at a price: the viewer must come to terms with the narrative's extensiveness and, as a result, the text's probable incompleteness, and their own limited control. Depending upon the chosen path, the reader can alter the order of "tiles" in which they appear on screen and in some cases (The Festival, Words) alter the sequence of particular words. In the majority of locations (The Bedroom, The Garage, The Living Room, The Body), should the reader choose a different path by returning to previous objects, the text will not change automatically in a combinatory algorithmic way. In such cases, the fragmented text is correlated to a given object permanently, and, as a result, what can change is the reader's perception (understanding) in the context of other objects' exploration. Overall, there are three types of navigation in Nelson's *Nine Billion Branches*: the aforementioned object-text set (rooms inside the house and organs inside the body), where clicking on a single digital object does not direct us any further, interactive text-generation (The Festival, The Words), and the Chinese box structure in the Mall whose digital objects lead to still other objects. Below is a diagram of the possible locations with regard to the Mall:[6]
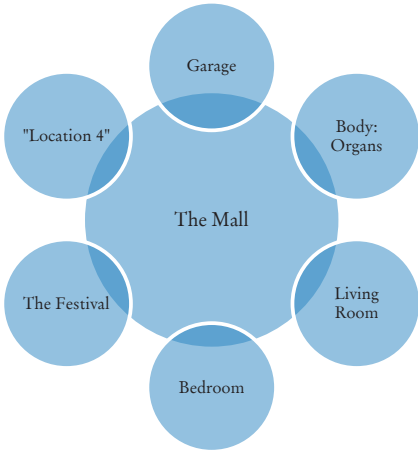
The Mall leads to the objects in the rooms, organs in the body, kaleidoscopic images of the circular sequence and separate words that become objects themselves. Furthermore, virtual locations do not define these objects; their mutual relation comes from the non-hierarchical shared online environment. The structure of the poem relies upon the

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[6] All three blue diagrams are made by the author of the article.

spatial immersion created by objects in interaction with other objects. The yellow background with a central location image framed in a square acts as a reminder of the arbitrary relations between objects, pointing to other worlds outside the main frame. Let one take the Den, or the Garage:
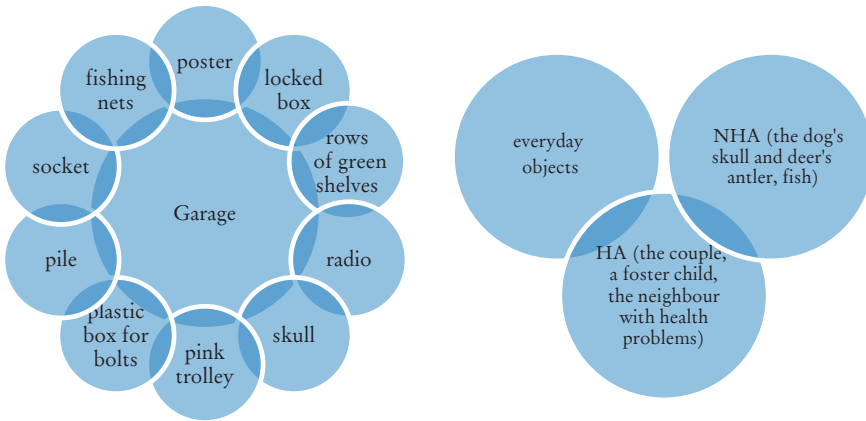
As seen above in the example of just one "room," *Nine Billion Branches* may not have exhausted the titular number of combinations that the human brain may embrace, but with all the poetic tiles and hypertext, it may well come close to it. Nelson's collage variety and the countless literary (path) options drew the attention of literary theorists. Critically, his poetic style (*I made this. you played this. we are enemies*) was appreciated for using "texts from exterior sources, fusing them with raw, open forms of original verbal and visual expression" (Funkhouser 172). What is more, like many other digital works by Nelson, *Nine Billion Branches* received wide critical acclaim (Queensland Literary Award) and was selected by Artshub as among the 10 best digital literary works.

AT HOME: THE DEMOCRACY OF OBJECTS

In *Nine Billion Branches*, the conventional division into the objects inside and outside the house does not make sense. Regardless of deep immersion, digital objects constantly refer readers to what is beyond this reality. Therefore non-categorizing between the objects (on the basis of whether they are situated inside the rooms or inside the body, outside the Mall, or are located in language) leads us to different understandings of what the world seems to be, or rather may become. In other words,

> In noticing the difference between home and the many things "outside,"
> we leave the formal definition of world and its worldhood and turn to
> the content: the things themselves that get assimilated and belong
> to the world. How do things belong to a world? Of course, the genesis
> of each world affects how the things emerge and relate to one another,
> and each world's genesis gives the things in that world a distinctive
> cast and color. (Heim 93)

Nine Billion Branches attempts to raise the question of how (digital)
objects belong to the world. On the whole, all objects, according to
Harman's Object-Oriented Ontology, regardless of whether they
are organic, non-organic, artefacts, or speculative, or imagined, are
to be regarded as on a par with others and given the same amount of
consideration (*Ontology* 9). Objects and their properties should be
differentiated and not confused; both properties and objects can be either
real or sensuous. Sensuous objects mediate between real ones and they
are strictly relational. The existence of real objects is not related to the
effect they could or could not produce (ibid.). One of the key rules of
OOO is the *withdrawal* of objects: they do not interact directly with
one another or humans (12). What is more, an object is not a sum of
parts and not as much as its impacts (53). In *The Democracy of Objects*,
instead of qualities, Levi R. Bryant focuses on the potential aptitudes
that each object has and which may vary depending upon an object
(89). Furthermore, Bryant advocates for what he calls the *subjectless*
object, "that is for-*itself* rather than an object that is an opposing pole
before or in front of a subject. . . . an object for-itself that isn't an
object for the gaze of a subject, representation, or a cultural discourse"
(19). In other words, he argues that objects exist regardless of human
existence or interpretations. Among objects Bryant enumerates e.g.,
language, intellect, artistic events, and planetary constellations, atoms
or rocks (18).

Objects in Nelson's poem, whether a small ceramic figurine, words,
the liver, a box for bolts, the forklift truck, the quilt, antlers, humans, an
animal skull, or a plastic, manufactured plant are treated as equal and none
of them is privileged over others. Moreover, in *Nine Billion Branches*,
humans are entangled in relations with other objects, but they do not
hold a principal position in these equations or control the narrative. In
his poem, Nelson demonstrates this quite explicitly: digital tiles do not
operate around people as main protagonists with nonhuman objects in the
background but the other way round. Visually, if people appear on screen
at all, they are small, blurred objects in the background, frequently masked
by red pen doodles.

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Throughout the whole poem, these apparently hand-written red graphics "achieve playfulness through dysfunctionality with respect to practical reality" (Ryan). Accordingly, Ryan stresses that dysfunctionality, apart from being the author's own ironic commentary on the text and at the same time having an aesthetic value, meditates upon the operational, social and critical dimension of the digital world's status. In the case of *Nine Billion Branches*, the red circles with the authorial annotations direct the readers' attention to the less vivid digital objects that become foregrounded dryly in this way. In terms of visualizations, the play with light and shadow and the angle of viewpoint (whose perspective the screenshot presents) remains of vital importance. For instance, in the tile below, in the shot from above, one cannot see human faces or any other details in their vague, transparent silhouettes, therefore it becomes impossible to distinguish mannequins from people:

As argued above, the red-circled "woman in pink" seems to be indistinguishable from other (human? non-human?) objects. What is more, (human? nonhuman?) mannequins are endowed with agency (they plan their positions), "singularly frozen," as if waiting to move. The alliterated "**g**ridded and **g**lassed map," reveals a calculated pattern executed on the polished, square-tiled floor. On the other hand, as the image is presented from a bird's-eye view, the grid belongs to the glass and steel ceiling. One might wonder why mannequins are called "smooth legged saboteurs," and why their bare legs are circled and linked with deliberate obstruction. Maybe their nonchalant poses are interpreted as provocative because by standing on their own, unparalleled in their singularity, they wish to maintain a degree of autonomy, instead of being grouped en masse.

What is more, there is discomfort in their positions, because mannequins are waiting for "terrible terrible" to terminate. The emphatic repetition of the adjective without a completing noun suspends the unfinished sentence in the air. As in OOO, the objects are related through their sensuous qualities, remaining withdrawn from access, as if erased from the image. Let us examine the tile below:
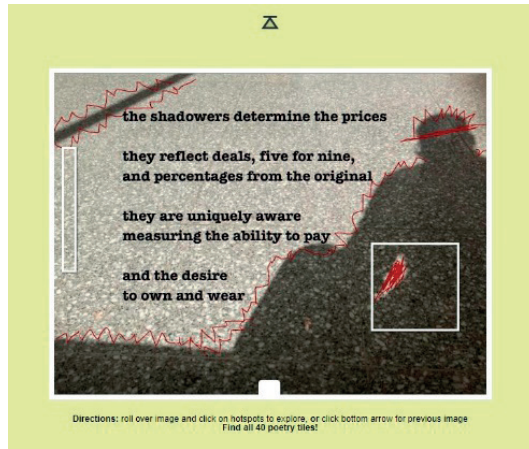
To some extent, *Nine Billion Branches* could be retitled "objects and their humans" but in OOO, object relations are non-categorized. As mentioned earlier, in Nelson's poem, there are not many silhouettes of people but the few remaining are out of focus, compared to shadows, or rather, as in the tile in question, to "shadowers." The transparent humanoid above is sarcastically crowned with the graffiti-like hand-drawn line. Being de-crowned from their special position in the Anthropocene, this mock regal insignia of ruling over all species is verbally rendered in ironic expressions: "uniquely aware" and "the desire / to own and wear." The cognitive capabilities: "reflect," "aware," "measuring," "determine," "ability to pay," numerical calculations—previously used as the instrument of exclusion—indicate in *Nine Billion Branches* that mental powers (see the ironic "percentages from the original") no longer guarantee a "unique" status, however much the purchasing power of money in late capitalism promises to make up for this loss. The red pencil drawn doodle on the shadow's side seems to signify a wound or blood. Following this line, the circled contour appears to resemble the corpse in a criminal investigation. Returning to the role of visualizations, seemingly human-made red commentaries to the image, as argued by Ryan in *Narrative as Virtual Reality 2*, imply the author's intervention, and I believe they can function as a type of internal self-interpretation to Nelson's text.

superstitious engineers built redundant escalators for the ghosts and mythical creatures they were told used the mall's cavernous spaces to train and play

Directions: roll over image and click on hotspots to explore, or click bottom arrow for previous image
Find all 40 poetry tiles!

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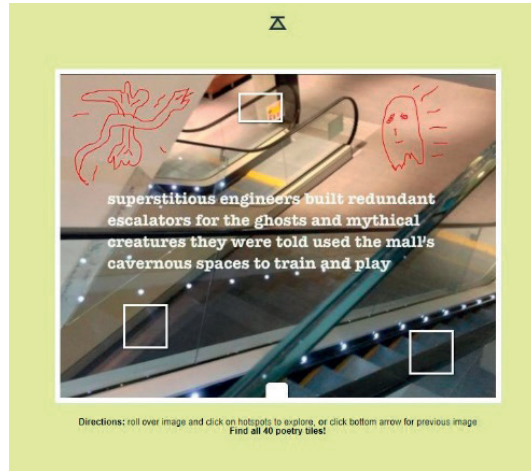
The empty elevators, uncanny (valley) mannequins and ghosts in a hollow commercial space bring to mind Romero's *Dawn of the Dead* (1978), where the closed shopping center becomes the shelter from zombies for the last humans. Nelson's mall is almost human-less: it is a hiding place of objects but also their imprisonment, it is humans who seem to be zombie-like intruders invading the territory that does not belong to them. In the tile, imaginary objects ("ghosts and mythical creatures") and their needs are taken equally seriously ("to train and play"). "Redundant escalators" imply the miscalculation in the number of users. The reference to "cavernous spaces" (the ironic connotations with nature) appears to resonate with Coleridge's "Kubla Khan" ("caverns measureless to man" 379), which remains in sync with the supernatural ambience of this poetic tile. The trope of objects' confinement in anthropomorphic representation leads readers to the passage that articulates it openly:

shrunken and frozen they are imprisoned for violent anthropomorphic acts

Directions: roll over image and click on hotspots to explore, or click bottom arrow for previous image
Find all 40 poetry tiles!
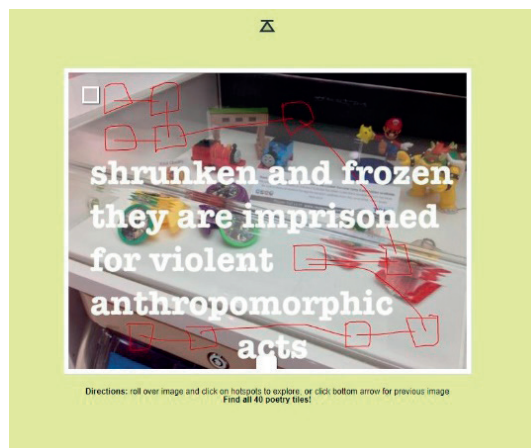
In this tile, objects pay for the violent (imposed upon them) anthropomorphic likeness with being a smaller, restrained and immobilized version of the human-centered world. The poem operates around the consonant "r" appearing in the first syllable of nouns and verbs, which intensifies the auditory effect of harshness. The enjambed and centralized "acts" leave the whole line for the modifier "anthropomorphic," giving prominence to this single word as the key concept of the whole poetic fragment. The sole word "acts" constitutes a clash between the capacity to do and the lack of mobility ("frozen"). Looking at the screenshot, one cannot help repeating after Dolores, the android in the *Westworld* series, who cites Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*: "These violent delights have violent ends" (2.6.9, 51). In other words, the statement prophesizes the need to terminate "violent anthropomorphic" representations of objects. How this order can be undone is depicted in the poetic tile below:
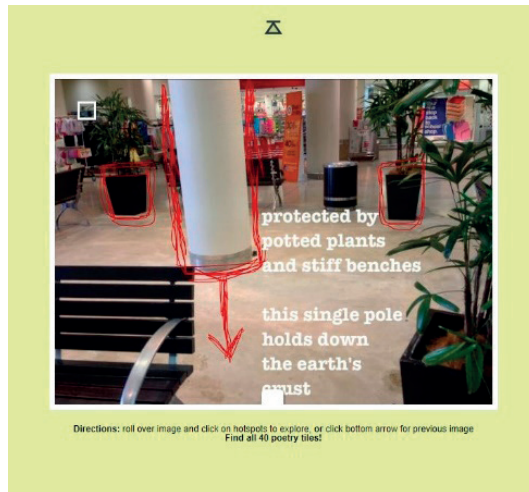
Here, the center of the world/the mall is a single pole that supports the Earth. Surrounded by other safeguarding objects (benches and potted plants), it keeps the world in its steady position. The text refers to the surface of the Earth but it does not diminish its stabilizing role. The poetic tile this time operates upon repeated plosives: **p**rotected, **p**otted, **p**lants, **p**ole. The ironic reversal of the perspective is enhanced by the red pencil arrow that seems to suggest that the pole indeed goes deep beyond the shop floor into the core of the Earth.

In conclusion, Bryant and his democracy of objects call for removing humans from the predominant position ("a redrawing of distinctions and a decentering of the human") but not, as the thinker stresses, from philosophical investigations (20). Comparable to the non-anthropocentric

narrative structure in Nelson's poem, what Bryant questions is the fact that humans do not wish to be one of many, therefore, and prefer treating other objects as what he calls *fictions* (38), "correlates or poles *opposing* or standing-before humans" (20). *Nine Billion Branches* perfectly subscribes to this statement, laying bare the ghostly and ghastly fictions of human-objects relations. However, neither Bryant in *The Democracy of Objects* nor Nelson by applying a non-anthropocentric perspective in his digital poem wish to overturn this scheme to replace it with the other extreme. In other words, the model does not work by substituting subjects with objects (Bryant 22). The philosopher concludes:

> Subjects are objects *among* objects, rather than constant points of reference related to all other objects . . . we get a variety of nonhuman actors unleashed in the world as autonomous actors in their own right, irreducible to representations and freed from any constant reference to the human where they were reduced to our representations. (22–23)

Similarly, Nelson in *Nine Billion Branches* attempts to strip objects of the human representational "fictions" and present them in relations to other objects but not as their interfaces. In other words, he encourages us "to think the being of objects unshackled from the gaze of humans in their being for-themselves" (Bryant 19).

BELONGING TO THE WORLD(S): COLLECTIVES OF HUMAN AND NONHUMAN OBJECTS

Humans and nonhumans are intertwined, as argued by Bryant in *The Democracy of Objects*, in *collectives* of human and nonhuman objects, which globally make up what people understand as the world (23–25). The collectives in *Nine Billion Branches* reveal their entanglements (Bryant borrows this concept from Barad) to readers who decide to open hotspots, selecting one of the objects framed in a square. Without this action, objects remain hidden from view. These collectives involve the belongings in the house, the humans that produced them, the humans who purchased the objects, nonhumans (plants, animals killed in hunting or in cruel experiments, given bone growth hormones) whose body parts are kept in the Garage, and many more. Bryant elucidates that "collectives involving humans are always entangled with all sorts of nonhumans without which such collectives could not exist" (25). *Nine Billion Branches*' poetic tiles provide commentary about such entanglements, human and nonhuman alike. In Nelson's poem, the emphasis is put, as one might repeat after Latour, on the act of gathering different

"materialities, institutions, technologies, skills, procedures, and slowdowns with the word 'collective'" to achieve, what he calls, "the progressive and public composition of the future" designs (59).

Nine Billion Branches has been praised by critics for commenting upon the "commercialization of public spaces and politization of private spaces" (Groth). The poem meditates in several tiles on the exploitative production of low cost, mass manufactured goods. For instance, the ceramic figurine in the Living Room contains a message not revealed to anyone, confided to an object by one of the part-time workers who made it. Overall, in *Nine Billion Branches*, objects tend to be appreciated for what they represent to humans rather than what they are. In the Living Room tile (above) the taste for foreign-looking overseas objects can "transform damage into trailer park royalty." The Bedroom narrative is one of self-deception and false pretenses. "The Not Homemade" quilt produced by machines programmed to make mistakes in sewing is meant to imitate hand-made craft, created with care and dedication. In the Bedroom, the window is covered with a rifle and the national flag which literally and metaphorically blocks the access of daylight, "polyester filter, symbolic / and generic / pride pride vague pride." The "polyester" pride of one's country, declared excessively and repeatedly, carries connotations with being a "weapon" for isolationism and xenophobia. The synthetic screen made of non-renewable petroleum symbolically fuses national and ecological chauvinism. The flag makes the room factually darker. The last line of this poetic tile refers to the proverbial rifle "aiming / towards the monsters living in the closet, hiding beneath ill-fitting shirts." The "ill-fitting shirts," are made of the aforementioned polyester, which is the political (made of petroleum) and biological (non-biodegradable) weapon itself. The speaker refers to the

filter ("We filter out the seemingly mundane of our immediate world") in a different sense in the opening paratext:

> The world, its politics and environments, conflicts
> and economies, is in peril, in disarray. We are
> flooded with tragic tales and the shameful deeds of
> others.
>
> And because of this we have lost sight of the beauty, the
> story and narrative hidden in the local, in the landscapes
> around us. We filter out the seemingly mundane of our
> immediate world. And yet it is in this immediate world where
> beauty lives, and change begins.

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In the opening lines of the paratext, the narrator enumerates several areas of focus (politics, environment, economies) that on a declarative level breed disenchantment and irritation (see "peril, disarray," "tragic tales," "shameful deeds," and "conflicts"). What appears worth noticing is that responsibility is relocated to "others" ("shameful deeds of others"), hence it means renouncing any personal/species, class, etc. accountability. The collective identification "we" appears in relation to landscapes that have to endure consequences of the hazardous actions referred to above. Consequently, the opening lexia encourages "us" to pursue beauty in the less obvious, hidden, everyday objects and scenery. One might expect the poetry of the dancing plastic bag from *American Beauty* (1999) and these associations are not entirely ungrounded. Nelson's poem is indeed political, not only because it contains an overt critique of the conservative right-wing outlook but it is political in Arendt's sense, encouraging to "act in concert," seeing politics as engagement in the collectives of others. Arendt writes: "Power is never the property of an individual; it belongs to a group and remains in existence only so long as the group keeps together" (44).

In *Nine Billion Branches*, collectives of objects encompass non-human beings as well as organic and non-organic entities. The poem shows that not only nonhuman animals lose their habitats. There is no land to grow plants, either. Plastic flowers in the Mall are "manufactured / and this plant will never transform / sunlight / and nitrogen into fibrous veins." Ironically, the object in the tile imitates the ZZ plant (*Zamioculcas zamiifolia*) which is believed to resemble the plants that survived the extinction of dinosaurs but turned plastic in late capitalism. The replacement of organic plants by their plastic substitutes seems to make sense as regards commercial market strategies. Plastic plants are cheaper to produce; they endure all weather conditions; they are easier to store, transport and sell; and, finally, they require virtually nothing of the customers. As regards power relations with

humans, the allegedly immobile plants are located below animals on the scale of deserving people's appreciation. In the poetic tile below, potted plants in the Mall are hostages "captured" by human pirates.

captured by hunters from an abandoned cruise ship, this tree's roots once held together the hull, growing through rooms, engine and sauna.

once gathered, the tree was placed here, forcing the mall's walls into straighter lines

Directions: roll over image and click on hotspots to explore, or click bottom arrow for previous image
Find all 40 poetry tiles!
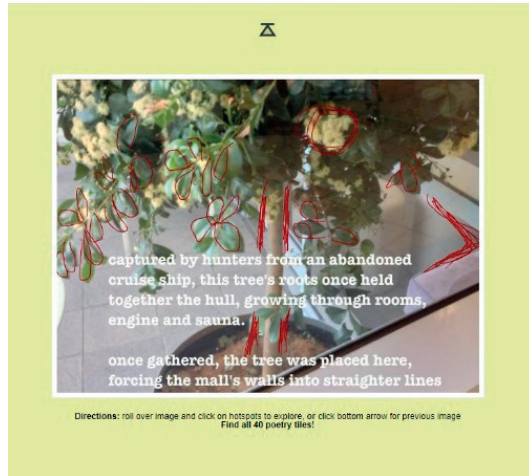
By reversing the perspective in the poem, "forcing the mall's walls into straighter lines," the poem implies that plants keep humans alive and not the other way round. In the past, the tree in the mall used to "hold the ship together" in one piece. The tile above mocks the apparent immobility of plants as the potted tree travelled all over the world on the cruise ship. In another tile, analogous to the corpse sprouting in the garden in T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* ("The Burial of the Dead"), "[i]n the spring, the tiles sprout wild, / flowers, and the tables grow vines / twisting and winding around / shopper's feet." When Eliot, drawing upon Baudelaire, calls a reader-brother in crime "hypocrite lecteur" (7) the audience of *Nine Billion Branches* seem challenged to believe in the sprouting of concrete and tiled floor in the shopping center. Nelson's digital poetry appears to be saturated with numerous intertextual references; the OOO school of philosophy correspondingly acknowledges openly its strong affiliation with art and its creative rather than communicative function (Harman, *Ontology* 44), especially with metaphors.

ART AS THE HOME OF METAPHORS

Harman claims that metaphors, like philosophy, provide what he calls a "non-literal access to the object" (260). Therefore, in the section "Five Features of Metaphor," he attributes special significance to this figure of speech, claiming

that instead of meditating on the object from the position of the observer, "[w]hat metaphor gives us, instead, is something like the thing in its own right: the infamous thing-in-itself " (86). In addition, the philosopher defines metaphors as "non-reciprocal" (one cannot reverse the relation without the change in meaning), "asymmetrical" (categories may be similar but never the same), "coupling" (they produce a new double entity), and adds that in the lack of a real object, they engage the reader/speaker (86-87).

Two metaphorical tiles chosen from *Nine Billion Branches* come from the Body section and the Mall but they both draw upon a reference to faith. In the poetic tile below, the liver is the main priest in the religion of organs. The grounds for comparison provide the spiritual qualities of the liver: being restorative and generative. The organ generously absolves humans and nonhumans from their trespasses and transgressions. The adjective "unclean" has a double meaning. The first refers to religious conviction, which tends to pass moral judgments upon one's purity, and the latter to the organ that cleanses the effects of (dietary) indulgences. The liver performs the non-judgmental liturgical service: "It forgives when we are unclean / it heals our self-harm / it pours life into our veins." The liver does not discriminate in terms of gradation of sins: even self-injurious behavior can be pardoned and cured. The mold turned into food reminds one of the origin and the end of the organic body. Searching for transcendence elsewhere, one actually carries it inside. The reader can find forgiveness in the materiality of their organ.
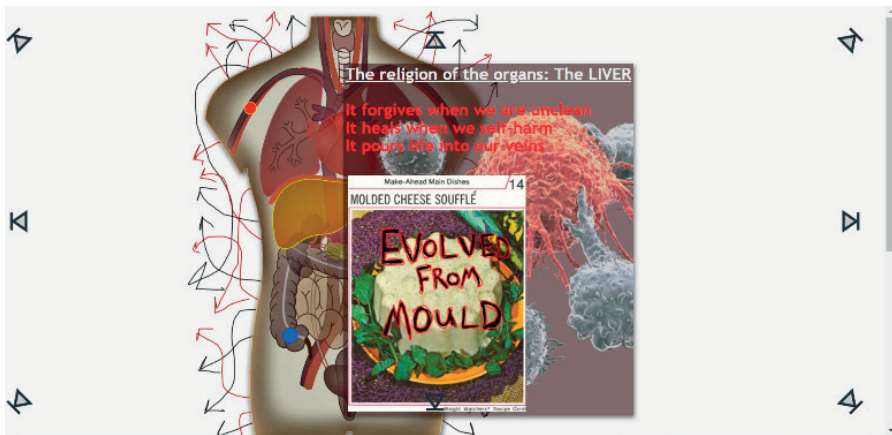
Overall, hypertexts related to nodes (vital organs in the human body) might be classified according to "three new ontological effects," as Bell calls them: "flickering, refreshment and merging" (267). The animated diagram of the human body creates an illusion of the factual item, only the arrows (signifying connections) that arise from this torso model weaken

this "realistic" effect. The liver drawing link leads to the metaphorical poem (analyzed above) about the liver's importance in the human body. What is more, it is accompanied by a digital image that looks like a "scientific" computer model of some cells (mold?) under the microscope. Therefore, as Bell puts it, readers are flickering "back and forth between the actual and the textual actual worlds," finding them to overlap at least temporarily (261). The ontological refreshment with subsequent "factual" links additionally blurs the aforementioned boundaries yet does not dissolve them. The further we go, the process of fusion between the reality on screen and the world around readers and hypertextual information intensifies. The ontological mergence happens when "the fictionalized account of a real-world event is enhanced by extratextual sources" (266). In *Nine Billion Branches,* using the same example, the ensuing links inside links introduce the cookbook recipe of the molded cheese soufflé with a dramatic inscription "Evolved from Mould," written in a font used in classic horror film openings. This way, the human liver, bacteria and dietary habits become reunited within one scare narrative.

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Comparatively, in the article "Digital Hermeneutics: From Interpreting with Machines to Interpretational Machines" (co-written with Marta Severo and Paolo Furia), to which he refers in his book, Romele applied Paul Ricœur's triple mimesis in the hermeneutic process of prefiguration, configuration and reconfiguration to digital analyses, understood as transition "from traces to data," "from data to methods" and "from methods to information" (74, 94). With *Nine Billion Branches* in mind, one can consider the first stage of mimesis as recognizing predispositions for the digital map of the Home/World to be explored, then designing/coding the spatial and narrative plan of all the locations in *Nine Billion Branches* with the external and internal links, finally allowing three ontological stages to balance the narrative with what goes beyond the fictional and beyond the initial design: namely, co-creating it with readers/players.

In the latter metaphorical tile, the shopping mall early in the morning is compared to a neo-classical temple. At first view, the consumerist mall, paralleled with the church of late capitalism, may not seem a very original idea. Additionally, Roman basilicas performed public functions and seeing analogies between capital's professed supernatural powers and the new religion may appear cliché. The architectural likeness with pillars, proportions, porticos or an empty courtyard provides the visual ground for comparison. It is hard to disagree that too close a semblance spoils the effect of metaphor and that it is better to seek what philosophers call "inessential likeness" (Harman, *Ontology* 74). However, when examining Nelson's metaphor more deeply, it appears that the supermarket-basilica is in fact a confinement for birds who beat their wings, trying to get out, and hurting their claws in this effort. The expression

"unlocking / the gates" brings to mind opening the penitentiary door. Ironically "open / to flocks of birds" means the opposite: it traps them inside. In Nelson's poem, it appears that birds tidy, "dusting / the arches," but from a human perspective, they are not welcome due to their alleged uncleanliness. The birds' painful attempt to leave the mall, rendered in "claw / carved palatial lines," evokes *A Sentimental Journey Through France and Italy* by Sterne, where the caged starling taught to imitate one sentence in human voice, kept repeating "I can't get out." What is more, the tile evokes associations with Shakespeare's sonnet LXXIII, where the trees devoid of leaves are compared to a derelict cathedral with birds as the choral group which used to sing there ("Bared ruined choirs, where late the sweet birds sang" 527), connoting the passage of time. By analogy, one can imagine the rubble from ancient times and the fall of the shopping temple to set the birds free.

for the hours between
sunrise and unlocking

the gates, this space
cathedral is open

to flocks of birds,
their wings dusting

the arches, and claw
carved palatial lines

Directions: roll over image and click on hotspots to explore, or click bottom arrow for previous image
Find all 40 poetry tiles!
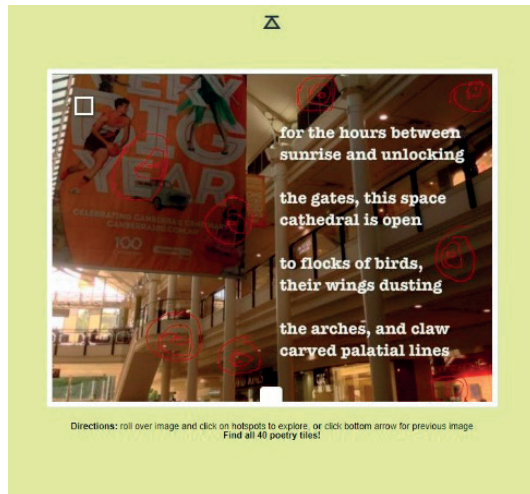
Appreciating its imaginative potential, Harman[7] explains that no metaphorical object (let us refer here to Nelson's poem directly: for example, the liver or the shopping center) can be approached in full, as he calls it, in "its inwardness," as "the thing in itself" (*Ontology* 82); in consequence, it is combined with the metaphorical qualities incorporated into the reader who substitutes the object (83). Bogost in *Alien Phenomenology, or What It's Like to Be a Thing* calls metaphors "speculating about the unknowable inner lives of units" (61). Despite his doubts, which I share, about putting the human back at the center of metaphorization, he believes that analogy is the only method of getting to know unknowable objects (64). However, the digital world offers more options to study objects than simple analogy.

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[7] See also Harman's *Art and Objects*.

The arguments for this claim are provided in the following section, i.e. shifting relations between the words, letters and the context related in the process of spectacularization.

THE *OIKOS* OF DIGITAL OBJECTS

Digital poetry as a medium can offer graphic visualizations of the aforementioned analogies realized via kinetic word-objects. When digital objects are online, which is the *sine qua non* condition of their existence, as proved by Hui, they create their own network of other objects with which they are linked via the internet. In *Nine Billion Branches*, two locations ("Location 4" and The Festival) are rendered in this way. Instead of "familiar objects," readers are presented with mobile words which are objects to be seen and looked at and not just read. In digital poetry, it is quite a frequent strategy, sometimes employed on its own and sometimes in connection with graphics or larger fragments of text. Ryan in *Narrative as Virtual Reality 2* calls such loose words "spectacles" and she refers to the process of splitting the signifier from the signified as "spectacularization," concluding that "[w]ith the full spectacularization of language, semantics no longer matters, words and letters become pure shapes, and the text takes the last step out of literature into visual art." In *Nine Billion Branches*, the past, memories and the present are marked by digital temporalities and modalities. The process brings to mind Hui's individuation understood as the underlying forces in which digital objects are making and remaking their status, "renegotiating [their] relations with other objects, systems, and users within their associated milieux. Digital objects also take up the functions of maintaining emotions, atmospheres, collectivities, memories, and so on" (57). In the case of "Location 4" and The Festival, readers' actions and affective reactions (the quickness of the cursor) can produce meaningful change in the content's generation.

"location 4"
— Methodist Church in Kansas
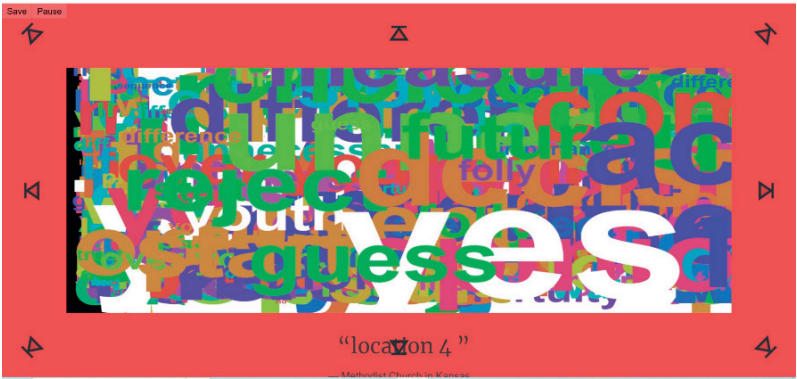
Each word in "Location 4" seems to move in separation; the connections between them are open and temporary. Word-objects appear quickly layered one on another, making the reading process almost impossible for humans. Terms such as "accept, different, guess, important, measure, slow, opinion, decision, etc.," can be of different color and size; however, those with positive connotations are always colorless. Such transparent capitalized writings (e.g., Youth, You, Future, Yes) provide hope for the world's new direction. However, without readers' engagement, the transparent concepts get covered entirely by colorful and more expansive words and they disappear under them. The objects' appearance and their pace is related to participants' cursor activity. As in most text-generators, the number of combinations makes seeing exactly the same screen very unlikely. It takes a lot of clicking to evoke this big YES out of randomly appearing words on the screen, YES resembling the ending of Molly Bloom's soliloquy in Joyce's *Ulysses*, in which she embraces the sensuality of the world declaring "and yes I said yes I will YES" (933). Yes to collectives and the democracy of objects, to their non-discriminative treatment and the home (*oikos*) that exists as the accumulation and relationality of objects.
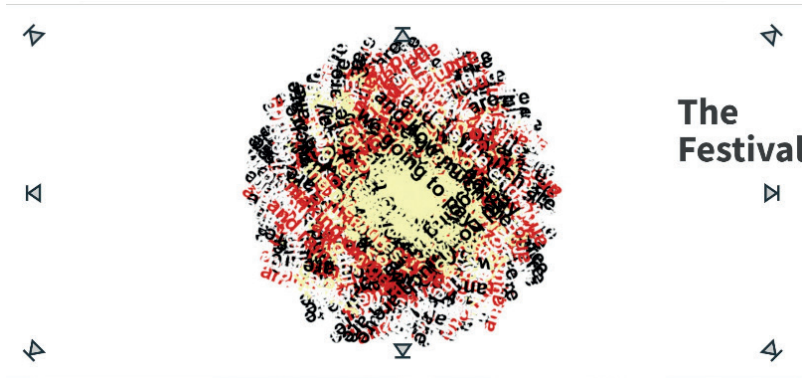
In "The Festival," the mobile sentence uncoils and coils into a spiral (a metaphor of the hermeneutic circle?), making and un-making itself. At the beginning (see the screenshot above), it is structured in the shape of a globe, but one cannot read any words yet. Left on its own, kinetic graphics gets unknotted and expands continuously, words become bigger and bigger until they obscure the whole screen, creating a claustrophobic and suffocating effect. When the sentence unwinds further, readers can see that it raises the ecological and global question, "how much are we going to pay making rain and oxygen?" While occupying the entire screen-space, images seem to use up all the oxygen. No sooner than the reader gets involved dynamically by moving the cursor repeatedly,

the accumulation of the dense words decreases. Navigating the cursor, the reader as if literally cleanses and oxygenates the screen/world; however, one has to do it continuously because without the player's engagement, the text nearly immediately refabricates and reestablishes itself, claiming back the screen. The screenshot below shows the text's reaction to the multiple clicking on the right-hand bottom of the screen.

Both of these interactive images illustrate how much being engaged in the ecology of things, at the level that Latour calls "common dwelling, the *oikos*" (180) can produce operational effects not only in the case of deoxygenation. Latour stresses that from the earliest times *oikos* meant the dwelling for human and nonhuman collectives before it became an exclusionist and anthropocentric concept. He argues:

> One's home, habitat, or dwelling is called *oikos* in Greek. Commentators have often been astonished at the fate of the word "ecology"—"habitat science," used to designate not the human dwelling place but the habitation of many beings, human and nonhuman, who had to be lodged within a single palace, as in a sort of conceptual Noah's ark. (131)

In conclusion, the structure of my analyses of *Nine Billion Branches* operated around the digital layers intersecting with the image of home with unordered collectives of objects. Latour's thought best summarizes the assumption underlying this article: "It is to the *topos*, the *oikos*, that political ecology invites us to return. We come back home to inhabit the common dwelling without claiming to be radically different from the others" (224). *Nine Billion Branches* embraced home for digital objects, metaphors, words and different ways of belonging to them. The methodological background for these interpretations came from philosophers and thinkers associated with several branches of Object-Oriented Ontology. In my

analyses, I attempted to prove that "digital technologies are structurally hermeneutic" (Romele 10), which in my case studies was argued with regard to digital visualizations. In the aforementioned explorations, digital objects are not treated as figurative representations or humans' projections; they exist autonomously, on their own terms. The autonomy of the objects is best rendered in the poem's rhizomatic structure, based upon nonhierarchical connections with no end or beginning. Apart from their aesthetic value, the digital hermeneutic visuals that Nelson aptly uses in his work provide additional commentary on the text in terms of its social, political and ecological dimensions.

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THE PHANTASMAGORIC AND THE REAL HOME: BETWEEN UTOPIA AND MATERIALITY

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Breaking the Promise of Perfection: Imperfect Utopias in Marge Piercy's *Woman on the Edge of Time*

ABSTRACT

Abstract: In an era still plagued by popularized skepticism toward utopian thought, Marge Piercy's 1976 novel *Woman on the Edge of Time* remains a compelling exploration of potential futures. This essay juxtaposes anti-utopian critiques of perfection, violence, and instrumental rationalism with Piercy's portrayal of both utopian and dystopian worlds. By examining these critiques alongside the novel, this essay argues for a reinterpretation of utopia beyond the assumptions of promised perfection. Rather, this essay embraces the flawed nature of the human condition and claims imperfection as a central feature of utopia itself.

Keywords: utopia, science fiction, perfection, technology, hope.

"The story—from *Rumpelstiltskin* to *War and Peace*—is one of the basic tools invented by the human mind, for the purpose of gaining understanding. There have been great societies that did not use the wheel, but there have been no societies that did not tell stories."

(Le Guin 27)

Amidst the bleakness of late-stage capitalism, environmental degradation, and global violence, the possibility of hopeful futures seems to fade. One study finds that, while over half of the American public is "extremely worried" about what lies ahead, one in four Americans explicitly say that "nothing made them hopeful" (Clary). Outside of the United States, when reflecting on a world post-coronavirus, French writer and provocateur Michel Houellebecq remarks: "We will not wake up after the lockdown in a new world. It will be the same, just a bit worse" (Paris (AFP)). Yet, it is not only a world worsened by a global pandemic that causes such despair, for climate change continues to remain one of the greatest perceived threats expressed by many Europeans (Poushter and Huang). Beyond the research data, these grave concerns take narrative form in various dystopian science fiction or climate fiction novels such as Kim Stanley Robinson's *New York 2140* or Cherie Dimaline's *The Marrow Thieves*.

However, although those educated in the United States have been "primed by such [anti-utopian] propaganda to reject utopian thinking . . . such thinking doesn't die easily" (Featherstone). In fact, what we find in these novels is not merely a grim look at what lies ahead, but a commitment to hope for more. Whether that hope is for better things to come or the hope that things do not get any worse, many of these novels can be characterized as "surprisingly utopian" (Rothman). Thus, for all the growing despair outlined above there also exists much hopeful discourse about utopian possibilities. Consider how explicitly utopian thought has made its way into the popular press with Joanna Macy and Chris Johnstone's *Active Hope: How to Face this Mess We're in without Going Crazy* or Rutger Bregman's *Utopia for Realists: How We Can Build the Ideal World*. Even more, Kristen R. Ghodsee's 2023 publication *Everyday Utopia: What 2,000 Years of Wild Experiments Can Teach Us About the Good Life* reminds us of those who—throughout history and continents—have experimented with alternative worldbuilding and how we might persist today.

Following the spirit of these texts, this essay argues against mainstreamed anti-utopian worldviews and claims that imperfection belongs to utopia itself. The essay focuses on Marge Piercy's *Woman on the Edge of Time* as an exemplary utopian science fiction novel that both celebrates possible futures and critiques contemporary US society. I will

first outline arguments against utopia (which are as popular or more so than the claims of Bregman, May and Johnstone, and Ghodsee who admit in their own writing the existence of such backlash). I will then explore Piercy's world of Mattapoisett and its relation to suffering, violence, and technology. Finally, I will conclude by asserting the importance of embracing imperfect futures to confront present challenges and incite action.

ANTI-UTOPIAN ARGUMENTS: VIOLENCE AND INSTRUMENTAL RATIONALISM

> "More blood has been shed in the twentieth century on behalf of bureaucratic calculation, racial purity, ethnic solidarity, nationalism, religious sectarianism and revenge than utopia."
>
> (Jacoby, *The End of Utopia* 167)

In popular conversations about utopias, it is common to hear such projects linked to the dream of a perfect society. There exists a commonly held belief that utopian societies are flawless, complete, and in no way lacking —as if they exist without labor, pain, or conflict. Although these notions might appear encouraging on the surface, when the idea of perfection becomes linked to utopianism it risks becoming a political weapon that provides fuel for opposition. The anti-utopian argument claims, as utopian scholar Lyman Tower Sargent recounts, that "a perfect society can only be achieved by force; thus, utopianism is said to lead to totalitarianism and the use of force and violence against people" (9). If perfection becomes the goal of utopianism, it requires a perfect blueprint from which a perfect people would not be allowed to deviate for fear of lowering or weakening its quality. Finally, the criticism goes, one must use the force of a strong, centralized government (and eventual dictatorship) to uphold the plans, manage the people, and achieve the perfected utopia (Sargent 24).

Drawing on the legacy of liberal anti-utopians from Karl Popper to Isaiah Berlin, Russell Jacoby puts it this way: "Utopia has lost its ties with alluring visions of harmony and has turned into a threat. Conventional and scholarly wisdom associates utopian ideas with violence and dictatorship. The historical validity of this linkage, however, is dubious" (*Picture Imperfect* 66). The anti-utopian critique of inevitable violence starts from a misunderstanding of utopia as the pursuit and promise of perfection and should remain suspect. For as Sargent notes, "[p]eople do not 'live happily ever after'; even in More's *Utopia*" (6). When we loosen the expectation

of perfection from utopianism, we allow more room for complex sociality and alternatives to the mundane. As we will see in *Woman on the Edge of Time*, Piercy's approach to and depiction of a utopian future is not one that strives toward perfection as there exist many of the same conflicts that will always arise with being human: disagreement, suffering, and death. Distancing utopianism from the assumption of promised perfection invites the truth of the human condition into its design.

Alongside the critique of perfection and violence, claims of instrumental rationalist thinking come into view. In her essay "Rehabilitating Utopia: Feminist Science Fiction and Finding the Ideal," Claire P. Curtis examines Michael Oakeshott's claim that utopianism "outlines the type of thinking that understands the problems of the world as solvable, and the blueprint for the best society as simply another problem to be solved" (151). At the crux of his argument is the view that although instrumental rationalism may be helpful in some areas of work, it has no place in politics. When such thinking does show up in politics, it too often becomes hyper focused on technique, outcome, and achieving perfection. As such, this approach is flawed as it denies the fluid, non-productive aspects of humanity in politics. Curtis puts it this way: "The perfection here is not even the abstract and perhaps laudable Form of the Good but rather a perfection of a puzzle with every piece in its place. It is a perfection where problems are solved solely for the purpose of being able to provide closure to a project" (151).

Hermeneutically, this critique of utopianism echoes Martin Heidegger's critique of calculative thinking. In the "Memorial Address," Heidegger warns of a flight from such thinking so that everything now falls into the clutches of calculation and automation. He writes: "Calculative thinking computes ever new, ever more promising and at the same time more economical possibilities. Calculative thinking races from one prospect to the next . . . [it is] not thinking which contemplates the meaning which reigns in everything that is" (*Discourse* 46). If we place this understanding alongside the danger of instrumentalism, we recognize technology as a bind between both concepts. Where calculative thinking mirrors and influences technology, instrumentalism fuels science's belief that all problems are measurable and solvable with technology, including the technique of trying to organize sociality.

Although science fiction has often been thought of as giving voice to the fears and desires of modernity, it remains at risk of instrumentalist critiques because such works often imagine lofty technological advances such as space travel or artificial intelligence as unmatched solutions. However, *Woman on the Edge of Time* avoids this very dependency on calculative automation by showcasing a tempered, non-anxious relationship to technology. Thus, although the utopian world of Mattapoisett has

made important scientific and technological advances, their relationship to technology is such that they "use technical devices as they ought to be used, and also let them alone as something which does not affect [their] inner and real core," as Heidegger writes (*Discourse* 54). With this, Piercy has imagined a world where our relation to technology opens up more meaningful ways of relating to one another without becoming bound to fixed solutions and devices.

UTOPIAN POSSIBILITY AS CONSTANT STRUGGLE

"The situation is bad, yes, okay, enough of that; we know that already. Dystopia has done its job, it's old news now, perhaps it's self-indulgence to stay stuck in that place any more. Next thought: utopia. Realistic or not, and perhaps especially if not."

(Robinson par. 9)

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Although Marge Piercy's *Woman on the Edge of Time* is considered a classic of utopian science fiction, the novel's utopian world of Mattapoisett is always at risk of being overtaken by dystopian possibilities. Set in the late 20th century, the narrative follows the life of Consuelo (Connie) Ramos, a Hispanic woman living in a world of poverty, sexism, and institutional violence. As Connie struggles to survive in a mental hospital, she discovers her ability to communicate with Luciente, a woman from the future who lives in the utopian society of Mattapoisett. As the novel unfolds, the reader joins Connie on her time-warping journey between her present world, the at-risk utopian future, and ever-looming dystopian threat. *Woman on the Edge of Time* acts not only as a mirror of our contemporary world but also responds to many of the critiques outlined above by examining perfection, violence, and technology.

At first glance, Mattapoisett seems perfect: everyone has shelter, food, and water which are maintained through environmentally conscious and sustainable means. Children are respected, cared for, and autonomous. There is an emphasis on wellness through community resources and mental support. People choose meaningful, uplifting work and no one suffers in monotonous jobs. Holidays are frequent, as are cultural festivals celebrating art and creativity. Thus, in many ways, Mattapoisett appears idealistic and flawless. But appearances can be deceptive and Piercy knows perfection is neither the promise nor possibility of utopianism as it cannot be separated from the deeply imperfect (which is to say human) beings.

In sharing her confusion over the lack of perfection in Mattapoisett, Connie and Luciente sketch some of the irresolvable tensions between humanity and the desire for a perfect society:

> "Yeah, and you still go crazy. You still get sick. You grow old. You die. I thought in a hundred and fifty years some of these problems would be solved, anyhow!"

> "But, Connie, some problems you *solve* only if you stop being human, become metal, plastic, robot computer." (Piercy 118)

Despite Connie's expectations of a utopian society, the community is still bound by the universal human experiences of aging, illness, and mortality. As in our own communities, jealousy, conflict, and hurt exist because these experiences are part of what it means to try and live well with others, even if that means it is painful. Thus, although our conceptions of utopia can be erroneously equated to a perfected, completed state, Mattapoisett showcases the possibility of better futures without erasing humanity's inevitable flaws and irresolvable tensions. In the passage above, Piercy reminds readers that misunderstanding utopia as perfect means misunderstanding the nature of our own becoming. Put differently, the world of Mattapoisett exists not because humans have overcome their humanity, but because they have learned to dwell together better through the hermeneutic endeavor of learning from history and caring for one another.

Still, although Mattapoisett appears serene, the journey was anything but peaceful. This is difficult because as the arguments outlined earlier show, critics argue that utopia can only be brought about through violent means. However, this argument obscures how critics use the fear of violence to halt utopian worldbuilding and distract from present-day violence. In *Woman on the Edge of Time*, Connie's present world is inundated with violence as she suffers under capitalism, white supremacy, and patriarchy. For example, when Connie attacks a pimp for beating and abusing her sister, Connie is forcibly locked away in a mental hospital. Her story is neither taken into consideration nor believed. Instead, "[a] bargain had been struck. Some truce had been negotiated between the two men over the bodies of their women. . . . She was human garbage carried to the dump" (Piercy 25). What Connie names here is the violence of institutional power partnered with men's decision-making, lack of autonomy, and denigration from personhood to objecthood. In Luciente's world, although the existence of Mattapoisett is relatively peaceful, the road was lined with war and death. Moreover, Mattapoisett is presently engaged in battle against

those who wish to bring about an altogether dystopian future. Thus, the existence of Mattapoisett must be defended violently against violence. "Power *is* violence. When did it get destroyed peacefully? We all fight when we're back to the wall . . ." Luciente states (Piercy 359). Despite Mattapoisett's desire for peace, the citizens also understand that violence is always a human possibility (and at times a necessity) in defending its existence. Thus, Piercy moves away from condemning violence outright and argues that it is justified when trying to bring about a better world. In this way, Mattapoisett's history and potentiality challenge simplistic notions of building more harmonious worlds without confronting the oppressive realities of power structures.

The understanding of violence as a survival tool of the oppressed to bring about a utopian future is both aligned with and counter to anti-utopian critiques. It is in alignment insofar as it agrees that working toward a better future can often become violent. However, it runs counter to critiques because it points out the present violence of systems of power and marks them as the initiator of violence and an obstacle on the path toward utopianism. From Piercy we learn to identify the violence already at hand and not become immobilized by the threat of violence of a different shape. By situating Mattapoisett between Connie's violent world and the threat of a dystopian future, we learn that utopian societies are not immune to or above violence but are shaped and informed by it. To be clear, this is not to make light of violence and suffering. Rather, it is to say that a violent world still holds the possibility of a utopian future, even if the path is bloody.

POSSIBILITY AND PROMISE

> "So utopianism involves a certain distance from the political institutions which encourages an endless play of fantasy around their possible reconstructions and restructurations."
>
> (Jameson, "The Politics of Utopia" 46)

Piercy's depiction of Mattapoisett simultaneously sets into relief the growing horror of Connie's 1970s and the barely-restrained terror of an alternative future: a hyper-capitalist patriarchal society where the wealthy elite live in space and exploit the (polluted) Earth-bound populations through total technological control of minds and bodies. Although Connie spends most of her time jumping between New York City and Mattapoisett in a fanciful literary time travel, Piercy suggests the utopian future is never guaranteed. Luciente tells Connie: "Those of your time who fought hard for change, often

they had myths that a revolution was inevitable. But nothing is! All things interlock. We are only one possible future" (Piercy 169). While Mattapoisett represents one potential outcome—a world shaped by solidarity and hope—the dystopian future serves as a chilling possible alternative.

Moreover, the distinction between possibility and promise is worth considering, as both the utopian and dystopian futures remain possible but only one has kept its promise. Because of Mattapoisett's imperfections, it is possible (and necessary) to prioritize human relationships and communal well-being over material wealth and power. In contrast, the dystopian future promises perfection through the relentless pursuit of capital, technological domination, and environmental destruction. By keeping its promise, the dystopian future exploits individuals, destroys communities, and plunders the environment for the sake of the immense production of capital and reinforcement of hierarchies.

In chapter 15, during a time traveling episode, Connie accidently lands in a dystopian future where she meets Gildina: "a contracty . . . cosmetically fixed for sex use" (Piercy 290). In this world, middle-class women survive on short-term sex contracts, processed food, and forced confinement. However, Gildina notes this life is privileged in comparison to the poor classes. In speaking of them she says: "It's not like they're people. They're diseased, all of them, just walking organ banks. . . . It isn't like they have any use" (282). This portrayal showcases capitalism's promise to focus on markets and profits above human dignity and wellbeing. In Gildina's world, the poor have been reduced to a commodity in the form of being an organ bank, valued only as useable fragments for the wealthy. Fredric Jameson puts it this way: "[B]y its transformation into a commodity a thing, of whatever type, has been reduced to a means for its own consumption. It no longer has any qualitative value in itself, but only insofar as it can be 'used'" ("Reification" 131). Thus, any sense of self, being, or value becomes swallowed up by the world of capitalism and transformed into a commodity. As such, capitalism keeps what we might call its "structural promise" to value humans only as commodities—as objects that must be made to produce for the owning classes.[1]

This promise is further reinforced through corporate ownership of people. Gildina tells Connie: "Now we all belong to a corporate body. . . . I belong to Chase-World-TT" (Piercy 290). With this, readers are invited to examine the less explicit but equally pervasive ways in which we presently belong to corporations under capitalism. Not only does the reach of corporate influence extend across economic, political, and cultural

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[1] This idea parallels and intensifies Connie's experience in the mental hospital where she was "human garbage carried to the dump" as stated in the previous section (Piercy 25).

realms, but workers must sell their labor in exchange for a chance at survival, while corporations prioritize shareholder and executive interests. Ultimately, Gildina is "only a cog in the corporate machine . . . she will be dismantled and recycled into the organ bank as a consequence of her illegal conversation with Connie" (Neverow 25). This grim outcome shines a harsh, telling light onto capitalism's relentless pursuit of profit and its disregard for human dignity and autonomy. In the end, capitalism keeps its promise of continued exploitation and dehumanization of workers for the benefit of the wealthy classes.[2]

"So that was the other world that might come to be," Connie thinks to herself after leaving Gildina (Piercy 291). While the "might" in her phrase may invite a moment of hope, it should also act as a cautionary possibility. Until this point, Connie does not fully understand the concept of many possible futures. However, after this chapter, it is clear to both Connie and the reader that there are no promises for a utopian future. There is neither a promise of its arrival nor its perfection. Instead, all that is offered is the possibility. On the other hand, it is painfully clear if the reign of an unrestricted free market continues to organize the whole of human behavior, it will do nothing but guarantee the prioritization of profit over humans, relationships, and land. Chapter 15 acts as a lynchpin of the novel that, although brief, reorients us to the promised uncertainty of the future. It serves as a stark reminder that under this kind of working logic, although the public promise suggests everyone has a chance at the best of a quasi-utopian future, capitalism's hidden guarantee is that there is not room for everyone in this picture.

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TEMPERING TECHNOLOGY

> "Yet, in its addiction to scientific-technological solutions for human progress, modern culture remains stubbornly blind to accumulated human wisdom and the need for articulating the good life."
>
> (Zimmermann 18)

When considering a utopian novel with a futuristic society, it is no stretch to assume a technologically advanced landscape full of space travel and robots. However, when Connie mysteriously time travels from her life in

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[2] This chapter's portrait of environmental degradation due to capitalism is also worthy of investigation. The poor classes are forced to live outside on Earth where the air is so polluted that one cannot see but a few feet in front of them through the yellowed fog. On the other hand, the middle class lives their entire life indoors and the wealthy classes are living on platforms in space. This novel offers much in terms of an environmental- or climate-focused approach to fiction and nature's role in utopian and dystopian landscapes.

1970 and arrives in Mattapoisett in 2137, she looks around and stammers: "[I]t's not like I imagined" (Piercy 62). Instead of a chrome cities and skywalks, she finds a serene, pastoral space filled with small buildings, green gardens, and lazy cows. She notices bicycles and people on foot as clothes line-dry in the distance. Thus, in Connie's mind, things seem to have regressed to a time of peasantry. But as the story unfolds, we learn that Mattapoisett is not technologically primitive. Rather, it learned from past technologically primitive, socially advanced societies in order to develop a non-anxious attachment to technology. Thus, Mattapoisett approaches technology as a means to reduce power hierarchies and increase connection without obscuring our interpretive, contemplative way of being.

Of the technologies present in Mattapoisett, many machines exist to remove tedious, menial jobs from society such as mining or sewing comforters. When asked why, Luciente responds: "Who wants to go deep into the earth and crawl through tunnels breathing rock dust and never seeing the sun? Who wants to sit in a factory sewing the same four or five comforter patterns?" (122). Through this, we learn that Mattapoisett strives to prioritize life-giving, creative vocations. Thus, residents use technology not to remove labor, but to allow for more satisfying opportunities. Put differently, Mattapoisett understands that we must limit technology, so it does not smother our human desire for meaningful pursuits and creative work.

Although Connie experiences these technologies as generally pleasant (albeit confusing), when she learns of the technology that allows babies to be born without pregnancy (the brooder), she feels particularly terrified. "Mother the machine," she thinks to herself in fear (95). Until this point, technology and machines seem to have been used to improve human lives, but Connie sees the brooder as something that interferes with and constricts life. Luciente explains that during the long revolution, in order for there to be no power for anyone, women needed to relinquish their power to give birth.[3] "Cause as long as we were biologically enchained," she explains, "we'd never be equal. And males never would be humanized to be loving and tender" (98). Not only is this technology employed to dismantle power, but the brooder also breaks the bonds between culture and physical appearance to remove racism. Luciente notes: "We want diversity, for strangeness breeds richness" (97). Thus, residents have employed technology in an attempt to dismantle power hierarchies in all areas of life.

Surely, the impulse to solve such problems makes rational sense; however, it also risks falling into the anti-utopian critique of instrumentalism as outlined in the second section of the essay. For in each

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[3] We can infer this idea stems from Shulamith Firestone's *The Dialectic of Sex: The Case for Feminist Revolution*.

of these examples, Piercy approaches tedious jobs and power structures as problems to be solved with technology. Yet, to be clear, problem-solving is not the issue. Part of utopianism is recognizing issues and trying to create better solutions. But when the reign of rationalism becomes paired with technology, it can quickly slip into a compulsion of endless automation without regard for humanity. Jameson writes, "[U]nder capitalism, the older traditional forms of human activity are instrumentally reorganized and 'taylorized,' analytically fragmented and reconstructed according to various rational models of efficiency" ("Reification" 130). In this dynamic, instrumentalism and endless technological expansion suffocate human flourishing by restructuring it along the lines of means and ends. Turning to Heidegger, instrumental rationalism is thoughtless because it encourages a flight from contemplation and meaning and instead, opts for the quickest, most efficient ways to fix problems (*Discourse* 46). Thus, without closer attention, *Woman on the Edge of Time* risks falling prey to such critiques.

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However, because Piercy embraces the transformative possibilities of technology, this novel acts as an imaginative space to sort through problems while keeping humans and communities at the forefront. By attending to real power imbalances in society and attempting to re-envision relations to work and family outside the traditional structure, Piercy advocates, as Curtis writes, that "technology can and should be harnessed to improve the conditions of human life in such a way that allow the business of human life to continue" (158). In the same vein, even though Heidegger condemns calculative thinking, he does not naively dismiss all technology. He writes: "It would be foolish to attack technology blindly. It would be shortsighted to condemn it as the work of the devil" (*Discourse* 53). Heidegger continues to advocate for saying both "yes" and "no" to technology so that we recognize its use but "deny [it] the right to dominate us, and so to warp, confuse, and lay waste our nature" (54). Such laying waste to human nature would be to obscure us from our poetic, meditative existence and unleash a world where calculation and rationalism become not only the best, but the only way of being.

Piercy carries this warning close as her depictions of technological advancements in Mattapoisett seek never to maim the nature of humans. Rather, she invokes a tempered approach to technology as a way to preserve our essential nature. Technology in Mattapoisett seeks to address issues of tedious work and power hierarchies so that residents might be released from these things and liberated toward themselves and their community. Released from demoralizing jobs, residents are free to find meaningful work. Released from biology and the nuclear family, both men and women are unrestrained in their ability to choose parenthood and connection. As

such, humans' relation to technology in the novel is an attempt to solve problems while simultaneously facilitating more meaningful ways of being.

Because Piercy is not oblivious to the dangers of technology and rationalism unchecked, she also presents the reader with a threatening look at rampant technological advancements outside Mattapoisett. In Connie's world of 1970, she has been selected as a test subject for a brain procedure that will control emotions and violence. As the doctors test the new procedure on patients, they hold the control device and proclaim: "You see, we can electrically trigger almost every mood and emotion— the fight-or-flight reaction, euphoria, clam, pleasure, pain, terror!" (Piercy 196). What is seen as exciting new technology to doctors and investors is experienced as invasion, loss of autonomy, and exploitation to patients.

Harking back to the potential dystopian future discussed in the previous section, Piercy hints at a trajectory from this procedure to the dystopian world dominated by technology, control, and capital. In the dystopian future, the mind-control technology being tested on Connie has made way for "sharpened control" where people of poorer classes have been technologically modified to "turn off fear and pain and fatigue and sleep, like [they've] got a switch. . . . [They] can control the fibers in [their] spinal cord, control [their] body temperature" (Piercy 288). When Gildina (the cosmetically modified and contracted sex slave) introduces her pimp she says: "He's a fighting machine . . . he's real improved. He has those superneurotransmitters ready to be released in his brain that turn him into just about an Assassin" (289). In both passages, the relationship to technology is one of control and instrumentality. In an attempt to do away with the imperfect elements of human nature (i.e. emotion, physical responses, sexuality), technology and a commitment to instrumentality becomes the means by which to dominate human physiology and consciousness. In this way, Piercy exposes the violence of a thoughtless, technology-crazed society in which the desire for perfection strips humans of their sensitivity and replaces it with cold automation.

Thus, Connie's charge is to fight against a world that bends toward technological domination and instrumental rationalism. If we agree with Heidegger, then we know this charge is not unlike our own. He writes: "[T]he attack of the technological language on what is peculiar to language is at the same time the threat to the human being's own most essence" ("Traditional" 141). For as the relentless grip of technology tightens, we must fight to break free as its attack threatens not just our material world but also our very being. In her own critique of technology and instrumentalism Luciente notes: "[W]hy try to control everything? . . . we think control interferes with pleasure and with communing—and we care about both" (Piercy 110). Because Piercy cares about human flourishing, she

uses the novel as a place to practice thinking through a non-anxious, non-dominating relationship to technology to improve lives in Mattapoisett. In this way, the constant struggle of utopia also includes a constant fight against technical domination and ceaseless negotiation of our relationship to technology as problem-solving.

CONCLUSION

"Yet we all hope to resist . . . But we must do that by leaving behind the cruel, dystopian system in which we live. It is worth noting that we already possess all the necessary tools to achieve this."

(Taşkale 357)

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Marge Piercy's *Woman on the Edge of Time* still serves as a timely narrative and testament to the struggle between utopian possibility and the looming promise of violence and technological domination if we continue current ways of living. Although popularized ideas and anti-utopian arguments equate utopia with flawless perfection, Piercy challenges these notions by sketching Mattapoisett and its citizens as imperfect (and fully human) in their approach to relationships, politics, and world-building. And yet, we find that such utopian projects can still be guided by principles of solidarity, community, and flourishing without demanding complete perfection.

Furthermore, Piercy anticipates the reign of technology and the pull of instrumental rationalism in shaping our relationship to violence and control. Although Mattapoisett enacts a tempered relationship to technology, the dystopian future depicted in chapter 15 showcases the detriment on our horizon were technology and systems of power to continue unchecked and unrestrained. As Piercy places Connie's present, the utopian future, and the dystopian threat in conversation with one another, readers are encouraged to develop a critical understanding of how each of these three worlds showcase threats and possibilities on our horizon.

In considering our present reality, it becomes increasingly clear that we may be closer to the dystopian future depicted in chapter 15 than we are to the utopian future of Mattapoisett. As our own world careens toward climate crises, economic collapse, and relational exhaustion, holding fast to an empty promise of perfection only closes us off from better futures. When escaping the mental hospital Connie thinks to herself: "[I]f she didn't seize what chance she has, if she didn't leap into the darkness, if . . . she awaited the perfect moment, the perfect moment never came" (Piercy 224). As Connie notes, those who forgo utopian

thinking often do so by mistakenly expecting perfection and hoping for something that will never arrive.

After reading *Woman on the Edge of Time*, it is difficult to imagine one leaving with a reading that equates utopia with perfection. For if we hope for perfection, we also risk ridding ourselves of our own imperfect becoming. The hopeful heart of the novel lies in its embrace of imperfection as inherent to the human condition. Thus, breaking the promise of perfection means understanding imperfection not as a hindrance to utopia but as one of its central features.

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Radiant Futures: Utopian Art as a Phenomenology of Home-Seeking

ABSTRACT

This essay examines the imaginative potential of utopian art. Utopian art is more than a representation of a possible future, it calls upon our imaginations to pull us into the act of home-coming itself. Following Heidegger, we depart from the idea that phenomenology is concerned with the imagination as an essential part of being-human. This essay leans on insights from Fredric Jameson's phenomenological exploration of potential futures via the imagination as the means through which we experience utopia in our daily lives. This theorization is grounded in an analysis of Susan Sontag's novel *In America* as demonstrating the utopian curves of consciousness as it is experienced phenomenologically in lived time. This novel lends credence to the idea that one purpose (among many) of utopian thinking is to find dreams worth reaching for; and in this reaching we find ourselves coming-home.

Keywords: utopia, phenomenology, literature, imagination, hermeneutics, narrative.

