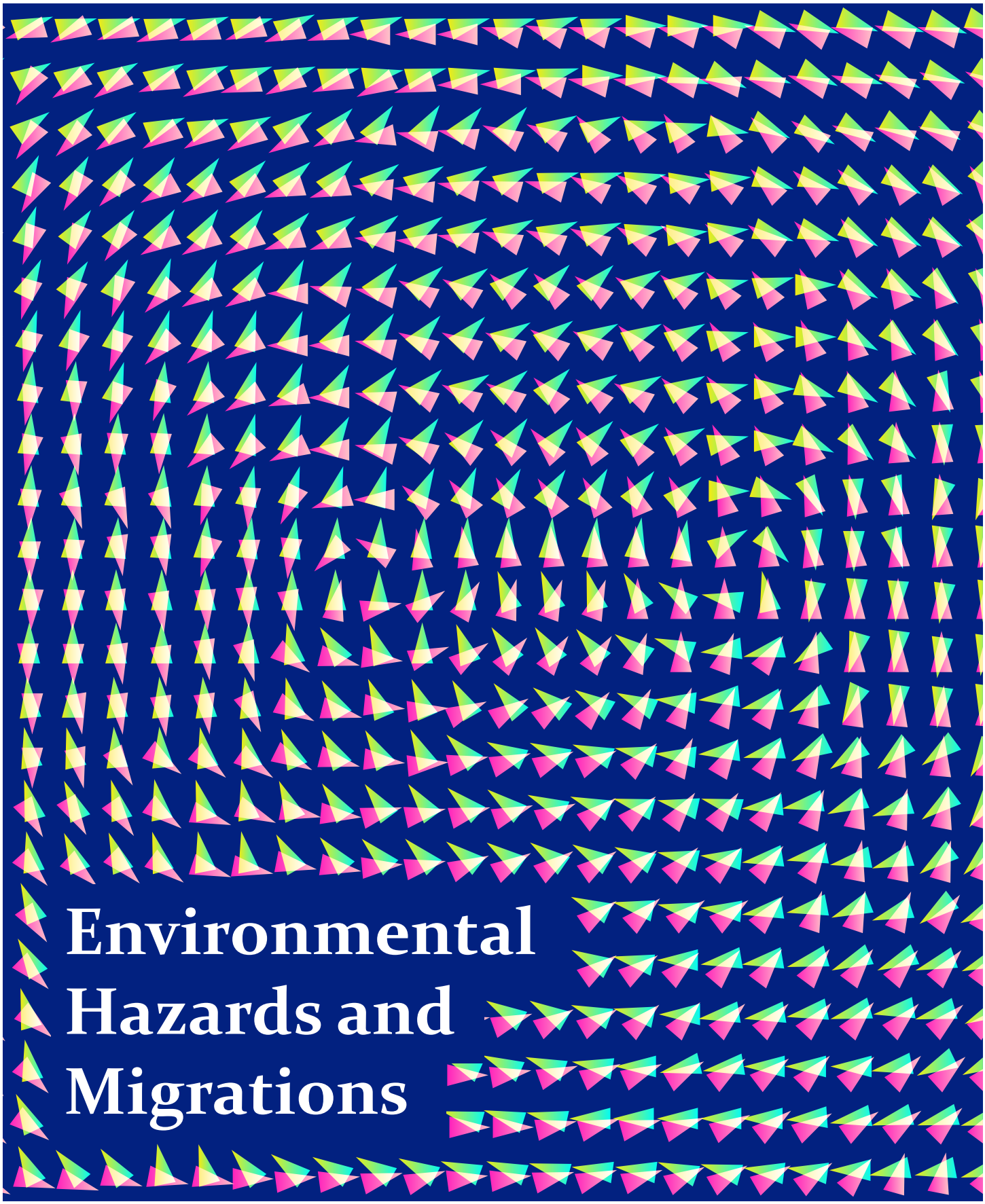
jamit!
Journal of American Studies in Italy

N. 3 - May 2020 | ISSN: 2612-5641



Environmental Hazards and Migrations

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NO. 3 MAY 2020
ENVIRONMENTAL HAZARDS AND MIGRATIONS

PUBLISHED BY
UNIVERSITÀ DEGLI STUDI DI TORINO | *Dipartimento di Lingue e Letterature Straniere e Culture Moderne*
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AN INTRODUCTION TO ENVIRONMENTAL HAZARD AND MIGRATIONS

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Ludwig-Maximilians University

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The third issue of *JAm It!*, "Environmental Hazards and Migrations," explores the relations between environmental transformations and migrations in the North American context from a multidisciplinary perspective. The unprecedented magnitude of environmental changes we are witnessing is dramatically accelerating human mobility across the globe, foreseeing a grim future for human and non-human communities in the most endangered habitats. Since the United Nations Environment Programme's official recognition of environmental refugees in 1985, the relationship between environmental changes and human mobility has spearheaded a vigorous debate among policymakers as well as scholars from several disciplines, who have begun exploring the connections among climatic disruptions, ecological transformations, and migratory phenomena. While scholarship in American Studies has produced relevant contributions analyzing the historical and present contingencies of both endogenous and exogenous migratory flows, the complex relations between migrations and ecological change require further inquiry.

Environmental historians have investigated the ecological reasons that are radically reshaping patterns of human mobility across the globe. They have renamed this process "the Great Acceleration," an expression that mirrors the increasingly global volume of anthropogenic activities since 1945 and its unprecedented reflection on the ecological balance of the eco-biosphere. Just as importantly, other scholars have traced back these unprecedented changes to the so-called Columbian Exchange—that is, the

unprecedented circulation of animals, plants, illnesses, and goods since Columbus' expedition to the Americas in 1492. Both these historical reconstructions are currently credited as two essential landmarks of the Anthropocene theory, a geological hypothesis claiming that the anthropogenic impact on the earth's ecosystem should be considered as a *de facto* telluric force, whose changes will be observable in the geological eras to come. Whether the Anthropocene will become a consolidated reality among scientists in the future, its historical and ecological roots are indissolubly connected to the relentless mobility of humankind across time and space, a testimony of its formidable resilience as a species. While the ecological consequences of the Anthropocene will continue to permeate academic and political debates in the future, human mobility will be increasingly affected by these unprecedented changes, forcing a reconsideration of concepts such as natural habitat, citizenship, and nation. The implications of these socio-ecological processes are powerful and, to some extent, still escape our full comprehension. They have the potential to reshape global economic and geopolitical scenarios, paving the way for cultural and ecological changes to redefine the role of the human race in our planet's ecology.

Furthermore, as we draft this introduction, humanity has been once again forcefully called to reconsider its role as an ecological force. While in historical perspective the current COVID-19 pandemic might look like one of many plagues that have haunted our resilient species over millennia, its ecological roots are indissolubly related to the growing human influence on the world's food-chain and its spread has been dramatically accelerated by the relentless human mobility that characterizes our times. While the sanitary consequences of the current pandemic might impair human mobility in the near future, in the long run they might exacerbate it. As estimated by a recent report from The United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR), climate imbalances will continue to threaten the livelihood of human groups inhabiting endangered habitats. As these communities will face the need to continue moving across the globe in search of not only better living conditions and medical assistance, but sheer survival, they will confront increasingly restrictive policies, massive budget cuts to allocated migration funds, and enhanced mobility dysfunction. If that is the case, migratory

phenomena will need appropriate social and ecological responses beyond international travel bans imposed across hemispheres. Equally important, humankind will need new narratives of hope and resilience in order to look at the next major challenges of our times. This issue attempts to contribute to these debates proposing submissions that—in line with the *JAm It!*'s commitment to diversity and multi-disciplinarity—discuss environmental migrations from/to/within the United States, both in past and present times and from different disciplinary and methodological angles.

The journal's thematic section opens with Colin Fisher's introductory essay, "The Crossroads of U.S. Environmental History and Migration History." In a commendable review effort, Fisher enumerates some notable reasons at the core of current environmental migrations, progressively moving to an historical analysis of the phenomenon in different contexts of the world, with a particular emphasis on the United States. Through a systematic literature review, the author illustrates the main scholarship that has analyzed the relationship between human mobility and the environment. These include pathfinder authors (such as Oscar Handlin and John Bodnar), environmental historians (Alfred Crosby, Louis Warren, Marco Armiero, Richard Tucker, Matthew Klingle, and Catherine McNeur), as well as political scientists (John Hultgren), and environmental sociologists (David Naguib Pellow and Lisa Sun-Hee Park). While differing in their disciplinary scope and territorial emphasis, this growing literature corpus has a common underlying thread: they tell us stories of marginalized and racialized populations struggling for environmental justice in disadvantaged urban and rural ecological metabolisms. While, as the author proposes, the relationship between immigrants and nature does not in every case present a "linear path," in most cases not only migrant groups altered their ecosystems, but also found creative ways to build communities and forge identities.

Gilberto Mazzoli and Daniele Valisena's contribution moves along similar lines, retracing the history of Italian migrants in Chicago as narrated by a local newspaper, *The Chicago Tribune*. In particular, the authors focus on the rather unusual occupation of urban spaces by ethnic working-class social formations between the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. As the article demonstrates, Italian migrants devised

unusual adaptation strategies to the unknown urban spaces that they occupied, creating a hybrid environment where the borders between urban and rural continuously blurred. Naturally, their precarious livelihoods clashed with the ideas of a city that was increasingly undergoing sanitation and modernization processes. In this sense, as Italian migrant communities devised resilience strategies in which their cultural knowledge intermingled with a foreign environment, their practices were often deemed as non-modern, especially in comparison to their surrounding modernizing urban environment. This contrast manifested explicitly through the opposition between subsistence gardens in Italian suburban homes in the United States and the traditional home lawn epitomizing the middle-class American dream.

Adopting a critical approach at the crossroads between philosophy and the history of ideas, Claiton Marcio da Silva and Leandro Gomes Moreira Cruz propose a critical reading of Thoreau's *Walden* in "Biopolitics and the Anthropocene Era: Ideas of Nature in Henry David Thoreau's *Walden*." Putting one of Thoreau's main philosophical works into current ecological debates on the Anthropocene, the authors provide an ecocritical reading informed by philosophical notions such as neomaterialism and posthumanism, contributing to the emerging disciplinary field of the environmental humanities. Through an original interpretative lens, the authors investigate Thoreau's critical assessment of the dichotomous relations between humans and nature, analyzing his response to modernization and the confrontation between different human groups in the region (European settlers and natives). In their opinion, Thoreau's social criticism could potentially be adopted as a litmus test in order to rethink the relations between humans and nonhumans and their role in ecological systems in the Anthropocene era.

From a different disciplinary standpoint, in "Understanding the Fabric of the Natural World," Leonardo Nolé takes an ecocritical and post-human approach to analyze how Annie Proulx's *Barkskins*, by substituting a single protagonist with a collective natural entity, challenges humanity's self-centered narrative while tackling anthropogenic issues. Connecting the history of migrations to the United States to the capitalistic timber business and the progressive disappearance of the virgin forest, Nolé discusses how Proulx's novel frames the many interconnected stories that *made* North

America within a narrative of destruction, claiming that only a holistic perspective can "reweave the numerous threads that compose 'the fabric of the natural world.'"

A similar ecocritical approach is taken by Elena Corioni in "Apocalyptic Visions from the Past: The Colonization of Mars in Dick's *Martian Time-Slip*." In her contribution, Corioni investigates the concerns related to global climate change that emerge in Philip K. Dick's novel as epitomized by a migration to Mars. The essay examines how *Martian Time-Slip* deals with concerns linked to the future of the natural environment and the human race. In the first section, the author explores dynamics of migration and terraforming, showing how Dick rewrites American history by displacing it to an extraterrestrial world. Linking Western expansion to the new frontier of Mars, the novel illustrates the destructive forces of colonization represented by the encounter of human and alien life. Finally, Corioni establishes a correlation between the human and the nonhuman, using mental illness as a narrative device.

With Nina Venkataraman's article "The Absent Victims: An Ecolinguistic Study of Environmental Refugees in the New York Times," the thematic section moves from literary dystopia to ecolinguistics. The author investigates the discursive construction of environmental refugees in *The New York Times*. Through the use of frame analysis, the author investigates a corpus of 78 newspaper articles collected from *The New York Times* from 1985 to 2015 including terms such as "climate refugee/migrant" or "environmental refugee/migrant." The author argues that environmental refugees featured in the *The New York Times* are framed as a security risk. She also argues that this is an incomplete representation of the issue, as some other ideas, like the lack of legal status, do not seem to be given equal legitimacy in constructing the issue. In the long timespan considered, the author observes a shift from the discussion of human displacement as one of the effects of climate change to its portrayal as impacting climate change. Narrowing the problem of environmental refugees to a security issue means focusing on tackling risks and threats rather than seeking the causes that lead these people to migrate. In so doing, the newspaper underspecifies humanitarian aspects, the agency of the victims, and the institutional practices that discuss responsibility.

Finally, Massimiliano Demata closes the thematic section of this issue of *JAm It!* Along similar disciplinary lines, with a reflection on the use of language in relation to issues related to environmental migrations. Demata insists on the importance of the use of language when it comes to such issues—issues he defines as social—to avoid perpetuating and reinforcing behaviors that victimize subjects displaced by environmental issues. Demata highlights the need for social changes and for a critical approach to the use of language in the narratives related to migrations, especially as environmental changes become increasingly dramatic.

After examining environmental migrations from multiple disciplinary perspectives, our free section begins with Valentina Romanzi's critical reading of the movie *Ready Player One*, directed by Steven Spielberg (2018). The essay shows how three different levels of reality are represented in the movie, claiming that they are portrayed as three isolated worlds that collide by the end of the movie. The three levels of reality we encounter in the movie are: a dystopic Columbus, Ohio, in 2045; OASIS, a virtual reality video game which configures as a parallel utopian world that allows people to escape from the misery of reality; and a world defined by metatextual references to geek culture and retrogaming, evocative of Zygmunt Bauman's theories on nostalgia described in his book *Retrotopia* (2017). It is the convergence of these three seemingly discrete fictional worlds that grants the plot a didactic happy ending that reflects on the risks of prioritizing vicarious experience over lived experience.

Finally, in "Crossing the Threshold of Temporality: 'Story of Your Life' and *Arrival*" Chiara Patrizi focuses on the ways in which Ted Chiang's 1998 novella "Story of Your Life" and its 2016 film adaptation by Denis Villeneuve, *Arrival,* address the modes of the eerie, a concept theorized by Mark Fisher as "a failure of absence or a failure of presence." These modes offer a key to analyzing and understanding the strategies that Chiang and Villeneuve employ to narrate a story—two complementary stories indeed—which affects communal as well as individual existence. The encounter with an alien population (the Heptapods) poses challenges which open the way for other, more existential questions. In particular, Patrizi focuses on issues that are not valid only in the narrative environment of science fiction, but that deal with fears and doubts which

are also very tangible outside the fictional world whenever the mind is shaken by an image or an event that breaks through our pre-established certainties regarding the life we inhabit.

A much-needed note of gratitude to conclude this introduction—this issue was completed at a time where our lives were significantly affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. We owe our gratitude to all the people who have contributed to this volume with unmitigated perseverance and dedication, and especially to our contributors, who managed to do such remarkable work despite the extraordinary conditions of precariousness that have affected all our personal and professional lives over the past few months. Our thanks also go to the University of Torino for its invaluable logistic and technical support, and to AISNA (Italian Association for North American Studies) and its Graduate Forum for their intellectual and financial patronage.

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THE CROSSROADS OF U.S. ENVIRONMENTAL HISTORY AND MIGRATION HISTORY

Colin Fisher
University of San Diego

It is a great honor to introduce this issue of *Jam It!*, especially since the topic the authors address—the environmental history of modern migration—is simultaneously so very relevant and yet so understudied. Over a billion people alive today have moved within or without their nation of birth. The vast majority of these people moved from rural areas of the Global South to cities, a pattern of migration which in 2007 pushed the Earth's urban population past fifty percent. Warfare, the growth of agribusiness, lack of opportunity, and grinding poverty pushed people from home. But they also moved because of the beginning phase of climate change and its many environmental side effects: crop failure, drought, floods, erosion, desertification, wildfire, deforestation, and sea-level rise, among others. Simultaneously, as Marco Armiero and Richard Tucker explain in their indispensable anthology *Environmental History of Modern Migrations*, the figure of the "climate refugee" is fueling a strong nativist backlash in Europe, Australia, and the United States and the rise of right-wing nationalist politicians who campaign on building bigger walls while sometimes celebrating the blood and soil of the homeland.[1]

Given the topic's obvious relevance, why is the environmental context of historical migration so understudied? U.S. immigration history's first big book, Oscar Handlin's *The Uprooted* (1951), did in fact address nature. Handlin argued that the European peasants regarded the natural world as magical and animate, and they included the land in their sense of community. But migration uprooted them from the

[1] On the environmental context for contemporary migration, see for instance Swing 2017, vi-vii; Myers 2002; Hugo 1996; Armiero and Tucker 2017.

soil that had long sustained them, breaking "the ties with nature." Peasants formerly rooted in the earth now found themselves hemmed in by tall buildings and "fenced off from the realm of growing things." According to Handlin, immersion in this mechanical artificial environment resulted in dislocation and alienation. It was a world where rocks, streams, and trees only came back as memories "to be summoned up to rouse the curiosity and stir the wonder" of their American-born children (Handlin 1951, 110).

In the 1960s, a new generation of immigration historians broke from Handlin. They found his generalizations about European peasant life overly simplistic and were troubled by the way *The Uprooted* rendered immigrants passive, socially disorganized victims of circumstance who had been yanked from the soil that had long sustained them. Inspired by the new social movements of the decade, younger scholars stressed the agency of newcomers and their significant role in making American history. That said, many of these scholars continued to address environmental themes, especially agriculture. On the one hand, they documented the role that enclosure of common lands, commercialization of farming, and competition for land played in convincing farmers to leave homelands; on the other, they explored extensively the considerable role of the foreign born in American agriculture.[2]

While U.S. immigration historians took up nature as a theme (although rarely with ecological sophistication), U.S. environmental historians largely ignored modern migration. Certainly, the environmental effect of settler colonialism was addressed extensively in the seminal work of Alfred Crosby and those he inspired. And some addressed how natural disasters, such as the dust bowl, led to internal migrations. But none until recently took up one of the most important topics in American history: the arrival of waves of migrants from Europe, East Asia, Latin America, and the Caribbean, starting in the mid nineteenth century and continuing to the present.[3]

One reason for environmental historians' blindness to modern migration was that until recently, they lacked tools for exploring unequal power relationships within human society. As historian Alan Taylor explained in 1996, social historians are "splitters" who

[2] For an excellent synthesis of this work, see Bodnar 1985. On immigrants in American agriculture, see Cannon 1991.
[3] Crosby 1986; Worster 1979.

are attentive to difference and power while "environmental historians tended to be 'lumpers,' prone to a holism that washes out the human diversity of experience and identity" (7). There was little conceptual space for understanding immigrant communities such as Italian Americans, who not only were internally divided along lines of region, class, gender, and generation but who as a group experienced stark exploitation and racism while also enjoying some privileges of whiteness or probationary whiteness denied non-European migrants, such as the Chinese or Mexicans, or racialized groups, such as African Americans.[4]

Environmental historians were also limited by the place-based nature of their field. They typically made a rural place—a river, forest, mountain range, bioregion, or national park—their object of study. The spatial constraints imposed on the past made it difficult to follow migrant communities who might move seasonally in and out of a given landscape or who might settle in one area but express profound love for a homeland thousands of miles away. A related restraint was that U.S. environmental historians did not study cities, the new home for the majority of immigrants who settled in the United States after the Civil War. Scholars fell prey to binary thinking. Nature, the central and conceptually slippery object of the field, supposedly existed in rural and wild areas far from seemingly artificial cities and the immigrants who lived there.[5]

Fortunately, these theoretical limitations are largely a thing of the past and some path-breaking environmental scholarship—much of it inspired by the environmental justice movement—is considerably enriching our understanding of the environmental dimension of modern migration. One important avenue of research is top-down, notably how Anglo Americans and later self-identified white Americans understood the relationship been nature and immigration. Researchers such as Susan Schrepfer, Garland Allen, Jonathan Spiro, and Miles Powell show that anti-immigrant scientific racism and Progressive Era conservation and preservation were not only compatible but sometimes mutually reinforcing.

[4] On Italians' complicated position within American race relations, see Guglielmo 2003.
[5] On the city and environmental history, see Melosi 1993.

In other notable work on the subject, Peter Coates demonstrates that nativist scientists often conflated American immigrants with non-native invasive species. Adam Rome shows how Anglo Americans, some of whom were self-professed environmentalists, simultaneously criticized immigrants for their failure to appreciate American scenery while bemoaning the ways that the lives of the foreign born were embedded in the messiness of urban nature. The links between environmentalism and nativism continued long after the Progressive Era. As political scientist John Hultgren notes, contemporary environmentalism (supposedly a central concern of the left) and nativism (taken as a preoccupation of the right) continue to cross-pollinate today. Environmental sociologists David Naguib Pellow and Lisa Sun-Hee Park give us an illuminating example: Aspen, Colorado, where privileged white environmentalists blamed the city's exploited Latino immigrant workforce for despoiling their mountain paradise.[6]

While U.S. environmental historians have given us fresh and sophisticated interpretations of American nativism, they have largely ignored the environmental context for emigration. Luckily U.S. immigration historians as well as environmental historians who focus on Europe, Asia, Latin America, the Caribbean and Africa have us partially covered. Thanks to their work, we know the biological context for out migration during the Irish Potato famine; the role of floods, drought, deforestation, erosion, land scarcity, and famine in prompting the Cantonese to migrate to Gold Rush California; the importance of natural disasters, crop failure, and diseases such as malaria in convincing some southern Italians to leave their homeland in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries; and the significance of drought and famine coupled with political oppression in pushing Ethiopians from their homeland in the 1970s and 80s.

We also know from immigration historians that agricultural capitalism, which fundamentally reorganized farmers' relationship with nature, played a dramatic role in fueling emigration. As immigration historian John Bodnar notes, "wherever agriculture tended to become commercial and affect existing patterns of landownership, the

[6] Schrepfer 2003; Allen 2013; Spiro 2008; Powell 2016; Coates 2007; Rome2008; Hultgren, 2015; Sun-Hee Park and Pellow 2011.

beginnings of mass emigration became visible." What was true in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries continues to be true throughout the rural Global South today.[7]

U.S. environmental historians, like their counterparts in U.S. immigration history, have paid significantly more attention to migrants once they arrived in the United States. Drawing inspiration from the environmental justice movement, a number of scholars explore how the foreign born and their children confronted environmental inequalities, in particular disproportionate exposure to environmental hazards. In rural areas, migrants from around the world picked crops, felled trees, ranched animals, mined the earth, and diverted rivers and built dams for companies that often exploited their labor. Environmental historians, such as Thomas Andrews, Linda Nash, Chad Montrie, Connie Chiang, and Douglas Sackman document how sites of labor — "workscapes," as Andrews calls them — shaped the bodies of immigrant workers, damaging their health and sometimes prematurely ending their lives. Migrants also confronted environmental inequalities in urban and suburban environments. As scholars such as Andrew Hurley, Chris Sellers, Sylvia Hood Washington, Monica Perales, Carl A. Zimring, David N. Pellow, Lisa Sun-Hee Park and others illustrate, a steel mill, meatpacking facility, copper smelter, or semiconductor plant could be every bit as dangerous as a mine, corporate farm, or logging camp. In addition, toxins from dangerous urban workscapes sometimes contaminated adjacent neighborhoods where the foreign born and their children lived and played.[8]

In addition to disproportionate exposure to environmental hazards, environmental historians also explore how new arrivals sometimes lost access to natural resources. Louis Warren, for instance, uses the murder of a game warden to explore how the state of Pennsylvania enclosed the commons and turned Italian immigrant deer hunters into poachers. Similarly, Benjamin Heber Johnson documents how in the creation of Superior National Forest, the state seized forests that striking Slovenian and Finish

[7] Crawford 1989; Ó Murchadha 2011; June 1979; Marks 2017; LeMay 2015, 16; Parrinello 2012; Shelemay and Kaplan 2015; Bodnar 1985. On agricultural modernization's impact on contemporary migration, see World Bank Publications 2007; Bhandari and Ghimire 2016.

[8] Sackman 2009; Nash 2006; Chiang 2018; Montrie 2009; Andrews 2008; Sellers1997; Zimring 2015; Hurley 1995; Hood Washington 2005; Perales 2010; Pellow and Sun-Hee Park 2003.

iron miners used to hunt, fish, and log. In *Shaping the Shoreline,* Connie Chiang shows how those intent on turning Monterey, California into a tourist destination drove Italian, Portuguese, Japanese, and Chinese fishermen from nearby waters and even removed a Chinese fishing village; and in her recent book, *Nature Behind Barbed Wire*, she documents how nefarious efforts to displace Japanese Americans from their place in the valuable agricultural and fishing industries fueled calls for internment during World War II. Sometimes enclosure of common lands took place in the heart of great metropolitan areas. Matthew Klingle documents how Seattle elites tried to privatize the waterfront used by marginalized people, including the foreign born; Catherine McNeur shows how Manhattan city officials banned hogs from city streets and destroyed immigrant shantytowns to make way for the creation of Central Park; and Jennifer Dyl reveals how San Francisco health officers, alarmed by an outbreak of bubonic plague, removed chickens and other animals, some of which were kept by Chinese residents. Pushed out of their rural homelands, Europeans, Asians, and Mexicans migrated to the United States and secured access to American natural resources, only to sometimes face dispossession once again.[9]

While mapping unjust appropriation of natural resources and disproportionate exposure to environmental hazards is critically important work, focus on environmental inequality and victimization risks running afoul of arguably the most important objective of contemporary migration studies: moving well beyond Handlin's account of immigrants as passive victims and documenting their agency under difficult circumstances. If we are to build on our colleagues' work in immigration history, environmental historians must consider the significant limitations of the environmental justice framework, use non-traditional foreign-language primary sources, and write richer "bottom-up" accounts in which migrants are three-dimensional characters who make choices in response to environmental and other restraints and operate in a world of intersecting and unequal power relationships. More specifically, we must acknowledge that despite exploitation,

[9] Warren 1999; Johnson 1999; Chiang 2008; Chiang 2018; Klingle 2007; McNeur 2014; Dyl 2017.

racism, and environmental injustice, migrants were also environmental actors who left a significant imprint on the land and sometimes operated in ecologically destructive ways.