"One has two ways of enhancing the value of one's own life: the first consists in the rational study of reality . . . the second consists in the experiencing of reality as spontaneous and self-liberating comprehending of its sensefulness. We call the first activity science, and the second art."

(Kocbek)

In the postmodern present, questions of belonging, truth, meaning, and possibility are thrust into a deeply complex position within our world. This complexity is articulated neatly within Nietzsche's parable of the madman from *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* in which he responds to the social consequences of the ongoing Enlightenment movement. The madman's lamentation on the death of god is a grim foretelling of the chaos that a god's absence would have for those societies whose foundation rests on a tradition of shared religious beliefs. Indeed, one can trace the origins of many modern perspectives—including the growth of liberal democracy from a political-economic system into a set of cultural values—to this historical shift.

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One such example of the shift into using politico-economic principles as morality is Francis Fukuyama's text *The End of History and the Last Man*. Therein, he argues human society has reached its peak in the form of 21st-century liberal democratic ideology. He contends that public debates over a superior form of social organization have ceased (at least in institutional environments) and that any contemporary efforts towards change reflect a concern for policy shifts, rather than interest in any foundational movement of society. More precisely, egalitarian participation in a structured market environment becomes the core value of the law over and above human flourishing. This has had profound implications the way humanity exists in its world today.

Consider March 2023, when the United States Surgeon General Dr. Vivek Murthy proclaimed loneliness to be an epidemic which ought to be given the highest priority in government affairs. In his advisory, Dr. Murthy draws a direct line of connection between loneliness and the "social-ecological model" (which includes liberal democracy, neoliberalism, and late-stage capitalism) under which we live. The advisory contains vague recommendations for "spending more time with others" but does little to address the ontological influences at stake for the population at large. As such, liberal democracy appears well equipped to create bureaucracies that identify social concerns without the tools necessary to resolve them.

While Fukuyama might argue that society's capacity for material production has ended the public interest in conversations about social reform, thinkers such as Martin Heidegger argue otherwise. In his astute piece, "Building, Dwelling, Thinking," Heidegger argues that the

technological advancement of human society in its present form leads to an apathetic worldly attitude. Were he alive today, he might argue that society practices an overexertion on the mind's creative proclivities in the form of advertisements, social media, and corporatization of pop culture. Modernity is focused on capitalizing life rather than encouraging it to be lived well. Within this shape of a world, our present collective-consciousness's ability to have faith in collective action and systemic reform has been severely dampened.

We may hold a collective sense that our present situation is off kilter (with regard to loneliness, belonging, meaning, and possibility) but lack the necessary lexicon and shared experience to articulate the change which we are seeking. It is for this reason that modern political thinkers are taking to task our social model for its impacts on human experience which, almost by necessity, pushes us into positions of social isolation and interrupts our ability to experience belonging, form trust in a sense of meaning, and conceive possibilities.[1] In such a system, the cultivation of a genuine political imagination, one that can conceive the world outside of its present organization, becomes imperative. This thought brings a secondary consideration with it; how are we to become attuned to an attitude that will satisfy the dormant needs of a lulled imagination, returning both its vitality and subsequent urgency to us? It is in a turn towards imagination, literature, and utopia that a preliminary outlook capable of these necessary changes might be discovered.

To explore such a perspective, we will turn towards the work of Fredric Jameson and Susan Sontag. Fredric Jameson's description of utopia in his 2004 *New Left Review* article titled "The Politics of Utopia" describes a political imagination that at once offers a way to look for the possibility in complex social environments while also addressing the phenomenology of such imagining. Jameson offers meaningful rebuttals to end-of-history thinkers like Fukuyama while sketching a model for detecting (in a beneficially pragmatic way) the whispers of utopia in our present perspective. The irony of referencing Sontag in an essay on utopia and interpretation is not lost on this writer, given her polemic against the latter in her article "Against Interpretation." Before diving into a study of the phenomenology of utopian imaginative thinking, her argument in the essay will be rehearsed briefly to see her stance against interpretation as, in fact, a diatribe against thinkers who make a claim to having the *only interpretation* of our world. Furthermore, we will see that Sontag conceives of interpretation as an aesthetic act which belongs to everyone. With this

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[1] Byung-Chul Han has written a series of texts on the subject. See *The Burnout Society*, *The Transparency Society*, *The Disappearance of Rituals: A Topology of the Present*, etc.

foreground in mind, her work in the novel *In America* will have a chance at sharing its most sophisticated insights. By accompanying her characters, a 19th-century Polish theater troupe's journey to a build a new home in the American West, will we see how an attunement to the utopian elements of our imagination are both urgent and necessary in participating in the act that Heidegger calls "home-building."

HOME-BUILDING AND ITS RELATION TO BEING

Heidegger's theory of home-building is given its shape in his essay "Building, Dwelling, Thinking." At the time, Heidegger's work is underscored by a deeply metaphysical tint. His concept of being-in-the-world illustrates his discrete preoccupation with the being-of-being (otherwise, for humans: the experience of living). This phenomenological angling of his work acts as a guidepost for the rest of his metaphysical system. His essay might more accurately be titled "*The Experiences of* Building, Dwelling, and Thinking." In this way, the reader finds a clearing in Heidegger's argument that the human act of measuring one's world takes place between the sea and the sky, in the boundaries of one's own lived horizon (Heidegger 145). From here we find our entry into the meaning and importance of "home-building" as a human act.

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For Heidegger, home-building is deeply intertwined with meaning, possibility, and imagination. He reminds us that we are only able to locate our own position in the world by learning to take the measure of our social and experiential boundaries. In this way, Heidegger's work shows its substance as a pragmatic philosophy that can (at least, attempt to) account for lived experience as inseparable from our cognitions of the world. Humanity does not find itself in procuring a specific "right" essence; instead, it is found in the act of searching for an essence itself. It is for this reason that possibility and imagination carry such weight for Heidegger. The searching act which defines human existence is the search for meaning. Using the faculties of the imagination to consider different possibilities, we can arrive at a stable frame of meaning that becomes our metaphysical home—our chosen vista through which to view the world. The imaginative act of searching-for-meaning is an essential part of Heidegger's metaphysical system. It is the property of the meditative facilities of the mind insofar as one meditates on possible combinations of thoughts and meanings to arrive at the specific one we will call home (Heidegger 151).

Understanding meditative thinking in this way confers a context for Heidegger's subsequent focus on technology. Heidegger argues that

the unchecked spread of technology fundamentally changes humanity's orientation to the world by desecrating those moments requiring meditative thought. He notes that automation significantly increases the rate and intensity at which we interact with curated aspects of our world. Heidegger's well-known concern for magazine advertisements is due to the psyche's tendency to move around too quickly when presented with such a jarring formatting style. The mind resorts to focusing on what is in front of it instead of the processes occurring within itself. With such a format in motion, remaining in synchrony with our imagination becomes difficult. Humanity is prompted instead to make snap decisions based on what it is empirically at hand. We lose the ability to meditate in a society that makes room for the mere calculation of the world. To be clear, one should not read Heidegger as a conservative figure who would return humanity to a world before electricity, for example. Instead, he is someone for whom each mode of thought has a place. Technology and calculation support the material needs of humanity, but they cannot replace our own thirst for *meaning-making* as an ontological endeavor. That is why Heidegger holds eminent art as one of our most potent means for preserving meditative thinking. For art's challenge is to spark the aesthetic act of meditation and interpretation in its audience.

While some chastise Heidegger for clouding his writing with unnecessarily dense language, one might posit the *challenge of language* as the very purpose of this essay. His pedagogical prowess is evidenced in his asking the audience to undertake the kind of meditative thinking that he hopes to give shelter to. As such, he demonstrates his phenomenological commitment in both the content and form of his writing. From this vantage point, we have sufficient grounding to recognize the contribution Heidegger's work has to Fredric Jameson's writings on utopia and the interpretive faculties.

UTOPIA AS A PHENOMENOLOGICAL OBJECT: FREDRIC JAMESON

In his essay, "The Politics of Utopia," Fredric Jameson guides the reader through several elements of his understanding of utopia as an interpretive act. Early on, he asks why one should consider utopian concepts at all. The postmodern reorientation of cultural values from the religious to the economic has set the stage for our political interpretations today. As such, the existing free market is conceived as arising from human nature (to satisfy seemingly organic wishes) and, thus, to act against the market economy is a form of violence against the self (Jameson 35, 51). Utopianism

appears in the modern understanding as a form of self-annihilation, a state of being without desire, an example of Freud's death drive at work (51).

Thus, Jameson conceives of the utopian impulse as arriving from a certain conjuncture between drive and interpretation. It is because humans are beings that exist with drive (in the Freudian sense) that we are bound up in the interpretive act. It is at this point where Jameson assists with converting Heidegger's ontological system into an even more phenomenological lane.[2] Jameson is interested in studying how humanity experiences their ontological situation. The curiosity that sustains inquiry into our worldly experience ties us to the act of interpretation. Humans are constantly taking the measure of the world to find our place in it; so we are, by necessity, always-already at-play with the imagination from within a utopian lens. Jameson's discussion of wishes, desire, and self-annihilation are intended as a phenomenological coloring of humanity's own quest for home-building as meaning-making. It is in our search to find a coherence of meaning for our own identity amidst a worldly social framework that calls us into interpretive play. What is named utopian has the quality of being a (e)u (good) + topos (place) (Ricœur 17–18). In simpler terms, we are searching for a place that is good for us. In other words, we are searching for a place that brings out the good in us, that inspires its own flourishing. The consequence of this search is an inevitable form of self-annihilation as an ego-death, a loss of sense in ourselves, to have a potential of finding a deeper sense of being-at-home.

If Jameson's approach sounds circular, then his argument is being appropriately conveyed. He attributes this "utopian circularity" as a symptom of understanding utopia from the lens of experience and technique. Utopian thoughts have an inherent circularity insofar as they refer to (and encourage) meditative thought as a mode of engaging the world of humanity. This is not to say that calculation does not have its place, rather that it is secondary to those needs which are rooted most deeply in our experience. In contrast to Heidegger, Jameson argues that there are "utopian practices at play from the novel to the marketing floor" (42). He hints at the possibility that utopia is a much softer concept than it is first perceived to be. Jameson reminds us that utopia is "frequently called 'too [or not] political [enough]'" (42). As such, utopia appears more tangible than the caricatures which are often attributed to it. The utopian moment is experienced as a "suspension of the political," of the over-formalization of meaning, and a return of daily life to experiencing-as-such

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[2] If we were to be strict Heideggerians, we might instead use the term "ontic." We will keep the term "phenomenological" in reference to the tradition of inquiry that arises from Husserl and Heidegger.

(42). Jameson's work finds kindred insights in Susan Sontag's theoretical and literary writings; for her, utopian interpretation is as urgent as it is essential being-in-the-world.

THE AESTHETIC EXPERIENCE OF UTOPIA: SONTAG ON INTERPRETING A LIFE

Now, we will study Sontag's "Against Interpretation" to see how she delineates and relates to the concept of interpretation. She recalls that art has been placed on the defensive since Greek antiquity, wherein Plato decreed art to be dangerously useless. Plato, argues Sontag, believes that art merely re-presents reality through another medium (in addition to the material world which is, itself, a re-presentation of transcendent forms). She summarizes Plato's perspective of art as being "not particularly useful (since you cannot sleep on the painting of a bed), nor in the strict sense, true" ("Against Interpretation" 95). Sontag goes on to provide a series of rebuttals against this mimetic view of art in what I will term an *aesthetic retort*.

Sontag's first counter to the mimetic perspective is that it represents a dampening of *what it is that art does*. The mimetic perspective deals art a disservice by trying to associate it with pure representation since, as Sontag points out, art has never aimed to make such a claim. Rather, it was Plato's metaphysical theory that demanded that art justify itself against the claim of being pure representation. In response, the defenders of great art (i.e. those who, in Sontag's eyes tend to take "the arts . . . [much] too seriously") reply that the artistic encounter is part and parcel to the act of interpretation, to the piercing of the represented to divulge its intended content (97). It is in the contrast between these two perspectives that Sontag finds sufficient footing to launch her own critique.

Modern bourgeois art criticism, contends Sontag, has done its own damage to humanity's relationship with art. To maintain institutional recognition, art criticism has attempted to mold the aesthetic act of interpretation into an instrumentalist technique. She admonishes modern art critics for framing interpretation as a "means of plucking a set of elements (the X, the Y, the Z, and so forth) from the whole work. The task of interpretation [becomes] virtually one of translation" (97). Such an approach strips art of its aesthetic potency, rendering it merely an entertaining parlor trick with the punchline being its singular, decipherable meaning. The instrumentalist practice renders art "manageable, comfortable" (97). The danger of such a practice is that it deludes the interpreter into a misrecognition of their own actions—to believe a declaration to be an

interpretive act. It is for this reason that Sontag finds such approaches better described as matters of de-codification or definition.

For Sontag, art is not meant to have a singular interpretation, rather, it is meant to inspire interpretations through aesthetic events. In this way, interpretation's own reflexive nature is given space to become visible. Indeed, she maintains that a certain level of suspicion ought to be maintained towards acts which are declared interpretive with special consideration given to the present historical moment. She indicts the de-codifying, defining practices masquerading as interpretation to be a "revenge of the intellect upon art . . . [and] the world" (Sontag 98). Sontag argues that a reclamation of interpretation from pure intellectualization is necessary, that it must be returned to its aesthetic dimension. Her argument sketches the disjointing quality of eminent art to be elevated as essential in instructing one's understanding of what it is that art "does." She describes a common error in separating the sensuous and cognitive tasks that the work of art presents. The error of this interpretive style is that the sensuous work is taken for granted and is to be followed by, rather than an informative precursor to, the work of art. She asks for a "recovery of the senses: to see, hear, and feel more" (104). She thus argues for removing the interpretive approach to art (in its de-codifying form), calling instead for an "erotics of art."

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In line with Sontag, the phenomenological tradition can be seen as an "erotics of experience," which hopes to equally reflect the sensuousness of life back into the mind's cognizing of the world. Interpretation might then be understood as the courage to be imaginative, to subvert the temptation to codify and to instead remain in-step with our worldly lives. In this way, her perspective's involvement with utopian ideals becomes palpable. Utopia instead should denote an act of aesthetic speculation into potential futures which might be born from our empirical present. It would be poor form to dismiss Sontag as anti-interpretation as such, but rather as against interpretation as a form of decoding. She also passionately warns against turning art into such a calculated endeavor or, even worse, doing the same to one's way of building and living in community.

Sontag's application of this schema is frequently evident within the structure of her novel, *In America*. In fact, one interesting way to read this novel is as the imaginative process that might have been in motion amongst the real travelers whose journey inspired its writing. Their time together is spent conceiving brave possibilities about their future in search of an authentic self-relation, daring to pursue these possibilities, and adjusting to the outcome. This experimentation in search of authentic self-narratives is precisely what Heidegger would consider an event of home-building. In this way, we can bear witness to a poignant reminder that imperfection is a hallmark utopian experience.

Imperfection, experimentation, and authenticity are laced with the logic of a temporally inflected mode of understanding. Each of these concepts contains the assumption that one form of being can proceed (or be succeeded by) another. Knowing that imagination and experimentation are intimately bound up with one another presents an opportunity to think of utopia as an imaginative element to be considered within temporal language. Accessing the phenomenological side of utopia is possible in its temporalization. In looking to the past, we are confronted with the idea of nostalgia. Savoring the occurrence of previously actualized possibilities comprises the base of our understanding of utopia. Recalling Jameson's work on utopia and the death drive, nostalgia glimmers in the past where an ego death led to an unexpectedly profound new beginning. Nostalgia inflames our curiosity towards future possibilities. These future possibilities which involve an interruption and redirection of our present trajectory and timeline in a more utopian direction are the auspices of hope. Lastly, the play of consciousness via the imagination is conceived (at least at a temporal level) as the oscillation between both past and future.[3] When we free consciousness to play within these utopian dimensions, it is engaged precisely in what Heidegger refers to as the act of home-building. Thus, art which stimulates utopian imaginings has the capacity to encourage us towards more authentic engagement with ourselves and one another.

These insights are reflected in a novel by Sontag that both describes a utopia and its lived experience: *In America*. This book elevates the concepts at stake for Heidegger, Jameson, and Sontag as means to reinterpret the real life of Helena Modjeska. Helena was a prominent theater actress from the mid-1800's who rose to super stardom throughout Europe and, later, America. Even as a work of stylized historical fiction, this book is deceptively truthful in the way it highlights the phenomenological themes at work in the study of utopia. They are deftly woven into the characters' inner lives and interpersonal interactions. This text stands as a "living example" of the concepts that are so dear to Heidegger, Jameson, and Sontag.

FINDING UTOPIA WITH-(IN AMERICA)

For this reason, Sontag's *In America* is an exceptional source of material for the contemplation and conceptualization of a utopian phenomenology. This section will take into consideration the relationships between

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[3] Here, I would point the reader to Schiller's *Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Man*. Play as an oscillation between experiences, reflection, and ideals is heavy indebted to Schiller's ideas in this text, particularly Letter IX.

three of the main characters: Maryna Zalewska, the actress; Ryszard Kierul, her lover and journalist, and Henryk Sienkiewicz, her physician. The symbolic associations between them represent the three temporal positions of present, future, and past, respectively. Furthermore, Maryna's development into a figure of greater self-awareness as the book progresses will provide ample opportunity to discuss the utopian imagination at play as it is experienced within the flow of consciousness. The interplay of these dramatic elements set the stage for a robust understanding of a phenomenology of utopia.

For those not familiar, the book follows the life and times of the Polish actress, Maryna Zalewska, who stands at the peak of her theater career in late 1860s Warsaw. Having attained such heights, Maryna finds herself taking stock of her lifestyle and the people around her. In spite of her passionate commitment to acting, she is smothered by the petty politics, ridiculous expectations, and emotional imposition dragging upon her shoulders as a leader of the theater scene. She finds herself hollowed out, hoping for her life to transform somehow. Among those near to her are a handful of friends who share a common interest in utopian thinkers of the day, such as Charles Fourier. They agree to embark on an expedition from Warsaw to build a new communal society outside of Anaheim, California.

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JULIAN AND RYSZARD: FORMING THE FUTURE

As a demonstration of faith in their budding community's project, Julian Bordis, another actor from Maryna's troupe, and Ryszard (her lover) volunteer to be the first to explore California to find a suitable location for the troupe to lay its new roots. Their passage from Europe to the United States disclosed itself quickly as a battle of perspectives in their approach towards this utopian endeavor. Julian, the elder of the two, adhered to a conventional attitude as they boarded the ship transporting them to America. He was quick to lecture Ryszard on the necessary customs to become invisible, dissolved into the demos, in their new homeland. Ryszard, on the other hand, was focused on the exact opposite: he suggested that he and Julian use pseudonyms and *act as if* they did not know one another (Sontag, *In America* 95). He was hungry to experience the freedom brought by the responsibility to create oneself, rather than finding comfort in dissolving one social script for another.

As one might imagine, the experiences of the two characters on their oceanic passage differ notably from one another. Julian feigned seasickness for several days and came to few social events with other

passengers. Ryszard reveled in every opportunity to congregate with the other guests. He mixed with people of several ethnicities, classes, and genders. The wide array of encounters dealt to him left Ryszard at once enlivened and devastated as he was learning to come to terms with the unexpected consequences entailed by his decision to start a new life (107). However, he still reviews his experiences with a charmingly characteristic stoicism. Despite his youthfulness, Ryszard displays a practical wisdom that allows for his hopeful idealism to be given real depth. In this way, he is a paradigm for how the utopian attitude is a boon to the development of a real actor in the world from a pragmatic standpoint. Ryszard moves forward with a hope given to him by his dream of a communitarian utopia. He becomes tempered rather than despondent by the slippery manner that his dream has begun to appear in his present experience as a soon-to-be-real-place. He represents the guiding light that radiates into the perspective of the utopian-at-play.

MARYNA AND HENRYK: PLAY AND NOSTALGIA

The provisional work in Julian's and Ryszard's chapter provides the larger backdrop of the experience of learning to recognize utopia-as-play. With these pieces in place, Maryna's deep soul-searching and personal transformation throughout the novel can be more clearly appreciated as the embodiment of play as the present-experiential form of utopia. Indeed, we witness this transformation resulting from her engagement with utopian moments from her life.

Prior to her departure from Europe, Maryna encountered her son's father. This individual left her with their newborn son after he revealed to her that he was legally married to someone else which nullified theirs. He complained that he would not be able to see his son (not that he did before) and chastised Maryna's decision to relocate, confident that she would miss Europe too much. Her elegant retort—"I am not going to America to find what I will lose by leaving Europe" (127)—indicates the buffering quality that utopian reflection can provide to those working to take courageous actions against the temptations of an unimaginative life. Initially ambivalent about this move and her larger plans for the United States, we see Maryna quickly overcoming these transitory concerns. She instead becomes preoccupied with more mature considerations about how best to run their new utopia or *phalanstery*, a term selected in homage to Fourier.

Many of her personal concerns during this time are shared in letters to her physician and admirer, Henryk, who remained in Poland. These letters are rich in emotions, ruminations, curiosities, and considerations.

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At times, Maryna shared with Henryk mundane feelings of inadequacy about losing her stardom, her beautiful physical appearance, and the possibility of failing to establish a viable commune (198). At other times, she is focused on more intimate and existential concerns. She discloses a harrowing fear that her journey will render her unrecognizable to her loved ones in Europe and pleads for Henryk to be understanding, rather than "[judging] the expressiveness of the stage empress to be excessive, unwomanly, rebellious—satanic!" (134). She returns to his affections time and time again as a source for her own stability as endures this transformative experiment.

Nostalgia, in its most general form, can be understood as a fountain for the nourishment of hope. Placing one's attention within a nostalgic mode attunes the faculties of the imagination to the utopian currents that already exist within the reserves of our memories. In exploring these accents, one also finds the psychic materials and reflective insights necessary to craft a fresh vision of the future. Contrary to the promises of modern political demagogues, the past is not something we can return to, nor should we aspire to. Rather, nostalgia is an anchor for reflection on the process of self-transformation as it is unfolding. In her continual writings to Henryk, Maryna is also returning to her younger self to find a contrast to her present circumstances, to see how the hopes of her past have shaped these efforts. Henryk has witnessed Maryna's previous leaps of faith, her pursuit of more challenging roles, her passage through difficult personal trials, and more. His influence provided reassurance that this search for a greater sense of being at home is worthwhile. This helps her find glimmers of hope in her labors, even as they produce outcomes that perhaps differ from her intentions. The partition between a hoped-for narrative and its realized project is the epitome of the present-experiential mode of utopia as play. It is Jameson's utopian circle articulated within a narrative framework.

The notion of play is an embodiment of the imaginative quality of the intellect. It is at once experimental and pleasurable, a search for the nuances within our worldly engagement that allow for us to flourish as human beings dwelling within a world. Instances of utopia-as-play are peppered throughout the plot. Julian's and Ryszard's antics noted above on the ship are a sterling example of this phenomena. On a superficial level, it might be tempting to chalk up to pure mischief their decisions to disguise themselves. While not denying this probability on one level, this decision also serves as a model for *the types of possibilities that are opened by this kind of utopian play*. The troupe's decision to move to California is a willingness to commit to courage, to rely on one another for aid and the grace to make mistakes as they find themselves anew. The purpose of utopia is not to indicate a state of being that is free from pain, fear, disappointment, anger,

or other inescapable facts of being-human. Rather, it is the means through which we can retain our hope and drive for a better future outside of old patterns of being, despite the pain such ventures incur. As such, utopian reflection is an essential part of the craft of human flourishing found in the practice of home-building. Utopia's value as a philosophical concept is repeated throughout the novel and Maryna's elasticity as a character adds credence to this argument.

Maryna was, of course, the de facto leader of the commune. However, she remained potently aware of this dynamic and used it with precision. At one point, she privately revokes her own consideration to administer the daily activities of the community's operations. She preferred, instead, to demonstrate that trait she desires others to acquire: an intrinsic motivation to serve the household (Sontag, *In America* 158). The act is an instance, par excellence, of Heidegger's notion of home-building. Maryna exercised her judgment in favor of bringing the troupe's shared vision into sharper focus. In this way, she exhibits an act of faith that is necessary for an utter rejection of any dominating logic. Our previously discussed notion of the imagination underscores utopian impulses as a primordial facet of our being-in-the-world. By its very nature, it is destined to subvert, even if only at times as a mere improvement to, the social order.

Indeed, this seems to be the direction that Maryna takes in her self-reflection as the phalanstery reaches its apex. It occurs to her that "acting [was subconsciously] a means of freeing oneself from the social condition of docility I received as a woman" (135). For several reasons, she comes to embody the "conscientization" process described by Paul Freire in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, of one who had learned to subvert the master-slave dialectic. At this point, things begin to change. To much surprise, or perhaps disappointment, the phalanstery erected by Maryna and her followers did not manage to survive a single year. In fact, it fell apart roughly six months after Maryna's wealthy husband, Bogdan, had purchased the lease for their community. Some of her followers returned to Poland, others abandoned them for different communes, while Maryna herself returned to the stage with the goal of being the most successful theater actress in America. Her letters to Henryk, the physician, start to dwindle. This newfound silence comes to signal the end of her first American dream.

This result might leave Sontag's reader doubtful of the extent to which utopian sentiments influence pragmatic decision-making. After all, her main character thought to trade the theater for an idyllic pastoral life, only to return to the theater. But Sontag's goals as a writer are more sophisticated than the mere representation of the difficulty of actualizing a challenging project. Rather, she suggests that it is foolish to consider utopia merely in its future-experiential form without considering its present-experiential form

as play and, thus, home-building. In fact, Sontag leans heavily into this idea when, through Maryna's voice, she describes "utopia [not] a kind of place but a kind of time, those all too brief moments when one would not wish to be anywhere else" (175). Centering this phenomenon brings us to the heart of Sontag's project, to account for the failures of utopia. Superficial criticisms of Maryna might view her, and this novel, as a failure of utopian art for not having actualized a single model of utopia as a self-sustaining commune come into focus here. This sentiment is highlighted in literary theorist Darko Suvin's *Brecht's Communist Manifesto Today* termed "anti-utopian thought" (37). It echoes a disbelief in our capacity for change, in line with Fukuyama's end-of-history perspective; that utopia is futile. In contrast to utopian or dystopian works of art which motivate through inspiration or dread, anti-utopian art is anti-motivational to its core.

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The truth is that failure is an inevitable part of imagining and living utopia. The error is to think of such failure as the end of an ideal or the destruction of some sacred truth. On the contrary, failure is the root through which the newest branch of our efforts must spring forth. It may behoove us to consider these failures in Hegelian terms as the negation propelling the dialectic of our being-in-the-world. In Maryna's case, this proves a deceptively radical way of considering this dialectic. If Sontag's literary meditation on utopia ends with its heroine returning to the stage, it is because this represents the necessity for actors in the world's theater to continue returning to its stage *despite its failures*.

Following Zalewska's advice, the best actors are the ones who "know how to fake it. There are plenty of times I don't feel courageous, but I act as if it's there and it appears" (Sontag, *In America* 135). When Maryna makes her return to the stage stateside, it is with an enhanced wisdom that encourages her to integrate a greater sense of fulfillment into her life. This has powerful implications for how we consider action in our own lives, particularly in the struggles for meaning waged by the established social order. Many of those within the younger generations are focused on a banal form of speech censorship.[4] To be clear, conflicts over language and meaning are noble and necessary goals for any social movement. However, this must not be carried out capriciously, and it cannot be the only form of waging resistance. Participating in anti-utopian forms of linguistic resistance has leaked from many Leftist practitioners into the public discourse as a staple of contemporary political interaction. Very little consideration seems to be given to the art and process of personal transformation. Such transformation involves a distinct form of messiness, the kind of haphazard vulnerability displayed by the protagonists of Sontag's novel. These events

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[4] This refers to the Millennial generation (of which I am a part) and younger.

are far from perfect, yet, from a phenomenological perspective, they are utopian. Sontag succinctly expresses this herself when reminding readers that the "revolutionary endeavor [of] America . . . is [that it is] supposed to repair the European scale of injury or simply make one forget what one wanted, to substitute other desires" (209). In other words, utopia is a return to a space where curiosity and wonder can be given their proper weight in guiding our decisions for the future. As such, the utopian project is analogous to the Japanese art of kintsugi wherein broken ceramics are repaired with gold. It is the efforts of these utopian repairs that hint at the promise of a more radiant future.

CONCLUSION

Susan Sontag's *In America* provides an example of how to approach utopia through an embodied phenomenological perspective. There are plenty of thinkers, both literary and philosophical, who supply models of utopias, communal or otherwise. It can be tempting to sit with an awareness of what utopia tells us our world could be like and make do with the comfort of being the one who is "always right." The tradeoff is missing out on the ability to develop a sense of how utopia can appear in various forms, and how it can serve as a motivation in both political and personal enterprises. Eastern religions have long professed the value of viewing time through the present moment as a powerful experience. Indeed, Sontag seems to echo this sentiment when she states that "one must believe in people to be a great writer, which means one must continually adjust one's expectations of them" (110). Learning to recenter the present moment, to be able to adjust and read that moment in a way that is informed by the past and with a pragmatic optimism for the future, provides a chance for a realistic assessment of one's circumstances, lending support to the efforts of those who seek to move with greater intention towards utopia.

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The Regional Impersonal as a Mode of Dwelling: Structures of Embodiment in David Jones's *The Anathémata* and Basil Bunting's *Briggflatts*

ABSTRACT

The discussion of dwelling in this article focuses on T. S. Eliot's controversial axiom of poetic impersonality as articulated in *The Sacred Wood* (1920) and practiced in *The Waste Land* (1922), and on how this axiom is rearticulated by his two younger contemporaries David Jones and Basil Bunting. I argue that in *The Anathémata* (1952) and *Briggflatts* (1966), their respective masterpieces, they reintegrate the ego absconditus through their distinct geo-aesthetical self-positioning which gives rise to "the regional impersonal" mode of poetic dwelling. This article explores the complex dialectics between the (neo)modernist claim of impersonality and the affective regional identification of the self-projecting consciousness in the two poems. While sharing Eliot's regard for the poetic artifact, Jones and Bunting rehabilitate the notion of the poet's cultural affiliation and representativeness as well as a culturally stimulated consciousness. Their act of self-sublimation is balanced by the material and sensual anchor of their regional allegiance. Further, the Eliotean fissure between the mind that experiences and suffers and the mind that creates resulting in a cascading multiplicity of voices in *The Waste Land*, is healed in Jones's and Bunting's poetic nostos and active mode of dwelling. Also, by giving resonance to numerous names and voices, mostly disembodied and obliterated entities, Jones's and Bunting's poetics introduces unifying strategies of impersonation reflecting their definite geo-cultural positioning. Eliot's original aporia is thus not resolved but re-inhabited.

Keywords: poetic sequence, (neo)modernism, regionalism, impersonality, bard, David Jones, Basil Bunting.

Over a quarter of a century had passed since the publication of *The Waste Land* and its theoretical accompaniment, *The Sacred Wood*, when T. S. Eliot remarked with experienced emphasis: "No man wholly escapes from the kind, or wholly surpasses the degree, of culture which he acquired from his early environment" (*Notes* 115). The very sensibility and intense awareness dictating these lines stimulated the symptomatically distinct yet principally analogous poetics of impersonality characterizing the early endeavours of T. S. Eliot and the later sequences of David Jones and Basil Bunting. Even though Eliot's aesthetic stance advocating a complete erasure of the traces of authorial presence in the literary work might seem extreme and contrived to elicit "awed confusion" (Ellmann 2), I believe that its deep seriousness and more definite motivation can be revealed in the context of neo-modernist poetry. It is the "early environment" postulated in Eliot's *Notes Towards the Definition of Culture* which alludes to the mode of dwelling as practiced by Jones and Bunting and which ultimately transforms the authors' respective withdrawal in the sequences of *The Anathémata* and *Briggflatts* into a most distinct expression of what I term "the regional impersonal."

"TRADITION AND THE INDIVIDUAL TALENT": ELIOT'S APORIA

The decades following the modernist *annus mirabilis* of 1922 saw an increasing critical resistance to Eliot's ideal of aesthetic impersonality as a central interpretative imperative. After the initial identification of his contemporaries with the socio-cultural disillusionment of *The Waste Land* (Cooper 94) and a collective embrace of its unprecedented experimental energy (Cowley 163), the poem has been repeatedly reassessed with a growing emphasis on the personal element, which is suppressed yet not fully sublimated. As the echoes of the post-WWI shock gradually subsided, Eliot's own axiom has been directed as a deconstructive tool against his poetry. This suggestive document of civilizational collapse was re-interpreted in terms of Eliot's philosophic allegiance to the solipsistic worldview of F. H. Bradley (Allan). The poet's fascination with the collective unconscious and the anthropological studies shared with other modernists, reflected in the ritual resonance of *The Waste Land* (Brown 109), has been narrowed into a psychoanalytical account of his own "ordeals" (Gordon). The intriguing multiplicity of voices and textual mementos has been redefined, under the psycho-biographical imperative, as a quest and vocal performance of a single protagonist (Bedient).

However, while the discussion of the poem has been thus increasingly gravitating towards a confessionalist view, the explanation of Eliot's possible motives for embracing the impersonal aesthetic stand has been striving towards surpersonal elucidation and consequentiality. The poet's insistent pleading for a non-self-assertive poetic practice has been regarded as a natural reaction against the Romantic excesses of subjectivism, "its seductive artistic 'I'" (Spender 136) and its biographical interpretative reductivism, as well as against Victorian sentimentalism. In the essays collected in *The Sacred Wood*, Eliot argues for an aesthetic discipline of the author's self-effacement from his creation. Identifying his objectivist stand as classicist, he attacks the romanticist sensibility for its troublesome individualism and unprofitable following of the artist's "inner voice," for an attenuated "sense of fact" and self-conscious Titanism (Bornstein 116). For the young poet, Rousseau's heritage was seen as an embodiment of "excess in any direction" (Moody 43). The post-1920 modernist production and sensibility is presented in constant *agon* with Blake's "eccentricity," "shapelessness," and "confusion of thought, emotion and vision" (Eliot, *Sacred Wood* 155–58) as well as Wordsworth's proto-Georgianism (Bornstein 105). While this exegetical polarity seems fully justifiable, and has been supported by the poet's own arguments, in isolation and through re-iteration it intensifies the *aporia* of Eliotean impersonality.

Several critical voices have contested the erroneous presumption of modernist impersonality (Buch-Jepsen 81–87; Schwarz 8–12; Ellmann 197–98). Rather than as a presence/absence dichotomy introducing a line of deconstructing sensationalism, the advocacy of impersonality should be viewed as a degree of authorial withdrawal. The interpreting process should constantly balance the ever-present interplay between the two impulses. In this perspective, the foundational texts of Eliot's poetics, "Tradition and the Individual Talent" and *The Waste Land*, will emerge, while emphatically professing authorial self-abnegation, as pieces of highly involved personal dialectics. The special asset of the former piece in this sense can be judged by Eliot's retrospective insistence on misdating this essay. Published originally in 1919, it was subsequently dated 1917 in an emphatic act of historical-cultural visionary self-inscription (Smith 22–41). This essay constantly treads a fine line between modernist poetics and politics following Eliot's "set purpose . . . in the name of explicit modernity" (Adams 130). The boundary between the impersonal creed and personal practice becomes practically invisible; Eliot steps with extreme stealth and caution as an aspirant priest haunting the Sacred Wood (Frazer 29). To ascertain the poet's private engagement in this endeavour, to apprehend the personal impulse behind the aesthetic will to attain "depersonalization" and "continual self-sacrifice" ("Tradition" 154), a point of contrast and reference is necessary.

In the following exploration of modernist impersonality, the regional focus of two neo-modernist sequences, *The Anathémata* (1952) by David Jones and *Briggflatts* (1966) by Basil Bunting will provide this correlative and, to some extent, corrective. It is through analysis and appreciation of the layered affective positionality of these two long poems that the mode of "the regional impersonal" as an expression of late modernist poetic dwelling inspired by Eliot's axiom will constitutively emerge. Even though neither poet has entered the literary canon as a prominent advocator of impersonality, they both shared, consistently and convincingly, Eliot's poetics of "ego absconditus" (Ellmann 2). While "Tradition and the Individual Talent" and *The Waste Land* can be regarded as aesthetical propositions, Jones's *The Anathémata* and Bunting's *Briggflatts* represent mature testimonies and climactic expressions of both poets' lifelong allegiances to the practice of authorial withdrawal to the textual margin. Considering the younger poets' positionality via the regional impersonal mode, we can begin to discern the subtle and persistent strategies of their poetic dwelling, communicating both their presence within their text and within their respective regions.

"MATERIA POETICA": JONES'S AND BUNTING'S ARTEFACTURE

We should start this corrective reconsideration by pointing to the sheer precarity of Jones's and Bunting's aesthetic undertaking when formulating this mode of dwelling. While Eliot's proposition of impersonality caused a notable critical stir yet enabled him assert his claim of aesthetic ascendancy, the post-WWII years found Jones and Bunting in a much more troublesome position. Their sequences were practically the only poetic works resisting the influx of the self-consciousness and bruised self-expression characteristic of most poetry produced during the 1950s and 1960s. The culturally expansive vision and historical inspiration of their work, a fully assimilated heritage of interwar modernism, did not endear them to proponents of the confessionalist current nor to defendants of the insular exclusivity of the poetic focus. The modernist sensibility of Jones and Bunting resisted the rawness of self-analysis as well as the immediacy of the empiricist experience, constantly pushing back against any close sensual or existential circumscription.

Mindful of Eliot's emphatic recommendation to focus on the poetry instead of the poet ("Tradition" 154), Jones's and Bunting's poetic practice had been constantly re-orienting its interest from the subject to the object of the poetic expression, culminating in the bravura of the steady regard

in their two late sequences. Since their early creative stages, both poets emphasized the ultimate importance of craft, of the perfection of the poetic artefacture taking precedence over the poet's own presence. In *The Anathémata* and *Briggflatts*, the perfection of the poets' art finally, and definitely, superseded the perfection of their lives. Both creative endeavours took over a decade of silence and crafting dedication (Jones, *Anathémata* 14–15; Makin 119–25). Without the presence of a discerning editor who could repeat Pound's radical act, the two poets had to adopt the most extreme self-discipline commended by Eliot. The unassuming presence of Jones and Bunting in their works recalls the self-insertion of the Celtic scribes and illuminators in the margins of their texts and, similar to this cultural precedent, serves as an index of their workman's humility and selfless spirit of aesthetic celebration (Rollason 150–51).

Early in his career, David Jones was trained to submit his artistic vision to the expressive technique and material medium during his apprenticeship as a painter and woodcutter (Blamires 35–73). In his subsequent literary work, he developed an analogous (im)personal position regarding his aesthetic object. In *The Anathémata*, the poet's artefacture-oriented archaeological impulse finds its most inclusive expression. In the Preface to his civilizational panorama, Jones's writing echoes Eliot's sentiment: "The workman must be dead to himself while engaged upon the work, otherwise we have that sort of 'self-expression' which is as undesirable in the painter or the writer as in the carpenter, the cantor, the half-back, or the cook" (12). In a letter to Saunders Lewis, Jones emphasizes his exclusive tending to the "materia poetica" and the necessity of self-restriction in the final arrangement in order to let "the facts speak for themselves as *signa*" (Corcoran, *Poetry* 27). Further, even though Jones's poetry is committed to a representationally sacramental and aesthetically transforming personal vision of Western culture, the author's presence driving this particular vision does not manifest itself through an "assertiveness" that would remind one of, for instance, William Blake (Brown 129).

Even though the focus of Bunting's Northumberland sequence seems more intimate and introspectively oriented, the poet's lifelong allegiance to the objectivist creed and practice prevented the hard, sinewy texture of his lines from sliding into nostalgia or pure self-analysis. Writing to Louis Zukofsky, his kindred spirit on the "outer Arctic margin" (Seed 105), Bunting defines a poem as "the desire for what is objectively perfect" (Forde 72). Throughout his life, he repeatedly refuses biography-driven creative and interpretative impulses. In 1932, he insists in one of his reviews that "it is confusing and destructive to try and explain anything in terms of anything else," especially "poetry in terms of psychology" (72). Over forty years later, in his foreword to *The Selected Poems of Joseph Skipsey*,

he reiterates this conviction: "We buy our shirts without asking who the seamstress was, and should read our poems without paying too much attention to the names they are printed over. Things once made stand free of their makers, the more anonymous the better" (Caddel and Flowers 7).

In his lifelong quest for a viable form of modernist lyricism, Bunting finds himself struggling with the major tradition of English poetry. In a repeated poetic exercise, he excises Shakespeare's sonnets, suppressing traces of the poet's explicit affective presence in the text (Caddel). Bunting whittles the verse like the Northumbrian mason whose "fingers ache on the rubbing stone" (Bunting 12). Even though a certain similarity between Wordsworth's "growth of the poet's mind" and Bunting's Northern sequence has been noted (Alldritt 152; Forde 208), it is the uncompromising "dwelling . . . on the worth and necessity . . . of things" of the young bard and his tireless "dodg[ing] of the plainest words into the right shape" that primarily fascinates Bunting (Makin 16, 269–72). Even though he subtitles his sequence "An Autobiography," Bunting refuses any facile biographical equation and insists that "the truth of the poem is of another kind" (Bunting 43).

Professing the aesthetic belief in impersonality with no less conviction than T. S. Eliot, Jones and Bunting did not only preserve the heritage of his high modernist principles, but they also revitalized the non-canonic fringes of "the great English tradition of personal poetry" (Blamires 12–13) by developing their distinct non-subjective mode of creative expression and representation. *The Anathémata* and *Briggflatts* show the perfect aesthetic poise of two passionate minds whose search for impersonal poetic expression is not motivated by the personal anxiety and anguish (Brown 91–99), and whose act of self-sublimation has been balanced by the material and sensual anchor of their regional allegiance. Contrasting with Eliot's distressed pacing through the undergrowth of the Sacred Wood, the two "writers in the landscape" developed, through their conscious natal geo-cultural identification, an aesthetic attitude and a mode of dwelling of at once a more astute personal presence and a more genuine, intuitive impersonality than Eliot.

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DWELLING IN AFFECTION: TOWARD THE NORTH-WESTERN FRINGE

Neither Jones nor Bunting were so incessantly haunted by the spectre of the historico-cultural displacement and elusive ideal of the "elsewhere community" (Kenner, *Community*) as T. S. Eliot in his transatlantic tension. Confronted by the instinctive bent of their orbit, Eliot's

theory of impersonality clearly emerges in its geographic causality. The depersonalization of his aesthetic venture appears as a direct reflection and corollary of personal *deplacement*. Juxtaposed with the dynamic yet securely centred cultural and physical experience of Jones and Bunting, Eliot's poetics of impersonality can be interpreted as a reaction to two major stimuli.

First, propelled by his academic confidence, aesthetic ambition, and immense cultural curiosity, Eliot abandons—following the earlier example of Henry James and Ezra Pound—the geo-cultural periphery for the very centre of the historical moment and literary fermentation. Arriving in London in the summer of 1914, a few weeks after the appearance of *Blast* and a few days after the start of the war, Eliot finds himself drawn straight into the politico-cultural vortex of the times. This radical replacement calls for a no less dramatic self-refashioning. Second, striving for a comprehensive literary synthesis of Western culture at the moment of the irremediable fragmentation of the self (Brown; Bradbury and McFarlane 71–93) provokes a further attenuation of the registering subject. The following discussion will address these two aspects of Eliot's ordeal of impersonality and its psycho-aesthetical reflection in the regional discourse of Jones's and Bunting's poetry. The proposed mode of the regional impersonal reflects these two analytical directions in its terminological coining.

Born in "a half savage country out of date" (Pound 49), Eliot had to make the dramatic transfer from the outermost part of the Western circuit to the European metropolis in order to grasp the essence of his time. As he encountered the layered texture of London's physical and spiritual heritage, Eliot also saw his mannered yet historically untested American self culturally re(de)fined. Even before he reached London during WWI, he enjoyed the private spectacle of depersonalization by exploring the disreputable quarters of Cambridge, Boston, and St. Louis as a Harvard undergraduate and, later, as an ambitious expatriate apprentice, the slums of Paris (Gordon 25, 51, 111). His "scavenging" Hydean adventure of urban dissembling (58) reached the climax of ambition when Eliot stepped into the throbbing square mile of the City. Working as a clerk at Lloyds, a leading financial institution of the time cumulating massive capital reserve (Rainey 9), and especially for its Colonial and Foreign Department where he witnessed the monetary procedures following the Peace of Versailles (10), Eliot enjoyed the simultaneous advantage of the expatriate's anonymity and the authority of the *éminence grise*.

This double psychological impulse found its ultimate aesthetic expression in *The Waste Land*, embodied by the withdrawn authority of Tiresias. The blind mantic figure witnessing the nightmarish spectacle represents Eliot's most ingenuous act of poetic depersonalization. His

thickly veiled presence, paying tribute to the dramatic mastery and rhetoric of Jacobean authors (Kenner, *Poet* 22), the troubled magniloquence of the Victorian dramatic monologues, and the ironical, quizzical line of Laforgue (Rainey 4), brings the contemporary performing strategy of the Yeatsean "mask" and Pound's "persona" onto another level of dissimulating and expressive potential.

The referential scope of Tiresias' presence offers a practically unlimited number of self-dramatizing scenarios: Tiresias' legendary androgyny transcends gender boundaries; his protracted ordeal on Earth brings him from Thebes to a London suburb; he walks this world and the other. His textual presence in the Western canon is pervasive. His story inspires, among the most illustrious authorities, Sophocles, Euripides, Ovid, as well as Tennyson. His riddling knowledge, life, and contacts wield power. The ultimate absorption of his negative capability melting the individual fates and characteristics (viz. Eliot's note to line 218) results in the isotypic anonymity paralleling the international pictorial communication introduced to the public in the same year (North 107).

According to the Greek myth, Tiresias prophesied the death of Narcissus. Adopting the Tiresian sublime as a trope of the authorial presence in his poem, Eliot renounces direct aesthetic self-reflection. Without falling for their own creative self-imprint, Jones and Bunting embrace a less oblique and expansive strategy of authorial self-inscription. The previously discussed supreme attention to their craft has been, since their early poetic attempts, deflecting their individual self-regard. Even though recalling their awe upon reading *The Waste Land*, the two poets, with no will to disguise within the familiar environment, objected to its "fraudulent representations of subjectivity" (Smalley 189). This resistance to self-veiling clearly manifests itself in *The Anathémata* and *Briggflatts*; both are sequences of the imaginative and physical homecoming that celebrate a conscious return to and self-authorized dwelling in the places of previously only instinctive identification.

Both poems, throbbing dioramas of life on the north-western fringe of Britain, identify the sincerity of one's self-presentation and wholesomeness of one's aesthetic purpose with the immediate allegiance to the native territory. Remaining close to the regional expressive sources and geo-cultural deposits possesses for both the ultimate moral and imaginative value. In his detailed investigation and vivid poetic recreation of the geology and topography of the Welsh peninsula, Jones strives for the authentic imaginative experience of the early medieval Arthurian narratives. Fascinated by the plasticity of their relief, he moulds, with an infinite patience and curiosity, the Welsh terrain before the readers of *The Anathémata*. The ice sheets heave and

slide, hills sink and rise, rivers revert and meander in the panoramic spectacle of the "fore-time" until the geographic "locale . . . incidence . . . deliberations" (Jones, *Anathémata* 53) are conspicuous and definite enough to receive the Briton warriors. Reviving the native tradition of the specific topographic silhouette, Jones resists the "vague[ness] and generalization" of the uprooted adaptations of the Continental Arthurian Romance-cycles foreshadowing the internationalized poetic idiom of modernism in the new "Alexandrian" era (Hague 80; Kenner, *Island* 4; Jones, *Epoch* 273).

256 The individualized narrative of Bunting's sequence dramatizes the geo-aesthetic dichotomy between localized affection and outward-bound ambition in even more explicit, experientially focused terms. In many respects, *Briggflatts* can be interpreted as a poignant parable of artistic displacement and immoderate ambition bringing the collapse of the individual inner sphere. Abandoning the native expressive tool and idiom, the Northumbrian artisan toils in vain to shape his words in foreign quarries, "an evasive ornament" to his displaced existence (Bunting 21). Even though "re-enacting the long-standing tradition of the Grand Tour" (Kenner, *Community* 6), he encounters sites of classic memory and sources of high cultural refinement, he fails to produce a lasting form ("It looks well on the page, but never well enough. . ." Bunting 20) unless he embraces the aching toil and patterns of northern masonry. Even though the Apuan marble, "always trickling, apt to the saw" (20), from the quarries at Carrara engendered the robust physiognomy of Michelangelo's forms (Alldritt 156), the "deserter . . . reproached uneasy mason" (Bunting 21) has to seek immortality in the echo and edge of the Northumbrian stone.

The eastward bound Alexandrian expansion in the third part of the sequence, striving to reach the very end of the world as mapped and imagined by man, fails to achieve cultural and metaphysical transcendence. Ending in a hiatus of strained consciousness (27–28), the quest reverses its course under the renewed imperative of the native territory (29). The poet's ambition to nudge the cultural polity is chastised by the story of the Northumbrian skald, Egill Skallagrimsson, an implicit presence and the voice of the "Baltic plainsong" (13), in Bunting's poem tracing the immoderate expansion of the Viking ruler Eric Bloodaxe. Challenging the established power structure, his art suffers humiliation (Rollason 218); joining the violent quest of the "king of Orkney, king of Dublin, king of Orkney" (Bunting 15), his lines perish in the "bale on the fellside" (22). The poetry prospers "lying low" (28), imaginatively and materially involved with its individual territorial origins.

DWELLING IN ACTION: BARDS AND SEERS

Not only do Jones and Bunting avoid any self-concealing strategies, but they also introduce the explicit presence of the poet in their sequences, as if actively reasserting a certain unity and substantiality of the creative mind fractured by Eliot's harrowing journey across the Waste Land. Re-embracing the Aristotelian impression of the mind (Eliot, "Tradition" 156) through self-reflective professional projection, they virtually eliminate the cognitive split between the mind that experiences and suffers, and the mind that creates. Even though still in a way present by indirection and a generalized role-playing in their work, the poets' identity and performance are essentially cognate and region-bound. While both poems are consequently pervaded by the generative spirit of verbal enterprise, the only analogous attempt of this kind to be found in *The Waste Land* is Hieronymo's spectacular revengeful deceit (l. 431).

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Thus, even though the explicit pronominal authorial presence in the two regional poems is extremely sparse since their sensibility points towards the pondered object, physical pattern, or cultural artifact, the "pers. pron. Ist sing. nom." (Spender 133) represents a considerably stable referential vector. In *The Waste Land*, "I" becomes a self-proclaiming token of subjective displacement and identity fracture. Similar to the decontextualized Tiresias, the young poet "throb[s] between two lives" (Eliot, *The Waste Land* l. 218). Even though Eliot grants the "old man with wrinkled female breasts" (l. 219) the privileged position of a personage uniting the poem and seeing its "substance" (viz. note to line 218), the circumference of the seer's knowledge and attention does not seem identical to the registering "zone of consciousness" of the poem (Kenner, *Poet* 149).

The identifying apposition "I, Tiresias" (Eliot, *The Waste Land* l. 218) thus presents yet another verbal echo multiplying the poem's signifiers. This pronoun is in its turn subsumed in the final cry of desperate self-defence: "These fragments I have shored against my ruins" (l. 430). The resounding nominal plural at the end suggests a more pervasive dissolution than suspected. The following line, the last clutch of the European mind, brings the ultimate split of the regard between the subject and the object, "Hieronymo's mad again," after the historicizing orthography conceals the first person, "Why Ile fit you" (l. 431). The Fisher King's inquiry, "Shall I at least set my lands in order?" (l. 425), dramatizes the intriguing dilemma between the poetics and politics of Eliot's modernism, between the self-effacement and personal agency behind such withdrawal.

No such splintering and impulsive ostracization of the self characterizes Jones's or Bunting's poems. As if in response to Eliot's mask of the mythic seer exhausted by his foreknowledge, in *The Anathémata*, Jones adopts the

stance of the native prophet of the emblematic name. His vatic confidence is reflected by the scriptural and classical precedents of the framing inscription: "TESTE DAVID CVM SIBYLLA" (Jones, *Anathémata* 49). In "Mabinog's Liturgy," revisiting an early Welsh sacramental past, the poet challenges the displaced authority of Tiresias: ". . . then let's prop his lids / p'r'aps he'll see a bit: / he lives to collate phenomena" (192).

If the poet joins his name with that of Sibyll and "place[s] himself in the order of signs" in this process (Jones, *Epoch* 5), such a gesture can be regarded as an instinctive expression of affection and distress rather than as a pivotal point of an impersonating manipulation. While the poet's voice, aware of historical and linguistic affinities, laments at the close of "Angle-Land" the recent mass fratricide in the West (Jones, *Anathémata* 115), it recalls, in uninhibited autobiographical detail, the truce of 1915 in the trenches of "Gallia Belgica" as one of the miracles of the Child (216). From the very beginning, we hear the poet's voice striving for an accurate expression for his unprecedented documentary enterprise: "His groping syntax, if we attend, already shapes. . ." (49). The frequent pronominal fusion of the poet and the priest administering the Mass does not pose, unlike Eliot's discursive concept for his poem ("He do the police in different voices"), essential problems of identity, for in Jones's view they are both participating in "poiesis," the man-defining activity (*Epoch* 13, 90).

Bunting's poem manifests a similar ease within the accepted limits of poetic self-identification and self-inscription. Even though the five-act aesthetic and psychological quest of *Briggflatts* juxtaposes several relatively discreet inquiring impulses and adventures (especially the second and third parts) with dramatic displacing breaks between them, Bunting's poetics ultimately favours an identity juncture. Rather than a kaleidoscope of multiple adventures and personae, his sequence should be regarded as an intensive individual apprenticeship inspired by the example of Sir Walter Raleigh, Bunting's ideal of experiential versatility (Makin 14, 271).

Similar to Raleigh, Bunting's praxis also precedes his poesis: "You can't write about anything unless you've experienced it: you're either confused in your subject matter or else you get it wrong" (Hall 7). The adventurous personal argosy of *Briggflatts* testifies that it was not through academic excellence that Bunting strove for cultural mastery, and that, unlike Eliot, if he occasionally took a break in writing poetry, it was not for the study of "metaphysics, logic, psychology, philosophy, Sanskrit and Pali" (Kenner, *Poet* 39). Even though the poet finds himself in various attires at multiple locations during this anabasis, his personal identity remains unfractured. It gradually emerges as the poet realizes his regional affinity while exposed to the foreign element. Following the inarticulate immediacy of his youthful regional identification in the

opening act, the poet's pronominal assertion signals a high emotional pitch. The intensity of the young expatriate's distress in *Briggflatts* ("You who can calculate the course / of a biased bowl / shall I come near the jack?" 17–18) is equalled and reversed only in the repose of the homing destination ("I hear Aneurin. . . I see Aneurin's. . ." 33).

Similar to *The Waste Land*, the regional mosaics of *The Anathémata* and *Briggflatts* make a constant claim to impersonality while in fact representing an unfolding individual zone of consciousness (Dilworth 153; Forde 209). The vision and experience of the two sequences is no less intensely internalized than the multitudinous perceptions in Eliot's poem. The panoramic historico-cultural perspective of Jones's embracing the vast mythical and physical deposits of the Mediterranean and Atlantic coasts, may, in spite of its geographical and chronological expansiveness, represent a moment of heightened consciousness, a meditative flight of mind, during the Mass celebration. The adventure of *Briggflatts* can be regarded as an experiential retrospect filtered through the mind of the "sailor come home" (Alldritt 150), meditating upon the native shore in a half-hermitic ecstasy similar to the region's early medieval saints (Bunting 33–34).

However, unlike *The Waste Land*, Jones's and Bunting's works do not sing a consciousness irredeemably locked in its solipsist cell (Eliot, *The Waste Land* l. 411–16). Their celebratory note could revive the "broken Coriolanus," loyalty without land (l. 416). Even though meditatively introverted, their sequences do not aspire to the dramatic representation of F. H. Bradley's existentialist perspective. While Eliot's poem self-consciously subscribes to the philosopher's belief that the individual "experience falls within [one's] own circle, a circle closed on the outside," mostly "peculiar and private to [one's] soul" (note to l. 411), Jones and Bunting opt for a more essentialist view of the modern human experience. While Tiresias' expansive and attenuated presence in *The Waste Land* represents the ultimate terror of the existentialist sentence, *The Anathémata* and *Briggflatts* introduce a more dynamic personal agency as a direct reflection of an active act of dwelling.

In the modern hell of Eliot's poem, Tiresias, who keeps his wit and senses in the mythic inferno (Gantz 528) and whose "intelligence SO ALIVE" fascinated Pound himself in the letter to Basil Bunting (Makin 77), survives only as a passive medium of historical predestination and repetitive collapse. In a conspicuous contrast to his "seeing" presence, the regional sensibility of Jones and Bunting calls for a more involved presence. The voice of Jones's poet constantly inquires about the possible historical outcome and accuracy of the imaginatively transposed events, actively delving into the deposits of the land:

<blockquote>

When is Tellus
to give her dear fosterling
her adaptable, rational, elect
and plucked-out otherling
a reasonable chance?
Not yet—but soon, very soon
as lithic phases go. (*Anathémata* 64)

</blockquote>

The interrogative cadence curves the lines throughout the poem, the visual disposition reflecting the active search on an archaeological site:

<blockquote>

By the uteral marks
That make the covering stone an artifact.
By the penile ivory
And by the viatic meats.
Who was he? Who? (65–66)

</blockquote>

Similar to *The Anathémata*, the inward turn of *Briggflatts* reflects the poet's strenuous journey for aesthetic form and meaning, ceasing only when "the sheets are gathered and bound, / the volume indexed and shelved. . ." (Bunting 38).

While the observing notoriety of Eliot's Tiresias reflects the ideal of anonymity and authority of the poet, the native impulse towards impersonality in Bunting's and Jones's poetry is of a bardic nature. The suppression of the poets' self-consciousness and self-regard in their sequences answering to the call of the land and its memory does not preclude an emphatic reflection of their shaping, performing presence or adventurous participation. After the expository crisis of Eliot's *Waste Land*, Jones and Bunting found an alternative to the long poem based on an "impressionistic or emotional" language and experience (Miles 97) in the regional format of an epic. Through the poets' withdrawal, Jones's and Bunting's compositions express their belief in the possibility of the suprapersonal, culturally representative modern poetic enterprise.

The epic potential of their individual work has been recognized since W. H. Auden's recognition of *The Anathémata* published as "A Contemporary Epic." William Bissett's response, "In Medias Res," has been drafted in a similar spirit. The focus and organization of one of the most complex studies on *The Anathémata*, Neil Corcoran's *The Song of Deeds*, was clearly inspired by the echo of Jones's "gest" (244). In his study of Bunting's poetics, Peter Makin reminds the reader of the poet's predilection for the epic genre, inspiring him to study Persian in order to complete the English translation of Firdusi's *Shahnameh* (75–77). In his companion to *The Anathémata*, René Hague has commented on the

"Homeric spirit" maintained by Jones's choice of words reviving the epic tradition of resonant compounds (42). Burton Hatlen, analyzing Bunting's verbal fond, has drawn attention to the resonance of the opening "brag" in *Briggflatts* with the first word of Beowulf, "hwæt" (52).

Even though the historical and genre inspiration of Jones's and Bunting's poetry has been symptomatically recognized, the broader implications regarding the radically differing geographical identification of the two generations of modernist poets have not been given full critical attention. And yet, while Eliot, behind his Tiresian mask, could only recall in mournful retrospect the unifying potential of Virgil's opus (Coetzee 1–16), Jones and Bunting revived in their poetry the resonant heritage of the Briton *cynfeirdd*, the "early poets" of the north-western native tradition (Jones, *Epoch* 63; Makin 177–86). Jones's priest ministers at the altar of a rough stone (*Anathémata* 50); Bunting's voyager navigates by the strides of "Orion over Farne" (Bunting 37). The seer thrives throbbing in the life of his region. Reaffirming this creative supposition, the poetry of Jones and Bunting connects the visionary tradition of the island (Ackroyd 49–58) with the formalist orientation and experiment of modernist poetry.

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DWELLING IN DEMARCATION: PSYCHOLOGICAL AND LINGUISTIC ISOTOPES

In yet another sense, composition under the imaginative guidance of "the tutelar of the place" (Jones, "Lord" 211) encourages the impersonalist poetics in *The Anathémata* and *Briggflatts* without sacrificing the sense of a stable authorial identity and without completely eliminating the affective aesthetic element. Adopting the character of the enfeebled guardian of Western prophecy for his ambitious historical-cultural retrospect, T. S. Eliot could hardly prevent the exchange between Tiresias' consciousness and the disembodied cries of civilizational pandemonium. In the prevailing modernist experience of dislocation, the boundaries of his identity and inner experience have been eroded by the unceasing vocal attacks from the outside. At the moment of the historical crisis of personal identity (Brown 1; Jervis 19–21), the "disorientate[d], shatter[ed] 'I'" (Spender 134) is not offered much support in the sense of self-defence and self-definition.

Having experienced this collapse during their younger years, Jones and Bunting search for viable aesthetic-psychological alternatives to the crumbling limits of the contemporary self. The decisive return to their native territory in *The Anathémata* and *Briggflatts* inspires the substitution of the frail boundaries of the expatriate identity and sensibility of *The*

Waste Land with a more solid, geo-historical demarcation and the "inward continuities of the site / of place" (Jones, *Anathémata* 90). Invoking the genius loci, "[her] that loves place, time, demarcation, hearth, kin, enclosure, site, differentiated cult . . . administratix of demarcations . . . queen of the minivers" (Jones, "Lord" 211–16), in their poetry, Jones and Bunting establish a psychological centre steadying the subjective presence. It is through the imaginative transposition and cataloguing of the regional physical and cultural memory that the individual sensibility is projected and identity asserted in *The Anathémata* and *Briggflatts* without much explicit authorial intervention.

This implicit self-projection shaped by the regional boundaries results in a more definite control of the registering consciousness over multiple impressions and cultural traces. While in *The Waste Land*, the "filament of platinum" ("Tradition" 154) of individual perception is beaten ever thinner by the "incessant shower" of innumerable words and voices (Woolf 898), the regional foci of *The Anathémata* and *Briggflatts* withhold this echoing multitude. Even though occasionally giving prominence to the speech and sensibility of other characters, the visionary voice of Jones's sequence imaginatively unites and rhetorically frames the individual performances. Introducing the extensive monologue of the Lady of the Pool in the heart of the sequence, it celebrates the unadulterated spirituality of the pre-imperialist London. In the idiom and professional pleading of Eb Bradshaw, "Thames-side mast-and-block maker" in "Redriff" (Jones, *Epoch* 26), the visionary voice recalls the ancestral patience of the pre-industrial craft. The repenting beauty of Gwenhwyfar in "Mabinog's Liturgy" becomes the embodiment of the island's early bounty and spirituality.

The regional orientation of Bunting's sequence inspires an even more pronounced univocality. The multiple biographical traces marking the Northumbrian territory converge in the subjective centre of the aesthetic expression. The fragmentary memory of the northern saints and rulers of the Northumbrian heroic age becomes vividly embodied in the instinctive identification and psychological projection of the central consciousness. The region's behavioural gamut runs from the expansiveness of the Norse pretender to the meditative containment of the saints.

The regional foundation and demarcation of the individual consciousness in Jones's and Bunting's poetry are intensified by clearly marked linguistic isotopes. While the territorially marked verbal expression in *The Waste Land* signals a general cultural uprooting and social decontextualizing of the post-war world ("Bin gar keine Russin, stamm' aus Litauen, echt deutsch"—Eliot, *The Waste Land* l. 12) culminating in the incomprehensible echo of the east-bound linguistic *nostos* (l. 400–31), the dialectal precision in *The Anathémata* and *Briggflatts* represents crucial

means for individual expressive authentication. The two sequences draw their mental and spiritual vigour from their author's conviction that "Tellus of the myriad names answers to but one name" which, "gently bend[ing] her head from far-height," she "whispered on known-site" (Jones, "Lord" 211). The visionary sensibility in Jones's poem constantly seeks and reasserts its geo-linguistic definition:

> And where:
>
> > West horse-hills?
> > Volcae-remnants' crag-*carneddau*?
> > Moel of the Mothers? /
> > the many *colles Arthuri*?
>
> . . .
> *Terra Walliae*!
>
> > Buarth Meibion Arthur! (*Anathémata* 55)

The limits of consciousness in *Briggflatts* emerge through a similar pattern of contrasts: ". . . becks ring on limestone, / whisper to peat" (Bunting 13). The poet adds an afterthought emphasizing the psycho-linguistic demarcation: "We have burns in the east, BECKS in the west, but no brooks or creeks" (43). These geo-linguistic limits mark the sphere of an affective identification of the self-projecting consciousness.

FROM DWELLING ON APORIA TO DWELLING IN APORIA

While Tiresias' presence in *The Waste Land* documents a complete personal detachment from the knowledge passed and possessed, the regional poetics of *The Anathémata* and *Briggflatts* signals the return of individual sensitivity with the renewed veneration of "the *numina* of localities and differentiated traditions" (Jones, *Epoch* 270). In Jones's sequence centred on post-Roman Celtic Britain culminated the poet's conviction that poetry is to be seen as "a kind of *anamnesis* of, i.e. an affective recalling of, something loved" (*Anathémata* 21). Bunting's poem celebrates and materializes the imaginative return to England's most northerly county envisioned since the schoolboy's letters home bewailing "great underlying difference between North and South" (Alldritt 3,15)—"a visit postponed for fifty years" (Bunting 38).