Environmental agency is most clear when it comes to agriculture. Whether immigrants imported Old World crops and farming techniques or, as was most often the case, quickly adopted American seeds, technologies, and farming practices, they altered the land around them. Consider the Chinese in California. Despite extraordinary hostility from white Americans, they mined the earth for gold, cleared forests, tunneled through mountains, and turned wetlands such as the Joaquin/Sacramento Delta into productive farmland, an achievement celebrated by Chinese leaders at the time and some subsequent historians. But as Patricia Limerick asks, "before it grew crops, the Central Valley grew carpets of wildflowers that dazzled John Muir and others. Should the loss of wildlife and wildflowers, as well as the costs of imposing intensive, irrigated agriculture in a semiarid landscape, figure in the writing of the history of the Chinese in California?.... What place did Asian immigrants occupy in the broadest picture of the conquest of both nature and natives in North America?" The complexity of the immigrant experience in rural America reminds us that we cannot simply divide people into environmental victims and environmental perpetrators but must instead pay attention to multiple axes of power, including unequal relationships with powerful Anglo-Americans as well as with other migrants groups, African Americans, Mexican Americans, and First Peoples; internal inequalities within migrant communities along lines of gender, class, ethnicity, language, nation, religion, and generation; and dynamic and sometimes destructive interactions with ecosystems.[10]

We also need to better address how migrants altered cityscapes. We know that migrants were stripped of access to urban natural resources and often experienced disproportionate exposure to environmental hazards. We also know that immigrants and their allies sometimes responded with collective political action, demanding an early version of environmental justice. But the Italian, Polish, Chinese, Mexican, and Puerto

[10] For a useful overview of the literature on immigrant farming, see Cannon 1991. On the importance of thinking about multiple axes of power, see Armiero and Tucker 2017; Armiero 2017; Limerick 1992. Some of the best work on migrant farming, fishing, and mining, focuses on California. See in particular, Armiero 2017; Mitchell 1996; Chan 1989; Chiang 2008; Limerick 1992; Sackman 2008; Ivey 2018.

Rican relationship with nature was often more complicated than the environmental justice paradigm allows. Some immigrants turned urban and suburban truck gardens into thriving businesses while others made careers in the messy work of maintaining the city's metabolism: laying sewers, collecting trash and recyclables, plumbing homes, stringing electric lines, killing cockroaches and rats, moving produce, and turning natural resources like animals, trees, and wheat into sausage, bread, and lumber. We also know that migrants used their wages to participate in American consumer culture, purchasing food, energy, and clothing but also sometimes more expensive items such as automobiles and real estate. In so doing, immigrants played a significant role in altering both urban and hinterland ecologies.

Precisely because they were a marginalized and frequently racialized population, migrants and their children often had a front-row seat to the workings of urban metabolism. Unlike privileged Anglo and later white Americans who decamped for bucolic suburbs and had the luxury of drawing a clear line between the supposedly artificial city and the seemingly natural suburb and wilderness beyond, Poles, Chinese, Mexicans and others were confronted at home and work with the messy interpenetration of nature and culture. Given this embedded experience of knowing nature at work and home, it is tempting to paint late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century immigrants as proto-ecologists who saw the lie of dualistic thinking and insisted on seeing the city as a networked nature/culture artefact. But if we pay attention to how migrants knew nature not only where they worked and lived but also where they played, things become more complicated. As I show in *Urban Green*, during their scant leisure, large numbers of foreign-born Chicagoans sought to escape an industrial urban environment that they saw as artificial and unhealthy and retreat to green places that they saw as natural: urban parks, Lake Michigan beaches, ethnic picnic grounds, and forest preserves. In other words, like the well-to-do, marginalized Chicagoans often drew a line between city and country, which they tried to cross during their leisure. They, too, were often nature romantics who longed for Sunday outings in forest preserves or along the Lake Michigan shore and who waxed nostalgically about the pre-industrial rural homelands they had left behind in Mexico, Ireland, Italy, or Greece. In other words, when it comes to the nature/culture binary, migrants sometimes could be every bit as dualistic in their thinking as Teddy Roosevelt (Fisher 2015; Fisher forthcoming).

In addition to exploring how migrants materially altered natural systems, we also must address the creative ways that they used American environments to build community and forge identity. U.S. environmental historians have long documented the meanings that Anglo Americans gave nature. We know that the American landscape (imagined as the garden, the frontier, and the wilderness) was a critically important foil for the cultural construction of American (although in reality Anglo-American and later white) identity in "nature's nation." But what about marginalized newcomers? To what cultural purpose did they put the environments that they encountered? Did they also use American nature to imagine community? As Patricia Limerick noted in 1992, conventional studies of American landscape "concentrated wholeheartedly on the thinking of English-speaking, westward-moving, literate, record-keeping, middle- and upper-class, pre-twentieth-century, white men. Offered as studies of American attitudes toward landscape, the standard works were in fact investigations into the minds of a minority. In the late twentieth century, such exclusivity in scholarly inquiry is no longer tenable." But, as Limerick noted, it is one thing to identify what is missing from the published historical literature and another thing entirely to address the vacancy.

Luckily, in addition to Limerick's own important work on Chinese- and Japanese-American perceptions of the western landscape, there are other insightful accounts on how marginalized Americans grounded ethnic identity in nature. We know that Mexican Americans articulated Chicano identities during the 1960s and 70s in part by referencing land: the mythical Aztec homeland Aztlán as well as the dangerous and exploitative corporate farms of the Southwest. We know that Jamaican immigrant Marcus Garvey and his followers in the United Negro Improvement Association imagined a Pan-African identity in part by evoking the lush vegetation of the African homeland, which Garvey symbolized with a green stripe on his famous Pan-African flag. We know that European immigrant leaders not only invoked the sacred soil of Germany, Ireland, Czechoslovakia, Poland, and Norway, but publically celebrated their community's role in American history, including the settlement of the frontier wilderness. As immigration historian Orm Øverland notes, these "homemaking myths" did dual service: they at once reminded

nativist Anglo Americans of immigrants' role in the discovery and making of America while forging American ethnic identity across lines of difference.[11]

Migrants also referenced urban environments to build community. Drawing on theorist of nationalism Benedict Anderson, Julie Sze argues that New Yorkers turned opposition to incinerators and sludge and sewage treatment plants into moments for imagining new inter-ethnic environmental justice coalitions. Residents in impacted neighborhoods, she writes, "created a shared sense of place and identity, centered on the belief that they were targeted as victims of environmental racism…. [Residents] also shared an imagined community with other urban localities that used environmental justice as their new language and approach to old problems of race and urban poverty." In *Urban Green*, I show how migrants in industrial Chicago used urban green spaces and nearby wilderness parks as places to remember distant homelands and imagine ethnicity. Ironic as it might seem, marginalized Chicagoans made park landscapes in "nature's nation" into important cites for producing and reproducing Irish, German, Italian, Mexican, Japanese, and Filipino identity and building community (Fisher 2015). In exploring these complicated questions of how the foreign born made rural and urban landscapes essential for producing and reproducing identity and community, environmental historians are poised to help answer some of the trickiest and most important questions in migration historiography (Sze 2006).

Environmental history and modern migration history — fields that address, respectively, place and movement through space — seemingly have little in common, but a number of scholars are exploring crossroads and in the process invigorating both fields. This is an important development not only because environmental and migration historians have so much to teach each other but because the present moment demands a reexamination of the past. The crossroads of the two fields must be explored in order to better understand the environmental context of contemporary migration and provide tools to activists working on climate and migration justice. It is precisely for these reasons that we should applaud not only the outstanding essays in Armiero's and Tucker's

[11] On Chicano identity and landscape, see Gutiérrez 1993; Lint Sagarena 2014. On Garvey and the green stripe, see Fisher 2015, 106; Øverland 2000.

anthology *Environmental History of Modern Migrations* but also the exciting articles published here in this issue of *JAm It!*.

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MIGRANT ECOLOGIES IN THE PRESS: CHICAGO ITALIANS AND *THE TRIBUNE*

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ABSTRACT

During the age of mass migration (1850-1940) more than 4 million Italians reached the United States. The experience of Italians in United States cities has been largely explored during the twentieth century and produced a vast amount of academic literature. However, the study of migrants' adjustment practices connected to nature is a quite recent concern, also for Environmental History. Migrants' visions of nature influenced their practices and attitudes toward the environment, helping them to be resilient and adjust to different urban contexts and manage the sense of displacement provoked by their encounter with a U.S. metropolis at the turn of the twentieth century.

Italians of Chicago, for instance, in their quest for a partial self-sufficiency brought into the urban space non-urban practices—like the raising of animals, the farming of many vacant lots in the city, and the collection of different kinds of materials from the urban landscape—which challenged the modernity project that was deeply embedded in the functionalist city enterprise. Their way of inhabiting the city was a performative activity, which generated hybrid spaces. In many cases though, these practices were perceived by U.S. authorities and public opinion as a sign of backwardness and an obstacle to modernity: this complicated immigrants' aim for self-sufficiency and generated conflicts over the uses of urban space.

One of the challenges that emerge from the study of migration phenomena through the lens of environmental history is the lack of sources: where can scholars find the environment in migration studies' sources? With this article we address such an apparent epistemological blank spot by analyzing one specific kind of written source: we aim to explore the Italian experience in Chicago through the articles of the newspaper *The Chicago Tribune*, which we analyze following the socio-ecological dichotomy of proper urban space vs. unruly migrant practices. Known for its nativist, isolationist, and anti-Catholic positions—which targeted the Irish before shifting to Italians—*The Tribune* played the role of an anti-Italian-immigrant press organ from the 1870s until the first decade of the twentieth century.[1] In an era when white Anglo-Saxon primacy within society, racism, and discriminatory discourses on immigrants' ethnic qualities were commonly accepted as scientific, *The Tribune* reportage of Italians' poor conditions and livelihoods concurred in re-enforcing such a narrative.[2] With this article, we want to show that through the

[1] On the history of *The Tribune* and its political positions, see Kinsley (1946).
[2] To deepen the relationship between science, ideas of "race," and immigration, and their influence on the work of the Dillingham Commission, see Benton-Cohen (2018).

often biased and deformed lens of the WASP middle-class press, it is possible to reconstruct Italians' and other immigrant's urban practices, as well as to show how so-called modernization processes were contested and resisted by various marginal urbanites.

TRANSHUMANT URBAN STRATEGIES: MOBILITY AND IMMIGRANTS IN MODERNIZING URBAN AMERICA

"A transhumant or metaphoric city insinuated itself into the clear text of the planned and readable city" (de Certeau 1980, 142). With his enlightening and prophetic style, Michel de Certeau offers a key to understanding the power of mobility within the urban context. According to the French historian, the urban space should be understood as an ensemble of different patterns and practices, which become visible when those iterant and itinerant trajectories cross each other. In de Certeau's view, street-level practices of everyday life characterize the cityscape as the environment where the multiple ways of inhabiting that "produce the city" occur.[3] Such a view opposes the top-down perspective that long informed—as it still does—urban planners regards and activities towards urban spaces. From the ground level, seemingly ephemeral livelihoods such as scavenging, recycling waste, raising and herding domestic animals around the city, and farming liminal green lots become a way of valuing the city space as a whole. Therefore, assuming that living (in) the city is an act of mobility-informed dwelling and livelihood practices, we argue that by moving between the urban and the rural, subsistence and wage, commons and private property, migrants' urban strategies were similar to the inherently itinerant pastoral practice of transhumance[4] which continuously challenged state borders and the enclosing of private space. We analyze those transhumant urban strategies through a highly significant case: Chicago.

[3] "History begins on the ground level, with some steps" de Certeau (1980, 147). With these words de Certeau states the inherent bottom-up approach of geo-history, at once a methodological posture and a scholarly practice. Much like environmental history, the French historian was theorizing a scholarly historical practice that united geographical or spatial approach to a diachronically based analysis of events de Certeau.

[4] Transhumance is a millennial practice that was—and still is—performed all around the Mediterranean area, consisting in the movement of shepherds, cattle, sheep, and other herding animals following seasonal pasturelands. The same practice, with different names, can be found all around the globe. Braudel spent a significant part of his work on those practices, which he defined as "continual migrations" Braudel (1949, 85-103) in his account of Mediterranean geo-history.

For millions of people, New York was the entry point to urban America, but often Italian immigrant patterns did not end in the Five Boroughs of NYC. Italians immigrants were mostly leaving behind their peasant lives and they were looking for urban environments and livelihoods. Chicago could very well rival the Big Apple as an urban future in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. Chicago was in fact the second preferred destination for Italians in America, as it was for most other immigrant groups.[5] As the Gateway City to the American West (Cronon 1991), Chicago exerted a potent attraction on newcomers, luring and ordering nature, goods, and laborers. We decided to focus on migrant subjects for they constitute inherently unruly figures within the modernity project. Plus, migrants were key constituents of Chicago's metabolism as a part of its circulation and extractivist processes. We opted for Italians as an ethnic group because of their high numbers and the interest that their unruly activities raised among journalists, social reformers, and politicians in the U.S. (Serra 2009; Vellon 2014; Guglielmo 2010). We argue that Italian immigrants epitomize the undisciplined figure of the immigrant within the U.S. urban environment. In a world where identity, nationality, class, and race were to be fixed and shaped by the joint action of capitalism and nationalism, immigrants were a living crack in this heteronormative apparatus. Italian immigrants' unruly livelihoods help us see how the construction of modern urban environments—in North America and elsewhere—was often contested from a variety of groups which were systematically and deliberately excluded and marginalized by this very social, economic, and environmental transformation.

WRITING AN ENVIRONMENTAL HISTORY OF MIGRATIONS: WHAT TO LOOK FOR?

Environmental history deals with the relationship between humans and the environments they inhabit: a relationship that produces temporal and social shifts as

[5] In the decade from 1900 to 1920, when emigration from Italy knew a massive growth, the Italian population in Chicago increased from 16,008 to 59,215, and this number represented one fifth of the Italian population in the United States in 1910. The total number of Italians in the United States was 2,045,877. Nelli (1983, 62); See Daniels (1990, 189).

well as ecological and environmental transformations. Environments and human societies in fact influence and—to use Lefebvre's words—co-produce each other continually (Lefebvre 1974). But what does it mean to look at the environment from an historical perspective? For environmental historians it is often a matter of summoning different disciplines and analyzing anew the sources we already possess in order to unveil the *environmental* in them. From a new observation, then, new questions—and answers—arise. In order to see that, environmental historians interrogate historical sources differently and we come up with new historical questions about the environment, and new ecological questions about history. As French historian Geneviève Massard-Guilbaud wrote, those questions might be the following ones:

> How did people, at different moments in time, perceive what we call today our environment? When neither the word nor the concept existed, what did people enjoy or dislike among the elements that surrounded them; whether built or natural, in a given time and given circumstances? What did they regard as an amenity, and what a nuisance? What struck them, if at all, as unfair, and did they complain? (2001, 20)

Following this methodological insight, we looked at the history of the Italians in the United States trying to imagine the encounter of many Italian peasants with the vastness of the American urban environment. What did the view of Chicago's skyline mean to those Italian peasants? How did these migrants see the urban space? Which experiences and vernacular knowledge did they mobilize to adapt to their new urban environment? Which sources do we need as historians to write their history? And what do we ask the pages of a newspaper to add new knowledge—as practitioners of environmental history of migration—about migrants' experience?

Environmental history of migration (EHM) looks at the transnational, vernacular, and bodily knowledges and practices that moved along with migrants to their new home. As migrants moved, so did their environments and their ecological understanding. Seeds, food, herding, scavenging, and picking wild herbs; those were all practices which originated in the practical and centuries-long relationship between Italian migrants and their rural environments back in Europe. In fact, most of those migrants came from rural areas (Vecoli 1964, 1983), and once in Chicago, New York, and

other American cities, they behaved accordingly to their own ecological understanding. Often relegated to the poorest neighborhoods and the lowest social classes, Italians mobilized their ecological knowledge in order to make a living out of what they could access in U.S cities: wastelands, dumpsites, seemingly abandoned lots of land, and lawns, as well as by raising domestic animals. What upper- and middle-class White Anglo-Saxon Protestant dwellers considered proper behavior for an urban citizen did not match Italian immigrants' needs. Italian saw and inhabited the environment of the Windy City differently from their fellow citizens in central Chicago. In this brief contribution, we want to retrace their vision and their understanding of the environment of Chicago. By looking at Italian practices as described by *The Chicago Tribune* we want to show how a different reading of the same narrative can lead to a very different understanding of Italian immigrant unruliness in American cities (Fisher 2015, McCammack, 2018).

With this essay, we mainly focus on one source: *The Chicago Tribune*, the most read newspaper in all of the Midwest.[6] We deliberately choose to focus on the *Tribune* since our aim is to write an essay that shows the methodology of Environmental History of Migrations: as Environmental historians, we don't want to write a comprehensive history of the Italians in Chicago, but we want to put up a few bricks for a bridge between disciplines, which migration historians could also cross, in order to start reading and interrogating sources with a different point of view. In addition to the *Tribune*'s reportage, we analyze some Italian reformers' and travelers' accounts of the same streets and immigrant groups in late nineteenth and early twentieth century Chicago, as well as a few Italian-American novels and other journalistic and scholarly accounts of other contemporary cities in the U.S. and in Italy.

[6] The *Chicago Daily Tribune* was founded in 1847. In its early decades, accomplished through the presence of the editor Joseph Medill, the Tribune supported the Republican Party. Later, in the first decades of the twentieth century, Robert McCormick—Medill's grandson—took control of the *Tribune*, making it the most read newspaper in Chicago in 1925, with a daily circulation of circa 650,000 copies. In this latter era the *Tribune* dealt in depth with issues of social and political reform, publishing investigations and editorials about political corruption. See Kinsley (1946).

In analyzing a few of the hundreds of *Tribune*'s articles concerning Italian improperness in Chicago, we follow the socio-ecological dichotomy of proper urban space vs. unruly migrant practices. We focus on the timespan between 1880 and 1924, the peak of the mass migration period.[7] The same decades correspond to a historical transformation in American cities which Chicago led, together with New York (Cronon 1991; Steinberg 2002, 2014). In fact, in those years, Chicago underwent a series of modernization processes—sanitary and infrastructural changes—that changed the cityscape and subverted the ecological relationship that had previously characterized American cities and their urban environment until the mid-nineteenth century. Not by chance, the first skyscrapers to appear in the United States were built in Chicago. Dirty roads, the lack of sewage systems, the free roaming of wild and domestic animals: those quite common features of urban life began to be consciously fought by municipal governments as well as by urban boosters and developers. But to free the city from its nonhuman inhabitants was not a matter of propriety to the vast mass of urban poor who relied on pigs, goats, and free access to waste and the urban green to sustain themselves (McNeur 2014; Fisher 2015).

In such a context, the resilient practices that European migrants performed were often perceived as non-modern. Often ethnically secluded in marginal areas, where the lack of public services and job opportunities exposed them to major setbacks to their American dream, Italians used their lay ecological knowledge to sustain themselves and supplement their meager incomes. As other immigrant groups did, Italians mobilized their rural background to transform their environments, producing hybrid urban-rural livelihoods. Italians' precarious and unruly livelihoods often clashed with the idea of a clean and ordered city that social reformers and urban planners were enforcing at the

[7] Concerning the Italian mass migration, Italian migration historiography generally focuses on the timespan between 1870—when the kingdom started to officially register emigrants—and 1924, when the Quota Act blocked mass immigration to the U.S., the period known as the *Grande Migrazione*. Recently historians placed the migratory flows from Europe to North America into the wider context of a unitary and global migratory flow of people, labor, and capital that occurred between the nineteenth and twentieth century. In the case of Chicago, the number of Italians swiftly rose from 552 in 1870 to 5,685 in 1890, then reached 59,215 by 1920, when they became the fourth largest immigrant group in the city behind Poles, Germans, and Russians. See Guglielmo (2004, 14); Bevilacqua et alt. (2001); McKeown (2004).

time.[8] Adjustment practices like raising animals in the streets or in tenement cellars, as well as scavenging and cultivating vacant lots to provide food for their families, were labelled by American authorities as undesired remains of a rural past which had no space in their idea of a modern city. Hence, urban reforms like street cleaning, or the implementation of *zoning* laws—the tool through which a municipality began regulating the uses of its land—often put obstacles in the way of activities like scavenging or animal agriculture (Brinkley, Vitiello, 2014).[9]

It is exactly in these interstices of the ephemeral history of Chicago that we can find precious sources and write an environmental history of migration. Descriptions are peopled with strange words and characters, at least for a modern urban context: a narrative where "Italian" and "immigrant" are often coupled with "goat," "chicken," and "cow." In this story, right next to skyscrapers or beltways, we see "farms," "gardens," "truck farmers," and "market gardening," while abandoned lots and liminal urban wastelands are reclaimed as commons to produce vegetables. It is a landscape populated by scavengers and peddlers, where "waste," "garbage," "junk," and "refuse" are transformed into valuable resources. It is all already there, in the *Tribune*'s articles, but instead of buying into journalists' criticism, we analyze Italians' unruliness through the lens of their ecological understanding of the urban environment. This method allowed us to extrapolate the *environmental content* in the *Tribune*'s articles and helped us to build an alternative narrative "from below."

ITALIAN SCAVENGER AND URBAN HYGIENE

Hygiene and waste mismanagement, as well as urban and social propriety, have long been tied together in late nineteenth century journalistic accounts. Migrants, minorities, and new urban dwellers' mischief were often protagonists of such reportage

[8] On the changes to the urban environment, especially in the United States, at the turn of the twentieth century, see: McNeur (2014), Melosi (2000), Tarr (1975).
[9] The city of Chicago formed a zoning commission in 1919 and implemented its first zoning law in 1923. In the mind of Chicago Mayor William Thompson, zoning was important to "preserve property values and . . . for the city industrial growth," Lewis (2013, 92).

in Chicago as in other major American cities (Melosi 1982; Zimring 2005). In 1882 the *Tribune* began paying attention to the hygiene problems that the growing city was facing with the lack of public cleaning services.[10] Notably, in the summer of 1882, the area of Chicago, and especially the Italian neighborhoods, were hit by a cholera epidemic.[11] Two years later, with the epidemic gone, hygiene had not improved, and a *Tribune* reporter venturing to the north side of Fourteenth Street, between Indiana and Michigan Avenue, could still smell "sickening refuse that pollute the air beyond the endurance of man of the ordinary mold."[12] Without the city government's will to spend more money on a public garbage disposal system, scavenging was the easiest possible bottom-up solution developed by local inhabitants to manage their own neighborhoods' properly.[13] Surprisingly, or maybe not, the solution that the *Tribune* suggested was not to pay for a public waste disposal system, but to teach the inhabitants of the Twelfth Ward "to burn their own garbage."[14] In that way, those uncivilized urbanites could contribute to the cleaning-up of the city prior to the World's Fair that was to happen in Chicago in the next months.[15] What the *Tribune*'s journalist considered as a sign of Italian immigrant's backwardness could instead be understood as a bottom-up strategy to cope with the lack of public interest in waste management. But such a view did not pertain solely to American citizenship. Class biases and racist considerations all concurred in marginalizing the poor. Significantly, also Italian middle- and upper-class dwellers and travelers shared similar accounts of immigrant neighborhoods in the U.S at the time.

In 1892, the Italian playwright Giuseppe Giacosa visited Chicago. During these days, he strolled through the city and wrote a memoir—later published as "Impressioni

[10] "Health Situation and Deaths," Chicago Tribune, March 28, 1882, 8.
[11] Ibid.
[12] "The Italian Quarter," Chicago Tribune, July 24, 1884, 5.
[13] "The Garbage Must be Consumed," Chicago Tribune, July 19, 1892, 4.
[14] Ibid.
[15] "There should be no shrinking or half-heartedness about this . . . Half-way measure will not do. It has been decided that the city must be put in presentable condition for the World's Fair . . . We ought not to have five hundred streets in the city heaped with trash, we must get rid of that garbage at the soonest." "The Garbage must be Consumed," Chicago Tribune, July 19, 1892, 4.

d'America"—about the Italian neighborhoods of Chicago. Among those memories, Giacosa focused on the figures of old women who he saw scavenging all day for useful scrap materials and leftover food. Those female scavengers were searching a triangular plot of land next to the railroad, on the pathway that Giacosa took every day from his hotel to the city center:

> . . . lo spettacolo della nostra miseria, va cercato un po' da per tutto e più nell'esercizio di certe infime industrie che solamente i nostri connazionali patiscono di esercitare. La più comune, consiste nel ribruscolare fra il lezzume ammassato presso i grandi depositi di cereali, le concerie, gli scali d'imbarco e le stazioni ferroviarie. È industria di vecchie donne delle nostre provincie meridionali andate in America col marito e coi figliuoli. Questi attendono all'arte loro od ai negozi; esse passano, piova o nevichi, l'intera giornata fra le spazzature per riportarne la sera, a farla grassa, il valore di pochi centesimi. (Giacosa, 1899, 117)[16]

The "spectacle offered by Italian misery" described by the composer did not differ much from what Italian journalist Matilde Serao described in her reportage on Naples in the same years (Serao, 1906). The point is that European and American cities were facing an epochal transformation, one where industrialization, urban growth and renewal, and increasing global trade all joined with a massive proletarization of millions of people. What Wines (1985) defined as the re-cycling mentality worked both in urban America as it did in Europe, but it was swiftly eradicated by new capitalist ways of valuing the environment. What wage-workers and middle-class citizens saw as valueless waste was still valuable to Italian immigrants. While many Italian men of Chicago spent their days in seasonal or part-time occupations in railroad jobs and construction (Gugliemo 2000,

[16] "The spectacle of our misery must be sought everywhere, and more in the scope of certain low-grade industries our compatriots suffer from practicing. The most common one is rummaging in those masses of garbage next to big grain warehouses, tanneries, loading areas, and railway stations. It is an industry mostly practiced by old women from southern [Italian] areas, who migrated to American with their husbands and children. These wait in their shops while the women spent—even in the rain or snow—the whole day in the garbage just to pick up—at best—few cents in value." Translated into English by the authors.

18), Italian women roamed the streets in search for food or valuable—to them, not to proper Americans—items as they used to do back at home.[17]

> Cartaccie, ritagli di cuoio, cenci, chiodi, bullette, pezzi di lamiera, fili di ferro, quanto è ultimo vilissimo rifiuto della grossa vita industre e meccanica, tutto raccolgono ed insaccano… Non le nutrisce anche il mondezzaio? Io ne vidi addentare gustosamente certi avanzi di patate succherine raccattati fra la spazzatura. Dio sa, quelle patate da quanti giorni erano cotte e come inacidite! Sedani, carote, cavoli vizzi e raggrinziti, mele fradicie, quanto le più povere cucine diedero per disperazione al corbello dello spazzaturaio, è loro pasto quotidiano. (Giacosa 1899, 117-118)[18]

Giacosa's notes about his time in Chicago and New York City are full of similar descriptions, which tellingly depicted the ambivalent tension of transforming urban environments during the transition to modernity.[19] But while Giacosa focused specifically on Italians, also the Irish, Germans, Greeks, Bohemians, Jews, and the fast-growing African-American community of the so-called Black Belt engaged in similar practices, or used to, in Chicago as in other cities.[20]

Through practices like scavenging, those immigrant urbanites contributed to the functioning of Chicago's urban metabolism, exploring and experiencing it via the rational and original application of those livelihood skills previously used in their homeland. Together with wealth and jobs, the Windy City produced waste and wasted lives too. Given their subordinate position within the urban socio-ecological context of the growing city, those unruly citizens mobilized their lay knowledge, developing an original hybrid livelihood in a foreign environment. Moreover, through their practical relationships with liminal and wasted nature, those immigrants recognized and

[17] Among various authors, Nuto Revelli gathered many testimonies of Northern Italian women's scavenging and inventiveness in gathering herbs and other valuable products in the Alpine region. See Revelli 1977.
[18] "Paper waste, leather scraps, rags, nails, tacks, plate slices, iron wire: they pick up all the vile remnants of industrial and manufacturing life. Aren't they fed even by the street cleaner? I saw them eating those scraps of sugary potatoes taken from the garbage. God only knows when these potatoes were cooked and became sour. Celeries, carrots, wrinkled cabbages, rotten apples, all that the poorest kitchens put into the street cleaner's basket becomes their daily meal." Translated into English by the authors.
[19] For deeper treatment of this aspect of Giacosa's writing, see Guarnieri (2006, 31-64).
[20] See Valisena, Armiero, Mazzoli (forthcoming).

benefited from the residual value inherent in discarded objects. Such a valorization by poor migrants helped the city manage the unprecedented waste-ecology that modern urbanization was developing. However, those unruly behaviors ended up supporting the exclusion and the racialization of migrants by wealthier citizens throughout all American cities and in Europe (Valisena, Armiero, Mazzoli, forthcoming). Narratives and "reportage from the slums" soon became typical in Chicago's Italian areas.

The establishment of a publicly managed waste-disposal service which in Chicago started in 1849 (Colten 1994, 128) threatened the very basis of such unruly hybrid livelihoods. As *The Tribune* reported, local scavengers set up a long-lasting protest against a modern waste facility built right in the heart of an Italian neighborhood. Apart from the unpleasant smell coming from the facility, the population could not embrace the "marvelous effectiveness" of the system's technology, which allowed for the conversion of garbage into fertilizers. As *The Tribune* journalist L. J. Kadish wrote, to his astonishment "the local scavengers found it more profitable to use the garbage for street filling and to feed the swine."[21] At stake, of course, was not modernity or technological progress, but the privatization of the commons and the loss of control over a means of survival.

FARMES AND GATHERERS IN THE URBAN WILD

Italians arrived in the Windy City at the time of its stormy industrial development in the 1870s. At that time, according to the U.S. Census of 1870, there were 552 Italians in Chicago and they settled mostly in the First, 27th, and 42nd wards. As noted by sociologist Giovanni Schiavo in his study on Americanization of Italians in Chicago in 1928, these areas were previously inhabited by Germans, Scandinavians, Poles, and the Irish. Those wards "had been for generations the seat of rampant vice, and of the worst types of political corruption." In late-nineteenth-century Chicago, the 42th ward was known as "Little Hell," and the First ward—mostly inhabited by Italians from the

[21] "How to deal with garbage," Chicago Tribune, July 3, 1892, 19.

southern regions of Calabria and Basilicata—was the old red-light district. Here, in 1892, the living conditions were "filthy and rotten tenements" where refuse and manure "accumulate undisturbed" and "tuberculosis prevail[s]." As Schiavo remarked, from those grime-dominated descriptions "we may form in our mind a vague picture of the wretched conditions with which the Italians were confronted when they settled in Chicago" (Schiavo 1928, 30-34). The state of the First ward did not improve in the following two decades. A 1915 survey depicted tenements' narrow backyards full of "decaying garbage, thrown there for want of any better place, rubbish of every description, filth from the stables and yard closets fill the so-called yard, which serves as well for the home of various animals and as the playground for many little children" (Walker 1916, 296-7). Unlike the Lithuanians described by Sinclair (1906), most of the Italians did not work for the meat-packing industry. Furthermore, Italians in Chicago did not comply with the narrative of the one and only Little Italy, or the idea of the uniform—and spatially segregated—community. As Dominic Candeloro argued, "Italians were occupying all the three directions of the Loop, clustering in the River Wards" (2003, 15), close to the working sites they were employed on. Italians settled between Halsted Street and the river,[22] but they were also found around Taylor Street and the area of the present-day University of Chicago, where more than 25,000 Italians lived in the heyday of immigration. Approximately, around the mid-1920s, some 75,000 Italians were living in the Windy City (Candeloro 2003, 16). The idea of the existence of only one Little Italy is a construction elaborated after the Second World War, when the last great wave of Italian immigrants arrived (Gabaccia 2007, 25-41; Rainhorn 2007, 45-56). Those women and men often discovered their *Italianity* only after they had migrated. Those Italians knew only one *paese*,[23] the small hamlets and towns where they

[22] The area where Hull House was—and still is—located. See Jane Addams (1920, 17). On a citywide level, Thomas Guglielmo individuates up to seventeen Italian neighborhoods in the early twentieth century Chicago. The most populated was the Near West Side area, where by 1910 twenty-five thousand Italians lived (2000, 17-19).

[23] In Italian, the word *paese* tellingly refers both to "home country," as well as to a small town or a rural hamlet. Those very limited worlds and cognate world-visions informed—and to many extents, it still does—the horizon and the sense of belonging of most Italians on the two sides of the Atlantic. As various Italian migration scholars have stated, Italian emigrants in the years of the great Italian migration often began to think of themselves as Italian

grew up. They spoke their own dialects, befriended, lived, and worked with their kin or *paesani*, and to the newly arrived immigrants, the Italians already living on this other side of the Atlantic seemed as foreign as were Chicagoans (Luconi, Barone 2010). The *Italianity* we refer to must be understood in very local terms: in the choice of a place to live, Italian migrants reproduced their homeland within the gridded urban space of American metropolises: both sources and historiography confirm that these Little Italies were also fragmented spaces. Italians abroad adhered to a sort of *campanilismo*, that basically meant "loyalty only to that area over which one could hear the bell from the village church" (Fisher, 2015, 53). This led to a precise spatial subdivision within Little Italies: Italians from different provinces lived together, grouped in different streets. Often *campanilismo* affected and fragmented the disposition of Italians even within a single street in a Little Italy: through word of mouth and the so-called chain migration[24] mechanism, the first settlers invited friends and families and re-created their small village of provenance even in a single tenement. As the *Chicago Tribune* rightfully reported, "Italian has a wide meaning."[25]

Nevertheless, those concepts were almost completely unknown to many social reformers and most public officers dealing with immigrants in the early 1900s and later on. As social reformer Mike Davis wrote in the mid-1920s ". . . most people [working with immigrants] seem to imply: Americanism is a dogma; the inferiority of foreign born as datum; uniformity as a social goal; compulsion as a method" (1921, 12). Given that point, it is not surprising that forcing foreigners to behave like proper Americans was perceived as a "natural goal" for police officers, property owners, and whoever lived close enough to the Italian neighborhoods. A contentious place of disagreement was the interpretation of public space and its functioning: Italian immigrants and proper Americans understood urban space in very different ways.

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from the moment they were classified and treated as an unitary ethnic and national group by American or other immigration officers upon their arrival. See Bevilacqua et alt. (2001).

[24] On chain migration mechanism, see J. and L. MacDonald (1968).

[25] "Italian has a wide meaning," Chicago Tribune, June 7, 1910, 8. On regional and local differences between Italians, see also Broers (2003).

According to Clay McShane (1979), by the beginning of the 1900s urban bureaucrats saw streets mainly as arteries for the flow of goods, while for many migrants they were places for social activities and various trades, relational and shared spaces at once. The American demarcation between the public space of the city and citizens' private dwelling areas was something that those Italian immigrants could not grasp properly. The same goes for the separation between working space and the home. As social reformer Jane Addams noted: "He [the average Italian] usually spends all his time outdoors, doing his work on the sidewalks or in the court or in the yard of his dwelling . . . where the goats and the donkeys or other animals share equally, with him and his family" (1920, 118-9). And again: "Because of limited space, fewer women kept small animals, except for a few caged rabbits, chickens or birds" (Gabaccia 1984, 93). As most other social reformers did, Jane Addams (1920, 282) also complained about those migrants, mostly Italians and Greeks, who used the streets of Chicago to sell food and vegetables:

> One of the striking features of our neighborhood twenty years ago, and one to which we never became reconciled, was the presence of huge wooden garbage boxes fastened to the street pavement in which the undisturbed refuse accumulated day by day. The system of garbage collecting was inadequate throughout the city but it became the greatest menace in a ward such as ours, where the normal amount of waste was much increased by the decayed fruit and vegetables discarded by the Italian and Greek fruit peddlers, and by the residuum left over from the piles of filthy rags which were fished out of the city dumps and brought to the homes of the rag pickers for further sorting and washing. (1920, 282)

Jane Addams' grievances about migrants' behavior materialized through her efforts to teach immigrants better ways to interact with the urban environment. The same vision was shared by other American public institutions during the Progressive Era. Such an account might come as a surprise especially since it comes from a social reformer who spent her life to improve Chicago's poors' conditions. Yet most social reformers like Jane Addams maintained the same progress-informed modern vision of Chicago's ruling classes, one which impeded them from seeing how rag-picking and scavenging were but an economically rational response to the impoverishment and the social marginality

that those Italian immigrants withstood. Also, since there was no public waste collecting service in their neighborhoods in Chicago, Italian had to do it themselves. Furthermore, those practices were elaborated by Italians drawing from their own vernacular knowledge. Italians' unruly *savoir-faire* had been constructed and transmitted from generation to generation in the context of rural communities which had to fight against a constant increase of population and limited resources. Especially in the south of Italy, the infamous *latifondo* (Petrusewicz 1996) social and agricultural structure forced poor farmers to constantly deal with few sources of food and income. In such a context, Italians had to develop new strategies to cope with their families' daily needs. In that perspective, urban America's concept of private property was easy to understand, but less so was the concept of public parks and leisure areas.

FROM SLUM ECOLOGIES TO PERI-URBAN FARMING

Scenes such as the one described by Addams were quite common in the Near North Side, the area known as Little Sicily or "Little Hell." The not-so-merry nickname of the area around Goose Island blended in a more-than-human juxtaposition the endless activities of the steel mills—the blast furnaces and the gas works situated in the area—and the activities of the Black Hand.[26] Obviously, nobody from the main Chicago newspaper found problematic the fact that those immigrants were continuously exposed to the toxic miasmas of the industrial area. Evidently, the elites, with their passion for a sanitized and beautified city, could be disgusted by immigrants' urban moral ecologies (Valisena, Armiero, Mazzoli, forthcoming) but they were not equally horrified by the urban capitalistic ecologies of production and profits.

Italians there, although mostly employed in road and building construction, never gave up to their vegetable gardens, building wooden shacks on every plot of land they could find, filling those areas with tomatoes, lentils, and other vegetables, and also with some goats and hens. The open spaces around 67th Street were thus transformed

26 "Little Hell," Chicago Tribune, November 27, 1875, 7.

from grasslands to hybrid spaces for working, socializing, and gardening, areas where goats could be seen roaming around to the dismay of the proper American residents.[27] Those practices served as a means to "remember distant villages, regions, and nations," but differently from what would later happen with the more "Americanized" relation with public parks, those early immigrants developed original ways to produce hybrid cultural/natural spaces, where work and leisure mixed rather than separated (Fisher 2015, 54). In his extensive research on Italian immigrants in Chicago, Dominic Candeloro (1981, 315) has stressed their quest for autonomy. Chicago Heights, a heavily Italian neighborhood in the city, was crowded with chickens, goats, and pigs. Aiming to limit their dependence from the market — and from wage work — Italians used to make canned tomatoes, pasta, and bread while harvesting urban commons, generally invisible to others, items such as chicory mushrooms and burdock stems (Arctium lappa).[28] While Italian immigrants were well known for their scavenging ability to extract value from waste, their skills as urban gathers still deserve more scrutiny. Alessandro Mastrovalerio was a Hull House resident and a journalist working for many years with Italians in Chicago. In one of his writings, he reasoned through the formidable picking instinct of Italians:

> The Italian instinct for picking is notable. In Italy they are used to pick wood from the forest, weeds from the fields, wheat and grain after the mowers fruit from the trees, insects from the bark of the trees and vines, for which they are paid so much per hundred; herbs, beans, pease (sic) and other truck-farm products from the plants; the seeds of weeds from wheat, oats, rye, etc.; herbs from the woods, and many other things which the average American would never think of using in any way. (1895, 134)

Mastrovalerio explained Italians' exceptional eye for recognizing and making use of any kind of resources available around them as a form of cultural heritage, a bodily knowledge derived from a long tradition dating back to modern-time era usages and

[27] See for instance "Empty City Lots," Chicago Tribune, April 15, 1922, 22. See also Candeloro (1981, 28).
[28] Ibid., 316. About the role of mushrooms for Italian immigrants in California and their gathering skills, see Arora (2008).

habits. In one of his novels, the Italian-American writer Toni Ardizzone confirms this idea of the city as an immense urban mine from which Italians could extract precious resources. In a passage from one of his novels, Ardizzone describes the unusual "hunt and gather" skills of *Ziu* Griddu, a Sicilian immigrant trying to survive in Chicago:

> At home, Ziu Griddu had a lot of hungry mouths to feed. Each day before dawn he tied the piece of rope that held up his pants and donned his jacket and put on his cap, then smoothed his drooping black moustache and ventured out with his knife and empty sack, looking for anything that he could bring back that evening to feed his family. No frog or snail, no snake or worm or slug, was too small. (1999, 167-8)

Historian Hasia R. Diner confirms Italians' outstanding ability to scan the (peri-)urban environment, looking for "plants that most Americans disdained as not being food" (2001, 61). Sometimes this foraging occurred in the remaining urban green areas, or, and Diner mentions precisely Chicago, in dumping grounds and vegetable markets, where Italian women collected articles which, although discarded, they could still use.

Pluri-activity and multiple sets of professional skills were a common feature of many Italians, who accordingly to the seasonal needs of the European labor markets would likely turn into masons, lumberjacks, miners, quarrymen, diggers, carpenters, and workers in many other jobs (Corti, Schor 1995; Dadà 1994; Petersen 1993). Such flexibility helped Italians to adapt to different environments, often surviving at the fringe of the "proper" urban space where their skills could be of special value.

Nonetheless, this attitude was not only a coping strategy to deal with extreme poverty. Italian immigrants preserved their connection to the land also when they moved up in the social scale of the city. An article in the *Tribune* dated August 15, 1909 congratulated a group of Italians who "abandoned the slums" to become "town farmers." The anonymous reporter described as a conquest worth mentioning the "normal housing" where Italians were now living in the suburbs of Chicago, almost at the city limits. Those "old-fashioned houses with an upstairs and a downstairs" were drastically different—in a better way—from the crowded tenements which had long hosted Italian families. Those Italians, mainly women, were working their plots growing vegetables for their own consumption. "Now many Italians in Chicago"—concluded the article—

"know that one can live better on the outskirts of the city than in the most congested streets . . . and they move as fast as they can to buy their little cottage."[29]Although still growing vegetables in the backyard, this passage into the suburbs seemed to turn Italian immigrants in the right direction to finally leave the wild costums of the slums and embrace the proper American (sub)urban lifestyle.

CONCLUSIONS

The transformation of Italian immigrants' livelihoods in Chicago corresponded to a shift in their social positioning among the white-ethnic groups in U.S. cities. At the same time, this historical change can be understood as a shift in the relationship between Italian immigrants and the environment of Chicago. However, even if they were moving their farming from the empty lots of Chicago's central areas to the periphery of the city, Italians didn't accept the proper ordering of urban America. Suburban style, to a certain extent, implied nothing but the application of the ideas of a clean and ordered city—which characterized the American urban context of the early twentieth century—to its suburban counterparts. Instead of tenements and skyscrapers placed on a gridded area, in suburbia it was typical to see endless rows of mono-familiar houses, most of which were equipped with a "(must be) perfect lawn." It could seem just a detail, but it is not: the transition from a backyard garden with vegetables to a smooth lawn occurred—due to a mixture of Romanticism and achieved wealth—in early twentieth century America, soon turning into an obsession.[30] The mono-familiar house with the lawn became the symbol of suburbia. In fact, in post-World War Two suburban America, a backyard with vegetables would surely be perceived as an unproper space. As Ted Steinberg wrote, a 1959 *Time* magazine article depicted the suburbs as a place where "crab grass on a lawn can lower a man's status faster than garbage in his foyer" (2006, 50). Whether Italians forsook their tomatoes, eggplants, and lettuce for such plain green lawns—thus being

[29] "Slums deserted for Suburb"; "Italians become Town Farmers," Chicago Tribune, August 15, 1909, 36.
[30] On the rise of the suburbs in the United States see Jackson 1985, Rome 2001.

finally tamed by the fascination of the American Dream—or they kept cultivating gardens in order to reproduce their homeland environments unconcerned about the aesthetics of suburbia, still deserves scrutiny. But that is the beginning of another story.

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BIOPOLITICS AND THE ANTHROPOCENE ERA: IDEAS OF NATURE IN HENRY DAVID THOREAU'S *WALDEN*

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ABSTRACT

This article discusses Thoreau's *Walden; or, Life in the Wood* (1854) as an interpretative key to rethink contemporary relations between humans and nonhumans in ecological systems. While Thoreau's *Civil Disobedience* came to be seen as his main political work *sensu stricto*, *Walden's* socio-environmental criticisms has commonly been regarded as outside the scope of his political commitment. As this essay demonstrates, Thoreau's social critique focused not solely on human life, but it widely encompassed the relevance of nonhuman beings, such as plants and animals or the pond's ecosystem as a whole. Yet, how can such a critical discussion be adopted in order to reflect on the relations between humans and nonhumans in the current Anthropocene era? Informed by the critical tools of the environmental humanities and ecocriticism, we seek to expand Foucault's concept of biopower to nonhuman beings through a critical reading of Thoreau's *Walden*, what we consider as a cutting-edge attempt to present a less anthropocentric idea of ecological systems.
Keywords: Thoreau; Walden; Biopolitics; Biopower; Anthropocene.

INTRODUCTION

In this article we analyze how the concepts of biopower and biopolitics can be applied to the theoretical infrastructure of the environmental humanities in order to construct a less anthropocentric idea of social relations.[1] Using Henry David Thoreau's book *Walden; or, Life in the Woods* as litmus test, we suggest a notion of biopower/politics more consistent with the current Anthropocene era.[2] *Walden* was

[1] For a more complete debate about recent uses of categories as biopower and biopolitics, see Srinivasan 2017, and Nimmo 2019.
[2] According to Arias-Maldonado, Anthropocene "designates the massive anthropogenic disruption of natural systems at a planetary level—a disruption so pervasive that some geologists advocate the end of the Holocene and the official recognition of a new geological epoch" (2020, 2-3). Assuming this position, the Anthropocene Era refers

written during and after Thoreau's life experience at the eponymous pond between 1845 and 1847, in the city of Concord, Massachusetts. In his text, originally published in 1854, the author provides a deep consideration of human and nonhuman relations. Reflecting on the dichotomous relationship between human society and nature, Thoreau raises several critical points about American society at the time, touching upon themes such as slavery, the Mexican-American war and the national rhetoric of alleged "progress." Although the text was produced in the mid-19th century, the author already presents a less dichotomous worldview concerning the Cartesian division between humans and nature present in Western social thought. Thoreau compared the ways of life of native Americans and European/American settlers, focusing on the relationship between human groups and nature. In his observations, he denounced the anthropogenic impact on the local landscape, analyzing indigenous culture and traditions as a counterpoint. This article proposes a reading of Thoreau's social criticism as an interpretative key to rethinking contemporary relations between humans and nonhumans in ecological systems.

While Thoreau's book *Resistance to civil government*—today known as *Civil Disobedience*[3]—came to be seen as Thoreau's political work *sensu stricto*, Walden's socio-environmental criticisms commonly have been regarded as outside the scope of his political commitment. However, Thoreau's social critique focused not solely on human life, but it widely considered the relevance of nonhuman beings, such as plants,

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to the current relationship between humankind and the natural systems, the increase predatory anthropic to alarming levels, climate change, and large other global environmental problems. For a more complete debate see Ellis 2018, Lynch and Veland 2018; Nicholson and Jinnah 2019.

[3] Thoreau was arrested in July of 1846 for nonpayment of poll tax. He believed that tax payment supported the Mexican-American War and the slave trade. So, he had stopped paying the tax since 1842. In 1849, after his brief arrest, Thoreau wrote the essay "Resistance to Civil Government," approaching the complex issues between the sovereignty of the State and the sovereignty of the individual. Concord's philosopher defended the right to disobedience, especially in cases of injustice committed by the government—in this case, his strongest opposition was in relation to the slave regime and the Mexican-American war. He stated: "I heartily accept the motto,—That government is best which governs least; and I should like to see it acted up to more rapidly and systematically. Carried out, it finally amounts to this, which also I believe,—That government is best which governs not at all." His reflections are on the genealogy of many political terms still in use currently as "non-violent resistance," "civil disobedience," and "non-violent revolution," among others. The book "Resistance to Civil Government" was, since its publication, important reading for social revolutionaries such as Liev Tolstoi (1828-1910), Mahatma Gandhi (1869-1948), and Martin Luther King (1929-1968). For a more complete picture of the influence of "Civil Disobedience," see López-Martínez 2016; Miller 2017; Jahanbegloo 2018; Arendt 1972; Losurdo 2015.

animals, or the pond itself. In *Walden*, the relationship between human and nonhuman forms of life appears as a recurring theme. What were the specific patterns of power relations described by Thoreau? How can these be useful to reflect on the relations between humans and nonhumans in the current Anthropocene era?

In *Walden*, Thoreau described the distinctive relations between dissimilar humans groups and nonhuman beings with a *longue durée* approach. Although he produced the text in the middle of the nineteenth century, in his narrative the author references the history of New England until his current time, with particular emphasis on the experience of the first British who settled in the region—which would become the city of Concord. In addition, Thoreau repeatedly developed comparisons between his "civilized" contemporaries and the remaining indigenous population who still inhabited the constantly changing environment. In a sense, *Walden* not only narrates the successive and concomitant experiences of colonial populations but also observes how these settlers interacted with the those previously occupying the same space—and the impact of the industrial revolution with the violent expansion to the American West. Thoreau's book tells a story of dramatic transformations in the relationship between human and nonhuman, comparing the way of life of Native American indigenous societies with that of European colonizers. As argued by Mary Louise Pratt (2007), the eyes of the conqueror—or the settlers in this case—can display a certain empathy during his task of conquering. In a similar fashion, Thoreau draws a significant picture of power-relations in the United States during the nineteenth century, as a white, Anglo-Saxon, and protestant man, belonging to the country's intellectual elite. On the other hand, by temporarily abandoning the nascent industrial civilization in favor of primitivism, Thoreau indirectly fosters the emergence of several movements alternative to industrial and capitalist society.[4]

[4] A large number of activists and social theorists were influenced by Thoreau's work. However, his experiences and texts were read more often under the anarchist and environmentalist lens. For anarchists, especially adherents of non-violence, the notion of "civil disobedience" has been widely used. Environmental movements, on the other hand, consider Thoreau, sometimes along with Emerson and Muir, the founder of ecological thinking. Also, during the 1960s in the United States, the hippie movement was inspired by Thoreau's life and work. In addition, several

Although Thoreau was descendent of European settlers, his text moves beyond the idea of Europeans/Americans as colonizers, attempting to understand nonhuman agency and human/nonhuman interactions in that specific habitat. Adopting a neomaterialist perspective, one could agree with Serenella Iovino and Serpil Oppermann (2012b, 79; 2012a, 454) that the nonhuman narrative "focuses on the way matter's (or nature's) nonhuman agentic capacities are described and represented in narrative texts (literary, cultural, visual)," as well as on the "power of creating configurations of meanings and substances, which enter with human into a field of co-emerging interactions." Drawing from a neomaterialist perspective, this article proposes a expansion of Foucault's notion of biopower (1998; 2003; 2007; 2008), adopting Thoreau's *Walden* as a narrative landmark. We maintain that his autobiographical experience can be considered as an example of what philosopher Jane Bennett (2010, xiv) defines as the concept of "affect" as the central point of political and ethical debates, looking at the "the agency of the things that produce (helpful, harmful) effects in human and other bodies." In the current Anthropocene era, characterized by severe anthropogenic environmental catastrophes, a neomaterialist notion of biopower can inspire ecological narratives of care, hope, and resilience.

BIOPOWER AND BIOPOLITICS: A DEBATE

Foucault's idea of biopolitics stems from an anthropocentric tradition that hardly considers the possibility of nonhuman power. As argued by American historian Robert Darnton (1986, 250), while early modern philosophers "dared" to modify the ancient order of knowledge in early modern era, this new order of knowledge was extremely influential for modernity, outlining new hierarchies and placing philosophy as the main trunk the "tree of knowledge." Towards the end of the twentieth century, post-structuralist and postmodernist thinkers radically pruned the Enlightenment's tree of

anti-colonialist and anti-racist movements were also influenced by the writings of the Concord philosopher. (Altran 2017; Rocha 2018).

knowledge.[5] While this group of social thinkers challenged both the ideas of reason and science, they continued to be intrinsically anthropocentric, regarding nature as a projection of human subjectivity, as did Foucault (1970). In other words, philosophical notions strongly grounded on human-centered approaches are still predominant over less anthropocentric paradigms. Regarding the notions of biopower and biopolitics Foucault (1998, 139; 1999, 138; 2003, 241-247; 2007, 16) maintained that the emergence of biopower technology was a phenomenon related to "the set of mechanisms through which the basic biological features of the human species became the object of a political strategy, of a general strategy of power." In other words, biological aspects were absorbed by the political field and supported the rationality of government practices, considering only humans as the subjects of socio-political life.

If the concepts of biopower and biopolitics proposed by Foucault are based on anthropocentric premises—where power emanates from the institution for the individual—his concept has inspired several disciplines. As argued by Srinivasan (2017), several studies have followed Foucault's concept of biopower, seeking theoretical-methodological conjunctions, in which concepts such as discipline, subjectivity, and mechanisms of power are adopted in order to explain socio-environmental problems. However, all this research is still fundamentally anthropocentric.[6]

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[5] The first use of the concept of postmodernity was in François Lyotard's "La Condition postmoderne" in 1979. According to the author, the postmodern condition was linked to "the state of our culture following the transformations which, since the end of the nineteenth century, have altered the game rules for science, literature and the arts." (Lyotard 1984, XXIII) In this sense, the changes perceived by Lyotard denoted the weakening of the great discourses that legitimized progress.

[6] In his article, Nimmo is aware regarding the anthropocentric approach provided by the original biopolitics: "For all its acuity in other respects, Michel Foucault's vision rarely if ever extended beyond human beings, the relations between human beings, and the things created by humans." In order to find a solution for this gap, Nimmo offers an explanation about the emergence of the earliest mechanical devices for the milking of cows through combining Foucauldian biopolitics and actor-network theory (ANT): "These are not inevitable features of this sort of approach, but risks that can be avoided, particularly—I want to argue—by drawing upon theoretical sensibilities from actor-network theory (ANT) and bringing these into productive dialogue with Foucauldian biopolitics. Theoretical syntheses can often be deceptive in their appeal, tending to gloss over subtle yet vital differences between traditions. But synthesis is not what I propose here, but rather a reading of biopolitics through certain currents from ANT" (Nimmo, 2019, 121). Bringing these two approaches together for a dialogue, we consider as very conjectural in epistemological terms, since those theories are not complementary. For this reason, we argue that the "original" biopolitics has problems in explaining nonhuman—or even human—phenomena, as we will argue in the following pages.