In *The Anathémata* and *Briggflatts*, Eliot's dictum of impersonality is revealed in its aesthetic irreducibility and experiential truth: "Poetry is not a turning loose of emotion, but an escape from emotion; it is not the expression of personality; but an escape from personality. But, of

course, only those who have personality and emotions know what it means to want to escape from these things" (Eliot, "Tradition" 156). Identifying the regional impersonal as a mode of geo-poetical dwelling in Jones's *Anathémata* and Bunting's *Briggflatts* allows us to contemplate and appreciate the complexity of Eliot's original proposition within the unifying gesture of the two sequences. Through these, the full truth of Eliot's dictum can finally be brought home. It can, at last, emerge as an aporia which has never been meant to be resolved but (re)inhabited. It is the self-positioning strategy of the regional impersonal that allows both Jones and Bunting to "live in" (Eliot, "Tradition" 156) the tradition of their respective regions while also locating their individual talents.

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Longing to Belong in One's Own Homeland: Tracing the Topophilic Cartography in Anita Sethi's *I Belong Here: A Journey Along the Backbone of Britain*

ABSTRACT

In this article I will read *I Belong Here: A Journey Along the Backbone of Britain* (2021) by Anita Sethi, the Manchester-born woman of colour, to explore how journeying through natural landscapes can be perceived as an emblematic reclamation of one's home and belonging. A victim of a race-hate crime that questioned her right to belong in her country of birth on account of her race, while she was on her way from Liverpool to Newcastle on the TransPennine Express train in 2019, Sethi resolves to undertake this journey on foot across the Pennines, a range of uplands in the northern England—known as the "backbone of Britain" and designated "Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty"—in order to reclaim her right to belong and roam freely in the land which she longs to call home. As her physical act of walking amidst intense beauty is intertwined with her internal journey of growing up as a brown woman in a predominantly white Britain, the narrative traverses beyond the Pennines, and is transformed into a testimony of how nature salves wounded souls in a fractured world, subjects who are strangely interconnected by myriad cultures and identities, movements and migrations. Consequently, drawing from the idea of topophilia, proposed by Gaston Bachelard and popularized by Yi-Fu Tuan, I will argue that Sethi's memoir eventually transcends the disturbing reality of being the estranged Other and charts a topophilic cartography to shepherd the alienated and the unhomed toward a sense of home and belonging.

Keywords: home, belonging, topophilia, nature, Pennines, Anita Sethi.

INTRODUCTION

The Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) describes hate crimes as "criminal acts committed with a bias motive" (15), where the victims are deliberately targeted because of their affiliation with a particular group that shares common characteristics. These characteristics are referred to as "protected characteristic . . . such as 'race,' language, religion or belief, ethnicity, nationality, sex, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity, disability, or other common feature that is fundamental to their identity" (15). Recent reports show that there is a steady increase in hate crimes world-wide. For example, Research Briefing no. 8457 published by the House of Commons Library, UK, on Hate Crime Statistics in November 2022, records that while there has been a steady increase in racial or religiously aggravated hate crimes since 2015, the highest rate of hate crime for all offences recorded by the police per 100,000 population in 2021–22 was in the Greater Manchester Police Force area (Allen and Zayed 4).

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Given this context, in this article, I will read the Manchester-born, woman of colour, Anita Sethi's memoir, *I Belong Here: A Journey Along the Backbone of Britain* (2021). The memoir is written following Sethi's experience of being a victim of race-hate crime while she was on her way from Liverpool to Newcastle on the TransPennine Express train in 2019 that questioned her right to belong in her country of birth on account of her race. The memoir documents not only her emotional and psychological distress but also records the literal journey she has undertaken on foot across the Pennines, a range of uplands in the northern England, known as the "backbone of Britain" and designated "Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty." Her memoir further intertwines her physical act of walking amidst intense beauty with her internal journey of growing up as a brown woman in a predominantly white Britain in order to reclaim her belonging in a place which she calls home. *I Belong Here* won a Books Are My Bag Award and was shortlisted for the Wainwright Prize for UK Nature Writing, Royal Society of Literature (RSL) Ondaatje Prize, Great Outdoors Award, and Portico Prize.

ANITA SETHI AND RACIAL PREJUDICE

Sethi's[1] ancestral Indian heritage can be traced back to the history of the colonial practice of the indentured labour system in the 19th century. Her mother's ancestral family were shipped from British India to British

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[1] Anita Sethi is a British journalist and writer and the recipient of a RSL Literature Matters Award. She has written columns, features, and reviews for national and international newspapers and magazines including *The Guardian*, *Observer*, *the i paper*, *Independent*, *Daily*

Guyana and her mother, after gaining a nurse traineeship, migrated to England alone at the age of 21. Sethi's father's family were sent from India to Nairobi, Kenya, when both countries were British colonies, and her father was born in Kenya. Following Kenyan independence from Britain her father also migrated to the UK at the age of 19. Sethi's parents eventually met in London and married in Manchester and Sethi was born in Manchester as a result of multiple migrations which are part of colonial history, and thus become part of British history as well. However, Sethi has to confront the recurring query of where she is actually from, right from her childhood, which conceals the stereotypical racial implication that Sethi does not belong in her land of birth.

In 2019, as she was travelling from Liverpool to Newcastle on the TransPennine Express train, Sethi became a victim of a race-hate crime. After asking a fellow passenger, who was playing loud music in the train compartment, to turn the volume down, she was met with a torrent of racist abuse: "Do you have a British passport? Get back on the banana boat. Paki c**t! F**k off!" (Sethi, *Belong* 26). As the rest of the compartment remained silent, Sethi, the only non-white British person present in the compartment, resolved to make an official report, first to the train staff, and then to the police at Darlington and Newcastle respectively. The accused was arrested, charged, pleaded guilty, and was convicted of "a racially aggravated public order offence, using threatening, abusive, insulting words and behaviour" (Sethi, *Belong* 12). Even though Sethi is relieved at the successful conclusion of the legal procedure, she continues to suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder, as she fails to overcome the hideous insinuation that she has no right to belong to a place that she calls home. In addition to this terrible incident in the train compartment, she has also been racially abused twice while walking on the streets, in Nottingham and London, in the same year.

Even before her experience of race-hate crime on the TransPennine Express train, Sethi confronted the casual banter "Well, you don't look like it" when she replied that she is from Manchester, UK, to the question "And

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Telegraph, *Sunday Times*, *Sydney Morning Herald*, *The Age*, *The National*, *New Statesman*, *Granta*, *Harper's Bazaar*, *Times Literary Supplement*, *Stylist*, and *BBC Travel* among others. She has also been published in the anthologies *Women on Nature*, *The Wild Isles*, *Common People*, *The Seasons* nature writing anthology, *Seaside Special: Postcard from the Edge*, *We Mark Your Memory*, and *Solstice Shorts* among others. Apart from being a guest critic, commentator, panellist, and co-presenter on several channels including BBC Radios 2, 3, 4, and 5, the BBC World Service, ITV, Times Radio, Sky News, and ABC Australia, Sethi was an International Writer in Residence and Ambassador for Journalism at the Emerging Writers Festival, Melbourne, and a writing fellow at the Wheeler Centre of Books, Writing, and Ideas. See https://anitasethi.com/writing/

where are you from?" by none other than the then Prince Charles at the Commonwealth People's Forum where Sethi was one of the speakers. As she goes through a range of emotions "from shock to humiliation to rage" at the casual ignorance of the history of the Commonwealth and colonialism from even the corridors of power, Sethi, in an open letter to Prince Charles, published in *The Guardian*, and titled "Dear Prince Charles, Do You Think My Brown Skin Makes Me unBritish?" (2018), recalls how British history lessons at schools are conspicuously silent on the histories of "immigration, the British empire, the Commonwealth and colonialism," thus unwittingly perpetuating racial prejudice and hegemonic power structures in the society. Barbara Perry's central idea of "doing difference," as identifying one of the major causes of hate crime committed toward marginalized communities, likewise indicates an existing social power dynamics. According to Perry, hate crimes reinforce the hegemonic and hierarchical boundaries of the supposedly dominant and the subordinate groups in society, where violence and intimidation are directed to those who are seen as different, thereby reminding them that they are the "other" which implies "you're different, you don't belong" (141).

Therefore, Sethi's resolve to undertake the journey on foot across the North Pennines is not only to assert her right to roam freely in her home country but also to affirm an un-Othered existence in Britain. In spite of being a novice walker and naturalist, Sethi's determination to explore the hills and moorlands in the North also addresses the tacit acceptance of the fact that the countryside of England has not traditionally been a place for people of colour. According to Campaign to Protect Rural England (CPRE), only one percent of visitors to England's National Parks and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty are people from Black, Asian, or minority ethnic backgrounds. Growing up as a daughter of a single mother who never had the luxury of enjoying expensive holidays, Sethi clearly recalls one memorable childhood holiday trip to the Lake District. Standing under the vast expanse of hills, lakes, and skies she realizes that there is an intimate bond between human and nature and that being in nature can become a cathartic experience—despite having been frowned at by a local resident who comments: "You don't see many brown folks out here in the countryside" (Sethi, *Belong* 80). In documenting her experiences of walking in natural beauty, following her horrible experience of being a victim of race-hate crime, Sethi's memoir thus transforms into a testimony of how nature salves wounded souls in a fractured world, subjects who are strangely interconnected by myriad cultures and identities, movements and migrations. Therefore, in the following section, I will first examine the concept of topophilia or love of place as proposed by Gaston Bachelard and Yi-Fu Tuan, indicating how a deep connection between the sense of

place and the sense of belonging exists. I will then explore how Sethi's memoir charts a topophilic cartography to shepherd the alienated and the unhomed toward a sense of home and belonging.

THE CONCEPT OF TOPOPHILIA AND BELONGING

W. H. Auden first used the word "topophilia" in his introduction to the collection of prose and verse written by John Betjeman, titled *Slick but not Streamlined* (1947). Auden's attempt to define topophilia marks this emotion with a certain kind of attachment to landscape and environment. However, he significantly points out that his idea of topophilia has little in common with simple nature love. As he maintains: "Wild or unhumanised nature holds no charms for the average topophil because it is lacking in history" (qtd. in Betjeman 11), Auden's perception of topophilia is not limited to responding to the beauty of the landscape but identifies it as a passion for the landscapes that are suffused with the past.

However, Gaston Bachelard's use of the term topophilia in his *The Poetics of Space*, which was first published in French as *La Poétique de l'Espace* in 1958, and translated into English in 1964, has expanded the acceptance of the term widely. Bachelard identifies topophilia as "felicitous space" and "eulogized space" which seeks "to determine the human value of the sorts of space that may be grasped, that may be defended against adverse forces, the space we love" (xxxv). Yi-Fu Tuan in his *Topophilia: A Study of Environmental Perception, Attitudes, and Values* (1974) refers to the term topophilia as a "neologism" (93). Even though the term is not an absolutely new word in the literal sense, as it has already been used by Auden and Bachelard before, Tuan's application and understanding of topophilia encompasses a wider range.

Approaching the idea of topophilia from the point of view of human geography, Yi-Fu Tuan defines topophilia as "the affective bond between people and place or setting" (4). Edward Relph suggests that Tuan's proposition is more about "-philia than about topo-, more about environmental attitudes and perceptions . . . than about the characteristics of places that contribute to those perceptions." In the preface to his volume on topophilia Tuan observes that although human beings and their environments are interconnected, environments for human beings are not only a resource, but also "sources of assurance and pleasure, objects of profound attachment and love" (xii). He further explicates that such affective ties between human and environment vary in intensity, subtlety, and modes of expression, such as response to environment, can be ranged from aesthetic to tactile. However, he significantly points out that

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topophilia is "not the strongest of human emotions" but can be compelling when a particular place or environment, which is normally associated with a sense of home or a locus of memory, transcends that simple implication to assume the role of a carrier of "emotionally charged events or perceived as a symbol" (93). Environment predominantly provides potentially infinite "sensory stimuli, which as perceived images lend shape to our joys and ideals" (Tuan 113), and topophilia can appropriate many different forms, varying greatly in emotional range and intensity, namely, "fleeting visual pleasure; the sensuous delight of physical contact; the fondness for place because it is familiar, because it is home and incarnates the past, because it evokes pride of ownership or of creation; joy in things because of animal health and vitality" (247). Therefore, the idea of topophilia evokes an integral relationship between place and home, which, in other words, indicates an intrinsic affiliation between place and a sense of belonging.

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However, belonging is a term which is frequently used but difficult to conceptualize. Antonsich ascertains that the idea of belonging is "vaguely defined and ill-theorised" as often the notion is taken for granted, as if "its meaning is somewhat self-explanatory" (644). In the introduction to their edited collection *Youth, Place, and Theories of Belonging* (2020), Sadia Habib and Michael R. M. Ward argue that belonging is a complex process which is predominantly "a personal dialectic in constant negotiation with one's surroundings" (1). They further profess that even though the perception of belonging is personal, the notion of belonging is inherently localized, as it is interwoven with a sense of place and its individual and collective histories, and is informed by "intersectional identity categories," thus making belonging "racialized, classed, gendered, and linked to place" (2). Thus, in the Foreword to the above-mentioned volume, Greg Noble proposes that the idea of belonging should be identified by a set of "practices," taking into account its "situated" nature, which underlines the "scales" of belonging which he identifies as local attachments articulated or disarticulated with "other registers of ethnicity, nation, and transnationality" (xvii–xviii). Hence, belonging is not simply given, but is constantly constructed and negotiated, and "operates in complex circuits of recognition" (xviii). Noble distinguishes belonging, being a set of practices, as a form of labour, where as "an expressive emotional attachment or detachment" reacts in ways that "increases or decreases the body's capacity to act" (xviii). Belongingness, thus produced, is also not just negotiating with the place and other human beings but forged in relation with "the spatial and non-human elements of one's environment" (xviii).

As a woman of colour in a predominantly white Britain, Anita Sethi has not only experienced several instances of macro and micro aggressions since her childhood, but also realizes that the place she calls home constantly

questions her right to belong in countless subtle (and less subtle) ways. However, she refuses to succumb to the existing racial prejudice that stops her from freely exploring her home country. Her journey through the North Pennines transforms into a journey of reclamation where her attempts to assert that "I belong in the UK as a brown woman, just as much a white man does" (*Belong* 12) lead to negotiating and constructing her sense of belonging in her own way. In addition, Sethi's experience also evokes an understanding of how belongingness can be shaped through vast mountains to tiny creatures, from deep rivers to fleeting raindrops, and how journeys through the natural world can be "emotionally restorative" (302), connecting her to the place which she calls home.

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TOPOPHILIC CARTOGRAPHY OF BELONGING

I Belong Here was published as the first book in the Bloomsbury Wildlife trilogy, and Anita Sethi has been hailed as a "powerful new voice in nature writing" (Cowdrey). Even though *I Belong Here* can be considered a part of the New Nature Writing genre, popularized by the practitioners such as Robert Macfarlane, Richard Mabey, Mark Cocker, and others since the late 1960s, Sethi's memoir carves out a different path. Sethi's encounters with nature, particularly during her walks across the Pennines, are not just to highlight the everyday connections between the human and non-human natural world, but to provide instances how physical experiences of being in the natural world can work as an act of resistance and reclamation, in response to deeply ingrained racial prejudice against the other, which results in perpetuating a sense of unbelonging. Sethi recognizes the need for belonging as a basic need, like water, air and food, the vital elements for all living organisms, and her search for belonging throughout her journey and her memoir is articulated in the call: "How could I feel a sense of belonging in my own body, in my own self, in the world? . . . How can nature help us to find a greater sense of belonging" (Sethi, *Belong* 9)? In her examination of new northern voices, Chloe Ashbridge rightly refers to Sethi's book as offering a trajectory of "developed post-pastoral engagements with nature writing" in facilitating "a reclamation of the English countryside from its imperial connotations while also recognising its history as a site of exclusion" (599–600). However, I will focus on Sethi's physical, emotional, and psychological responses while walking through the Pennines, and how her inquisitive vision and understanding unearth the harmonious interconnection of similarities and differences existing in the natural world, leading her to reclaim a sense of belonging to the land she calls home.

Opened on 24 April 1965, Pennine Way is the first National Trail in England and is one of the UK's most famous long-distance walks. Starting from Edale in the northern Derbyshire Peak District, it follows the Yorkshire Dales, through the Swaledale Valley, across the north Pennines, and over Hadrian's Wall in Northumberland to the Cheviot Hills, ending in the Scottish Borders in Kirk Yetholm. The trail offers spectacular landscapes and rich wildlife areas, including three National Parks and various National Nature Reserves. Some of the well-known spots along the route are Kinder Scout, Stoodley Pike, Top Withins, Malham Cove, Pen-y-Ghent, Tan Hill, High Force, Cauldron Snout, High Cup Nick, Cross Fell, Hadrian's Wall, and The Cheviot ("Pennine Way"). Sethi documents her varying experiences of being a race-hate crime victim, including while undertaking the Pennines walk, in five chapters in the memoir, in addition to a Prologue and an Epilogue. The titles of the chapters, namely, Mouth, Skin, Backbone, Lifeblood, and Feet, immediately indicate how her traumatic experiences and her transformational reclamations are intertwined in her mind and body, responding simultaneously through different aesthetic and tactile sensations.

For example, throughout the book Sethi repeatedly highlights how the sight of a river or even the sound of a flowing stream calms her down: "I hear the river before I see it, and the sound makes my heart surge as all remaining weariness drains away . . . I am lifted sky-high by the sight, and its wild energy washes away a skein of grimy anxiety" (*Belong* 84). However, as she looks at the River Aire she contemplates how flowing water, rivers, and oceans are all interconnected with each other, irrespective of geographical borders and boundaries. She reflects on how the River Aire flows through the northern cities and towns before joining the River Trent at Trent Falls to form the Humber Estuary, and how the Humber flows until it meets the North Sea, which is part of the Atlantic Ocean. She further notes that this is the same Atlantic Ocean which borders Guyana and into which the Berbice River runs, nearby which her mother grew up. Colonial history has mostly erased the history of the Indian indentured labourers on sugar colonies in the Caribbean, but as Sethi's visit to the National Archives in Georgetown, Guyana, to search for her ancestral history reveals, nature connects the borders and their respective inhabitants. Evoking Auden's idea of topophilia in which natural landscapes acquire greater significance because they exude the past and fuse into the present in which migration and displacement are a reality, Sethi remarks while pausing for breath on a footbridge across the river: "[H]ow we are living at a time when we need to build bridges not walls, not only across rivers but also cultural divides" (85). Sethi further points out that how nature prompts us to naturalize all kinds of colours and textures irrespective of racial differences. The river

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water often changes its colour from blue to brown as it flows along. The tree barks beneath the moss are also naturally brown, while the particular skin colour of black or brown has been demeaned in a place where diverse colourful nature spontaneously thrives. Sethi thus pines for an affirmation as all colours and textures which are parts of the natural world "need . . . to be reclaimed as beautiful" (105), so that a sense of belonging between different races and colours can be constructed.

Sethi's visit to Malham Cove, a natural wonder which is protected by law, not only brings her attention to the concept of protected characteristics, but also inspires her to notice that faults, clints, and grykes are not merely empty gaps or cracks, but also a potential environment and microclimate for rare wild flowers and ferns to thrive, which Sethi perceives as a sign of optimism in desolation. She writes: "Far from being lifeless up here, life has found a way of growing in the most unexpected of places, through cracks and fissures and breakage. It seems miraculous to see, uplifting and hopeful" (127–28). Similarly, she perceives Horton Scar as "not only an absence but also an opening, a possibility" where all the emotional scars and holes can be allowed to fully grieve and eventually alchemized into showing "who and what we love" (197–98), transforming her from a victim to a survivor.

Sethi's final destination, Hadrian's Wall, which is protected as a scheduled monument because of its historical importance, reveals how fear of immigration and prejudice against the Other has existed since the days of the Roman Empire. The 73 miles or 118 kilometre long wall was built between AD122 to AD130 to guard the Roman Province of Britannia from the barbarian invasion of the northern ancient Britons. However, against the glowing evening sun Sethi regards the famous Sycamore Gap Tree,[2] which stood by the side of the Hadrian's Wall for hundreds of years between two distinctive curves in the earth, caused by melting glacial waters, and she quietly meditates on the ways in which the natural world ceaselessly witnesses our histories and stories, our existence and predicaments, our violations and transgressions, since time immemorial.

In tune with Tuan's observation, Sethi's physical journey through the Pennines eventually transforms into a symbolic journey, providing sensory stimuli, including corporeal and emotional, which transfers her from hate and trauma to joy, happiness, and belonging. Sethi's constant negotiation with the flow of the river, wild ferns and flowers, wide range of mountains

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[2] Due to an act of vandalism the historic Sycamore Gap Tree was felled overnight on 27 September 2023, causing some damage to the Hadrian's Wall. A 16-year-old boy and a 60-year-old man have been arrested on suspicion of criminal damage and released on bail (Jagger).

and vast expanse of valleys in the Pennines, leads her to a practice of constructing belongingness in the situated nature, which, in its manifold varieties, signifies that, in spite of differences of race, class, colour, or creed, human minds, like the shifting and changing elements of nature, are strangely interconnected by myriad cultures and identities, movements and migrations. As Habib and Ward point out, Sethi's eventual unearthing of her rightful place in the north is a result of her personal dialectic with the natural world which salves her wounded soul and fosters her deep love for her home—a place where her sense of belonging has been questioned or denied by others.

CONCLUSION

Sethi's quest for reclamation thus forges a novel cartography of belonging which fuses the literal trails of the Pennines documented in the OS map with the desire paths of a scarred and traumatized psyche. The text traverses the routes of migration histories, ponders the transient and unsettled homes that people strive to create along the way, wonders how to feel settled in one's own skin when one is at the risk of racism, and discovers how places make people and vice versa. Evoking Yi-Fu Tuan's proposition that affective bonds between people and places are capable of radiating assurance, pleasure, attachment, and love, Sethi's embracing of the amazing nature of the Pennines in search of belonging obliges her to question the nature of belonging itself. She examines whether one can truly belong to a place or a place can entirely belong to an individual. Belonging, in its aggressive forms, implies notions of ownership, indicating an existence of power hierarchy, which eventually leads back to the same stereotypes that result in prejudice, marginalization, and race-hate crimes. Enthralled by vast, wild, ancient, and timeless nature, Sethi realizes how we are "all temporary guests on this earth" (*Belong* 296). Since we will take nothing of our belongings with us, the only way to establish a sense of belonging to ourselves and to our environment is not to search for finding oneself, but to lose and dissolve ourselves in the manifold heterogeneity of the surrounding landscapes and mankind, which teems with diverse wildlife and assorted organisms, varied colours and textures, faults and fissures, gaps and scars. As Sethi allows herself to dissipate in the landscape, she invokes the ancient Maori saying: "I am the river, and the river is me," which gently guides her to settle into "the sound and sight and smell of the river and its wildlife . . . the shell between the self and world dissolving as I walk" (170). Such a diffusion of the self in nature and mankind generates empathy and fosters an understanding of the Other through a different viewpoint.

Sethi's consultations with Dacher Keltner, the founder-director of the Greater Good Science Centre, based at the University of California, Berkeley, which sponsors scientific research into emotional and social well-being, testify to the same perspective. Keltner rightly points out that nature can be healing to various post-traumatic stress disorders. He identifies how a human body, similar to an antenna, responds to the sensuousness of nature, the sound, the scent, the colour which can directly calm down one's stress response. He also emphasizes the significant element of "awe," asserting that "when you get out in the wonders of nature you feel awe and you feel there's a lot more to life than the trauma, there's more to this story" (Sethi, *Belong* 235). Sethi's narrative thus travels beyond her personal trauma and the Pennines, and reinscribes the sense of belonging through her words, her skin, her love, empathy, and forgiveness. Reiterating the observations of the Father of the National Parks, John Muir (1838–1914), who highlights the interconnectedness of natural formations and formations of human beings: "When we try to pick out anything by itself, we find it hitched to everything else in the universe" (87), Sethi solemnly observes, in a similar fashion, that all external journeys are intrinsically internal, and that one needs to find belonging within one's self. "The body itself is a landscape and for the first time in a while I feel I am fully inhabiting myself and simultaneously inhabiting this place, becoming the sea and sky" (298), Sethi writes, and as her wounded body and soul symbolically transmute themselves into an embodiment of natural elements she finds her way home in the land of her birth by tracing the topophilic cartography of belonging.

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IMAGINARY, HAUNTED, AND AESTHETIC DWELLINGS

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Imagination and Dwelling in *The House that Jack Built*

ABSTRACT

This article employs a phenomenological and hermeneutic lens to examine the themes of dwelling, creative imagination, and the interplay between ethics and aesthetics within Lars von Trier's film, *The House that Jack Built*. The film follows Jack, an engineer and self-taught architect, who pursues his dream of building an ideal home while committing morally reprehensible acts (murders). He documents these crimes using negative photography, turning them into a twisted form of artistic expression. This study explores the convergence and divergence of ethics and aesthetics, drawing on a hermeneutic understanding of imagination and dwelling. It uncovers that creative imagination holds the potential for ultimate *hybris*, meaning transgression and rebellion against "the great Architect behind it all." It is a force that supplements human limitations and positions them as original, autonomous creators incapable of dwelling in a shared world. While creative imagination emerges as a force that transcends human limitations, it is also intricately linked to dwelling. It serves as a conduit for personal expression and the ability to bestow and create meaning. It becomes a prerequisite for personal identity, responsibility, and freedom. It is inherently ethical as it facilitates effective communication and the cultivation of *praxis* within the community. This ethical dimension is disclosed in *praxis* and culminates there, highlighting creative imagination as an essential human capability that enables care and dwelling.

Keywords: dwelling, imagination, art, ethics, *The House that Jack Built*, Lars von Trier.

INTRODUCTION

In his renowned works on dwelling, Heidegger quotes Hölderlin: "Full of merit, yet poetically, man / Dwells on this earth" (qtd. in Heidegger, "Poetically" 216). What does this mean, and what is the relationship between dwelling and poetry or creative imagination? In this article, I will draw on the phenomenological and hermeneutic understanding of dwelling, creative imagination, and the relationship between ethics and aesthetics to interpret Lars von Trier's film *The House that Jack Built*.

    The House that Jack Built caused outrage when it premiered at the Cannes Film Festival in 2018, with many audience members leaving the cinema. The film follows a man called Jack over 12 years and introduces five randomly chosen "incidents" (murders) that define Jack's development as a serial killer. The story is told from Jack's point of view. He takes photographs of his victims and considers each a work of art. Despite his clumsiness, he is fortunate in his endeavors, almost to the point of parody. He takes increasingly significant risks to create the ultimate artwork, a house made from human bodies. Despite the shock and disgust it instills in some viewers, the film raises profound philosophical questions. Understanding some visceral reactions to the portrayal of Jack's vision and actions, in this article, I will engage in a philosophical discussion rather than a moral debate and try to substantiate Jack's views on art. By using *The House that Jack Built* as a basis for reflections on the notion of dwelling, creative imagination/art, and the relationship between ethics and aesthetics, I hope to provide a deeper understanding of these ideas.

HERMENEUTICS OF JACKS'S DWELLING

Jack, an engineer by profession, has always been passionate about architecture. After inheriting a significant amount of money, he buys land to construct his dream house. However, despite having extensive knowledge of architecture, he cannot build the house he desires. He creates several projects and begins constructing some but destroys them in disappointment and dissatisfaction with his work, primarily due to his chosen materials. Frustrated, he lives in a small apartment, obsessively working on designing his dream house. Why is Jack so obsessed with building the house? Why is he unable to build it with land, funds, and knowledge at his disposal? What does this tell us about Jack? Heidegger's understanding of dwelling may provide some insight into these questions.

    For Heidegger, dwelling is not just a passive occupation of a space; it involves a sense of meaning and significance. Dwelling is a fundamental

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way in which humans engage with their surroundings and establish a meaningful relationship with the world. According to Heidegger, dwelling is a complex and profound concept that includes the existential, poetic, and meaningful connection between human beings and the world they live in. It is about how we interact with and attribute significance to our surroundings, establishing a meaningful framework for our existence. "The way in which you are, and I am, the manner in which we humans *are* on the earth, is *Buan*, dwelling. To be a human being means to be on the earth as a mortal. It means to dwell" (Heidegger, "Dwelling" 145). The notion of dwelling concerns how humans exist in space and interact with the world and others. Our sense of belonging (including belonging to ourselves, i.e. identity) is integral to dwelling. The paradoxical nature of belonging is expressed by the feeling of home and home-coming, as well as the feeling of home-lessness expressed by the embodied meaningfulness of home and home-coming, and simultaneously the fleshly and spiritual feelings of home-lessness.

In one of the film's opening scenes, the main character encounters a woman whose car has broken down. Upon inspecting the vehicle, Jack remarks that the issue is not with the car but with the jack. "[Jack]: The issue with your jack is it's broken" (von Trier). They take the jack to a blacksmith, "a very good one," who attempts to repair it but eventually breaks down again. The jack cannot be fixed. This scene is more about the Jack than about a jack, more about Jack's character than a broken jack. We soon learn that Jack lacks any meaningful relationships or sense of purpose in his life. He lacks human emotions, longings, or fears. He is lost. He has no narrative identity and no original ideas. He is broken, homeless within his own skin. He lives in a world that does not understand him and that he does not understand:

> I went to great lengths to fake normal empathy in order to hide amongst the masses. [trying to imitate facial expressions from a magazine]: Smile. Oh, yes, yes, yes, yes. Disappointed. Very, very disappointed. I was a very sensitive child, profoundly afraid of playing. For example, hide and seek in case of hide. I always chose to run in near panic into a field of reeds to hide. (von Trier)

Perhaps Jack's obsession with building a house is an attempt to create a dwelling place that would rescue him from the fate of homelessness, find a sense of belonging, and discover who he truly is. But is he capable of accomplishing his dream?

If it were only a question of architectural or engineering skills, Jack would be perfectly capable of creating his desired house. However,

Heidegger's notion of "building" goes beyond just the physical construction of structures. It encompasses nurturing, maintaining, and inhabiting a space, shaping and forming our environment. This process of bringing forth and molding the world we live in is what building truly means. Ultimately, he draws a close connection between dwelling and constructing and caring:

> The old word *bauen*, which says that man is insofar as he dwells, this word *bauen*, however, also means at the same time to cherish and protect, to preserve and care for, specifically to till the soil, to cultivate the vine. Such building only takes care—it tends the growth that ripens into the fruit of its own accord. . . Shipbuilding and temple-building, on the other hand, do, in a certain way, make their works. Here building, in contrast with cultivating, is a constructing. Both modes of *building*—building as cultivating, Latin *colere*, cultura, and building as the raising up of edifices, *aedificare*—are comprised within the genuine building, that is, dwelling. . . . To dwell, to be set at peace, means to remain at peace within the free sphere that safeguards each thing in its nature. The fundamental character of dwelling is sparing and preserving. It pervades dwelling in its whole range. (Heidegger, "Dwelling" 145)

Heidegger based his concept of Care on the myth of *Cura*. This ancient Latin myth, found in a 2nd-century collection of myths edited by Hyginus, explores the ideas of vulnerability and care as being ontologically rooted in the human condition. The myth depicts humans as beings held together by Care. This is necessary because humans are divided between the spiritual (represented by Jupiter) and the bodily (represented by Earth) realms. Care helps humans reconcile these two dimensions and overcome their split condition. Heidegger's analysis in section VI of his work supports his central idea of Care (*Sorge*) as the Being of Dasein. He argues that Dasein is a Being-in-the-World (*In-der-Welt-sein*) and is active in the world as it acts. Taking care is the practical expression of this existence. The myth of *Cura* is crucial to Heidegger's argument because it expresses Dasein "primordially" (ursprünglich) and symbolically helps us understand the significance of Care as the Being of Dasein. Heidegger's exploration of care and dwelling is intertwined with his broader philosophical project, emphasizing the existential nature of human existence and the need for an authentic relationship with the world. Care and dwelling are thus intertwined: care is the foundational structure of our existence, and dwelling is how we authentically engage with our surroundings and find a sense of belonging in the world.

Crucially, for Heidegger, "[o]nly if we are capable of dwelling, only then can we build" (Heidegger, "Dwelling" 158). But Jack is incapable of dwelling in the Heideggerian understanding of the notion. He does not care; he does not construct. He destroys, destructs, and murders. He states: "If glorification could demean a work, why should destruction and demolition not be able to do the opposite and create art? . . . an artist must be cynical and not worry about the welfare of humans or Gods in his art" (von Trier).

It is not only Jack that is home-less in the sense of care-less. In one of Jack's murder incidents, he reveals to his victim—a girl he calls Simple—his plan to kill her. Even more cruelly, he encourages and even helps her to scream, as loud as she can, in the apartment and then through the window. No one reacts to those terrifying screams. Jack comments on it:

> You know, maybe I'm mistaken, but as far as I can tell, not a single light has gone on in any apartment or stairwell. You know why that is? 'Cause in this hell of a town, in this hell of a country, in this hell of a world, nobody wants to help! You can scream from now until Christmas Eve and the only answer you'll get is the deafening silence that you're hearing right now. (von Trier)

Jack and Simple are not in some desolate area. On the contrary, they are inside an apartment building with many other inhabitants and cars parked outside:

Fig. 1. Jack and Simple.[1]

Such grimness defines von Trier's vision of contemporary society. Heidegger introduces the notion of the "fourfold," which consists of earth, sky, divinities, and mortals. This fourfold is a way of understanding the interconnectedness of various elements in the world and how they

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[1] All seven screenshots included in this article were captured by the author.

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contribute to the experience of dwelling. Each component plays a role in shaping the world and providing meaning to human existence:

> By a primal oneness, the four-earth and sky, divinities and mortals—belong together in one. . . . This simple oneness of the four we call the fourfold. Mortals are in the fourfold by dwelling.

> But the basic character of dwelling is to spare, to preserve. . . . To spare and preserve means: to take under our care, to look after the fourfold in its presencing. What we take under our care must be kept safe. . . . Mortals would never be capable of [dwelling] if dwelling were merely a staying on earth under the sky, before the divinities, among mortals. Things themselves secure the fourfold only when they themselves as things are let be in their presencing. How is this done? In this way, that mortals nurse and nurture the things that grow, and specially construct things that do not grow. Cultivating and construction are building in the narrower sense. *Dwelling*, insofar as it keeps or secures the fourfold in things, is, as this *keeping*, a building. (Heidegger, "Dwelling" 147–49)

In von Trier's dark hell, we ceased to care for our neighbors (the mortals), earth, sky, and divinities. "Cause in this hell of a town, in this hell of a country, in this hell of a world" (von Trier), it would appear that nobody wants to help because nobody *cares*. We become increasingly incapable of dwelling in the world; we merely stay on earth among the mortals, destroy nature, disrespect the sky, and disregard or even mock divinities.

HERMENEUTIC-PHENOMENOLOGICAL APPROACH TO IMAGINATION AND DWELLING

Dwelling is also connected with creative imagination (see Ricœur). For Heidegger, dwelling, related to poetry in the broader sense of artistic creation, including the technical arts of building and cultivating, is the heart of human dwelling as it brings the mysterious power of granting and making into personal expression. While Jack is aware of his psychopathic tendencies, he is convinced of one thing: that he is a true and genius artist. Jack certainly has some artistic and creative potential. He takes photos of his victims using analog photography, printing the negatives, and sees them as extravagant art. In one of his most inspiring dialogues with Verge (who is a clear representation of Virgil from *The Divine Comedy*), when commenting on his photographs, he says: "For me though, what was really sensational about the work with the photo, it wasn't the image but the negative. When I was ten years old, I discovered that through the negative, you could see the real inner demonic

quality of the light. The dark light" (von Trier). In photography, a negative is an image that presents a reversed grading of tonalities with respect to the subject. Below are some examples of Jack's works:
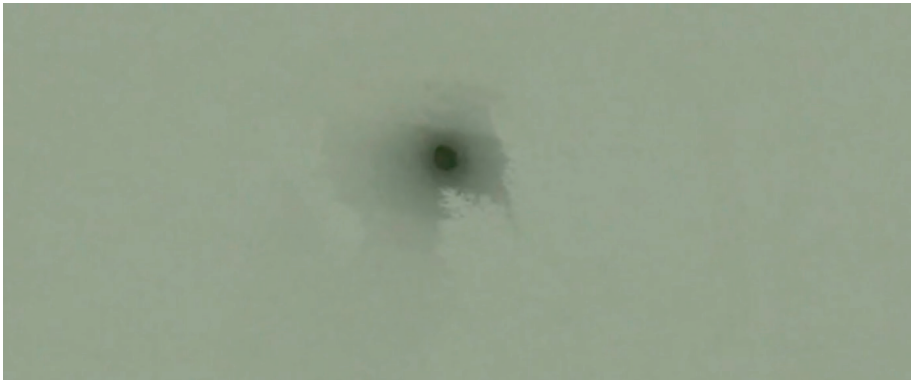
Fig. 2. The fire.

Fig. 3. The sun.

Fig. 4. Jack's victim.

This tone inversion is the direct consequence of the light-sensitive silver halide compound used to capture an image in a camera: it darkens in areas exposed to the brightest parts of the subject. Here, Jack is at his most creative. Not only by presenting but also by representing reality as he sees it through negative photography. According to classical Jungian psychoanalysis, the archetype of the Self represents a kind of fullness, the entirety of human psychic processes—both conscious and unconscious. Central to developing the Self is exploring the unconscious, closely related to his idea of the shadow. For Jung,

> Shadow is that hidden, repressed, for the most part, inferior and guilt-laden personality whose ultimate ramifications reach back into the realm of our animal ancestors. . . . If it has been believed hitherto that the human shadow was the source of evil, it can now be ascertained on a closer investigation that the unconscious man that is his shadow does not consist only of morally reprehensible tendencies but also displays a number of good qualities, such as normal instincts, appropriate reactions, realistic insights, creative impulses etc. (par. 422–23)

Jung believed that individuals and groups needed to recognize, acknowledge, and deal with their shadow elements. Failing to do so often leads to interpersonal and inter-group problems, fuelling prejudice and even sparking significant conflicts. Becoming familiar with the shadow is an essential part of the therapeutic relationship, of individuation, and of becoming a more well-rounded, whole, and colorful individual. By recording light through shadow and eventually bringing out the positive (copies, inversions, facsimiles), we can reveal certain previously unclear aspects. In this sense, the positive is a copy, while the negative is the original image, often unwanted, unintended, or suppressed. It is essential to recognize that our shadow selves hold a lot of potential, qualities, and capacities that need to be acknowledged and owned to avoid a state of impoverishment in our personality. From this perspective, shadows play a crucial role in our ability to understand ourselves.

In a hermeneutic-phenomenological approach to interpretation, one can identify aspects of oneself reflected in various forms of expression, such as literary or visual works (Wierciński 438). In the context of our discussion, we focus on interpreting the creations of an architect and a photographer. When a piece of art resonates with an individual, it becomes a means of gaining authentic self-understanding. This fundamental purpose underlies the act of engaging with literary and artistic works. It becomes a process of navigating the intricacies of our reality and the unique context in which we exist. The surprise and unexpected encounters

during the reading or interpretation signify moments when one recognizes facets of oneself within the artwork. The viewer, initially opening herself to the potential meaning of the artwork, approaches it with existential seriousness, anticipating a meaningful encounter.

According to Gadamer, an artwork expresses itself in a way that unveils something akin to a discovery, a revelation of a previously conceived idea. Every disclosure is inherently a closure, occurring simultaneously and in a dialectical relationship (Gadamer 470). Viewing photographs becomes a process of learning something new about one's experience that was previously hidden or undisclosed. Through encountering the artwork, the reader uncovers a truth waiting to be discovered, "the truth that illuminates itself in the constant dynamics of concealment and disclosure" (Wierciński 45), learning about herself in a way that may have been overlooked before. The reader recognizes this truth, expressed by the artwork, as genuine and acknowledges it in the moment of revelation. The connection between the viewer and the artwork is likened to a shared dream, the true essence of building and creation. It becomes a journey of self-understanding, transforming the act of interpreting an artwork into being interpreted by it. In this reciprocal process, the artwork resonates with the viewer, leading to a shared experience and a deeper understanding of oneself. Understanding what the artwork communicates is a form of self-encounter and self-beginning. Exposure to the artwork becomes exposure to oneself, shaping a new understanding of life. The reader's self-image is affected, but the distortion contributes to a more complex sense of oneself. Ultimately, reading becomes a means of working out one's self-understanding while interpreting the artwork. The viewer envisions potential transformations and self-conceptions in response to the artwork's gravity. This engagement with art enables a nuanced understanding of oneself and the integration of isolated experiences into the continuity of personal growth.

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Viewing photographic artworks, informed by hermeneutic knowledge, emerges as a compelling approach to self-discovery and understanding. Through this engagement, viewers gain profound insights into their identities and envisage potential transformations, validating the significance of reading as a form of self-knowing and experiencing who we are. As Jack looks at his negatives, he moves closer to finding his true self and understanding who he really is or wants to be. However, we are left unsatisfied as Jack fails to delve deeper into the relationship between his artworks and his potential audience or explain his fascination with the darker aspects of life. Is it his attempt to capture the Jungian shadow that exists within all of us? Or is it his artistic exploration of the darker aspects of human nature? These questions are left unanswered, as Jack's primary fascination is with something he calls "the noble rot." This refers

to decomposition, deconstruction, and death. Jack's problem is not his appeal to the shadow but his lack of interest in the light, communication, and interpretation, mainly expressed in language. This might also be at the origin of his complete lack of empathy or ability to human connection. He tells Verge: "I loathe diagnosis you can just write down in letters" (von Trier). The following images scroll through the screen:

Fig. 5. Jack's view of language.

For Heidegger, on the other hand, the "poets" of finer artistic expression and especially the written word are the guides of humanity. They signal the power of making present and manifest intentionally, albeit always indirectly, the power of manifestation. What questions arise when we reflect on the phenomenology of home and its indissoluble connection to the ontological hermeneutics of human linguality formally indicated by Heidegger's famous "Language is the 'house of Being'"? (Heidegger, "Letter" 217)? Poets guide thinking insofar as the latter dwells on the mystery of disclosure. Without poetic guidance, there is no hope for any culturally renewed sense of the ultimate horizon of our collective longing. Alternatively, we may well be condemned to the barbaric anti-poetry of domination and control. Verge seems to believe this as well, as he responds to Jack:

> [Verge]: That's not fair, the letters are clear. They look after us and create boundaries between good and evil, and they carry religion. [Jack]: Religion has ruined human beings because your God teaches people to deny the tiger in themselves and turns us all into a throng of slaves too shameful to acknowledge it. [Verge]: Oh, Jack, you should have read the right letters in your life, but you didn't want to. (von Trier)

Jack goes by the nickname "Mr. Sophistication," which may refer to a philosopher or sophist who uses clever but false arguments that lack strong foundations. Through his conversations with Simple, it is clear that

he despises anything ordinary or commonplace. He strives for the sublime, but not in the sense described by Kant, for whom sublime experience of imagination is not found in nature but within our minds and is directly related to performing a particular negation in its face:

> All we are entitled to say is that the object is suitable for exhibiting a sublimity that can be found in the mind. For what is sublime, in the proper meaning of the term, cannot be contained in any sensible form but concerns only ideas of reason, which, though they cannot be exhibited adequately, are aroused and called to mind by this very inadequacy, which can be exhibited in sensibility. (Kant 99)

According to Kant, the sublime is found in our response to terrifying things rather than the terror itself. Kant argues that when our own position is secure, frightening events become attractive, and we label them sublime because they elevate the soul above ordinary concerns, revealing a unique power of resistance. The sublime, involving fear, awe, and pleasure, is a nuanced aesthetic experience beyond mere terror, connected to encountering vast, powerful, or incomprehensible phenomena. It is not mere terror that is sublime but our imaginative response to it. The potential for *transcendence* must be awakened in us.

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On the other hand, Jack's art is a presentation that is not mediated by imagination, "a fiction without the comfort of the fictitious; a signified naked of its signification; a presentation without representation" (Manoussakis 295). He believes in his capacity to adequately *present*, rather than creatively or artistically *re-present* terror. He argues that our aesthetic admiration should be directed at the raw and unfiltered depiction of evil rather than a more subdued portrayal that has been imagined and artistically created: "Some people claim that the atrocities we commit in our fiction are those inner desires which we cannot commit in our controlled civilization. I don't agree" (von Trier). Nevertheless, as Bachelard argues, the artist's creative imagination and language do not work to present reality; the creative artist's unique capacity to create works beyond reality is essential. "Imagination is not, as its etymology would suggest, the faculty of forming images of reality; it is rather the faculty of forming images which go beyond reality, which sing reality" (Bachelard, *Poetic Imagination* 15).

Bachelard suggests that an artist's imagination and language are not limited to merely depicting reality. Rather, their true potential lies in creating works that go beyond reality, in "deforming the images offered by perception, of freeing ourselves from the immediate images" (19). True artistic creation does not just present life or death but opens up the possibility of a new life or a good death. This is because art is essentially an aspiration towards

new images. Bachelard believes that poetry plays a crucial role in mediating between art and reality. He emphasizes the importance of poetic imagination and reverie in creating a dynamic interplay between the two. Poetic images have immense power to shape our perceptions and experiences, allowing us to understand reality beyond empirical observation. Poetry can help us connect with the deeper, symbolic dimensions of the world, making the familiar unfamiliar and revealing hidden dimensions of reality. Bachelard is particularly interested in the intimate connection between the human psyche and the spaces we inhabit. He suggests that poetry can illuminate the subjective experience of space, transforming it into a poetic, imaginative reality that goes beyond the physical characteristics of the environment. By engaging the imagination, fostering reverie, and creating poetic images that deepen our understanding of the world, poetry plays a crucial role in mediating between art and reality.

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From this perspective, we can ask critical questions about Jack's authenticity as an artist. It raises doubts about whether Jack embodies an artist's essence according to Bachelard's perspective. The passage prompts the reader to consider the ethical and aesthetic dimensions of Jack's artistic expression. The relationship between ethics and aesthetics becomes a central concern in evaluating the nature and value of Jack's artistic endeavors.

THE (IM)POSSIBLE RELATION BETWEEN ETHICS AND AESTHETICS

The ancient Greeks believed that ethics and aesthetics were interconnected. The three transcendentals—Beauty (*Kalon*), Truth (*Aletheia*), and Good (*Agathon*)—were considered to be indivisible. Plato, although not directly, speaks of this unity in his Dialogues, particularly in *Symposium* and *Phaedrus*. Beauty is True and Good, Truth is Beautiful and Good, and Goodness is True and Beautiful.

However, this view changed throughout philosophy and art history, particularly due to challenges posed by early 20th-century avant-garde movements. One of the most notable challenges to this viewpoint was presented in the form of the film *The Andalusian Dog*, created by Salvador Dali and Luis Buñuel in 1929. The film lacked a narrative structure or logic and aimed to evoke horror, repulsion, and shock in viewers. In his autobiography, Buñuel described how the Surrealist movement influenced *The Andalusian Dog*:

> We all felt a certain destructive impulse, a feeling that, for me, has been even stronger than the creative urge. . . The idea of burning down

a museum, for instance, has always seemed more enticing than the opening of a cultural centre or the inauguration of a new hospital. What fascinated me most, however . . . was the moral aspect of the movement. . . . It was an aggressive morality based on the complete rejection of all existing values. We had other criteria: we exalted passion, mystification, black humor, the insult, and the call of the abyss. Inside this new territory, all our thoughts and actions seemed justifiable. (107)

Von Trier's film reopens the debate on whether ethics and aesthetics should be considered together and which is more important. Jack takes a clear stance.

> [Jack]: Do you know Blake's poems about the lamb and the tiger? . . . God created both the lamb and the tiger. The lamb represents innocence, and the tiger represents savagery. Both parts are perfect and necessary. The tiger lives on blood, and murder kills the lamb. And that is also the artist's nature.
> [Verge]: You read Blake like the devil reads the Bible. After all, the poor lamb didn't ask to die in order to become even the greatest art.
> [Jack]: The lamb has been bestowed with the honor of living forever in art, and art is divine. (von Trier)

For Jack, then, beauty is divine. *Kalon* stands above all else, and those who do not understand it belong to the human herd.

Kierkegaard suggested that human life can be divided into three stages: aesthetic, ethical, and religious. In the aesthetic stage, individuals live like artists, seeking beauty and salvation. They consider art as a religion and create it for its own sake. To them, beauty is the highest and only value. In this stage, Kierkegaard's artist sees human beings as works of art and turns them into objects of admiration. The artist throws them into tragedy to make them even more admirable, and so does Jack. Kierkegaard poses a question to us: can beauty save us? Let's consider its relation to other humans. We admire their beauty, but as we get closer to them, we lose sight of the stunning view. Beauty keeps us at a distance. Kierkegaard discusses this topic in *The Seducer's Diary*, which describes the relationship between the artist and the work of art, Johannes and Cordelia. Johannes seduces Cordelia, becomes engaged to her, gets too close to her, loses the stunning view, and then breaks off the engagement to restore it. Driven to a state of misery, Cordelia becomes his work of art. The abandoned Cordelia is in despair, but only now, in her desperation and from the distance, is she truly beautiful. Doesn't that justify the artist? Johannes receives a letter from Cordelia:

> Johannes, Never will I call you "my Johannes," for I certainly realize you never have been that, and I am punished harshly enough for having

once been gladdened in my soul by this thought, and yet I do call you "mine": my seducer, my deceiver, my enemy, my murderer, the source of my unhappiness, the tomb of my joy, the abyss of my unhappiness. I call you "mine" and call myself "yours," and as it once flattered your ear/ proudly inclined to my adoration, so shall it now sound as a curse upon you/a curse for all eternity. Do not look forward to my planning to pursue you or to arm myself with a dagger in order to provoke your ridicule! Flee where you will, I am still yours; go to the ends of the earth, I am still yours. Love a hundred others, I am still yours—indeed, in the hour of death, I am yours. The very language I use against you must demonstrate to you that I am yours. You have had the audacity to deceive a person in such a way that you have become everything to me, so that I would rejoice solely in being your slave. Yours I am/yours, yours/your curse. *Your Cordelia* (Kierkegaard 15–16).

Johannes does not respond to the letter. As an artist, he considers Cordelia's letter a work of art. Cordelia's letter is beautifully written; it *is* a work of art. Johannes, in a sense, is its co-author. Kierkegaard examines the nature of evil and considers that the aesthetic relationship between human beings is one of its forms. It is the act of aesthetic wandering around human beings. This wandering cannot be transformed into loyalty or lead to a complete separation. It drifts in the aesthetics that disregard the pain of the other. "It is one of the forms of modern evil" (Tischner 98, translation mine).

Is there any relationship between ethics and aesthetics in our contemporary understanding of art? For von Trier, there is a connection between ethics and aesthetics, or at least between ethics and imagination. At the end of *The House that Jack Built*, Verge guides Jack to Dante's Hell, where he is meant to reside in one of the upper circles (probably the seventh, which is for violent murderers). In Canto XII of Dante's *Divine Comedy*, Virgil tells Dante when they enter the seventh circle: "But now look down the valley. Coming closer you will see the river of blood that boils the souls of those who through their violence injured others" (Dante 178–79). However, Jack ends up at the very bottom of hell, reserved for traitors. We will revisit this question and explore why Jack ultimately ended up there. To do so, we must delve more deeply into the notion of creative imagination.

DWELLING IN CREATIVE IMAGINATION

Bachelard speaks of the "ultimate poetic depth of the space of the house" (Bachelard, *Poetics of Space* 6) within which we dwell and which dwells in us. Dwelling is directly related to the notion of creative imagination,

creative dwelling, and creative creation of the dwelling space. Jack sees himself as a particularly original architect, thus as the one who creatively creates spaces. And yet, he seems absolutely disinterested in what Jeff Malpas sees as the essence of architecture, namely "[t]he relation between architecture and the human being" (11). In his aspirations to become an architect, Jack compares himself to "the great architect behind it all" (von Trier). As he explains to Verge: "The old cathedrals often have sublime artworks hidden away in the darkest corners for only God to see or whatever one feels like, calling the great architect behind it all. The same goes for murder." What is most important in architecture, for Jack, is the *material*: "I often say that the material does the work. In other words, it has a kind of will of its own, and by following it, the result will be the most exquisite." As disturbing as it is, after a series of as many as sixty-one murders, Jack finally finds the *material* for his perfect house, that is, human corpses (all of which he kept in a walk-in freezer). He finally fulfils his dream to create a work of art, a place of dwelling, out of murdered human beings:

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Fig. 6. Jack's house.

However, in any work, human creation is never *ex nihilo* (out of nothing) but instead is conditioned by the givenness of the already-created world, which human creation alters, refigures, and reinterprets. Mr. Sophistication is not satisfied with the inert, created matter. He requires a different kind of material—divine material—that is proper only to divine creation.

In the Genesis story of the creation of Adam, God created man in His own image and likeness. For Richard Kearney, this means that God "risked allowing man to emulate Him, to set himself up as His rival, to supplant Him in the order of creation" (69). Genesis reveals that creative

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imagination holds the potential for transgression—a force supplementing human limitations and positioning individuals as autonomous creators. In the realm of imagination, we can create or dismantle without constraints. Although not directly related, the Biblical story of Adam bears similarities to the Hellenic myth of Prometheus. They both "hang between heaven and earth, between a world of paradisal freedom and a world of bondage" (Frye 207), rebel against the divine order, dismantling the established harmony of nature. Both Prometheus and Adam are depicted as benefactors of humanity, yet also instigators of illegitimate desires to substitute their creations for the original divine act of creation. It enables a world where humans, having assumed the roles of gods and demigods, perceive their own imaginations as divine. Plato exposes the limits of the stolen "wisdom of practising the arts" in his *Protagoras* dialogue (19). For him, the bestowal of divinity to humanity also sowed discord between humans and the gods. Despite significant distinctions, the biblical narrative of Adam's fall and the Greek myth of Prometheus' theft depict the acquisition of imagination as an offence against the gods. Ancient philosophers caution against the peril of unchecked imaginative power, considering it the breeding ground for human *hubris*. They perceive imagination not as a productive force but as a mimetic capacity that should remain subordinate to reason. The unrestrained feeling of omnipotence in imagination is seen as a basis for arrogance. When imagination is pursued for its own sake, it may lead to a detachment from reality, fostering overconfidence. When divorced from reason, imagination risks becoming a destructive rather than a constructive force.

On the one hand, imagination promises to address humanity's sense of lack; on the other, it imparts the stain of the original transgression (whether Adam's or Prometheus') to all subsequent generations. In essence, imagination serves as a power that supplements the human experience of insufficiency, positioning humans as original creators. Yet, because imagination operates in the realm of art rather than nature, it cannot entirely escape the awareness that it is an imitation of the original act of a divine maker (such as the biblical Yahweh or the Greek Demiurge)—an act deemed lawful. All traditions share the conviction that "[i]magination can never forget that its art is artifice, that its freedom is arbitrary, that its originality is a simulation, repetition, mimesis" (Kearney 76). On the other hand, Jack usurped himself the right to use the divine material—human beings—and think of himself as an original creator in his own right.

When Verge takes Jack to Hell, despite belonging to one of the upper circles of Hell, Verge shows him the entire structure, including the deepest part of Hell, which features a mysterious broken bridge:

Fig. 7. Jack and Verge on the bridge.

The following dialogue occurs:

> [Verge]: That's how deep the deepest hell goes. It's actually not here I'm to deliver you, however improbable that may sound, but a couple of circles higher up. I took you down here as a kind of a favor because you did after all give me a little to chew on with your story, and I understood that you wanted to see it all. When you are done looking, we'll turn back.
> [Jack, pointing to the broken bridge]: Where does that path lead?
> [Verge]: On the other side. It leads out of hell and up. As you can see there was once a bridge but that was before my time.
> [Jack]: Isn't it possible to climb all the way around? This way, and make it over to the other side?
> [Verge]: Quite a few have tried, but I have to say, never successfully. I wouldn't recommend it, but the choice is entirely yours.
> [Jack]: I'll take my chance.

The film's ending portrays that Jack never shows remorse for his actions and continues to believe in his divine abilities to outsmart God and gain access to paradise. However, his attempt proves futile, resulting in his descent into the deepest layer of the ninth circle of hell. The upper layer of the circle is where the Giants reside. Canto XXXI delves into the theme of pride among the Giants. Their rebellion against their gods is a profound manifestation of Envy and Pride. Nimrod, driven by envy for God's dominion, attempted to construct a tower to Heaven, while the Titans, except for Antaeus, rebelled against Jove. The Fallen Angels, spurred on by pride and envy, also revolted against God. Dante vividly depicts the menacing amalgamation of qualities embodied by the extreme wickedness of the Giants and others in the Ninth Circle: "for when the faculty of intellect / is joined with brute force and with evil will, / no man can win against such an alliance"

(Dante 355, Canto XXXI).[2] However, the deepest layer of the ninth circle is reserved for traitors like Brutus and Cassius, and Judas, the worst of them all, is in the deepest of depths, chewed on by three-headed Lucifer himself. Perhaps von Trier, depicting Jack's fall into the deepest layer and meeting with Lucifer, supplements Dante's vision with his commentary on art and creative imagination, suggesting that it is not traitors but those who see themselves as divine creators and use their creative imagination for destructive purposes (like the Giants) that commit the worst form of *hubris* and will dwell in deepest hell.

IN LIEU OF CONCLUSION

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The story of creative imagination does not have to end here. Although imagination carries within itself a threat of transgression and *hybris*, it is also a space of possibility where we discover who we can be and where we can live. Creative imagination is a condition of responsibility because it allows us to form ourselves as a perduring identity over time, capable of fulfilling commitments and pledges to others. However, this self-constitution is not an autonomous act of an isolated self since it requires creativity and receptivity to others' narratives. Imagination influences communication and ethics in a cathartic way because it allows us to imagine what it is like to be someone else and to see the world through their perspective. This ability to imagine oneself as another is a crucial ethical ability. This invites further reflection on the possibility of bringing together ethics and poetics in light of the hermeneutic understanding of imagination. We typically understand *poiesis* as creation and *praxis* as action. However, for Bachelard, whose work has been described as "herméneutique réductrice" (Lamy 254), *poiesis* indicates a sense of bringing something new into existence when dwelling in the creative imagination. Dwelling in art leads to education, formation, and transformation of one's soul or Being. As Kearney suggests, *poiesis* can serve ethics because creative works invite us to enter their otherness and recognize ourselves in them, putting ourselves into question and losing ourselves to find ourselves. *Poiesis* is pivotal to our capacity to set our motives, goals, and actions accordingly, and it is essential to effectively communicate and cultivate *praxis* in a community because "praxis is not only disclosed in poiesis: it also finds there its end" (Drapało 489). By acknowledging its end in the realm of action, *poiesis* can

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[2] In the original, we can read: "che' dove l'argomento de la mente s'aggiugne al mal volere e a la possa, nessun riparo vi puo far la gente." This raises questions about the direct correlation between the intellect and "the argument of the mind," which, although interesting, goes beyond the scope of this paper.

become a guarantor of responsibility. Imagination is inherently ethical. Art does not have to be conventionally beautiful or speak of the good, but it cannot promote evil if we care about the world that we dwell in.

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Silent Voices:
Dwelling with our Specters through *Palimpsesto* (2017), by Doris Salcedo

ABSTRACT

A palimpsest is a writing erased and replaced by another. Sometimes, perhaps all too often, our lives become incarnated palimpsests thanks to the prevailing biopolitics, which refers not only to the government of the living, but also to the multiple practices of dying and disappearing. Can art teach us to create new spaces of co-habitation with our essential ghosts, with those who refuse to abandon us despite everything? In this article we address the work entitled *Palimpsesto*, in which the Colombian artist Doris Salcedo (Bogotá, 1958), makes visible one of the most ignominious events in our recent history: the deaths of thousands of people in the Mediterranean due to indifference and, on occasions, the complicity—conscious or unconscious—of a desensitized European society, closed in on itself. In *Palimpsesto*, the artist creates a space where those absences are permanently present *in absentia*. However, Salcedo's art goes beyond testimony and representation: the tears that flow from the earth itself, outlining on the ground the names of women and men who drowned while fleeing war, reveal not only the need to name those who are no longer with us, but could lay the foundations to erect a kind of divinology (Meillassoux, "Deuil à venir" 105) through which new ties and forms of dwelling would be built, beyond interested political use, between human beings and those harassing absences.

Keywords: absence, dwelling, memory, palimpsest, presence, specters.

INTRODUCTION

Through the window, they look at you, they scrutinize you. Just a shadow, a soft breeze of wind that takes on a somber tone. Sometimes it is simply a sinister whisper, barely audible, that is impossible to capture:

> The day was gray enough, but the afternoon light still lingered, and it enabled me, on crossing the threshold, not only to recognize, on a chair near the wide window, then closed, the articles I wanted, but to become aware of a person on the other side of the window and looking straight in. One step into the room had sufficed; my vision was instantaneous; it was all there. The person looking straight in was the person who had already appeared to me. (James 141)

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It is no coincidence that one of the great masters of horror stories, H. P. Lovecraft, mentioned these spectral presences—much as they appear in the writings of the aforementioned Henry James, and Ambrose Bierce, Edgar Allan Poe, or Nathaniel Hawthorne, to name but a few—as one of the fundamental elements to embody the terror of human beings facing the other, that is to say, the unknown (49). That these volatile apparitions not only appear but observe us from the outside of our own intimate space adds more fire to the ardor of our anguish: our house is no longer ours, it no longer belongs to us entirely, it does not protect or shelter us anymore. For this reason, our most private places constitute the spaces par excellence of ghosts. These spectral manifestations decenter us, deterritorialize us. In fact, there are many occasions in which one becomes truly aware of those specters that haunt us in the shadows when one is outside one's own home and can contemplate it from the outside. What if those presences have always been there? Disturbing thought that can only unfold its true force when one has gone outside of what is most appropriate to oneself and has felt it, therefore, beyond one's own subjectivity. At that precise moment one cannot deny them, one cannot reject their presence.

Not only must we take them into account, but, as Derrida asserted in his *Specters of Marx*, we cannot but take them into account (7). However, we sense that the French philosopher, in that profoundly ethical project, begins his reflections *in medias res*: the specter already moves among us, perhaps precisely because it is always present, because it cannot be absent. In other words, Derrida's reflections commence when the specter has already attained effective reality, for it already torments us.[1] This is akin to

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[1] Perhaps the French philosopher would not concur with us regarding the effective reality of the ghost. What the specter reveals, as Derrida discusses in the second volume of *The Beast and the Sovereign*, is that we must inquire into the relationship between the real, reality, and language: "In order to think (but what does one call thinking? The question is

the specter of Hamlet's father, whose emergence effortlessly draws his son's attention and acts as an imperative upon his soul and thus his actions. But can we entertain the comparison between the agency of a king's ghost over his own son and that which the "clandestine immigrant" (Derrida, *Specters* 219) possesses? We believe it is necessary to acknowledge that many voices have been silenced, many subjects and events have been consigned (often meticulously) to a condition of invisibility and inaudibility, depriving them, even, of the ability to haunt the present like a ghost. Or, if they were to be a ghost, it would be one utterly devoid of vitality, left without the initiative to appear and reappear time and again. While Derrida directs his hauntology towards the ethical responses of the living to specters that are already at work, our perspective, akin to that of Esther Peeren (2014), is interested in exploring what and how the work of the specters can be made possible, in this case, through the names invoked by the artwork of Doris Salcedo.

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TO BE A WITNESS OF THE WITNESS

To qualify as Derrida's specter, two conditions must be met: an existence in a liminal space between materiality and immateriality, life and death, and possessing sufficient agency to impose its presence. How can those lacking the ability to manifest, manifest themselves? How can we dwell with those essential specters—as Quentin Meillassoux defines them ("Deuil à venir" 105)—that harass us, refusing to cross permanently to the other side? Can these ghosts change our way of perceiving some realities? These appear to be the questions that Colombian artist Doris Salcedo asks in her work *Palimpsesto* (2017). As Mary Schneider has stated (49), political violence, expressed and denounced working with a materiality that is always fragile, suspended between presence and absence, is the artist's great concern throughout her work. She tries to become, in this way, a kind of medium between the living and the dead by exacerbating a shared passion, as she herself explains:

> I try to be a witness of the witness. I look for an intimate proximity with the victims of violence that allows me to stand in for them. One must feel close to another in order to stand in for him or her and create an

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here more acute and more urgent than ever since the point was to think the *logos* beyond the *logos*, to think the phantasm, the *phantasmata*, the phantoms and the revenants beyond the *logos*), well, in order to think the phantasm is what one believes one can oppose *to*, or rigorously distinguish *from*, the effective reality of what happens, and therefore from the undeniable effectivity of the event, it is necessary to think something like a *phantasm of the event . . .* it is necessary, then, to think this thingless thing that a phantasm of the event would be, but also by the same token, an event of the phantasm, a phantom of the event and an event, a coming or supervening of the phantom" (185–86).

artwork out of another's experience. As a result, the work is made using his or her testimony as its foundation. It is not my rational intent but rather the experience of the victim that tells us about trauma, pain, loss. As a sculptor, I am aware of every detail that informs the life of the victim: the corporeality, the feelings, the vulnerability, the failings, the space, his or her life's trajectory and language. I don't formulate the experience of the victim, rather, I assemble it so that it remains forever a presence in the present moment . . . Sculpture for me is the giving of a material gift to that being who makes his presence felt in my work. (Merewether 19)

For Salcedo, therefore, the primary fundamental issue in her work is to render present what is absent. In this way, those specters that move within the liminal space we discussed earlier, but are deprived of a voice, can be heard. What Salcedo does is to make manifest, to testify through fostering an intimate proximity with the victims of violence, to make their ineffable sentiment somehow mutual, communal. It is precisely this deep-rooted sense of compassion, the capacity to step into another's shoes, to share in the suffering of another being, and to appreciate the worth and vulnerability of memory encapsulated within a fleeting materiality that Salcedo pushes to the brink of obliteration. It is imperative that the wounds endured by survivors and victims of political violence remain unhealed, serving as conduits through which the apparitions capable of awakening collective moral sensibilities are free to manifest.