In contrast, recently the sociologist Nimmo (2019, 119) has demonstrated how human-animal studies have recognized the role of nonhuman animals in historical constructions. Following Foucault's idea of subjectivity as the product of the ongoing political processes of subjectivation, Nimmo argues that in the same way other "subjects and subjectivity are perpetually shaped by techniques and devices of historical change in power, knowledge, and discipline." In this light, the relationship between nonhumans, humans, and technology can be interpreted as a potential modifier of subjectivity. As argued by Holloway and Bear, "bovine and human agency and subjectivity are entrained and reconfigured in relation to emerging milking technologies so that what it is to be a cow or human becomes different as technologies change" (2017, 234). Through technological development, the relations between humans and the material world are modified. This transformation is the result of a "mediation" realized by technology, modifying human agency and discourse, as well as the relations with nonhuman beings. Thus, if objective reality has an agency over subjective human constructions, it is possible to affirm that technological changes produce a modification in the material world and in the construction of subjectivity. Such a non-anthropocentric perspective would pose a solution to an anthropocentric philosophical approach, proposing a more-than-human critical paradigm.[7]

Naturally, applying a less anthropocentric perspective to Foucault's notion of biopower presents several theoretical-methodological challenges. However, recent studies from the environmental humanities can be related to concepts of biopower and biopolitics thanks to current reinterpretations. As an example, a short article published by Etienne Benson (2014, 88) demonstrates how the rise of national states, and the

[7] This short quotation about the relationship between technology, humans, and cattle leads us to two premises that criticise post-anthropocentric assumptions, at least the post-structuralist line: first, in this narrative, if we observe well, is there no objectification of subjectivity? It seems to us that subjectivity and its changes are mediated objectively by technological changes and, also objectively, measured in their modifications. Second, the example discussed is intended to be a response to what he considers, in Marxism and Feminist approaches, to be an "essentialist" notion of the nonhuman. However, situating the relationship between technology-human-bovine in time and space does not guarantee a satisfactory answer. More than that, it insists on an essentialization; or rather, on the theoretical construction of an "ideal type," of a supposed interposition of this type of relationship in an industrial society—also essentialized. There are extremely powerful variables in time, in space, in other actors and, above all, in economic relations that can lead to countless results.

growing control of land within national borders, would have influenced the interpretation of ornithologists on the role of territoriality over the life of birds. In other words, the emergence and consolidation of national states between the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth century would also leave its mark on the sciences, as ornithologists began to interpret fauna from exacerbated human notions. Birds like warblers, as well as humans, were therefore regarded as organized life forms, acting within a strong territorial perspective, because scientific studies on these animals happened in a much-territorialized landscape. The idea of an increasingly anthropogenic formation of landscapes in recent centuries, imposing novel territorial or epistemological boundaries, adds a more complex notion to the top-down approach to biopower and biopolitics. In his text, Benson demonstrates that humans, especially scientists, continually reinterpreted elements of fauna because of changing historical and ecological contexts.

According to this theoretical framework, one could maintain that biopower and biopolitics do not only address human governance over other humans and nonhumans, but that different forms of life also exercise power over humans and other nonhumans in constant contact, conflict, and interaction. In this light, can birds, trees, swamps, mountains or rivers just be "objects" of observation and research? Are historical and social factors solely shaping the interpretation of animal behavior, or do nonhumans exercise some form of power—or may we say biopower?—over humans? In the next lines, we regard the vibrant environmental circumstances captured by Thoreau's view as a transforming agent, actively influencing the philosopher's notions of society, environment, and subjectivity. Analyzing the symbiotic socio-environmental relations present in *Walden*, we maintain that this text should be regarded as Thoreau's real political manifesto in the age of the Anthropocene.

WALDEN: FROM INDIGENOUS TO COLONIAL

The landscape that Thoreau experienced in the nineteenth century was neither pristine nor wild: it was the result of human occupation long before the emergence of the American nation and European colonization. In the mid-nineteenth century, Thoreau

gave a description of Walden Pond that evaded the grandeur of the Rocky Mountains or the Appalachians.[8] In fact, he considered Walden an important place for the purity of the water and its depth, while his landscape, in general, was not characterized by any exotic beauty: "the scenery of Walden is on a humble scale, and, though very beautiful, does not approach to grandeur, nor can it much concern one who has not long frequented it or lived by its shore; yet this pond is so remarkable for its depth and purity as to merit a particular description" (Thoreau 1995, 89). Thoreau's portrait of Walden and of the woods that surrounded it reveals a certain ambiguity in his thinking. If in certain moments Thoreau romantically magnifies the plurality of pristine life in the vicinity of Walden, on the other hand, he does not attribute anything extraordinary to the place, neither in economic nor in ecological terms. The triviality of the landscape denotes that its value does not lie in human appreciation, but in its "intrinsic" existence.

Thoreau was aware of the transformations that had taken place after two centuries of European occupation. He estimated that, approximately ten centuries before, the native people of North America—especially in the region that would be called New England after colonization—had developed agriculture and settled in the regions where they would later meet the British and other European colonizers. Before that, they already had seasonal camps in different locations in the region (Blancke and Robinson 1985). Therefore, he did not consider the territory as a demographic vacuum, or as "free lands" in the period before colonization, as suggested by Frederick Jackson Turner (1893) in relation to the American West. In this sense, he questioned the pristine status of the territory after millennia of cohabitation between humans and nonhumans. The relationship between human settlers and nonhumans suffered great

[8] During the 19th century, the US government promoted a mass migration to the Western "free lands" beyond the Rocky Mountains and the Appalachians. The process that became known as "Marching to the West" led to a great territorial expansion, through treaties, wars, and purchases of territories and subsequent re-population of these regions, eventually uprooting local indigenous populations. In 1830, the "Indian Removal Act" was approved, a legislative instrument for the removal of indigenous populations; and in 1862, the "Homestead Act," a law that facilitated the migration of American citizens to the West. One of the factors that legitimized this migration was the doctrine of Manifest Destiny, a belief that Americans were chosen by God to civilize "American territory." This migratory process can be considered as a remarkable event in American history; as maintained by historian Frederick Jackson Turner during the late nineteenth century, the history of the U.S.A is the history of the colonization of the West (Turner 2008; Avila 2005).

modifications with the American occupation. As William Cronon (1983, 03-05) reminds us, in his diary Thoreau observed these changes, especially after reading *New England's Prospect* by William Wood, a traveler who visited the region in the middle of the seventeenth century. In addition to the written records produced by travelers and colonists who arrived during the first migratory waves, Thoreau drew from oral traditions from Native Americans who still inhabited the region during the nineteenth century. Perhaps the most prolific message regarded the origin of Walden Pond. As reminded by Thoreau,

> My townsmen have all heard the tradition—the oldest people tell me that they heard it in their youth—that anciently the Indians were holding a pow-wow upon a hill here, which rose as high into the heavens as the pond now sinks deep into the earth, and they used much profanity, as the story goes, though this vice is one of which the Indians were never guilty, and while they were thus engaged the hill shook and suddenly sank, and only one old squaw, named Walden, escaped, and from her the pond was named. It has been conjectured that when the hill shook these stones rolled down its side and became the present shore. (Thoreau 1995, 92)

This narrative reports an indigenous worldview of the origin of the place. Although his narrative is linked to colonizers' tales, Thoreau attributes the birth of Walden to an indigenous elder woman. As demonstrated by archeological sources, during the centuries before European colonization, Native Americans lived in demographically dense societies, moderately transforming the environment through the use of fire. This led them to develop enhanced ecological notions addressing the interdependence of human and nonhuman (Blancke and Robinson 1985). This "environmental awareness" was attributed to nonhumans' important roles in society: just like water, trees, and soil, all forms of plant and animal life acquired a metaphorical "human" agent status in society—biopolitics in our approach. It is also worth noting that large groups of Native Americans organized themselves socially and politically in a relatively more egalitarian way than European colonizers, demonstrating a less hierarchical worldview, also in relation to nonhuman actors (Blancke and Robinson 1985; Bruchac, 2004). Following indigenous traditions, Thoreau's narrative approaches Walden Pond as a native entity, not subjected to the Cartesian notions of hierarchy, value, and utility characterizing

Western thought. Looking at the simplicity of the native way of life, Thoreau proposes a reconsideration of the behavior of society in regard to nature, technology, and human society itself. This worldview also calls into question the power of nature—or nonhumans—and how these other beings can affect human life beyond the powerful grip of human biopolitics. In attempting to answer questions about nature and the changing world in which he was living, Thoreau used empirical observation while living in the woods. As he admits in his texts, he

> . . . wanted to live deep and suck out all the marrow of life, to live so sturdily and Spartan-like as to put to rout all that was not life, to cut a broad swath and shave close, to drive life into a corner, and reduce it to its lowest terms, and, if it proved to be mean, why then to get the whole and genuine meanness of it, and publish its meanness to the world; or if it were sublime, to know it by experience, and be able to give a true account of it in my next excursion. (Thoreau 1995, 48)

As noticed in these lines, for Thoreau the value of empirical observation lies in exploring the possibility of a more harmonic life between humans and nonhumans. After all, Thoreau's major "disobedience" was his denial to uncritically embrace the values of industrial civilization. In this sense, *Walden* constitutes a reaffirmation of his social, political, and ecological disobedience. As he affirms in the text, he was mainly interested in obeying other laws:

> A saner man would have found himself often enough "in formal opposition" to what are deemed "the most sacred laws of society," through obedience to yet more sacred laws, and so have tested his resolution without going out of his way. It is not for a man to put himself in such an attitude to society, but to maintain himself in whatever attitude he finds himself through obedience to the laws of his being, which will never be one of opposition to a just government, if he should chance to meet with such. (Thoreau 1995, 158)

Although one cannot know for sure what Thoreau meant by "more sacred laws," considering his deep meditations on the relationship between society, nature, and technology, he was clearly referring to the different epistemologies of nature among indigenous people, especially in relation to nineteenth-century American settlers. As maintained by Thoreau, the Americans could learn something from "the customs of some savage nation" while remembering the "feast of first fruits" (1995, 37), a custom of

the Mucclasse Indians who when receiving new clothes, pots and household utensils burn out all their despicable things. Thoreau's admiration for Mucclasse tradition can be comprehended in another sentence: "a man is rich in proportion to the number of things which he can afford to let alone" (Thoreau 1995, 44). In opposition to the rising industrial revolution in the United States during the nineteenth century, Thoreau sought in Native experiences an alternative to reflect on the society that was being constructed in America. While the philosopher watched the acceleration of environmental transformations and the hegemonization of nature as a "resource," he considered alternative paths of "progress" that would allow repositioning humans into nature and understanding the intrinsic value of nonhumans. This understanding became progressively more incompatible with a society that increasingly accelerated the transformation of the environment in which it lived, based on social hierarchy, private property, and exploitation, both human and nonhuman.

This historical fact allows one to observe the biopower of the environment present in Walden. Unlike Native people, European colonizers relied on a different worldview—quoting Bruchac, "most European traditions consider nature to be inanimate" (2004). Not only did they bring with them other systems of values and beliefs, but also new plants and animals that intensified the complexity of the local environments. The impact of migrations with regard to power-relations between humans and nonhumans was notable in distinct aspects. It caused a great transformation, what Carolyn Merchant has divided in two main transformations: a "colonial ecological revolution" from 1600 and 1800, and a "capitalist ecological revolution" (2010) from the American Revolution to the middle of the nineteenth century. Both these revolutions revealed by Merchant were deeply marked by human and nonhuman migrants. The colonial revolution brought a "European ecological complex of animals, plants, pathogens, and people," and it collapsed the native societies, impacting power relations between humans and nonhumans. Thoreau wrote concurrent with the emergence of the "capitalist ecological revolution," although he knew that the relationship between humans and nonhumans had been significantly altered since the European migration. Thoreau recognized the changes brought by

colonization, and while he described the nature of Walden, he also noticed the sound of trains, and those of the axes cutting trees. Although Thoreau has been recognized as one of the greatest American philosophers, his unorthodox view of society was successful among his peers. However, his ideas of human-nature relations can still be relevant in order to understand the "ecological revolution" in our times, as well as the direction of contemporaneous societies with regard to the relation between humans and nonhumans.

WALDEN: A (BIO)POLITICAL MANIFESTO "BY NATURE"

Reading through the pages of *Walden*, one would notice no conventional separation between nature and culture, or human and nonhuman, but an interconnected world, where every form of life is equally valuable. As Thoreau maintained, "I go and come with a strange liberty in Nature, a part of herself" (1995, 67). By empirically observing the interaction between nonhumans and humans, Thoreau provided an integrated idea of the world, in which human and nonhuman forms lived in an interactive way. This led him to conclude that "nature is as well adapted to our weakness as to our strength" (Thoreau 1995, 9). Here, Thoreau's idea of "nature" seems to encounter what Isabelle Stengers (2015, 40) and Bruno Latour (2017) call "Gaia"—a living being possessing the power of agency and able to resist the attacks of human forces. Assuming this position, *Walden*'s narrative reflects on the biopower of "nature." In his diary, Thoreau maintained that "nature has left nothing to the mercy of man,"[9] interpreting it as a being endowed with genius, an active force that exercises power in relation to the "material world."[10] By maintaining that "there is nothing inorganic," Thoreau maintains that nature is constituted by a multiplicity of human and nonhuman agents engaged in

[9] This citation is omitted in some of the consulted publications. However, the sentence appears in the manuscript transcripts made available online by the project "The Writing of Henry D. Thoreau" in the Thoreau Library. The originals can be consulted in "manuscript 33" of Thoreau's diaries, the 22nd and March of 1861. Available for consultation at: http://thoreau.library.ucsb.edu/writings_journals33.html.

[10] "Nature is full of genius, full of the divinity" (Thoreau 2009, 384).

constant relation and motion, whether cooperating or disputing (Thoreau 1995, 67). As maintained by the author,

> when an acorn and a chestnut fall side by side, the one does not remain inert to make way for the other, but both obey their own laws, and spring and grow and flourish as best they can, till one, perchance, overshadows and destroys the other. If a plant cannot live according to its nature, it dies; and so a man. (Thoreau 2001, 21)

Through these observations, Thoreau corroborates the same ideas that he reported in his diary years before his stay at Walden: "every part of nature teaches that the passing away of one life is the making room for another" (Thoreau 1906a, 03). Thoreau noticed that when untouched by humans, plant life maintained its own pace, expanding and occupying the spaces that it required to survive. By living "in nature without fences," he could observe from his simple residence "a young forest growing up under your meadows, and wild sumachs and blackberry vines breaking through into your cellar; sturdy pitch pines rubbing and creaking against the shingles for want of room, their roots reaching quiet under the house" (Thoreau 1995, 66). Sharing spaces with nonhuman beings does not seem to have been a problem for Thoreau. On the contrary, his stay at the pond allowed him to consider that it could be "some advantage to live a primitive and frontier life, though in the midst of an outward civilization if only to learn what are the gross necessaries of life and what methods have been taken to obtain them" (Thoreau 1995, 10). Certainly, one of Thoreau's main goals in moving to Walden's woods was to learn from nonhuman forms of life, "communicating with the villas and hills and forests on either hand, by the glances we feel them, or the echoes we awakened" (Thoreau 1906a, 442). The "communication" desired by Thoreau can be interpreted as an attempt to understand his changing world. However, this concern was not easily found among his contemporaries. "Nature has no human inhabitant who appreciates her… She flourishes most alone, far from the towns where they reside. Talk of heaven! Ye disgrace earth" (Thoreau 1995, 101). Perhaps part of the discomfort that Thoreau felt about the direction of "progress" in America was due to his perception that humanity was neglecting its connection with other forms of life. Just as Leo Marx evoked with the

image of Sleepy Hollow—the machine in the garden—trains and railroads also symbolized the widening gap between humans and nonhumans.

However, while highlighting the contradictions of industrial society, Thoreau sought in multiple ways to learn what nonhumans could teach him, nurturing an admiration for natural phenomena, while also attempting to understand them in relation to human agency. In one passage of his text, Thoreau declared that in the late afternoon he sometimes confused the "natural music" of the cows with the singing of young people from the village. In explaining this statement, Thoreau admitted: "I do not mean to be satirical, but to express my appreciation of those youths' singing, when I state that I perceived clearly that it was akin to the music of the cow, and they were at length one articulation of Nature" (1995, 64; italics added). Such a melodic articulation was what the Concord naturalist longed for in observing the relations between humans and the natural world. As he admitted,

> it is important to consider Nature from the point of view of science remembering nomenclature and system of men, and so, if possible, go a step further in that direction . . . so it is equally important often to ignore or forget all that men presume they know and take an original and unprejudiced view of Nature. (Thoreau 1906b, 168-169)

In fact, in Thoreau's view, an adequate social project should preserve a certain symbiosis between human and nonhuman beings. A human society willing to explore a similar scenario would need to learn from its environment and the nonhuman beings that cohabit that territory, establishing a symmetrical relationship with these subjects. In this sense, reading *Walden* as a manifesto addressing the relationship between humans and nonhumans could potentially allow one to reconsider the notion of biopolitics as a relevant critical tool for the environmental humanities, looking at the active power of nonhuman subjects, an increasingly essential epistemological and political tool in the age of the Anthropocene. As argued by Thoreau, humans should consider themselves "as an inhabitant, or a part and parcel of Nature, rather than a member of society" (1862).

This article has attempted to provide an "ecologically oriented" notion of biopower, beyond a dichotomous idea of humans and nonhumans. Such an idea of

biopower implies "a dialogic interaction of texts and contexts" and a dialogic construction of human/nature interactions conjoining literary and scientific discourses (Oppermann 2006, 118). It is precisely this dialogical interaction between *Walden* as a text and as a pond that becomes visible in Thoreau's idea of nature: an ecological agent that is not only at the mercy of human power, but a dynamic actor. In fact, looking at nonhuman subjects carries an ideological rupture, as "this means widening the scope of the objects of moral responsibility from a singular 'center' (humankind) to a multiplicity of 'peripheral,' ethically as well as ontologically marginalized subjects [nonhuman beings]" (Iovino 2010, 35). It is the widening of this scope that fundamentally modifies ecological ethics whether in science or politics. As Thoreau noticed by observing the plurality of existence in Walden, "nature and human life are as various as our several constitutions" (Thoreau 1995, 09). Thoreau's political, social, and ecological criticism finds its foundation precisely in the opposition between the forms of life that he observed in his text and the modern lifestyle that was gaining momentum in the city of Concord. Life in the midst of nascent industrial society distanced humans from the notion of "inhabitants," maintaining a symmetrical relationship with other nonhuman forms of life, as a "part of nature," and leading them to the notion of "members of society." Realizing this problematic issue, Thoreau concluded that the "members of society" were disconnected from nature and could not learn from it. In contrast to human society, in nature a "different kind of right prevails" (Thoreau 1906c, 445). Thus, a "natural [hu]man" should build his 'institutions' and his 'right' by aligning them according to natural life but always compromising with the plurality of humans and nonhuman beings.

In this sense, Thoreau's experience at Walden, with its texts and lessons from natural life, can provide us with interpretative tools in order to reflect on our current relationship with nonhuman forms of life, enhancing our understanding of the importance of being an "inhabitant" of the earth's ecological system, just as much as we consider relevant being members of civil society. As argued by Serenella Iovino (2010), literature, like any art form, can provide us with subsidies for the creation of values based on local reflections that can help reflection on universally shared principles.

Following this argument, Thoreau's *Walden* can provide useful critical insights for the formulation of less anthropocentric values, and for the moralization of nonhuman beings which have often been neglected in many analyses. As current environmental issues are forcing human societies to construct interpretative concepts useful for enhancing our environmental awareness, Thoreau's non-anthropocentric perspective expressed in *Walden* can contribute to shaping notions of biopower that take into account the ecological significance of nonhuman agents for the construction of extended social values.

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UNDERSTANDING THE FABRIC OF THE NATURAL WORLD: THE ROLE OF THE COLLECTIVE PROTAGONIST IN ANNIE PROULX'S *BARKSKINS*

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ABSTRACT

Contemporary Anthropocene narratives often choose to engage with large scales of space and time. As a consequence, according to Ursula K. Heise, "the single protagonist may decrease in importance, since epic-style narratives over the last century have tended to shift the major narrative actants from individual human characters to collective and sometimes nonhuman actors." Annie Proulx's latest novel, *Barkskins* (2016), is a fitting example of this tendency. Despite its commitment to several human characters, *Barkskins* never forgets about the story of the forest, which in Proulx's words is "*the* character, the underpinning of life." In this essay, I will explore the role this multifaceted collective protagonist plays in *Barkskins*' narrative. First, thanks to the many human characters at the center of the plot, the narrative can geographically and historically map people's past and present movements across America, Europe, Asia, and Oceania, taking the timber business as an example of the technological and cultural development of capitalism in different parts of the world and its long-term effects. Second, the making of the forest and several indigenous people into central characters enriches and diversifies Proulx's discussion of the human impact on the natural world. Finally, its twofold perspective on the actions of single human beings as well as the impact of humanity as a whole bring *Barkskins* to raise the question of individual/collective agency vis-à-vis the present environmental crisis.
Keywords: Annie Proulx; Anthropocene; Collective Protagonist; Ecocriticism.

What is so new about the New World? When the two characters that open Annie Proulx's *Barkskins*, René Sel and Charles Duquet, leave France in 1693 to reach the coast of Canada, they are confronted with the unimaginable extent of its forests. Nothing they saw in the old continent is comparable, because in the new world "grew hugeous trees of a size not seen in the old country for hundreds of years, evergreens taller than cathedrals, cloud-piercing spruce and hemlock" (Proulx 2016, 4). Questioned about the actual size of this natural wonder, René's and Charles's *seigneur*, their new employer, answers: "It is the forest of the world. It is infinite. It twists around as a snake swallows its own tail and has no end and no beginning" (5). A Frenchman himself, Monsieur Trépagny compares the forest to a mythical creature, showing the newcomers' inability to rationally understand what they have in front of them. It is something they have never experienced before—it is so vast it escapes their understanding and

imagination. For them, it is first and foremost a problem of temporal and geographical scale.

Annie Proulx has experienced a similar problem of scale while writing *Barkskins*, for her initial subject, climate change, was in her words "too large and too difficult . . . to serve as the foundation for a novel" (Clay 2017). Even if limited to one aspect of climate change, "deforestation caused by human timber cutting for profit" (ibid.), the scope of this text, its attempt to encompass almost three centuries of planetary history, remains ambitious and places *Barkskins* in a developing series of contemporary narratives committed to representing the anthropocene, the well-known geological epoch first theorized by Paul J. Crutzen and Eugene F. Stoermer (2000). In the field of American literatures, Anthropocene narratives are part of a rich and prosperous tradition that has explored for a long time the relationship between human beings and the environment, with numerous and diverse contributions. Richard Powers's *The Overstory* (2018), winner of the 2019 Pulitzer Prize, is only one of the most recent examples of the relevance and success of U.S. environmental fiction. It is important to underline that the Anthropocene presents new and specific challenges to writers and critics, and its influence on literary and cultural studies is now widely recognized. According to Jennifer Wenzel (2020), the Anthropocene forces us to rethink literary and cultural interpretive schemes because it "involves multiple, human-induced changes to the Earth system resulting from rearrangements of molecules and life forms across the planet, associated with the burning of wood and fossil fuels, industrial chemistry, planned and accidental discharges of nuclear material, and global trade and migration" (4). Therefore, it certainly "shifts the emphasis from individual thoughts, beliefs, and choices to a human process that has occurred across distinct social groups, countries, economies, and generations" (Trexler 2015, 4). At the same time, as Dipesh Chakrabarty has clearly put it in his four influential theses on the climate of history, the anthropocene poses a challenge to the concept of anthropocentrism, since it can make

sense only if "we think of humans as a form of life and look on human history as part of the history of life on this planet" (2009, 213).[1]

The narratological needs of this new geological age influence the contemporary production of and the critical discussion around literature in general, and the novel in particular. Some voices, like Amitav Ghosh in his always-quoted *The Great Derangement*, have argued that "the *longue durée* is not the territory of the novel" (2016). According to Ghosh, the modern realist novel has mostly excluded collective and global issues from its interests, because of its focus on human protagonists and their inner life. As a result, "at exactly the time when it has become clear that global warming is in every sense a collective predicament, humanity finds itself in the thrall of a dominant culture in which the idea of the collective has been exiled from politics, economics and literature alike." Other scholars, like Ursula K. Heise, have underlined the successful role of genres such as science fiction, which often allows to overcome "constraints of probability, individualism, and scale that shape the mainstream novel" (2018). The term "cli-fi," or climate fiction, is used precisely to describe a growing "body of cultural work which engages with anthropogenic climate change, . . . combining fictional plots with meteorological facts, speculation on the future and reflection on the human-nature relationship" (Goodbody and Johns-Putra 2018, 2).[2]

Proulx's attempt to deal with the Anthropocene is of a more conventional kind, which is probably the reason for the book's limited critical attention. Rather than speculating on the future, she is concerned with a realistic reconstruction of the past (Owens 2016), of those centuries in which the transformation of human beings into a geological force is particularly evident. The result is a quite traditional historical novel, fairly different, at least from a formal point of view, from the formulations that critics

[1] For an analysis of the idea of anthropocentrism in American literature, see Bryan L. Moore, Ecology and Literature: Ecocentric Personification from Antiquity to the Twenty-first Century (2008) and Ecological Literature and the Critique of Anthropocentrism (2017).

[2] For a glimpse at the diversity and richness of contemporary discussions around the role of science fiction in representing the climate crisis and the anthropocene, see for instance the special issue of Science Fiction Studies (vol. 45, no. 3, November 2018), entitled "Science Fiction and the Climate Crisis," edited by Brent Ryan Bellamy, and Shelley Streeby's latest monograph Imagining the Future of Climate Change (2018), which highlights the connection between climate change, science fiction, indigenous studies, and activism.

such as Frederic Jameson or Ian Baucom have recently proposed for the contemporary outcomes of this genre.[3] Proulx's idea of historical novel seems to rely on a definition coined by Mikhail M. Bakhtin, which highlights its "positively weighted modernizing, an erasing of temporal boundaries, the recognition of an eternal present in the past" (1981, 365-366). So it is for Proulx: despite a chronologically linear narrative spanning from 1693 to 2013 that could emphasize the temporal distance between past and present, her human characters make in the past the same mistakes that we impute to the present; they show the readers how wrong they did and how wrong we still do. At the same time, they underline that certain human actions—like deforestation—have long-lasting repercussions, clearly complicating the relationship between different temporalities, especially when considered from the perspective of the anthropocene.