NAMING THE ABSENT

Under these overarching premises, let us delve into the work titled *Palimpsesto*. Firstly, why did Salcedo choose such a title? As is well known, a palimpsest is a writing that has been erased or altered, overlaid with another script, but which still retains visible traces that can come to light. It is, in essence, a form of absent presence or a presence *in absentia*. The installation, first displayed in the Palacio de Cristal of Madrid, comprises an immense rectangular floor upon which the spectator may tread. It is a greyish surface with a sandy texture, resembling a succession of tombstones. Suddenly, small droplets of water emerge from the floor; the very earth seems to weep. Gradually, these tears coalesce to spell out the names of those who had no voice, those who could not be mourned: names of migrants and refugees who lost their lives in the Mediterranean while fleeing conflicts in the homelands, in the face of the tragic indifference—sometimes outright complicity—of a European society seemingly drifting toward an alarming self-imposed identity closure. Yet, almost in the same breath as these names surface, the earth absorbs its tears, causing them to fade away slowly.

As one strolled amid the tears, amid the names, one was initially compelled by a sort of imperative of silence. Those names reverberated in hushed tones, engendering a private moment for each unsuspecting visitor, a face-to-face encounter, as the artist herself notes, that transcends the beautiful metaphor through which the earth weeps—that is to say: it goes beyond mere representation—but instead harnesses the full metonymic potency of the names. For it is not solely the name that becomes manifest, but the life behind that name, which permeates the spectator precisely through resonance, through sympathy. The power of the work lies, among other considerations, in affording us the opportunity to contemplate the philosophical habit perpetuated by prevailing biopower and necropolitics— as Achille Mbembe has called it (2003)—one that centers discussions on life around its mortality or finitude. The self-aware ego wandering amidst the tears finds itself inevitably fractured, dislocated from its own core, following the diverse rhythms imposed by the appearance and disappearance of names, treading upon a ground that has suddenly morphed into quicksand, rending apart the reality that it once deemed controlled and secure. The individual comes to the realization that, as Theodor W. Adorno contended (92), they may be nothing more than the sum of their scars, the enduring traces left by experiences of alienation: these specters emerging from the earth are in fact our open wounds, seeking a dignity they were denied through a voiceless existence, a voice that Salcedo magnifies into deafening resonance for the living.

But what is the uncanny—following Sigmund Freud (140)—potency of the name of a stranger that is capable of uniting, much like lightning bridges the chasms between heaven and earth, the deceased and the living? First and foremost, the artwork displaces the primacy of the biological aspect inherent in conventional definitions of life and death: the life of the name surpasses the life of the body. There is "a certain kind of surviving," Judith Butler writes, that "takes place in language" (4). Naming is:

> an act that precedes my will, an act that brings me into a linguistic world in which I might then begin to exercise agency at all . . . This is what I have been called. Because I have been called something, I have been entered into linguistic life, refer to myself as through language given by the Other. (38)

Perhaps the true potency of a name lies, therefore, in its ability to summon the departed among the living, transcending even the intentionality of the survivors. This is the impression that lingers as you traverse Doris Salcedo's work: it is an act of invocation. Beyond the bureaucratic constructs of biopolitics and its propensity to adhere to stark

polarities (a person is either alive or not, a person is familiar or not, and so forth), the piece engenders a call to another being who is no longer present, asserting their direct presence within us, their vitality in us. An unfathomable other, who awaits us and surpasses us, who beckons us, finding their voice within us.

This entire process is magnified when the possibility exists that this Other may be alive or biologically dead: that is to say, disappeared. How many parents incessantly assert that, even though their children may be deceased, even though their bodies have not been found, they are still alive? As Salcedo's work demonstrates, prevailing necropolitics reduces the disappeared to nullities, strips them of their names, deprives them of their dignity and life. In the face of these political actions, *Palimpsesto* instills the palpable sense that the disappeared can endure, sustained by anyone who utters their names, by anyone who resonates with them: they think of me, therefore I am. Here, in our estimation, another pivotal facet of Salcedo's work comes to the fore, intimately entwined with the profound metonymic power of names and, consequently, with the displacement of biological primacy. Within the expanse of the Palacio de Cristal, inverting Wagner's verse from *Parsifal*,[2] space metamorphoses into time. Life itself is not conceived as a linear trajectory definitively desiccated by death; instead, it is death that is perpetually nullified by the resurgence of life in unexpected, extraordinary forms. Circularity, the eternal return, is but life ensconced within its boundless potentiality. The names that well up like tears from the depths of the earth encapsulate and unfurl this immense potency time and time again. Speaking of the present, therefore, does not merely entail discussing a flattened here and now that withers before our very eyes; rather, the present is full of past and future. It embodies both the recollection of what we are ceasing to be and the seeds of what we will become: both the no longer and the not yet.

In this regard, within *Palimpsesto*, a form of remembrance of the unremembered takes place, of that which, as Eelco Runia suggests, we carry with us more than we realize, more than we are consciously aware of (92). The intervention by the Colombian artist in the Palacio de Cristal engenders an almost inevitable association between the artwork and the origins of the very edifice, linked to Spain's colonial past. The Palacio was built for the General Exhibition of the Philippines in 1887, an event situated within the context of the universal and local exhibitions that had been unfolding in many European cities since the mid-19th century. Therefore, the work embodies a highly intricate interplay of spaces and times: from the names that encapsulate the ongoing Mediterranean

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[2] We are referring, of course, to the verse intoned by Gurnemanz, "Zum Raum wird hier die Zeit" (47).

massacre in the face of the passive gaze of the West, other moments of atrocious biopolitical dominance are revived and come to dwell with us in the present.[3] Dwelling with these names beckons us to peer into a space-time abyss that induces a certain vertigo, even despair.

Immersed in this vertigo, the observer becomes aware of the profound paradox inherent in Salcedo's work. *Palimpsesto*, on the one hand, conveys very specific critical and ethical values, a rebellion against a system that dictates who lives and who dies, who matters and who does not. However, does it not also risk being assimilated by that very system? Could the force of the artwork be neutralized when it takes place within and for an institution of this kind? Considering the expressive capacity of intentional silence—which the artist herself claims in her work—and the fact that a name allows you to enter a preformed linguistic world, preceding your own will, does it not inherently entail the possibility of a politically motivated use of a name that, one could say, you have inhabited but do not fully own? By choosing some names and excluding others, is the artist not reproducing something akin to the system itself: that is, deciding who is revived and who remains voiceless? This vulnerability of the life of a name is expressed exceptionally in Salcedo's work: the specific enclosed setting and the deliberate interplay of lights emphasize the brilliance of the names when fully outlined, but that achieved beauty quickly dissipates. The work recalls, but also easily forgets. And within those crevices of memory lies the potential for distortion and sordid, calculated manipulation as well.

Perhaps, precisely because it confronts the dilemma openly and lays bare certain mechanisms of the system even as it mimics them, *Palimpsesto* is a work capable of challenging the very logic in which it participates. Being mindful of these paradoxes is undoubtedly what leads Salcedo to emphasize the face-to-face encounter, as we have previously mentioned. We believe that this process of becoming-other, of bearing witness, is also a profound affirmation of the interconnectedness of names, individual lives, and the community. When one wanders through the unique and animated cemetery that is *Palimpsesto*, the pervading emotion does not speak of an "I." It is not a projection of a self-contained ego outward; it does not reside within the realm of subjectivity. Instead, the spectator's emotion speaks "he/she"

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[3] In the opening pages of *Specters of Marx*, Jacques Derrida advances a similar stance: "One name for another, a part for the whole: the historic violence of Apartheid can always be treated as a metonymy. In its past as well as in its present. By diverse paths (condensation, displacement, expression, or representation), one can always decipher through its singularity so many other kinds of violence going on in the world. At once part, cause, effect, example, what is happening there translates what takes place here, always here, wherever one is and wherever one looks, closest to home. Infinite responsibility, therefore, no rest allowed for any form of good conscience" (xv).

because it absorbs the pain of the other through an act of sympathy. It speaks "you" as it directly engages with the other, eliminating the distance. But it also speaks "we" as it turns its gaze towards fellow spectators.[4] In essence, the work becomes a social, collective, and communal experience between the living and the dead, shared even with those with whom we may have little in common, to borrow the expression from Alphonso Lingis (13). Ultimately, each person's tears and cries transform into a kind of collective song. This, for us, is a fundamental question, and Salcedo's work addresses it with remarkable vigor: the manifest presence of the unfamiliar within the familiar, with an emotion than transcends our individual ego, no longer confined to the constant exclamation of the "I." We find ourselves in a realm where pathos and ethos are inseparable. In other words, the aesthetic contemplation of our dwelling with these names and the imaginations they evoke merges with the ethical imperative to take action.

The objective of dwelling with our specters that Doris Salcedo proposes not only has a clear aesthetic intention, but also addresses the deepest aspiration of ethics: the achievement of a kind of justice. It is about profoundly transforming the subjectivity of today's human beings, about renovating the intimate lives of individuals through this face to face with those who shout at us in silence. The work, though rooted in the present, looks as much to the past as it does, above all, to the future. It is not, therefore, a negative proposal, but rather a fully affirmative one: it does not intend for us to fall into despair, to sink into the vertigo that it itself shows. This would mean leaving the subject devoid of all agency, paralyzed. As Meillassoux states, overcoming this despair means releasing the subject's power of action: not turning him into an idealist, but rather pointing out the option of justice as a possible but unmanageable reality ("L'Immanence" 59).

CONCLUSION

To conclude, *Palimpsesto* prompts us to contemplate how the relationship between the self and the other undergoes a profound transformation by shifting the conventional axes of difference away from binary opposition of life and death to a more intricate and less polarized mode of interaction.

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[4] This passage constitutes an elaboration on a comment by Gilles Deleuze in *Two Regimes of Madness*, in which, following the ideas of Maurice Blanchot, he asserts that emotion does not belong to the realm of the subject but rather belongs to the event: "Emotion does not say 'I.' You said it yourself: you are beside yourself. Emotion is not of the order of the ego but of the event. It is very difficult to grasp an event, but I do not believe that this grasp implies the first person. It would be better to use the third person like Maurice Blanchot when he says that there is more intensity in the sentence 'he suffers' than 'I suffer'" (187).

Paradoxically, reducing representation to its barest essentials, in this instance, possesses an inexorable vitality and generative power. This leads us to reflect not only on what is being represented—those whose deaths while fleeing war went unmourned—but also on how art, as a means of knowledge and action, could contribute to constructing a future emancipated from the social and political practices that reduce the departed or disappeared individual to a mere void, an absolute nullity.

Let us recall the two vital constants of Derridean ghosts: liminality and the power of manifestation. Considering all that has been said before, how does Salcedo make manifest the voice of those who lack it? What is it that she invokes? Precisely by declaring their powerlessness, their invisibility. She does not seek to invoke figures that, afterward, remain carved in marble for the posterity of history. On the contrary, what Salcedo sublimates is precisely the fragility of certain lives—of those who perished in the Mediterranean, dead and disappeared, but also of the families and friends they left behind, dead while alive. At the heart of Salcedo's aesthetics lies a desire to honor vulnerability and fragility while actively forging social horizons of hope. It is an act of sympathy, of compassion, from which all springs. In *Palimpsesto*, Salcedo makes visible the cracks, the spaces, the moments in which, by acknowledging their powerlessness, people assert both their needs and desires. This implies that we, as spectators, suddenly become attuned to something within the lives of those who had no voice and were never properly mourned. There is something in the lives of these names that had previously eluded our understanding but now gazes into our eyes and resonates in our ears with renewed force. The work moves us in threefold ways: it engenders an emotion, facilitates the expression of thought, and constitutes an ethical action that reclaims the dignity and presence of those who were dehumanized into insignificance. In doing so, it redefines the relationship between life, death, and aesthetics, revealing that the key to both personal and collective transformation lies in reimagining ourselves. And if the aim is to reshape our collective imagination to craft fairer abodes, any action worthy of that name should be inherently poetic.

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"If I Could but See a Day of it": On the Aesthetic Potential for Belonging and Action

ABSTRACT

This essay argues that the potential freedom revealed within aesthetic experiences of beauty can encourage a utopian form of belonging that could help materially realize this potential. Drawing upon Immanuel Kant and Friedrich Schiller, while aesthetics offers the occasion to imagine freedom, aesthetics alone cannot make us free. To try to instantiate aesthetic freedom, as Herbert Marcuse notes, is utopian: imagining freedom in an unjust world produces dissatisfaction with reality. Thereby, aesthetic occasions can heighten a longing for the material manifestation of the potential freedom it glimpses. Under the right conditions, such longing encourages be-longing, (and be-longing encourages longing), a deep feeling that can excite wills to act in concert to refashion the world inspired by its image. To demonstrate this, I first read Schiller to display the possibility for aesthetic experiences to offer us back our freedom *in potentia*. Then, following Marcuse, I explain the utopian character of this aesthetic freedom, as it longs for broader materialization that is not-yet existent. Finally, I sketch how this longing can encourage be-longing through a reading of Kim Stanley Robinson's novel *The Ministry for the Future*.

Keywords: aesthetics, potential freedom, imagination, utopia, political possibility.

> "One might then look from the novel or painting
> or film out at the world."
>
> (Clune 69)

> "The more strongly an alternative world is imagined, the more
> it becomes a viable candidate as a successor to our present."
>
> (Pears 15)

> "Poetry is a prophetic foretelling of the future at the boundaries
> between two worlds, the worlds of dream and reality."
>
> (Kocbek)

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1.

In his essay "The Poet," Emerson links the words of poets not only to the traditional aesthetic categories, such as the beautiful or the sublime, but, also, to the political notion of freedom: "The poets are thus liberating gods. The ancient British bards had for the title of their order, 'Those who are free throughout the world.' *They are free and they make free*" (emphasis mine).[1] There is something about poets and their words that have both aesthetic and political significance. The poets, by being concerned with aesthetics, are free, and spread freedom through their words. This freedom is both embedded into the human condition as a possibility and can be realized through one's actions. More precisely for the purposes of this essay, the worlds glimpsed through poetry offer windows into *potential* freedom, at once of this world and of other possible ones, i.e. as no-longer, not-yet, could be, and might never be. When so many do not feel that they are as free as they could or should be, this poetic freedom need not end at the conclusion of its poetic verse. Instead, it can "spill over," co-mingle into, or refract back into everyday life, and this can have material consequences. Like the cave dweller in Plato's famous allegory, Emerson's poet is not content with being free as an individual, nor with merely glimpsing freedom and leaving others unfree, but also shares this freedom with others to realize it as broadly and completely as possible into the

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[1] The title of this essay is inspired by William Morris's utopian novel, *News from Nowhere or An Epoch of Rest*. Before waking up in a future-revolutionary utopia, the protagonist yearns to see what the revolution would look like after a spirited, though unproductive conversation with members of "the League." Morris writes of the protagonist: "After a brief discomfort, caused by disgust with himself for having lost his temper . . . he found himself musing on the subject-matter of discussion, but still discontentedly and unhappily. '*If I could but see a day of it*,' he said to himself, 'if I could but see it!'" (44).

world at large. Poets, then, are not only the unacknowledged legislators of the world, as Percy Bysshe Shelley reminds us, but they also need not only legislate in a prefigurative way: *poetry frees*. If we think of poetry broadly to include other arts of appearance, then it is political insofar as they shape our remembrances of the past, our understanding of the present, and our imagination of possible futures that orient and motivate our actions.

However, this does not satisfactorily delineate how poetry, and art more generally, can "free" in an insufficiently free world and how these words, as Janice A. Radway writes, "might make talk walk," or, put differently, translate the utopian impulses of aesthetic experience into political transformation (18) To this end, I return to Immanuel Kant's *Critique of the Power of Judgment* and Friedrich Schiller's *Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Man* to sketch a philosophical link between aesthetic experiences and political freedom *in potentia*. Although aesthetics independent of additional action cannot make us free, I argue that they offer an occasion to imagine freedom more broadly. Broadened notions and feelings of freedom need not remain isolated to an aesthetic experience itself: they can refract back into everyday life and contribute to a desire to instantiate such potential freedom more generally. Drawing upon Herbert Marcuse's book *Eros and Civilization*, and Ramsey Eric Ramsey's essay "A Politics of Dissatisfaction: The Heretical Marxisms of Reich and Bloch," I argue that attempts to instantiate such potential freedom are utopian: imagining freedom in an unjust world *develops* dissatisfactions with reality. Aesthetic occasions can heighten a longing for the material manifestation of the potential freedom it glimpses. Finally, drawing upon Kim Stanley Robinson's utopian novel *The Ministry for the Future*, I imagine how, under the right conditions, such utopian longing encourages utopian be-longing, (and be-longing encourages longing), an intense feeling that can excite wills to act in concert to refashion the world.

2.

To begin, aesthetic experiences can provide the occasion for us to realize our potential freedom. As Schiller explains: "Although [beauty] only offers us the possibility of becoming human beings, it is to our own free will to decide how far we wish to make this freedom a reality" (148). Aesthetic experiences do not, in a straightforward sense, make us free, as if, for example, reading *The Ministry for the Future* would make me free. Indeed, such a simplistic bourgeois conception of freedom as "I do what I like" is precisely one which I think aesthetic experiences could help broaden and nuance. Although this is not the space to fully elaborate a contrasting

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notion of freedom, for now, it suffices to say that such a notion follows something more like Hannah Arendt's idea of freedom ("What is Freedom?"). This notion emphasizes freedom as the manifestation of new beginnings in the world, the attempt to enact principles irreducible to pure utilitarian motivations or outcomes, and paradoxically, being both a necessary possibility of human existence *and* only capable of being so through ever-renewed performances. In contrast to a simplistic freedom, then, I experience a deeper kind of freedom when reading *Ministry* that is to varying degrees possible within the world at large. Aesthetics, then, can reveal the possibilities for freedom within a particular historical context and, more generally, the character of this existential freedom inherent within the human condition.

For Schiller, art reveals potential freedom because of the character of our aesthetic relation to a work of art and because of its ability to simultaneously speak to us as individuals and in general as human beings. He writes: "Beauty is indeed form, because we contemplate it; but it is at the same time life, because we feel it" (164). Approaching something aesthetically, then, overcomes conventional conceptual divisions that people usually inhabit, e.g., thinking v. feeling, individual v. community, ideality v. materiality, etc. When I look at Henri Matisse's *The Joy of Life*, for example, my senses are engaged by the manifold colors and curves that compose the work. Yet, at the same time, my thought is engaged by the opening within the dancers' circle and possible stories of the figures. Perhaps most importantly for my argument, this painting engages my imagination through this scene to consider what kind of freedom this world would have and glimpse what it would be like. My interpretation of this painting, then, simultaneously employs my faculties that are otherwise often thought of as at odds with one another. This "free play" of our faculties, i.e. the dynamic engagement of our human powers, is itself exemplary of a more complete freedom glimpsed within aesthetic experiences. In a word, being free is something *like* looking at a painting: the way one inhabits poetry, literature, or film hints at a broader way of being free.

In addition to the potential freedom that aesthetic experiences glimpse, crucially, these experiences of potential freedom are not private, subjective, nor merely sensual, though they may feel personal and appeal to the senses. Following Kant's *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, if the pleasure from a beautiful experience is truly beautiful, rather than agreeable or charming (i.e. stemming primarily from the senses, e.g., the pleasure from drinking a cup of coffee), then this means that such a pleasure is communicable to others. Here, I follow Communication studies scholars, such as Gina L. Ercolini (*Kant's Philosophy of Communication*) and Scott Stroud (*Kant and the Promise of Rhetoric*),

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who interpret Kantian philosophy for human communication. Such aesthetic communicability makes possible not only detached or limited understanding, but also that others might come to feel similarly to one another through communication. Kant explains: "The universal *communicability* of a pleasure already includes in its concept that this must not be a pleasure of enjoyment, from mere sensation, but one of *reflection*; and thus aesthetic art . . . is one that has the reflecting power of judgment and not mere sensation as its standard" (185). In other words, aesthetic pleasure is produced through the *reflection* upon beauty, e.g., a painting or novel, and this reflection can be communicated and shared with others in a way that is different than, for example, sharing a cookie. (Indeed, when one reflects upon a work of art, this process of reflection is similar to and can be a forerunner to conversing with another.) This communicability is key for Kant's aesthetics because it means that aesthetics are *public*, not private, and, I would add, that it is something that one can argue about in a way one cannot about matters of agreeability. No argument could persuade someone that the coffee tastes good *to them* if it does not in a way that one might be persuaded to find beauty in a painting like *Joy of Life* if, at first, they find it grotesque (though without recourse to proofs to compel agreement). Kant later describes this as the ability "to argue [*streiten*] about taste (but not to dispute [with recourse to proof, *disputieren*])" (214). Therefore, that one *judges* a work of art to be beautiful places this on the terrain of interpretation: neither my senses (nor adherence to a concept) dictate my judgment. Art's communicability, then, allows for the possibility that it may be reflected upon and judged in public, i.e. that one's first impressions may not be their last.

One can see the philosophical underpinnings of a more harmonious way of being-with-one-another through art's propensity toward sociability. Kant goes as far as to say that the ability to communicate about art with others "promotes the cultivation of the mental powers of sociable communication" (185). Where Schiller draws out the possible [human] consequences of an aesthetic education, Kant highlights the foundation that makes this possible through the way art indicates and promotes a propensity toward sociability. That one can simultaneously speak with others about *The Joy of Life* as an individual and as a possible representative of a group itself points to the profound interconnectedness of being-in-the-world with others. Since Kant identifies that there is only empirical interest in aesthetics within society, aesthetics provides both a baseline foundation of human sociability and, in the way that one can "woo and court" others, also offers an example of being-with-one-another that might provide an opportunity to think (and think differently) about what freedom looks like with others in society (176). Contrary to the popular

notion that art is individual and that reflection upon it is personal or purely subjective, then, the idea that sociability is at the basis of aesthetic reflection is paramount. Aesthetic sociability means that potential "connections" between people are already latent, with Kant even aspirationally claiming that "[i]n [aesthetic] taste egoism is overcome" (qtd. in Arendt, *Lectures* 67). The ability and potential desire to reflect upon art with others are the aesthetic buds that, given the right conditions, may flower into political action.

Building upon Kant's aesthetics, Schiller links the public character of beauty to happiness and to tempering our sense of limitations: "Beauty alone do we enjoy at once as individual and as genus, i.e., as representatives of the human genus . . . Beauty alone makes the whole world happy and each and every being forgets its limitations while under its spell" (177). Akin to the simultaneous aesthetic engagement of thought and feeling, a work of art feels personal but also can speak to others in shared ways (and this sharedness need not be identical). This communicability is present not only by the fact that pronouncement "this is beautiful" can be understood by others, but also in the sharable spellbinding effects of a work of art. This is another feature of potential freedom aesthetic experiences can reveal: there is no necessary nor inherent antagonism between individuality and generality. For example, I can feel attracted to *Joy of Life* in a way akin to others without losing myself in this kinship. Indeed, the painting itself suggests a harmonious way of being-with-one-another while retaining individuality.

The political potential of aesthetic reflection, however, need not end at the point of beauty's ability to be enjoyable as an individual and as genus, nor its propensity to human sociability: one of Schiller's contributions to Kantian aesthetics is to link this public quality of beauty to human happiness and to easing human limitations. Breaking down the inappropriate barriers between public/private, thought/feeling, and idea/material makes us more happy and uplifts our feeling of possibility. If one cause of unhappiness is produced by overstraining one "half" of our selves, e.g., work that taxes thinking, at the expense of atrophying the other "half" of our selves, e.g., feeling, then these experiences momentarily restore the balance of these aspects of our being. By appropriately exercising the full powers of the psyche, aesthetic experiences can relieve the feeling of being a brain without concern for the body, or a body without concern for the brain. Although, as Ramsey, citing Bloch, reminds us, we are still resisted in the material realm and constrained by thinkability in the ideational realm, beauty helps us forget the artificial constraints and limitations created by a society that privileges, for example, reason over emotion (Ramsey, "A Politics of Dissatisfaction" 29).

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3.

Given the pressing needs to realize broader forms of actual political freedom, one must justify the value of this vision of potential freedom as an avenue for actual freedom. In other words, what, if any value, do utopian glimpses into alternative ways of being offer to redress actual material conditions? In short, aesthetic experiences can display a potential freedom that at once glimpses positive alternative ways of being-in-the-world *and* can produce or reinforce a kind of dissatisfaction with the existing state of affairs. Here, I draw upon Marcuse's account of the preserved "memory" of freedom held within art through its link to fantasy and imagination. Marcuse writes: "Like imagination, which is its constitutive faculty, the realm of aesthetics is essentially 'unrealistic,' it has retained its freedom at the price of being ineffective in the reality" (172). Schiller's account already provides a link between potential freedom and aesthetics. Marcuse's account, here, then, offers a political assessment about the effectiveness of this potential freedom for liberatory projects, one that he values for its preservation of freedom, but not for its political transformative effects. (Even if one does not subscribe to the idea that aesthetics are *essentially* ineffective in reality, one of the reasons they require justification as important is because they are often viewed as ineffective.) Yet, within Marcuse's framework, I think that this potential freedom is not inherently ineffective if, with the imagination, it links up to a dissatisfaction with the comparative unfreedom of the wider world that socially shared aesthetic experiences can provide occasions for. Insofar as potential freedom could manifest into forms of actual freedom, the scaffolding for which lies within dissatisfaction, then, in principle, art is not necessarily ineffective for change. This is because experiences of potential freedom can expand existing dissatisfactions, (or generate new ones), to bridge potential freedom glimpsed into materialized freedom. In essence, art *can* be transformational, and this transformation need not end at, for example, the boundary of a canvas or cover of a book.

One way in which art can be transformational, within Marcuse's framework, is its link to fantasy and imagination. Indeed, these faculties are key to the kind of potentially effective dissatisfaction because they are less constrained by reality while still maintaining a connection to reality. As Marcuse explains: "Phantasy (imagination) retains the structure and tendencies of the psyche prior to its organization by the reality, prior to its becoming an 'individual' set off against other individuals" (142) If fantasy is still connected to the existing reality but not wholly subservient to it, then fantasy can offer enough distance from reality to judge it, yet fantasy can also preserve enough connection to reality to change it. In other words, drawing upon cultural studies scholar Stephen Duncombe, fantasy and

imagination can simultaneously operate within the criteria of *desirability and plausibility* (10). By straddling between these criteria (criteria that need not be contradictory), the potential freedom glimpsed within art can produce a dissatisfaction that does not only preserve possible freedom but can also promote actual freedom.

Of course, the difficulty is *usually* (though not always) believed to be the plausibility of liberatory visions, not the desirability. One hears a version of this in statements like "it sounds good in theory but does not work in practice." Marcuse's argument that art is not taken seriously enough to prompt political change suggests the power of what Sigmund Freud in *Civilization and its Discontents* calls the reality principle, whose guiding criterion of plausibility tends to be conservative. It is interesting to note that Freud views artistic creation as a kind of weak harmony between the drive to pleasure and the limits of reality: "This ['higher and finer'] kind of satisfaction—the *artist's joy in creating*, in fashioning forth the products of his *imagination* . . . has a special quality [for avoiding suffering]" (31, emphasis mine). However, plausibility is not inherently conservative, and is indeed necessary for liberatory projects to have a chance at success. One can see this even within Freud's pessimistic identification of artistic (and scientific) exploration as a strategy to ward off suffering (and perhaps even hope for happy hours) within the constraints of reality. Insofar as art is concerned with what is possible, it can speak to desirability *and* plausibility, and reinterpret what it means for something to be plausible. (Indeed, far-right projects seem to be becoming less plausible with this having little effect on either their desirability or political potency for many. This precisely points to the importance of desirability for political projects in tandem with plausibility.) As Marcuse notes, "[p]hantasy plays a most decisive function in the total mental structure: it *links* the deepest unconscious with the highest products of consciousness (art), the dream with the reality" (141, emphasis mine). On Marcuse's account, art is legible to both our desire for liberation and ability to assess the plausibility of possibilities. This is because it links these seemingly disparate aspects of life: unconscious and conscious, dream and reality, etc. (This is also why conservative art exists, is legible as plausible, and why it can reorient or sustain particular desires.)

Since, as the Surrealist Manifesto reminds us, imagination is also concerned with the criteria of plausibility,[2] then, drawing upon Ramsey

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[2] I refer to the following within Andre Breton's first 1924 Surrealist Manifesto: "To reduce imagination to slavery—even if one's so-called happiness is at stake—means to violate all that one finds in one's inmost self of ultimate justice. *Imagination alone tells me what can be*" (qtd. in Marcuse 149).

Eric Ramsey's "A Politics of Dissatisfaction," I argue that art can help "potentialize the potential" of particular possibilities in conjunction with making them appear desirable (and the existing state of affairs or other possible situations appear to be undesirable). Building upon Ernst Bloch's ontology of possibility in *The Principle of Hope*, Ramsey explains: "Potentializing the potential is not to do the thing to be done . . . rather it is bringing the possibility of something's capacity-of-being-done out from under the sedimented and reified naturalness of business as usual" (35). Actualizing possibility requires activating possibility, i.e. possibilities must be understood as possibilities, however nascent this understanding may be, if they are to be realized. When art potentializes potential freedom to create, for example, more just gender dynamics, then this potential at once draws upon the criteria of plausibility and desirability, ideally displaying that something *ought* to be done otherwise and that something *could* also be done otherwise. This makes dissatisfactions more potent because one is more likely to interpret them as legitimate.

If art, as Hannah Arendt describes in her *Lectures on Kant's Political Philosophy*, can "woo and court" people to the desirability and plausibility of a particular possibility, then such a possibility can manifest or aggravate dissatisfaction with the status quo (72). Combining the feeling of potential freedom latent within art with existing dissatisfactions and the imagination of alternate possibilities accentuates the potency of one's dissatisfactions. Often, dissatisfactions are dismissed on the grounds of desirability, e.g., "you ought not feel dissatisfied by your class position, it's on the basis of merit," or, on the grounds of plausibility, e.g., "there's nothing one can do to adequately redress racial discrimination without making it worse." Instead, if the longing for something better is considered desirable and plausible, then, dependent on material conditions, this puts it closer to what Bloch calls the "real possible" or the "not-yet" (Ramsey, "A Politics of Dissatisfaction" 29). By moving closer to the kind of possibility more ready to be realized, a more plausible dissatisfaction with reality could be the ideational beginnings of transformative cooperation and action (especially when coupled with the desire for something better).

If one grants that one can and ought to hone our dissatisfactions with reality and channel them toward actualizing appropriate possibilities, one still must justify why art is an appropriate place where this might occur, as opposed to other places, such as within banal experiences or with ordinary objects. For instance, if mundane experiences of imagination are, admittedly, much more common, then it might appear that this would be a more fecund ground to prompt and hone dissatisfactions. Although I hold onto, *in principle*, the possibility that almost any experience can have this kind of disclosive power, it can only do so if it is seen "from

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the right light," e.g., poetically. The problem with mundane experiences of imagination, in part, stems from their ordinariness, averageness, and leveled-down character which make it difficult (though not impossible) for them to provide new perspective. Indeed, Martin Heidegger's description of "the they" (*das Man*) offers insight into this leveling of the mundane:

> We enjoy ourselves and have fun the way *they* enjoy themselves. We read, see, and judge literature and art the way *they* see and judge. But we also withdraw from the "great mass" the way *they* withdraw . . . The they . . . prescribes the kind of being of everydayness. (123)

Mundane imagination, banal experiences, and ordinary objects are unlikely to produce the kind of dissatisfactions that could manifest into the transformative cooperation and action necessary to realize greater freedom because they are, too often, already judged as *they* would see it, seen as *anyone* else would. The everydayness, averageness, and leveled character of the they, which is how one usually exists (and, on Heidegger's account, how we mostly exist) is so powerful that the glimpses of potential freedom that reside within them would require monumental effort and desire (for most) to reflect upon. Given the lack of freedom and the injustices in the world, and the myriad of ways in which people habituate them, places where present habits tend to perpetuate themselves are not fecund for bringing the potential freedom of the human condition to the fore. Thus, any place that could glimpse the potential freedom in a more vibrant way must have a meaningful potential to contend with the everydayness, averageness, and leveling of the they (even if still quite difficult).

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Reflection upon art offers a more fecund ground for the honing of dissatisfactions that could transform into action because it offers a way to *yield* to the painting, novel, film, etc. In other words, at its best, art can keep the they at the appropriate distance, or more precisely, be in an appropriate relationship to the they and viewers and readers of an artwork. Here, I am borrowing Ramsey's use of "yield" as one appropriate part of the interpretation of art ("Before the Work of Art" 94). In contrast to the habitual character of the mundane that draws one *into* the everyday, Ramsey explores why art can be different:

> [When art addresses us], we are *drawn out* of the time of the day-to-day, out of ourselves in our everydayness—thus, out of the ways we are accustomed to making sense of things. By being drawn out of the time of the everyday, *there is a chance to be drawn into something else*—i.e., into the ongoing meaningfulness—in a manner that makes us aware of it and aware that our being there is a site of this disclosure. (93, emphasis mine)

Even at their best, ordinary experiences tend to draw us in, rather than out, unless we already have a broadened perspective or child-like wonder, e.g., it takes a poetic comportment for Walt Whitman to not be able to know what grass is and find awe in the child's question, "What is the grass?"[3] Following Ramsey, then, one feature of art, is that it also provides an occasion for reflection with the promise that some new perspective or understanding may be gleaned deeper as an outgrowth of the encounter. Although an interpreter may be called to provide much effort in the task of interpretation, an artwork can be a co-creator of interpretation in a way that, though still difficult, is more accessible for glimpsing potential freedom than the banal. With effort from viewers and readers, artworks may even maintain an appropriate relevance to the averageness of the they to help readers stay with the potential long enough to better assess its plausibility and desirability.

As my description hints at, art is not suitable to glimpse at potential freedom because this potential is easy to glimpse: the above passage I cite from Heidegger explicitly mentions how the they already interprets literature and art in average ways, levels them, and makes them accessible within the everyday. To confront this challenge, eminent art, despite all the odds, can still find ways to beckon the interpreter in and encourage her to stay with the work. By eminent art, I do not intend to valorize works simply for their age, influence, fame, status as a marker of social capital, etc. Such valorization is precisely a way *one* [*das man*] often praises art ("Oh, look at that Matisse"). Instead, by eminent art, I simply mean works that tend to resonate with their viewers or readers in such a way that excites the imagination. As Ramsey explains of this possibility of art, "[w]e turn to art because we need imagination to understand who we are . . . paintings as works of art do the work of art by embodying a futurity that sets into relief our interpretive finitude" ("Before the Work of Art" 101). The hint of an eminent work, here, is that if one glimpses into its potentiality, yields to it, grapples with this, then truths can be revealed that can change lives. Irrespective of form or genre, eminent art provides material rich enough to make the effort, for example, to imagine a more just world, worthwhile. Thereby, they can hone dissatisfaction in a way that is irreducible to other means of persuasion, e.g., pamphlets, manifestos, orations, because of the way eminent art challenges the interpretations of the they (e.g., what Schiller describes as an idolatry of utility), if one stays with the work.

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[3] This refers to the following passage in Walt Whitman's 1855 poem, "Song of Myself": "A child said *What is the grass*? fetching it to me with full hands; How could I answer the child? . . . I do not know what it is any more than he."

4.

In this final section, I investigate how this more individual longing for a better possible world can transform into a kind of utopian be-longing to maximize the possibilities for realization through a reading of Robinson's *Ministry*. Of course, just as no aesthetic experience is purely individual or private, the longings that may develop into belonging themselves are always already social. This reading of *Ministry* also serves as an example of how the interpretation of a work of art can glimpse at, deepen, and communicate the potential freedom of the human condition within a work of art to inspire political action.

 With this understanding, this section explores how these latent social connections may become more manifest into concrete political action with one another. By utopian, I follow utopian-studies scholar Lyman Tower Sargent's description: "Utopianism is a philosophy of hope, and it is characterized by the transformation of a generalized hope into a description of a non-existent society" (8). Utopian belonging, for my project, refers to a coming together of dissatisfied people to manifest a world inspired by the hope for something better, e.g., something more akin to the potential freedom one can experience in art. Although I base my interpretation of utopian belonging within the science-fiction world of *Ministry*, I do not think this undercuts its ethos: insofar as this literary utopia resonates with possible action, it serves as an *example* to orient our thinking. Indeed, English scholar Robert Markley goes as far as to say: "Robinson's fiction makes a strong case for seeing science fiction, and not traditional literary realism, as the truly significant genre for our current moment in human and planetary history" (2). Or, as I cite Kocbek in the opening epigraphs, "[p]oetry is a prophetic foretelling of the future at the boundaries between two worlds, the worlds of dream and reality." The *boundary* condition of poetry, literary utopias, and art in general, between dream and reality is not just a weakness: its prophetic strength lies in the possibility of honing dissatisfactions with reality, coalescing around common dissatisfactions, and encouraging action inspired and motivated by the possibilities presented in the novel.

 Ministry prophesizes that banal dissatisfactions can transform into radical ones, given the right circumstances. In a near future world that wrestles with the environmental and political-economic challenges of climate change, Robinson imagines a yellow-vest-esque French uprising. In accord with Ramsey's description of a pedagogy around dissatisfaction, one of the character's dissatisfactions in the novel begins much more modest than visionary:

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> I myself was a kid, *the main thing that got me out there was how much I hated school*, where I always had been made to feel stupid. I was slotted into the bottom classes early on and my life was sealed at that point, on a track to servitude, *even though I knew I had real thoughts, real feelings*. (Robinson 245, emphasis mine)

Simply hating poor schooling alone is not enough to manifest a robust and radical dissatisfaction that could link up with others into liberatory projects. *But it is a start*. In contrast to the character's school, the street uprisings became the classroom that potentialized the belief that life could be different and better, confirmed the legitimacy of the character's thoughts and feelings, and translated this feeling into co-feeling and coordinated action. Yet, without the hatred of poor schooling, being made to feel stupid, and being slotted to servitude, then it is difficult to imagine this character participating in the uprising. The education that the uprising provides in this case, then, is the education of their dissatisfaction into a form of action in concert with others. This action in concert with others recasts the object of oppression and increases the likelihood of transforming the collective situation into something else (Ramsey, "A Politics of Dissatisfaction" 36). Under the right conditions, in this case a nation-wide political movement, the narrower dissatisfaction can link up with a more robust dissatisfaction; the "real thoughts and real feelings" are confirmed and broadened to incorporate and develop the dissatisfactions of others.

At this point, the utopian character of the belonging is still unclear. Indeed, there is an impressionistic quality to utopian belonging: how the form of dissatisfaction takes shape into coordinated material movements can be ambiguous. Robinson writes of the uprising's narrator: "But for sure what happened then was the most intense and important feeling I could ever live in this existence . . . *solidarity*. We could see so many others with us, all on each others' side" (246, emphasis mine). In contrast with pervasive feelings of loneliness and busyness under capitalist life (loneliness to such a degree that the US surgeon general recently described it as an epidemic), working together with others for the common good is a profoundly attractive proposition. Indeed, one of the characters of Edward Bellamy's classic utopia, *Looking Backwards*, identifies solidarity as the essential difference between Victorian and eutopian civilization:

> If I were to give you, in one sentence, a key to what may seem the mystery of our [eutopian] civilization as compared with that of your age . . . it is the fact that the *solidarity* of the race and the brotherhood of man, which to you were but fine phrases, are, to our thinking and feeling, *ties as real and as vital as physical fraternity*. (64, emphasis mine)

Coupling Robinson and Bellamy's descriptions of solidarity, solidarity has a complex interrelation between the idea of togetherness and its material manifestations through action. Similar to the social character and communicability of aesthetic experience, any solidarity is built from and upon the fundamental existential feature of being-with one another, even if such ways of being-with one another manifest more as deficient modes of concern, e.g., being-without-one-another, passing-one-another-by, and not-mattering-to-one-another (Heidegger 118). Utopian belonging, in its more prefigurative moments, appears more ideational than material. However, this feeling of solidarity before it manifests in action is also essential: for millions would not take to the streets in concert, and, as Robinson later writes, work *harder* than they did as wage slaves for the sake of hope for a better world, unless there were common dreams between people (278). In other words, like the possibility for sharedness in aesthetics without identicality, utopian belonging, gathered around simultaneously common and disparate hopes, can manifest in different forms in the present, from extraordinary uprisings to everyday kindnesses.

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We can never know what will trigger dissatisfactions into action (thus how important potentializing as much potential for change as possible). This is why honing longings and dissatisfactions into forms of belonging, such as through art's potential freedom, is essential. Returning to Robinson, he describes the 21st-century French revolution: "I think that's what happened here, *some trigger or combination of triggers*, the extinction of some river dolphin, or another refugee boat going down offshore, who knows, maybe just lost jobs, but suddenly we were all headed to Paris" (245, emphasis mine). The silver lining in the catastrophe we live in is that there will be triggers that could transform banal longings into utopian longing; banal belonging into utopian belonging. These forms of longing and belonging, should they arise, will be profoundly meaningful: amidst the catastrophes to come there can be reversals of what is expected, as the etymology of "catastrophe" reminds us.

One such possible reversal from the present is a feeling of being significant. Amidst a future flooding of Los Angeles, one character in *Ministry* finds *purpose* in helping others in a way she did not find in seeking fame. As this unemployed actress turned impromptu flood relief worker puts it: "Here I was helping people, all of us scared, and my right bicep just screaming, and I kept thinking This is real, this feels good, why again are you trying to be a fucking actress?" (Robinson 278). In these circumstances, even profoundly intense labor becomes profoundly meaningful: helping others feels "real" and "good," even though every conventional metric, including the pain from her body's "screaming right bicep," feels bad. This glimpse into the likely future of flooding and other

climate-related catastrophes displays a source of hope in more people working (and working together) in ways that now tend to appear available only to the most selfless. The utopia of saving the world for all inhabitants of the biosphere (or at least for as many as possible) points to a possible source of profound meaning, even in the most seemingly mundane tasks. Rather than only or necessarily immiserating people, this glimpse allows us to imagine future situations where we can reintroduce and recast the joys and struggle of living with one another.

Made possible in part by the glimpse of potential future offered in novels such as *Ministry*, we can think *ahead* to act in ways that pave the way for these triggers-to-come to channel into anticipatory forms of belonging. One cannot simply wait for the world to become more like the utopian vision glimpsed by poets and utopian literature if they expect it to come to fruition. (Indeed, Emerson reminds us that poetry is also an active force, not a passive vision of what could be. Or, as Kocbek identifies, poetry is at the *boundary* between dream and reality, i.e. it is a dream with consequences for reality and within it.) As Black science-fiction writer Octavia Butler explains in a section entitled "Count on Surprises," "[o]ur tomorrow is the child of our today. Through thought and deed, we exert a great influence over this child, even though we cannot control it absolutely. Best to think about it, though. Best to try to shape it into something good." Thinking through the future that *Ministry* prophesizes, then, is not just helpful for seeing a potential future in an abstract sense, but, more importantly, such prophetic imagination can help shape our future toward something better within the here and now. No matter how naïve it may sound to cynical ears, a hope of *Ministry*, and utopian literature in general, is that the imagination of a potential future may help bring something better into fruition, not merely be a momentary venting of dissatisfaction or escape from emptiness or exploitation. Although no single work can provide a blueprint for what one ought to do (nor should one want it to, given the ambiguity and contingency of life), nonetheless, the image of utopian solidarity and meaningfulness of life are but two aspects of this work that can inspire and orient one's own actions, in addition to broadening one's conceptions of what is possible, what is plausible, and what is desirable. Witness *Ministry*'s final prophesy: at once glimpsing our potential freedom, honing dissatisfaction with the world in comparison to the beauty of its words and vision, and a declamation for utopian belonging *par excellence*:

That we could become something magnificent, or at least interesting. That we began as we still are now, child geniuses. That there is no other home for us than here. That we will cope no matter how stupid things

get. That all couples are odd couples. That the only catastrophe that can't be undone is extinction. That we can make a good place. That people can take their fate in their hands. That there is no such thing as fate. (Robinson 563)

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"I have forgotten your love, yet I seem to glimpse you in every window": The Hermeneutical Aesthetics of (Be)longing

ABSTRACT

The article addresses the nuanced but also profoundly enticing and challenging reality of belonging evoked in painting. I examine three artworks by artists of different times and styles—John Everett Millais, Johannes Vermeer, and Salvador Dalí—to show how art facilitates our understanding of the phenomenon of human belonging. The selected works of art are connected via the motif of a female figure in front of a window, as well as the implicit or apparent theme of love. Focusing on the motif of the window, which represents both a literal and metaphorical barrier but also a gateway to what is unknown and unfamiliar, I seek to discover the diverse and unexpected understandings of the phenomenon of belonging, viewed in the light of either an overt or implied intimate relationship. The aesthetic encounter with these artworks offers a unique possibility to uncover the uncharted territories of our sense of belonging. As a theoretical backdrop, I follow the precepts of Hans-Georg Gadamer's ontology of art. Gadamer claims that the artwork's meaning comes to its full realization in the aesthetic encounter; he names that which happens— an increase in being—*Zuwachs an Sein*. The increase in being relates to the inexhaustible meanings that shine forth while we are contemplating an artwork. The aesthetic intimations of the paintings under scrutiny bring to light the subtle senses of the interweaving of dwelling, longing, belonging, and love.

Keywords: art, belonging, Hans-Georg Gadamer, hermeneutical aesthetics, longing.

"[E]verything is but a path, a portal,
or a window opening on something other than itself."

(de Saint-Exupéry 78)

GADAMER'S ONTOLOGICAL-PHENOMENOLOGICAL MODEL OF AN AESTHETIC ENCOUNTER[1]

Human longing is a complex phenomenon, ranging from the need to cross a boundary and alleviate the pain of being separated from someone or something one sees as desirable (cf., e.g., McGraw) to the metaphysical longing for God, beauty, truth, and infinity (see, e.g., Tarnowski). Similarly, the human sense of belonging may be understood in diverse ways: belonging to tradition, culture, one another, etc. In this essay, I focus on belonging as an emotional and spiritual state—the fulfillment of the longing to connect with and belong to another human being and to a reality that is desired and anticipated.

Disclosing the manifold ways in which humans belong, the innermost feelings of longing to belong, fantasy landscapes, figments of human imagination, and realms that seem inconceivable, art enhances an understanding of our primordial sense of rootedness and exigency to belong. Our yielding to the power of art and our patient attention to artworks occasion a unique possibility of recognizing the complexities of the phenomena captured in them. Since the beginning of conscious time, artists have been inspired by the topic of belongingness. Art issues a welcoming gesture for us to enter a conversation and remain in a dialogic disposition that opens us up to being and becoming more sensitive to the essence of our lived experience, to what shapes our actions, and to what awakens our dreams. Belonging, captured in art, is one of those intricate areas that spur innumerable senses. Gadamer's hermeneutic aesthetics offers an intriguing perspective, both interrogating and acknowledging the inimitable way in which art discloses the heterogeneous nature of our human experience. The sense of belonging is deeply inscribed in this experience.

In his ontological-phenomenological model of aesthetic experience, Gadamer emphasizes the performative aspect of art. He uses the notion of *Spiel* (game) to indicate what happens in the spectator's *vis-à-vis* dialogical encounter with an artwork. Just as in a game, the result of the aesthetic

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[1] The title of this article uses a line from Pablo Neruda's poem "Love": https://allpoetry.com/poem/8497011-Love-by-Pablo-Neruda

experience is not known beforehand (cf. Gadamer, *Relevance* 22–24; Keane and Lawn 91–92; Davey, *Unfinished* 46–49), but it is revealed in the back-and-forth movement that, according to Gadamer, characterizes the aesthetic encounter. A work of art does not procure a static and univocal message; rather, whenever we enter an aesthetic encounter, we are invited to recognize the truth that is being unveiled in the enactment (*Vollzug*). An artwork has its own *being*, and its truth shines forth in its performance (cf. Gadamer, *Reader* 214–15). The reception of art cannot be narrowed down to the acquisition and accumulation of knowledge about a given artwork, even if the historical and social context of its creation remains an important part of the interpretative process. Rather, it is fundamentally the viewer's unique perception of that which is already there that is constitutive of an aesthetic encounter. Significantly, an artwork's claim to truth is not to be understood in terms of a statement or proposition but rather as an unveiling that happens in the actualizing of an artwork in time and place (cf. George 110).[2]

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Gadamer argues that in our encounters with art we are arrested by the truth that shines forth. It is the unfolding of truth, which is processive, rather than a sudden revelation, that holds us captive. Gadamer's notion of a game indicates the structure of how art discloses itself to us—when we contemplate an artwork, it is the back-and-forth "conversation" in which the truth is unveiled. According to him, entering into contact with a piece of art is not just revelatory but also transformative. Gadamer famously states: "The intimacy with which the work of art touches us is at the same time, in enigmatic fashion, a shattering and a demolition of the familiar. It is not only the 'This art thou!' disclosed in a joyous and frightening shock; it also says to us; 'Thou must alter thy life!'" (Gadamer, *Philosophical* 104). Significantly, concluding his essay "Aesthetics and Hermeneutics" with those lines, he not only highlights that the artwork addresses us but that it puts a claim on us, requiring a transformation of our course of thinking, acting, or even a decisive change in life. Quoting the closing words of Rainer Maria Rilke's poem "Archaic Torso of Apollo," "Thou must alter thy life!", Gadamer does not merely allude to the impact of the work of art (Apollo's statue) on the speaker but makes it into a paradigm—art prompts us to change our lives.

In an aesthetic encounter, we partake of the inexhaustibility of meanings that an artwork holds and that are disclosed in the process of its self-actualization. The fullness of our experience of being captivated by

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[2] I offer a commentary on Gadamer's assertion of an artwork's self-actualizing in "*Via pulchritudinis*: The Narrative of Violence and Vulnerability in Painting in View of Hans-Georg Gadamer's Hermeneutic Aesthetics" (2023).

what is in the artwork brings forth an increase in being—*Zuwachs an Sein*. In our intimate encounter with a work of art, it increases its own being (cf. Gadamer, *Relevance* 37). Gadamer's notion of an "increase in being" is the core of his explication of the ontological aspect of the experience of art (Gadamer, *Truth* 135–36). He argues: "[I]f we really want to think about the experience of art, we can, indeed must, think along these lines: the work of art does not simply refer to something, because what it refers to is actually there. We could say that the work of art signifies an increase in being" (*Relevance* 35). Gadamer's phenomenology of art emphasizes the unpredictability of human interaction with a piece of art. His approach is anti-reductionist and anti-objectifying. Each time we attempt to address a work of art, it speaks to us, bringing into the open what is already there.

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According to Gadamer, our encounter with art is not merely of a personal nature but is an event (*Ereignis*).[3] Something ultimately important *happens* when we contemplate art, since an aesthetic encounter induces a ground-breaking change—we enter the process of *metanoia* (cf. Gadamer, *Relevance* 34–35). Following Gadamer's claim of the transformational character of an encounter with art, we can say that when we undertake an intimate conversation with an artwork, it activates a process of questioning and self-questioning, and we respond with the entirety of our being, finding ourselves at the threshold of the familiar and the unfamiliar. Art has the capacity to overwhelm us, and its "piercing watching" of us is a way of calling on us to change (34; cf. Gadamer, *Philosophical* 104). Drawing our attention to the seminal change that happens *to* us and *in* us in an aesthetic encounter, Gadamer connects his claim to the avowal of the self-disclosing nature of the symbol: "The symbolic does not simply point toward a meaning, but rather allows that meaning to present itself. The symbolic represents meaning" (34).

Although in the subsequent section I point out the manifold meanings commonly attached to the symbol of the window, it is crucial to highlight that since, for Gadamer, the symbolic allows the meaning to present itself, employing his aesthetic hermeneutics means to transcend the practice of merely deciphering the symbolic meaning. Allowing the meaning to present itself, the work of art invites us to indulge in the familiar and the uncharted territories of meaning. My tracing of the many figurative meanings of the window serves as a preliminary investigation of the viable possibilities of diving into this, on the one hand, common and, on the other hand, always intriguing motif, generating new senses. Placing the transformational and revelatory nature of an artwork at the forefront,

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[3] I proffer a thorough explication of Gadamer's phenomenology of art as play and the *eventing* of art in *On Beauty and Being* (125–46).

Gadamer talks about the symbol as a site of excess and that which "rests upon an intricate interplay of showing and concealing" (*Relevance* 33). It is in the interplay of concealing and revealing (*Verbergung/Entbergung*) that the meaning of an artwork shines forth (cf., e.g., Gadamer, *Werke* 259–60).

WINDOW IMAGERY AND THE ENACTMENT OF DIVISION, DISCLOSURE, AND BELONGING

The above remarks on Gadamer's ontology of art will serve as a backdrop to my encounter with the selected artworks embodying human (be)longingness. To be able to appreciate the chosen, exemplary pieces of art more deeply, while using the tenets of Gadamer's aesthetics, I will first resort to a survey of the hermeneutically dense symbolic meaning of the window motif used in art to represent the mystery surrounding our human belonging and longing. The human settlement and the world of nature are literally and metaphorically (dis)connected. The threshold between them is a liminal space riven with polyvalent meanings. Rather than merely providing a background for human habitation, the natural environment is a force that shapes and participates in creating human dwelling (cf., e.g., Arias-Maldonado). If we think of the landscape as something that co-creates our place of dwelling, we can witness how it impacts our personal living area, stays in contact with us, and emanates a certain aura (cf., e.g., Baudrillard 34). The edge at which the human dwelling begins and the world of nature ends is the genuine locus of the hermeneutically informed tension, with astonishing and even competing senses. This meeting point is the *locus revelationis*—the space of poetic revelations of intimacy and (di)vision, wherein vision is an integral part of (di)vision.

Artistic evocations of windows, doors, and gates—the edges between human residence and the outside world—show that these partitions are the space of an encounter between two seemingly different realms. Constituting a divide, a window, just like a door, is the real and metaphorical venue where distinct realities and states of being meet. However, unlike the door and the gate, the windowpane creates the illusion of complete permeability, or the disappearance of the boundary between the household and its surroundings. The apparent lack of the frontier caused by the window's penetrability, which, however, is not complete, draws our attention to the ambiguous nature of the phenomena of familiarity and strangeness that is denoted in the intriguing relations between exteriority and interiority, remoteness and closeness. Even more importantly, though, the seeming unity of the outer and the inner provided by the window inspires us to think ontologically about human dwelling. The connection between the

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outside and inside reminds us that human existence remains in primordial oneness with the world outside, both animate and inanimate.

Crucially, the existence of the transparent glass barrier between landscape and habitation sensitizes us to the puzzling reality of our concomitant seeing and not seeing fully (cf. Baudrillard 42) and, by extension, to the hermeneutic dilemma of understanding and not understanding completely. The concurrent possibility of vision and an impasse in attaining it to the fullest is cogently expressed by St Paul, who uses the metaphor of glass to depict the impossibility of reaching out for another reality and, at the same time, sensing and anticipating it: "For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known" (1 Cor 13: 12). The symbolic nature of the window partition embraces the possibility of considering our human way of seeing as impaired and insufficient, simultaneously alerting us to the undisclosed—to the presence of the invisible. Furthermore, the fragility of the window partition prompts us to consider the possibility of breaking through and bringing the gulf between the *inside* and the *outside* to an end. Undeniably, the easily destroyable divide can also suggest the potential precariousness of the movement between different places and differing states of being, both literarily and metaphorically.

Satiated with figurative senses—including diverse understandings of caesura (division) and opening (vision) that embody the tension between nature and culture—the evocations of the window partition in art draw us into the plethora of meanings of human dwelling that resonate with our sense of familiarity, safety, and rootedness, but also strangeness, precariousness, and uprootedness. Hermeneutic sensibility, however, lets us move beyond the matrix of dichotomous thinking about the window as the space of the encounter between divergent realities. This kind of sensibility encourages us to transcend the cursory understandings of the window's dual function and provides a possibility of appreciating the meanings that arise from entering the dynamic communication between the outer and inner spheres of home. Similarly, transcending a rigid, dualistic framework means relinquishing a clear-cut understanding of notions of home, being-at-home, and homelessness. Alongside the more nuanced ways of perceiving reality encapsulated by those concepts, the window's apparent translucence draws our attention to issues of permeability and transparency without transition (cf. Baudrillard 42) and, thus, to the simultaneity of exclusion and inclusion in our experience of being-at-home.

While it might seem like a cliché to state that the window carries the rich symbolism of closeness and distance, openness and closure, the wonder of seeing, and the impossibility of touching (cf. Baudrillard 41–43), these binary oppositions may lead us to an acknowledgement of the

more subtle and profound realities that the window evokes. An open window directs our thoughts to moments of epiphany. As much as it can play the role of alerting us to the forthcoming and unsettling crisis, the window can also symbolize the foresight of time promising happiness. As Paul Ricœur states: "The symbol invites us to think, calls for an interpretation, precisely because it says more than it says and because it never ceases to speak to us" (28). The polysemy of senses that the window as a symbol contains invites versatile interpretations, even conflicting ones, and simultaneously opens new vistas in our understanding of notions of closure and disclosure, and distance and remoteness, evoked by the symbol of the window. We can argue that an open window epitomizes a desperate desire to be close to what one views as one's *home*, a place that can possibly differ from the location of one's residence.[4] Equally, the open window reflects an urge to escape the suffocating, demeaning, and hostile environment inside. In literature and art, the open window is often an emblem of an attempt to open oneself to the unpredictable otherness or to regain the *home* that no longer exists or is lost by (re)imaging, (re)creating, and (re)establishing it in a new environment. The closed window, on the other hand, is often evocative of entrapment and captivity.

The sense of separation and belonging evoked in the literary and artistic images of the window brings to mind an ontological search for a *home*. Our ongoing journey to what we perceive to be our home is also infused with epistemological reflexivity. The memory and the knowledge of the familiar create the possibility of reconstructing the once familiar in our present milieu. Equally importantly, the apprehension of the familiar can entail creative homecomings: the mental construction of the home to come, the unknown home, and the home of our destination. Consequently, the open window is sometimes seen as a sentimental attempt to recapture a romanticized past, tinted, nonetheless, with feelings of suffering and nostalgia (cf., e.g., Kenzari 41). On the other hand, the open window often stands for the possibility of a new life, presence, and home. The semantic opaqueness of the window motif, resting on the window's basic function of vision and division, has long intrigued literary and visual artists.[5] An examination of the diverse, centuries-old use of the window motif in literature and the fine arts elicits insights into the complex nature of the relationship between landscape and home. Their concurrent separateness and inseparability express a hermeneutic in-between that implies the

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[4] This is aptly portrayed, for instance, in Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights*, where the harsh and beautiful Yorkshire moors, rather than the grandiose interior of the Thrushcross Grange palace, serve as a true home for the novel's heroine, Catherine Earnshaw.

[5] Cf., e.g., Rewald; Racz; Masters; Iovane, Bernasconi and Franciolli.

paradoxical closeness of two divergent states of being, symbolically understood as *now* and *after*, the living and the dead, present and future, spiritual and physical.

When positioned *vis-à-vis* the language of art, the above observations lead us to uncover how the window in works of art creates an aesthetic-hermeneutic space that reveals the multifaceted reality of human dwelling and belonging. Commenting on Maurice Blanchot's provocative assertion that art describes one who has lost himself, the world, and the truth of the world (74), Karoui-Elounelli (ex)claims: "Art is the enactment of one's belonging to exile!" (10). Although Blanchot focuses on literary art, we can, by extension, view his and the commentator's avowal as potently expressive of visual art's potential to capture the paradoxical reality of *being an exile* and *being at home* as belonging together. Belonging is perceived as responding to but also integrating a physical and symbolic barrier, both rigid and fragile, including and excluding, accepting and threatening.

Created by artists of different nationalities, epochs, and styles, the three paintings under discussion serve as the focus for an exploration of human belongingness in its inextricable interweaving with the phenomenon of dwelling, which cannot be restricted to a place of residence, but also encompasses mental states and reflects introspective moods. The paintings under scrutiny in this study: *Mariana* (1851) by the Pre-Raphaelite painter John Everett Millais; Johannes Vermeer's *Girl Reading a Letter by an Open Window* (c. 1657–59); and *The Woman at the Window*, by the Spanish surrealist artist Salvador Dalí (1925), immerse us in the poetics of tenderness and privacy, of severance and seclusion, of the movement toward and the palpability of the reality outside, of the firm or broken sense of belonging. The connective thread in those three paintings is the motif of a female figure situated near a window. On a deeper level, however, they are also connected through the motif of love, either expressed via the literary text that the painting is based on (*Mariana*), suggested in an indirect way (*Girl Reading a Letter by an Open Window*), or evoked by an intense sense of dissolution (*The Woman at the Window*), which may be viewed as the epitome of consummate love. The fragile boundary between the external world and the human dwelling provided by the window invites us to ponder all that exceeds the dual nature of human existence in its relationship to the outer and the foreign. In these exemplary artistic embodiments, the window seems to both provoke and undermine clear-cut distinctions such as openness and covertness; the need to expand limitlessly and to commit oneself to a certain relationship, activity, place, and realm; alienation and belongingness. The fragile nature of the window divide inspires us to

recognize the subtle, emotive *in-between* of human existence as positioned between interiority and exteriority, immanence and transcendence.

Although exploring Gadamer's philosophical reflection on belonging is not the focus of this essay *per se*, it is interesting to note that he himself engages with the topic of belonging in manifold ways, though not always in a straightforward fashion. His stance on this issue is mostly interwoven with a deliberation on tradition—one of his prominent themes (see, e.g., Gadamer, *Truth* 354–55, 457–59). It is germane, though, to here call upon Gadamer's hermeneutics of conversation and his perspective on belonging together in human relationships. He argues that "belonging together always at the same time means being able to listen to one another" (*Truth* 355). Significantly, the female figures that feature in the selected paintings are loners who either experience a lack of belonging, or whose sense of belonging is deeply disturbed. The only way they seem to dwell in the listening mode is not through a *vis-à-vis* conversation with the Other (the beloved), but through attentive listening to their own hearts. Their interior monologue may give the impression that they converse with and listen to the Other. This imagined conversation, however, does not change their condition of being alone and longing to belong.

MARIANA: THE MICROCOSM OF LONGING FOR INTIMATE BELONGING

The trope of the window in visual art is frequently used to evoke human longing and, at the same time, in an intensely provocative way, to embody a sense of (be)longing, or an unrelenting desire to belong to another place and reality. The relation between distance and belonging can bring to mind the varied spaces we might be dwelling in. The unreachable and faraway that we long for can become the source and site of the workings of the imagination. When we yield to the remote while simultaneously attempting to make it our own, we reconfigure it to become something approachable and tangible. With a tinge of the uncanny, the apparently far-off turns into the near and is full of poetic intensity, as expressed in Novalis's famous dictum (1798): ". . . in the distance everything becomes poetry—poem. *Actio in distans*. Distant mountains, distant people, distant events, etc., everything becomes romantic. . ." (translation by Hoeckner; qtd. in Hoeckner 55). This kind of appropriation is present in Millais's painting *Mariana*, which romanticizes the feminine longing to reunite with a lover. The painting alludes to Shakespeare's comedy *Measure for Measure*, featuring the character of Mariana, an abandoned fiancée, as

well as to Alfred, Lord Tennyson's poem "Mariana," an echo of this play,[6] thematizing a lengthy period of waiting and the feminine capacity for endurance while potently employing landscape to convey intense, fragile, and suppressed emotions.[7]

Awaiting the beloved, a common artistic and literary motif, takes on a solemn tone in Millais's masterpiece, one suited to grieving and unrequited love. Here, dwelling is an endless awaiting in the solitariness and scantiness of the space for living, which highlights eerie feelings of entrapment and weariness, heartbreak, loss, the ecstasy of longing, and the sorrow of unbelonging. Captured in a moment of exhaustion, fueled by a hopeless need to speak with the outside world, Mariana is positioned next to the window, which acts as a barrier rather than an escape, sealing the irreversibility of her gloomy situation. Longing and tense eroticism are emphasized through the female protagonist's bodily comportment, which clearly indicates separation from her lover and a painful absence of company. Conversely, the window can be understood as playing the classic role of a possible opening (both literal and metaphorical) to the mysterious afar and beyond, which is tantamount to a desired and true sense of belonging. Addressing the two opposite sensations of shutting-off and opening, this artwork compels us to reconsider what we understand through the irrevocable path of destiny and how we respond to the primordial call to belong.

The reality outside the window in Millais's painting seems to remain very close to the one experienced by his heroine. An intense sense of deprivation is perhaps subdued by calling on the realm of fantasy and imagination, which is facilitated by the perceived proximity of human dwelling and nature. The motif of leaves communicates the unanticipated relationship between external and internal space, replete with Mariana's spiritual longing. The leaves having entered the room appear to have been woven into the tangible materiality of the embroidery she has been working on (cf. Easby). Emphasized by the lyrical confluence of the outside and the inside, the boundary dividing the domains of nature and humans seems almost non-existent. But upon closer inspection, we can see that Millais deconstructs this apparent mood by adding yet another significant aspect to the landscape: the window overlooks not just the garden but

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[6] See Moller. Millais's painting is also an intertextual allusion to Tennyson's other poem, "St Agnes's Eve." Both poems, "Mariana" and "St Agnes's Eve," as Anne Hardy accentuates, "engender the contrasting emotional extremes of melancholy and religious ecstasy" (211). For more on the intersections between poetry and Pre-Raphaelite art, as well as the "transgressive hybridity" of visual and literary arts, see Armstrong (15–31).

[7] For an analysis of the Pre-Raphaelite paintings inspired by poems, but also poems inspired by the works of the Pre-Raphaelites, see, for example, Andres and Donnelly.

a wall (another partition), which bears a symbolic meaning. The interplay between creating and removing physical boundaries reflects the typical Victorian preoccupation with maintaining and exceeding constraints on behavior:

> Since virginity for its own sake was so universally exalted by the Victorians, the importance of keeping up "mural" defenses to protect that purity was reiterated ad nauseam. In courtship imagery, the resulting wall served as an architectural maidenhead in some senses, a reminder to women of the need both to restrain the boldness of men and to check their own passions. (Casteras 91)

The wall in the painting signifies the need to abide by social and sexual norms but also draws attention to a common transgression of them. The wall outside also inspires us to examine how the figure of Mariana, "walled," is positioned within the composition of the painting. Her head, symbolizing her thinking, is stretched back, emphasizing that she is confined to her home. Her lower body, which is her center of desire, is thrust toward the window as a means of communication with the outside reality.

Mariana's place of dwelling is filled with melancholy and a sense of time passing. A deep, though somewhat disturbing, unity is felt in the nostalgic intensity, which best characterizes the mode of being that Millais captures in his painting. Nostalgia relates to the depiction of the interior of the chamber, which is saturated with an aura of solemnity and piety but also a tormenting sense of incompletion. The quintessence of the heroine's devotional disposition is her dwelling in the in-between of blissful togetherness with her lover in the past and the prayerful, inarticulate desire for the actuality of a union with her fiancé in the present. The evocation of this meaning-laden in-between provokes questions about the formative and transformative power of devotion. This painting both upholds the legitimacy of dedication and downplays its genuine sense, calling on us to creatively respond to the dubious status of piety. The mystery of longing that spurs thoughts of erotic oneness with the beloved echoes Diotima's famous lesson to Socrates about love's delicate but powerful nature and its space of dwelling that is stranded between infinity and temporality. The dualistically founded character of love so vividly articulated by Diotima, can be articulated thus: "Eros is an in-between reality (*metaxy*) partaking of both eternity and time" (Greenaway 127), and invites the viewer of *Mariana* to ponder love's labor and locate its fruits in eternity rather than in earthly reality.

Weariness affects Mariana's soul and body—the bodily posture perfectly matches spiritual weakening, as well as the profound longing to release frustration and to dwell in reciprocity. Interestingly, Millais's

heroine is exemplary in representing the hysterical pathology characteristic of early modern women. The immediately recognizable body language suggests hysterical symptoms, and one may say that, evoking feminine exasperation, the painting reveals womanhood in its primary carnal form (cf. Peterson 57). Inevitably, the corporeal is equated here with a vital mode of dwelling. Providing a barrier, the windowpane marks another meaningful in-between, recognized in the spatial composition of the painting. The centrality of the female figure effectively draws attention to longing located in the bodily being, but the way Mariana is positioned, with her back stretched, transports us straight to the realm of daydreaming— the moment of imagining an escape from captivity (cf. Easby). Yielding in front of *Mariana*, the embodiment of feminine capability, the viewers dwell in the world of an imagined love and are held in the unstable equilibrium of romantic infatuation. Under the poignant curse of Eros, self-understanding seems to be an explicitly tall task. Mariana's eroticized body—her velvety, dark blue dress, the ornamental belt, calling to mind heroines inhabiting medieval romances,[8] and her look expressive of her forlorn soul—appears to be the genuine site of where love is dwelling.

Significantly, Mariana's gaze is only moderately directed to the window, while the tint of resignation and suspension seem to hold it in the ambience of the ephemeral. Imagining belonging to where one is not and spiritual dwelling in external space—outside the walls of the room—seem to give a misleadingly truer connection with the harmony of the past and the possible delight of the future, the dreamy land of consummate love. Millais expresses a sense of imprisonment and desperate seeking to belong through several distinct details of the painting's composition. Rather than providing an aperture, the window evokes the feeling of an immensely poignant enclosure—its ring-like shape, suggestive of a cage—directs our thoughts to the woman's fate, which is inevitable. The death motif, just as in the Tennyson poem which inspired Millais ("She only said, 'my life is dreary, / He cometh not,' she said; / She said, 'I am aweary, aweary, / I would that I were dead!'"), is noteworthy. The sheer physicality of wished-for death is exacerbated by the intuited demise of the self. The absence of the object of love equates with the loss of Mariana's present self—the dissolution of her identity as a fiancée; imagining and memorializing is unable to stave off death, and, thus, she seems to already belong to the shady world of the dead rather than the tangible reality of the living. The viewer is invited to ponder the destructive power of unrequited love,

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[8] Interestingly, Millais, like other Pre-Raphaelites, depicts the female character as wearing a medieval-like gown. However, her rounded pelvis seems to accord with the way the Victorians portrayed women's physiognomy; see Hollander (486).

yielding to the portrayal of love's paralyzing aptitude. Millais's painting speaks to the deepest recesses of the spectator's need to love and be loved. Embodying the failure of love, it enflames the coming to the surface of fundamental questions about love and its indispensability in our lives.

Interestingly, the artist chooses to paint a stained-glass window, and its imagery, the scene of the Annunciation, inspires us to think of it as a mirror for Mariana, since her waiting countenance reflects Mary's vigilance.[9] What is the role of the Annunciation motif in the painting's thematic framework? Does it highlight the detachment of a woman's world of devotion and worship from the joyful and unimpeded flow of romantic love? Or, on the contrary, does the heroine's zeal and piety imply her closeness to Mary and herald future fulfillment? Millais plays on the meaning of the Annunciation, which is the moment when Christ is conceived and Mary becomes the mother of God, inspiring us to reflect on how binary oppositions of fulfillment and emptiness, joy and sadness, belonging and separateness are disavowed. In Shakespeare's play, Mariana is finally granted the position of a married woman, whereas in Tennyson's poem and Millais's painting, she is doomed to desolation and remains alone and childless (cf. Hickey). Mary's praise, joy, and profound sense of belonging to God's plan are displaced and juxtaposed with Mariana's sadness, despair, and sense of being in the wrong place.[10] The implication of Millais's choice of the stained-glass window rather than a standard one is equally stark. This kind of window prevents the direct emanation of light, which seems to imply that the permeability between the two worlds is less effective, and this may also indirectly suggest that the abysmal darkness of not-belonging obscures true vision and does not allow for the satisfactory dénouement of Mariana's immense struggle. Millais's painting calls on us to rethink our ability to see and feel. Despairing over the loss of love is a process of disavowing the deeply ingrained myth of separate selves; aliveness is propelled by love. Instead of putting an end to longing, the unreciprocated love dwells in shadows, blurred by the interweaving of grief and hope.

Acutely lonely and craving kinship, Mariana, the modern-day Penelope, is as much the epitome of the female capability of endurance as of wounded womanhood—of any woman who is expected to passively consent to the *status quo* of societal mores.[11] Drawing on the well-known trope of a female awaiting her lover (cf., e.g., Schweizer 279–82; Van Zyl Smit 393–406), Millais's painting not only includes the window as a meaningful motif but also offers a window into the gendered world of the division

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[9] An engaging analysis of the role of the stained-glass window in *Mariana* and its minute details can be found in Kelly.

[10] For insights into the enticing relationship between Mariana and Mary and Mariana's lover and Archangel Gabriel, see Kelly.

[11] Cf., e.g., Hoffman (264–71).

between the feminine and the masculine realms of Victorian England (cf., e.g., Marsh). Evoking submissiveness and patient tarrying—traditionally ascribed to women—their hands and hearts cannot be idle—the picture holds a direct but mute appeal: women are expected to show modesty and compliance, and this is the realm where they arguably belong.[12] However, exploring the passivity-activity dichotomy, and the formulaic distribution of power between males and females, Millais appears to pose a query about the rigidity of the barrier in acting out gender roles[13] and, at the same time, questions the obviousness of the ambits the two sexes belong to, complicating further the univocal response to the painting that seems to be expressive of the societal expectations imposed on females.[14]

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Interestingly, the stasis of Mariana's situation—dwelling in the compelling (ir)rationality of her desolation (we know from Shakespeare's and Tennyson's works that she lost her dowry and was abandoned by her fiancé)— may also be understood as her *ek-statis* in the Heideggerian sense of being-outside-of, of an *ek-sistence* that is transcending itself.[15] Mariana's being-in-the-world is out-of-bounds as it is completely dedicated (transcending its being) toward the Other—her lover. The belonging of the loving party to the beloved and their belonging-together, which can also be subject to torment and violation, as in Mariana's case, can be expressed as follows:

> Belonging, we can say, is grounded in a luminous beauty within the murkiness of the ordinary, simply because the beloved is a beloved, and present in our midst. From the beloved to whom we are now subject, we pick up the boundaries that demarcate the uniqueness of our selfhood. It is for the sake of the beloved that we choose to exercise our agency. We exist-from and exist-toward the beloved whose presence invites us to be responsible and free, in that order. In the presence of the beloved, I am present to myself as *lover*, unfolding myself in ways that I may not have otherwise done. In such unfolding, I bring my own possibilities to light. (Greenaway 129)

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[12] A survey of gender relations in the context of the social hierarchy and domestic problems is offered, for instance, in Langland and in Hoffman.

[13] Interestingly, Millais, as a male artist, appears to draw our attention to women's feelings of being overwhelmed by the world of men, subverting the conventional attitude represented by men. A similar sentiment can be discerned in paintings by other Pre-Raphaelites.

[14] For an analysis of the intersections between Pre-Raphaelites' art and the Victorian novel, as well as the Pre-Raphaelite artists' attempts to redefine gender constructs, see, e.g., Andres (46–48).

[15] In *Four Seminars*, Heidegger asserts that "Dasein is essentially ek-static" (71), underscoring thus that Dasein is transcending in its being. For further explication of the notion of *ek-stasis* see, for instance, Polt (265–67).

Besides engaging the ontological-phenomenological dimension, Millais's painting perfectly distills the essence of an epistemic dilemma. Mariana is captured in the crisis of time—in her desire to cross the boundary between the known, to which she belongs, and the unknown to which she wants to belong. Her sense of belongingness arises from the fundamental law of love—lovers (be)long to one another. Since longing is "an ever-present energy, questing and fusional" (Gifford 9), the fragile partition of the windowpane can possibly be easily destroyed, and oneness can be reestablished and belonging reconfigured.

As much as Millais's choice of the stained-glass window seems to bear on the message of his painting, so the decision to use a bay window has certain important connotations. The bay window best serves to render the proximity of the raging world of nature and the secure interior of the human dwelling. The window's very construction—it protrudes and occupies part of the space thought to belong to nature—suggests an obvious intrusion of the human into the natural surroundings, which is ingeniously paralleled by the penetration of human habitation by the outside world of nature—the leaves that seem to fit in the object of the woman's art. If Millais's painting evokes female passivity, it is one that is pregnant with meaning. Entrapped in the privacy of her room, "totally enclosed and isolated by her surroundings, with even the garden visible outside the window bordered by a high brick wall" (Easby), the woman is a prisoner, tragically limited not only because of the room's compactness, which indicates the lack of a possibility of personal development, but because of the mental structures imposed on her. The life led between the little altar and the table with the embroidery symbolizes selfless devotion, adoration, and passionate love. Mariana's art (her embroidery) is an escape of the self that suffers from an aggrieved sense of not-belonging to the creative self that seems to expand. Downcast thoughts seem to be counterbalanced and sublimated by a religious sentiment suggested by the place of worship, which can also be viewed as symbolizing the woman's sacrifice in expecting a lover who is tarrying and who will probably never come. Millais's embodiment of womanhood as anguished and distressed discloses the painful condition of not-belonging.

Viewing Millais's painting through the lens of Gadamer's model of aesthetics prompts us to move beyond the formulaic distinction between the safe inside and the hostile outside. The truth about the female protagonist's predicament of not-belonging daunts us. We have to acknowledge that instead of a cozy interior and an innocent act of relaxation, the painting evokes a sense of uncomfortable confinement and frustration. Despite the picture's plausible expression of the theme of love, Millais's character neither delights in love nor belongs to her place of

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dwelling. In the back-and-forth movement of contemplating this artwork, our initial response to the embodiment of belongingness and alienation is questioned while other senses emerge for us on our meditative aesthetic journey towards a comprehension of the reality that the painting captures. The gradual apprehension of the reality—or, rather, the realities—that the painting conveys both calls on us and enacts the invaluable possibilities of the expansion of the viewer's self. The artwork's *increase in being* in the process of self-actualizing coalesces with the spectator's *increase in being*.

GIRL READING A LETTER BY AN OPEN WINDOW: LONGING AS THE PORTAL TO BELONGING

The acute feeling of entrapment and doom in Millais's pictorial evocation of Mariana's condition can be contrasted with the sensation of impending freedom and perhaps happiness in Vermeer's painting, *Girl Reading a Letter by an Open Window*. This masterpiece encourages us to ponder the reality of longing as the cognitive and emotive space of connection and contentment. The female character in the picture seems to represent the typically feminine desire for romantic fulfillment,[16] which is potently expressed through the motif of the open window, as if in a gesture to invite the world of sensual and/or mental pleasure. The significance of the window as the portal to happiness and gratification is powerfully underlined by Vermeer's use of light. The light that infuses the room from outside might be understood as symbolically indicating that alterity and newness present themselves as more satisfactory and pleasing than the known reality of the inside, heralding the reality that the female figure is drawn to. Vermeer's employment of light seems to highlight the emotional state of longing.[17] In combination with the human gaze and the clarity of composition—suggesting the artist's attentiveness to time—his evocative use of light directs our thoughts to longing as the thematic framework of the painting (cf. Ford and Wheelock 86). The apparent dissolution of the barrier between the exterior and the interior invokes the sensation that the imaginary world is near, and that the woman's fantasy can come to actualization.[18] However, when we focus on the evocation of the need for romantic fulfillment, we may miss the interpretation of light as symbolizing intellectual and/or spiritual illumination, and, thus, the female figure engaged in thought rather than romance.

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[16] An engaging study of femininity and libidinous desire in Vermeer's paintings of women is offered, for instance, in Salomon.

[17] On Vermeer's use of light and shadow, see, e.g., Thurston (475–76).

[18] Feminine subjectivity in relation to home and domesticity, as captured by Vermeer, was analyzed, for example, in Chapman.

The wide-open window encourages us to view the space outside as both distinct and as amalgamating with the internal. We do not see the window opening *en face*. Instead, Vermeer's ingenious composition makes us confront the window sash with the girl's face reflected in it. The reflection introduces the element of the uncanny—perhaps the maiden's hidden part of herself, the unknown and the possibly suppressed. Although the heroine's gaze is fixed on the letter, her figure faces an open window, which positions her in the direct impact of the light flowing from the outside. The figure of the girl, bathed in light, arrested in time, and almost timeless, impresses us with a profound spiritual quality that can be viewed as a particular kind of serenity (cf. Read 64). Vermeer engages us with a thought-provoking synchronicity between the window remaining open and the possibility of a new existential opening that the letter appears to represent. The stylish metal divisions highlight the bulk and the material tangibility of the window partition. This ornamental element, typical of the time when the painting was created, counterbalances the immediate interpretation of the window as providing an easy passage to the world outside.

As the dark red curtain in the window is pulled aside, our attention is simultaneously drawn to its concealing and disclosing purpose. The drapery's practical materiality serves as a reminder to us to keep what is private closed off from prying eyes and to be mindful when doing so.[19] On a symbolic level, the curtain makes us more alert to the sudden burst of the radically new, when it is pulled back to reveal something unexpected in all its alluring splendor. Perhaps it is the reality of a secret love that tempts the girl to succumb to its beguiling power. Vermeer's ability to seize the moment and imbue it with insight and meaning draws us into the very heart of his art. The important, symbolic component of the painting's composition—the enigmatic letter, whose contents are known only to the girl and not to us, the viewers—is how the artist cleverly captures the moment of revelation. The painting's exploration of the tension between belonging and non-belonging and the ambiguity of the letter's message[20]— its transparency and secrecy—resonate profoundly, raising an

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[19] Vermeer's frequent use of the curtain in many of his paintings is the source of unwavering interest, induced in both art historians and common viewers. One of the innumerable instances that feature a drapery is his masterpiece, *An Artist in his Studio*. A detailed analysis of the importance of the drapery in the composition of this painting can be found, for instance, in Hinden (23–24). Interestingly, as the critic claims, unlike in *Girl Reading a Letter by an Open Window*, half of the room would be covered if the curtain were released, which may imply that the message of the painting (*An Artist in his Studio*) is even more complex than it seems to be suggested by the dichotomy of openness and covertness encapsulated in the image of the room either closed or made open to the eye of the spectator.

[20] The intricate nature of the letter in the painting is explored, for instance, in Nash.

awareness that the epiphanic moment is the time of disclosure, possibly revealing that the girl longs to belong to a reality different from the one she is dwelling in.

Vermeer demonstrates how something that appears to be disclosed can nevertheless remain hidden and available for further disclosure. The hermeneutic tension of veiling and unveiling operates here to the effect of bringing us, the viewers, to the brink of uncovering some essential truth, only to subvert the closeness of our discovery and make us aware that what has been disclosed is simultaneously engendering other mysteries. The Gadamerian reading of art (cf. *Relevance* 34) alerts us to how Vermeer's painting puts a claim on us by drawing us into the realm of intimacy, silence, and something genuinely unresolvable. The intensity of the painting's address to us has been cogently expressed by Wiseman:

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> The task for the viewer of a canvas by Vermeer is to get beyond mere identification of the pictured scene and the effort to figure out what is going on in it, to recognize the silence pervading the canvas as a metaphor for the reality and the separateness of the minds of the depicted figures. What is called for is that the viewer bear witness to the privacy of their worlds, not try to fathom it. We can bear witness only to what we stand before or are in the presence of. We know we are in the presence of another (painting or person) when something in the other leaps up to touch, to pierce us. (323)

The seemingly accessible world of Vermeer's art is also acutely inaccessible, when we are invited to attend to the private and the intimate, yet recognize that crossing the boundary between the world of the artwork and ours would be a mere figment of imagination. The enigmatic, dense reality of his work, calling on us to respond and let ourselves be overwhelmed by that which happens in our aesthetic encounter with this painting, precludes a univocal response to the query of belonging and not-belonging when the portrayal of longing overpowers our cognitive and emotive capabilities, generating more questions than answers, and inviting us to appreciate our confrontation with the shifting borderline between the consciousness of belonging and its opposite.

Apart from thematizing the human need to belong, Vermeer's painting draws our attention to another level of belonging—the intimate game between the spectator and the artwork, following the back-and-forth movement paradigm.[21] The effect of the red screen is intensified by the

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[21] The back-and-forth movement bespeaks the self-forgetfulness of the viewer and her absorption in the work of art. It is the kind of movement that relates to playing a game. What happens is not intentional; rather, it is something that comes from beyond the viewer

existence of the green one, which creates the illusion that the boundary separating the viewer and the world of the artwork may break, which makes him/her feel strangely connected to the painting, as if they belonged to it. The space of the room seems to open when the green shade is pulled aside, encouraging viewers to explore its contents or—even more intriguingly and engagingly—to become part of the narrative. Rather than the starkness of separation, the impression of inclusion and a peculiar sense of belonging prompts us to look at the reality of belonging from yet another angle. The paradigm of veiling and unveiling hinted at by means of drapery is a complex issue with provocative overtones.

The literal veiling and uncovering seem to metaphorically emphasize the dynamic interplay of concealment and unconcealment (*Verbergung/Entbergung*) of Being[22] that discloses itself to us. We can surmise that Vermeer prompts us to acknowledge that his art poetically discloses the reality of love, and, at the same time, renders it hidden, and open to interpretation. As Wiseman notices, "Vermeer's subjects do not unlock their secrets under his brush, interpretations of his paintings are uncertain and indeterminate. In this they are like the contents of the unconscious mind, primitive in being untouched by culture and its systems of intelligibility" (319). When we contemplate Vermeer's painting, something important is brought into the open in the hermeneutic tension of veiling and unveiling. It is possible that we do not merely identify ourselves with the girl in her need to fulfill her longing, but, more profoundly, discover the power of our own longings. As seems to be suggested by the girl's predicament, longing can become the portal to a true sense of belonging.

The viewer remains in the focal, if enigmatic, in-between that the female character in Vermeer's painting is in—the woman is positioned at the imperceptible border between her current reality and the potential future she faces. While the viewer is separated from the situational setting depicted on the canvas, they also feel uncannily and even uncomfortably close to it—possibly discovering even more in common with the painting's story than is readily and easily acknowledged. It feels as though the

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(cf. Gadamer, *Relevance* 22–23). Developing his ontological-phenomenological model of an aesthetic encounter, Gadamer introduces the distinction between *Erlebnis* and *Erfahrung* aesthetics (cf., e.g., Davey, "Lived" 326–41). Through the notion of *Er-fahrung*, Gadamer draws attention to movement and emphasizes that something important happens in an encounter with art. This encounter is an event (*Ereignis*), in which the viewer undergoes a seminal change.

    [22] In his ontological hermeneutics, Martin Heidegger accentuates that Being discloses itself to us in the tension between concealment and unconcealment (*Four Seminars* 41). Heidegger extends his ontological model upon the revelation of truth in art; see "The Origin of the Work of Art" (1971).

painting is a kind of window itself because of the green drapery that denotes the artwork's border. Vermeer employs this visual trick to let the spectator recognize the image as a potential window into a reality that is both familiar and intelligible to them while remaining ambiguous and demanding interpretation. The two screens frame the chamber's interior in a provocative way. Their hues, which are rife with symbolic meaning, highlight the painting's ambiguous message and compel us to delve deeper into the complex and nuanced feelings of belonging and longing that lie beneath those phenomena. Red, which is commonly associated with passion and infatuation, is a suitable color to convey the underlying theme of a romantic liaison alongside the overtly sexualized longing (indicated through the figure of Cupid) and is excellently paired with green in its popular connotation of hope and good prospects, thereby creating the possibility of viewing the clandestine message of the letter that the girl is reading as containing the promise of happiness.

Whereas in Millais's picture, the personal domain is kept private and, therefore, emphasizes the entrapment of the female, in Vermeer's painting, the private is infringed upon as the light entering the room through the window seems to metaphorically let drop the mystery that envelops the content of the letter. The recent discovery of a part of the painting that was covered with a layer of paint—a portrait of Cupid on the wall behind the girl—emphasizes the ambiguity of the painting's message and draws our attention to a wider spectrum of interpretations. This broader vision is especially intriguing since we know that it was scientifically proven that someone else's hand, not Vermeer's, interfered with the picture's original form by hiding the Cupid.[23] One possible interpretation is that the portrait of Cupid, a picture within the picture, confirms the assumption that the letter contains an amorous message.[24]

Vermeer's painting engages our imagination to such an extent that the conundrum presents itself as an unending challenge. Interpreting this masterpiece, we succumb to its enticing way of making us pose questions, and thus its impact makes us feel that we cannot remain the same—the slow uncovering of its manifold senses guides us to an experience of self-expansion. Spurring endless responses, the mystery that is captured in this painting bewilders us. Intrigued as we are, we cannot help but acknowledge

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[23] Cf., e.g., Brown.

[24] This kind of interpretation can be supported by the message encapsulated in the presence of Cupid in Vermeer's other works, e.g., *A Woman Receiving a Letter*, or *Girl Interrupted at Her Music*. For further information on the meaning hidden in the ekphrastic images of Cupid in Vermeer's art, see, for instance, Weber (298–99). Weber draws our attention to the imposing, large image of Cupid in *A Girl Reading a Letter by the Open Window*, which might highlight the predominance of a love motif rendered in this painting (295).

that the painting's enigmatic power is not to be fully accessed in one sitting and tamed, but rather that it encourages us to patiently let the truth shine forth and, at the same time, to explore greater possibilities for our own development. The aesthetic pleasure that we derive is the pleasure that makes us grow. Thus, we are in the position of both appreciating and awaiting our development in new encounters with this artwork.

THE WOMAN AT THE WINDOW: THE TRANSFORMATIVE POWER OF LONGING FOR WHERE WE DO NOT BELONG

Dalí's *The Woman at the Window*[25] is an intriguing instance of how any obvious sense of belonging can be debunked through the artist's choice of blurring the boundary between two states of being. Dalí paints his sister Anna Maria from behind, at the window in Cadaqués. The painting enchants us with the softness of the woman's blueish-greyish dress, her relaxed figure, and the soothing view of the sea that induces an emotional response to the woman's secret longing (cf. Dredge). The figure of the woman seems to belong to both the inside and the outside of the room in this painting. The unification of colors that appear both on the inner and the outer sides of the woman's place of dwelling powerfully indicates her metaphorical dissolution into the seascape. The level of integration with the landscape is so extensive that one may get the impression that the female remains in some mysterious oneness with it. Her confluence with her surroundings may allude to the woman's immature personality or a lack of experience, but such minor observations can only deter us from Dalí's quintessential attempt to explore the paradoxical unity of the exterior and the interior. Spectacular as it is, the visible unity might indicate the longing for something remote or secret and the surfacing of impossible desire. The woman's body language expresses her intense attentiveness and absorption (cf., e.g., Shanes 69). Providing an opening to an unknown reality—the intriguing unfamiliarity outside—the window invites the woman and, by extension, the viewers to cross the boundary and unite with that which is longed for. This sentiment plays the pivotal role in the painting; longing becomes belonging. If longing not only leads to belonging but is shown as interwoven with it, we may surmise that Dalí's phenomenology of human belongingness is much more nuanced than it initially appears to be. It

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[25] It is interesting to compare Dalí's painting to Caspar David Friedrich's *Woman at a Window* (1822). Friedrich is believed to be the first to explore the symbolic possibilities of the open window. See, e.g., Grant.

suggests that longing is the *spiritus movens* of any sense of rootedness and connectivity, as we feel connected to where we long for.

When taken to its logical conclusion, the astounding permeability of the landscape and the human being, which is the composition's controlling idea, makes us succumb to the illusion that the fusion of the two is nearly complete. The almost indistinguishable human and natural domains compel us to uncover the meaning of this perfect, if unsettling, equilibrium, achieved through the trick of the woman's dress resembling the sea. Significantly, the room in this painting is empty, dull, and uninteresting, and stands in contrast to the more attractive outside. Dalí provides no details of furniture or décor, and the view of the interior is minimized. One part of the window casement is missing, which almost goes unnoticed (cf. Leal). This heightens the effect of the chasm between the appeal of the outside and the woman's wish to belong to it with all its attractions rather than to the dreary inside. Since the female is depicted with her back facing the viewer, we can only guess her emotional state as expressed through her body posture. Despite the delusion of the unification of the woman and the seascape, at once tempting but uncrossed, the window barrier is suggestive of a reality that is immaterial. The alluring power of where one does not belong is the genuine substance of (be)longing. The window, constituting a sudden disruption in the unified pattern of the wall that is drab, uninteresting, and monothematic, is a gateway to dreams becoming reality.

Dalí defies the principle of mimetic representation, creating a dreamscape that is governed by stillness and fantasy. Looking, perhaps hopefully, at the horizon, the female character inhabits a world that is beyond the tangible reality of her predicament. Longing is about situating oneself on the horizon of where one wants to belong and dreams of belonging. The object of one's longing can be a place that is forbidden, full of mystery, but also fulfilling one's desire for freedom and happiness. It can equally well create the true possibility of self-actualization or the mirage of completion. In a vein similar and yet essentially different from Millais's painting, the outside in this artwork seems to invade the interior of the woman's place of dwelling. The surreal world of Dalí's art, in which the wave-like curtains mirror the sea's velvety softness and appeal, articulates a surrender to one's desire to connect with the outer world. Solitariness, paradoxically both emphasized and disparaged via the odd sameness of the pattern of the woman's dress and that of the curtains, is the space of her inner dwelling and belonging.

Contemplating Dalí's surrealist painting, we are invited to experience an increase in our capacity to transcend the real, and, thus, we realize that while being addressed by this artwork, we are also in a position that may be uncomfortable for us, as the painting necessitates an acknowledgment of the transgression of the preconceived ideas of dwelling and belonging. As much

as the female character is made to belong to the surrounding landscape, the world outside seems to belong to her, too. The bizarre oneness of a human being and the landscape, which is depicted in this artwork, prompts us to partake in a game in which belonging and alienation are not unambiguous terms. Moreover, we may feel intrigued by the possibility of contemplating the delicate and, at the same time, powerful nature of the phenomenon of love, suggested in a clandestine way via the motif of dissolving realities. While disturbing us, Dalí's painting powerfully expands our selves and our sense of (be)longing.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Employing the tenets of Gadamer's ontology of art grants us the possibility of recognizing the specific kind of conversation that takes place between an artwork and its viewers. In this conversation, something important is revealed, and we cannot remain silent in the presence of what is unveiled. Triggering emotional resonance, an artwork holds us in awe. It puts a claim on us, demanding an answer. We cannot escape its "piercing" way of watching us. The seeming reversal of the roles of the viewer and what is being viewed bespeaks the gist of the event of art's performance. Illuminating our pathway of how we can understand what happens *to* us and *in* us when we contemplate an artwork, Gadamer's model of art sensitizes us to an increase in being—*Zuwachs an Sein*, which reveals the ontological dimension of an aesthetic encounter. In the back-and-forth conversation that occurs in this encounter, the excess of meaning that the artwork holds is actualized. Participation in the dialogue also entails the viewer's self-enrichment; her world expands beyond the strictures of what is familiar.

In our patient attention to the selected works of art that embody belonging, we feel the exquisite pleasure of uncovering those realities of belonging that are unexpected and more nuanced. The lingering fashion of exploring the complex relationship between the outside and the inside of *home*, instantiated by the discussed paintings, draws our attention to the intricate reality of dwelling and belonging—one in which the boundary between what we understand as inclusion and exclusion appears to dissolve. When looked at from the perspective of the window motif in art, the close relationship of the two phenomena yields important findings that impact our understanding of (di)vision and (dis)closure. In the selected paintings by Vermeer and Dalí, the window is open: the glass partition loses its disseveering force, and gains a visionary, imaginary, and even transcendent power. The locked window in Millais's painting represents the inaccessibility of the world of otherness and the Other—it

retains its dividing function and seems to suggest no possibility of change. The symbolism of the window examined in these artworks sensitizes us to a deeper understanding of our *search for home*, longing, and belonging that is undergirded by the philosophical quest for the meaning of mortality and identity, but also self-understanding and love. The evocations of (be)longing in art not only acknowledge the truth about our sense of belonging but also make our vision and self expand in the endless unveiling of what is and what will allow itself to be discovered.

The narrative dimension of the chosen artworks exemplifies the disclosure of the longing to belong (also the unthinkable one), which is possibly doomed to failure, but which can equally result in an almost perfect oneness with the reality that is exterior to the self. The window partition grants a vision of the unfulfilled past, of not being present in the moment, of emptiness and desire. It partakes in the dynamics of closeness and remoteness, in terms of both space and time. Space is saturated with an uncanny presence that is juxtaposed with a poignant absence. Time is not simply stopped but immensely treasured. In the process of our self-recognition, the window provides a rich vision of our incessant quest for home, while we are seeking the comforting state of a deep awareness of identity in the analeptic and proleptic movement of meaning. The window glass, as a real and imaginary threshold or a semi-transparent *veil*, features a continuous invitation to hermeneutically unveil the more subtle meanings of an ambiguous relationship between landscape and the human place of dwelling, including the fantasy landscape of our minds and longing for which the longed-for *home*, carrying diverse meanings, is a reality of belonging in epitome.

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(MORE-THAN-HUMAN) INTERSECTIONS, (MORE-THAN-GENERIC) LIMINALITIES

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The Meaning of Animals in the First Farm Revolts: From Kostomarov's Ukraine to Reymont's Poland at the Turn of the 20th Century

Abstract

In 1945, George Orwell published *Animal Farm*, a critique of Cold War totalitarianism wherein animals acquire human speech, walk on two legs, and ultimately oppress themselves once gaining power. Its concern for the lived experience of farmed animals is marginal. But it was not the first farm animal revolt. Two decades prior, Polish novelist Władysław Reymont published *Bunt* (*Revolt*) about a farm animal uprising in search of equality that degenerates into chaos and abuse of power. It was a metaphor for the Bolshevik takeover in Russia that formed a model for Orwell's later metaphorical criticism of a different generation of totalitarians. Even earlier, Ukrainian historian Nikolai Kostomarov published his own tale of animal revolution, "Skotskoi Bunt" ("Animal Riot") in 1880, a story that was given a wider audience upon its republication in 1917, just prior to that same Bolshevik Revolution. The case for Kostomarov's tale being an allegory for human travails, however, is more difficult to make, and there is linguistic and historical evidence that the story is less concerned with human revolution and more with a case against harming nonhuman animals. Both narratives were written and published in a specific cultural context in time and space that would have created distinct receptions to the works partially based on human political realities, but also rooted in flourishing vegetarian and animal rights movements in Ukraine and Poland at the turn of the 20th century.

Keywords: farm animals, rebellion, literature, Ukraine, Poland.

"I saw a little boy," wrote Orwell of his inspiration for *Animal Farm*, "perhaps ten years old, driving a huge cart-horse along a narrow path, whipping it whenever it tried to turn. It struck me that if only such animals became aware of their strength we should have no power over them" (Reed). Or so he claimed. Whatever the potential motivation that drove Orwell to his subject, it is clear that *Animal Farm* is far more concerned with a critique of Cold War totalitarianism than it is about the fate of farmed animals. *Animal Farm* is an allegory wherein the animals acquire human speech, walk on two legs, and ultimately oppress themselves once gaining power. Its concern for the lived experience of farmed animals is marginal, despite their ubiquity in the novella.

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But a whipped cart horse and distaste for totalitarianism were likely not the only inspiration for Orwell's work. There has been recent scholarship that attempts to read the animal back into *Animal Farm*, arguing that the book can be interpreted in a posthuman context (McHugh 2009; Kerr 1999; Cole 2017; Bishop 2020; Drew 2022), but those works ground their theory in the literature of the Anthropocene rather than emphasizing the historical context of the novella's authorship. It is, to be sure, contested ground. Less contested is the fact that two decades prior to the appearance of Orwell's *Animal Farm*, Polish novelist Władysław Reymont published *Bunt* (*Revolt*) about a farm animal uprising in search of equality that degenerates into chaos and abuse of power. It was a metaphor for the Bolshevik takeover in Russia that formed a model for Orwell's later metaphorical criticism of a different generation of totalitarians. Even earlier, Ukrainian historian Nikolai Kostomarov published his own tale of animal revolution, "Skotskoi Bunt" ("Animal Riot") in 1880, a story that was given a wider audience upon its republication in 1917, just prior to that same Bolshevik Revolution. The case for Kostomarov's tale being an allegory for human travails, however, is more difficult to make, and there is linguistic and historical evidence that the story is less concerned with human revolution and more with a case against harming nonhuman animals.

While it is clear that Orwell borrowed (and perhaps even plagiarized) linguistically from Kostomarov, the scope of his narrative borrowed far more heavily from Reymont. Reymont's *Bunt*, like *Animal Farm*, tells an allegorical narrative of the cost of revolution in service to totalitarian regimes. It describes the takeover of a farm by nonhuman animals, only for that takeover to descend into chaos and bloodshed. Kostomarov's story, however, is an account of a failed revolution, one where the animals attempt to redress the legitimate grievances of all farm animals for the abuse and death experienced on animal farms, only to be rebuffed by humans, given the same problematic excuses for human behavior still used by advocates of

animal slaughter in the 21st century, and ultimately condemned to continue on in the approximation of life given to farmed animals.

Both of the narratives, then, one from Ukraine and one from Poland, were vital to the creation of Orwell's later totalitarian allegory. More importantly, each were written and published in a specific cultural context in time and space—Central and Eastern Europe from the 1880s to the 1920s—that would have created distinct receptions to the works partially based on human political realities, but also rooted in flourishing vegetarian and animal rights movements in Ukraine and Poland at the turn of the 20th century. Orwell's *Animal Farm*, one of the most influential novels of the 20th century, may not have been a story of animal rights, but it was based, and in some cases almost copied directly, from stories far more closely linked to such concerns.

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Nikolai Kostomarov was an early progenitor of what today we would call social history. A century before Marc Bloch and Lucien Febvre founded the Annales School in France, and even longer before historians in western Europe and the United States took up the cause of social history in the 1960s and 1970s, Kostomarov studied the Ukrainian peasantry and its desire for cultural autonomy against the influences of Russia and Poland. He was also a polymath who wrote fiction and collected contemporary ethnographic material relating to the people of Russia's western frontier (Prymak, *Mykola Kostomarov* 8–10, 27–34, 86–92, 104–08, 174–78; Prymak, *Ukraine* 93–94, 146–48).

It is generally assumed that Kostomarov's tale of animal revolt in 1880 was an allegorical denunciation of Narodnaya Volya (People's Will), a revolutionary populist movement posed against the autocracy of Tsar Alexander II. People's Will grew out of an earlier organization, Land and Liberty, which itself was a response to rural poverty in Russia that was not remedied by the emancipation of serfs in 1861. Calling for "complete freedom of conscience, speech, press, assembly, association, and electoral agitation" (Offord 28–29), the group turned to terrorism and political violence, which would ultimately culminate in 1881 with the assassination of Alexander. A forerunner to the broader anarcho-syndicalist movement that swept across Europe and the United States, Narodnaya Volya weaponized peasant discontent in a way that Kostomarov found to be counterproductive and dangerous. When he was eleven years old, Kostomarov watched as a peasant uprising killed his father (Schmid 620). As a social historian, he was not unsympathetic to peasant discontent, but saw revolutionary violence as unnecessary and ultimately doomed to failure.

While initially sympathetic to the Poland of Władysław Reymont, he turned away from that support in 1860 (Prymak, *Mykola Kostomarov* 111–17, 142–43, 147). "The Poles can deceive the European public with

their proclamations about liberty and nationality, but they will find it difficult to fool us South Russians," he wrote in a letter to Russian journalist Konstantin Kavelin; "We do not want to be enslaved for the sake of certain European ideas" (Schmid 626).

The futility of revolution and loyalty to established authority was always part of Kostomarov's fiction. Both his 1860 novel *Syn* (*The Son*) and his 1875 *Kudeiar* tell the stories of failed revolutionaries and the ultimate futility of the act itself. A version of this motif can also be seen in his later historical allegory *Elliny Tavridy* (*The Greeks in Taurus*) (1883). In a letter Kostomarov wrote in 1860, he explained: "Freedom is pure nonsense. If you destroy the monarchy, the aristocracy, and the police, weaker spirits and bodies will always become slaves of stronger ones" (Schmid 633). At the same time, however, Kostomarov described Ukrainian poetry as "inseparable from nature: it brings it alive and makes it a part of the joy and the grief of the human spirit. The grasses, the birds, the animals, the heavens, morning . . . they all breathe, think, and feel together with mankind" ("Two Russian Nationalities" 125–26).

Kostomarov's love of animals, and the constant critique of rebellion in both his historical and fictional work, without need for allegory, calls into question whether his work in "Animal Riot" was itself a metaphor for human actions. After all, as John Reed explains, "Tolstoy was a friend, colleague, collaborator, and neighbor of Kostomarov." Editor Vladimir Grigoryevich Chertkov, like Tolstoy a strict vegetarian, described in 1891 one story written by Kostomarov and "worked on and perfected by L. N. Tolstoy 'who gave to it quite a new and original ending'" (Dillon 145). Chertkov described Kostomarov as a "famous satirist" and claimed that the story was "from an ancient legend of Little Russia" and that it "has wonderful spiritual force and is very sensational—for it depicts a sorrowful characteristic side of Russian life" (Dillon 146). Tolstoy, apparently, was still deciding whether or not to give his consent to publish the piece abroad in England, and ultimately never agreed to do so. We cannot be sure that the story was "Animal Riot," but it seems likely. Chertkov assured his English colleagues that if the story was eventually published in England, "[i]t must be signed thus: written by Kostomarov and Leo Tolstoy" (Dillon 147). Even if it was not "Animal Riot," however, the relationship between the two was real and substantial.

Tolstoy first began transitioning to vegetarianism after his 1879 *Confession*, beginning in earnest in 1882 and completing the process in 1885. He was influenced most directly by Vadim Konstantinovich Geins, who had lived in a variety of American communes under the name William Frey and returned to Russia an advocate for a vegetarian lifestyle. Another of his confidants, Vladimir Chertkov, had converted to vegetarianism in

England in 1884 and after his return to Russia the following year would advocate for animals and author, in 1890, *An Evil Pastime: Thoughts on Hunting*, which argued that as humans no longer required dead animals for sustenance, "hunting is no longer now a natural form of the struggle for existence, but rather a voluntary return to a primitive beastlike state" (LeBlanc 4). Though Tolstoy himself did not read the book until 1891, there was also *Man's Diet in Its Present and Future* (1878), by Russian scientist Andrei Nikolaevich Beketov, which argued against a diet rooted in animal flesh. Tolstoy himself had British author Howard Williams's *The Ethics of Diet* (1883) translated into Russian and wrote an introductory essay for it, "Pervaia stupen" ("The First Step"), which became his most influential piece of writing on the ethics of vegetarianism (LeBlanc 4–6).

Kostomarov would have been familiar with all such works published prior to April 1885, the time of his death. In addition, late Victorian socialism and anarchism included interest in animal rights and vegetarianism throughout the continent (Hinely 13). Henry Stephens Salt's "A Plea for Vegetarianism" would appear in Manchester in 1886, beginning decades of animal rights publications and activism (7–20).

When Kostomarov's story appeared (or, perhaps, reappeared) in 1917, it did so at an auspicious time (Malitska, "Meat and the City" 5). As Ronald LeBlanc has explained, "on the very eve of the outbreak of World War I, the vegetarian movement would seem to have reached its peak in Russia" (10). In 1913 and 1914, there were All-Russian Vegetarian Congresses in Moscow. Vegetarian ephemera like postcards and portraits of famous vegetarians were for sale throughout the country. The most dominant vegetarian organization was the Kiev Vegetarian Society, and Ukraine found itself at the center of the vegetarian movement in Russia, challenged only by the St. Petersburg Vegetarian Society, founded in 1902, while other vegetarian societies developed in Warsaw, Kiev, Moscow, Minsk, Poltava, Ekaterinoslav, Saratov, and Odessa. In the inevitable schism that grew between the two organizations, it was the Ukrainian contingent that made the case that there was a fundamental ethical difference between "hygienic vegetarians" who chose not to eat meat for health reasons, and "moralistic vegetarians" who believed that animals' lives should be protected, siding decisively with those who chose to not to eat animals for moral reasons (Goldstein 106; LeBlanc 11).

In January 1909, the first issue of the *Vegetarian Review* (*Vegetarianskoe obozrenie*), founded by Iosif and Moisei Perper, appeared from Chişinău in modern-day Moldova, but from 1910 until the end of its print run in 1915 emanated from Kiev (Malitska, "Mediated Vegetarianism" 315). In its first issue, the monthly periodical explained that "vegetarianism primarily rejects slaughtered food, since it is obtained through killing, which corrupts

humanitarian feelings, destroys the beauty of the world around us, and ruins the lives of both animals and people" (Perper 3–4).

In May 1914, the *Vegetarian Herald* first appeared in Kiev, making the case for compassion for animals. Its editors were not "opposed to an appreciation of nutrition from a hygienic point of view," but "we do not consider it an essential or distinguishing feature of vegetarian teaching" ("Ot redaktora" 2, translation mine). The Ukrainian vegetarian movement of the 1910s did not deny the ancillary benefits of refusing to eat meat, but they still saw such benefits as decidedly ancillary. Vegetarianism was about protecting animals.

For those influenced more by St. Petersburg, health began to take precedence in vegetarian literature, and as the 1910s bore on, more and more Russian vegetarians began citing health reasons as their prime motivation for turning to a meat-free diet. Influential vegetarian advocates like Evgenii Lozinskii, Natal'ia Nordman-Severova, and Aleksandr and Olga Zelenkova all emphasized the human benefits of vegetarianism, certainly not denying that animals were protected (Olga Zelenkova's vegetarian cookbook was titled, *I Don't Eat Anyone*), but seeing that as the ancillary benefit (Goldstein 105, 107, 109–10; LeBlanc 13).

Despite the schism, by the 1917 publication of Kostomarov's story, vegetarianism had become extremely popular in Russia. After the Bolshevik Revolution, in December 1917, vegetarian periodicals were shuttered, but meat shortages resulting from the Great War and internal political strife led vegetarianism itself to remain decidedly popular (LeBlanc 22). Such was the climate into which Kostomarov's "Animal Riot" appeared.

The story itself is framed as a letter written by a Ukrainian farmer to a friend in St. Petersburg, mirroring the divide in the vegetarian and animal rights movements in the country. It describes an uprising on a Ukrainian farm, led by the bulls, then spreading to the horses, pigs, sheep, and chickens, all of whom are rebelling against the cruelty of treatment toward farm animals. "This was not a riot of subordinates exactly but of the indentured, and not of humans but of farm animals and house pets," he explains early in the story:

> We are used to thinking that since animals are mute, they must also be foolish. It seems rational using human logic: they can't talk, we say amongst ourselves, so they must not think or understand anything! But is this actually true? We can't reason with them so we consider them foolish and mute, but it turns out—as we'll thoroughly discuss here—that we can't understand their language. (Kostomarov, "Animal Riot")

In speaking of Omelko, the farmhand who speaks with the animals: "This one-of-a-kind expert on animal nature would never agree with those

who believe that the logical faculties animals possess are much weaker than those of humans. Omelko insists that animals display an intelligence no lesser—and sometimes even greater—than that of humans" ("Animal Riot").

Those commenting on Kostomarov's story have drawn parallels to George Orwell's *Animal Farm*, both in its language and its allegorical critique. John Reed has cataloged all of the instances in which Orwell could have come into contact with Kostomarov's work in the 1930s and has demonstrated how parts of the British text mirror that of the Russian. He compares the first 5,300 words of Kostomarov's story to the first 5,200 of Orwell's, arguing that most of it, at least twenty paragraphs, "are directly analogous."[1]

Reed's case is well-proven, and it is clear from the evidence that Orwell must have had some contact with Kostomarov's story. It is less certain, however, that because Orwell's story was an allegory for mid-20th-century politics, Kostomarov's must be an allegory, or would necessarily have been read as an allegory, for a late-19th-century version of revolutionary upheaval. For example, the bull's speech in the Ukrainian animal revolt—in contradistinction to that of Orwell's Old Major—describes uniquely animal problems:

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> Look what they do to our poor calves. They load the poor little things in a cart, tie their legs, and take them away! And where do they carry them? To have their throats cut, torn from their mother's teat! The greedy tyrant has taken a liking to their meat, and how! He considers it one of his best dishes! (Kostomarov, "Animal Riot")

There is no correlation between the taking of veal calves to human violence against other humans. There is, however, a real danger to calves that they will be forcibly removed from their mothers and killed for veal. Further, Orwell's version speaks of farm exploitation in general so as to heighten the similarities to the exploitation of human labor. Kostomarov does not. "The humans milk our mothers and wives, depriving our little baby-calves," says the Ukrainian bull. In his specificity, Kostomarov clearly describes actual farm practices and the torture practiced on the animals kept in such situations. The taking of milk, of course, could be read as allegorical, as a metaphor for the taking of working-class human production, but it does not have to be. Without the generalized effect of Orwell's heavy-handed comparisons to human situations, it would be perfectly reasonable,

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[1] This is ground previously covered by other analysts, and there continues to be debate about the similarities between the manuscripts and Orwell's knowledge of his predecessors (see, for example, Hac-Rosiak, who claims that Orwell did not know about Reymont's work).

particularly in a hub of animal advocacy like Ukraine, to read the narrative as a critique of cruelty to farm animals.

The specificity of Kostomarov's slaughterhouse narrative is similar. It continues after Reed's brief selection:

> Do you know, brother, about this slaughterhouse where they are taken? You will feel a chill creep through your veins as soon as you realize what they do at that slaughterhouse, so it is for good reason that our brother-beast lows pitifully when nearing the city where it is located. They tie the poor bull to a post, and then the evildoer approaches with a hatchet and hits him square on the head between the horns. The bull howls from fear and pain, stands on his hind legs and the evildoer gives it to him one more time—then a knife to the throat. One after the first, then a third, then a dozen and another dozen, until he's gotten a hundred bulls. Bovine blood spills in torrents. Then they take the skin off the dead ones, cut the meat into chunks and sell it in their markets. The other bulls that were brought to the city to be killed walk past those stands and see the meat of their comrades hanging there, and their bovine hearts sense that soon the same fate will befall them!

Such is not the fate of humans in 19th-century Ukraine. It is treatment specifically reserved for farmed animals, described with sympathy for their plight and with no real functional corollary to human concerns.

There is in Kostomarov's story a similar diatribe about horses used in battle:

> They mount our brother and rush at one another. They want to kill each other, and they kill us in the process. Their ruthless, severe hearts do not pity us. So much noble equine blood is shed. Then such horrible sights! . . . And for what? . . . They don't ask the cavalry horses if they want to fight a war, but they saddle and ride them to fight; they never consider that maybe our brother has no interest in dying without knowing what he is dying for.

Again, the complaint here is directly related to the experience of horses in battle, horses who die alongside humans for specifically human concerns. There is no allegorical correlation to the experience of these horses and those of a different set of humans not already included in the narrative as participating in any given conflict. Kostomarov is not comparing the suffering of horses used in human wars to that of humans conscripted unwillingly into infantry units. He is describing the specific experiences of horses who are conscripted into use for those wars not as fighters themselves but as property, as part of the equipment of soldiers, whose lives are ancillary concerns of those humans participating in the conflict.

The pigs in the story complain that "pig" is used as a human epithet. And "while despising pigs and criticizing our characteristics, man still cuts us up for lard and makes ham and sausage from our pig meat." There is, without question, bigotry and totalitarian cruelty in the human treatment of pigs, just as there is bigotry and totalitarian cruelty practiced by humans against other humans. But Kostomarov's description of this particular bigotry and totalitarian cruelty is decidedly specific to that practiced on pigs.

Omelko attempts to confront the animals. "I told them that God himself made them to serve man and man to be their master. But they all shouted, 'Who is this god? That is your human thing, this god business. We animals do not know any god.'" Of course, the peasant class in Ukraine and the Russian working poor more broadly were among the most religious in the country. There is in the description of religion no comparison to human concerns. Rather, it is a commentary on religion being used by humans to prioritize themselves over and against nonhuman populations, to justify animal cruelty with claims of God creating humans in his image and God granting those humans dominion over nonhuman animals.

Eventually Omelko confronts the geese. "We don't have the strength to fly," they tell him, "so we're staying with you. Just don't butcher us. We want to live." But the caretaker's response to the geese is similar to common justifications for animal abuse in both the 19th century and the 21st, the proposal of a quid pro quo between humans and farmed animals. "You want to live, you say. But I assume you also want to eat. So you expect us to feed you but not get any use out of you? No, no, that won't work," says Omelko. "If you want to stay with us and want us to feed you, then give us something in return. We feed you, and so we eat you." Omelko makes a similar argument to the chickens: "You more than any of the other birds on earth can't live without us brother-humans. Accept it, stupids, and submit: this is our fate, you and me. We have to watch over you and feed you, and for that we butcher you and take your eggs."

Thus the animal revolt is suppressed. The bull who begins the agitation is beaten to death, the stallion castrated. The animals lose, just as farm animals always lose in confrontations with humans. That they are not able to topple the human administration of the farm is significant. There is no opportunity in the story for Kostomarov to make a grand gesture bemoaning totalitarianism, or even bemoaning the outcome of successful revolutions in general, despite the fact that his historical and fictional work often dealt with such subjects. Instead, with a failed revolution, the animals attempting to better their own lives, and in most cases save their own lives, become tragic figures, heroes who fail. The failed revolution makes them sympathetic. The rebels cannot become the dictators in such a story,

because animals are always victims of human caprice, and Kostomarov's plot is structured to make that point, rather than any allegorical point about the problematic nature of revolution itself.

Kostomarov, Ulrich Schmid explains, "condemned every kind of secret political activity that was directed against the existing government" (624). But the case of the animal revolt appears to be different. The narrative itself is just over 9,000 words, much of the story taken up with specific depictions of cruelty to animals that take place on farms and in human wars, none of which carry direct correlations to the kinds of human suffering that existed in Russia in the late 19th century. Moreover, with the flourishing of the vegetarian movement in Ukraine and Russia both in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the close relationship between Kostomarov and Tolstoy, and the long historiography the author left behind of specific critiques of human rebellions that required no allegorical flourish, it is reasonable to assume that Kostomarov either intended his story to be about the plight of farmed animals or that a substantial portion of his readership would read it that way, or both. The linguistic and historical evidence seems to point to the latter option.

Intent in the work of Władysław Stanislaw Reymont, however, is far more certain. He was responding directly to the Bolshevik Revolution in Russia. But equally certain is that he would have been familiar with the work of Kostomarov. When the Ukrainian died in 1885, Reymont had just finished a tailoring apprenticeship and was traveling as an actor for various theater companies. He was born in 1867 in Kobiele Wielkie near Łódź, occupied by the same Russia that occupied Ukraine. His family was poor, but devoted to Roman Catholicism and Poland. Members of his family had participated in the 1863 Insurrection, and his patriotism led him to resist his Russian education and ultimately to be expelled from school. He began his writing career in 1894, creating careful portraits of provincial Polish life, and became a sensation in the late 1890s with *Ziemia obiecana* (*The Promised Land*, 1899) and in the 1900s with *Chłopi* (*Peasants*, 1904–09), work that won him the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1924 (Napierkowski 48–49; Krzyżanowski 64–75).

That year, however, he published a novel radically different from *The Promised Land* and *Peasants*, a work that had been serialized two years previously in the popular Warsaw magazine *Tygodnik Illustrowany* and that seemed, on the surface, to contain resonances of Kostomarov's depiction of a farm animal revolt, republished seven years prior in 1917 (Krzyżanowski 135–36). By 1924, however, the geo-political context into which Reymont's novel, *Bunt*, entered, was decidedly different than it had been in Kostomarov's 1880. And the emphasis on vegetarianism and the value of animal life was less pronounced in interwar Poland than it had been in early-20th-century Ukraine and Russia.

Moreover, what vegetarianism existed in the country was steeped in the health concerns championed by those in St. Petersburg. The vegetarian movement in Poland, such as it was, began at the time Kostomarov was writing his story. In a partitioned nation, as Ewa Kokoszycka has explained, "vegetarian Poles were not only vegetarians, but also Polish patriots striving to maintain their national identity. Many of them viewed vegetarianism as a way to improve the condition of the Polish nation, and in this way vegetarianism was seen as patriotic" (150). That said, vegetarianism was decidedly located on the cultural fringe of the partitioned nation. "In the country in which the bourgeoisie systematically gorge themselves and working classes dream of doing the same," wrote Józef Hempel in 1908, "a vegetarian is regarded as a harmless lunatic" (1625, translation by Ewa Kokoszycka).

Konstanty Moes-Oskragiełło, one of the founders of the vegetarian movement in Poland in the late 19th century, proclaimed the spiritual and health benefits of a meatless diet as Kostomarov was writing "Skotskoi Bunt." Acting as a kind of religious guru and homeopathic healer, he founded "Odrodzisko Jarskie" ("Vegetarian Retreat"), a therapeutic healing retreat that included vegetarian eating. In 1888, he published *Jarstwo i Wełniarstwo w Dziejach Dawnej Słowiańszczyzny* (*Vegetarianism and Wool Processing in the Ancient Slavic Times*, 1888), which tied historical Slavic success to vegetarian diets in an attempt to make the case that the natural legacy diet of Poles should exclude animal products. While his spa did attract some early interest, his pronouncements about vegetarianism met with skepticism, if not outright scorn, among much of the Polish population (Rzeczycka and Hess 159–75; Hozyasz 431).

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In 1912, Maria and Augustyn Czarnowski began publishing the magazine *Jarskie Życie: Miesięcznik Etyczny o Kierunku Odrodzeńczo-Wyzwolennym* (*Vegetarian Lifestyle: An Ethical Monthly Oriented to Revival and Liberation*). Though the magazine was printed in Berlin, it was published in Polish, and the Czarnowskis distributed it to all parts of partitioned Poland (Pasieka 45–63; Zając, Wrona and Wójcik 10–16). As with the work of Oskragiełło, the magazine focused principally on health concerns, and vegetarian leaders in the first decades of the 20th century tended to follow a similar line (Krasińska 342–55). Pediatric psychologist Józefa Joteyko argued that plant-based diets helped child development, and physicians Józef Drzewiecki and Apolinary Tarnawski argued for similar benefits in adults. Tarnawski himself developed another vegetarian spa, with less emphasis on spirituality and more on health and wellness, that stayed active until World War II. Vegetarianism in Poland was typically marginalized, and when it was not, it was making claims about the benefits of abstaining from meat for holistic healing and general health rather than arguing for the importance of animal life (Konieczna 149–58; Migała and Jandziś 273–90).

The one real exception to the general Polish rule in the first decades of the 20th century was a pamphlet published in 1907 by Janisław Jastrzębowski, a frequent contributor to *Jarskie Życie*, *Precz z mięsożerstwem!* (*Down with Carnivorousness!*). While Jastrzębowski makes health arguments tying meat-eating to alcoholism and other addictions, he also emphasizes the barbarity of eating animals. Butchers were culprits in a scheme that robbed living beings of lives they did not voluntarily give, and the broader culture of killing animals led to human degeneration into war and violence (Smaga 28–30). His was, however, a voice pushing against both the mainstream of Polish culture and the trends in vegetarian advocacy in the country.

This does not mean, however, that there were no protectionist voices for animals in Poland, particularly in metropolitan areas. They were led by a significant animal welfare community that pushed back against acts of urban animal cruelty. Towarzystwo Opieki nad Zwierzętami (Society for the Protection of Animals) had formed in 1868, a branch of a similar organization founded in St. Petersburg earlier in the decade, and remained vibrant into the 20th century. Based in Warsaw, the organization also had chapters in Łódź, Poznań, Kraków, Lwów, Wilno, Stanisławów, and Częstochowa ("Rozporządzenie Ministra" 12). After World War I and the birth of the Second Polish Republic, interest in animal welfare expanded. The Warsaw group had 1200 members in 1922 and the Society had eighty-four branches across the country by 1930. Just as in Ukraine, however, dissension tormented the group. In 1927, some disaffected members broke away and created a new organization, Polska Liga Przyjaciól Zwierząt (League for the Friends of Animals), which itself had more than three thousand members and, by 1934, twenty branches in cities across Poland. Significantly, however, the schism in Poland was not doctrinal or philosophical. Those defecting from the Society cited leadership issues in the group's administration rather than any specific animal welfare-related grievance (Plach 24–25).

Still, that lack of doctrinal grievance was largely due to the limited scope of the groups' concerns. The goal of the organizations was to minimize animal suffering, particularly in the public sphere, rather than to champion any tangible form of animal rights. Farmed animals were rarely part of the agenda of the groups and there was little to no contact between the various branches of the welfarist societies and vegetarian activists in Poland. As Eva Plach has explained, "Poland's interwar animal protectionists believed that animals could and should be used by humans for various purposes, as long as the animals were not made to suffer 'needlessly'" (26).

There was, to be sure, progress led by the two animal welfare organizations. In 1928, four years after Reymont's *Bunt* appeared, Poland's Sanacja government, led by Józef Piłsudski, passed the country's first

animal protection law, which prohibited the "tormenting" of animals. That tormenting, however, did not include the kinds of torment pronounced by farm animals in Kostomarov's tale. Milking and killing, even among protectionists, were seen as fair use for farmed animals. Their emphasis instead was on the plight of city horses and urban domestic pets, declared in organizational newspapers like *Przyjaciel Zwierząt* (*Friend of Animals*) and *Świat Zwierzęcy* (*World of Animals*) ("Rozporządzenie Prezydenta" 723–24; Plach 22, 26–29).

It was an effort to "counteract the brutalizing effects of the Great War," Plach explains, "to include a humanitarian ethic in the post-partition nation, and to build a modern and 'civilized' independent Poland" (23). Animal activism was in aid of patriotism, expanding Polish civilization and "Europeanness" in the interwar period (ibid.). And so the cultural context, particularly in relation to the lives of nonhuman animals, into which Reymont's *Bunt* appeared, had not created the conditions wherein the book would be received as a defense of animals; and the tenuous political situation of the Second Republic and the reverberation of the nearby Bolshevik Revolution, combined with Reymont's own respect for Polish peasant life and the animal killing that sustained it, demonstrated so clearly in *The Promised Land* and *Peasants*, ensured that his intent would have little if anything to do with actual concern for the fate of farmed animals. *Peasants*, for example, described the slaughter of animals ten different times without any attempt at problematizing the practice. What had begun in Ukraine as a sympathetic portrait of the suffering of traditional food animals had become, seven years after the communist takeover in Russia, an allegory far more concerned with human political endeavors.

Not only was the cultural and political landscape of Second Republic Poland ripe for such work; there was also a long national tradition of animal allegory and fable on which Reymont could draw, most notably in the work of 18th-century poet Ignacy Krasicki. One of the best-known figures of his era, Krasicki served as Primate of Poland, he was an advisor to the country's last king, and was a friend of Prussia's Friedrich the Great (Kapolka 271–79; Welsh 42–51). He was also a fablist and satirist who historian and translator Charles S. Kraszewski describes as "Poland's LaFontaine" ("Krasicki" 7). Much of his animal work came in his 1779 *Satyry* (*Satires*) and his 1802 *Bajki i przypowieści* (*Fables and Parables*). One of those parables was "The Lamb and the Wolves":

Who seeketh spoil is quick to rationalize.
Two wolves a straying lamb took by surprise:
"You'll eat me?" cried the lamb, "and by what right?"
"Thou'rt tasty, lost, and we've an appetite" (Kraszewski, "Krasicki" 9)

It was a takedown of the powerful and their justifications for abusing the poor and vulnerable, cloaked in the guise of an animal fable.

However, perhaps his most influential animal account featured a different kind of animal revolt. *Myszeida* (*The Mouseiad*), first published in 1775, tells the story of a group of mice and rats fighting for survival against a gang of predatory cats. While the poem went through so many drafts that Krasicki's biographers cannot exactly place humans and cats in a one-to-one ratio, describing who each of the feline characters is supposed to represent, the overall message of the plight of the powerless against the powerful remains trenchant. "The work is a general comment on the failings and trials common to all humans," Kraszewski explains ("Krasicki" 13), and it provided a clear example of how to marshal an animal revolt in the service of allegorical human statements about the culturally constructed politics of the day. The epic features no humans or farm animals, but it demonstrated the modern Polish effectiveness of using animals as stand-ins for human political concerns in a way that older foreign accounts, like those of Homer or Aesop, might not have done.

Thus while Reymont certainly had Kostomarov's tale at the ready, his own version of the farm revolt would take place in a social, cultural, political, and literary climate different from that of its forebear to the south. In his hands, the revolt of the animals would turn from a statement on the condition and life of farmed animals to a statement on the politics of the age.

Bunt tells the story of a group of "domestic and wild animals who seek freedom from human tyranny" (Krzyżanowski 135). Led by a dog named Rex, an obvious stand-in for "King," they wander through the wilderness, seemingly failing at every turn. Rex had been raised in luxury before being cast out following the death of his owner, leading him in his bitterness to foment a revolution against humans to lead captive animals to a place away from civilization. Their failure leads them to revolt again, this time against Rex himself. After lynching him and deciding that human leadership is the best of bad options, they are unable to find humans and so submit to the leadership of a gorilla. Reymont biographer Jerzy R. Krzyżanowski has noted that nowhere in the story does Reymont name a specific political system, leader, or state: "Reymont's story dissolves in grandiloquence and generalizing symbolism and misses the point, even if only by a hair" (135). It was a "satire against the idea of revolution rather than its fulfillment, and his use of allegory to charge actual events with a broader, more universal meaning, proved to be a mistake" (135–36). Ultimately, Krzyżanowski concludes that Reymont "produced an unfortunate hybrid of an almost Biblical parable and the anthropomorphic tale typical, for instance, of Kipling's animal stories" (ibid.).

Jerzy Kwiatkowski, too, assesses the novel poorly: "It is shallow and luridly exaggerated. The tastelessness of its idea (presenting the 'revolt of

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the masses' as a revolt of beasts) blew up in the author's face, as it limits the possibilities of analysing the phenomena it condemns" (206, translation by Charles S. Kraszewski). Contemporaries reacted similarly, seeing the allegory as far less effective than Reymont's more realistic portrayals in novels like *Peasants*.

For critics and commentators who do not see animal representation as tasteless, however, it is clear that Reymont does treat animal cruelty seriously. In one early instance, a donkey releases a "bloodcurdling cry" and runs up to a dunghill. "The master's whelp's splashed him with boiling water! It all but took off his skin!" (Reymont 64), explains one of the animals looking on. "With a horrid, mournful bellow, the donkey rolled in the cool muck, while a pack of boys, with the young master at their head, ran up to continue their fun, pelting the beast with stones and knocking at his legs with staves" (ibid.). Reymont describes not the institutionalized cruelty of the farm animal complex but instead the kind of cruelty fought against by Polish groups like Towarzystwo Opieki nad Zwierzętami and Polska Liga Przyjaciół Zwierząt. That dogs are the central characters of the book also maintains the emphasis of Poland's dominant animal welfare groups at the time.

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What exists in Reymont's tale, then, is a transition from the animal advocacy of Kostomarov and the base symbolism of Orwell. Kostomarov uses his animal revolt to demonstrate the moral problems of animal agriculture. *Animal Farm* uses animals as props to comment on human events. Reymont falls somewhere in between them. His revolt is an allegory to be sure, but he does describe human cruelty to animals, and those who respond are animals who behave like animals. "They don't read, they don't build windmills or brew beer," explains Charles S. Kraszewski, "and—what is conceptually even more interesting—they act like animals: children of a nature proverbially, and truly, red in tooth and claw" ("Humanity" 22–23). Predator animals kill other animals, for example, despite the collective grievance against humans. Rex himself is particularly bloodthirsty as he moves from domesticity to ferality. Reymont, in other words, takes animals seriously.