Despite its more traditional structure, *Barkskins* shares with other Anthropocene narratives the choice to substitute the single protagonist for a more collective one. As Heise explains when describing the possible outcomes of contemporary sci-fi stories, "the larger-than-life hero or single protagonist may decrease in importance since epic-style narratives over the last century have tended to shift the major narrative actants from individual human characters to collective and sometimes non-human actors" (2019, 301). *Barkskins*'s narrative reaches both goals at the same time. On the one hand, the story revolves around a cluster of human protagonists that relentlessly replace one another over more than three centuries. On the other, the forest works as an actual character from the start. "For me," Proulx explains, "the chief character in the long story was the forest, the great now-lost forest(s) of the world" (Leyshon 2016). Together, these human and non-human actors create a collective protagonist that allows Proulx to enhance her representation of the Anthropocene, as I will try to demonstrate in this article. First, thanks to the many human characters at the center of the plot, the narrative can geographically and historically map people's past and present movements

[3] Frederic Jameson in his *The Antinomies of Realism* (2013) and Ian Baucom in "Moving Centers: Climate Change, Critical Method, and the Historical Novel" (2015) present David Mitchell's *Cloud Atlas* (2004) as a prominent example of the contemporary historical novel.

across America, Europe, Asia, and Oceania, taking the timber business as an example of the technological and cultural development of capitalism in different parts of the world and its long-term effects. Second, the transformation of the forest and several indigenous people into central characters enriches and diversifies Proulx's depiction of the human impact on the natural world. Third, its twofold interest in the actions of single human beings as well as the impact of humanity as a whole bring *Barkskins* to raise the question of individual/collective agency vis-à-vis the present environmental crisis. In other words, this multifaceted collective protagonist allows Proulx to fulfill what is perhaps her highest ambition: to reconnect, if only in the pages of a novel, the broken threads of a long and truly global story.

THE NEWCOMERS: THE VIOLENT STORIES OF CAPITALISM

As I mentioned before, *Barkskins*'s narrative spans from the end of the 17th century to the present day. However, its main focus is the period between the 18th and the 19th century, where Proulx seems to place the germination of certain technological and cultural seeds that will fully develop in the 20th century and beyond. The novel, in fact, relies on the first component of its collective protagonist to track the development of capitalism as an economic model, through various European and American characters that work to shape the American continent as well as the rest of the world. The establishment of the colonies, the construction of increasingly larger cities, the constant improvements of roads and trade routes are just some of the examples Proulx makes to map out this expansion, which is of course physical and cultural.

At the very beginning, the first two protagonists are the already-mentioned René Sel and Charles Duquet, two Frenchmen in search of redemption and success, whose story bears a strong resemblance to that of Proulx's own ancestors (Burnett 2016). The sense of displacement felt towards the so-called New World and its endless forests is soon forgotten. Through their words and actions, René and Charles become the symbols of a certain way of thinking, and in particular of a relationship with the natural world they keep applying to the new context. This is an old interest of American literature, addressed by classics like John de Crèvecoeur's *Letters from an American Farmer* (1782),

James F. Cooper's *The Pioneers* (1823), or Henry D. Thoreau's *Walden* (1854), but also an old interest of Proulx's. Referring to the writer's entire literary production, Alex Hunt notes that "while geography determines culture in Proulx's work, geography itself is a category shaped by culture" (2009, 2). This is particularly evident in *Barkskins*'s first pages, since René and Charles know from the start that they will work as woodcutters for three years in what is now Canada, in order to own a piece of land and finally start a new life. The newcomers see the land as private property, the forest as an incredible chance to make a profit and pass it on to their descendants. Proulx sees Christianity as the culture reference for this way of thinking (Freeman 2016). One of the two epigraphs to the novel is a quote from "The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis," a famous article published by historian Lynn White. "By destroying pagan animism," White argues, "Christianity made it possible to exploit nature in a mood of indifference to the feelings of natural objects" (1967, 1205). In Proulx's account, the claimed and controversial contribution of Christianity to the relationship between human beings and the natural world matches another cornerstone of modern Western culture: capitalism. Charles Duquet, who will realize his dreams of success through a profitable business based on American timber, describes the forest early in the book with the keyword of capitalist thought. "There was one everlasting *commodity* that Europe lacked: the forest . . . The forest was unimaginably vast, and it replaced itself. It could supply timber and wood for ships, houses, warmth. The profits could come forever" (Proulx 2016, 69; emphasis added).

Charles Duquet's deforestation project originates precisely from the false belief that forests are infinite and always able to regenerate themselves. In his mind, the logical consequence is that an infinite resource can lead to infinite profits, if only an appropriate market is found. The North American business scene soon becomes too limited for him, so Charles embarks on a long journey to Europe and China. This is the way in which Proulx tests her character's beliefs, by confronting him with different contexts and points of view. During the numerous discussions with a Chinese merchant interested in his timber, Charles learns that the locals have used the forest in various ways in their thousand-year history, feeding the needs of war, agriculture, or paper

production. They used it to the point that wood is now scarce, which explains the demand for foreign merchants and supplies. However, "Duquet thought it likely that the forests of China and France and Italy had been puny in the beginning; he believed that the uniquely deep forests of the New World would endure. That was why men came to the unspoiled continent—for the mind-numbing abundance of virgin resources" (98). Blinded by his hunger for profit, Charles really becomes Proulx's champion of Western thought and the founder of a real "forest empire" (121).

The design and development of the timber business in North America and other countries occupies a privileged position within the novel because it allows Proulx to explore the persistence and evolution of these cultural patterns in space and time. Thanks to *Barkskins*'s collective protagonist, readers can follow the representative development of Duquet's company, its geographical and technological expansion. At the same time, thanks to the individual protagonists presented one after the other, they can connect these general tendencies to specific situations, understanding how personal choices are involved in historical change. Particularly interesting is the moment when, about two hundred years after its foundation, Duquet's company, now called Duke and Sons, falls into the hands of Lavinia, who will fully realize the multinational aspiration of her ancestor. While visiting the family sawmills and lands for the first time, she starts to feel "a powerful sense of ownership; they were her trees, she could cause these giants to fall and be devoured by the saws. She regarded their monolithic forms with scorn" (502-503). The disorientation her ancestor felt in the face of the woods, his fear vis-à-vis the otherness of the forest, is now completely overcome by the now innate ideas of capital and private property, which cannot be limited to the trees. "And the birds that rested on them, her birds, her squirrels and porcupines; all of it" (ibid.). Proulx's description of Lavinia's insatiable longing for possession reminds me of a very powerful scene in William Faulkner's *Go Down, Moses* (1942), another American novel that, as Lawrence Buell has written, "elegiacally bears witness to the disappearance of the virgin forest" (2001, 176). At the end of the famous chapter/story entitled "The Bear," one of the characters, Boon, kills the animal of the title, the most desired prey of all. Many hunters have tried before him, some of them without really wanting to, because the bear

was more of a symbol in their eyes, a sort of personification of the forest and the wilderness itself. The death of the animal, Faulkner makes it particularly clear, brings Boon no contentment or reward. On the contrary, the satisfaction of his desire for possession leads him to madness: sitting against a tree full of squirrels, he can only shout at everyone approaching "Don't touch them! Don't touch a one of them! They're mine!" (Faulkner 1994, 315). Unlike Boon, whose sudden insanity reveals a profound personal relationship with the natural world, Lavinia's longing for possession is fueled by capitalist and entrepreneurial thinking, and translates into more careful and extensive planning, into the search for new forests to buy and exploit. "What fabulous kinds of wood may not grow in distant places?" (Proulx 2016, 529), she asks herself, before leaving for New Zealand to explore the natural resources and commercial possibilities of such a distant country. In one of the rare moments when the narrative abandons its purely realistic tone, Proulx adds: "far to the east, deep under leaf mold and black forest soil, the bones of Charles Duquet relaxed" (ibid.), establishing a direct connection between centuries and geographies, transforming Lavinia's behavior into the fulfillment of actions started decades before. This is one of the ways the narrative finds to show that the destruction of the forest was no accident, but the result of a meticulously built plan, of individual and collective choices that various characters keep taking and confirming over the years. Following multinational agendas, the Duke and Sons will thus continue its expansion, reaching many parts of the world after New Zealand, like South America, where "in league with banks, other timber outfits, the mining industry, coffee, cocoa, banana, and mango importers, became part of the new colonialism" (659). Once again, Proulx continues, "when the great onslaught on tropical forests began, they were in the van, taking all they could" (ibid.).

Despite its focus on the Dukes, *Barkskins*'s narrative never forgets to give a sense of the scale and spread of the historical phenomena it represents. For instance, it constantly keeps track of the various waves of migration that bring an increasing number of people to the United States and contribute to the timber business in different ways. "The world had heard of the rich continent with its inexhaustible coverlet of forests," Proulx writes. "Everything was there for the taking—it was the chance of a

lifetime and it would never come again" (531-532). While some immigrants are involved in the actual cutting of the forest, others simply need timber to build their houses and start their new life. As Marco Armiero explains, it is not really appropriate to speak of "how immigrants shaped or adapted to the 'natural' environment" (2017, 55), since they behaved according to preconceived systems of values and views of the natural world. These "were collective rather than individual enterprises" (54), Armiero continues, and *Barkskins*'s narrative conveys precisely this idea of collectivity. The European ways of life, which settlers and migrants replicate in the new world, is often supplied by timber, affecting the American landscape more and more. New sawmills, roads, railways, factories and cities come to replace the once "infinite" woodlands. Most newcomers, although in different ways, follow the motto Monsieur Trépagny established at the beginning of the novel: "To be a man is to clear the forest" (Proulx 2016, 17).

THE NATIVES AND THE FOREST: THE INTERTWINED STORIES OF EXPLOITATION

The other two main components of *Barkskins*'s collective protagonist complicate the novel's discussion of this controversial relationship between human beings and the natural world, focusing the attention on indigenous peoples and the forest itself. From the beginning, the narrative broadly embraces the stories of Native Americans, echoing again a long and fertile tradition in American literature, recently revived by works like William T. Vollmann's "Seven Dreams" series (1990-2015). *Barkskins*'s second main storyline develops around René Sel, who soon marries a Mi'kmaq woman, Mari. Together they will give birth to a multiracial lineage, i.e. to a number of protagonists that will provide a highly critical point of view on the newcomers' mainstream narrative.

René and Mari themselves, the narrator underlines, "stood opposed on the nature of the forest" (50). While René, who still thinks like a Frenchman, works all his life as a lumberjack to subjugate the alleged exuberance of the woods, Mari sees the forest as "a living entity, as vital as the waterways, filled with the gifts of medicine, food, shelter" (51). The opposition is clear: for René the forest becomes a resource only when destroyed, since the profits come from external sources and systems, while for Mari the

forest is a resource in itself, and must be preserved in order to continue to benefit from it. This culture clash will continue with later generations and will be reasserted, for example, by Kuntaw Sel and Beatrix Duquet, the first couple to bring the two families together. Kuntaw is one of René's grandchildren, while Beatrix is the daughter of one of Duquet's descendants and a Passamaquoddy woman. Although at this point their heritages are much more mixed, Beatrix wants her partner to learn how to read books and approach western knowledge, while Kuntaw wants her to "read" the forest, that is to "understand and decipher the tracks of animals, the seasonal signs of plants and trees, the odors of bears and coming rain, of frost-leathered leaves, the changing surface of water" (278). More importantly, he wants her to understand that "the forest and the ocean shore are tied together with countless strings as fine as spiderweb silks" (ibid.).

In this respect, as Ben De Bruyn has rightly noted, "Proulx's work evokes the cultural stereotype of the 'ecological Indian'" (2016, 80), the well-known tendency to idealize indigenous culture and history. But Proulx seems to be aware of the risk. In one of the many interviews given at the book's release, she critiques those who believe in the existence of a primeval forest prior to the arrival of the Europeans. "Native Americans," she explains, "had plenty to do with the shaping of the forest, including setting fires every few years and sometimes big fires every fifteen years to keep open parklike places where deer would come for the grass and meadow fare" (Freeman 2016). In other words, Greg Garrard confirms, "invariably Indians had previously dwelt in the habitats under threat, transforming and managing them in their own ways" (2004, 123). With this awareness, Proulx seems more interested in the complex and multiform representation of the natives' present, of the new challenges to their individual and collective experience.

In particular, *Barkskins*'s collective protagonist becomes an effective way to discuss the violence imposed on Native Americans as an example of slow violence, creating an even deeper connection with the history of deforestation. "Slow violence," Rob Nixon has influentially written, is "a violence that occurs gradually and out of sight, a violence of delayed destruction that is dispersed across time and space" (2011, 2). After the first bloody encounters with the newcomers, the history of the natives is

characterized by another kind of violence that continues in new forms until today, "a violence that is neither spectacular nor instantaneous, but rather incremental and accretive, its calamitous repercussions playing out across a range of temporal scales" (ibid.). The three centuries covered by Proulx's story are enough to highlight changes over a long period of time, to follow the many forms this violence takes. In addition to the obvious practical aspects, such as the dispossession of the land, from a cultural point of view many of the indigenous protagonists are faced with the loss of traditional practices and knowledge. Even when they try to preserve them, they have to tragically recognize their futility in a world that is so rapidly changing. As the narrator comments early in the novel, the Mi'kmaq language has been influenced by European languages for a long time, it "was awash in French words with remnants of Portuguese and Basque from the days of those earlier European fishermen on the shore" (Proulx 2016, 182). But now that Native Americans are decimated and unable to carry on their traditional activities, the old language is useless, because it lacks the words to describe the new social system and way of life. "If we want to secure any of our old land, we have to do it the whiteman way with papers," one of the indigenous characters say towards the end of the book. "To learn those English laws we have to know how to read. Write. In English" (612). The ineffectiveness of the old culture and the brutality of the new one bring with them also a sense of profound individual disorientation. Achille Sel, René's and Mari's son, embodies the personal and psychological side of this form of violence from a very early stage. If his mother was still able to provide food and medicine to her family thanks to ancient knowledge and techniques, to feel a strong connection with the forest and her people, Achille quickly realizes he doesn't belong anywhere. During a fishing trip with other Mi'kmaqs, his canoe is rammed by a giant black and white fish, an orca that seems to come from one of the natives' myths. In another of the few non-realistic moments of the narrative, the animal looks Achille in the eyes and confirms: "You are not" (185). As generations go by, the situation continues to deteriorate. Achille's grandson, Tonny, voices this malaise in an even more definitive way, transforming it into a desire to leave, or rather, to die. "I am apart from every person," he says, talking to his father. "English, Mi'kmaq, French, American. I have no place . . .

I have no one. I not belong. No place good for me. I go away. Maybe somebody kill me soon. Then I be done" (276).

While some native characters respond to the new condition with despair and inaction, others begin to take part in the activities initiated by the newcomers and work for the white people and their companies. *Barkskins* points out several times that the natives end up contributing to the timber business. Some work as informers, teaching the white entrepreneurs where the richest and greatest forests are located and how to reach them through the ancient Indian paths. Others participate directly as woodcutters, often in the most dangerous jobs, such as moving tons of logs down the rivers. In any case, Proulx's choice to put many different indigenous protagonists at the center of the narrative confirms once again her attempt to portray the complexity of their experience, beyond stereotypes. Jinot Sel, one of Tonny's sons, is an important example in this respect. After allowing readers to explore various aspects of the North American timber business from the point of view of the workers, he has the opportunity to leave the American continent and get to New Zealand, where he will continue to cut trees. It is true, as De Bruyn writes, that in the end his story "suggests that class and race boundaries are insurmountable" (2016, 79), because he will pay for a murder he did not commit. But his first encounter with the New Zealand forest enacts a significant reversal of the Pioneer myth that opened the book. Like René and Charles in Canada, so Jinot enters a forest "so unlike the pine forests of Maine, New Brunswick and Ontario, or any other he had ever seen, he never could have imagined it" (Proulx 2016, 426). As for his European ancestor, his fascination for the new world is momentary: the New Zealand forest soon "repulsed him with its violent tangle of vegetable exuberance, its unfamiliarity and ancient aloofness" (430). The myth of the ecological Indian does not belong to his story.

As Jinot's case highlights once again, the forest is really the place in *Barkskins* where the opposing histories of the newcomers and the indigenous people are confronted, the element around which individual and collective destinies revolve. Even more than that, the forest often becomes an actual character, the last component of the novel's collective protagonist. From a narratological point of view, this is achieved in

two main ways. First, there are many instances in which the forest is the subject of the action, on a par with the human protagonists. At the beginning of the book, for example, when René Sel is engaged with other men in their work of deforestation, Proulx writes: "In its own way *the forest was swallowing* René Sel, its destroyer. *The forest was always in front of him*. He was powerless to stop chipping at it, but the vigor of multiple sprouts from stumps and still-living roots grew in his face, the rise and fall of his ax almost a continuous circular motion. There seemed always more and more trees on the horizon" (57; emphasis added). It is important to notice how Proulx avoids a complete personification of the forest. Making it the subject of the sentence, the writer highlights the performative power of this non-human actor but does not equate it with a purely human logic.

Moreover, the forest becomes a real character because it is shown in its geographical singularities and in its development and transformation through time, like its human counterparts. From spruces and white pines in North America to the majestic kauri of New Zealand and the many fruit trees (mangoes, guava, passionfruit, starfruit, coconuts, bananas) of South America—the narrative never forgets to mention the different species of plants that constitute each forest, another example of the meticulous research conducted by the author in the preparation of the book. The tragic destiny of the forests is of course described through the practice of deforestation and the technological advancements that foster the timber business. In addition, Proulx's narrative acknowledges the role of fires that in several waves have destroyed the North American woodlands, both in the form of more general fires the settlers start in order to clear the land for fields and pastures, and of specific epochal fires, such as the ones that in 1910 burnt over three million acres in three days in Montana, Idaho, and Washington. Together with the saw and the ax, as Proulx would say, fires contribute to leaving indelible "scars" on the earth (38).

The combined action of time and human beings also modifies the very essence of the forest. As the Mi'kmaq characters quickly notice, once-common varieties of plants are more and more difficult to find. "But of uncommon weeds there was no lack—mallows, dock, stinging nettles, sow thistle, knotgrass, and adder's-tongue, aggressive

clovers" (180-181). Europeans bring with them to the new world a number of new species, thus altering pre-existing balances—this is part of the process that Alfred Crosby has famously named "ecological imperialism" (1986). Towards the end of the novel, one of the last descendants of the Sels, Sapatisia, who has devoted her entire life to the study of plants and ecosystems, is questioned by two very young members of her family on a related issue. They want to know why people can no longer rely on the medicinal plants once used by Native Americans. "Since the conquest the air has been filled with pesticides and chemical fertilizers, with exhaust particles and smoke. We have acid rain," Sapatisia explains. "The deep forests are gone and now the climate shifts. Can you figure out for yourselves that the old medicine plants grew in a different world?" (696). This is perhaps the most ambitious goal achieved by the forest as a protagonist: the ability to highlight that its change is strictly related to the change of wider environmental factors, to a larger story of countless interconnections.

THE COLLECTIVE PROTAGONIST: A STORY OF INTERCONNECTIONS

Sapatisia Sel is obviously right: the world described at the end of *Barkskins* is different from the one discovered in its first pages. Three hundred years of human activity have affected it in macro- and microscopic ways, producing above all a break in the relationships between human beings and the other living species. In Proulx's words, as soon as René Sel and many more people started their work on the forest, "the wildness of the world receded, the vast invisible web of filaments that connected human life to animals, trees to flesh and bones to grass shivered as each tree fell and one by one the web strands snapped" (12). *Barkskins* focuses precisely on this story of destruction, on its causes and its consequences, as told from an individual and collective point of view. Two such different perspectives are held together by the narrative's collective protagonist, which proves to be one of the author's most effective narrative techniques to keep such a complex story together. Thanks to her collective protagonist, Proulx "reveals that a broader perspective on the human does not necessarily imply a neglect of individual identities or socio-political issues" (De Bruyn 2016, 80). The attention paid from time to time to so many European, American, and indigenous characters certainly

becomes an exercise in realism, a successful way to account for the role of individual stories and to evoke the complexity of the evolving socio-historical context. At the same time, Proulx challenges the reader not to consider the history of the world from the limited perspective of its human component. The constant presence of the forest next to the other human protagonists reveals that humans are only one of the living species, although certainly very influential. The most convincing example is provided by the dynamics of the collective protagonist itself, which highlights the transience of the human characters, whose life, as well as that of the many trees in the forest, is continually subjected to the risk of an imminent and more or less accidental ending. Above all, Proulx's narrative succeeds in highlighting how the destinies of humans and the other living species are closely interconnected, leading to a final remark on the possibility of individual and collective agency in the face of the past and present environmental crisis. This seems to link *Barkskins*' to "the overarching concern of Proulx's fiction," which, according to Karen L. Rood, "is the way in which ordinary people conduct their lives in the face of social, economic, and ecological change" (2001, 10). If much of the novel is in fact focused on the destructive individual and collective human actions of the past, *Barkskins*'s last chapter is set in the present and looks to the future. At this point, the narrative is led by a group of international researchers and environmentalists, guided by Sapatisia Sel and funded by a sort of environmental protection fund that is the last reincarnation of part of the Duke empire. The group's main focus is forest replanting, an activity that the limited perspective of a single human being cannot embrace. "It will take thousands of years for great ancient forests to return," Sapatisia explains to her colleagues. "None of us here will see the mature results of our work, but we must try, even if it is only one or two people with buckets of seedlings working to put forest pieces back together" (Proulx 2016, 706). Her point of view is not as naïve as it may seem. She knows very well that it is too late to go back to the world of the past—she has witnessed herself the melting of polar ice caps. She knows that strong powers are against their work, since one of her co-workers was killed in the field. At the same time, she believes that certain human actions can have a positive effect on the earth and the ecological crisis, if only an alternative point of view is found

and shared. "It is terribly important to all of us humans . . . to help the earth regain its vital diversity of tree cover. And the forests will help us. They are old hands at restoring themselves" (ibid.). Through Sapatisia's words, as well as through the novel's collective protagonist, Proulx seems to suggest that this individual and collective, human and non-human perspective is the only way to finally reweave the numerous threads that compose "the fabric of the natural world" (698).

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APOCALYPTIC VISIONS FROM THE PAST: THE COLONIZATION OF MARS IN DICK'S *MARTIAN TIME-SLIP*

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ABSTRACT

In recent years, climate change has emerged as a dominant theme in literature, with writers trying to find new ways to express how the alteration of climate affects people. Even though it was published before climate change was so pressing an issue, Philip K. Dick's *Martian Time-Slip* (1964) deals with the worries caused by an Earth that is becoming increasingly inhospitable, pushing people to migrate to Mars. This article explores how Dick expresses the challenges that immigrants must face in trying to adapt to a new environment and how he uses Martian society to criticize the degeneration of the capitalistic society that marginalizes people who are acutely able to empathize with both the human and the nonhuman world. Among these marginalized people there is Manfred, a child who suffers from autism. Dick depicts Manfred's mind as an instrument that disrupts people's linear sense of time and that denies the principle of cause and effect.
Keywords: Philip K. Dick; *Martian Time-Slip*; migration; climate change.

INTRODUCTION

In the foreword of the anthology *American Earth: Environmental Writing Since Thoreau,* Al Gore writes that "environmentalism, while inevitably a source of conflict, is inherent in our national character, a fundamental part of our heritage as Americans" (2008, xviii). While literary studies began focusing on the relationship between literature and the environment as recently as the early 1990s, American literature has always produced eco-fiction, a subgenre aimed at scrutinizing the story of people in the natural world. According to Scaffai, from its inception, eco-fiction developed into two main strains: the first has its roots in Henry David Thoreau's work and is grounded in an exaltation of nature, which he saw as the origin of ethical and civil rights; the second employs the themes and concerns of nineteenth and twentieth century science fiction, enriching the genre's conventions with subjects and reflections rooted in ecological issues (2019, 115).

A close connection can be traced between New Wave science fiction and the development of the modern environmental movement: both came into their own in the

1960s and 1970s and influenced each other. Indeed, Rebecca Evans explains that "when environmentalism emerged, it "took shape as a necessarily *predictive* as well as descriptive field" (2019, 436). She claims that the modern environmental movement viewed the world as being in "the early stages of ecological disaster" and sought to motivate policy makers and society to prevent future catastrophes by using science fiction's literary "speculative strategies in general and the genres of apocalypse and dystopia in particular" (Ibid.). At the same time, Evans continues, New Wave science fiction tried to distance itself from earlier genre offerings and "was willing to reject escapism and interrogate pressing social issues" (438). The New Wave writers were interested in formal experimentation, avoided utopian scenarios, and responded to contemporary anxieties by addressing environmental issues. Therefore, the alteration of the natural environment and the resulting threats to the survival of our planet have been primary concerns of science fiction since the 1960s. Eric C. Otto defines New Wave and the environmental texts of the first few decades of the twentieth century as narratives of "ecological loss;" as society "was starting to see its way of living as incompatible with local and global ecological fitness," science fiction depicted dystopian futures caused by cataclysmic events on a devastated Earth (2019, 582). This means that, even before the concept of the Anthropocene gained currency and climate fiction emerged, science fiction writers depicting apocalyptic scenarios proposed that human greed can change—and, in some cases, even destroy—the natural environment.

Even novels written in the 1960s and 1970s by writers who did not see themselves as producing 'ecological science fiction' show the way in which ecological thinking influenced science fiction. Indeed, an interest in environmental issues is evident in all of Philip K. Dick's work. In *The Ruins of Earth* (1971), one of the first science fiction and ecology anthologies, Dick's "Autofact" depicts a postwar era in which robots control the world, monopolizing the planet's resources and leaving humans with nothing. In the introduction to this anthology, Disch wrote that he appreciated Dick's work because it warned readers of the dangers of technology and therefore played "a significant part in the very urgent business of saving the world" (1971, 6). Dick composed other short stories that examined the consumption of natural resources, including "Survey Team"

(1954), which deals with humanity's "insatiable desire for more and more resources" (Markley 2006, ch. 5). Further, McKibben's (2008) anthology—*American Earth: Environmental Writing Since Thoreau*, already quoted at the beginning of this article—included a passage from Dick's *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* in which protagonist Decker remembers "how in his childhood it had been discovered that species upon species had become extinct" (Dick 1968, ch. 4). *Martian Time-Slip* (1964) is another of Dick's works depicting the way in which men constantly alter the natural environment. In this novel, Dick represents an Earth where levels of pollution are so high that people are dying, and Mars, now colonized by humans, is experiencing a process of desertification caused by the exploitation of natural resources.

In this article, I will attempt an ecocritical interpretation of *Martian Time-Slip* using Scaffai's (2019) definition of the interactions between literature and ecology as a critical starting point. Ecology is the branch of biology that deals with the relationship between living organisms and their environments. However, the word also refers to all human activities that develop in relation to the environment, such as agriculture or industrialism, as well as to measures taken to protect and preserve it. Therefore, according to Scaffai, in literature, an ecocritical approach studies the relations that characters establish with their environment, how their activities change it, and the results of those changes, such as catastrophes, epidemics, and climate change. The concept of *Umwelt* is central to this approach. Introduced by biologist Jakob von Uexküll in the first half of the twentieth century, Umwelt refers to the environment as it is perceived by different organisms, meaning that both humans and nonhumans have particular visions of the spaces they inhabit. When narratives give voice to nonhumans, they employ the literary device of "estrangement," using an unexpected perspective to reframe a familiar reality (Scaffai 2019).

As Disch (1971) pointed out, an ecological consciousness is expressed in literature through interconnectedness: the "peculiar tunnel vision and singleness of focus" of the so-called hardcore science fiction saga "is the antithesis of an 'ecological consciousness' in which cause and effect would be regarded as a web rather than as a single strand chain" (6). Following from this, *Martian Time-Slip* is built upon different webs that tie

together its characters. Brain W. Aldiss found three webs: that of civilization, that of humanity, and that "connecting all the good and bad things in the universe" (1975, 43). The characters are also connected to each other by their shared experience of being the colonizers of a new planet; each one interacts in different ways with the space as they try to survive in an inhospitable environment. Mars itself is something of a nonhuman character, and many characters are defined by their interactions with the nonhuman. In writing about different points of view and visions of the same space, Dick creates a web, a sort of literary ecosystem to which each character brings his own way of being and thinking. Mars is a space of interconnection, a biosphere inhabited by humans and nonhumans that exists only in the interaction of these elements.

This paper will explore how *Martian Time-Slip* deals with concerns linked to the future of the natural environment and the human race. In the first section, I will explore the dynamics of migration and terraforming; setting the novel in an extraterrestrial world permitted Dick to rewrite American history, linking Western expansion to the new frontier of Mars and showing the destructive forces of colonization. Dick also explored the dynamics of homesteading, showing how new generations develop a sense of belonging to Mars' environment. The second section of the paper examines Dick's conception of mental illness: during their visions, Manfred and Jack, both schizophrenics, adopt the role of connectors between the human and the nonhuman. Moreover, Manfred and Jack's points of view seem alien and cause estrangement in the reader.

MARS: A DYING PLANET?

Many science fiction writers decide to approach the question of nature through displacement to another planet. There is, in fact, a long tradition of sci-fi works set on Mars or involving the invasion of a Martian population seeking to escape extinction. Popularizing the image of Mars as a red, dry planet, once home to a Martian civilization, was Percival Lowell's non-fictional trilogy (Mars 1895; *Mars and Its Canals* 1906; *Mars as Abode of Life* 1908), based on Lowell's astronomical observations that had led him

believe in the existence of artificial canals on the surface of Mars.[1] Both Edgar Rice Burroughs and H. G. Wells were influenced by Lowell's works. Wells depicted in *The War of the Worlds* (1898) the invasion of the Earth by Martians seeking to colonize another planet to escape an ecological crisis. Burroughs envisioned a dying Red Planet inhabited by a "partly medieval and partly Native American-inspired society" (Heise 2011, 452). Then in the postwar period Ray Bradbury published *The Martian Chronicles* (1950), a collection of stories set between 2030 and 2057 that examines the effects of Martian settlement on Earth and Martian people. Inspired by realistic accounts of Midwestern lives in the first half of the twentieth century, such as the connected stories of Sherwood Anderson's *Winesburg, Ohio,* Bradbury evangelized for Mars' "power to redeem or rescue a troubled and threatened world" (Abbott 2005, 240).

After Bradbury, Philip K. Dick wrote about the colonization of Mars in two novels: *Martian Time-Slip* (1964) and *The Three Stigmata of Palmer Eldritch* (1965). Both novels were written during what critics have usually recognized as the most artistically accomplished period of Dick's production, which includes Dick's masterpieces (*Dr. Bloodmoney, Martian Time-Slip,* and *The Man in the High Castle*). *The Three Stigmata of Palmer Eldritch* is set only partially on Mars. The image of the planet that transpires is very bleak. In 2016, people are drafted to emigrate to Mars because on Earth temperatures are rising; however, the colonizers find Mars a hostile environment, barren, and covered by dust. They try to make vegetables grow, but the land is too arid. They try to construct irrigation canals, but water is too sparse. Mars is so inhospitable that a native civilization does not exist on the planet, and the only animals are Martian rodents, which eat humans' crops, and jackals that prey on people. In this novel, Dick is not very interested in depicting the struggle for survival on the Red Planet: the environment on Mars is so hostile that people do not really try to establish contact with it, and they hate the land. In this "desolate wasteland," humans survive "the hardship of

[1] Before Lowell, the Italian astronomer Giovanni Schiaparelli had observed on Mars' surface a network of "channels," which was mistranslated in English as "canals" (Calanchi 2016, 10).

their daily exile from Earth only by means of drug-induced virtual-reality experiences of a different, easier life" (Heise 2011, 454).

If in *The Three Stigmata of Palmer Eldritch* the reader can only glimpse the difficulties colonizers must face on Mars, *Martian Time-Slip* is much more involved in analyzing the process of homesteading. As explained by Carl Abbott in the article "Homesteading on the Extraterrestrial Frontier," "homesteading is a particular facet of the complex processes by which agriculturists settle 'empty' and undeveloped territories, whether the prairie of North America or the imagined planets of SF, and it is a process with deep resonance in American history and national identity" (2005, 242). In *Martian Time-Slip,* Mars is "both colony and frontier" (Markley 2006, Ch. 5): it is described as the last frontier and its colonization clearly mirrors that of the American West. Dick is hardly the first writer to employ the idea of the frontier in science fiction and to adapt it to extraterrestrial worlds. It is one of the clichés of sci-fi to see the future, particularly Mars's territory, as the new representation of the American Western frontier. In analyzing the *topos* of the frontier in science fiction, Abbott suggests that "because the imagery and mythology of the western frontier so pervade American culture, science fiction repeatedly internalizes the stories that Americans tell about the development of the West and writes them forward for places and time yet unknown" (Abbott 2005, 243). Usually, there are two processes described in narratives about humans trying to make a living on extraterrestrial planets: homesteading and terraforming. Terraforming indicates the deliberate transformations of a planet's ecology, atmosphere, or climate to make it more hospitable to humans. Homesteading narratives focus on single individuals or families, their attempts to adapt, and "draw on the rich experience and mythology of the American farm–farming frontier" (ibid.). Terraforming narratives, instead, are about power and politics; they talk about the big picture and often are involved with problems related to technology and science.

Philip K. Dick is not interested in science or technology per se:[2] Mars displays a spatial configuration akin to Earth's landscape, with prairies, mountains, and deserts. The atmosphere is thin but breathable; therefore, humans can live on Mars almost as they live on Earth or, to be more precise, in California. In fact, as pointed out by Umberto Rossi, "the barren Martian landscape is quite similar to that of the state where Dick lived for the most of his life . . . like California, Mars is a dry, desolate land" (Rossi 2011, ch. 4). Robert Crossley, in his book *Imagining Mars: A Literary History,* writes that the image of Mars in *Martian Time-Slip* is retrograded because scientific plausibility is not a priority for Dick (2011, 227). The way Mars is described in the novel is affected by the assumption still popular in the 1960s about the Red Planet's presence of canals. This belief was definitely refuted in 1965 when the United States' Mariner 4 Spacecraft took pictures of the barren landscape of the planet. At this point, "even Dick . . . could not ignore the unprecedented photographic images of Mars that began to enter the collective consciousness" (227–228); in 1968, Dick himself wrote in *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* (1968) that "in the old days they had believed in canals on Mars" (Dick 1968, ch. 15). Yet these canals are very important in the depiction of Mars in *Martian Time-Slip*. Besides being "anamorphic images of the complex system of aqueducts supervised by William Mulholland which allowed the fast growth of Los Angeles at the beginning of the twentieth century" (Rossi 2011, ch. 4), they give an image of how Mars's natural landscape has been affected by the human endeavor to establish a prosperous society. Indeed, they represent social inequalities rooted in the new communities grown on the planet: only wealthy people can have constant access to the water brought by the canals, while the rest of the population must be careful not to waste a single drop. When, in the first chapter, flying in his helicopter, Jack sees the canals from the sky, they look like a "fertile spiderweb of lines" which connects all the colonies (Dick 1999, 47). However, the water of the canals shows "the accretions of time, the underlying

[2] *Martian Time-Slip* "offers the pleasure of a good realist novel" (Palmer 2005, 156). Its very strong realist component is attested by the presence of the theme of marital crisis, a motif often found in Dick's sci-fi and mainstream novels.

slime and sand and contaminants" (ibid.) because of the UN's incessant filtering: the canal system and its water, once pure, now sluggish and green, also symbolize the deterioration of human relationships in Martian society.

Martian Time-Slip depicts a near-future Mars colonized by terrestrials who are trying to terraform the planet to make it more like the habitat of "Mother Earth." A replica of Earth's subdivisions into states, Mars is now almost completely a desert land without any natural resources. Humans are trying to tame the wild nature of Mars without leaving anything pristine: there are ranches intercut with the desert and oases like the settlement of the plumbers, with fountains and steam baths erected on the margin of the desert. While Bleekmen had occupied once only one-fifth of the planet and had left the rest "as it had found it" (Dick 1999, 8), humans want to reshape every part of the environment. Mars, or at least a part of it, was a fertile and rich land that permitted the development of an advanced civilization, but after human colonization, it is subject to a process of desertification caused by the exploitation of natural resources and by human activity. It was once a sort of Eden that had been spoiled by humanity's short-sightedness. Arnie Knott, for instance, imagines an original state of perfection on Mars: "All Mars, he decided, was a sort of Humpty Dumpty; the original state had been one of perfection, and they and their property had all fallen from that state into rusty bits and useless debris" (Dick 1999, 75). As humans are trying to make Mars more similar to Earth, the Red Planet is undergoing a process of decline that replicates the one of Earth, where overpopulation and pollution (two of the main concerns expressed in sci-fi novels of the 1960s and 1970s) are forcing people to Mars. These images of ecological devastation and resource depletion "employ Mars both as a reflection of contemporary problems and as an intimation of Earth's future" (Markley 2005, Ch. 5). Humans seem doomed to repeat again and again the same mistakes, as happens in Dick's short story *"Team Survey,"* in which "the survivors of an endless war on Earth that has left the planet uninhabitable blast off for Mars" (ibid.). When they arrive, they find out that Mars too has been stripped of its resources and devastated by an ancient civilization that left long ago for another planet. The narrative turn happens when the team understands this civilization is the human one, that six thousand years before had fled to Earth. At the

end, the team seeks a new, virgin world, but it seems very probable that they will destroy that world, too.

Martian Time-Slip is also a homesteading narrative depicting the efforts of families to survive in a grim country. Mars' landscape is another image of the American West, with dust that covers everything and descriptions of violent sandstorms. Mars represents to many characters a sort of Promised Land where they can create a new and perfect society. This kind of discourse echoes the narrative built around the idea of Manifest Destiny—Mars as a new frontier is a sort of second possibility for humanity to initiate an ideal society. Yet, in *Martian Time-Slip*, Dick is revisiting the glorious history of American movement westward. If once writers used the Martian setting to draw utopias or myths (Calanchi 2016), Dick challenges the traditional Western myth built on stories of success through perseverance. Abbott explains that, between the 1950s and the 1960s, when historians were rediscovering the history of the West and the human and natural cost of Western expansion, some sci-fi writers began to question the national narrative that celebrated individualism and scientific progress (2005, 251). The revision of the American past is reflected in *Martian Time-Slip*: it seems that the colonization of Mars is failing because Mars's society is controlled by people like Arnie Knott and Jack's father, who think only about their personal interests and speculate on Martian land. Their behavior causes much pain to people and the planet, causing what seems to be the imminent extinction of the Bleekmen and the desertification of the planet. "Dick saw the frontier controlled by the inescapable power of capitalism and consumerism" and believed that the social and economic life of Mars "subverts the values of dedication, family, and neighborliness that lie at the heart of the homestead myth" (Abbott 2005, 252).

Consequently, Mars seems doomed to become a planet without an ecosystem. Plants are almost completely absent, and animals are rare—and often quite horrific. However, the narrative technique deployed by Dick leaves some uncertainties about the real nature of Mars. *Martian Time-Slip* is narrated through the technique of "multiple internal focalization" (Rossi 2011, Ch. 5). There is no omniscient narrator, but Dick uses the point of view of different characters (Arnie Kott, Jack Bohlen, his wife Silvia and his

son David, Leo Bohlen, Norbert Steiner and his son Manfred, Otto Zitte, and Dr. Glaub).[3] Dick experimented with this technique in his realistic or mainstream novels, where the reader can often find "multiple plots and multiple narrative foci" (ibid.). According to Umberto Rossi, this literary procedure embodies the dichotomy between *koinos kosmos* (shared world) and *idios kosmos* (private world). What Dick calls *idios* and *koinos* is a simplification of what Dick found in existential psychoanalysis, where *koinos* means *Eigenwelt* or private world and is opposed to *Koinos*, or *Mitwelt,* or shared world. Both "are the human counterpart" and differ from *Umwelt*, which is "the environment, the natural world: the world as it is" (ibid.). This implies that a shared world is just another human construction, a cultural artifact, one might say, the product of the interaction of individuals. In addition, the shared world or *koinos kosmos* could break down, in Dick's terms, revealing an *Um welt* or natural world that we are not equipped to directly cope with (ibid.).

In *Martian Time*-Slip, Dick represents only the private worlds of single characters and not what the reality, within the boundaries of the narration, really is. The reader can read points of view on the world that contrast, so if sometimes the shared world that the characters inhabit seems bleak and grim, in some cases it seems that Mars could actually be a more interesting environment, with an ecosystem that some characters, like Arnie's sons, David, or the Bleekmen, seem to value. If we analyze the point of view of persons who are at the margins of society, for example, because they suffer from mental illness or because they are 'just' children, life on Mars seems to acquire a new significance. This means that not only is it impossible to know the reality, but also the shared world is unstable. When one of the machine-teachers of the Martian school says to his students that it is impossible that they have seen a raccoon because they do not exist on Mars, maybe, as Pagetti suggests, the teacher should not be so sure about

[3] Umberto Rossi writes that he does not think that Dick ever adopts David's point of view, even if Darko Suvin also inserted David in this scheme. In some passages, Dick adopts David's internal focalization, and other aspects of his character can be deduced by what people think about him or by what he says in dialogues. As I will discuss in the rest of the article, it seems to me that David is an important character in *Martian Time-Slip* and that his attitude towards others, and in particular towards the Martian environment, is very clear.

denying or disappointing students because there are different ways to 'see' a racoon (Pagetti 2006).

Jack's father, Leo, for instance, is interested only in his speculation. He sees the red planet only as a free land of which he can take possession. To Leo, Mars looks like a miserable scenario: "He saw a flat desert with meagre mountains in the far distance. He saw a deep ditch of sluggish brown water and, besides the ditch, a moss-like vegetation. That was all, except for Jack's house and the Steiners' house a little farther on" (Dick 1999, 116). Leo thinks that he is in front of a grim environment that still needs more planting and landscaping. For Jack, instead, this landscape has something that fascinates him; it bears the mystery of a world inhabited by the centuries. He is surprised that his father does not want to "walk around, look at the canal, the ditch. . . . You haven't even glanced at it, and people have been waiting to see the canals—they've argued about their existence—for centuries" (Dick 1999, 115). Jack is one of the few characters who does not see Mars as a place to exploit or as a desolate land, but as a space with an identity and a history that must be respected. In the first chapter, while he is flying over the Martian land and sees the canal system, he feels a connection with the land. It is as if he could feel the exhaustion of the environment, its hope to be left alone in its wild element: "[O]ver the west," he sees "the reaches, which were waiting for human science to race back and pass its miracle" (Dick 1999, 7).

Along with Jack, future Martian generations seem the only ones who really feel a sense of belonging to the Martian environment. It is typical of homesteading narratives to focus on the "challenge of learning to live off a strange land," but also to address "the problem of generational change as children prove better able than parents to learn and adapt to the new environment" (Abbott 2005, 245). Second-generation immigrants have a more direct relationship with the Martian landscape and show a sensitivity that seems odd to people who still identify home with the Earth. Arnie Knott has two sons born on Mars from his first wife, but he cannot establish any form of communication with them. To their father, they seem "novel and peculiar," without any sense of humor, "and yet they were sensitive; they could talk forever about animals and plants, the landscape itself. Both boys had pets, Martian critters that struck him as

horrid" (Dick 1999, 18). These children are curious about the land and the civilization that inhabited it; indeed, they often wander in the wasteland and return with what seems to Arnie worthless things such as, "a few bones or relics of the old nigger civilization, perhaps. When he flew by 'copter, Arnie always spotted some isolated children, one here and another there, toiling away out in the desert, scratching at the rock and sand as if trying vaguely to pry up the surface of Mars and get underneath. . ." (19). It seems that, to Arnie's sons, the Martian environment is not so horrible: they have never seen nature on Earth, so they do not have anything to compare with Martian wilderness, unlike their father.

Jack's son, David, is representative of the entire new generation of children born on Mars from immigrant families. David is both romantic and practical, with a deep interest in mechanics, a subject in which he excels; he brings together in himself a love for science and for nature. It seems to me that through this character Dick opens to the possibility of the establishment of a new, future society in which an attitude toward scientific development and an ecological spirit will result in a more conscientious relationship with the land. David is very often associated with his garden, of which he is very proud: it is the first thing that David would like to show his grandfather when Leo lands on Mars, and he often talks about his garden in his letters to Leo. David, with great care, attends to the growth of beets, carrots, and potatoes, trying to cultivate a land that is dry and fruitless. This garden is an example of what Willa Cather called in *O Pioneers!* (another homesteading narrative but set in the Great Plains of the twentieth century) the attempt to "make an impression" upon a land that is as arid and monotonous as the Great Plains of the United States. As in Willa Cather's work, one can find gardens cultivated by immigrants who are successful in importing plants from all over the world. In cultivating this garden, David demonstrates a deep understanding of Mars' land (usually, families are quite unsuccessful in planting gardens on Mars): if he is modifying the Mars environment by introducing vegetables that could be found only on Earth, he is doing this in an attempt to render Martian land more fertile. David does not farm on an industrial level; he just tries to reach self-sufficiency. Arnie Knott, instead, wants to terraform the Martian environment only for his own profit and,

therefore, tries to produce the New England-type of melon, "because everybody likes a good slice of cantaloupe in the morning for his breakfast" (Dick 1999, 12). David's garden is also very different from Arnie's sister's garden, which is an ostentatious display of wealth and water overuse, because she cultivates only flowers.

David's sensitivity is not limited to the natural world; he also shows empathy towards his neighbors. He shows a compassionate heart when he asks his mother to help the Steiners by giving them water because they finished all their stores. David is afraid that the Steiners' garden will die if they do not have enough water stored up for it; he thinks that this would be terrible because he knows that, in the desert-like landscape of Mars, gardens are very precious and rare. He understands that, if the Steiners are always so demanding and in need of help, it is simply because they do not know "how to keep their property going right" (Dick 1999, 3). David reveals a deep sense of community, and the value of community life will be the note on which *Martian Time-Slip* will end.

MENTAL ILLNESS: A CONNECTION BETWEEN THE HUMAN AND THE NONHUMAN

One of Dick's main concerns while he was writing *Martian Time-Slip* was mental illness; he was particularly fascinated by Ludwig Binswanger's *Existential Psychiatry*, a book inspired by Heideggerian phenomenology (Pagetti 2006, Introduction). In "Diagnosing Dick," Roger Luckhurst (2015) draws a brief history of the psychological theories that influenced the discourse about mental illness in the United States between the late 1940s and the 1980s, and points out how Dick's work "was often profoundly sensitive to these changes in psychiatric discourse" (2015, 19). In particular, while Dick was writing *Martian Time-Slip,* the way mental illness was considered was changing. In 1960, Thomans Szasz published "The Myth of Mental Illness," arguing that psychiatry was merely demarcating deviations from socially sanctioned norms. This was an argument that had just been made by R.D. Laing in *The Divided Self* and would soon after guide Michel Foucault's *History of Madness*, first published in 1961 (Luckhurst 2015, 23). Thanks to existentialist psychology and counterculture, which was developing in the

1960s and 1970s, mental illness began to be seen differently, as caused by the society and the outside world.

In *Martian Time-Slip,* two characters suffer from mental illness, in particular from two different forms of what in the novel is called schizophrenia: Jack and Manfred. Manfred is a ten-year-old boy whose diagnosis today would be autism, now considered a specific learning disorder with a possible genetic or neurobiological basis. However, it was only separated from schizophrenia and the general nosology of psychoses as late as 1979. In *Martian Time-Slip,* there are "competing conceptions" of psychosis (Luckhurst 2015, 24). The first is more traditional and sees Manfred's autism as a "child form of schizophrenia" and connects the illness to a conflictual relationship with his parents. Schizophrenia was once seen as a form of dementia, that is, a degenerative illness for which there was no cure. In Dick's novel, it is often repeated that Jack cannot really recover from schizophrenia because there is no cure; as for Manfred, his father raises the possibility that the child's mother, cold and distant, is to blame for Manfred's condition. But *Martian Time-Slip* also clearly conveyed the influence of the anti-psychiatry movement of the counterculture of the 1960s in its depiction of mental illness.

Jack decided to emigrate to Mars after what he calls a neurotic episode, during which he saw the personnel manager's office of the firm where he worked as a dead man transformed into a machine. But, on Mars, he re-experiences similar episodes. Jack expresses the belief that mental illnesses are caused by the oppressiveness of society. Mentally ill people are seen as strange or ill because they do not respond to the world in the way that it is expected from them. However, Jack thinks that maybe they are the only ones to see reality for what it really is. He sees that the realities that the schizophrenic or autistic person cannot understand are the ones that are imposed on him:

> the reality which the schizophrenic fell away from—or never incorporated in the first place—was the reality of the interpersonal living, of life in a given culture with given values; it was not biological life, or any form of inherited life, but *life which was learned.* It had to be picked up bit by bit from those around one,

> parents and teachers, authority figures in general . . . from everyone a person came in contact with during his formative years. (Dick 1999, 61-62)

The very idea that autism and schizophrenia are illnesses to be cured is, according to Jack, just a cultural belief. He states, "a child who did not properly respond was assumed to be autistic—that is, oriented according to a subjective factor that took precedence over his sense of objective reality" (61). Those considered mentally ill are the ones who are impossible to teach because they do not accept truths that are imposed on them. Jack expresses the same view of Binswanger's mental illness, according to whom "psychosis was to be grasped as a process of 'world-building,' and the doctor had to understand what he called 'the world-design or designs in which the speaker lives or has lived'" (Luckhurst 2015, 25).

If Jack sees humans as machines, it is because he perceives that people have lost their sense of empathy, while sometimes machines show more empathy than humans. This reflection on the apathy of the human race and its incapacity to feel compassion towards one another or towards the natural world is one that will intrigue Dick for many years and that will find complete expression in *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* (1986). In this novel, androids created to serve in the colonies are so similar to humans that sometimes it is difficult to recognize them. The only aspect that can really differentiate androids from humans is their incapacity to empathize with other persons, and with animals. In the end, *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* is a reflection on what it means to be human, as suggested by Kim Stanley Robinson' "The question pondered by the novel is not the one of the title, which asks for the definition of the androids, but it is rather one concerned with the nature of humanity, of humaneness" (1984, 92). Emblematic of this novel is a scene in which a group of androids torture a spider just to see what would happen to it if it had four legs instead of eight. The scene is narrated from the point of view of John R. Isidor, an intellectually below-average human. Isidor is treated badly by society, but he is very sensitive. He feels sick while he is watching the androids cut one leg after the other off a spider that could well be the last spider on Earth; he feels so sick that he decides to kill it, letting it drown into the sink. In worlds like the Mars of *Martian Time-Slip* and the Earth of *Do Androids Dream*

of Electric Sheep? it is not easy to understand and define what *being human* means. The fact, for example, that it is almost impossible to distinguish between electric animals and real animals points out that the border between nature and culture, the typical duality on which Western culture is based, is becoming blurred.

Manfred's understanding of the world, as well as Jack's schizophrenic episode, are described as moments of absolute reality, "with the façade stripped away" (Dick 1999, 68); they unveil a reality that society is not prone to accept. I find it very meaningful the way in which Jack describes mental illness when he says that the schizophrenic falls away from the reality of a "given culture with given values," not from "*biological life*, or any form of inherited life" (61; emphasis added). Indeed, what the reader sees through Manfred's eyes is the biological process of decay and entropy (which Manfred calls *gubble*). It is as if, under the surface, autism enables Manfred to grasp the constant working of time. Manfred can see the corruption of things and the moral corruption of people: In his morbid visions, Manfred sees that the culture and society around him is condemning the human race to extinction with its yearning for power and riches.

Similar to Jack's episodes, Manfred's subjective perspective of the world blurs the confines between the human and the nonhuman. His vision puts him outside the common world of the other characters; his view is that of the "other," one who lives on the margins. Dick expresses the gulf that divides Manfred from the other characters, also adopting a language stylistically different to express the child's inner world. The world described through Manfred's eyes causes in the reader the effect of "estrangement," which enables the reader to see aspects of life usually taken for granted. An example of estrangement is the way in which, during the dinner in chapters 10–12, Manfred sees Arnie while he is eating: "[H]is (*Arnie's*) head was a skull that took in greens and bit them; inside him the greens became rotten things as something ate them to make the dead" (Dick 1999, 127). There is almost a role reversal in this vision: vegetables are alive until Arnie eats them, while persons are seen as lifeless "suck of bones" (ibid.). The language used for Manfred is a very material one, one that sees humans as a set of bones and organs, in which the nonhuman seems to take revenge on

humans and take possession of their bodies. The other characters are scared of Manfred because his mind sometimes invades their thoughts, but Manfred also is a victim: "This invasion leads readers to see Manfred as a threatening, possibly destructive presence; but this happens because in these last chapters we mostly see the autistic boy's private world through Jack's idios kosmos, suffused with fear and anguish. When we directly access Manfred's private world . . . we see that the boy is not threatening, but threatened" (Rossi 2011, Ch. 4).

Moreover, to express what Manfred sees and sometimes also what Jack perceives, Dick uses a language that seems disconnected. At the beginning of the twentieth century, Eugen Bleuler, a Swiss doctor who studied schizophrenia, listed four symptoms that permit the recognition of mental illness in a patient. Two of them are important because they find expression in the style adopted by Dick to express Manfred's visions. First, "there were symptoms that show a loosening of the associations in thoughts, a loss of a normal linear narrative of the self, so that schizophrenics were said to display highly disorganized cognitive processes and a 'great irregularity' in their time-associations" (Luckhurst 2015, 21). Additionally, "Bleuler pointed to a profound ambivalence, by which he meant that patients were disabled by being able to hold both positive and negative feelings and cognitions simultaneously, leaving them stranded by conflictual meanings" (ibid.). These two aspects translate into a narrative that is not linear, that disrupts the cause and effect relationship, and into a narrative that uses simultaneity: Manfred sees the future and the present at the same time, and he sometimes does not know the difference between the two timelines.