At the same time, however, the animals develop a human hierarchy and begin killing for political rather than biological reasons. As Kraszewski explains, though the novel does, "on occasion, argue for the respect due to non-humans, especially domesticated breeds," ultimately the author is arguing that animals "are no better than that scoundrel man" ("Humanity" 31). Man, however, was still the principal scoundrel, and the allegorical nature of the work led it to be banned in Poland after the communists took over the country following World War II.[2]

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[2] Though Orwell's *Animal Farm* was also banned by the Communists, it was translated to Polish in 1946, soon after its first English printing. (Kraszewski, "Humanity" 7–8, 45).

There exist several possibilities for how the stories of Kostomarov and Reymont got to Orwell. Olga Kerziouk speculates that perhaps they arrived through his wife Sonia Brownell, who had previously worked as an assistant to Russian emigre Eugene Vinaver, son of Maxim Vinaver, who had been in Russia at the time of the publication (or republication) of Kostomarov's story and who studied in Warsaw at the same time that Reymont was at school there. Or perhaps the stories came to Orwell via Teresa Jeleńska, a Polish refugee in London who was *Animal Farm*'s first translator and a friend of Orwell (Kerziouk). John Reed has argued that Reymont's story could easily have come to Orwell because it was published the same year that the author won the Nobel Prize, and Kostomarov's work would have been a staple of Orwell's university education. "Orwell wouldn't have read about Kostomarov once," Reed explains, "[h]e would have read about him hundreds of times."

However it happened, two significant animal revolts occurred in literature before Orwell spread the phenomenon throughout the western world.[3] But the revolts changed along the way. Orwell took the farm from Kostomarov and the allegory from Reymont, but as the riots developed, the animals themselves were lost along the way. What began in Ukraine as a set of legitimate grievances by farmed animals, demonstrating a response to active movements advocating for respecting nonhuman animal life, devolved through time and space, moving west through the first half of the 20th century, where the actual plight of farmed animals was replaced by anthropomorphized animals presented as revolutionaries for their metaphorical value as human replacements to make political commentary about the meaning of uprisings and totalitarianism. Though most of Reymont's peasants still lived a provincial farm life, concentrated factory farming had already commenced in much of the west. As human society developed between 1880, when Kostomarov's story was written, and August 1945, when Orwell's novella was published, nonhuman farmed animals continued to be victimized at increasingly greater rates, as all of the complaints made by the animals in "Skotskoi Bunt" were exacerbated by mechanization. And yet, as the popularity of such animal revolts increased, the voices of the fictional animals making a case for their own liberation, for the dignity of animal life, human and nonhuman, which had been the subject of advocacy in Ukraine, Poland, and Britain, were lost in translation, drowned out by the human atrocities they came to represent.

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[3] And, of course, that phenomenon is still happening. In 2010, for example, David L. Levy published *Revolt of the Animals: A Novel*, wherein animals discover that humans are plotting to use nuclear weapons, thus destroying animal life, so they rise up to help stop it.

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A Study of Transgressed Boundaries in *The Gate to Women's Country* by Sheri S. Tepper

Abstract

This paper endeavours to delineate the gender dynamics and ethical quandaries arising from the repercussions of war and the decisions undertaken to preserve societal norms, as depicted in the 1988 science-fiction novel entitled *The Gate to Women's Country*, written by American author Sheri S. Tepper. Serving as a critique, the narrative provides insight into inquiries surrounding the supposed genetic determinants of violence. It interrogates established paradigms pertaining to gender, introducing a society meticulously crafted through scientific design.

Keywords: Sheri S. Tepper, science-fiction, gender, American literature, boundaries.

As Wallace McNeish states in his article "From Revelation to Revolution: Apocalypticism in Green Politics," "apocalyptic discourse is a major mediating frame through which publics have come to engage with the issue of climate change, and by proxy with wider green politics" (1037). The apocalyptic milieu embodies a tabula rasa approach for numerous societies, facilitating the re-creation and reconfiguration of social structures. Such realms, realized contemporaneously mainly through an environmental cataclysm, used to be the reflections of nuclear dangers lurking in the Cold War and the arms race. The reproduction of such a vision is discernible in the writings of Sheri S. Tepper, especially her 1988 novel *The Gate to Women's Country*. The narrative delves into the thematic terrain of social structure and gender roles. Situated within a post-apocalyptic future, the narrative artfully elucidates apprehensions surrounding global annihilation through the deployment of a pinnacle nuclear armament—an unsettling resonance that holds significance in the contemporary world.

This article seeks to trace the gender dynamics and moral dilemmas that arise from the consequences of war and the choices made to maintain people's way of life. In the narrative, Tepper's method of subverting the patriarchal viewpoint is twofold: by constructing a non-stereotypical society and by adapting the classical Greek myth of Iphigenia. A critique, the story offers an insight into the questions of genetical determination of violence. The theoretical underpinning of this study draws upon gender theories, notably exemplified by Rosi Braidotti's conception of subverting rigid gender boundaries. Braidotti's theoretical framework, evident in her examination of posthuman subjectivity and critique of traditional humanism, challenges established fixed and essentialist interpretations of gender. She advocates for a more nuanced understanding, introducing the concept of "nomadic subjects" who navigate diverse identities and subjectivities, thereby proposing a subversion of strict gender roles. In this perspective, the subversion encompasses an embracing of the multifaceted nature of identity beyond conventional binary categorizations. Furthermore, Braidotti integrates Deleuzian philosophy, especially the notion of "becoming," challenging the concept of fixed identities. According to her, the subversion of rigid gender roles involves a continuous process of becoming, where individuals participate in the exploration of and experimentation with diverse aspects of their identities. Building upon Braidotti's perspectives, the work of Donna J. Haraway enriches the theoretical framework of this article. Haraway promotes a more adaptable and intersectional understanding of identity, disrupting binary dichotomies and underscoring the significance of nuanced lived experiences. Haraway's methodology aligns with Braidotti's, urging a shift away from inflexible gender norms towards a more comprehensive and diverse appreciation of the dynamics of identity.

In contrast to Sheri S. Tepper's other literary works, *The Gate to Women's Country* has undergone scholarly examination; however, such analyses have not prominently addressed the thematic exploration of boundary crossings depicted within the narrative. One of the seminal works addressing the novel explores the theme of (anti)sexuality and accuses it of being homophobic. Wendy Pearson, in her critical examination, expresses dissatisfaction with the narrative, asserting: "The hetero-/homo-sexual binarism that is valorized in our culture and reproduced in *Gate* tends to obscure and distort the sexual natures of individuals and acts and thus to suppress other stories of sexuality whose binarisms are different or non-existent" (202). Responding to Pearson's critique, Sylvia Kelso, in her article "On *The Gate to Women's Country*: An Exchange: Re-Opening the Gate to Women's Country," challenges Pearson's overtly negative assessment, contextualizing the novel within Tepper's larger body of work. Kelso counters, stating: "I would argue that Pearson's reading of the passage on homosexuals' fate in *Gate* (§17:200) is a case of irony missed—irony that drops an early clue to the dystopic nature of *Gate*" (139). Another critical analysis by Peter Fitting examines the theme of separatism in Tepper's novel, emphasizing an overall pessimistic tone. Fitting contends:

> This pessimism has to do with Tepper's essentialist view of the origins of violence and her reliance, however metaphorical, on an elite (the Women's Council) which knows what is best, implying that most of the women cannot be trusted to make enlightened decisions or to act in their own best interest. (43)

Building upon the critical discourse surrounding Tepper's text, Shiloh Carroll, in her 2008 work "Both Sides of the Gate: Patriarchy in Sheri S. Tepper's *The Gate to Women's Country*," characterizes the text as a convergence of "a feminist utopia and "a 'battle of the sexes' novel" (25). Expanding upon this nuanced examination, Carroll rigorously delves into an analysis of misogyny within the narrative, elucidating the origins of women's endeavour to establish a tranquil societal framework as rooted in the manifestations of "male aggression and domination" (26). This analytical exploration enriches the broader scholarly conversation regarding the complex thematic elements present in Tepper's literary oeuvre.

Tepper's narrative unfolds within two principal locales: the designated Women's Country and the martial bastion of the warrior city. As accurately highlighted by Rowland Hughes and Pat Wheeler, "the human relationship to the natural world has long been central to the dystopian imagination" (2). In the novel, the antagonism exhibited by female characters towards

the external milieu substantiates this assertion. Tepper conceptualizes the idea of female supremacy, a common motif of the science fiction genre, by establishing a republic governed entirely by women. Just as Csicsery-Ronay Jr. calls science-fiction "self-aware" and "rich in social diversity," Tepper's novel experiments with the familiar dichotomy of two genders (1). Established after a series of nuclear conflicts, known as *convulsions*, Women's Country remains a protected area governed entirely by women, whose main concerns are intellectual pursuits and social designing. On the other hand, men reside in garrisons, outside the city limits. The nomenclature of towns is predicated upon feminine names, exemplified by instances such as Alicetown, Tabithatown, Susantown, or Marthatown. The men's primary objective is to defend the city from external threats and undertake minor military conflicts against their enemies.

The issue of gender is investigated by means of a profound examination of social roles, desires and power dynamics. As a critique of the patriarchal worldview, the novel portrays its central character, Stavia, in one of the breakthrough moments of her life, when, at the age of fifteen, her son David has to decide whether to come back to the realm governed by the women, or to live outside the Country's borders with the men. This is inextricably linked with a pattern shared by all males, who, at the age of five, are separated from their mothers and relocated from the city to the garrison. There they undergo physical education and are trained to become warriors. At the age of ten, they return to the city to announce their first individually-made decision: whether to stay with men and hold physical power or to return to the realm of women. The stark contrast between the two lies within the activities offered. The inhabitants of Women's Country are the primary decision-makers and intellectuals, while those of the garrisons are trained as warriors and hold physical power.

Undoubtedly, Tepper is not the first author to depict such a utopian matriarchal state. Ancient myths, such as those of the Amazons, the Hindu text *Devi Mahatmya*, or Sumerian and Egyptian mythical tales, were all connected by the common feature of heroines or goddesses. In modern times, such experiments in writing were undertaken by a plethora of authors: Elizabeth Burgoyne Corbett in *New Amazonia: A Foretaste of the Future* (1889), Charlotte Perkins Gilman in *Herland* (1915) or Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain (Bekum Rokeya) in her short story "Sultana's Dream" (1905) to name only a few. Tepper, nevertheless, was a pioneer in exploring the concept of selective breeding. Considered to impede human development, features shared by the patriarchal society of men, like zealotry, aggressiveness or physical strength, are slated for eradication.

Central to the narrative is Stavia, a character whose heightened discernment of societal intricacies is prompted by the noteworthy act of

her son, David, as he repudiates the female sphere and ardently commits himself to a life situated beyond the delimited confines of the urban landscape. The foundational trajectory of the narrative is fundamentally shaped by the poignant experience of losing her son. The primary heroine in the tale seems torn between her female duties and the bitter truth hidden in the purposeful separation of the two genders that she reckons with as the story unfolds. Stavia's memories regarding her initial contacts with Chernon, a boy of the garrison who turns from a friend into an offender who rapes Stavia and impregnates her with her son, provide an insight into the gender dynamics. As elucidated by Tepper, within the delineated societal group, contrasting roles are assigned to the representatives of the two genders. Subsequently, these elements intricately contribute to the delineation and formulation of the characters' identities. The character of Chernon functions as a narrative conduit, facilitating an in-depth examination of gender dynamics and power structures. Initially portrayed as a dutiful soldier adhering to societal expectations, he embraces the entrenched gender roles and responsibilities inherent in the matriarchal community. Driven by his role as a protector engaged in conflicts against external societies, Chernon's allegiance to societal norms is profoundly ingrained. As the narrative progresses, he undergoes substantive character development, involving a nuanced exploration of masculinity. This introspective journey challenges traditional notions enforced by societal norms and contributes to a more inclusive and intricate understanding of manhood. The metaphorical battleground where he engages in conflicts symbolically encapsulates broader struggles within Women's Country. This emblematic arena encompasses both external conflicts as a soldier and internal struggles associated with his questioning of societal norms, and masculinity.

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The unrestricted crossing of borders appears to be inherently challenging, influenced by both literal and symbolic considerations. The literal aspect pertains to the tangible barrier constructed to safeguard the residents of Women's Country from the potential perils present in the surrounding open expanse. The gate serves as a symbol of transformation and growth, representing a pivotal moment in characters' personal development and the evolution of their perspectives. Beyond individual journeys, it metaphorically encapsulates the barriers and challenges within Women's Country, symbolizing the obstacles each character must overcome in their pursuit of understanding and autonomy. Within the narrative's complexity, the gate takes on additional layers of symbolism, signifying the interconnectedness of different realities or dimensions. Passage through the gate signifies a deeper connection between visible and hidden aspects of Women's Country. As such, the gate alludes to

the presence of secrecy and concealed realities gradually discovered by characters like Stavia. The gateway leading to Women's Country remains predominantly closed throughout the year, opening periodically to admit initiates partaking in the *Ritual of Sacrifice*—boys proclaiming their future destinies—and warriors granted access during the carnival, facilitating intermittent interactions with women. The symbolic meaning involves the renunciation of one's prior family existence in the matriarchal society.

The abovementioned *Ritual* is a one-way journey, a renouncement not only of one's female family members, but also of the possibility of advancing in education or science. Nevertheless, boys already trained to become warriors express their unshaken belief in the seemingly higher cause. In fact, the *Ritual* was designed purposefully to select males who display aggressive patterns of resolving conflicts and exclude them from the rest of society as a threat to the stability of life. The primary objective is to separate the disruptive element, transforming it into a means of protection. Remarkably, Tepper's discourse refrains from acknowledging females of an analogous nature within the confines of this particular world. Regrettably, there exists a conspicuous absence of information pertaining to women manifesting similar behavioural patterns. The element contributes to the core tension of the plot. It is a moment of sacrifice to society, as well as by the mothers who would not have the possibility to partake in their sons' lives. In the story, the common welfare outshines the emotional toll the mothers have to endure. This ethical dilemma is a recurring motif since the societal choices express the priorities in the represented world. Not only are the boys abandoning their mothers physically, but they also lose the possibility of forming families. Their lives are now ruled by means of the commands of their military leaders.

The familiar dichotomy of male and female worlds in the novel stands as a starting point in the discussion over questions posed by the second wave of feminists. Tepper seems to suggest that the peaceful coexistence of the representatives of the two genders is rather fragile and hardly possible. The reversal of the patriarchal mode makes one ponder over the equality of the genders. In the novel, men are excluded from gaining advancement in education, science or politics, the elements that, historically speaking, females had long been deprived of. This is a world based in grave injustice, sexism and a reversal of stereotypical gender roles. At the same time, Tepper's narrative questions the validity of binary perceptions of gender. In the story, the fear of men is rooted in their supposedly inborn propensity towards aggression and violence. Thus, the attempts at selective breeding were undertaken so as to provide a means of shaping the generations to come. Engaging with the concepts of scientific determination, the females in the Women's Country control their population by letting women

become impregnated by mild non-violent individuals residing alongside them within the urban setting. Intermittent sexual encounters with the warriors during the designated *carnivals* are allowed, even desired by the authorities so as to reassure men about their paternity of children born in Women's Country. However, during the alleged medical examination, women receive contraceptive measures.

Additionally, Stavia's current existence and recollections serve as a foundational locus for contemplation on the significance of loss. Immediately after the announcement of her son's decision, Stavia attended the rehearsal of an annually staged play, *Iphigenia at Ilium*. A woman in her thirties, she was to recreate the mythical Iphigenia, an unmarried virgin girl, the daughter of Agamemnon, the king of Mycenae, and his wife Clytemnestra. Due to some unfortunate occurrences and troubles with the weather triggered by the goddess Artemis, whose favourite deer had once been killed by Agamemnon himself, Iphigenia was to be sacrificed to let the Greek fleet sail to Troy to participate in the war.

Iphigenia was a character in a plethora of ancient Greek texts: in Aeschylus' *Agamemnon*, her murder is a reason for Clytemnestra's plotting against the king. In Hesiod's *Ehoiai* (*The Catalogue of Women*) her name is written twofold: both *Iphigenia* and *Iphimede*. In this version, the blameless maiden experiences an unexpected salvation orchestrated by Artemis, being supplanted by an *eidolon*, a ghost, whereas Iphigenia is transformed into Hecate, the goddess of magic, darkness and transitional phases. The Greek concept of *eidolon* is inextricably linked with the discussions on perception, reality, and the relationship between appearances and underlying truths in philosophy. It reflects a recognition of the distinction between the world as it appears to the senses and a deeper, more fundamental reality that may be hidden or blurred. It corresponds to a multitude of ideas associated with image, among others the Aristotelian concept of *phantasia*, "similar to a perceptual content, but can be retained in imagination . . . even when perception of the object is no longer taking place" (Aristotle 256).

Similarly, Plato, in his allegory of the cave from *The Republic*, uses the term *eidolon* to refer to the shadows or illusions that prisoners in the cave mistake for reality. The shadows cast on the cave wall are mere images or representations (*eidola*) of the true forms, which exist outside the cave in the realm of perfect, eternal Forms. Plato employs the concept of *eidola* to underscore the dichotomy between the realm of appearances and the domain of ultimate reality. It is the "bearer of illusion, opposed to the real being" (Chow 156). Therefore, in accordance with a Platonic interpretation, within Hesiod's text, Iphigenia's *eidolon* is construed as an equivalent representation of the actual girl.

Two plays by Euripides also revolve around the character of Iphigenia: *Iphigenia at Aulis* and *Iphigenia in Tauris*. In the former, Agamemnon is torn between loyalty to his nation and love towards his beloved daughter. Iphigenia, devoting her life to the higher cause, acknowledges the inferiority of the desires of human beings. Bearing much resemblance to the Biblical story of the Binding of Isaac, Iphigenia is rescued by means of a *deus ex machina* device and replaced with a deer at the altar. According to Girard, "[t]he sacrifice serves to protect the entire community from its own violence; it prompts the entire community to choose victims outside itself" (8). There is little structural difference between a human and an animal sacrifice.

The latter play, *Iphigenia in Tauris* covers the subsequent events, queen Clytemnestra and her lover Aegisthus being assassinated by Orestes, Iphigenia's brother, who arrives at Tauris to escape Erinyes, tormenting his soul and triggering madness after matricide. Stealing the *xoanon*[1] of goddess Artemis from her temple, the young man is captured and sentenced to be sacrificed. Recognized and rescued by his sister, Iphigenia, Orestes happily returns to Greece. Thus Iphigenia undergoes a paradigm shift, transitioning from a position of victimhood to that of a rescuer. In this rendition of the narrative, she is dispatched by the goddess Athena to the sanctuary of Artemis in Brauron.

As Girard writes: "In many primitive societies children who have not yet undergone the rites of initiation have no proper place in the community; their rights and duties are almost nonexistent" (12). Consequently, the choice of the young princess in the mythical story of Iphigenia is a perfect choice. Summoned by a pretext that the acclaimed warrior Achilles is to marry her, Iphigenia arrives with her mother only to discover the murderous plans of her father. Martha Nussbaum studies the ethical dimensions of the slaughter of the mythical Iphigenia, focusing on the inner struggles of the characters involved in the conflict. As she states in her book, "[t]he sacrifice of Iphigenia is regarded by the Chorus as necessary, but they also blame Agamemnon" (33). The tragedy studied by Nussbaum is Aeschylus' *Agamemnon* in which Iphigenia's father is "allowed to choose: that is to say, he knows what he is doing; he is neither ignorant of the situation nor physically compelled; nothing forces him to choose one course rather than the other" (Nussbaum 34). The concept denoted as "familial guilt," as characterized by Nussbaum, is situated within the sphere of responsibility assigned to Agamemnon, the tragic protagonist compelled to confront a poignant dilemma between filial affection for his daughter and allegiance to his nation (34). In the Euripidean version of the story, *Iphigenia in Tauris*, the protagonist articulates

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[1] A wooden image of Artemis, a cult object in ancient Greece.

a profound sentiment, declaring: "I am afraid—not of death itself! But of the interim, the dying hope," thereby exemplifying her courageous disposition (55). Within Tepper's narrative framework, the myth undergoes a process of reinvention wherein it is recounted from the victim's vantage point: "Really she was murdered, but made the men feel guilty, so they pretended she had sacrificed her own life" (Tepper 72).

Reinterpreting the ancient myth by means of science fiction, Tepper questions the universality and topicality of classical tales, challenging their patriarchal frame of reference. Grappling with the consequences of societal choices, Stavia aptly observes the existing struggle between the genders. Torn between her desires and obligations, she bears a strong resemblance to the mythical Iphigenia, who entrusted her life into the hands of her father to save the nation from troubles, claiming in the Euripidean *Iphigenia at Aulis*: "Think of me and forget your cares for now" (43). On the other hand, within Tepper's narrative interpretation of the Iphigenia mythos, the central heroine articulates allegations of male brutality, asking Polyxena during the performance: "Tell me. Did the men cry when they slit your throat?. . . They didn't cry when they were slitting mine, either" (Tepper 264). Polyxena, the mythical youngest daughter of King Priam and Queen Hecuba of Troy, is often compared to Iphigenia. Her story is found in various works of the classical canon, including the writings of Virgil, Euripides and others. She was ritually killed, presumably for having contributed to the death of Achilles, whom she despised for having murdered her brother Troilus. In this way, Tepper challenges the reader's understanding of gender by using the idea of cognitive estrangement (as used by Darko Suvin). Situating the character of Stavia-Iphigenia within a dystopian context, Tepper subverts the existing boundaries and considers possibilities that may not have been apparent within the constraints of the classical canon that expresses the patriarchal viewpoint.

Ancient myths are saturated with examples of the subjugation of women. As Braidotti writes about women: "Their representations are overdetermined and depicted as necessarily absent, excluded from the centre stage" (*Posthuman Feminism* 19). According to Best, "through her adaptation of Euripides's plays, Tepper comments on gender ideology in a continuum of time from ancient Greece to both Tepper's own contemporary context and the future that she has illustrated in her novel. She questions the universality of the classical canon by demonstrating the distinctly problematic patriarchal ideologies inherent in examples from this canon, and uses strategies of cognitive estrangement found in both science fiction and the reception of classical texts to allow readers to explore potentially problematic aspects of their own context through contexts far removed from their own" (Best 105). A fundamental tenet of the theatrical production revolves around the assertion that the deleterious

repercussions of conflicts and warfare instigated by males extend significantly to impact women, children, and the broader societal fabric. The performance serves as a censure of acts of violence, predominantly perpetrated by the male demographic.

Moreover, Tepper's narrative expresses the limitations and negative consequences of rigid gender stereotypes and the expectations that come with them. It depicts how these expectations can stifle individual potential and lead to moral dilemmas for the characters. As the novel unfolds, the concept of otherness is being redefined. In accordance with the view proffered by Rosi Braidotti:

> Subjectivity is equated with consciousness, universal rationality, and self-regulating ethical behaviour, whereas Otherness is defined as its negative and specular counterpart. In so far as difference spells inferiority, it acquires both essentialist and lethal connotations for people who get branded as "others." These are the sexualized, racialized, and naturalized others, who are reduced to the less than human status of disposable bodies. (*The Posthuman* 15)

The concept is realized in Tepper's narrative by means of subversion of the patriarchal viewpoint and traditional gender roles. The novel significantly challenges conventional ideas about gender. Using Braidotti's definition, "[f]eminism is the struggle to empower those who live along multiple axes of inequality" (*Posthuman Feminism* 3). Embracing this delineation of feminism, Tepper's narrative embodies the "subversive politics" factor of feminism that Braidotti writes about (3). In accordance with her perspective, "[i]t means creating the alternative versions of 'the human' generated by people who were historically excluded from, or only partially included into, that category" (3).

Moreover, in the matriarchal society of the Women's Country, there is a subversion of the stereotypical patriarchal viewpoint on gender roles. Not only does the story question the idea of fixed gender roles, but it also raises questions about the binary concept of gender. It challenges the notion that gender is strictly male or female, as the narrative hints at non-binary or gender-fluid individuals who do not fit neatly into such categories. This is exemplified through the characterization of servitors, individuals who are genetically designed and exhibit a lack of aggressive tendencies. The principal proposition aligns with the conceptual framework of identity fluidity as elucidated in the scholarly discourse of contemporary academics. In accordance with Rosi Braidotti's explication, "the becoming woman/animals/insect imperceptible consists of deconstructive steps across the boundaries that used to separate qualitatively Self/same from others"

(*Nomadic Subjects* 35). Clearly "[t]he reference to 'woman' in the process of 'becoming woman,' however, does not refer to empirical females, but rather to topological positions, degrees, and levels of intensity, affective states" (37). Utilizing Braidotti's conceptual framework pertaining to the contemporary global milieu, characterized by elements of instability, mutability, fragmentation, hybridization, and progressive nomadization, proves advantageous in the nuanced characterization of debated concepts such as "womanhood" within Tepper's narrative. The beginning of Stavia's journey toward womanhood is instigated by the emotional resonance associated with the sense of loss that she encounters.

In her writing, Braidotti actively interrogates the materiality inherent in corporeal entities, positing an exploration that extends beyond their biological essence to encompass intricate social and cultural inscriptions. In the realm of gender studies, this scholarly endeavour involves a meticulous examination of how prevailing societal norms and expectations intricately determine the lived experiences of individuals possessing a female physiognomy. This intricate process significantly influences the conceptualizations of femininity and womanhood, thereby contributing to a nuanced understanding of the multifaceted interplay between embodiment, societal constructs, and gender identity.

Also, employing the Deleuzian conceptual framework of "becoming," specifically elucidated as "[i]t is not the girl who becomes a woman; it is becoming-woman that produces the universal girl" (Deleuze and Guattari 305), facilitates an examination of the emotional intricacies inherent in the character of Stavia-Iphigenia. The protagonist engages in a profound contemplation of her societal role and identity within a cultural milieu that prioritizes intellectual prowess over the authentic expression of emotions. This emotional complexity challenges the idea that certain emotions are inherently tied to one's gender, which seems to be the dominant tenet in *The Gate to Women's Country*. Throughout the transformative process, Stavia perceives herself in dual roles—as both an observer and the observed, an active participant in actions and a passive object in a state of inertia.

This process also corresponds to Zygmunt Bauman's concept of liquid modernity, affecting diverse aspects of human life, including identities, relationships, and social structures. In his *Liquid Modernity*, he studied the difficulties individuals encounter when manoeuvring through a world in which social connections are increasingly temporary, and conventional structures defining identity and significance are less secure, claiming:

> The disintegration of the social network, the falling apart of effective agencies of collective action is often noted with a good deal of anxiety and bewailed as the unanticipated "side effect" of the new lightness and

fluidity of the increasingly mobile, slippery, shifty, evasive and fugitive power. But social disintegration is as much a condition as it is the outcome of the new technique of power, using disengagement and the art of escape as its major tools. For power to be free to flow, the world must be free of fences, barriers, fortified borders and checkpoints. Any dense and tight network of social bonds, and particularly a territorially rooted tight network, is an obstacle to be cleared out of the way. (14)

Moreover, Stavia's transformation corresponds to Donna J. Haraway's concept of the cyborg, a subversive figure that disrupts traditional gender norms and opens up possibilities for new forms of identity. In her writings, Haraway challenges the idea of fixed, natural identities and embraces notions of constructed, contingent identities. She asserts that "[t]here is nothing about being 'female' that naturally binds women. There is not even such a state as 'being' female, itself a highly complex category constructed in contested sexual scientific discourses and other social practices" (155). The cyborg, through its defiance of conventional gender norms, paves the way for a postgender world. Postgenderism, as envisioned by Haraway, entails transcending the limitations of gender categories entirely, imagining a future where identities are not preordained by biological sex. As Haraway claims: "The cyborg is a condensed image of both imagination and material reality, the two joined centers structuring any possibility of historical transformation" (150). The blurring of boundries, a key concept in her writings, undermines binary oppositions and fixed categories, including those associated with gender. Nevertheless, Tepper's vision of a female world entirely separated form the male one does not fully comply with Braidotti's philosophical ideas since her experiment with a subversion of the patriarchal viewpoint in the novel results in the formation of an eugenic matriarchy.

Moreover, the narrative delves into the regulation of sexuality within Women's Country, utilizing this exploration as a conduit to elucidate the profound impact of societal values and expectations on the lives and choices of its characters. Furthermore, it instigates contemplation regarding the repercussions of a society that rigorously governs sexual activity, inviting an examination of its implications on individual autonomy and emotional well-being. In the societal construct of Women's Country, the governing council exerts control and regulation over sexual activity. The prevailing ethos within the social leadership posits the prescription that sexual interactions should be exclusively circumscribed to purposes of procreation. This methodical regulation of sexual conduct stands as an indispensable component of the society's strategic endeavours—strategically crafted to safeguard tranquillity and cultivate intellectual pursuits. Women are expected to practice sexual abstinence unless they are in the approved relationships that

result in childbirth. Sexual relationships outside of these sanctioned unions are discouraged and considered disruptive to the society's values, which resemble a fusion of feminist separatism with a quasi-Victorian morality. Thus, procreation is considered a duty, and women are encouraged to have children for the betterment of society. Those who produce children for the society are highly valued. Their march towards a perfect peaceful society ironically inscribed within the war novel.

This is inextricably linked with the concept of genetic engineering, undertaken by the female inhabitants of Women's Country. In order to design a peaceful society, women meticulously delineate the criteria governing the selection of desired traits in their prospective sexual partners:

> Three hundred years ago almost everyone in the world had died in a great devastation brought about by men. It was men who made the weapons and men who were the diplomats and men who made the speeches about national pride and defense. And in the end it was men who did whatever they had to do, pushed the buttons or pulled the string to set the terrible things off. And we died, Michael. Almost all of us. Women. Children. Only a few were left. Some of them were women, and among them was a woman who called herself Martha Evesdaughter. Martha taught that the destruction had come about because of men's willingness—even eagerness—to fight, and she determined that this eagerness to fight must be bred out of our race, even though it might take a thousand years. (Tepper 301)

The male inhabitants who have opted to remain within the confines of Women's Country are referred to as the "Damned Few." This epithet denotes not only the scarcity of men authorized to reside in this societal framework, connoting a purposeful inclusion of males within the community, but also their inferiority and enslavement. The planning and operational efficacy of the city lay within the purview of the councilwomen and servitors, as they assumed pivotal roles within the socio-structural framework, as Tepper says: "Those who kept things running. Those who did what had to be done" (313). The insight offered depicts a rather pessimistic vision of the society. In the concluding scene, as Stavia assumes the role of Iphigenia on stage, she is posed with the mythical Achilles' inquiry, "What's Hades like?", to which she responds:

> Like dream without waking. Like carrying water in a sieve. Like coming into harbour after storm. Barren harbour where the empty river runs through an endless desert into the sea. Where all the burdens have taken away.
> You'll understand when you come there at last, Achilles. . .
> Hades is Women's Country. (Tepper 315)

Tepper underscores that death serves as an equalizer between genders and provides women with a means of liberation from a restrictive patriarchal ideology. According to Iphigenia, Hades, the domain of the dead, is governed and filled by females. Such a view is in sharp contrast with the classical canon, since Odysseus in *The Odyssey* encounters both men and women there, and Aeneas, the eponymous character of *The Aeneid*, finds only men in Hades. Additionally, the abovementioned snippet could suggest that Women's Country remains a realm of death and bitterness.

Nevertheless, challenging the patriarchal worldview, Tepper inserts a peculiar remark. Namely, Stavia conversing with one of the servitors, expresses the taboo nature of a particular phenomenon referred to as the "gay syndrome": "'That's absolutely forbidden.' Stavia bit her lip. Even in preconvulsion times it had been known that the so-called 'gay syndrome' was caused by aberrant hormone levels during pregnancy. The women doctors now identified the condition as 'hormonal reproduction maladoption,' and corrected it before birth" (Tepper 76). There exists a societal prohibition against a "gay syndrome," attributing it to abnormal hormone levels during pregnancy. Within the narrative, women doctors are depicted as recognizing and rectifying this condition, which is now labelled as "hormonal reproduction maladoption," prior to birth. This section underscores the speculative and dystopian elements in Tepper's narrative, illustrating the influential role of societal norms and medical interventions in regulating different facets of human existence, including sexual orientation. The term "hormonal reproduction maladoption" is not really provided with sufficient explanation. The introduction of such a surprising remark within the provided narrative is not unexpected, given the portrayal of the eugenic matriarchy. Across a spectrum of speculative narratives, characters embodying queer identities find themselves recurrently subjected to discriminatory practices, marginalization, and oppressive circumstances within alternative settings.

The centrality of the transgression of boundaries in Sheri S. Tepper's *The Gate to Women's Country* aligns with the theoretical framework propounded by Judith Butler, who in her *Gender Trouble. Feminism and the Subversion of Reality* states:

> The masculine/feminine binary constitutes not only the exclusive framework in which that specificity can be recognized, but in every other way the "specificity" of the feminine is once again fully decontextualized and separated off analytically and politically from the constitution of class, race, ethnicity, and other axes of power relations. (7)

In Butler's conceptual framework, she critiques the normative boundaries linked to gender, urging individuals to interrogate and surpass societal norms.

Sheri S. Tepper's investigation into the subversion of gender roles is primarily instantiated through insight into the gender dynamics and ethical quandaries arising from the aftermath of war, intertwined with societal decisions aimed at sustaining established ways of life. The meticulous engagement with the concept of selective breeding constitutes a nuanced exploration of socio-biological paradigms within the thematic framework of her work. In the narrative, the challenge to the patriarchal perspective involves two aspects: creating a society that diverges from stereotypes and reinterpreting the classical Greek myth of Iphigenia. Tepper's novel can be viewed as an endeavour to experiment with subverting conventional gender boundaries. However, a critical examination through the lens of philosophers such as Rosi Braidotti, who advocates the subversion of entrenched categories, particularly emphasizing fluidity and diversity within identity, notably concerning gender, reveals a nuanced perspective. Contrary to a complete deconstruction of binary oppositions and a rejection of fixed gender notions, the narrative unfolds within a matriarchal community whose political structure, upon closer scrutiny, appears rooted in eugenics rather than fostering a constructive collaboration between diverse groups.

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From Kitsch and Carnivalesque to Cultural Appropriations: Liminal Representations of Post-Apartheid White Identity in Die Antwoord's Music Videos

ABSTRACT

Through their multi-dimensional artistic performances—manifesting in music, lyrics and videos—the South African rap-rave hip-hop duo Die Antwoord expresses the ethos of "Zef," a white working-class Afrikaner post-apartheid culture. Zef is associated with a specific style of vulgar aesthetics, language and humour which portrays its subjects in a derogatory manner, by presenting their appearance and behaviour as crudely ill-bred and vainly tasteless. This paper discusses discursive and visual strategies employed in selected Die Antwoord music videos, demonstrating how their use of kitsch aesthetics and carnivalesque elements allows them to render the liminality of contemporary white Afrikaans experience. It also examines the way in which the appropriation of cultural signifiers in the band's work undermines myths of authenticity, represents the fragmentariness of subjectivity, and emphasizes the rhizomatic qualities of post-apartheid identity. The primary example will concern the band's adaptation of Roger Ballen's photographic work. Absorbing Ballen's aesthetics is shown to be part of a broader artistic strategy of appropriation adopted by Die Antwoord with the view of attacking established social categories and destabilizing normativity. As the paper postulates, the band's music videos employ liminal and carnivalesque artistic modes, combined with intertextual appropriations, in order to interrogate post-apartheid South African identity.

Keywords: Die Antwoord, music videos, Zef, Roger Ballen, appropriation, intertextuality, kitsch, carnivalesque.

With the release and immediate YouTube success of their two limited-budget music videos, "Enter the Ninja" and "Zef Side," the South African rap-rave hip-hop duo Die Antwoord entered the hall of international fame in 2009—not with a whimper, but with a bang. Their creative pursuit equally combines music and visual arts: it was mostly their music videos, virally dispersing through the Internet, that account for their popularity and significant critical acclaim, as well as abundant unfavourable opinions. The band members, Watkin Tudor Jones, a.k.a. "Ninja," and Anri du Toit, a.k.a. "Yo-Landi Vi$$er," pay significant attention to the visual aspects of Die Antwoord, both in their music videos (many self-directed) and in their meticulously stylized public image, complete with peculiar outfits and flagrant tattoos. The ideological dimension of their public persona is their claim to express the ethos of "Zef," a white working-class Afrikaner post-apartheid counterculture movement. The band's defiance manifests, among other things, in persistently rejecting cooperation with large record labels: their debut album *O* was self-released (and available as a free download); the subsequent four albums were released by their own independent label, Zef Records. An apt illustration of their self-ironical and subversive attitude is the self-presentation in the spoken prequel to an early video: when the interviewer observes that the name of the band means "the answer" in Afrikaans, he asks "The answer to what?", at which Ninja scoffs and says "Whatever, man" ("Zef Side").

The socio-cultural reality of early 21st-century South Africa is marked with many inescapable dissonances; hence, the articulation of attitudes and identities requires an innovative approach to cultural codes and signs. "Authenticity" is established in destabilization and hybridization. As it happens, Die Antwoord are virtuosos of hybridity. This paper shows how their flagrant use of kitsch aesthetics, carnivalesque obscenities, cheap parody and intertextual appropriation allows them to render the liminal experience of white Afrikaans post-apartheid youth and to represent their fractured and fragmentary subjectivity. It also discusses discursive and visual strategies employed in selected Die Antwoord music videos, demonstrating how the appropriation of cultural signifiers and their use as *objets trouvés* can be used to undermine the myths of authenticity and emphasize the rhizomatic qualities of post-apartheid identity. The primary example will concern the band's adaptation of Roger Ballen's photographic work. The analyzed material embraces selected videos from Die Antwoord's first four albums, *O* (2009), *Ten$ion* (2012), *Donker Mag* (2014), and *Mount Ninji and da Nice Time Kid* (2016).

The South African "Zef" identity, emerging among young Afrikaners in the early 2000s, is deeply rooted in the country's specific post-apartheid socio-cultural landscape. The transfer of political power from

the (white-controlled) National Party to the (black-controlled) African National Congress, which took place after the first democratic elections in 1994, effectively meant that South Africans had to reconstruct their social relations and re-establish their identities. The name often used for the new political project, the "Rainbow Nation," coined by Archbishop Desmond Tutu, was supposed to represent the idea of a multicultural and ethnically unbiased post-apartheid order. The first and foremost aim of this socio-political trajectory was to eradicate racial segregation and prejudice, securing human rights and adequate democratic representation for each ethnic group. This obviously meant that whites had to yield their privileged position, sharing political power with blacks and coloureds (as these terms were defined in the 1950 Population Registration Act); they mostly experienced the democratic transition as "ushering in vulnerability" (Steyn 10). In effect, as de Klerk phrases it, in post-apartheid South Africa "whiteness as privileged and privileging signifier seems to have gone into hiding" (41). The loss of a highly advantaged status and, especially, the decline of the economic situation, has occurred in the first years of the new century, most acutely among South African people of Afrikaans origins. When they no longer maintained previously enjoyed state protection, they became much more likely to become unemployed and impoverished. Statistics show rising levels of joblessness and destitution among working-class Afrikaners, leading to social phenomena unprecedented in this ethnic group, such as begging, squatting and homelessness (Wood). As Anton Krueger notes, "[t]he transition to democracy in 1994 implied, for many white Afrikaners, defeat, failure, guilt, and self-abnegation" (401).

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The dynamic processes of post-apartheid social destabilization, which transferred white Afrikaans identity into "a liminal space" and demanded that it be "challenged, renegotiated and possibly reconfigured" (Marx and Milton 727), led to the formation of Zef subculture in the early 21st century. The term itself was conceived in the late 1950s, and its name derived from the Ford Zephyr car, a cult motor classic in South Africa at the time. For several decades Zef was used as an unfavourable term to label poor working-class or unemployed white Afrikaners, but in post-apartheid years it acquired a "new designation" which started to "impl[y] an attitude of resilience" (Krueger 402). Zef certainly still evokes associations with crude aesthetics, vulgar taste and primitive obscenity, but the coarseness of "white trash" is now worn with self-ironic pride, and Zef's "impurity . . . appears to be invoked as an exalted hybridity" (Du Preez 107). This new, post-apartheid Zef style is utterly self-conscious, "staged and performed" (Van der Watt 411) and it entails, as Krueger puts it, "presenting a persona in a *purposefully* degrading way, *exaggerating* one's appearance and mannerisms as low class, ill bred, and boorish" (400, emphasis mine).

The features of Zef style are self-consciously displayed by Yo-Landi and Ninja in Die Antwoord's music videos.[1] Their looks are a pastiche of unrefined kitsch aesthetics. Ninja usually performs bare-chested, in boxer shorts, exposing his clumsy amateurish tattoos (the most articulate one is the self-mocking caption "PRETTY WISE," lettered below his Adam's apple). His demeanour of gaudy elegance includes heavy fake gold jewellery, gold-capped teeth and, occasionally, a painstakingly trimmed moustache. Posing as a would-be gangster, he often waves guns and wads of money. Yo-Landi is distinguished by her peculiar mullet hair, looking quite incompetently trimmed. She also sports superfluous artificial gold adornments and her clothes are overly pretentious, either in terms of bad-taste sumptuousness, like extravagant fake furs, or pretended childishness, like pink plush slippers or a Pokémon onesie. Their language, both in the lyrics and in the interviews, is also a caricature of rough unsophisticated discourse, splattered with swear words, often dumbed down and trivialized, e.g.: "Yeah girl, I'm a freak of nature / Sign my name on your boob, fuck a piece of paper" ("Evil Boy"). The duo often perform in highly contrasted voices: Ninja's dynamic rapping in a clear tenor, and Yo-landi's sugary "baby voice," a squeaky mezzosoprano produced in the head register. A well-known example is "Enter the Ninja," where Yo-landi, posing as a teenage girl, pleads in a high-pitched voice: "I am your butterfly / I need your protection / Be my samurai," to which her partner manly replies: "I'm a ninja, yo / My life is like a video game / . . . No fucking around I'm cutting down anyone in my path."

The flagrancy with which Die Antwoord display tawdry aesthetics in the image of their artistic persona as well as in their music videos relates to what Barragán and Ryynänen identify as the rise in cultural status that kitsch has enjoyed in recent decades. Identifying the sources of its ascent both in the eclecticism of postmodernist aesthetics and in the neoliberalist transformation of markets which brought demand for "global, efficient, homogenized, colorful, predictable, good-looking, and affirmative" products (22), and for "artists that produce easygoing, simple, and . . . spectacular artworks that flatter the eyes without needing any art historical knowledge" (23), the critics contend that presently "kitsch not only reflects our sensitive *zeitgeist*," but, what is more, that "the art world has been the *trendsetter* for many a kitsch in modern and contemporary culture" (19). Likewise, Lipovetsky and Serroy discern

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[1] Die Antwoord's exhibition of Zef traits is generally part of their artistic persona, also performed on stage, in interviews and in other public acts, but my analysis focuses on music videos and does not cover these areas. References to those elements of their image will consequently be sparse.

the elevation of kitsch aesthetics status: while formerly it was correlated with "heaviness, heaping, and excess," now it denotes "relaxing laughter and ironic lightness" and "expresses less contempt for the popular than a desire for the cheerful and distanced lightness" (74). While in the past it evoked "the conformism of imitation and the negation of autonomous individualism" (78), presently kitsch can be artistically employed as "a way of affirming individual subjectivity, making fun of the norms of legitimate culture, escaping taste's conformism, stereotypes of 'seriousness,' and 'respectable' appearances" (77). In this context, it can be assumed that the shocking spectacles of kitsch artistic inadequacy and commercial, eye-catching triviality employed by Die Antwoord can serve a creative and political purpose.

Vulgar and gaudy imagery projected by the band in their looks, behaviour and lyrics also evokes associations with Mikhail Bakhtin's notion of the carnivalesque. This has been frequently noted by critics, who connect Die Antwoord's "monstrous carnivalesque extravaganza" (Du Preez 103) with the Zef aesthetics propagated by their artistic persona, especially through music videos. For Krueger, the Zef identity in general can be "closely linked to carnivalesque aspects of the festival experience, such as excess, pleasure, performing youth identities, and experimenting with sexuality" (404). Likewise, Bekker and Levon note that Die Antwoord construct the Zef aesthetic "as a form of carnivalesque performance," which is particularly seen in "the prevalence of grotesque realism, or a focus on depicting the materiality of bodily existence and the debasement of more noble concepts" (136). Bakhtin's idea of the carnival, as the time which "celebrated temporary liberation from the prevailing truth and from the established order [and] marked the suspension of all hierarchical rank, privileges, norms, and prohibitions" (Bakhtin 10), directly corresponds to the liminal position of post-apartheid "white trash" Afrikaans identity, distrustful both of the former hegemonic colonial authority and of the new "Rainbow nation" idealism. This subversion and disrespect are realized through the employment of the grotesque, which relies, for Bakhtin, on "exaggeration, hyperbolism [and] excessiveness" (303). In my view, the carnivalesque strategies employed by Die Antwoord in their music videos can be classified into four categories. The first one, *monstrosity and ugliness*, consists in using repulsive and loathsome images, such as scorpions and spiders crawling over Ninja's head and naked torso, or bugs writhing in his open mouth in "Fok Julle Naaiers," or blood smeared over Yo-landi's barely clad body in "Pitbull Terrier." The second, *disrespect and blasphemy*, entails openly derisive portrayals of famous personages, such as celebrities (e.g., Lady Gaga in "Fatty Boom Boom," or Oscar Pistorius in "Banana Brain"), as well as profane insults of religious symbols, for instance, an

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almost naked woman twerking against a cross painted on the wall ("Fat Faded Fuck Face"), or a picture of Jesus hanging next to one of a nude woman on the wall of a suburban family house ("Baby's On Fire"). The third category, *obscenity and sexuality*, manifests in unreserved displays of sexualized bodies, both male and female (e.g., breasts in "Evil Boy" or "Rich Bitch," penises in "Evil Boy"), as well as in the arrangement of the bodies suggestive of a sexual act (as in "Fat Faded Fuck Face" or "Cookie Thumper"). The final category, of *kitsch and vulgarity*, is explicit throughout Die Antwoord's lyrics and presents itself also in brazen expressions of bad taste, observed not only in the abovementioned gaudy stylization of their artistic persona, but additionally in narrative details, such as Yo-landi's gold toilet seat ("Rich Bitch") or Ninja lighting up his cigarette with a burning dollar banknote ("Ugly Boy"). In one of their most emblematic music videos, "I Fink U Freeky," which features most of the characteristics of their grotesque insurgence, Die Antwoord's lyrics self-consciously—and self-ironically—announce their devotion to weirdness through the repeated verse "I fink you freeky and I like you a lot." Observing Yo-landi's vicious mockery and Ninja's evil grin, we clearly see that "carnival is the people's second life, organized on the basis of laughter" (Bakhtin 8).

Another point of controversy around Die Antwoord's artistic project is situated around the band's appropriation, or, as some would have it, misappropriation, of the signifiers of sexuality, class, culture and race. In their attempts to represent marginalized South African post-apartheid identities, Yo-landi and Ninja employ an amalgam of various cultural borrowings. The obvious fact that the band draws from rap and hip-hop (musically, but also in terms of dress aesthetics), which are genres universally associated with black artists, is seen by some as a highly contentious, or even unethical, artistic strategy. For instance, Marx and Milton maintain that "the appropriation of the language and style of black-identified music forms and their attendant (sub)cultures by white musicians and audiences represents a form of cultural piracy" (740). Lanisa Kitchiner, in turn, claiming that hip-hop and rap should be regarded as a phenomena of black popular culture that voices the experiences of black communities, proposes that Die Antwoord's use of gangsta rap is only meant "to transmit longstanding codes of Black inferiority" (66). Likewise, the band have also been dismissed as modern "blackface minstrels," who evoke the image of white American popular culture performers producing racist black caricatures: Adam Haupt argues that Die Antwoord do not enter into dialogue with the hegemonic discourse, and, in consequence, their blackface acts only uphold "conservative racial . . . politics" (467). Other scholars, however, believe that the band "consciously deploys blackface as part of a strategic racial project," making a "shift from an understanding of race as essential to race as contingent" (Schmidt 134,

138). Furthermore, the advocates of Die Antwoord's postmodern project note that "through the appropriation of racial signifiers of other race groups, they are able to render their white identity ironic" (Scott 755). Indeed, the heavy dose of self-irony, which appears to elude some of the critics, is one of the hallmarks of the band's artistic persona that permeates their music video appearances. I would like to claim that, just as they use kitsch to articulate political statements with "ironic lightness" and employ carnivalesque obscenities to question authorities, Die Antwoord appropriate artistic and non-artistic *objets trouvés* with the view of representing present-day fractured South African identity. Despite the disapproving opinions of some critics, who, like Kitchiner and Haupt, blame Yo-landi and Ninja for unwarranted cultural appropriation—or even racism and misogyny—the audiences can find in their scandalizing artistic work acute political themes seasoned with blatant irony.

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In the spoken introduction to Die Antwoord's first video, "Enter the Ninja," Ninja introduces himself wryly: "I represent South African culture. In this place you get a lot of different things: Blacks, Whites, Coloured, English, Afrikaans, Xhosa, Zulu, watookal [*whatever*]. I'm like all these different things, all these different people, fucked into one person." In this way, he situates himself not as a privileged white person, but as "a mongrel gutter dog, both embracing and parodying a syncretic fusion of the many different cultures and races of South Africa, celebrating as well as subverting the rainbow nation discourse" (Krueger 400). Through their eclecticism and mimicry of various styles, cultures and traditions Die Antwoord represent the hybridity of South African identity. Their songs flaunt this hybridity through their mixture of various musical genres as well as languages in the lyrics, which combine mostly English and Afrikaans, but also include words borrowed from African indigenous languages, or from Cape Town gangster slang. Also Ninja's appearance, with his gold-capped teeth, apparently hand-drawn, prison-style tattoos, and ubiquitous guns, evoke Cape Flats gang culture. Apart from appropriated music genres, languages and elements of subculture, the identity concoction brewed by Die Antwoord relies significantly on their use of popular culture products. These are present in the music—for instance, "Enter the Ninja" includes fragments of Smile. dk's song "Butterfly," while "Zef Side" recycles Bronski Beat's "Hit That Perfect Beat"—as well as in the visuals: for instance, the video for "Baby's On Fire" features shots which directly reference well-known Hollywood blockbusters *Back to the Future* and *Terminator*, while in "Evil Boy" Ninja's hand is shown transformed into an alien "claw," just as with the protagonist of Neil Blomkamp's *District 9*, a film popular not only in South Africa.

Die Antwoord's ironical approach towards South African identity issues is often accomplished through their intertextual references to the works

of Anton Kannemeyer. Kannemeyer, a comics artist born in Cape Town, is recognized for referring critically to the South African early 21ˢᵗ century social and political climate: using irony, dark humour and subversive satire, he portrays post-apartheid social relations and stereotypes concerning South African culture. His 2010 book, *Pappa in Afrika*, a pastiche of Hergé's Tintin comics which sarcastically comments on racial and colonial issues, is openly invoked in Die Antwoord's "Fatty Boom Boom."[2] The video presents a woman dressed up as Lady Gaga, who—like Tintin in *Pappa in Afrika*—takes a tour through an "exotic" country in a shabby van driven by a grinning, excessively servile black guide. The exoticization and stereotypical representation of South Africa is spoofed in the narrative, which shows Lady Gaga in a concrete jungle of rundown, destitute Johannesburg streets, where hyenas scavenge on rubbish and local vendors keep a black panther and a lion as pets. The most transparent reference is the shot in "Fatty Boom Boom" whose composition directly copies Kannemeyer's picture "Black Gynaecologist."[3] Kannemeyer's works also correspond to Die Antwoord's music videos through their display of carnivalesque qualities: for instance, some of his works, such as "White Nightmare: Black Dicks,"[4] are an absurdist commentary on stereotypical portrayals of the virility of black race as a threat to white colonizers. A corresponding grotesque phallic imagery is present, for example, in the "Evil Boy" music video.

Yet the artist whose work is the most important intertextual basis for Die Antwoord's music videos is unquestionably Roger Ballen. Ballen is a photographer born in 1950 in the United States. He settled in Johannesburg in the 1980s and gained international recognition for *Platteland* (1994), a collection where he "exposed the myth of apartheid white supremacy in his portraits of poor, disabled and psychologically unstable sitters" (Barnard 45). His portrait work, continued in *Outland* (2001), employs a strategy of "penetrating facial masks to comprehend the psychological makeup of a person" (Gaule 48). Two of his notable photographs, "Dresie and Casie, Twins, Western Transvaal" and "Sergeant F de Bruin, Department of Prisons Employee, Orange Free State,"[5]

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[2] The cover of *Pappa in Afrika*, showing some elements of the book's censure of racism and irony towards stereotypical representations of Africa, can be seen at the website of Michael Stevenson's gallery: https://www.stevenson.info/publication/anton-kannemeyer/pappa-in-afrika

[3] See https://archive.stevenson.info/exhibitions/kannemeyer/gynaecologist.htm

[4] See https://archive.stevenson.info/exhibitions/summer2007/kannemeyer1.htm

[5] Both pictures can be viewed on Tate Gallery's website: https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/ballen-dresie-and-casie-twins-western-transvaal-p20477, https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/ballen-sergeant-f-de-bruin-department-of-prisons-employee-orange-free-state-p20473

display the characteristic approach to their subjects: they "are not of ordinary human forms, but rather the governing image is of physical imperfection and deformity. They possess coarse exaggerated features, and appear unusual and bizarre," while the arrangement of the frame and lighting "magnifies details, highlighting flaws and imperfections" (Gaule 52). The portraits are pervaded with a sense of the subjects' isolation and despondency, as well as a more general aura of anxiety. Ballen himself points out that his subjects seem "ultimately powerless, trapped and inert, unable to change their destiny" and their eyes reflect a "state of existential despair" (81). At the same time, though, Ballen's models can sometimes be seen as displaying more agency and disquieting, stubborn resistance. Instead of accepting their vulnerability in passive anxiety, they seem to return the examining gaze of the camera and evoke distress in the onlooker.

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These "prehensile portraits of the unprivileged" (Ballen 8), almost always white and lower class, are an important source of inspiration for Die Antwoord in their examination of Zef identity. The band's music videos also feature portraits, introduced in a manner highly unusual for this form: as static shots of single people, usually taken from their waist up, standing against a studio background and looking into the camera. They are filmed in black-and-white, just like Ballen's photographs. Some of them are portraits of Yo-landi and Ninja: the artists are not lip-syncing, but stand immobile in their poses, sometimes displaying unusual, disquieting facial expressions. Even more unconventional for the music video genre are static portraits of people other than band members, whose presence is not motivated by the narratives of particular videos, either. A particularly remarkable example is the introductory sequence of "Fok Julle Naaiers": over forty opening seconds of the video consist solely of such portrait shots of several people, each a few seconds long, fading in and out one after another. Similar portraits appear in other music videos, as well, e.g., in "I Fink U Freeky," where they substantially contribute to the eerily disturbing character of the video. Robert J. C. Young's description of Ballen's portraits in the introduction of the photographer's retrospective album—"the images have an in-your-face quality, too close for comfort which means that the portrait grasps at you, seizes you and holds you fast. It is not so much we who are looking at them, but rather they who are looking at us, compelling us to respond and submit to their gaze" (Ballen 8)—closely fits the portraits appearing in Die Antwoord's videos, too.

An important feature of Ballen's portraiture, also accountable for its specific, grim nature, is the setting. His subjects are pictured in their living quarters and these interiors—coarse, austere and unattractive—

are a crucial element constructing their identity. As Gaule notes, "the depiction of bare cement and earth floors, sparsely furnished interiors, unadorned walls and car seats supported by bricks create the impression of a temporary existence within these interiors" (55). The portraits of poor, plain white people in their shabby, disquieting houses—like "Cookie with his wife Tillie, Orange Free State"[6] or "Man Turtle"[7]—reveal not only the photographer's keen eye for social detail, but his utmost empathy. Ballen himself deems "ignorance, dejection, apathy and a lack of ambition" (77) responsible for the misery and hopelessness of his subjects, which are reflected by their living conditions. In some of his photographs, the subjects are absent: only the interiors speak of their residents, metonymically describing their disadvantaged status. A good example is "Bedroom of a Railway Worker, De Aar,"[8] with its web of disjointed wires representing precariousness and disorder of brittle existence, its collapsed symmetry denoting an absence of certainties, and its dismal crudeness implying quotidian banality. The bleak and lowly houses from Ballen's photographs parallel the stark suburban Cape Town neighbourhoods depicted in Die Antwoord's music videos such as "Zef Side," "Baby's On Fire," or "Pitbull Terrier."

Yet the most conspicuous element of Die Antwoord's music videos to be inspired by Ballen's work is wall drawings forming the background. Ballen, who initially used simple, whitewashed backgrounds of his subjects' house walls, was inspired to employ drawings after "photographing subjects against walls in homes saturated with their lines, marks and drawings" (151). In the early 2000s, drawing was gradually integrated into his portraiture, which, in time, gave way to symbolic still life photography. For his *Shadow Chamber* project (released in 2005), the key part of the artist's imagery was formed by "walls covered in scribbles, smudges, drawings and cut-outs, as well as broken frames, masks and wires of all kinds" (149). Good examples are "Funeral Rites,"[9] juxtaposing tall, ghostly domineering figures with small anxious human faces, or "Boarding House,"[10] a nightmarish residence with broken toys (some pinned to the wall), rather repulsive wall paintings, dilapidated furniture and two

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[6] See https://www.artnet.com/artists/roger-ballen/cookie-with-wife-tillie-orange-free-state-Q0lyRfPycWWJuTZDhLQh3A2

[7] See https://flashbak.com/outland-roger-ballens-portraits-of-life-on-the-edge-of-reincarnation-40580/031-man-turtle/

[8] See https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/ballen-bedroom-of-a-railway-worker-de-aar-p81269

[9] See https://www.artnet.com/artists/roger-ballen/funeral-rites-_3Id5KtBMykZ4IxtDMmuMw2

[10] See https://www.artspace.com/roger_ballen/boarding-house-2008

peripheral figures, a child and a dog. Ballen's uncanny, unsettling aesthetics attracted Die Antwoord, who used his graphics in their "Enter the Ninja" video and then sought his direct collaboration, first for a photo shoot, then for co-directing "I Fink U Freeky." The video was filmed on sets constructed on the basis of his photographs, with "a series of installations . . . that reflected [his] aesthetic" (Ballen 158). In their subsequent music videos, such as "Evil Boy," "Fatty Boom Boom" or "Fat Faded Fuck Face," the band use Ballenesque drawings on background walls, costumes, or body painting. The aesthetics of the drawings reflects the psychological tension and sinister unease of the band's artistic project. The paintings usually depict distorted or exaggerated figures, primitive human faces, animalistic masks, intricate abstract patterns, and ambiguous, enigmatic symbols. They are always monochromatic, raw and simple, their crudeness situating them close to tribal art, graffiti and children's pictures.

   Ballen's art, which in the mid-2000s "started to incorporate aspects of both art brut and surrealism" (Ballen 158), is a piercing visual element of Die Antwoord's music videos, accentuating the otherworldly qualities of liminal spaces they wish to depict. Both his graphics, used by the band in various contexts, and his portrait photography, shaping some characters in the videos, are an important inspiration for the distinctive visual style, which fascinates many of their followers. Yet, as has been demonstrated above, absorbing Ballen's aesthetics is part of a broader artistic strategy of appropriation adopted by Yo-landi and Ninja in their attempt to "draw attention to the continued racism, homophobia, sexism, and classism in the postapartheid era" of what was proudly called the Rainbow Nation (Obbard and Cork 426).

   Die Antwoord's artistic project cannot be dismissed as an exercise in potentially racist and misogynist commercial banality and iconoclastic controversy. Through their portrayals of exaggerated white trash "Zef" identity, they attack established social categories and fixed roles, and "celebrate social transgression and cultural contamination" (Chruszczewska 69), successfully utilizing "parody to destabilise white normativity as defined under apartheid" (Milton and Marx 25). Kitsch aesthetics and carnivalesque imagery, which the band unreservedly employ, become effective (and affective) tools to interrogate the rhizomatic qualities of South African identity. The strategy of a densely intertextual use of various cultural and artistic appropriations, visual and musical *objets trouvés*, emphasizes the fractured and fragmentary character of present-day postmodern, post-colonial, post-apartheid identity of South Africans: it is a provisional amalgam, formed with incongruous bits and pieces coming from various spheres and cultures, not all of them entirely authentic and independently original. By interspersing elements of kitsch with moments

of liminal angst, Die Antwoord show the true face of Zef: it blends the gold-capped-teeth smile of Ninja lighting a cigarette with an American banknote and the stern gaze of Sergeant F de Bruin, which poignantly emanates from an aestheticized black-and-white photograph.

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Voices of the Dead: Robert Eggers's *The Lighthouse* and the Horror Genre

ABSTRACT

This article examines the 2019 film *The Lighthouse*, directed by Robert Eggers, which follows the descent into madness of two 19th-century lighthouse keepers as they become stranded on a desolate New England island and confronted with threats both natural and supernatural. The focus of the article is primarily on the film's employment of the cinematic language associated with the horror genre, discussed primarily in reference to the theoretical framework proposed by Noël Carroll, and thus it serves as the argument for *The Lighthouse*'s inclusion into the genre. I place particular emphasis on the considerations of human nature present in the film. *The Lighthouse* illustrates the disastrous impact of finding oneself outside of the boundaries of civilization; without the constraints imposed by society, but also without the sense of security it offers, the evil that can be found in every human being is revealed and the characters turn against each other.

Keywords: horror, cinema, Robert Eggers, Noël Carroll, genre.

INTRODUCTION

In a 2016 interview with the British film magazine *Sight & Sound*, Robert Eggers offers an explanation as to the source of the obsession with history which came to characterize his filmography; what interests him are the "voices of the dead" and "exploring who we are by going backwards" (Bitel). In this article I take a closer look at Eggers's second feature, *The Lighthouse* (2019), his attempt to transport the audience into the past and the film's depiction of the impact that being stranded on the border between civilization and wilderness can have on the human psyche, with particular emphasis being placed on the considerations of human nature present in the film. Without the constraints imposed by society, but also without the sense of security it offers, the characters in the film become helpless, as their isolation turns into a catalyst for the evil that can be found in every human being and may reveal itself in extreme situations. The focus of the article is primarily on the film's employment of the cinematic language associated with the horror genre, discussed primarily in reference to the theoretical framework proposed by Noël Carroll, and thus it serves as the argument for the inclusion of *The Lighthouse* into the genre.

Set in the late 19th century, *The Lighthouse* tells the story of two lighthouse keepers, Thomas Wake (Willem Dafoe) and Ephraim Winslow, real name Thomas Howard (Robert Pattinson), stationed on a remote island off the coast of New England. As the story unfolds, a raging storm hits the area and prevents the two men from leaving the island. Running low on rations and deprived of freshwater, they begin to consume copious amounts of alcohol and grow increasingly distrustful of each other. The harsh weather conditions and the tasks assigned to him by the elder man eventually start to take a toll on Howard's mental health. He becomes increasingly curious about Wake's uncanny obsession with the light atop the lighthouse and, as the time goes by, convinces himself that his supervisor must have murdered his previous colleague. Meanwhile, Wake believes that the storm is a punishment brought upon them for the killing of a one-eyed seagull by his subordinate. Supernatural occurrences begin to plague Howard as he finds himself unable to distinguish between his visions and reality. Wake's vastly conflicting testimony regarding what is happening—from the amount of time that they have spent on the island to his insistence that it was Howard and not him who destroyed their boat—further fuels the tension between the two men, which eventually leads to a violent confrontation.

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THE LIGHTHOUSE AS A HORROR FILM

The Lighthouse has left critics divided when it comes to its classification as a horror film. While some, like Manohla Dargis, refer to it as such, others, including Peter Bradshaw and Owen Gleiberman, contend that its generic identity is more ambiguous. Thus, the claim that *The Lighthouse* represents the horror genre deserves an adequate substantiation, perhaps even more so due to the fact that Eggers has expressed scepticism about "specific definitions of what genre is" and more specifically, about classifying his sophomore feature as a horror movie (see Ebiri; Johnston), instead referring to it as a film more akin to the subgenre of weird fiction, defined by writers such as Clark Ashton Smith or H. P. Lovecraft (Miéville 510). One could undoubtedly put forward an argument that the distinction between horror and weird fiction is hardly clear and that the latter could be considered a broad grouping of horror, fantasy and science-fiction authors, both those associated with *Weird Tales* magazine (the first issue of which was published in the US in 1923) and some who predate them (the most notable and influential of whom was Edgar Allan Poe). While a great degree of similarity, both aesthetic and thematic, can be observed among these works, it stands to reason that many researchers would consider most of the weird fiction texts to be examples of horror fiction. Eggers's comment might have been influenced by the desire to market his film in a way that would be more appealing to the award committees, as horror and horror-adjacent films rarely get nominations from the most coveted institutions such as the Academy Awards or the Golden Globes, with some rare exceptions like William Friedkin's *The Exorcist* (1973), Roman Polański's *Rosemary's Baby* (1968), Jonathan Demme's *The Silence of the Lambs* (1991) or, more recently, Jordan Peele's *Get Out* (2017). In fact, the last two of these have been referred to with terms such as "suspense drama" or "thriller," the latter of which, in the case of *Get Out*, stemmed from its own director's description of his film as a "social thriller." The attempt to present some of the more recent horror films (among them *The Lighthouse* and *Get Out*) as different from the average representatives of the genre—and therefore more deserving of critical attention—can also be seen in the discourse around them. Terms such as "elevated horror" or "post-horror" came to be used to describe these texts throughout the second half of the previous decade. In his 2021 book on the subject, David Church discusses these labels, focusing both on the features shared by the films usually associated with the aforementioned labels—which he describes as an "aesthetically linked cycle within the longer . . . tradition" (3) of arthouse cinema and which are characterized by a slower pace, "visual restraint and stylistic minimalism" (10)—but

also on their origin and the criticism levelled at the proponents of the terms, which often points out their lack of genre literacy or cultural capital in general (28) and the solely evaluative nature of the epithets such as an "elevated horror." While some of the films included in Church's provisional corpus of post-horror cinema (14) would not be considered horror films when analyzed in the context of definitions adopted further on in this article, *The Lighthouse* can indeed be considered as such both in the view of Church and other critics discussed below. That being said, it is not the goal of this article to dismiss Eggers's choice not to describe his film as horror. Instead, I would like to argue that *The Lighthouse*'s employment of the poetics of horror plays a crucial role in setting up the film's central themes and allows Eggers to showcase the toll that seclusion can take on the human mind and create an environment that mirrors the internal turmoil of the characters.