It also seems possible that Manfred's visions are affected when the people who surround him are selfish: capitalists like Arnie and Leo, or morally corrupted like Jack and Doreen, whom Manfred sees as bodies in decay because they are having an affair. Instead, when he is with the Bleekmen, he seems to find a sort of peace and someone who can empathetically share his vision and emotions (I do not see Manfred as an apathetic character; conversely, he seems to me deeply sensitive and affected by his nightmarish visions). Both Manfred and the Bleekmen inhabit the periphery of society, and both are subjected to a sort of imprisonment (Vallorani 2006). Manfred and the

Martian natives share a common experience, which is one of submission and dispossession.[4] Heliogabalus explains to Arnie that "his [Manfred's] thoughts are as clear as plastic to me, and mine likewise to him. We are both prisoners, Mister, in a hostile land" (Dick 1999, 183). Nevertheless, Manfred's impression of the Bleekmen is very different from that of other colonizers. If they usually see this native population as miserable and poor, so weak that they will abandon their culture and religion to accept that of the colonizers, Manfred perceives in them the elegance of their movements and their sensibility. At the same time, the Bleekmen are the only ones who do not treat Manfred differently because of his "condition" and who really accept him as part of their community, showing compassion and comprehension toward the child. Both share a deeper connection with the wilderness of the Martian environment. Manfred, having found his place among the Bleekmen, in one of the last scenes, walks with the Martian natives towards the desert without fearing it. Instead, he finds a sense of peace in that landscape: "The desert lay ahead, for them and for him. But none of them had any regrets; it was impossible for them to turn back anyhow, because they could not live under the new conditions" (221).

Manfred and the Bleekman decide to go into the desert, the space that on Mars represents the wilderness that terrestrials have not been able to tame. The desert also represents the 'original spirit' of the Martian environment, the only aspect of the landscape that has not been changed by humans' endeavors. In the middle of the desert, there is a rock, Dirty Knobby, that is important in the narration. Dirty Knobby seems to represent the spirit of the Martian environment. It is the place where all things and persons are connected: it is here that Arnie sees for the first time through Manfred's eyes and enters his mind, mainly thanks to the barbiturates that he takes, but maybe also because of the nature of that place. This empathetic experience changes Arnie,

[4] Umberto Rossi compares the Bleekmen to Native Americans: "the Bleekmen are evidently the Martian equivalent of the Native American or Mexicans which lived on the West Coast before it was colonized by European American" (Rossi 2011, Ch. 5). Some critics have seen analogies between Dick's Martian civilization and Australian Aboriginals (Pagetti 2006), while according to others, Bleekmen's enslavement re-enacts that of African Americans (Vallorani 2006).

making him more sensitive. For the first time, Arnie acknowledges Manfred's pain in feeling so isolated from the rest of the world: he wants to keep his promise to mail Manfred to Earth, as the child wants. It is emblematic that this moment happens at Dirty Knobby, a place that, despite its strange name, seems to be a mystic place for the Bleekmen and seems to emerge almost as a character at the end of the novel. While he is walking toward the rock, Arnie feels its presence (maybe also because he is affected by what Heliogabalus said to him about the mountains), and it seems to him that Manfred's mind is merging with Dirty Knobby.

Finally, the establishment of contact with the Bleekmen breaks through Manfred's sense of isolation, while Jack decides to return home to his family after he has left Doreen, acknowledging the pain he caused Silvia and choosing to conduct a moral life from then on. Regarding the ending of *Martian Time-Slip*, Kim Stanley Robinson wrote that "it is the quietest, calmest, and most resolute of Dick's endings . . . Against this developing nightmare history are offered only the acts of caring for family and neighbors, but for the moment it is enough . . . Meaningful private life can counteract the pressures of a dystopian society" (1984, 58). Fredric Jameson recognized a strong utopian element in *Martian Time-Slip*. Manfred appears for the last time, and this time, he can communicate with other people. He thanks Jack for what he did, trying to communicate with him. "Here then is the collective, the primitive communism of the aboriginals, who have also become the helpers and the rescuers of the schizophrenic Manfred, himself now a new kind of prosthetic being who has emerged from out of the future of his own past" (Jameson 2005). As pointed out by Rossi, "Manfred reaches salvation by leaving the American web (not just the building but also the socio-economical context which created it) and finding his place between the marginalized and defeated. Madmen are the only hope left" (2011, Ch. 5). Moreover, in their quiet endings, Jack and Manfred prove to have gradually developed a sense of belonging to the Martian land. Manfred can escape again to the desert with the Bleekmen, while Jack decides not to end his marriage and chooses to keep living on Mars. Connecting with each other and with the environment seems to be all that can define what human nature really is and offer some sense of hope in the face of a ruthless society. Being human

means to act like David, who tries to make something grow from the land, not to enrich himself like Arnie or to display his wealth like Arnie's sister but to establish "communication," a mutual exchange with the land. This sense of community and the possible beneficial outcomes from a close connection with the environment seem to redeem the characters. Dick ends *The Tree Stigmata of Palmer Eldritch* in a similar way: Barney Mayerson, once interested only in his professional career, decides to remain on Mars, to keep living with the other Earth immigrants and to try to make his garden grow, even if that environment is even bleaker than that of *Martian Time-Slip* and no one seems to be successful in taking care of their crops. Both these novels end on the concept of interconnectedness between humans and between the human and the nonhuman, as the only way to survive in a world that can seem hopeless and ruled only by entropy.

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THE ABSENT VICTIMS: AN ECOLINGUISTIC STUDY OF ENVIRONMENTAL REFUGEES IN THE NEW YORK TIMES

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ABSTRACT

Absence of coverage in elite newspapers about one aspect of climate justice is environmental migration. Very little is understood about victims caught in the debate about climate change and forced movement. In *The New York Times*, the selective framing of the issue portrays people displaced by slow and gradual climate change or sudden climatic events as being security risks, making absent other important ideologically factors that seem to alter the central story line of environmental migration. Using Pan & Kosicki's (1993) framework to understand how a frame is built in the newspaper, what emerges is that the reportage is marked by absences. These absences offer the elite newspapers a way forward to ignore issues that do not seem to be newsworthy for coverage. Yet, these absences of coverage lead to absence of attention on the true victims of climate change.
Keywords: Climate change; climate refugees; environmental refugees; framing; absences; news discourse.

PREAMBLE

Environmental refugees featured in the newspaper *The New York Times* (henceforth *NYT*) are framed as being security risks. I argue that this frame-package of environmental refugees[1] as security risks is marked by absences. Projecting environmental refugees as security risks is an incomplete projection of the issue, as some other ideas, like lack of a legal status even as a refugee, do not seem to be given equal if not more legitimacy in constructing the issue. The central storyline of the reportage began with portraying them as victims of climate change when the newspaper first mentioned them in the early 1980s. This changed in the 1900s when global warming

[1] There were other frame-packages that emerged including the North-South divide on climate change and Small Island Nations (SIDS) as the first victims of climate change, but the most recurring frame-package was that of these humans being displaced framed as security threats.

moved from being primarily an environmental problem to one where climate change affected political, social, and economic aspects of society.

The term environmental refugee is a controversial construct, a legally unrecognized term of reference, yet it is used by writers and some opinion-makers alike. Biermann and Boas define such people as "people who have to leave their habitats (and home territory) immediately or in the near future because of sudden or gradual alterations in their natural environment related to at least one of three impacts of climate change: sea-level rise, extreme weather events, and drought and water scarcity" (2010, 67)

FRAMING IN ECOLINGUISTIC LITERATURE

Ecolinguistics inherits many of the premises and aims of Critical Discourse Analysis (henceforth CDA) in that ecolinguists' intention in their object-of-critique[2] is similar. While CDA examines ways in which discourse constructs and reflects ideologies that create unequal power and hegemony (i.e., humans vis-à-vis other humans), some ecolinguists aim (in addition) to address how language use can have an unequal ecological impact through the actions of humans vis-à-vis other humans, non-human species, ecosystems, and the environment. In both cases, the objective is to address issues of concern and make unequal relationships both visible and central to the discussion.

In ecolinguistics, framing is one of the tools used to understand how the media can shape and limit the speech, action, and options of both policymakers at one end and the readers on the other. This method has been used by Stibbe (2015), Lakoff (2010), and Cachelin et al. (2010) to show that ecological framing of environmental issues is mostly done in negative terms, as issues that need to be diagnosed or solved. This analysis of *NYT* joins this group where the trajectory is framed by justice for both

[2] As explained by Fairclough, an object-of-critique is "discourse being some sort of 'entity' or 'object'" and a critique of object is "a [combination of] critique of discourse and an explanation of how it figures within and contributes to the existing social reality" (1995, 3).

humans and their environment. In studying the reportage of environmental refugees, the aim is to understand what kind of justice these people are served by other humans, but it is also to understand the relational nature of humans with their environment.

The understanding of a frame in this research is that it is a group of factual and interpretative statements with a specific thematic orientation supported with a combination of rhetorical[3] and stylistic devices. This is called a media-package by Gamson and Lash (1983) or frame-packages by van Gorp (2007). In framing analysis, the principle task of the researcher is to unpack these frame-packages. This is done by detailing the specific thematic orientations and linguistic structures that combine to form the frame. Repetition of such form a frame package. Each frame-package is distinguishable by its unique way of combining the structural, rhetorical, or stylistic devices. Each frame-package provides the "central organizing idea[s]" connecting different elements of the news-story including the actors, quotes, sources, context, and background information, and relaying these as "interpretative packages that help to make sense of relevant events, suggesting what is the issue" (Gamson and Modigliani, 1989, 3).

The present research differs from and serves to supplement the growing number of ecology-based projects examining nature and human interactions by shifting the focus from how humans affect nature through material actions and events to how news discourse serves to convey, construct and negotiate meanings about human relationships with the environment and its interrelated parts.[4]

[3] "Rhetorical devices" is an overarching term that includes stylistic devices such as metaphors, exemplars, and catchphrases, in addition to facticity strategies employed by writer' to increase the effectiveness of news (Pan and Kosicki, 1993, 62).

[4] Nature is inclusive of non-human species, flora fauna, earth, soil, sun excludes humans; environment is all of these along with humans.

METHODS AND METHODOLOGY

The empirical evidence for this study was generated from a systematic reading of newspaper articles on environmental refugees from *NYT* over a 31-year-time-period.[5] The sample initially consisted of 78 newspaper articles from 1985 to 2015 including terms such as "climate refugee/migrant" or "environmental refugee/migrant." The list was generated using the online database Lexis-Nexis; the 'major mentions' was used to search for stories that have start and end dates of January 1, 1985 to December 31, 2015. In addition, 'major mentions' limits the search to include the terms "environmental refugees," "climate refugees" in the headlines, lead paragraphs and indexing tags. One advantage of using the Lexis-Nexis route was the appearance of fewer framing mechanisms—no pull quotes and no logos.

The dataset includes all types of articles: news articles, editorials, opinion pieces, features and published letters to the editor. Letters to the editors were dropped as upon review they did not offer any fresh perspective. Selected items were arranged in a chronological manner. A mix of all genres of news articles were included due to the small amount of data retrieved over the 31-year period. The articles[6] were examined qualitatively. The final population was N=53.

The New York Times was chosen as the focus of this research as it is the industry standard for gathering news and reporting it. It is considered the most influential media source in the agenda-setting process both among policy makers and other media organizations (Dearing and Rogers, 1996). The newspaper is also a forerunner in the industry not in terms of circulation as much as for investigative and in-depth reportage on controversial issues.[7]

To examine the construction of the frame-package environmental refugees as security risks, it was helpful to understand the repeated thematic orientations in the

[5]The choice of this rather long time-period ensures that the results are not distorted by specific climatic events such as the 2010 Indian Ocean tsunami or the 2010 earthquake in Haiti. An article was included in the dataset as long as it had at least one discussion on any aspect of environmental migration as opposed to a mere mention.
[6] The word articles replace newspaper articles.
[7] As an aside, most climate change denial reports have an Anglo-American perspective (Björnberg et al.,2017, 234).

newspaper. The frame was the central idea or storyline that provided meaning to unfolding events. It also directed the reader's attention to understand the issue in a certain manner. In a frame, there is preference for certain selection of words and phrases, including stock phrases and sources of information (Simon and Jerit 2006, 257). Gamson postulates it is a frame that offers a "central organizing idea for making sense of relevant events" (1989, 157). The repetitive use of selected linguistic structures, and reasoning devices makes absent or less prominent other ideas that may be equally relevant to the discussion. Thus, overtime many articles lend salience to a particular aspect of an issue while other aspects are absent or become marginalized in the reportage. As suggested earlier, for this study we will only focus on one frame-package. In detailing how the reportage framed the environmental refugees, I chose to follow the methodology laid out by Pan & Kosicki (1993), which allowed me to closely examine structural elements in the discourse that allow construction of a certain version of reality. This approach shows how linguistic constituents assemble a particular storyline, thus, how the frame was built block by block. By using this linguistic approach, I am able to observe not only the building blocks of the frame but also what is missing or made less salient in the discussion.

Every article in the dataset was annotated to detail the syntactic, script, thematic and rhetorical structures of a frame as proposed by Pan and Kosicki (1993). Briefly, syntactic structures in an article are similar to Van Dijk's (1988b, 26) "macrosyntax," that is the inverted pyramid arrangement of headline, lead, episodes, background, and closure in a news article. The script structure of an article often follows closely that of a story—a beginning, climax and end, despite news articles having their own story grammar (1988b, 50) consisting of the five Ws (who, what, when, where, why) and two Hs (how and how much). The thematic structure of the article, or, the idea that pervades the whole article was observed as it allows the writers to construct the story with one theme as the central core connecting various subthemes. Lastly, the rhetorical

structures[8] of every article were documented to detail the stylistic choices made by the writer but they are not discussed in this paper.

To build the frame, lexical items, sentences, paragraphs and the macro-text itself was examined in every article. Lexical items were useful to identify the elements of script and thematic and rhetorical structures. Sentences were analyzed to understand how the theme was developed in an article. Paragraphs allowed for an understanding of the thematic direction of the article and the macro-text was useful to understand how the syntactic constituents were arranged repeated over time. The next step in the process was to make aggregate observations of factual and/or interpretive elements along with their stylistic devices and then to name the frame-package. The names of the frame package were indicative of the thematic orientation of a group of articles that share similar ways of presenting the issue along with a network of rhetorical devices and reasoning devices. The name functions like an identity tag of the frame. Once the frame package is named, articles with similar thematic orientations along with similar reasoning and stylistic devices supporting the theme were grouped together. Pan and Kosicki's (1993) approach pays enough attention to the structure of an article and sufficiently guarantees the reliability and the validity of the frame constructed.

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

An issue as complex as the displacement of humans due to climate change has multiple causes, effects, and interdependencies. Framing entails understanding the ". . . central organizing idea or storyline that provides meaning to an unfolding strip of events, weaving a connection among them" (Gamson and Modigliani 1994, 143). The initial hypothesis is that the central storyline is built through structural units that portray environmental refugees negatively. The analyses of basic elements that build the frame[9]

[8] Gamson and Lasch's (1983, 102) list of stylistic choices of framing devices suggest how to think about the issue and three reasoning devices justify what should be done about it. The framing devices are "(1) metaphors, (2) exemplars (i.e. historical examples from which lessons are drawn), (3) catchphrases, (4) depictions, and (5) visual images (e.g., icons).

[9] For a full list of articles analyzed please see Venkataraman 2019.

(Venkataraman 2019) are presented along with a discussion of how they functionally present the problem of human displacement. The conclusion will provide an overarching argument of how some themes regarding climate change and its effects on humans are made less salient by the frame-package.

- *THEMATIC STRUCTURES: THE CHIEF ARCHITECT OF THE FRAMES*

Themes in an article are developed through the description of an actor(s) and their action(s). The theme might include the goals of the actors developed through direct and indirect quotes, while detailing the context and the background. It also examines the root causes and consequences of events and actions. Themes are an integral part of how a frame is realized. Thus, themes help "constructs a particular angle of interpretation on the topic of each text which resonates with other aspects of discourse organisation" (Martin 1992b, 12). For Pan and Kosicki (1993, 59), "the theme is also called a frame" because frames provide ways in which "media organize and present issues and events" (Dimitrora and Strömbäck 2005, 404).

- *THEMES*

Themes are the basic entities that define a socially constructed reality in a frame. Since the articles selected focus primarily on environmental refugees, the themes developed the topics of displacement of "climate refugees" (*NYT*, 20), "floating populations" (*NYT*, 25), and "ecological refugees" (*NYT*, 18). The first absence to note is that people who are displaced are not refugees, as they do not have a legal status that offers them protection in the host countries.

The recurring theme of climate change as a threat-multiplier was a way by which climate change moved from being categorized simply as an environmental risk, to that where climate change was seen to be affecting the environment, geo-political interactions, economics, society and human security at large. Climate change as a threat-multiplier then co-opts environmental refugees in the bargain, for environmental refugees on the move to escape the environmental stress or conflict was a way by which *NYT* chose to frame human displacement in the 1980s. The movement

of people in places such as Mali was portrayed as, "a crippling drought in this landlocked West African country has made water as precious as the salt and gold traded in Timbuktu centuries ago" (*NYT*, 23). In Syria, the extreme drought along with a growing population, corrupt regime, extreme sectarian and religious passions were the reasons why "half the population in Syria between the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers left the land" (*NYT*, 12). The environmental refugees were therefore seen as victims of complex situations involving strife, lack of resources and a changing environment. As a threat-multiplier climate change was seen to be one of the root causes of human displacement. In addition, during sudden climatic events, essential resources were used ineffectually to tackle emergency situations like food and water distribution. Thus, environmental refugees were framed at this point as truly being part "of the effect of warming[which] will be calamitous for poor countries" (*NYT*, 19) since we are "talking about some countries that never had much chance to recover from the last serious drought. And there is quantitatively and qualitatively an increase in insecurity" (*NYT*, 21). While climate change was a threat-multiplier, environmental refugees were seen to be the true victims who might be "need[ing] American humanitarian relief or military response" (*NYT*, 2).

When these people moved to surrounding regions, violence erupted as they competed for already stretched resources in host regions: "'now there are too many people for one well,' said a regional official, surrounded by makeshift tents of mats, sticks and newspaper" (*NYT*, 11). These violent fights in neighboring regions allow the framing of threat-multiplier to identify climate change as a root cause of security in these regions.

This repetitive theme of climate change as a threat-multiplier also has implications for the basic entity of the frame "environmental refugees." In fleeing from the effects of climate change and unrest at home, these environmental refugees are construed as the victims of climate change. Yet when they cross into neighboring regions and they compete for resources in the host regions, they are seen as a "deluge" and "invasive." The attention is now on the intentional harm caused by these people as they fight for resources.

Of particular interest is the relationship between the themes of loss and damage often projected together, with the writer making no distinction between what can be rectified through technological or financial help and complete loss of livelihoods, cultural heritage, and status as a nation.

The signifying elements of a theme are the lexical choices that are arranged in a certain fashion to develop a particular view. They function as "framing devices because they are recognizable and thus can be experienced . . . conceptualized into concrete elements of a discourse, [and] be arranged or manipulated by newsmakers" (Pan and Kosicki 1993, 59).

Two points are made here. The words "risk," "climate change," "migration," "loss," and "damage" were used repeatedly. In contrast, the terms "justice" and "legal status" resulted in surprisingly low returns despite being the crux of the matter. The term "justice" and its synonyms were found in only three sources and with a mere four references over the three decades in NYT whereas the word "legal" had four references in three articles. This is a significant absence concerning these people as they try to move away from degradation and harm.

This brief description of themes and lexical choices made by the writers provide the entry point for discussing the concrete elements of the discourse arranged to make the frame communicable through the news media.

SYNTACTICAL STRUCTURES

- *MACROSYNTAX*

The first structural element of a frame is called "macrosyntax" (van Dijk 1988b, 26). This consists of an inverted pyramid structure where headline, lead, episodes, background, and closure are arranged in a top down manner and in descending order. Given below is a detailed discussion of the structural elements where environmental refugees are featured in the leads of the articles or hidden as a mere mention in the context, background or closure of the article. Every time environmental refugees are mentioned in the lead the discussion was coupled with climate change.

- *HEADLINES*

In a macrosyntactic structure of a newspaper the headline is the first element that helps in framing an issue. Headlines provide ways by which frames are bolstered. While headlines have specific linguistic forms and communicative functions (Bell 1991, 186; Dor 2003, 697; Van Dijk 2013, 221), the most important way by which they contribute to the frame is by providing a summary of the article. In most of the *NYT* articles, the headlines served as a macro-proposition for the entire article, that is the thematic focus of the text is projected in the headline (Van Dijk 1988b, 33). This is how the "central organizing idea or story-line" (Gamson and Modigliani 1994, 143) is expressed.The mention of environmental refugees is entirely absent from all headlines. The first framing element in the macrosyntax, the headline, fails to engage with the theme explicitly.

The headlines fall into three syntactic patterns: groups, non-finite clauses, and finite clauses (Montgomery and Feng 2016, 504). A group mentions a specific geographical region or entity: "Obama on Obama on Climate" (*NYT*, 11), whereas non-finite clauses are expressed as "A Paradise Drowning" (*NYT*, 17), and finite clauses consist of a complete sentence or clause: "Haitian Refugees Chide U.S. Policy; Unequal Treatment of Immigrants Cited" (*NYT*, 15).

In discussing the headlines, the finite clauses frame the threats, risks, dangers and consequences of climate change, the groups characterize the consequences of climate change in specific geographical locations, mostly in Africa and the Asian subcontinent while non- finite clauses talk of climate change as a global phenomenon from privileged or elite perspectives only. If the U.S. is mentioned in the headline,[10] it is to explicitly project its stances, for example: "U.S. is Ending Haven for Those Fleeing a Volcano" (*NYT*, 2).

The headlines in the non-finite group provide only a part of the information. What is missing are the major actors like the high-carbon-emitting nations. The deletion of details in the headlines help embody a point of view signaled by the

[10] By and large the articles reflected a U.S. perspective on issues related to the environment and migration.

headlines itself. In the headline, "Paradise is Drowning" (*NYT*, 17), neither the victims of climate change nor the causes are mentioned. The frame develops the problems of climate change, and the headline legitimizes bold assertions about climate change but without mention of either perpetrators or victims. In yet another example, "The Impending Deluge" (*NYT*, 9) the use of the *verb+ing* form in the headline creates an effect of immediacy, even a sense of doom in the immediate future. Non-finite clause headlines thus contribute to the alarmist and doomsday discourse often associated with climate change representations in the media (Risbey 2008, 27).

In both categories of groups and finite-clause headlines, the newspaper frames the environmental refugee issue as either a risk or threat. In the example, "Obama Recasts Climate Change as a Peril with Far-reaching Effects" (*NYT*, 6), the headline signifies the discussions of disruptions in host countries because of human movement towards First-World countries. This developed credence between 2006-2015, when climate change was cast as a security threat by military experts in the White House. In another example, "Africa's Drought Sears the Land of Timbuktu" (*NYT*, 7) we see the same issue reported in a diagnostic fashion. The problems faced are constructed in an interweaving manner that explains local problems of weak governance, economic mismanagement, and climatic conditions that have contributed to the present state-of-affairs.

Headlines between 1985 and 1995 used perspectives of victimhood to construct the frame on environmental refugees. Yet as we began to live with climate change in 1990s, the headlines began to narrow in scope. In the 2000s, the frames in the newspaper dealt exclusively with security threats or projection of the global phenomenon of climate change on others' locally lived realities.

In frame construction, headlines provide the first cues to the classification of the frame-package, yet it is marked by a visible absence, the mere mention of environmental refugees themselves.

- *LEADS*

Leads, or the first two paragraphs of the article, indicate the most important information found in the article (Lorimer and Gasher 2004, 238). Traditionally, the inverted pyramid style used to have the lead as the base providing the five W's, in covering an event or episode that is considered newsworthy. Thus, leads almost always establish the frame of the story (Sieff 2003, 260). In most leads, the descriptive information provided serves to "orient the [reader] in respect to the person, place, time and behavioural situation" (Labov and Waletzky 1967, 32). In 51 articles (out of 53), the lead echoed what the headline said.

While most articles followed the traditional style of using leads as a way to clue the readers into the rest of the article, there were instances of the lead being a poor indicator of the frame of the article for reasons that had more to do with absence playing a pivotal role in shaping the discourse than with a shift in style to a more relaxed narrative style that fuses features of descriptive writing with news reporting.

Another type of lead that is seen in the newspaper were those which offer a scaffold for the writer to reorient a specific actor's point of view in their own terms. In Example 1 below, the writer allows the lead to hook the reader by envisaging the risks posed by rising sea-levels, yet the article reorients the risk with the writer's own understanding of the issue:

> Example: 1
>
> *Headline:* **The Bay of Bengal, in Peril from Climate change** (*NYT*, 1)
>
> *Lead:* Nearly one in four people on earth live in countries that border the Bay of Bengal. The region is strategically vital to Asia's rising powers. Its low-lying littoral—including coastal regions of eastern India, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Myanmar, Thailand Malaysia and Sumatra—is home to a billion people who are now acutely vulnerable to rising sea-levels. Storms are a constant threat; over the weekend, a cyclone, Phailin swept in from the bay to strike the coastal Indian state of Orissa, leading to the evacuation of some 800,000 people.
>
> *Opinion of the writer*: But first the countries that ring the bay must rise above their potential fault lines and embrace the interconnectedness of their history . . . The bay's turbulent climate has played an outsize role in the region's history.

In the example above, in the lead, the writer "cull[ed] a few elements of perceived reality and assembl[ed] a narrative that highlight[ed] connections among them to promote a particular interpretation" (Entman 2007, 164). The particular interpretations developed by the writer follow the lead by weaving the writer' own world views and culling details of the proceedings of the conference or detailing what happens when rising sea-levels batter the mangroves of Bangladesh or force people in dinghy boats toward Australia. These particular interpretations were developed by "sizing and magnifying or shrinking elements of the depicted reality . . ." to make certain elements of the event ". . . more or less salient" (Entman 1991, 9) thus, influencing the central storyline of the frame. The writer promotes an understanding that closer inter-governmental interactions between neighboring countries could help solve local problems with climate change. There is an absence of any help suggested from any of the developed countries in the same region or even in the West. This is also the way the lead contributes to the frame changing over time. These displaced people move from being victims to problems that need to be managed.

While the leads provide the main frame of the article, there were also instances of culling and sizing of the information that were evident in ways that do not allow the reader to understand the frame immediately. For example, in articles that begin with a short narrative about an individual in order to contextualize the argument, there is a marked absence of evidence to show how the narrative builds the argument for or against environmental refugees' status or about climate change's effects on human displacement.

The following example shows how the lead begins with framing an issue with an individual story, yet, further on in the article the frame develops thematic relationships about the main entity of environmental refugees as being security risks to society. An individual story as a lead but soon forms a thematic generalization of a group of people. The article begins with an individual story that seems to be credible, reasonable and natural, while the article itself opens space for an incredible, unreasonable and unnatural displacements of humans which shows an ill-defined nuance in an issue.

There is a disconnect between the lead being the hook of the article and the development of the issues.

Example: 2

Headline: **China Migrants: Economic Engine, Social Burden** (*NYT*, 24)

Opening Sentence in the Lead: With his possessions bundled in plastic and hung from his shoulders, his trousers rolled up to beat the heat, 30-year-old Ren Jun drifted into Beijing this month, part of the migrant tide of 50 million peasants that is threatening to swamp China's urban landscape.

Analysis: The journalist refers to internal displacement, rather than to outward migration. This makes absent the need for discussion on the legal status of environmental refugees when they cross borders. It also makes it a local problem that is regulated by domestic laws and regulations applicable in China.