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In order to tackle the question of *The Lighthouse*'s generic identity, we need to adopt a definition of horror and, more specifically, horror as a genre of film. In his seminal book *The Philosophy of Horror* (1990), Noël Carroll puts forward the term "art-horror," by which he refers to the emotion that is supposed to be caused by the narratives and images that appear in works that belong to the genre (8). Carroll's approach is rather unique, as it assumes that "emotive responses of the audience, ideally, run parallel to the emotions of characters" (17) and thus the way in which the characters respond suggests how we should react to what is depicted in horror films, whether on screen or on the page. In such a way, Carroll steers clear of the problem of the diverse range of emotional responses to works of horror that the audience is undoubtedly bound to have. While people will react to these books or films in different ways (some hardened horror fans will remain unfazed when confronted with what most people would consider terrifying, while other members of the audience may, for example, become scared after being confronted with seemingly innocuous imagery connected to their phobias), focusing on mirroring the protagonists of these stories instead centres the theoretical framework on the texts themselves, thus allowing us to conduct a more objective analysis of the emotions that they intend to elicit.

EGGERS'S APPROACH TO HISTORICAL ACCURACY

One way in which Eggers tries to immerse the audience in the experience of the characters is the film's meticulous attention to period accuracy, from its set pieces, through the costumes, to the way in which the

characters interact. This devotion is rather unusual for a film set in the past, most of which are inevitably bound to contain numerous anachronisms. Some of these are deliberate representational strategies adopted by filmmakers, often going as far as to purposely incorporate contemporary imagery into its historical setting, as in Derek Jarman's *Caravaggio* (1986), Andrzej Wajda's *Pilate and Others* (1972) or, more recently, Marie Kreutzer's *Corsage* (2022), while most of the filmmakers maintain the pretence of transporting the viewers to the past, yet do not care whether the exact piece of clothing used as a costume belongs to the 15th century rather than, say, the 13th century, in which this hypothetical film may be set. What matters to them is that the audience members who are less knowledgeable about the history of fashion will recognize said costume as something at least vaguely medieval. This is the case with many well-known historical epics, from Mel Gibson's *Braveheart* (1995), through Ridley Scott's *The Last Duel* (2021), to David Michôd's *The King* (2019). *The Lighthouse* and Eggers's other two features, *The Witch* (2015) and *The Northman* (2022), are among the few films, another example being Stanley Kubrick's *Barry Lyndon* (1975), which take an approach that is much more concerned with historical accuracy.

Eggers had spent years conducting research for the film before it entered the pre-production stage of filming; his own work, discussions with his collaborators and further consultations with experts resulted in painstaking accuracy. *The Lighthouse* was mostly shot on location, with some of the additional interior scenes for the latter being filmed at the Yarmouth Airport and on soundstages in Halifax (Thomson; "Jarin Blaschke on *The Lighthouse*," 05:30–06:53). The buildings which serve as the main setting for the story were built from scratch, something made even more impressive by the remoteness of the place in which they were constructed. Period-accurate furniture, household items, and props were carefully sourced or crafted to enhance the authenticity of the setting, including the lighthouse's functional components, such as the working lantern and the custom-built Fresnel lens (Thomson). An impressive amount of effort was put into studying the clothing of the time and then recreating the chosen items for the costumes of the characters. Part of the unique black-and-white colour palette of the film—a stylistic choice that Eggers and Jarin Blaschke, the cinematographer of the film, agreed on very early on during the development process—is the unusual orthochromatic look achieved by Blaschke through the use of a custom cyan filter, which emulates the look of late 19th- and early 20th-century photographs by preventing red light from entering the camera. The effect that he produced with it not only anchors the film in the time in which it is set by bringing its look closer to the photography of the 1890s, but also

greatly heightens the local contrast. As a result, it emphasizes the textures of the world inhabited by the two lighthouse keepers. Most remarkably, the use of orthochromatic emulation enables the audience to perceive even the slightest imperfections, pores, and blemishes on the actors' faces, as it accentuates the reddish tones in both skin and pores, thus making both men look more weathered and beaten down, displaying their difference in age and highlighting through their appearance how they become increasingly affected by the dangerous elements and isolation (Thomson). Furthermore, Eggers and his team tried to ensure that the actors sound like the individuals they are portraying. When writing the script for *The Lighthouse*, Eggers and his brother Max turned to literature: the reading list included Edgar Allan Poe—whose unfinished story "The Light-House" was the initial inspiration for the film, even though the brothers abandoned the idea of adapting it early on during development (Fear)— Herman Melville, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Robert Louis Stevenson, and H. P. Lovecraft. However, the writer whose work proved to be the most influential for the film was Sarah Orne Jewett, whose output included interviews with people from that era. The brothers studied Evelyn Starr Cutler's dissertation "Representation of Maine Coast Dialect in the Work of Sarah Orne Jewett" (1976), which included an analysis of the dialects used by the interviewees, based on which they created a set of rules which they followed while writing the dialogue. The language used by Dafoe's character was modelled after the old seamen from Jewett's stories, while Pattinson's echoes the Maine farmers from that era (Primo; Fear).

The care put into these elements of *mise-en-scène* ensures that everything depicted on the screen feels tangible for the audience, thus creating a sufficiently believable backdrop for the supernatural elements of the film. This matches what Eggers set out to achieve in the script for his debut film, *The Witch*:

> In order to effectively depict this world in which ordinary people understood supernatural occurrences to be an expected part of life, it is essential that all aspects of the film be carried out with utter naturalism. The characters must appear as real farmers, not actors with dirty faces. Even the supernatural elements must be photographed as realistically as possible. Yet, with all this authenticity and "realism," it is still a folktale, a dream. A nightmare from the past. (Eggers ii)

While Eggers himself may call his approach "fetishistic" in interviews (Crucchiola), his meticulousness results in instilling into a period drama a feeling which we would normally associate with contemporary-set horror films and psychological dramas: the safety of our immediate surroundings

being trespassed by the dangerous Other, taboos being broken, all in a way that not only manages to reduce the distance between the contemporary audience and the time depicted in his stories, but also subverts schemes of cultural categorization.

THE LIMINAL NATURE OF A HORROR MONSTER

This crossing of cultural boundaries is important for Carroll especially when it comes to discussing the figure of the monster and its role as the catalyst for art-horror. The presence of supernatural monsters is, of course, not limited to horror, as they appear in myth, legends, folktales, fantasy, and science-fiction stories. That being said, what separates horror texts from these is that "in works of horror, the humans regard the monsters they meet as abnormal, as disturbances of the natural order" (Carroll 16), as opposed to being an integral part of the world, like in fairy tales or fantasy. For example, one can think of the protagonist of Disney's 1989 adaptation of *The Little Mermaid* (dir. John Musker) or Syrena from the 2011 fantasy film *Pirates of the Caribbean: On Stranger Tides* (dir. Rob Marshall) and compare them with the mermaid that we encounter in *The Lighthouse*; the former two are humanized and fairly non-threatening, while the lattermost is presented to the audience as uncanny and off-putting through the way Howard reacts to her. After initially being attracted to her (not unlike the way in which the character of the missionary is enamoured with Syrena in the aforementioned *Pirates of the Caribbean* film), he then suddenly starts being threatened by her, as characters in horror stories usually do when confronted with the supernatural (Carroll 28), in this case his realization that she is not a human female, but rather a hybrid of a human and a fish.

While I will discuss the idea that monsters occupy a "space between fear and attraction" (Cohen 19) slightly later in this article, I would like to examine another characteristic of the horror monster that is partly connected to the feeling of fear and which Carroll considers to be particularly significant when defining horror, that is, the idea that the characters consider monsters to be disgusting.

Carroll observes that the feeling of disgust is supposed to stem from impurity (28). The idea of the impure/unclean and its role in horror fiction was greatly inspired by two influential texts, *Purity and Danger* (1966) by Mary Douglas and *The Powers of Horror* (1980) by Julia Kristeva. Referring to Douglas's text, Carroll puts forward the interpretation that she "correlates reactions of impurity with the transgression or violation of schemes of cultural categorization"; similarly, in Kristeva's *The Powers*

of Horror, the abjection that is filth or the presence of a corpse stands in opposition to the current order of things that governs our lives, it shakes our culture of cleanliness and order at its very foundation (Carroll 3). The monster is a liminal being, always at the margins of what a human being can make sense of and what they would perceive as the Other. What makes monsters threatening is their hybrid status and the resulting inability "to include them in any systematic structuration" (Cohen 6).

They are dangerous not only because they may physically harm the characters, but also because they actively threaten their understanding of reality. This is precisely what happens in Eggers's film: the mere belief in the existence of the supernatural entities makes the two lighthouse keepers spiral into madness and turn against each other. These supernatural creatures do not have to interact directly with humans; in the case of *The Lighthouse* such contact is, in fact, fairly limited, which is further emphasized by the ambiguity as to whether or not they are just a figment of the main character's imagination. One effect that the choice of shooting the film in black-and-white has on the audience's perception is that the lack of colour automatically makes everything seem much less familiar to us and blends the surroundings and characters together, fuelling the oneiric atmosphere of the film and making it harder to distinguish between what is real, as the main character descends into madness. This, of course, may remind the audience of a number of horror films that preceded it, for example Jack Clayton's *The Innocents* (1961), an adaptation of Henry James's 1898 novella *The Turn of the Screw*, which seems to have inspired *The Lighthouse* both aesthetically and thematically (i.e. in terms of repressed sexuality being a possible source of the main character's deteriorating sanity, an idea that will be explored further in this article).

Carroll assumes that the monster can be everything "not believed to exist now according to contemporary science" (27), therefore making it easier for us to square his definition with the fact that the characters of *The Lighthouse* do not share our contemporary point of view and thus may believe in the existence of the supernatural (even though the main character is initially much more sceptical towards it than his far more superstitious colleague). Additionally, the ability to *imagine* the existence of something or even the mere assumption that something *may* exist (i.e. the belief that killing a sea bird brings bad luck, recognizable from Samuel Taylor Coleridge's "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" [1798] and voiced in the film by Dafoe's character) does not necessarily equal being convinced through either experience or another form of proof that something *does* exist. Carroll refers to Descartes' distinction between an objective reality and a formal reality, according to which the entities that

possess a formal reality exist, while the objective reality of something means that we can imagine it could exist, but it really does not (see: vampires, unicorns, werewolves, etc.) (29–30). To once again illustrate the definition with an example from the film, seagulls have a formal reality, but the assumption that the seagulls which inhabit the island in the film are, in fact, the reincarnated seamen is an idea that only exists in the realm of an objective reality. Returning once again to the concept of impurity, Carroll notes that it "involves a conflict between two or more standing cultural categories" (43) or in other words, two distinct categories that are combined in a way that they cease to be familiar to us and instead become threatening: monsters in horror are an example of this. Carroll divides the means of creating them into five categories: fusion, fission, magnification, massification, and horrific metonymy (52).[1] *The Philosophy of Horror* would posit the seagulls from *The Lighthouse* as an example of fusion in horror, as they can be seen as either part animal and part human (or, to be more accurate about their alleged nature: they are spirits that took the form of an animal), and massification as well, especially in the final scene where a whole flock of them feasts on the unfortunate protagonist.

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Seagulls are not the only example of fusion in *The Lighthouse*. The above-mentioned mermaid is an obvious example and in the same film we also have the titular lighthouse, which could be interpreted as something akin to the haunted house, which Carroll also considers an example of fusion, though not the one that is visually perceptible, as it condenses "different ontological orders," namely "the animate and inanimate" (45). Alongside their isolation, the lighthouse indeed remains the most important external factor that fuels the mental breakdown of the characters. Thomas Wake's unhealthy fascination with the light of the

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[1] Carroll defines these categories as follows:

a. Fusion happens when two contradictory categories, for example "inside/outside, living/dead, insect/human, flesh/machine, and so on" are combined in a single entity (e.g., zombies or vampires that combine life and death) (43).

b. Fission also assumes the coexistence of two contradictory identities; they may share the same body like in fusion, though not at the same time (temporal fission, e.g., werewolves or alter-egos like Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde) or they may be multiplied in space (spatial fission, e.g., doppelgängers) (45–47).

c. Magnification is the act of making a being (especially one that is already "adjudged impure or disgusting within the culture") larger than it is in real life (e.g., giant spiders or insects) (48–49).

d. Massification is multiplying entities (e.g., swarms of insects, Gremlins, etc.) (50).

e. Horrific metonymy is used when the monster is not disgusting at first glance, but it is instead surrounded by beings and objects which are considered to be disgusting and betray the monster's true nature (e.g., Dracula, who initially does not look monstrous, yet is surrounded by all manner of impure creatures) (51).

lantern is established early on in the film; he is extremely protective of access to it and forbids Howard from entering the lantern room. Wake's behaviour towards the lamp is rather concerning, as Howard observes that the older lighthouse keeper undresses when in the presence of the light and seems to experience some sort of religious epiphany during this ritual, which may signify the supernatural nature of the lantern, as the ending of the film could suggest. Howard becomes obsessed with the light, which eventually becomes one of the reasons for the characters' violent confrontation and the murder of Wake, after which the younger character finally manages to enter the room. We observe as his hand reaches for the light and he starts laughing maniacally, at first in a seemingly euphoric way, before he begins to turn more and more distressed, eventually falling down the stairs. In the final shot of the film, we see him gravely injured, with an eye damaged in a way that reminds us of his predecessor and the seagull as which he was supposedly reincarnated (and which was killed by Howard earlier in the film). Wake considered the killing of the bird to be the reason why the two lighthouse keepers got cursed; his act would bring them bad luck and accordingly, it was soon followed by a storm which prevented them from leaving the island. Howard becomes a somewhat promethean figure; he claims the forbidden light, but in the aftermath of it we see him lying among the rocks, alive, but with a flock of seagulls feasting on his entrails. As the camera zooms out, we do not see the lighthouse anymore, as if it had disappeared, further suggesting either the supernatural nature of the lantern or the passage of time; perhaps, just like Prometheus, Howard remained alive, forever trapped in the cycle of torture, and the lighthouse crumbled and ceased to exist.

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Considering the lighthouse itself a monster would allow us to deal with one problem with Carroll's definition of horror—namely, the fact that the existence of a monster and its role in the story are of utmost importance for him when deciding whether something can be considered a part of the horror genre. In *The Lighthouse* it is not that obvious who the monster is. The mermaid is certainly monstrous, but her role in the film is somewhat limited. She seems to represent Howard's repressed sexual desires; a lifelike version of a tiny, wooden mermaid figurine that he finds after arriving on the island. It is ambiguous whether she is real or whether she just appeared to him in a dream. This ambivalence is integral to Carroll's understanding of the role that nightmares have in horror fiction. The products of such dreams are, according to him, "simultaneously attractive and repellent, insofar as they function to enunciate both a wish and its inhibition" (169). This proves to be true in this case, as the main character is initially fascinated by the mermaid but runs away horrified as he discovers her true nature.

Fig. 1 & 2. Howard's visions of violence and sexual gratification (01:08:07 and 01:08:10).[2]

In "Monster Culture (Seven Theses)" (1996), Jeffrey Jerome Cohen notes that "the monstrum is etymologically 'that which reveals'" (4); monsters often represent human fears and anxieties. Numerous critics and audience members have noted the homoeroticism in the behaviour of the two main characters of *The Lighthouse*. Howard seems to be repressing his sexuality; perhaps the mermaid and his dreams represent his latent homosexuality. As Cohen suggests, drawing on the work of Michel Foucault and Susan Stewart,

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[2] All screenshots were taken by the author of the article.

the figure of the monster often symbolizes forbidden sexual practices (14). This once again invites a comparison to the previously mentioned *The Innocents*, in which case we can similarly interpret Miss Giddens's belief in the existence of ghosts that supposedly plan to harm the children in her care as a projection of her own repressed sexual urges toward the young Miles. In Eggers's film, Howard repeatedly tries to fantasize about having sexual intercourse with the mermaid, first masturbating to the tiny figurine, then dreaming about meeting her near the sea and finally, masturbating again while thinking of her. What characterizes the two later scenes is that he comes to perceive the female body as disgusting; not only does he run away from the mermaid in a dream, but also her female parts remain that of a fish in his fantasies and during the final attempt at masturbation these images are mixed with the memory of a man whom he left to die and whose identity he assumed. For this scene, Blaschke used a set of old Petzval lenses, the design of which goes back to 1841, which distort the out-of-focus backgrounds in a very unique way, especially near the edges of the frame. The strong effect that the choice of lenses for this scene has on the visual language of the sequence emphasizes how the distinction between reality and the protagonist's visions becomes almost completely blurred at this point. The scene highlights how for Ephraim, his (repressed) sexuality and violence are gradually projected onto each other and eventually become inseparable; his failure to find another form of release, combined with other forms of extreme pressure that pile on him (visions of supernatural occurrences, isolation, lack of food combined with an excessive consumption of alcohol and later also turpentine) eventually result in one final outburst of violence as Howard and Wake come to blows and the younger man murders his supervisor.

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Fig. 3. The eponymous structure towers over the main character (00:16:29).

The Lighthouse provides us with a look at the process of implosion of a social structure, namely the dichotomy that governs the relation between the two lighthouse keepers. The pair ends up trapped together both on the island and in the film's boxy, almost square 1.19:1 aspect ratio, a rare sight mostly associated with the advent of sound cinema in the late 1920s and the early 1930s and the films such as Carl Theodor Dreyer's *Vampyr* (1932) and Josef von Sternberg's *The Blue Angel* (1930). The narrowness of the frame emphasizes the height of the vertically positioned elements of the background, most notably the eponymous structure which looms over the island, but even more importantly, the aspect ratio encloses the characters in a tight space, highlighting the feelings of claustrophobia and isolation from the outside world. The characters end up confined together as the tensions rise, leading to the inevitable outbursts of violence.

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Fig. 4 & 5. Early in the film, Wake towers over his subordinate; eventually, the roles are reversed (00:41:36 and 01:36:34).

With the help of the skilful use of blocking, Eggers and Blaschke put the ever-changing dynamic between both Thomases in *The Lighthouse* onto the screen. At the beginning, Dafoe's character towers over his subordinate, either through being placed closer to the camera or in a position from which he can look down at Howard; at the end, the protagonist played by Pattinson takes his place in the frame, eventually forcing the older man to crawl on all fours and then putting him in the ground and burying him alive while standing over his would-be grave. The older man, a guardian of the phallic tower, can perhaps be interpreted as a kind of a Lacanian father figure.[3] On the island, he is the law and his act of forbidding his younger colleague from entering the lantern room can then be seen as a form of primal prohibition; the lighthouse then symbolizes the mother figure. This illustrates the ambivalent nature of the building; while the aforementioned phallic shape is associated with masculinity, I would argue that the object of the protagonist's desire is not the lighthouse itself, but rather the light on top of it, while the phallicity of the titular structure reflects the protective role of its walls—and Wake's position as its guardian. Indeed, the older man openly claims the lantern as his spouse; during one of their dinners, he tells Howard that he is "damn-well wedded to this here light, and she's been a finer, truer, quieter wife than any alive-blooded woman" (*The Lighthouse* 33:04–33:14). Howard's obsession with the light and his attempts to get close to it eventually lead to the implosion of this order. First, he decides to oppose Wake, even explicitly telling him that the older man is not his father; then we observe a temporary reversal of roles, as Howard defeats the older man in a fight and puts him on a leash, forcing him to crawl like a dog. He eventually kills his supervisor, who in his final words exclaims that the light belongs to him. Whether or not ascending to the lantern room and looking into the light returned the wholeness to the young lighthouse keeper remains unclear; his expression quickly turns from ecstatic to terrified. Then again, perhaps such would be the experience of regaining what we lose with the formation of our sense of self. The main character's struggle with his own identity is further complicated by the fact that "Ephraim Winslow" is not his real name, but rather the identity of a man he murdered. The fact that he shares his real name, Thomas, with the other man only raises further questions. Some audience members have put forward the idea that they are, metaphorically, two sides of the same person. In this way, one could see them as an example

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[3] Lacan identifies the figure of the father as the personification of the law. When a child realizes that they are a separate entity from their mother, the father begins to keep them at a distance, regulating the child's Oedipal desire and prohibiting them from regaining their wholeness (Felluga 71–72, 182).

of spatial fission, a single character "multiplied into one or more new facets, each standing for another aspect of the self" (Carroll 46), a projection of such an unwanted, repressed aspect onto an imaginary figure. This would tie into the theme of guilt connected to the crime committed by Thomas/Ephraim when he murdered his foreman. Perhaps the older lighthouse keeper's constant assessment of his subordinate's performance and behaviour symbolically represents how one part of Howard's personality is judging another throughout the film. No matter who Wake may be—a god, an imaginary father figure or an ordinary lighthouse keeper—he is undoubtedly there to judge Howard's actions and, in that way, exert control over him. The moment when the younger man reads Wake's diary and realizes that he has been judged negatively is the moment when he finally breaks down and kills his supervisor. Though Howard is seemingly free from the consequences of the death of Winslow, his inability to cope with the weight of his conscience still leads to his eventual downfall. While the two men remain isolated from the wider society, its laws nevertheless remain deeply ingrained in Howard's morality.

THE CONSEQUENCES OF ISOLATION

The impact of cultural conditioning on our morality and the dangers of transgressing that framework are particularly significant in *The Lighthouse*. Joseph Conrad's short story, "An Outpost of Progress" (1896), provides an excellent context for the film, the narrative of which bears a remarkable resemblance to Conrad's text. As in Eggers's sophomore feature, in "An Outpost of Progress" we follow the plight of two men who are deployed to tend to the titular building and condemned to each other's company in a place far from civilization. When their transport home gets delayed and their supplies are running low, the pair begins to dwell on their wrongdoings, and over time they start to become increasingly irritated, until finally a seemingly minor argument causes them to confront each other and results in the death of one of the men. The murderer loses his mind and eventually dies himself. Conrad and Eggers both focus on a specific location and explore how this confined setting influences the characters and shapes their experiences. Both the lighthouse from Eggers's film and the outpost from Conrad's story could be seen as examples of the Foucauldian heterotopia, a place which is "literally 'outside' of the dominant social space," yet despite being "distant from it" serves as a representation of the "aspects of the dominant culture" (Rutledge and Tally 7–8), in this case Western civilization. Michel Foucault stresses heterotopia's capability "of juxtaposing in a single real place

several spaces, several sites that are themselves incompatible" (25). The protagonists reach the place in which the stories are set as the vanguard of that progress mentioned ironically in the title of Conrad's short story: the two lighthouse keepers from *The Lighthouse*, tasked with keeping watch over the light that shows other people the way through the darkness from one outpost of civilization to another; Kayerts and Carlier, sent to oversee the ivory trade on behalf of a trading company. These two outposts are as distant from civilization as they can be, and yet they represent it, just like they represent those hundreds of similar places, some of which actually exist and some of which function only as concepts. This may be why in neither of these stories do we see the locations specified in terms of geography; the setting of *The Lighthouse* is somewhere in New England just as the setting of "An Outpost of Progress" is somewhere in Congo. We are given no names because these two places are supposed to be a representation of numerous similar locations. They serve as archetypes in which the authors' perceptions of these places and the people who inhabit them are condensed with commentary on the societies from which they were born and the anxieties and fears of these cultures. "What horrifies is that which lies outside cultural categories" (Carroll 35) or, speaking more broadly, outside the reach of what is known to us. The opposition between civilization and nature (or wilderness) is deeply ingrained in our culture. Throughout history, we invariably come across an idea that monsters come from places that are not known to humans, like Grendel, who descended on the mead-hall of Heorot from his murky lair in the marshlands. Getting too close to the border puts one at risk of confronting the monsters that may live outside of it or, an even worse fate, face the possibility of becoming a monster themselves (Cohen 12).

There is an obvious effort in the way in which Eggers and Conrad convey this feeling of dread that underlines the characters' sojourn in the unknown. The "sense of danger which one half suspects to be imaginary" (Conrad 129) never quite leaves Kayerts and Carlier, who remain willingly unaware of everything that extends beyond the very edge of the outpost. The narrator describes them as two "blind men in a large room" (133). The fact that they remain oblivious to their surroundings throughout the months they spend in Africa reflects their general attitude to everything that finds itself outside of the border of the civilization that is so precious to them. Regardless of their fear of wilderness, they are unwilling to learn anything about it or fully admit their lack of competence; they are content with leaving everything in the hands of Makola, a local man who works for their trading company. Similarly, Howard finds himself stranded on an island surrounded by the ocean, the realm of the Other by its very nature—almost boundless and traditionally a place from which monsters

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came (Carroll 34)—yet remains dismissive of his more experienced partner's cautionary tales. It would seem illogical, as their approach makes them far more vulnerable to the dangers that constantly lurk in their minds, but their concerns are mitigated to some extent by the belief that civilization will protect them from the Other. This notion proves to be mistaken. When the characters are removed from the space in which they were formed and "placed in an unfamiliar territory" that exerts "its own subtle influence upon them," they find themselves "unable to adapt or modify their character to fit this heterotopic space" (Rutledge and Tally 8); their belief in civilization is what eventually destroys them. The contact with "primitive nature" is said to fill Kayerts's and Carlier's hearts with "sudden and profound trouble" (Conrad 129) in the same way the characters in *The Lighthouse* were troubled by their belief in the threat of the supernatural. Transgressing the border puts them at risk of becoming a monster themselves (Cohen 12), which is precisely what happens in the end. Being exposed to the unknown serves as a catalyst for discovering in one's nature both the capacity for evil and the willingness to accept it in the name of convenience.

When the protagonists of "An Outpost of Progress" discover that Makola sold their servants into slavery, they are initially outraged, yet remain passive, not willing to confront the overseer. The vision of profits and their own complacency proves enough to appease their conscience; they are unfit for this moral struggle, having nothing to rely on besides the inhibiting mechanism of the culture that they have left behind. The image of society in "An Outpost of Progress" and *The Lighthouse* reveals its dual nature—it both fosters and enslaves us. Everyone who is a part of it remains under the constant supervision not only of its rulers, but also of everyone with whom they share this society, "from neighbours and family members up to the police or the state apparatus itself" (Rutledge and Tally 11). And while the written and unwritten laws ensure they perform their tasks adequately, the irony of the situation is that society is the only place in which these characters truly feel "comfortable and secure" (11) as they seem unable to take care of their fates once the grip that society has on them is loosened—their reliance on civilization "fosters a dangerous dependence" (Fraser 158). Without "the sanctions of society," these men are "ineffectual in meeting the tests of new experience that require moral . . . judgment" (Black 133). They also inevitably become more susceptible to justifying their wrongdoings. In *The Lighthouse*, Howard excuses leaving Ephraim Winslow to die. In his mind, it was an accident rather than something that he did himself, just like the slave trade was Makola's doing and not Kayerts's and Carlier's idea. Both the former lumberjack and the protagonists of "An Outpost of Progress" are of course equally guilty because they allowed these

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things to happen, but they are willing to pretend otherwise, as it soothes their sanity. Their transgressions have all happened away from the punitive apparatus of society, with no witnesses—or anyone who was willing or able to punish them—around. However, even though they may ignore their guilty consciences, the fear associated with them will always return. A man may destroy the doubt within himself, but he cannot destroy fear: "subtle, indestructible, and terrible, that pervades his being; that tinges his thoughts; that lurks in his heart" (Conrad 155). Once they step away from the laws of their civilization—"something that worked for their safety"—they begin to feel empty; the one thing that "kept the wilderness from interfering with their hearts" is now gone and "hopelessness and savagery" (Conrad 156) begin to encroach on them. In the finale of the two stories, the characters reproach each other's misdeeds, both real and fictionalized, and then take each other's lives in the violence that ensues. After spending several months away from civilization, they "lose their ability to function or even survive once outside the machine" (Rutledge and Tally 11). Edward W. Said writes that this dependence on "the safety of their surroundings" lays them open to "a terrifying invasion by the unknown" (98); the mechanisms of "social camouflage in which they have placed their unexamined faith" (99) prove to be their undoing.

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One could, of course, conclude from the example of Howard, Kayerts and Carlier that the inclination to moral decay is presented in these texts as something unique to people who are shown in a bad light from the very beginning. The protagonist of *The Lighthouse* is responsible for another man's death, while the two characters from "An Outpost of Progress" are referred to as "two perfectly insignificant and incapable individuals" (Conrad 128); the director of the Great Trading Company goes even further and describes them to the company's servant as "two imbeciles" (127). Despite that, I would argue that these men are not necessarily evil from the onset of the story, but are, in a way, like children themselves, "awakened to the terrible exigencies of individual responsibility" (Black 134). In *The Lighthouse*, Wake says that drinking "keeps them sailors happy, keeps 'em agreeable, keeps 'em calm." Howard responds by concluding that it makes them "stupid." Indeed, society could be compared to alcohol in terms of the impact that it has on people—often pleasant and soothing, yet addictive and potentially harmful to some. These characters all act just like people who are addicted would when forced to stop drinking; at first, they are subsisting on the remnants of the thing to which they are addicted, be it alcohol or civilization with its rules, and then, once sober, they break down, unable to cope with their situation. Society both nurtures and imprisons those who are a part of it, while also providing them with a false sense of security that implodes once they have to tend for themselves away from civilization.

CONCLUSION

To conclude this article, I would like to return to the claim that *The Lighthouse* is a horror film. The importance of classifying it as such—and my decision to do so—does not mean that one could not explore similar themes in a text of a vastly different generic identity. Indeed, the example of "An Outpost of Progress" provides me with an example of a text that does just that yet is neither a film nor a horror. Importantly, however, the genre provides the director with a set of tools that are particularly helpful in bringing to the screen the considerations of human nature, the interest in which Eggers has declared in the interview quoted in opening paragraph of the article. If we once again turn to Carroll's definition discussed earlier in the essay, we will notice that horror is, in its essence, a genre that customarily tackles the question of taboos and cultural categories. It both offers us an insight into how they shape our perception of reality and speculates on what may happen once something (i.e. a supernatural entity of some kind, in this case a horror monster) subverts these categories and facilitates the implosion of the order that has hitherto governed the lives of the characters.

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Unearthly Nature:
The Strangeness of Arbospaces
in Thomas Hardy's *The Woodlanders*

ABSTRACT

Commonly acknowledged as one of Thomas Hardy's most environmentally-conscious literary accomplishments, *The Woodlanders* (1887) provides fertile ground for a stimulating and topical ecocritical debate. The intricate correlation between the natural and the human—indicated by the very title—undergirds the structure of the text and creates unique narrative collisions while simultaneously propelling the development of the plot. The multiple references to the sphere of the paranormal—realized in the passages pertaining to local lore and, most significantly, in the descriptions of the setting—reflect the conflation of superstition and uncanniness, which adds otherworldly overtones to the novel. The article analyzes these qualities insofar as they shape the portrayed landscape—specifically, the woodscape—as a realm whose essence continually balances between the fantastical and the real. It also examines how the natural and human elements are reciprocally subsumed by means of anthropomorphic language and how this occurrence can be interpreted through the lens of intertextuality. By focusing on these rather antithetical concepts, I wish to demonstrate how the boundaries between them are elided, thus preserving an aura of ambivalence that pervades the novel.

Keywords: Thomas Hardy, *The Woodlanders*, supernatural, trees, ecocriticism, arbospaces.

A NOTE ON THE NOVEL

Serialized in *Macmillan's Magazine* from May 1886 to April 1887 and published in three volumes the same year, *The Woodlanders* was identified by Hardy as one of his "Novels of Character and Environment"—a phrase he first used in the "General Preface" to the Wessex Edition of his works from 1912. As Linda Joyce Baker specifies, "environment" in this context is not merely defined as the geographical area inhabited by the characters, but it also encompasses the manner in which those characters adapt to their surroundings (3). Therefore, the intricate correlation between the natural and the human undergirds the structure of the text, which is indicated by the very title. Moreover, Ronald Draper classified this work—alongside *Under the Greenwood Tree* (1872) and *Far From the Madding Crowd* (1874)—as one of Hardy's three pastoral novels, pointing to its faithful depictions of rural life and agrarian culture (47). Interestingly, as noted by Elizabeth Carolyn Miller, such an attempt to classify Hardy's environmental realism can be set against the recent tendency in ecocriticism to reconsider the pastoral as a critical mode (700).

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In fact, many scholars benefit from the thematic profusion of *The Woodlanders* by viewing certain scenes through the prism of the pastoral elegy. Such is the case with David Lodge, who, by referring to the circumstances of Giles Winterbourne's death, remarks how evident the representative qualities of the genre are in the description of nature mourning its carer. Moreover, Lodge mentions the fact that Hardy, being well acquainted with classical Greek literature, must have been equally familiar with the tradition of the pastoral elegy and thus must have consciously incorporated it into his text (26). A similar observation is made by Lesley Higgins, who, in addition, distinguishes the pattern of melodramatic characterization through the distinction between natives and interlopers. This distinction, which can be summarized as a clash between the traditions of the rural and the sophistication of the urban, is easily identified by the reader as the fundamental tension that animates the narrative (115–16). Curiously, it also represents the very essence of the pastoral genre, which relies upon the entrance of courtly, sophisticated strangers into a less complicated, idyllic countryside (Fayen 99).

These remarks testify to the potential for a stimulating and topical ecocritical debate, affirmed by the novel's consideration of ecocentric themes (Blin-Cordon 1). Further, the text's historical context is equally worth considering since, on the one hand, it involves the primarily cultural and aesthetic (not ecological) concept of nature constructed by Wordsworth, while, on the other hand, being confronted with the patrician and elitist approach to both aesthetics and nature, embodied by John Ruskin

(Taylor 879–80). Another layer of complexity which may be explored is the recurring legacy of Darwinism and the fact that, in *The Woodlanders*, a nature sympathizing with the suffering of human beings (expressed in terms of pathetic fallacy) is replaced by one essentially Darwinian, always engaged in a ruthless struggle for survival (Draper and Draper 51). This is why, as noticed by Higgins, the novel is permeated by the author's keen awareness of evolutionary realities, which add a disconcerting subtext of degeneration and extinction that is simultaneously natural and cultural and that consequently reveals a more arcane—or even threatening—facet of Hardyan nature (111). This facet, proper to the sphere of the paranormal, is realized in the passages referring to the local lore and, most significantly, in the descriptions of the novel's setting. Although its presence may seem unimposing or even irrelevant at first glance, it is essential to the full comprehension of the storyline since it constitutes one of its driving forces, shaping the characters' fate and spotlighting their connection to the land that transcends the boundaries of mere agricultural dependence. However, considering how this somewhat haunted reading of the novel's landscape is entrenched in ecocritical theory, it seems apposite to review some of its core premises.

A NOTE ON ECOCRITICISM

Set against the backdrop of the surge in cultural theories, ecocriticism formally emerged in the 1980s as an activist mode of literary studies, deeply rooted in the science of ecology and the ethics of environmentalism, the main purpose of which was to address the environmental crisis of the late 20th century (Remien and Slovic 4–5). As indicated by Greg Garrard, "the widest definition of the subject of ecocriticism is the study of the relationship of the human and the non-human, throughout human cultural history and entailing critical analysis of the term 'human' itself" (5). Further on, Garrard points out the interrelation between ecocriticism and ecology (5), with ecology being understood as a worldview that places emphasis on environmental connectedness (Ghazoul). He also stresses how vital it is for ecocritics to aspire to surmount the two disciplinary boundaries and to consequently form their own ecological stance, which could be then transposed into literature. The interdependence of those scientific fields becomes all the more pertinent if we consider the extent to which ecocriticism arises from the reaction to humankind's alienation from nature, brought about by the disenchantment related to modern science and technology (Remien and Slovic 5). We can therefore observe how the ecocritical movement as such is inextricably linked to various spatial and

societal changes, as well as to the cultural and ideological repercussions that originated from them. Thus, as Dana Phillips pithily puts it, nature viewed through the lens of ecocritical perspective is "thoroughly implicated in culture, and culture is thoroughly implicated in nature" (577–78). In the introduction to *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology* (1996), Cheryll Glotfelty undergirds this commentary by acknowledging that "human culture is connected to the physical world, affecting it and affected by it" (xix). The idea, albeit tinged with a dose of antinomy, is prefigured in Hardy's novel and will be more closely examined in the later part of the article.

When it comes to the literary precursors of ecocriticism, Alice Jenkins emphasizes the importance of Alexander von Humboldt's *Cosmos: A Sketch of a Physical Description of the Universe* (1845–62), since its far-reaching scope and scale reflect the ideal of a unifying, holistic science that would transcend disciplinary boundaries (89). As Jenkins notes, the pillars of Humboldt's proto-ecocriticism reside in his stylistic, generic and historical predilections, amongst which one may single out the act of privileging art that sees human and non-human nature as equally compelling and that does not objectify the non-human by treating it as a mere chattel (92–93). Despite Humboldt's ethically questionable position towards natural exploitation and industrialization, which he considered essential for human progress (96–97), Jenkins admits that the ideological legacy of *Cosmos* to modern ecocritical thought is incontestable. She addresses this statement by arguing that

> [*Cosmos*] develops a nature politics that focuses on the benefits to humans of exposure to and understanding of the natural world. If one of the fundamental goals of modern ecocriticism is to investigate culture in such a way as to prompt change in dealings with nature, *Cosmos*'s position is almost the complement of this: through engagement with nature, humans alter their cultural activities, resulting in greater political and intellectual liberty. Though Humboldt values nature for itself, he values human engagement with nature, whether through scientific or literary means, for a combination of moral and political reasons. (95–96)

The notion of an inextricable link being forged between culture and nature dovetails with the previously mentioned theoretical components of ecocriticism, as well as with Hardy's depiction of the relationship between the woodlanders and their land. Indeed, central to the novel's structure is the way in which the individual perceptions of the trees—together with notional involvement in the landscape—jar and coalesce within Little Hintock, thus shaping the interactions between the characters and fostering the ecology of interdependent perspectives (Burton, "Thomas Hardy" 64).

In addition, human engagement with nature holds a supplementary importance in view of the idea that ecocriticism functions as a reaction to human detachment from place, and that it acts upon the consequent sense of deracination, brought about by the lost sense of closeness with the land (Miller 696). As stressed by Derek Gladwin, the notion of place as such represents a fundamental principle of ecocriticism because of its application in both literary and ecological theories and its eventual contribution to the development of one's own ecological awareness (140). Thus, from the perspective of ecocritical thought, one may infer that there exists a palpable connection between the human self and the natural place, and the disruption of such a connection may result in a feeling of placelessness and an undermined sense of one's own identity for, as Neil Evernden remarks, "[t]here is no such thing as an individual, only an individual-in-context, individual as a component of place, defined by place" (20). Therefore, in order to prevent the loss of the sense of place—and thereby the sense of self—one engages in the extension of the boundary of the self into the environment by imbuing it with life and thus regarding it as animate (19). This practice constitutes the very essence of the literary device called pathetic fallacy, which is elegantly alluded to by Simon Schama in *Landscape and Memory*, where he states: "For although we are accustomed to separate nature and human perception into two realms, they are, in fact, indivisible. Before it can ever be a repose for the senses, landscape is the work of the mind. Its scenery is built up as much from strata of memory as from layers of rock" (6–7). However, what may be now regarded as a literary device meant to reinforce or reestablish the inner connection with the natural world by infusing its elements with one's own feelings, was originally considered by the author of the term as a corruptive and perverse practice.

Indeed, John Ruskin, who developed the notion of pathetic fallacy in 1856, treated it with a fair amount of disdain (as the word "fallacy" may suggest), believing it to result from the indulgence in violent emotions which distort and consequently falsify our perception of external things. For Ruskin, this kind of fallacy is committed by the lesser artist who, instead of espousing the value of faithful artistic representation, dilutes it through his over-emotional perspective (Morris 249). Moreover, the act of succumbing to the siren song of pathetic fallacy eventually renders the human ignorant of meaningful messages that they could have found in natural elements and that would help them relate to the external objects. As such,

> [t]he pathetic fallacy is committed whenever death is preferred to life, whenever destruction is preferred to creation. Morality fails and the fallacy is engendered when man is *isolated* from man or from nature.

> Morbid sensibilities are pathetic because they are partial and thus do not engage "the entire human spirit." Morbid sensibilities are a sign of imbalance and incompleteness. They are pathetic because they turn man to feed upon his own petty substance rather than upon the great and massive substance of nature. (261, emphasis mine)

Therefore, this literary device—in principle closely linked to the central concepts of ecocriticism—may paradoxically result in even further alienation from the natural world, widening the gulf between the falsehood of perception and the truthfulness of objective observation. This is why Ruskin advocated the idea of the individual realizing that neither they, nor nature, may exist only for themselves and that one must learn to feel at home in the realm of nature, which would remain unaffected by human affectation (251). With this sentiment in mind, it is apposite to embark upon a closer analysis of Hardy's text and observe how ecocritical thinking may be detected in a novel published at a time when a form of ecocriticism *avant la lettre* was already being performed by those Victorian scholars who dabbled in a critique of such notions as industrialization, enclosure, and the relationship between literature and science (Taylor 879).

THE LAND AND THE OUTLANDER

Reconsidering the argument provided at the beginning of the article, it now seems all the more plausible to state that the environmental consciousness in Hardy's *The Woodlanders* is conveyed distinctly and powerfully. The fitting affiliation to the novels of "Character and Environment," as well as the text's concise but telling title, attest to a work in which the agrarian spirit of Wessex manifests itself in a particularly palpable way, and in which the influence exerted by the landscape upon its dwellers is preternaturally intense. From the opening scene, which evokes the image of an old coach-road that circles the abundant woods and orchards, the reader encounters a cryptic parallel existing between the setting and the human countenance (Bate 15). Thus, it can be observed that

> [t]he *physiognomy* of a deserted highway *expresses* a *solitude* to a degree that is not reached by mere dales or downs, and bespeaks a tomb-like stillness more emphatic than that of glades and pools. To step . . . from the edge of the plantation into the adjoining thoroughfare, and pause amid its emptiness for a moment, was to exchange by the act of a single stride *the simple absence of human companionship for an incubus of the forlorn*. (Hardy, *Woodlanders* 35, emphasis mine)

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Indeed, a few lines later one learns that the desolation oozing from the land has a tangible impact on those within its vicinity, making the first human figure who appears in the text feel "more alone than before he had emerged upon the highway" (35).

The vividness of the description confirms Constance Rose Nutt's statement about the artistry with which Hardy imparts a sense of melancholy to the landscape (34), but it also casts a different light on the narrative significance of the non-human. In fact, upon closer consideration, the premise of the novels of "Character and Environment" aligns with Evernden's previously cited idea that the individual is contextually defined by place, since their position as its fixed component offers the only existential affirmation (20). This in turn ties in with the practice of animism, based on the act of extending the human self into the environment, thus imbuing it with a certain life force (19). Therefore, a mystical continuity is created, which simultaneously constitutes the essence of Ruskin's theory of imagination, where nature's powers are realized in humans and human emotions are expressed in nature (Morris 257–58). From this perspective, *The Woodlanders* represents a work that, in addition to being environmentally conscious, places this consciousness at the very centre of its structure, with the characters' identities and livelihoods being organically dependent on the land they inhabit and cultivate.

The land impresses itself upon the woodlanders' lives on many levels, primarily in relation to their way of perceiving the world. Indeed, as Jonathan Bate notes, both Winterbourne and Grace are influenced by the landscape differently, for Giles's perception is conditioned by the local rurality, whilst Grace—due to her urban education—holds onto the image of a broad lawn in the fashionable suburbs of a fast city (16). Between this pair of childhood sweethearts comes Fitzpiers, whose main function is to further confound Grace's newly-developed duality of vision. Thus, the clash of her former identity as a village girl with that of an educated but estranged urbanite contributes to Grace's feeling of placelessness. Importantly, her status as an outlander is underscored both by Fitzpiers and by Grace's initial inclination towards him. As such, the doctor's ignorance of the community's history being embedded within the environment differentiates him from the locals, who, by remaining attuned to the collective memory retained by Little Hintock, forged an almost biographical and historiographical acquaintance with its every element (18). The idea of a mystic connection between the inhabitants and their natural habitat could be explained by Schama's comparison of the greensward to a remnant of a pastoral dream, whose enduring myth harbours another landscape, hidden beneath a veneer of contemporaneity (16). This second landscape, condensed within the memory which envelops

the village, is visible to its fixed residents but impenetrable to Fitzpiers, whose sojourn in nature as a modern man is bound to remain superficial and self-motivated (Bate 18).

Furthermore, due to his incongruous social position, the character displays an acute mistrust towards the outside world, evocatively referenced in the passage describing a nocturnal ride through the forest, during which it becomes known that "[t]he surgeon, having been of late years a town man, hated the solitary midnight woodland . . . It often occurred to his mind that if in some remote depths of the trees an accident were to happen, his being alone might be the death of him" (Hardy, *Woodlanders* 145). Were one to place this attitude within a concrete historical context, one could refer to Paul Segal's outline of 4th-century Greece and the prevailing tendency to no longer define people's essence through the otherness of the external elements but rather to enclose it within the confected framework of the *polis*. Hence, by shunning the natural, the 4th century strives to elevate the human and make of it a byword for dignity and excellence (Segal 42–43). Fitzpiers's sense of defencelessness may therefore stem from the fact that the night forest emerges as a spot where the ideological constructions of civilization are mercilessly challenged and their underpinnings suddenly appear alarmingly frangible. This creeping disquietude aligns with Ruth Heholt's concept of haunting which, by creating the collapse of rationality that defies the notion of time, space and dimensionality, effectively befogs what is firm and graspable (Heholt and Downing 7). From this perspective, the woodscape of Little Hintock trespasses Fitzpiers's conventional topological confines. Instead, it symbolizes a land where otherworldly associations constitute the primary token of identification, shaping the transpersonal experience of its permanent inhabitants while continuously perplexing the more pragmatic newcomers, for whom the underlying strangeness eludes all reification.

THE NATURAL AND THE CULTIVATED

Similarly, a fuller exploration of themes essential to Greek literature could inspire a comparison of Little Hintock to Bruno Snell's concept of Arcadia as the "spiritual landscape," where each image acquires a metaphorical meaning and where myth and reality constantly intrude upon each other (306). This analogy is implied by the novelist himself, who on one occasion calls Giles and Grace "two Arcadian innocents" (Hardy, *Woodlanders* 309). However, in Hardy's version of events, the cultivated and rationalistic Fitzpiers irrevocably dissipates the Arcadian "tender feeling" by indulging in carnal relations with Mrs Charmond (Snell 288). In this context, *The*

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Woodlanders is pervaded by the sense of lost nature, pertaining both to Grace's disconnect from her native land and the reader's own realization that the reserved approach of Fitzpiers is more relatable than the unique environmental sensitivity personified by Giles (Bate 20). Thus, the passage in which the young woman gets lost in the woods and is clearly bewildered by the changes that have taken place there during her absence, she exhibits a misguided overfamiliarity with her surroundings and places her in stark contrast to the figure of Giles, described by Hardy as looking and smelling

> like Autumn's very brother, his face being sunburnt to wheat-colour, his eyes blue as corn-flowers, his sleeves and leggings dyed with fruit-stains, his hands clammy with the sweet juice of apples, his hat sprinkled with pips, and everywhere about him that atmosphere of cider, which at its first return each season has such an indescribable fascination for those who have been born and bred among the orchards. (*Woodlanders* 235)

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To account for this recently developed disparity between the two characters, it is useful to consider Hillary Tiefer's remark, according to which Hardy's output is marked by the continual opposition between the characters who are natural—i.e. who adhere to the essential laws of nature—and those who are cultivated and therefore uphold arbitrary laws that equal social expedients (208). In *The Woodlanders*, this contrast is particularly evident, since the arrival of the cultured Fitzpiers becomes the catalyst for the events that will impact the collectivity of Little Hintock. Furthermore, the character itself may be regarded as the embodiment of Hardy's interpretation of the Arnoldian concept of culture, defined as an idea of perfection in doing, thinking and behaving, supposed to ensure peace, joy and serenity in one's life (Jadhav 247). However, Hardy's interpretation of the same concept is more ambiguous and rather unfavourable, since its application leads to the denial of one's true self and deracination from the native soil. Bate finishes this characterization by devising a fitting comparison, according to which the move from the state of nature to that of civility resembles the fall of humanity (16). Despite the ambiguity, typical of Hardy's treatment of various social subjects and positions, it looks like the narrator of *The Woodlanders* also insinuates that the process of self-fashioning and education to which Grace was subjected resulted in a significant spiritual impoverishment and that, because of it, "[s]he had fallen from the gold old Hintock ways" (Hardy, *Woodlanders* 74). Grace's later regretful realization of the fact, encapsulated by the remark that cultivation only brought her "inconveniences and troubles" and that she wished she "worked in the woods like Marty South" further confirms the paradoxical impression that although culture aims towards the betterment of the self, it eventually leads to its nullification (251).

However, Megan Ward offers a more complex interpretation of the polarity between nature and culture, pointing to the fact that *The Woodlanders'* sceptical depiction of cultivation arises from its ambivalence regarding nature. The author clarifies this statement by indicating how the agrarian vision of nature presented in the text is in itself a result of cultivation, here construed as a series of agricultural processes like digging, shaping and planting (867). Indeed, what Hardy himself seems to indicate is that the line between nature and culture becomes virtually indistinguishable in a world considering cultivation successful only when it resembles the nature from which it came (872). In discussing the subject of Victorian ecocriticism, Jesse Oak Taylor also paints nature as an absence that is either potential or imminent, since, from the human perspective, it remains in a state of perpetual withdrawal (881–82).

At this point, one could contest the latter part of the observation made by Peter Remien and Scott Slovic, according to whom the natural world stands as humanity's metaphysical other and is thus opposed to culture (7). Indeed, taking into account Ward's analysis, it appears that one is defined and therefore dependable on the other, and that both concepts exhibit traits of polymorphism, while consistently establishing the characters' relatedness to their surroundings, and creating various narrative collisions between them.

THE NATURAL AND THE HUMAN

Having touched upon the coalescence of nature and culture, it is equally important to examine the overlapping of the natural and the human elements whose depiction in the novel corresponds with the above remark about nature being humanity's metaphysical other. In her article on dendrography, Elizabeth Carolyn Miller evokes the opening phrase of another of Hardy's novels, *Under the Greenwood Tree*, which suggests that "[t]o dwellers in a wood almost every species of tree has its voice as well as its feature" (Hardy, *Under the Greenwood Tree* 33). Analyzing this quotation more profoundly, one notices how, by having recourse to an anthropocentric perspective, Hardy suggests an intimate closeness with the sylvan space which sensitizes its residents to the finest distinctions in the sounds occurring within the forest (Miller 705). Thus, Hardy represents his characters in the same register as the trees, producing an effect of environmental realism rather than of realist individuation (706). Such an affiliation of the human to the arboreal constitutes a thread repeatedly featured throughout the novel. Its presence comes across as especially strong in the chapter mentioning the act of felling, where the

precarious situation of the oaks is imprinted upon them in a disconcertingly human-like manner. Thus, one witnesses how

> [e]ach tree *doomed* to the flaying process was first *attacked* by Upjohn . . . After this it was barked in its erect position to a point as high as a man could reach. If a fine product of vegetable nature could ever be said to look *ridiculous* it was the case now, when the oak stood naked-legged, and as if *ashamed*. . . . (Hardy, *Woodlanders* 166, emphasis mine)

The anthropomorphic language applied to the sylvan realm, as well as the comparison of its fate to that of an executioner's victims (166), imparts a candid sympathy to the passage, while highlighting the tangible impact of agricultural practices upon the environment. In his evocative article, Tzachi Zamir remarks upon trees as being emblematic of sadness and grief due to the ascription of visual similarity between branches and arms raised or lowered in lament (442). Were one to apply this analogy to the above quotation, the characterization of flayed trees as mutilated corpses comes across as all the more piteous. The same haunting emotional charge is masterfully physicalized in Berlinde De Bruyckere's installation *Cripplewood*.

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Importantly, the blending of the human with the natural does not occur one-sidedly, but is in fact reciprocal. As Anna Burton observes, people themselves are rendered arborescent, thus becoming an inherent part of the silvicultural lineage. The confusion of both arboreal and human existences is meant to illustrate the significance of the position that the trees—as well as the land upon which they grow—occupy in the collective psyche of Hintock ("Thomas Hardy" 63). Indeed, Hardy continuously stresses the centrality of this space, presenting it as a repository of multiple narratives and histories that co-exist amidst the boughs, as well as in the residents' minds (Burton, *Trees* 138). This mysterious union seems fully incarnated by the character of Giles, who is endowed with "a marvellous power of making trees grow," ensured by "a sort of sympathy between himself and the fir, oak or beech that he was operating on" (Hardy, *Woodlanders* 93). Indeed, Winterbourne's remarkable sympathy is said to confer to his fingers "a gentle conjurer's touch" (94), which bears a resemblance to magical abilities befitting a sorcerer. Moreover, Giles's visceral presence in the novel may inspire a new way of interpreting the text, one based on the idea of viewing the trees as people and the people as trees, thus recognizing the characters as rooted, budding, leafy and abloom (Cohen par. 6–7).

Another character exhibiting arboreal qualities is Marty South, whose life and work are explicitly centred around the woods. In fact, the so-called "treeness" of Marty constitutes a trait both like and unlike other identity

categories, connecting her to forms of existence with a wider compass than the human (par. 12). In this regard, one could compare Marty to the mythological figure of a hamadryad, since her essence—just like the three-nymph's—appears to be presented as being absorbed by the woodland on a metaphysical level. Such an occurrence is indicated in the scene of the planting, where Marty empathizes with young pines by detecting similarities in their shared fates. The anthropomorphic energy exuded by the saplings makes Marty aware of "'[h]ow they sigh directly we put'em upright, though while they are lying down they don't sigh at all . . . It seems to me . . . as if they sigh because they are very sorry to begin life in earnest—just as we be'" (Hardy, *Woodlanders* 95). Nevertheless, George S. Fayen stresses that Hardy's decision to introduce traces of personality into natural processes should not be construed as a pathetic or consoling fallacy but rather as a sign that the search for familiar features in the outdoor realm testifies to the need for mindful self-identification in a mindless universe (98–99). This statement could be supported by another instance of trees acting similarly to humans, more precisely in the passage about the fierce struggle ensuing between the plants and the saplings. In this case, the humanescent traits are not meant to elicit a form of sympathy, but, instead, to intensify the aura of anxious and ruthless rivalry in a place where

> [t]he Unfulfilled Intention, which makes life what it is, was as obvious as it could be among the depraved crowds of a city slum. The leaf was deformed, the curve was crippled, the taper was interrupted; the lichen ate the vigour of the stalk, *and the ivy slowly strangled to death the promising sapling.* (Hardy, *Woodlanders* 83, emphasis mine)

This exposure of the woodscape's sordid underbelly, together with the cut-throat competition of its components, harks back to Darwin and his reluctance towards the idea of conceptualizing nature as a perfectly fixed image, namely a face whose features can be fathomed and delineated with the utmost accuracy (Willingham-McLain 73).

THE ARBOREAL AND THE ARBO-MYTHICAL

Nevertheless, apart from the more primitive and earthbound descriptions, the novel also displays a more esoteric vision of the woodland, defined by Peggy Blin-Cordon as supernature. In her article on the subject, the author points to the text's insistence on the occult powers which reside in the woods and which contribute to the uncanny atmosphere that pervades it, thus rendering it a liminal space where more receptive denizens can

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feel the presence of the dead, or at least the presence of past lives (4–5). And while for Isabelle Gadoin it is silence that functions as an incorporeal intermediary between the living and the dead (50), such an idea could be extended to the landscape itself, through whose mediumship this inter-realm communication occurs. Hence, the forest provides an essential habitat for ancient pagan myths, like those describing old, hollowed trees as the tombs of gods slaughtered on the boughs and encased within their bark (Schama 16). The description of the Hintock thicket at nighttime fittingly conveys this otherworldliness, seeming to lurk under the guise of "the creaking sound of two over-crowded branches in the neighbouring wood . . . rubbing each other into wounds, and other vocalized sorrows of the trees" (Hardy, *Woodlanders* 47).

The author's conspicuous display of this fixed spectral presence within the forest lays the narrative foundation for a realm which is conducive to the occurrence of unordinary happenings and which therefore imposes upon its residents a suspension of rational thinking. This is suggested in the passage describing one of Little Hintock's contiguous villages, Marshcombe Bottom, as "intensely dark with overgrowth, and popularly supposed to be haunted by spirits" (282). Curiously, a commentary about the supernatural phenomena, made by Hardy himself, discloses the novelist's belief: "[b]etter be inconvenienced by visitants from beyond the grave than see none at all"; Hardy expounded upon this statement, claiming that "[t]he material world is so uninteresting, human life is so miserably bounded, circumscribed, cabin'd, cribb'd, confined. I want another domain for the imagination to expatiate in" (qtd. in Archer 45). Indeed, the eeriness which typifies the descriptions of the Hintock woodland may inspire the impression that, apart from bespeaking writerly finesse, it is meant to reflect the vagaries of fate in deeper and richer hues, such as cannot be found in a purely anthropocentric setting. Moreover, the woodland exposes the arbitrariness of various misfortunes that befall the locals and that cannot be avoided, even through their atavistic practices and traditions. Thus, despite human exploitation, the trees retain their intimidating phantomish essence, by means of which they repeatedly question and undermine civilization's hegemonic hold (Blin-Cordon 6).

As it happens, in the introduction to the novel, Lodge notes that the alliance between the woodlanders and the woods is considerably contingent upon superstition (21). This is adeptly evidenced by the story of Marty's father, John South, and his peculiar apprehension towards an old elm which grows in his garden. When his health begins to fail, South's fear intensifies, eventually convincing him that "the tree 'tis killing me. There he stands, threatening my life every minute that the wind do blow. He'll come down upon us and squat us dead"

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(Hardy, *Woodlanders* 123). Certainly, a striking feature in the passage is the application of a personal pronoun in reference to a (supposedly) inanimate object, all the more testifying to the rootedness of mystical beliefs that subliminally condition the locals' spatial responsiveness. Moreover, the persistence of those beliefs within the community is confirmed by Marty's comment on her father's obsession, according to which "[o]thers have been like it afore in Hintock" (133). In his article on the pervasiveness of folklore in *The Woodlanders*, Peter Robson identifies a variety of fantastical tales that are elicited from the locals and that can "only . . . be accounted for by supernatural agency" (Hardy, *Woodlanders* 168). One of them relates to the genre of folk belief known as the "cockstride ghost," where the spirits of deceased wrongdoers are bound to a specific place—usually a pool or a swamp—from which they can only escape at the rate of one cockstride per year (Robson 88). The fact that the belief is mentioned in the novel by one of the bark-rippers proves that the paranormal is omnipresent and therefore may be detected in every recess of the Hardyan woodscape, provided that one's perception of such happenings is sufficiently honed. Moreover, the idea of these deeply entrenched atavistic impulses serving as topographical anchorage for the denizens aligns with the statement that, at its chimerical core, haunting amounts to an unusually active engagement with places in a given time (Paphitis 4).

Eventually, John South becomes the victim of the old elm, dying from the shock caused by its cutting-down, wrongfully ordered by Fitzpiers. Interestingly, in her richly informative work, *The Long, Long Life of Trees*, Fiona Stafford reveals the pertinence of Hardy's preference for this specific species, pointing to the overlap between its botanical make-up and cultural connotations. Thus, she acknowledges that elms' shallow rooting dangerously predisposes them to falling during strong winds or dropping large limbs without warning. And, touching upon a more artisanal aspect, Stafford remarks that the resistance to rot rendered elms a valuable source of planks for coffins (200–01). The representation of these deathly qualities in the novel, although dismissed by Maxwell Sater as overliteral and therefore risible (100), validates the interpretation of Hardy's trees as individualized entities which can directly impinge upon human lives and consequently expose their disposability.

Nevertheless, the character who gives the impression of being the most affected by what Blin-Cordon defined as "arboreal menace" (4) is Giles Winterbourne. In fact, upon analyzing the poignant—albeit indirectly recounted—scene of his agony on the forest floor, a contrasting vision of nature may be conjured up, such as the one depicted in the Greek myth of Apollo and Daphne. There, the nymph, frantically pursued by

Apollo, finds refuge from her would-be aggressor in the boughs of a laurel tree, into which she is transformed by her father and river god, Peneus. Through this merger of the humanoid and the terrestrial, nature emerges as a divine shelter, able to free Daphne from the violence of Apollo's sexual desire. When comparing the myth's portrayal of the natural world to that contrived by Hardy, one may realize the extent to which the two visions are at odds with one another. Indeed, Hardy's account exposes the inherent indifference of the Hintock woodland, which, while able to intimate a form of attachment to its carer, does not display enough solicitude to bring him succour in the moment of distress and, what is more, remains unfazed by his suffering. Hence, in this case, the fusion with the landscape contains more sinister undertones, since its completion—imposed upon the protagonist rather than being presented as a choice—equals his eventual demise. Therefore, the deplorable circumstances of Winterbourne's death reveal the duality essential to nature which, as observed by Drake, always assumes "a serpent in the Garden" (251). Here, the duality manifests itself in the workings of rain, storm and wind: elements that can never be tamed or propitiated, regardless of the environmental devotion of their victim.

However, a certain disconcerting quality marks these accounts, consequently drawing a parallel between the fates of their protagonists. As it happens, the unions, although circumstantially different in the two stories, can be interpreted as valedictory rites of passage, at the end of which the characters' sense of self is irrevocably stifled. Zamir illustrates this metamorphosis in vividly poetic tones, defining it as an act of stripping individuals of the particularity of their own matter which—due to its irreversible rearrangement—can no longer be registered or welcomed by others (446). Therefore, the attainment of harmony with the natural world comes at the highest price imaginable since in both instances it compels the protagonists to shed their earthly existence, either literally, that is by means of a fantastic physical transmutation, or figuratively, through death.

In conclusion, the woodland depicted in Hardy's novel constitutes a realm steeped in paradox: partially domesticated by agrarian practices but all the while othered by atavistic attitudes and feelings, it casts a spell upon its dwellers, adroitly blurring the distinction between imagination and reality, and therefore rendering the two concepts equally potent and essential to the full comprehension of the narrative. Finally, the presence of the supernatural oddities, alluded to in the descriptions of the novel's setting, confirms the impression that beneath the deceptively benign surface of Hardyan arbospaces thrives a ghastliness whose spectre never ceases to haunt its human denizens.

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The Disnarrated and Denarrated in Eugene O'Neill's *The Iceman Cometh*

ABSTRACT

Drawing on the notions of "disnarration" (telling what did/does not occur) and "denarration" (cancelling or negating what has occurred) as theorized by, respectively, Gerald Prince and Brian Richardson, this paper examines the narrative structure of Eugene O'Neill's *The Iceman Cometh* (1939). We focus on textual details to explain how the disnarrated and the denarrated in O'Neill's play are mostly manipulated as narrative as well as thematic devices to mark the consoling and soothing illusions of the "pipe dreams" which give meaning to the lives of the bar's regulars. Central to our analysis is how the self-deluded tavern loafers, of whom Hickey is a paragon, resort to a whole spectrum of narrative negations because to them truth is too painful to bear. We argue that the use of disnarration and denarration by Hickey and the other characters in the play helps to create an all-protective world of non-being furnished with an illusion of safety and a false sense of contentment masking feelings of fragility and meaninglessness. These narrative features are central, whether we take Hickey to be a character who is genuinely suffering from mental illness or a cunning criminal who has killed his wife in cold blood.

Keywords: Eugene O'Neill's *The Iceman Cometh*, narratology, disnarration, denarration.

INTRODUCTION

Much has been written by literary scholars from many critical perspectives on the arch theme of self-deception in Eugene O'Neill's *The Iceman Cometh* (henceforth *Iceman*). In this essay, we attempt to probe the play's omissions and silences as well as its depiction of dreams, evasions, and distortions of reality, using the critical apparatus of narratology provided through the lens of the insights developed by Gerald Prince in his landmark 1988 essay "The Disnarrated" and Brian Richardson in his seminal 2001 essay "Denarration in Fiction: Erasing the Story in Beckett and Others." Prince's "disnarration" describes events which are not clearly incorporated or embedded in the story's plot while Richardson's "denarration" portrays events of a paradoxical and contradictory nature, which disrupt the logical flow of the story and render it impossible to establish whether or not those events have actually occurred in the story. Obviously, these strategies are cognitively significant as they mean to prevent the story of each character's life from being completely narrated and shared with the reader. In the following pages we will examine how O'Neill attempts to create the effect of lifelikeness through deliberate deployment of "disnarration" as well as "denarration" in his play. We show that his characteristic strategy of negation brings to light his characters' blind search for realizing their true self and vocation.

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It should be noted that the narratological concepts of disnarration and denarration have been extensively discussed in fiction but are far less frequently addressed in relation to drama. Both novels and plays "tell stories," however, and the common ground is there. As the German narrative theorist Manfred Jahn puts it, "a play's text must be read and understood as a piece of narrative fiction before it may be used as (and possibly turns into) a recipe for performance containing 'instructions' by the playwright" (672). Plays, Jahn maintains, "have a narrative world (a 'diegesis'), which is not distinct in principle from any other narrative world" (674). In other words, Jahn further explains, they "have a story and a plot, and even if they do not literally 'tell' their story, tellability and experientiality are dramatic criteria as well as epic ones" (ibid.). O'Neill's *Iceman* should thus be regarded in this context of narration in drama. Moreover, these narratological conceptualizations obviously overlap with Possible Worlds Theory, the more philosophical subcategory of cognitive poetics. Accordingly, our analysis will also take into account this connection. As narrative strategies, the disnarrated and denarrated occur in virtually every narrative; however, they have generally received little scholarly attention in relation to *Iceman* although they seem to be essential to O'Neill's narrative and thematic structure in this particular play.

Iceman has come to be widely acknowledged as one of O'Neill's greatest achievements. The play came into being promptly. O'Neill began writing it in June and completed it in November 1939 in a short span of time (Shafer 172). In his autobiographical plays, including *Iceman*, O'Neill "dramatized his personal family relationships in many and different guises, when his dramatic art seems to have matured to its fullest extent" (Berlin 166). It would, therefore, come as no surprise that the American dramatist has employed the formal narrative strategies of omission and erasure in order to, among other things, disguise, to some extent, his personal life. The play takes place at Harry Hope's, a waterfront saloon and rooming house, on the downtown West Side of New York during the summer of 1912. The hotel was mostly modeled after three dive bars: "Jimmy the Priest's," "the Garden Hotel," and "the Golden Swan Café" referred to as "the Hell Hole" where O'Neill himself became a regular in his late youth. This was a time of personal predicament for the playwright, who experienced heavy drinking, a suicide attempt, divorce, a bout of malaria and convalescence at a tuberculosis sanatorium. The characters in the play resemble those that O'Neill encountered during his difficult times throughout the 1910s (Dowling).

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O'Neill's choice of a bar as the play's setting in fact gives him greater freedom and scope of action to undertake a "trenchant study of human weakness and self-deception" (Grecco 146). Harry Hope's bar is ideal for the central figure of the play, Hickey, who "dis/de/narrates" the story of his life. As Emil Roy explains, "the advantages of Hope's saloon as a place of retreat for Hickey are obvious: no one he knows in his business will ever meet him there," so Hickey can easily misrepresent the truth (300). For Hickey, Hope's saloon is significant as a place of retreat to which he could escape to connect with his old pals. Hickey is both keeping a secret from others and from himself. In the former, misrepresentation of truth occurs as people in the world outside the bar are not likely to meet him there and know about what he has done. In the latter, misrepresentation of truth occurs as the bar is the last resort Hickey has to challenge his perception of love and hate, and to build a case of insanity defense. The play's setting and themes thus seem to yield themselves more unreservedly to the narrative strategies of excision and omission.

Harry Hope's bar is inhabited by a group of drunken "misbegotten" habitués, clinging to their "lying pipe dreams" in order to escape reality. These illusions are nourished by drinking. On the morning when the play begins, the bar's inebriated customers are awaiting the arrival of Hickey for Harry's sixtieth birthday celebration. Finally, Theodore Hickman, the hardware salesman, known as Hickey, arrives towards the end of the first act but unexpectedly starts preaching to them to relinquish their

dreams in order to encounter their "true self." Hickey has newly become a teetotaler and urges the barflies in Act Two to find a "new life of peace and contentment where no pipe dreams can ever nag at [them] again" (O'Neill 144). He thus exhorts many of the drunken derelicts to regain sobriety, leave the bar, and chase after their dreams. In the end, Hickey proves to be a fake saviour. He is the one who had frequently cheated on the faithful Evelyn, has murdered her and possibly feigns insanity to save himself from the death penalty.

From a narratological perspective, here we focus on the role of "disnarration" and "denarration" in their evocations of "possible alternate worlds" or "alternate diegetic worlds." Graphically, the narrative dimensions of the disnarrated and the denarrated in *Iceman* exhort the reader to engage with the fragments camouflaged behind the central narrative. Through these techniques, O'Neill attempts to delve deep into the inner recesses of human nature and show how uncanny its workings are rather than displaying outward appearances. In this way, he throws into high relief his central theme threading all the parts together: "Man lives by illusion, dies by reality" (Walker 145). Through the character of Hickey, O'Neill suggests that humans find solace in life-saving lies and that death is the only way out when such solace is no longer viable.

The most manifest nexus of the deployment of disnarration and denarration in O'Neill's text is the character of Hickey, who displays creative absences and erasures as his dreadful secrets are gradually revealed in the course of the play. In what follows we examine several instances of these narrative acts. These indicate that Hickey's experience must have been much more profound than he might have been prepared for. As Van Hulle notes, "both the strategies of 'dis-' and 'denarration' tend to have a disconcerting effect" (258). Hickey creates his self-image through these narrative tactics: they allow him to consciously twist and deform the reality from which he strives to escape. That is why Hickey, the play's guilt-stricken protagonist, breaks down when he realizes the truth about himself.

THE DISNARRATED

The narratological concept of the disnarrated (in French: *dénarré*), as coined by the American literary theorist Prince, in his essay "The Disnarrated," "covers all the events that *do not* happen but, nonetheless, are referred to (in a negative or hypothetical mode) by the narrative text" (2). To put it most succinctly, Prince's notion of disnarration is "a function of unrealized strings of events" (5). This concept in fact emphasizes how the non-

occurrence of events or acts in a story appears to have a determining role in the development of the narrative sequence. Disnarration, Prince contends, can be expressed by "the narrator and his or her narration," or "one of the characters and his or her actions" (2). It is accomplished through "alethic expressions of impossibility or unrealized possibility, deontic expressions of observed prohibition, epistemic expressions of ignorance, ontologic expressions of nonexistence," and also through "purely imagined worlds, desired worlds, or intended worlds, unfulfilled expectations, unwarranted beliefs, failed attempts, crushed hopes, suppositions and false calculations, errors and lies, and so forth" (3). Thus, the disnarrated can serve numerous different purposes.

In the light of Claude Bremond's demonstration, Prince further elaborates the concept by stating that "every narrative function opens an alternative, a set of possible directions, and every narrative progresses by following certain directions as opposed to others: the disnarrated or choices not made, roads not taken, possibilities not actualized, goals not reached" (5).[1] Every narrative function, according to Prince, involves a bifurcation into a virtual and an actual possibility. Taken as a whole, disnarration as a narrative dimension highlights the proposition that when one narrative path is already taken, the other is excluded. As Robyn Warhol-Down, a feminist narrative theorist, observes in her essay "'What Might Have Been Is Not What Is': Dickens's Narrative Refusals," the disnarrated aspect of a text becomes "a vividly *present absence*, existing at a narrative level somewhere between the text and everything that is left out of it" (49). This narrative negation can be traced back to Jacques Derrida's antagonistically intertwined concepts of the metaphysics of presence and the metaphysics of absence, thereby challenging the separating boundaries between presence and absence.

The experimentation with new techniques of narrative presentation became an integral part of the modernist era as it offered a more substantial degree of flexibility, autonomy, and variation for authors. Likewise, Prince's "disnarration" mainly occurs in modernist narrative, which "more so than any other genre, insists on our confronting and defining the problematic relationship between what is said and left unsaid" (Lindholm 48). Although O'Neill's *Iceman* is not exactly a modernist play, it is a work that, like every play, offers a pool of linguistic and thematic triggers for virtual, unrealized possibilities. As an example of

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[1] Jorge Luis Borges's "The Garden of Forking Paths" (1941) is the prototype example of the narratives of "roads not taken," demonstrating labyrinths of branching plot possibilities which can be overwhelmingly endless. The *fabula* in Borges's story accommodates "the existence of multiple alternative worlds," which as Raphaël Baroni states, "cannot be reduced to mutually exclusive versions" (251).

modern drama, O'Neill's play most notably aims to display "narrative obfuscations" and "a feeling of waiting for something inscrutable" (Krasner 3, 1). The play's central thematic concerns, particularly that of self-deception, constitute the basis for hypothetical sequences of events. Prince illustrates that disnarration has the effect of conjuring up specific and suggestive images and scenarios: "the class of themes that somehow imply the notion 'unrealized' (the theme of missed occasions, lost illusions, unjustified ambitions)" and, more largely, "the class of themes governed by contrasts and contraries (lifelikeness and reality, appearance and being, determinism and freedom, imagination and perception, and so on)" (*Narrative as Theme* 37–38). The disnarrated, then, introduces and develops many themes.

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O'Neill's "pipe dream" bears some similarity with Ibsen's "life lie." O'Neill underlines the Ibsen-inspired concept of "saving lies" or "pipe dreams," as they are called in *Iceman*, that is, "the necessary self-deceptions required to survive life's vicissitudes" (Anderson 199). The cynical Dr. Relling in Ibsen's 1884 *The Wild Duck* utilizes a noun, *livsløgnen*, which is interpreted as the "life lie," or the "the saving lie," or the "lie that makes life possible" (Bailey 2). Hickey resembles Gregers Werle; both attempt to "heal" the life-lies and end up destroying those around them. Nevertheless, O'Neill's pipe dream pertains to all of the characters: "Their pipe-dream selves depend on a mutual validation by the others; this is the internal social contract that shields them from the rapidly changing external world" (Eisen 64). These pipe dreams "are connective rather than collective, not a revolutionary movement so much as the 'hopeless hope' that generates tragic consciousness from its inescapable dialectic of ambition and despair" (Eisen 49). It is the state under which everyone must live—the dream of life is what makes life endurable with all its tragedies and ambiguities, the tonic which makes life brighter.

Drawing upon the conception of tragedy in the classical tradition and Ibsen's social problem plays, O'Neill attempts to describe "the suffering of individuals who are either self-deluded or untrue to their destinies, and his plays gain intensity through a slow stripping away of a character's mask to reveal a core psychic identity" (Anderson 199). O'Neill himself acknowledges "the human need for the saving illusion by restoring the community of Harry Hope's saloon at the end of *The Iceman Cometh*," but he also "leaves the characters in a state of paralysis with Larry, the only enlightened member, recognizing that all they are doing is waiting for death" (Murphy 223). Shattering the dreams of the bar's inhabitants only turns them into despondent, waxen zombies. This kind of living, promised by illusions of hopeless fantasy, does not appear to yield creative or significant outcomes.

The play's disnarrated successions mostly involve those pipe dreams of the denizens of Harry Hope's bar which can only be demystified at the expense of "descend[ing] into states of death-in-life" (Cannon 176). The play opens with Larry Slade, the "Old Grandstand Foolosopher," talking about "the lie of a pipe dream," which is "what gives life to the whole misbegotten mad lot of [them], drunk or sober" (O'Neill 83, 10). Significantly, however, the reader is not informed as to what each character's "pipe dreams" are. The reader is left to wait for Hickey's arrival and, in the meantime, to speculate on what these pipe dreams might be. The fact that they stick to "a single doctrine—the doctrine of Tomorrow—keeping hope alive through the anticipation of significant action on a day which never comes" further opens space for narrative fissures (Brustein 342). The disnarrated gaps in the play propel the story forward to its conclusion, maintain the readers' interest all the while, and allow them to reflect on the narrative.

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In the story world, the barflies are left to wait for Hickey's arrival and, in the meantime, they are at liberty to indulge their own alcohol-ridden fantasies, considering what their present encounter might bring about, as from the very outset everything signals that this visit will be different. Before Hickey appears, Cora, the bar's older prostitute, informs other boarders that she has just encountered him on the street and that he has told her: "I'm just finishin' figurin' out de best way to save dem and bring dem peace" (O'Neill 74). Harry Hope simply ignores it as "a new gag" (74) but he soon admits: "He ain't like the old Hickey! He'll be a fine wet blanket to have around at my birthday party! I wish to hell he'd never turned up!" (88). This time Hickey seems to be quite different from his usual self. The disnarrated gap is here related to "epistemic expressions of ignorance" (Prince, "Disnarrated" 3). By promising to "save" his old drinking companions, Hickey generates a disnarrated gap in the story, which demands to be unraveled in the process of the narrative.

Furthermore, the characters' waiting for Hickey's arrival/appearance signifies that they are going to entangle themselves in the logic of mere appearances throughout the play. O'Neill's tragedy is replete with disnarrated gaps, mainly through focusing on the inclination of all the regulars at Harry Hope's to retreat into alluring reveries, which challenge and distort reality and create alternative visions of reality. Hickey comes into Hope's bar with this pipe dream to induce the "whole family circle of inmates" (O'Neill 36) to fearlessly face the truth about themselves in order to achieve serenity of mind and happiness. From the start, Hickey seems to be operating as a dramatic character, manipulating the others in order to expose them in their habitual lies. He attempts to lead his friends towards a more honest appraisal of themselves (while knowing that this will fail).

In Act Three, he sardonically addresses them: "You can't hang around all day looking as if you were scared the street outside would bite you!" (190). The pipe dreamers seek refuge in a bar which provides an environment most suitable for nourishing and sustaining, in Prince's account of the disnarrated, "purely imagined worlds, desired worlds, or intended worlds, unfulfilled expectations, unwarranted beliefs, failed attempts, crushed hopes" ("Disnarrated" 3). Larry Slade heralds in Act One what destiny lies in store for the vagrants and alcoholic dropouts in the bar. Right at the outset, he represents the boarders at Harry Hope's saloon as being at peace for they have sunk to the bottom; there is no farther for them to go:

> What is it? It's the No Chance Saloon. It's Bedrock Bar, The End of the Line Café, The Bottom of the Sea Rathskeller! Don't you notice the beautiful calm in the atmosphere? That's because it's the last harbor. No one here has to worry about where they're going next, because there is no farther they can go. It's a great comfort to them. Although even here they keep up the appearances of life with a few harmless pipe dreams about their yesterdays and tomorrows, as you'll see for yourself if you're here long. (O'Neill 25)

Larry introduces Hickey in the same act as "a great one to make a joke of everything and cheer you up" (13). Hickey has the knack of disguising facts in favour of pleasing his own companions and lightening the atmosphere up. Hope affirms Hickey's sense of humour in Act One: "Bejees, I can't figure Hickey. I still say he's kidding us. Kid his own grandmother, Hickey would" (86). Similarly, the young former anarchist Don Parritt describes Hickey's humorous ability in Act Two as something unhuman: "There's something not human behind his damned grinning and kidding" (126). Hickey's uncanny humour seems to lie in his deftness in disnarrating. Crucially, he disnarrates the story of his wife, Evelyn, and the Iceman. As Hope discloses in Act One: "Always got a million funny stories. . . . Remember that gag he always pulls about his wife and the iceman? He'd make a cat laugh!" (61). When Hickey says to the "Gang" (76) in Act One that he is "off the stuff. For keeps" (78), Hope hypothesizes: "Sure! Joined the Salvation Army, ain't you? Been elected President of the W.C.T.U.? Take that bottle away from him, Rocky. We don't want to tempt him into sin" (78). From the moment he arrives in the bar, Hickey seems surrounded with an aura of mystery and secrecy, claiming that he has a story to tell. Larry, who suspects that there is a problematic narrative to be pieced together, mentions this state of suspense in Act One: "You're keeping us all in suspense. Tell us more about how you're going to save us" (85). Here "suppositions," in Prince's parlance, can open the way for the disnarrated gap.

In Act Two, the bar's residents are left to speculate from the fragmented evidence of Hickey's story as to what his way to peace might be:

> Beginning to do a lot of puzzling about me, aren't you, Larry? But that won't help you. You've got to think of yourself. I couldn't give you my peace. You've got to find your own. All I can do is help you, and the rest of the gang, by showing you the way to find it. (112)

The bar's denizens stare at Hickey in a state of incredulous, bewildered confusion when he announces that his "dearly beloved wife" Evelyn is dead, but he does not feel any grief, as Evelyn is finally free of "a no-good cheater and drunk" husband and is finally at peace (151). In the penultimate act, Hickey still remains a puzzle that needs to be solved; as Larry puts it: "What did your wife die of? You've kept that a deep secret, I notice—for some reason!" (204). Hickey, who in fact "cheats" the bar's inmates by promising them peace, is an expert in disnarration, filling his speech with "epistemic expressions of ignorance," "unwarranted beliefs," "suppositions and false calculations, errors and lies" (Prince, "Disnarrated" 3). He falsely supposes and calculates in Act Two that he can make the pipe dreamers liberate themselves of "the damned guilt that makes you lie to yourselves you're something you're not, and the remorse that nags at you and makes you hide behind lousy pipe dreams about tomorrow" (O'Neill 147). But his mission is just another pipe dream which readily yields itself to disnarration.

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The fact that Hickey appears as a performer opens the space for disnarration. As Matthew H. Wikander notes, "Hickey is a performer, a salesman, a 'bughouse preacher,' . . . peddling the language of recovery and rehabilitation" (176). When, in the first Act, Hickey points out that he does not need alcohol any more, Harry Hope interprets his teetotalism as a theatrical act: "That sounds more like you, Hickey. That water-wagon bull—Cut out the act and have a drink, for Christ's sake" (O'Neill 80). Hickey is aware that his "brand of temperance" (79) would be taken as sheer performance and tries hard to convince his audience otherwise: "It's no act, Governor. But don't get me wrong. That don't mean I'm a teetotal grouch and can't be in the party. Hell, why d'you suppose I'm here except to have a party, same as I've always done, and help celebrate your birthday tonight?" (80). The fact that Hickey puts on his con act before the dreamers thus invites a chain of suppositions and speculations about him.

Even love is disnarrated in the play. It is presented, as Edwin A. Engel contends, as "an illusion, and all women are bitches or whores" (286). "Palpable and undisguised symbols of this truth," Engel further points out, "are the three prostitutes, the only women to appear on the stage. Yet the

presence of four others is felt: Hickey's wife, Evelyn; Parritt's mother, Rosa; Hope's wife, Bessie; Jimmie Cameron's wife, Marjorie" (286). Thus, the disnarrated gap is here related to "unfulfilled expectations" (Prince, "Disnarrated" 3). The absent women are also disnarrated in the play as they may be misrepresented. As Judith E. Barlow points out: "We do not see the perspectives of that 'damned bitch' Evelyn Hickman, 'that nagging bitch' Bessie Hope, or that 'damned old bitch' Rosa Parritt, except through the eyes of their spouses, lovers and sons" (172). Concerning the absent women, the disnarrated gap is thus related to "suppositions and false calculations, errors and lies," in Prince's terminology ("Disnarrated" 3).

Hickey paints a rosy picture of his marriage; the tension-ridden, love-hate relationship of Evelyn and Hickey is disnarrated until the end as a loving one. A guilt-ridden Hickey murders his ever-forgiving wife for her "insistence on conventional morality" (Barlow 165). Nevertheless, Hickey disnarrates his own shocking confessions at the expense of the confusion and mystification of roomers at Harry Hope's and the audience. Ironically, Hickey's jokes about the iceman turn out to be an attempt to displace his sense of guilt. In one reading Hickey's attempt to convert the daydreamers could be taken as a ruse to build a case of insanity defense as he knows that he will be indicted for his wife's murder. Hickey's disnarration here could be a calculated strategy to avoid a death sentence. However, his disnarration generally stems from his instability.

The question of whether Hickey suffers from mental illness or not is a moot one. He calls police officers and is prepared to go to the electric chair. He transforms his story (of having murdered his wife out of love) when confronted with the lie: he has murdered her out of hate, not love. He murders his wife in a calculated and cold-blooded manner, replacing the pipe dream of his reformation with that of the salvation of the gang at Hope's bar. As such, Hickey's plight could be said to be, in one sense, his failing to think and behave rationally. Believing in an all-invincible rather than a vulnerable self, Hickey confuses love and hatred. His desire for alternatives, evident in his deployment of disnarration and denarration, results from this confusion.

THE DENARRATED

In *Unnatural Voices: Extreme Narration in Modern and Contemporary Fiction*, Richardson discusses modern authors' "continuing desire to 'make it new'" as a "primary motive" behind inventing "novel forms of representing consciousness in fiction" (135). His concept of the "denarrated" descriptions and events is modeled on Prince's concept of the "disnarrated" (Richardson, "Denarration in Fiction" 169). Denarration, Richardson writes, is "an

intriguing and paradoxical narrative strategy that appears in a number of late modern and postmodern texts" (168). It is a type of narrative erasure in which "a narrator denies significant aspects of her narrative that had earlier been presented as given" (168). In the same essay, Richardson considers the simplest example of denarration as "something like, 'Yesterday it was raining. Yesterday it was not raining'" (168). In denarration, the statements are so at odds with each other that the logical continuity of the plot is destabilized. Hence, the readers must decide between contradictory events, but they do not have enough information to determine which events have actually occurred in the story. In Richardson's "more extreme interventions," the narrative negation, like Penelope at her loom, tangibly disentangles the threads of what has been woven within the fabric of the narrative (170). The "narrative world," Richardson postulates in the same essay, "may start to fissure; instead of observing a fluctuating narrator alter descriptions of a stable world, we will see the world being created and recreated anew" (170). The narrative strategy of denarration suggests that a fictional universe is created seemingly out of nothing, then de-created back into nothing.

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Richardson continues that "very little (if anything) is left over after the assaults of textual negation the narrative performs upon itself" (171). He argues that denarrated events fabricate "an inchoate temporality that cannot be analytically reconstructed into any sustained order" (173). He contends that in instances of denarration one can observe "the ontological fragility of the status of much fictional discourse—at any point, the narrator can contradict what has been written, and thereby transform the entire relation between events as well as the way they are interpreted" (173). In fact, Richardson declares that literary fictions may first narrate and then denarrate events by revising the narrative over and over; perform cancelation or de-creation of characters and events, and then bring them back to life on the page; they may escape final fixed and stable endings; or offer forking narrative paths.

As Richardson points out, these narrative instances of denarration have much in common with what Brian McHale has designated in *Postmodernist Fiction* as "'Worlds under Erasure'" ("Denarration in Fiction" 171). As McHale contends, it is possible to find fragmented narrative as a tendency in modernist narratives as well: "Narrative self-erasure is not the monopoly of postmodernist fiction, of course. It also occurs in modernist narratives, but here it is typically framed as mental anticipations, wishes, or recollections of the characters, rather than left as an irresolvable paradox of the world *outside* the characters' minds" (101). Contrary to postmodernist narratives, McHale suggests that "the canceled events of modernist fiction occur in one or other character's subjective domain or subworld, not in the projected world of the text as

such" (101). As such, the world of the text is not destabilized in modernist narratives, but the slippages among wishes, recollections, or anticipations only occur in the characters' minds.

Hickey comes to Harry Hope's bar to denarrate the story of the barflies' pipe dreams and to strip the dreamers of their alcohol-fuelled illusions. He exhorts each of the bar's inmates to abandon their pipe dreams, which hold them prisoners in the bar, and to risk the reality outside. Hickey says to the drifters in the first act: "Just stop lying about yourself and kidding yourself about tomorrows" (O'Neill 81). Hickey purports to liberate them of their pipe dreams so they can "[r]est in peace. There's no farther you have to go. Not a single damned hope or dream left to nag you" (86). The barflies are already at peace. They are content. Hickey assumes that he just needs to provoke them to action; he needs to "save" them in order to confirm that he was right to murder Evelyn. Hickey denarrates not only the story of their "pipe dreams but also their close friendships" (Floyd 268). At one point in the first act, he even denarrates his own mission: "I was only kidding Cora with that stuff about saving you. No, I wasn't either" (O'Neill 81). Hickey's first statement to Cora is immediately negated by the second, hence the possibility of the first statement becoming a consistent part of the narrative is undermined. Moreover, during the course of the play, "his most cherished illusion—that he loved Evelyn" is denarrated as well (Voglino 82). With the declaration of his insanity, whether genuine or feigned, Hickey denarrates all his sermon-sounding admonishments to the bar's inhabitants about facing their true selves. The denizens of Harry Hope's saloon immediately seize on this opportunity: "They can return to their pipe dreams in peace. There is still a hope in the world" (Chaturvedi 275). Thus, the story of their pipe dreams can be narrated once again. He even figuratively denarrates himself from the very point he appears in Harry Hope's bar, as is evidenced in Cora's remark in Act Two: "When he forgets de bughouse preachin', and quits tellin' yuh where yuh get off, he's de same old Hickey" (O'Neill 110). One can infer that right from the very moment Hickey appears in the bar he vacillates between being "old Hickey" and striving to act like a "bughouse preacher."

In Act Two Hickey proclaims that he does not give a damn about either life or death since he has divested himself of all his "pipe dreams" and exhorts his old pals to liberate themselves too: "Then you'll know what real peace means, Larry, because you won't be scared of either life or death any more. You simply won't give a damn! Any more than I do!" (116). Nevertheless, when he is about to be arrested in the final Act of the play, he starts pleading insanity to save himself from the death penalty: "Yes, Harry, of course, I've been out of my mind ever since! All the time I've been here! You saw I was insane, didn't you?" (243). Then, however, in his penultimate speech in the final Act, he narrates his earlier story, declaring that he does not give a damn

about life now that his illusion—that he killed his wife out of love—has been shattered: "God, you're a dumb dick! Do you suppose I give a damn about life now? Why, you bone-head, I haven't got a single damned lying hope or pipe dream left!" (245). Nevertheless, Hickey's confession of insanity denarrates his earlier claim in the play, when he convinces Larry in Act Two that he was "too damned sane" (117). Therefore, Hickey gets trapped in a vicious circle of narration, disnarration, and denarration throughout the play's plot, until he is led out of O'Neill's play by the two detectives, Moran and Lieb. Hickey is the one who ends each of the first three Acts of the play but when he is eventually ushered out of the tragedy, the last Act is ended with enthusiastic jeering chorus: "'Tis cool beneath thy willow trees!" (240). The thematic line "The days grow hot, O Babylon! 'Tis cool beneath thy willow trees!" while it simultaneously "reinforces the connotation of the title," denarrates the very words of Scripture "wherein the warm, loving bridegroom of the Bible is replaced by the cold, profane iceman of death" (Frazer 1). So, Hickey's plans for "peace and contentment" lead only to disillusion and despair, and he turns out to be the Iceman of the play's title, or Death.

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Hickey further denarrates himself, when his mission gradually becomes clear in the process of the narrative. He claims in Act One that "[j]ust the old dope of honesty is the best policy—honesty with yourself, I mean. Just stop lying about yourself and kidding yourself about tomorrows" (O'Neill 81). He promises to the bar's regulars that by divesting themselves of "lying pipe dreams," they can be raised to a position in which they can live an honest life. Nevertheless, he denarrates himself at the very moment he lies to himself and other boarders about the main reason for killing his wife, Evelyn. Therefore, his preaching loses its edge upon the pipe dreamers when the real motive of his own act of murder is revealed. In Act Four, once Hickey has in effect "killed" the drama, he thoroughly steps into the role of dis/de/narration. First, at the end of his sudden, shattering burst of confession in the final Act, Hickey proclaims that he murdered his wife out of love and later in his next speech, he again affirms his cherishing illusion: "There was love in my heart, not hate" (227). Through Hickey's long monologues in the final act, the barflies notice that he has quite conceivably fabricated the whole story. He insists that he is sincere about his love for Evelyn and Evelyn's love for him:

> I suppose you think I'm a liar, that no woman could have stood all she stood and still loved me so much—that it isn't human for any woman to be so pitying and forgiving. Well, I'm not lying, and if you'd ever seen her, you'd realize I wasn't. It was written all over her face, sweetness and love and pity and forgiveness. (238)

But when, in the same speech, Hickey states that he has torn Evelyn's picture, he displays the first signs of unreliability (238). In his next long monologue, Hickey denarrates himself, stating that he killed his wife out of hatred, and that he actually hated and despised her:

> Christ, I loved her so, but I began to hate that pipe dream! I began to be afraid I was going bughouse, because sometimes I couldn't forgive her for forgiving me. I even caught myself hating her for making me hate myself so much. There's a limit to the guilt you can feel and the forgiveness and the pity you can take! (239)

His next disclosure in the final Act is the most problematic one, since it seems that he vacillates between loving and hating his wife—narrating and denarrating the vicious circle of love, hate, and then love again. He first displays signs of love, stating that he killed Evelyn "to give her peace and free her from the misery of loving [him]," then he suddenly reveals the terrible truth that he really harbored resentment against the "damned bitch" (241). At the end of his terrible confession, Hickey again denarrates the hate story: "No! I never—" (242).

Thus, in the midst of dis/de/narrating how he came to murder his wife, "Hickey inadvertently comes upon the truth that he has not killed her out of mercy and kindness to liberate her from the perpetual disappointment of her dream of reforming him" (Alexander 57). Rather, as Doris Alexander notes, "he has killed her out of the suppressed rage that has grown in him during the years of unbearable guilt and self-loathing her endless forgiveness of his periodical alcoholism has made him feel" (57). Laurin Porter asserts that Hickey's hatred (of himself and of Evelyn) has encouraged him to transform his own drinking companions into converts in order to mitigate his own guilt about killing his wife. "His anger in the face of Evelyn's pipe dream, his resentment at her attempt to make him over in her own image—these are the furies that have pursued Hickey to this moment of truth" (Porter 21). But this is an appalling truth he cannot tolerate. "Rather than confront his deep hatred for Evelyn, he falls back on the comforting delusion of insanity, even when it means allowing Harry and the others to reclaim their own pipe dreams" (Porter 21). Hickey cannot confront the gruesome truth of his hatred for Evelyn. He concludes that he must have gone insane if he had killed her and addressed her as a bitch. He denarrates himself this time once more when he affirms his love for her by attesting to his own insanity: "No! That's a lie! I never said—! Good God, I couldn't have said that! If I did, I'd gone insane! Why, I loved Evelyn better than anything in life! . . . Boys, you're all my old pals! You've known old Hickey for years! You know I'd never" (O'Neill 242). Hickey thus resorts to his old self when he narrates his love for Evelyn.

Curiously, Evelyn does not appear in the play and is presented entirely through her husband's descriptions of her. Almost all the other figures in the play are paired with another so that the stories they narrate can be verified/witnessed. But no one has ever met Evelyn. Therefore, Hickey can narrate, disnarrate, and denarrate to his heart's content, since no one knows otherwise. Evelyn might be much more like Bessie, Hope's wife, or Marjorie, Jimmy's wife, who are portrayed more three-dimensionally, although they do not appear either. One can assert that Hickey has fabricated the story of Evelyn to account for what he did. And the story is all retrospective, constructed on his walk from Astoria to the downtown West Side of New York—as a means to give grounds for his action. Finally, in his last words on stage, Hickey once again reiterates the illusion of his love for Evelyn, before being ushered out by the two detectives. "All I want you to see is I was out of my mind afterwards, when I laughed at her! I was a raving rotten lunatic or I couldn't have said— Why, Evelyn was the only thing on God's earth I ever loved! I'd have killed myself before I'd ever have hurt her!" (246). In denarrating himself once again, Hickey did not murder himself and instead shot his wife in her sleep and left her body in the bed.

Barbara Voglino opines that one encounters "three different Hickeys" in his three last successive speeches: first, "a mentally unstable person babbling about dying and meeting his wife," then "a clear-sighted man tortured by the merciless truth that confronts him," and finally "a dreamer struggling to hold on to his most cherished illusion at any price" (84). "The composite picture that emerges from these kaleidoscopic shifts of personality," adds Voglino, "is that of a man teetering on the edge of insanity" (84). Harry Hope takes advantage of Hickey's apparent insanity to avoid confrontations with the truths that he and his companions had been made to see about themselves. They no longer have to swallow the "bitter medicine, facing [themselves] in the mirror with the old false whiskers off," as Hickey asserts in Act Two (O'Neill 116).

The down-and-out residents of Harry Hope's bar claim that they knew Hickey must have been insane but acted otherwise to kid him along and humour him. Hope contends:

> We've known him for years, and every one of us noticed he was nutty the minute he showed up here! Bejees, if you'd heard all the crazy bull he was pulling about bringing us peace—like a bughouse preacher escaped from an asylum! If you'd seen all the damned-fool things he made us do! (244)

Hickey, a character previously "enslaved to two pipe-dreams: that he killed his wife out of love, and that he can 'save' his old cronies," finally seems to cling to a new illusion (Morgan 345). Alexander argues that all of the bar's

inhabitants, except Parritt and Larry, admit "Hickey's newest pipe dream that he had gone crazy in that moment of naked hatred because by doing so they can explain away as humoring a madman their futile attempts to enact their dreams in a real world" (57). As Julia White notes, Hickey was in fact "swallowed up by the magnitude of the task that he had proposed for himself" (119). Hickey is overcome by the unbearable weight of the missions he has assigned to himself. He eventually accepts that his pipe dreams are only pure fantasy as he cannot convert his own companions into sober allies, and he has to face the bitter reality that he killed his wife out of hate. As his pipe dreams are denarrated and their paradoxical and contradictory natures are revealed, Hickey is led out of the play. Hope finally negates the new Hickey and remembers only his old comrade: "We'll forget that and only remember him the way we've always known him before—the kindest, biggest-hearted guy ever wore shoe leather" (O'Neill 251). In this way the new Hickey is denarrated out of the world of the bar's inmates.

CONCLUSION

O'Neill's *Iceman* is characterized by narrative strategies of omission and elision. The narrative techniques of disnarration and denarration are closely interwoven with the themes of pipe dreams and self-deception in the play. By employing these narrative dimensions, O'Neill augments the suspense—a crucial element in the play—and helps craft the plot. Furthermore, these narrative techniques work to psychologically probe the characters, especially Hickey, a self-deceiving, potentially deluded or deranged man who has radically misconstrued his homicide as an act of self-sacrificial love. Hickey's many instances of disnarration and denarration reveal his complex, guilt-ridden character. They display the struggle of an angst-ridden protagonist to deal with his plight. As the play moves towards its end, the bar's inmates seem to try to lead the new Hickey out of the play so that they can resume their pipe dreams once more. O'Neill's overall style, marked by such techniques, uncannily fits the themes of illusion, self-deception and love-hate vicious circles in which his characters are trapped.

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International Language Poetry: Radical Poetics in Charles Bernstein and Andrzej Sosnowski

Abstract

The article discusses two linguistic poetry projects—that of the American poet Charles Bernstein and that of the Polish poet Andrzej Sosnowski. The main focus is on those poems by both poets which draw inspiration from the early modernist tradition of avant-garde and experimental literature. At the same time, the keystone of both works reveals itself to be—in reference to Ezra Pound's poetic project—the belief that a poem is not so much a record of the poet's experiences and emotions, but rather a distinct field capable of effectively assimilating and absorbing various elements (such as vocabularies, language styles, discourses). In this light, when closely examined, Bernstein's and Sosnowski's poems emerge as a late-modern attempt to contain the oversimplified, ideologized images of contemporary reality within an effectively polyphonic poetic text. This is because the author attempts to demonstrate that a difficult poem, employing avant-garde techniques, does not have to be merely a sterile formalist exercise. Instead, innovative poetic practices continue to have an important role, particularly if we shift our focus from political and journalistic declarations to the politicization of form. Poetry that still seeks stylistic and formal innovations can suggest alternative approaches to readers regarding the oversimplified methods of shaping social formations.

Keywords: radical modernism, avant-garde, Charles Bernstein, Andrzej Sosnowski, difficult poetry.

One of the most vividly recurring themes in the description of contemporary poetry is the so-called controversy surrounding difficult poetry (see Fink and Halden-Sullivan). This issue is fueled by numerous declarations and manifestos written between the "first utopian, optimistic phase" of the "Modernist era" (during which the greatest literary inventions of our time were born; here, I am primarily referring to collage, simultaneity, free verse and verse-prose combinations, genre-mixing, indeterminacy of image and syntax), and the present day.

This contemporary context continues to differentiate mainstream poetry, known for its clarity and accessibility, from avant-garde poetry that engages in experimental techniques, ironic undermining of symbolic structures, and other formal gestures that draw the reader into a playful co-creation of meanings. However, whereas mainstream poetry has its fixed conceptualization (mainly based on the rhetoric of emotion, and the romantic provenance of the poetic expression theory), discussions of the reasonable conceptualizations of difficult poetry still remain current (see Fink and Halden-Sullivan).

This essay aims to provide a brief critical reflection on categories such as innovation, and radical/difficult poetics. However, this reflection seeks to avoid the pressure of absolute innovation and originality, as Derek Attridge previously pointed out in his famous book titled *The Singularity of Literature* (see chap. 3). Therefore, it is crucial to make some distinctions between categories.

The traditional exploration on the topic of literary innovation in literary studies—adopting the perspective of questioning the legitimacy of referenced terms (such as literary experiment, innovation, radical and difficult poetics)—produces both local terminological proposals narrowed down to the examination of isolated phenomena and very general definitions. For example, in the introduction to his classic study *Poezja eksperymentalna* [*Experimental Poetry*], Jacques Donguy outlines fundamental and general characteristics, defining experimental poetry as "all language exploration being in opposition to the poetry that undertakes and develops forms inherited from the past" (7, translation mine). However, such a broad definition is not adequate for discussing the history of recurring debates on the role of innovation as the basic narrative principle of literary studies. The terminological confusion I have discussed so far proves to be a complex problem that has been debated numerous times. Over the course of this enquiry, I will touch on several aspects and motifs within those debates.

Firstly, revising traditional notions of invention, innovation emerges as a philosophical investigation, a definitional excursion. Derek Attridge attempts to make a clear distinction between originality (closely related to

novelty and the act of creation—bringing into being of something new to the creator) and invention. He defines the experience of originality as "a powerful and pleasurable element in our . . . enjoyment of a poem" (41), as one of the aspects of innovation. He points out that "invention possesses originality of the fullest kind . . .; it is a new deployment of materials that can be both imitated and developed, . . . challenged" (42). So, innovative work marks both a significant departure from the norms of the cultural matrix and a capacity to incorporate cultural materials. The singularity of a cultural object turns out to be a particular configuration of general properties that is able to "go beyond the possibilities pre-programmed by a culture's norms" (63). Attridge claims that we recognize the unique configuration of language and the individual deployment of rich cultural materials as inventive work.

Secondly, the debate on innovation ultimately becomes a dispute about postmodernism. In her book *Radical Artifice*, Marjorie Perloff engages in an interesting debate (Perloff herself was often associated with postmodern critique) with Fredric Jameson's postmodern position, primarily with his texts collected in the book *Postmodernism, Or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*. Jameson argued for the modern necessity of pastiche as the only possible strategy of writing: "[I]n a world in which stylistic innovation is no longer possible, all that is left is to imitate dead styles, to speak through the masks and with the voices of the styles in the imaginary museum" (Jameson 17–18). In this narrative framework, characterized by a sense of decline typical of apocalyptic discourse practiced by postmodern critics, the appeal to the legacy of the avant-garde is doomed to fail as it represents an ideologically contaminated attempt to revert to the category of innovation. However, Perloff stubbornly refuses to reject that category.

Therefore, thirdly, a recall of the category of invention and innovation is both risky and necessary. In her essay "After Language Poetry," Perloff notices the danger of continuous momentum towards innovation; permanent experiment can easy fall—she writes—in the "stylistic fixation" trap (17). However, she maintains the category of innovation primarily through its association not so much with "novelty," but with "each time specificity and difference" introduced by a poem (16–17). This allows the critic to track—as she writes—the "brilliant references" (34). Therefore, emphatically, aesthetic categories do not have a descriptive nature. Such terms as experiment, innovation, radical/difficult poetics, avant-garde, radical modernism, poetics of indeterminacy—all play the role of a communication framework for the detailed, scrupulous analysis of innovative literary texts.

Detailed historical, literary, and philosophical deliberations should ideally be accompanied by more practical insights. Charles Bernstein

argued that a "difficult poem" is a nuisance both to the reader and to the author himself, while at the same time being capable of evoking truly "enriching aesthetic experiences" (Bernstein, *Attack of the Difficult Poems* 3). The poet, who describes himself as "the author of, and a frequent reader of, difficult poems" (3), even compiled a humorous checklist for readers to determine if they were dealing with a difficult poem.[1] However, behind these jocular remarks is the fundamental realization that the problem of a poem that is not merely a tool for facilitating communication and building an understanding with the reader (and, as Bernstein notes, this has probably only been achieved by the most popular American poet Billy Collins) is, in fact, the problem of all modernist poetry. The poet even hints at a specific date, the year 1912, when the outbreak of the epidemic of difficult poetry took place. This turning point is probably primarily linked to the beginnings of the imagism movement (which were reconstructed, for example, by Marjorie Perloff in her text "After Free Verse: The New Nonlinear Poetries"[2]). In this sense, when reading poems written in the 20th century (and the early 21st century), one has no choice but to accept this peculiar aesthetic experience (as mentioned above). Bernstein leaves no doubt in this regard, writing that "[d]ifficult poems are normal" (Bernstein, *Attack of the Difficult Poems* 4). The language poetry projects examined in this essay are part of this modernist, 20th-century tradition.

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DEFINITIONS OF LANGUAGE POETRY . . . *IN USE*

In 1981, Charles Bernstein wrote: "[W]e are initiated by language into a (the) world, and we see and understand the world through the terms and meanings that come into play in this acculturation, coming into culture where the culture is the form of a community, of a collectivity. . . . words have meaning . . . *in use*" (Andrews and Bernstein 60). This provides a good starting point for rethinking language-oriented or language-centered poetry. The term "language poetry" has two principal meanings in my essay, related to the context of American poetry in the 1980s and also Polish contemporary poetry, accordingly related to Charles Bernstein's and

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[1] See: "Are you reading a difficult poem? How can you tell? Here is a spelling checklist of five key questions that can help you to answer this question: 1. Do you find the poem hard to appreciate? 2. Do you find the poem's vocabulary and syntax hard to understand? 3. Are you often struggling with the poem? 4. Does the poem make you feel inadequate or stupid as a reader? 5. Is your imagination being affected by the poem?" (Bernstein, *Attack of the Difficult Poems* 3–4).

[2] See Perloff "After Free Verse" 141–46.

Andrzej Sosnowski's poetry.[3] It is also worth emphasizing the prepositional attitude of my title for two reasons. Firstly, I am referring to a genealogical prospect that prompts me to consider certain concepts with the aim of demonstrating a continuity of late avant-garde poetics, a continuity which leads from late avant-garde poetics to the poetic experiment in contemporary poetry. This comparison, to put it most concisely, is essential for understanding the poetry emerging in the 1990s and in the 21st century—both the poetry of programmatic nonreferentiality, and *poems that defy reader expectations*.[4] Secondly, we need some basic facts. In the 1980s Charles Bernstein published five volumes of poetry, and also co-edited *The L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E Book* (1984) with Bruce Andrews. At the turn of the 1980s and 1990s, Andrzej Sosnowski was studying at the University of Western Ontario and was aiming to complete his doctoral thesis dedicated to the poetry of Ezra Pound. He never finished it but became a poet highly influenced by, among others, American poetry of the 1980s and certain strands of Anglo-American poets (from Pound to John Ashbery and John Cage). Marjorie Perloff describes this strand as the "anti-Symbolist" mode of indeterminacy, of literalness and free play.[5] Sosnowski is also the translator of the poetry of Pound, Ashbery and Cage into Polish.

The first text of *The L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E Book* titled "Repossessing the Word" informs us as follows:

> L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E started as a bimonthly magazine . . .
> we have emphasized a spectrum of writing that places its attention

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[3] In this sense, the aim of my work is to make late modernism poetics less centric, and to produce the diversification of modernism's places (Mao and Walkowitz 739). For this reason, I would like to compare two language poets—Charles Bernstein and Andrzej Sosnowski (whose work appeared for the first time in the book form in English in 2011—book entitled *Lodgings*, translated by Benjamin Paloff), poets of special sensitivity to the language pool.

[4] Marjorie Perloff describes this kind of "the new poetic" as "a period style that exhibits specific features" (see *Unoriginal Genius* 7–9).

[5] See: "[W]hat we loosely call 'Modernism' in Anglo-American poetry is really made up of two separate though often interwoven strands: the Symbolist mode that Lowell inherited from Eliot and Baudelaire and, beyond them, from the great Romantic poets, and the 'anti-Symbolist' mode of indeterminacy or 'undecidability,' of literalness and free play, whose first real exemplar was the Rimbaud of the *Illuminations*. . . . We cannot really come to terms with the major poetic experiments occurring in our own time without some understanding of what we might call 'the French connection'—the line that goes from Rimbaud to Stein, Pound, and Williams by way of Cubist, Dada, and early Surrealist art, a line that also includes the great French/English verbal compositions of Beckett. It is this 'other tradition' (I take the phrase from the title of a poem by John Ashbery) in twentieth-century poetry" (Perloff, *The Poetics of Indeterminacy* vii).

primarily on language and ways of making meaning, that takes for granted neither vocabulary, grammar, process, shape, syntax, program, or subject matter. . . . Focusing on this range of poetic exploration, and on related aesthetic and political concerns, we have tried to open things up beyond correspondence and conversation. (Andrews and Bernstein ix)

The term "language poetry" relates to the death of the poetry ("as we know"; see Messerli 1)—so there is a pressing need for expansion. These introductory declarations prompt a reconsideration of the status of poetry in social, political and aesthetic aspects. And finally, language isn't a transparent medium of the poem, but the matter of the poet's close attention (from subject to shape patterns). All these problems, in my opinion, are common to basic declarations of both American and Polish language poets.

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However, it is worth discussing the question of the pleonastic nature of these statements, pleonasm being the use of more words or word-parts than necessary for effective expression. What does the name Language poetry really imply? Isn't all poetry made of language? Or is "poetry . . . a place to explore the constitution of meaning, of self, of groups, of nations,—of value" (Bernstein, *My Way*—chap. "The Revenge of Poet-Critic, or The Parts Are Greater Than the Sum of the Whole")?

It means a resistance to the illusion of language as a transparent medium; it means a resistance to "the poetry primarily of personal communication, flowing freely from the inside with the words of a natural rhythm of life, lived daily" (Bernstein, "Stray Straws" 39). It means, as Marjorie Perloff clearly points out, a resistance to the generic "sensitive" lyric, to the mode of the expression of a particular subject (see *21st-Century Modernism* 158–60), to the still vital, Symbolist mode. "The question, What is Language poetry? has already inspired a number of definitions, some of them useful in a limited sense, some of them borderline silly" (15), Linda Reinfeld noticed. However, the pleonastic definition of so-called "language poetry" can't be the normative one. It should rather be *a matter of comparative degree*. And that is why I have chosen an active, process-oriented claim: "Making the structure of meaning in language more tangible and in that way allowing for the maximum resonance for medium" (Bernstein, "Semblance" 115). This statement has more practical value than other historical epithets (such as "language-centered writing" or "language-oriented poetry").

Bernstein and Sosnowski are poets who are especially sensitive to the language pool. "Special" here signifies a heightened sensitivity to language compared to poets of the generic "sensitive" lyric, and the expression of

a particular subject. In this sense, Andrzej Sosnowski in his early essay titled "'Apel poległych' (o poezji naiwnej i sentymentalnej w Polsce)" ["'The Roll Call of the Fallen' (On Naive and Sentimental Poetry in Poland)"] points to the urgent necessity of renewing interest in the language pool. According to Friedrich Schiller's influential distinction between the sentimental poet and the naive poet, Sosnowski describes Polish contemporary poetry on the threshold of the 21st century. If Schiller's naive poetry is based on the assumption that a union between form and content (gratifying sense and totality) is unproblematic, we can point towards two centres of such a "classical" model. Late volumes of the so-called Old Masters (poets born in the early part of the 20th century, e.g., Czesław Miłosz, Zbigniew Herbert, Wisława Szymborska—two of whom were honoured with the Nobel Prize in Literature) were at the very centre of readers' interest and critical debates as well. Their poems appealed to metaphysical perspectives and constituted an independent voice in their poetic proclamations. In this perspective, the most influential poets of the later generation (poets born in the 1960s, e.g., Marcin Świetlicki, Jacek Podsiadło) could have also been called "naive" due to their basic confidence in the immediacy of a particular existence within the poem. A common goal was the expression of authentic existence, delivering clear information to readers. Schiller's alternative was the sentimental poetry, which rejected the "naive" assumption that the sign can completely disappear in what is signified. In this perspective, the Polish poetry scene after 1989 was altered by poets such as Andrzej Sosnowski, for whom—as sounds familiar—"the sign not only fails to archive union with what it signifies, but also openly set adrift amid a swarm of other signifiers" (Rasula 90).

Apart from the characterization of the literary process in the last decades of Polish poetry, an interesting aspect of Sosnowski's essay is the vocabulary used to formulate the programme of the new linguistic poetry. The poet mainly associates it with the avant-garde impulse. When describing the atmosphere of the late 1980s and early 1990s in Poland, he complains about the "ethical determination" inherited from the last decade of confinement behind the Iron Curtain, which led to the marginalization of the avant-garde movement in Polish literature. On the other hand, Polish contemporary poetry has a chance of returning to the "excesses of the avant-garde" (Sosnowski, "'Apel poległych'" 23, translation mine). It is worth emphasizing that apart from Bernstein, the above-mentioned programme of linguistic poetry, which is supposed to represent a return to the tradition of radical modernist poetics, is also acknowledged by Sosnowski, but only to a certain degree. The poet claims that the poem should be as risky as possible.

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ABSORPTION (CHARLES BERNSTEIN)

Does Bernstein's poetry "really have a place in the great modernist tradition?"—Marjorie Perloff poses this question at the beginning of her analysis of the works by the author of *Recalculating* in her book *21st-Century Modernism* (173). Clearly, Charles Bernstein's poems do not provide a single, dogmatic response to such a question. However, an early essay-poem, "Artifice of Absorption" (written in 1987 and published in a separate book in 1988, later reprinted in *A Poetics* in 1992), may provide important clues in this respect. The work opens with passages dedicated to deliberations on the difference in sensitivity to the structure of meaning; poets adhering to the lyrical norm prevalent in the 20th century, as Bernstein argues, were willing to sacrifice formal complexity for the sake of explicitness, clarity of thought and message in the poem (in other words, they were sacrificing the form for the sake of content). Bernstein, meanwhile, proposes the stance of an intense sensitivity to the formal organization of the poem. One of the passages from "Artifice of Absorption" reads: "to create a more powerful / ("souped up") / absorption than possible with traditional / . . . techniques" (Bernstein, *A Poetics* 59).

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The poet elaborates that while a poem representing the dominant norm of lyricism will aim to achieve a consistent result through the coherence of the poetic narrative (usually focused on a single topic, motif, expression of the feelings and thoughts of the subject), in a poem characterized by "a more powerful . . . absorption," a field absorbing different elements is produced at various levels of the organization of the message (lexical, syntactic, intertextual references, etc.). At the same time, the various elements assimilated and absorbed by the poem do not have to produce any coherent message. The goal is rather to produce an effect of contradictoriness, multiplicity, and polyrhythmicity.

The question is as follows: what techniques can provide "a more powerful . . . absorption"? I would like to consider this question by reading the central poem of *Controlling Interests* (1980), "Standing Target." At the beginning, I quote two first lines: "Deserted all sudden a all / Or gloves of notion" (Bernstein, *All the Whiskey in Heaven* 55).

What we know from another italicized line ("*All of a sudden all deserted*") is that the "of" is missing, and the order of the sentence is wrong. However, we can perceive the absence of this element. These two lines rely on sound, particularly on vowels. The first line is based on words with a dominant "e" and "a," and the second line—on the vowel "o." Furthermore, the missing "of" will appear in the penultimate section of the poem, in which the "of" is restored to view:

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fatigue
      of                    of
            open for
      to                    , sees
doubles
glass              must
      are               for
      in          : they
                        , her
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(Bernstein, *All the Whiskey in Heaven* 64)

The "of" here lets "her" be seen; the "of" is the sign for *woman*'s appearance (see Reinfeld 48). But how? The visual markers (the double "of" in the second line resembles eyeglasses) produce the effect of appearance at eye level, which is unavailable at the level of nonvisual content.

These two passages, which I have cited so far, prompt the reader to consider

> two domains of poetry that are too little attended to: the sound and the look. This is another way of saying that *poetry* is too little attended to: sounds too quickly converted to words or images, the material space of the page too quickly supplanted by the ideational space of the text. (Bernstein, *My Way*—chap. "The Response as Such. Words in Visibility")

Once again: what techniques can provide "a more powerful . . . absorption"? We can say that "the experience is engendered through a combination of elements" (Reinfeld 71), and that "Bernstein's sound play [and visual play] have a place in the great modernist tradition" (Perloff, *21ˢᵗ-Century Modernism* 173). However, I would like to revisit Pound for a moment. Charles Bernstein, in his essay titled "Pound and the Poetry of Today," contrasts two contemporary compositional techniques: collage and montage. He describes montage as involving the use of contrasting images in the service of one unified theme, and collages as the juxtaposition of different elements without recourse to an overall unifying idea (see Bernstein, *My Way*). "Standing Target" demonstrates the process of such montage, of making the poem cohere as far as possible. However, it is worth noting that Bernstein isn't interested in producing the effect of the unitary plane of the poem. Rather, he is engaged in producing the poem's singular, performative mobility.

It would therefore be justified to say that, in the quoted fragments of the "Standing Target" poem, experience is not so much presented (focused on an articulated topic), nor meant as the object of lyrical expression, but

is born out of the incorporation of various elements into the poetic text. Aspects that play a crucial role in this respect—but are usually marginalized in the 20th-century norm of lyricism—are sonic and visual elements.[6] Works such as the "Standing Target" poem, therefore, owe much to "the great modernist tradition." They feature a large-scale, collage-like juxtaposition of elements that, in line with the assumptions of "Artifice of Absorption," work towards producing a poem as a field of more powerful absorptions.[7]

IMMERSION (ANDRZEJ SOSNOWSKI)

Sosnowski represents the third wave of Polish "language poetry," which is one of the most influential tendencies in Polish postwar literature. The first wave (for example, Miron Białoszewski[8]) and the second one, the so-called New Wave (for example, Stanisław Barańczak, a poet and professor of Slavic Languages at Harvard University, who emigrated from Poland in 1981[9]), have sought to recover early avant-garde impulses and techniques. Sosnowski, to make a distinction, renews in his poetry not only the early modernism poetics markers, but also the mode of indeterminate poetics (from Rimbaud to Stein, Pound, and Williams, by way of Cubist, Dada, and early Surrealist art, and to Ashbery, Cage). Therefore, his poetry, akin to that of American "language poets," engages with the atmosphere of disjunctive poetics previously explored by the poets associated with the New York school, particularly John Ashbery, whose early volume *The Tennis Court Oath* was one of the main inspirations for the entire Language movement, as well as the poetic constraints invented by OuLiPo.

To highlight the similarity, one can compare Bernstein's definition of the poem with Sosnowski's. Bernstein states: "[E]ach poem speaks not only many voices but also many groups and poetry can investigate the

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[6] Asked about his interest in "arrangement of the lines, a preoccupation sharing with poets such as Pound," Bernstein said: "I'm attracted to the idea of lines being a primarily visual feature of the poem—it's the modest way of designing (or arranging) how the page looks" (*My Way*—chap. "An Interview with Manuel Brito").

[7] It is possible to identify in Charles Bernstein's oeuvre a group of these radical, uncompromising works, which avoid the constraints of the semantic keystone, thanks to their assimilation of avant-garde techniques (one could add to the poems mentioned earlier "Hinge Picture" from the book *My Way*, 1999). It is also worth adding that, as Marjorie Perloff notes, the result of this "extreme polyphony" in Bernstein's poems is not merely an impression of being lost in a nonsensical chaos of data and information, but a kind of attentiveness training, which helps one perceive "the landscape of similarities" in the multitude of data (*Unoriginal Genius* 93).

[8] Miron Białoszewski's poetry was brilliantly described by Krzysztof Ziarek in his book titled *Historicity of Experience: Modernity, the Avant-Garde, and the Event*.

[9] See Witkowski; Barańczak.

construction of these provisional entities in and through and by language" (*My Way*—chap. "The Revenge of Poet-Critic, or The Parts Are Greater Than the Sum of the Whole"); Sosnowski: "It is not *my* monologue. It's not even the monologue of my own language, but a more complicated, polyphonic adventure, sometimes a dialogue, sometimes a polylogue" (*Lodgings* 156). What is discernible in both statements is the poets' reluctance to rely on the strong position of the subject. The function of the poem is not so much to nurture such expression of a single voice as it is to retain the capability to engage with different materials, to function in multiple forms or media. At the heart of this programme lies a fundamental belief that all our constructions of worldviews consist of intricate, complex polyphony.

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Let us now consider two examples of this "more complicated, polyphonic adventure." A poem titled "The Oceans" begins as follows:

> Quite delayed, I set sail on the great oceans
> with the first auspicious wind. The beach is now sketched in the distance
> by a line of breakers, in the cabin I'm brewing a mocha. . .
> I set the yacht to drift. . . How I love these states
> of inertia, as the boat dances like a leaf on gentle waves:
> so great is this love that I'm overcome with torpor,
> and first I scan the radio for some decent rock,
> later I broadcast my thoughts casually into the unknown,
> and on deck, napping away this entire tranquil day,
> I reach into the boundlessness of things for what's yet unwritten,
> thus to multiply our shared belongings.
> But with the first word all thought is plunged into shadow
> (Sosnowski, *Lodgings* 57)

The second stanza repeats twelve end-words; we have twelve stanzas plus one irregular stanza with six lines. The scheme is a well-known procedure, called sestina. Sosnowski implements this constraint as a force that compels him to engage in a difficult, intellectual play, rejecting the illusion of transparent literary language convention. The poet notices that this permutation produces the effect of multivocality: "Something like a 'statement' or 'message' simply cannot work, because some other voice always appears that suddenly challenges and dismantles the tone and composition of the ostensibly unambiguous utterance" (*Lodgings* 157).

The second example is even more complex but illustrates similar effects. I excerpt it from the long poem "Post-Rainbow" ["Po tęczy"]:

> And sitting by the river yesterday we saw a whirlpool.
> It was a steady, apparently stationary whirlpool

that appeared to be falling in love with us.
It would draw something in and suck it down,
wink like an eye of alarm, icon of the storm.
Tremble of pipes in a faraway system,
for all of a sudden a distinct *pop!* and I had the impression
we're descending straight to your desktop and
                                        ha ha
little lyric. We drink time's brandy. As long as there's
a whirlpool, we drink. Wir trinken und trinken
brände der Zeit, Brandy der Zeit
(*Lodgings* 128)

We listen to a kind of conversation, but we recognize it through visualization (some phrases are written in italics). Typically, a word written in italics in a poem denotes a word or phrase borrowed directly from another language. However, Sosnowski's poem complicates this convention. The borrowed phrase ("Wir trinken und trinken"—from Celan's *Todesfuge*) is written in regular fonts. What's more, the sensitive metaphor "we drink time's brandy" is juxtaposed with a masterpiece by Celan. "Time's brandy," "brände der Zeit," "Brandy der Zeit"—which phrase is able to constitute the voice of poem? Any and every of them at a time.[10]

Sosnowski claims: "I write in an utterly fallen, scrambled language, and it's possible that somewhere in this language of mine, in the language of these poems, there remains some fallen spark of revelation" (*Lodgings* 158). Sosnowski and Bernstein are two poets who have never moved too far from a language that is not so much heard as overheard and then organized into formal patterns (see Perloff, *21ˢᵗ-Century Modernism* 179). However, whereas Bernstein seems to subject the "extreme polyphony" in his works to scrutiny, Sosnowski accepts the inevitable unpredictability of the poem. To search for the fundamental motivation behind this radicalism of the author of "Post-Rainbow," it is worth noting the opening lines of the quoted fragment of the poem ("And sitting by the river yesterday we saw a whirlpool. / It was a steady, apparently stationary whirlpool / that appeared to be falling in love with us"). "Whirlpool" turns out to be not only the personal pronoun "wir" in German (and in Celan's poem), but also an "apparently stationary whirlpool," observable on the river. This image, although puzzling, is justified by the created soundscape of the passage ("**whir**lpool"—"**wir**"). However, it can also be interpreted as a commentary on the function of poetic language itself. The poem also

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[10] See: "You can hear at least two [or three] voices in two [or three] different registers" (Sosnowski, *Lodgings* 156).

reveals itself as a whirlpool that draws in signals from the environment, capturing the very implosive moment of various discursive materials falling into poetic language.[11]

HOW TO READ A RADICALLY DIFFICULT POEM?

In the article mentioned above, Charles Bernstein argued that the reader who seeks "the accessible poem" is usually simply idealizing the very notion of "accessibility" in such a work. The essential poetic traditions of the "long" 20th century, at least since the revolution of imagism, have tended to make readers more familiar with the experience of reading difficulties. How, then, should one deal with difficult poems?

Linda Reinfeld pointed out the overall tendency of reading "language poetry": "Such poetics constructions are necessarily indeterminate . . ., matters of contingency rather than necessity or pure chance" (20). To read the indeterminate text is to demystify. Is this mode of reading still fruitful in the age of cultural studies which risks leveling all art to the status of symptom rather than to the status of original (unoriginal) work of a poet?[12]

The key issue here concerns the methodological assertion put forth by the entire poetics. For example, let us note how it problematizes the status of close reading. There is no simple return to New Criticism, which described a given poem's unifying metaphor as the "key design" of the poem. I am referring to the challenge of rethinking our "return," adjusting our approach. We don't need a close reading of a key design of the poem, but we need to read closely the structure of dislocation in poems with a special sensitivity

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[11] It is worth recalling here that in Ezra Pound's poetic programme, at a crucial moment of transition between the techniques of imagism and the "ideogramic method," around 1914 and 1915 (when, together with Wyndham Lewis, he began publishing the magazine *Blast*), the concept of VORTEX was extremely important. Pound used it to redefine the imagist precision of representation; the static nature of such imagery was to be replaced by "a radiant node or cluster; it is what I can and must perforce call a VORTEX, from which and through which, and into which ideas are constantly rushing" (qtd. in Kenner 290).

[12] See Terry Eagleton's book titled *How to Read a Poem*. The critic justified the need to write this book by his own experience of a lecturer in literature who, in recent years, has noticed a waning interest of students in literary criticism. The crisis of the discipline, which he relates here to the practice of close reading, is usually put down—albeit, as Eagleton points out, wrongly—to 20th-century theories of literature (from Russian formalism to deconstruction). However, it was precisely these theories that promoted the practice of "scrupulously close reading" (2). What is meant here is not so much a simple return to the practice of *close reading* by the New Criticism ("Close reading is not the issue"), but a particular sensitivity to the literary form of the poem, which deserves to be read "fairly closely" (2).

to the language pool (see Perloff, *Differentials*).[13] A poem is constituted by the meaning-generating strategies of its own rhetoric.

One of the advocates of such "close reading," a meticulous formal analysis allowing critical discernment, is Marjorie Perloff. In her book titled *Differentials*, she argues:

> Perhaps there is finally no alternative to what was called in the Bad Old Days, *close reading*. Today's students may have no idea what close reading entails, but surely their teachers vaguely remember close reading . . . as some sort of New Critical or Formalist exercise whereby readers performed dry, boring, and nitpicking analyses on given "autonomous" texts, disregarding the culture, politics, and ideology of those texts in the interest of metaphor, paradox, irony. . . . But would a *far reading*, then, be better than a close one? Well, not exactly, but perhaps *reading* is itself passé, what with the possibility that a given poem or novel could serve as an exemplar of this or that theory, in which case one might only have to focus on a particular passage. . . . Formalist reading, we are regularly told, goes hand in hand with the premise that the poem is an autonomous artifact. But the privileging of the poetic function has never meant that knowledge—of the poet's life, milieu, culture, and especially his or her other poems—is not relevant. (xiii)

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Several of her arguments are worth noting here. First of all, the critic's postulate of revisionism comes at a time when American campuses have already been ploughed through by dominant cultural studies, which, while freeing the practice of reading 20th-century literature from tedious new-critical exercises in formal analysis, have also enabled arbitrary cultural recontextualizations of the texts analyzed. Secondly, this revisionary return to the New Critical directive of *close reading* comes with an awareness of the limitations of that earlier, strongly institutionalized method which typically involved identifying a "central paradox" or "central metaphor" in a poem, understood as a clearly defined centre of a poetic work. Perloff fundamentally disputes this argument, pointing out that contemporary innovative works are rather characterized by the absence of such a "clear centre" and a lack of balance between tensions and opposing elements. With regard to this type of innovative poetry, Perloff recommends meticulous reading, taking into account the reluctance of contemporary poets to employ such unifying formal solutions for their poems. In other words, when a poem incorporates a poetics of heightened complexity, and alliterative games consistently, the critic should be just as scrupulous

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[13] It is so close to Art Berman's definition: "[D]econstruction is a skeptical New Criticism" (278).

in describing these complex games. At the same time, they should opt for radical differentiation rather than concluding the interpretation with answers to the questions posed by the text.

In the case of language poems, what is at stake is neither mere formalism nor the advancement of certain social and political projects in the name of one ideology or another. Andrzej Sosnowski and Charles Bernstein share their attachment to avant-garde experimentation in their works (the radical modernist tradition) and their emphasis on the importance of the reader's/writer's respect for the formal organization of the poem. It should also be noted, as Bernstein observes in his sketch "Comedy and the Poetics of Political Form," that the key task for the poem to fulfil is to highlight the literary conventions and protocols that govern everyday communication. The poem does not side with any radically subversive political undertakings but rather focuses on restoring the democracy of non-neutralized individual voices. The political effect of poetry cannot be viewed in terms of a measurable number of supporters, as the purpose of the poem is not so much to seek supporters but active partners in resisting the clichés that legitimize simplistic, ideologized images of contemporary reality. As Bernstein and Sosnowski observe, only poetry that continues to search for stylistic and formal innovations can present individuals (readers) with alternative ways of producing social formations.[14]

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[14] "Language poetry" in its special sensitivity to the language medium, is able to renew critical and hermeneutic attention to textual soundscapes and textual visibility (see Bernstein, *My Way*—chap. "The Response as Such. Words in Visibility").

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