Comment: The reader is exposed to a frame that is familiar and reoccurring in migrant literature, namely, the "refugee invasion" (Leudar et al. 2008, 188) as expressed in the article as "pressure on existing infrastructures," "overburdened rail system," "criminalization of these people," ". . . gangs of criminals . . ."(*NYT*, 24). The lead develops the theme in a way already familiar to the reader instead of engaging with the issues that confront these victims from an environmental-migration nexus perspective. The notion of climate change and its consequences on the livelihoods is posited in just one sentence: "The land is not fertile, and it is far from any water." In brief, even if it is identified, the underlying issue is not effectively addressed.

To conclude, while the lead suggests themes that follow and describe the risks and problems associated with human displacement, it also frames the issue because it occludes other themes on human displacement that include justice and suffering of the displaced. If environmental refugees are featured in the lead, they form "mass migration" or "large scale displacement of people" (*NYT*, 3). In many ways the focus is on the consequences of climate change and its risks rather than on the suffering of environmental refugees.

In an overwhelming majority of the articles (97.6%), the lead allows the observer to understand the frame of environmental refugees as security risks. The only exceptions come with individual stories that contextualize the article itself but do not necessarily develop the main frame of the article.

- *CONTEXT AND BACKGROUND*

In a frame, context and background play the roles of making the reader aware of the issue either by reminding of old information or building a scaffold to new information. In this reportage, they enhance the reader's understanding of probabilities and uncertainties associated with human displacement. While the function of context in *NYT* is the specific climate-related event(s), outcome of a conference, or the particular disaster covered, the background is the more comprehensive, structural or historical information given about climate change or environmental refugees. Context and backgrounds work as important signifiers of familiar knowledge and introduce fresh details for new events or episodes.

In *NYT*, the context and background are presented in an incomplete and superficial manner, their logical contribution to the frames being in the form of predetermined values which allow the frame to recycle themes of non-sustainability, loss, and damage associated with climate change, refugee invasion, and accompanying security threats.

The following example provides an understanding of how the frame is built through the themes echoed in the context and background.

Example 3

Headline: **No Fixed Address** (*NYT*, 5)

Context: The images of starving, exhausted, flood-bedraggled people fleeing New Orleans and southern Mississippi over the last two weeks have scandalized many Americans long accustomed to seeing such scenes only in faraway storm tossed or war-ravaged places like Kosovo, Sudan or Banda Aceh.

Analysis: Environmental migration is contextualized by comparison to scenes seen as typical of faraway storms or wars ravaging in Africa or Asia, allowing the reader to understand that the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina is in many ways a new sight for Americans. It can also be viewed as providing backgrounding to Hurricane Katrina

In the newspaper, when environmental refugees were constructed as a consequence of climate change, they are often not seen in the lead but only in the context and background to climate change.

In the frame-package of environmental refugees as security risks, the structural background in these articles explains *how* these people become environmental refugees but does not explain *how* they become security risks. Instead, this is just repeated in the closure of the articles. Thus, leads that contain lexical choices about a "national security imperative" (*NYT*, 6) or posing "a serious threat to America's national security" (*NYT*, 7) are provided with detailed background about situations that allow us to understand the push factors for climate change but not how these people might become security threats to America.

The context and background of articles delving into the issue of human displacement due to climate change often provide negative supplemental information. However, this information does not lead to a better understanding of the complex nature of the problem but promotes fallacies with counterproductive values ascribed to environmental refugees as security risks.

- *EPISODES*

The articles' main bodies contain what Werth details as including: "actions, events, motions, accomplishments and processes" (1999, 102). These are the episodes in an article. When the newspaper reports the proceedings of meetings and conferences, the events advance or progress in complication, leading to resolution and outcomes, meaning the articles highlight the outcomes of the conferences or meetings. In contrast, when the report has no resolution, it is an opinion piece.

In *NYT* the episodes are presented as two kinds of suspenses:[11] past-oriented suspenses and future-oriented suspenses (Rimmon-Kenan 2002, 12; Knobloch et al.

[11] An initiating event described in the newspaper might have significant consequences. This is likely to instigate concern from the reader, resulting in suspense. The suspense is an affective reaction from the reader. (Knobloch et al. 261)

2004, 261). Future-oriented suspenses are episodes detailing human displacement which explain what might happen when they are displaced; past-oriented suspenses are episodes that encode what caused them to move.

As seen in Table 1 below, *NYT* develops the past-oriented suspenses in greater detail. This is expected since the future-oriented suspenses often lack a closure in terms of real-world answers.

Table 1: Difference between past and future-oriented suspenses

Past-oriented suspenses	Future-oriented suspenses
Here is what scientists have found is happening to our climate . . . Almost all of the ice-covered regions of the Earth are melting—and seas are rising (*NYT*, 13)	The prospect of waves of environmental refugees fleeing ravaged Third-World economies or low-lying areas and causing "enormous destabilizing pressures. (*NYT*, 24)

The significance of suspenses as a framing device in episodes is considerable. Past-oriented suspenses are varied in the reportage from understanding climate change to postulating how weak governance or stretched resources in countries from where environmental refugees are forced to move contribute to their movement. Yet the future-oriented suspenses do not encode thematic development of episodes regarding their legal status or loss of nationality or even their way of life. Instead these are framed singularly as the *eventuality* that they will be part of the security risks.

- *CLOSURES*

There is no resolution to the issue of human displacement in the real world at the moment. Yet the issue is written up with elements of a closure in which specific scenarios are imagined. This is not reflective of the real-world situation where human displacement is still taking place, and imagined scenarios are not substantiated. The socially constructed reality created by the writers forecloses alternatively imagined

geographical spaces for environmental refugees, or even legally binding adaptive measures for these people. Closures work as one of "the formal points at which ideological closure is most powerfully exerted" (Fiske 1989, 180). In *NYT* closure showcases a window to the elite representation of this issue where only ideas of loss, damage and security risks are echoed but accountability fails to be mentioned. Having provided a frame for interpreting the issue, the closure completes the frame as exemplified in the following examples in Table 2.

Table 2: Closures

Reference	Excerpts from *NYT*	Themes of Closure
(*NYT*, 6)	Climate change especially rising seas is a threat to our homeland security—our economic infrastructure and the safety and health of the American people.	Threats that are not substantiated
(*NYT*, 14)	The environmental effects of the gulf spill remain largely unknown. But the number of lives disrupted is certainly in the thousands, if not tens of thousands, . . . the ultimate cost will be counted in billions.	Consequences without accountability

There remains a lack of definitive conclusion in the discussion about environmental refugees, save in two articles. Instead, the closure recasts the issue as a consequence of climate change exclusively.

To conclude this section on macrosyntactic structures the features analyzed here all contribute structurally to frame. Yet when each of these elements is studied in the data, the structure of the frame emerges in the following manner: headlines posit the problems of climate change exclusively; the leads suggest that mass migrations constitute a security risk; the episodes in the article progress both with past and future

suspenses even if the past is more detailed; and the future suspenses allow for a very negative construct of human displacement with no alternatives imagined. Finally, the closure works to remind the reader of the loss and damage of climate change while reiterating the issue as a security concern.

- *MACROSYNTAX: SCRIPT STRUCTURES*

The script structures are how the arrangement of elements in an article contributes as a signifying power in terms of location in the macro-syntactic structure of news articles. As we saw throughout our discussion the headline along with the lead has the greatest potential to frame an issue, as it is located at the top of the article. Yet, only once in three decades was the signifying power of the headline used to directly engage with the problem of human displacement. As discussed earlier, the headlines focused on climate change rather than human displacement due to climate change. Aligning the headline with the larger issue of climate change allows the themes normally associated with climate change in the form of consequences, effects, problems, causes, and moral responsibility to be discussed here. Since the issue has some undecided and unknown variables, in terms of legal status, causes of migration, and the actual numbers of refugees moving, it makes it hard for a journalist to frame so many uncertainties. Thus, headlines provide the means by which we can legitimize our understanding of content that has many variables and is abstract in nature. It therefore seems logical for newspapers to engage with a better-known topic such as climate change (despite climate change itself being fraught with so many uncertainties) and then find an entry point to engage with this topic on more familiar grounds. The headline in the newspaper thus offers proof of this as it frames the effects of climate change rather than frame human displacement itself. In addition, as headlines are structurally situated first in a news article, they also are the first points at which they impose meaning upon uncertainties. The first point of framing is in the headline where human displacement is magnified as a security risk, dramatized in other lands or even minimized as just another effect of climate change.

As seen in the example below, the headline and lead allow the reader to understand the article from a particular point of view. When examined, they project two important points in the frame. First, for an issue to be considered as a problem, it has to command the attention of the public. Yet neither the leads nor the headlines succeed in garnering attention to the issue of human displacement. While they engage with larger themes of climate change, they do not direct attention to one of the core issues that define the problem, namely the lack of a legal status of these people. Next, both the lead and the headlines as a structural unit contribute to the transformation of environmental refugees from primarily victims of climate change to potential security risks, thereby helping to transform the focus on the consequences of human displacement in a familiar borrowed discourse of invasion of immigrants (Charteris-Black 2006, 564).

Example 4:

Headline: **Global warming's role in mass migration is addressed** (*NYT*, 3)

Lead: The two UN climate conferences outside Paris . . . But global warming has already another effect- the largescale displacement of people that has been an ominous politically sensitive undercurrent in the talks and side events here . . .

Thematic Analysis: Destabilizing effects of mass migration

It is in the context or background of the article where the environmental refugees were mentioned most often. In 98% of the articles, the issue of environmental refugees is discussed as part of context or background information that allows the reader to understand the phenomenon of climate change better. While the context and background play important functions of situating the environmental problem within a specific temporal or geographical location, it is an ineffectual means by which to frame the issue. This is because context and background are merely used as a scaffold to express a point of view on the main theme of the article. Thus, the context and background allow the issue to be hidden rather than being projected prominently for the reader. It requires a careful reading of the whole article for the reader to have access

to information on environmental refugees. In the example given below, we understand the structural background information on floating populations only in the fourteenth paragraph of the article. In terms of prominence, the article focuses on the lack of a natural resource defining human displacement within a country's borders, again making absent the legal aspect of environmental refugees.

Example 5:

Headline: **The Dynamic New China Still Races against Time** (*NYT*, 25)

Lead: There is not an adjective that soars high enough or denotes with enough force to describe China's economic explosion or the promise of its future.

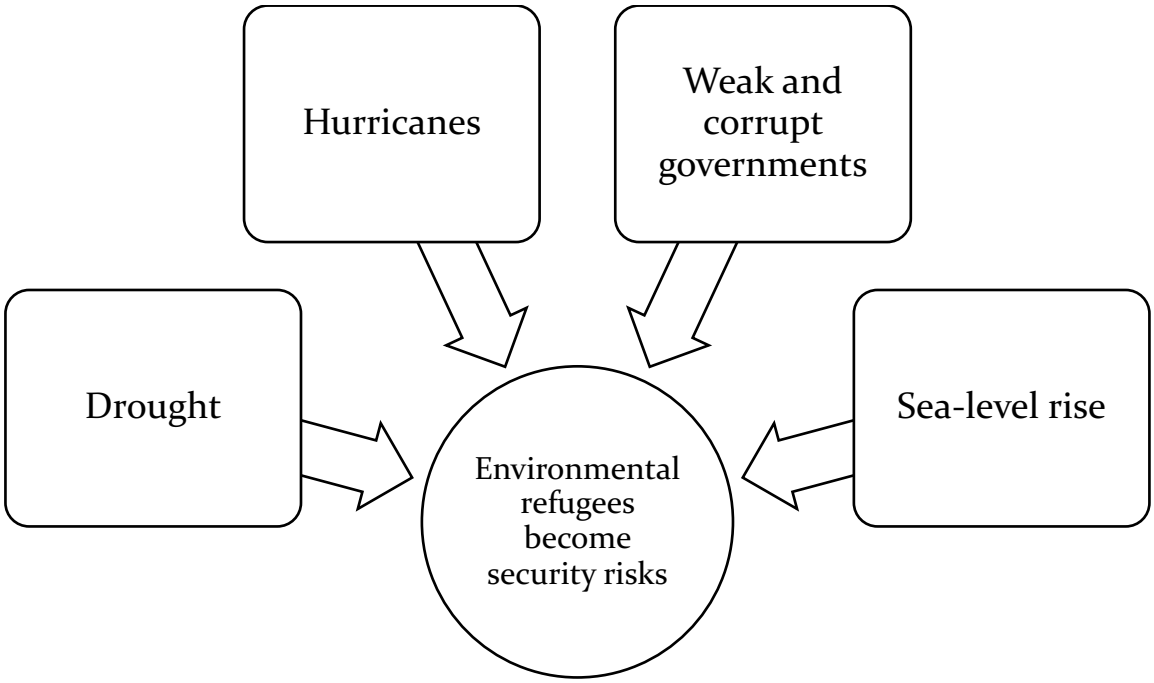
Background: (Paragraph 14) By some estimates, millions of environmental refugees may already be among a 'floating population' that is migrating towards the cities and coastal provinces.

Thus, structurally the context and background information allow for environmental refugees to be introduced to the reading public, but since the information is not foregrounded, it contributes to its absence from the newspaper.

The topic of environmental refugees is developed in episodes that covered specific calamities and also included hypothetical evaluations of mass migration. Most of the episodes have either to do with sea-levels rising or lack of natural resources to sustain a population. The episodes thus contribute to the frame development by laying out specific instances of mass migration, the casual-consequential dimension built up through reporting of incidents and accidents.

Figure 1 details episodes of the causes of movement of people. Other dimensions of the issue, such as the nature of the movement and the legal status of these people are absent. In terms of contributing to the frame construction, it is context, background, and episodic development in the articles that allow for the issue to be discussed as it is.

Fig 1: Diagrammatic representations of episodes in the reportage



Finally, in 50% of the articles, the closure reiterates either a resolution or a recommendation on climate change. If we use the statistical numerical value to understand how this contributes to structuring the closure, we conclude that it plays a significant role in reiterating ideas echoed in the article about the causes of movement of environmental refugees. Yet a qualitative analysis shows that in these articles, the frames mostly develop the connection to climate change without allowing the issue to be developed in terms of either refugees' legal status or loss of their way of life.

- *REASONING DEVICES*

Arguments help to build up a frame to promote "particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation (Entman 1993, 52). Thus, a frame can be built by providing only a certain type of argument or provide

partial information to complete an argument[12]. The argument made here is that the frame on environmental refugees is so poorly constructed that readers are exposed to partial perspectives that allow them to draw hasty conclusions without qualifications.

In the analysis, Stephen Toulmin's (1958, 95) approach to studying arguments has been employed. In every argument, there are essential roles played by the content. The *claims* made are conclusions drawn in an argument; *data* is the support or evidence given to support the claims formalized in numbers, dates, people and their quotes, and named places. *Warrants* help make link between the data and claim and shows how the evidence supports the claim. Not all warrants are universal, thus qualifiers help in asserting conclusions with the use of modal *qualifiers* like "necessarily" and "probably" with various degrees of force. Exceptions to the warrants are laid out by the *rebuttals*. What the proponents or various actors offer to establish their authority is called *backing*. Understanding the argument structure helps us understand how the issue is repeatedly constructed with data supporting different claims being made without a well-established link provided by the warrant. In addition, the arguing from negative consequences allows environmental refugees to be framed as a security threat which empowers the frame with details of the problems and risks of human displacements. An overview of the arguments presented in the reportage are:

i. Environmental refugees are people displaced by climate change or weak governments and over-stretched resources in home states.
ii. Climate change is a threat-multiplier and a security threat.
iii. Environmental refugees are a security risk.
iv. Migration of these people is problematic.

A careful analysis of the frames shows that when reconstructed, parts of the argument structure make defensible assumptions about the nature of climate change yet fall short in offering careful warrants about humans being displaced, who thus become security risks. Data is positioned to show that climate change is indeed

[12] It is neither possible nor necessary for *NYT* to deal with any of these issues in a detailed manner as some degree of culling or sizing the information is a necessary strategy employed.

negatively affecting life on this planet. *Data* is presented as facts, judgments, and testimonies as seen in Table 3 below.

Table 3. Types of data

Physical details, numbers: But in sub -Saharan Africa, where the desert creeps south, or in Bangladesh where half the population lives on ground less than 16 feet above sea-levels, or in Syria where extreme drought was a factor in the collapse of a nation, a warmer earth is already generating refugees. (*NYT*, 8)	Judgment and truth claim.
Specialized knowledge: The report on Tuesday follows a recent string of scientific studies that warn that the effects of climate change are already occurring and that flooding, drought, extreme storms, food and water shortages and damage to infrastructure will occur in the near future. (*NYT*, 4)	Truth claim and Judgment
Expert Opinion: "The same thing can happen as a result of sea-level rise. Bangladesh is having terrible problems in this area" (quote by Dr. Oppenheimer, chief scientist of Environmental Defense, a national research and advocacy organization). (*NYT*, 16)	Testimony
Individual Stories: ". . . And then suddenly the drought happened." What did it look like? "To see the land made us very sad," she said. "The land became like a desert, like salt. Everything turned yellow." (*NYT*, 12)	Testimony
Documentary Evidence: A report this year from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change estimates that rising seas will force 60 million people away from their coastal homes and jobs by the year 2080. (*NYT*, 21)	Judgment

As shown in **Table 3**, there are various types of data which lead to a generalized claim that mass migration is a consequence of climate change. Mass migrations constitute

security risks in host countries. In terms of argument analysis, this claims from negative consequences.

The empirical data provided in the newspaper supports the claim that climate change is affecting life on earth and that it does cause migration. The data also supports the claim that climate change does cause mass migration in certain instances but *not* the fact that these refugees become security risks to the U.S. The dangerous future consequences of millions of displaced humans as security risks is not based on any evidential data provided in the newspaper. Backing these claims are only elite voices as seen in the examples given below:

Example 6:

> [Former President Obama] ". . . They don't have a lot of margin for error and that has national security implications. When people are hungry, when people are displaced, when there are a lot of young people particularly young men who are drifting without prospects for the future, the fertility of the soil for terrorism ends up being significant. And that can have an impact on us (*NYT*, 10)."

Although elite voices make the claim that environmental refugees could be security risks, the data provided in the newspaper only supports the view that climate change could be seen as the starting point for conflict in areas where resources are stretched. The warrant making the link between the claim and data is thus reduced to the rhetoric of politics. Even if we assume that the argument is made from negative consequences, the premise (or claim) that these environmental refugees are security risks is not supported.

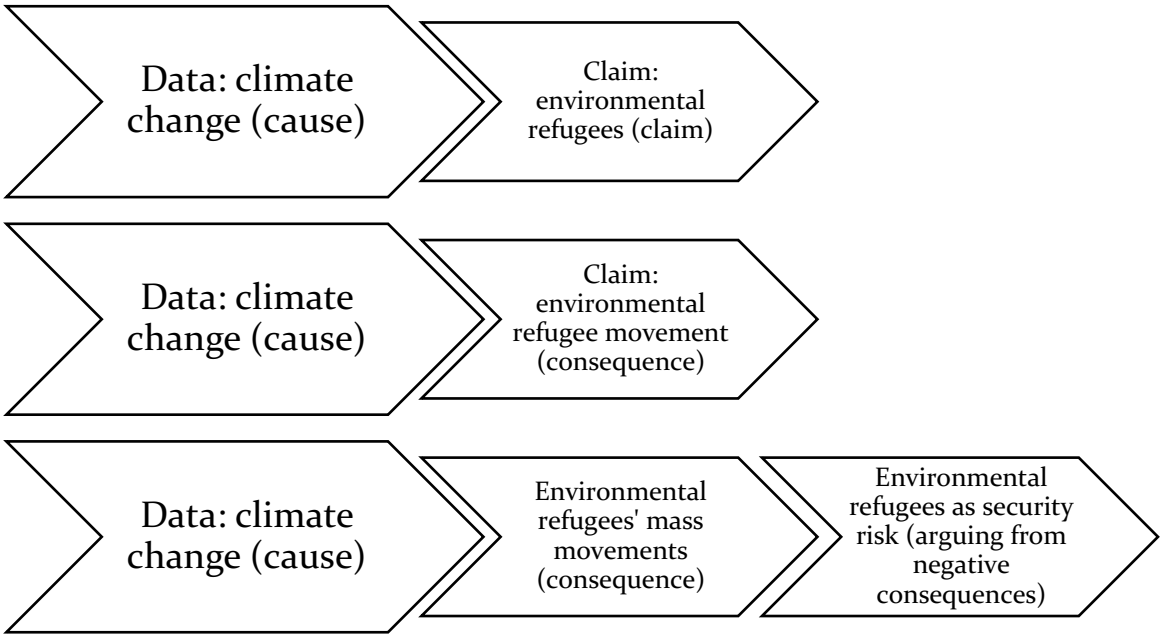
The presence of weak warrants in the arguments has two effects on the frame in this issue. Since 62% of the articles were framed with climate change as a problem, environmental refugees seen as security risks are argued from negative consequences which provides ways for both of these issues to be placed within the same articles. This allows the reader to make the conceptual leap between climate change as a security threat to environmental refugees being security risks based on rhetoric from elite actors alone. Since the argument is made based on negative consequences, this issue is also framed as something that has to be battled with or fought against.

Furthermore since 96% of the articles project elite testimonials as warrants in building the frame, these elite testimonials reiterate support for the argument that it is elite actors that frame the debate (Druckman et al 2013, 59).

Arguing from negative consequences allows the root of the argument to be classified as climate change. Yet the root of the arguments needs to be pushed back further to understand ways by which anthropogenic climate change is constructed.

Figure 2 below shows this movement of the frame from environmental refugees as victims to that of being security risks. This attempt by elite actors to reframe the issue of environmental refugees as a security risk is done by appealing to two principles: that these people deserve our help and protection, and two, they could potentially be risks themselves.

Fig 2: Reframing of the issue



This securitization of climate change has been debated (Warner and Boas 2017; Corry 2012; Trombetta 2008) in academic circles as a means by which the risk or threat of climate change is a way of typifying the problem, allowing for political actors to engage in certain types of action that helps deflect attention from inaction on climate change mitigation. This reframing of environmental refugees as security risks then fits

into the same agenda. If we examine the timeline of when environmental refugees began to be called "security risks" in the newspaper, the frame of climate change as the first and foremost threat-multiplier becomes apparent. The idea that environmental refugees are security risks is not present in the early 1990s when climate change was beginning to be constructed as a security threat, but it only gets mentioned in the late 1990s when environmental refugees are still present as an issue of people displaced due to overstretched or scarce resources in home states. This reframing of environmental refugees as security risks is developed in a negative manner in the rest of the reportage over the last two decades.

CONCLUSION

The detailing of the building blocks of frames in *NYT* shows the frames are built up from specific lexical choices through specific data types. The headlines, along with leads are the most important component in terms of establishing the framing hook, yet they fail to engage with the issue in a successful manner. Context and background, often ignored in framing analysis, provide ways by which environmental refugees are discussed. Hidden in contextual or background information, environmental refugees are often afforded a discussion, but nevertheless remain less salient than climate change. Finally, while episodes focus on specific climatic instances or general degradation, conclusions frame the universal message that mass migration is an unwelcome phenomenon.

What the analysis shows is that there was a shift from discussing human displacement as one of the *effects* of climate change to discussing human displacement as primarily an *impact* of climate change. With discussions of effects of climate change, we see how environmental refugees cope with the phenomenon, in what ways climate change influences their lives, and how they have to adjust to sea-level rises or the warming of the planet. The discussion can be seen as classifying the primary results of climate change as namely sea-level rises, deforestation, and environmental refugee movement. Then, there was an attempt at reframing the issue with the focus entirely on the resultant impacts of human displacement. This allows for engaging human

displacement as a separate issue where arguments are made about the resultant impact of mass migration on host nations.

In addition, the reportage fails to show differing perspectives on a (non) status as a refugee. As no column space is devoted to the discussion, both policy makers and the reading public are not exposed to varied thoughts on the matter. This absence helps divert attention to the nature of the movement rather than the problematic definition of their status. Descriptions empower the character of the movement but non-coverage of a crucial aspect of the definition leads to focusing on the migratory flows rather than taking a humanitarian stance about their status in host countries and their own homelands.

By defining the environmental refugees as risks, the play of hegemonic power comes into question. The definition of a risk is a one-sided moral evaluation of the problem. In the last decade, the singular framing of environmental refugees as security risks reduces the moral evaluation only to one side. Moral evaluation is possible if the reportage discusses which elite states are capable of providing the protection needed. Instead, this absence of discussing restorative justice by responsible parties is framed as local problems wherein protection and assistance is best arranged at the local or regional level. While the moral claims of the ecologically marginalized are presented, the weakest are the ones who suffer the most; humanitarianism remains a voluntary and virtuous act that does not bring in notions of accountability or obligation. Thus, the option of help from local governments centers on their inability to sustain their own populations, making it possible for a benefactor to step in to help. The moral evaluation includes descriptions of the benevolent benefactor, rather than an obligation based on the historical burden of responsibility.

Narrowing the problem of human displacement to a security issue means focusing on tackling risks and threats, rather than seeking to address the causes of insecurities. This makes absent the need to address insecurities from the victims' point of view as their lived realities do not find expression in the newspaper except as an anecdotal hook into the article.

What this research shows is that in the frame package of environmental refugees as security risks, the clausal and lexical choices made by the newspaper underspecify the humanitarian aspect of it, the agency of these victims and the institutional practices that discuss responsibility.

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ENVIRONMENTAL HAZARDS AND MIGRATIONS: A REJOINDER AND A PLEA FOR DISCOURSE AWARENESS

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The papers published in this issue of *JAm It!* respond to the urgent need for multi-disciplinary approaches to the study of the relationship between migration and the environment, especially in the North American context. This relationship has always existed and has been the main cause, or one of the main causes, of many mass migrations across or between nations or continents. However, the last three decades or so have witnessed dramatic, and often apocalyptic, changes in the environment caused by climate change and the ensuing damage to human communities and their livelihood. The rising importance of climate- or environment-induced migration is not limited to the changing degree of intensity and frequency of such events or the dimensions of the phenomenon of migration itself. Rather, the connection between migration and the environment has become a controversial topic in many areas of the public sphere, as nowadays we are witnessing changes in the *discourses* and *languages* evolving around, and feeding into, narratives of migration and the environment. Indeed, a crucial factor in the perception of the relationship between migration and the environment is *how* this relationship is discussed in the public sphere: narratives addressing environment and migration by, or about, communities displaced by environmental changes are at the crossroads of discourses of various kinds, employ language originating in political, legal and scientific domains, and have become more and more frequent in media narratives (see Demata 2017; Herrmann 2017; Høeg and Tulloch 2017; Russo 2018).

The narratives (both real and fictional) exploring the nexus between migration and the environment and the language used in them may be evaluated in terms of the relationship among language, discourse, and society as theorized by Critical Discourse Analysis. As argued by Fairclough (2001, 23-26), there is a close relationship between social order and the order of discourse, the social order, *i.e.* the way society is structured

(including the political and social hegemony exerted by certain groups over others) and order of discourse, i.e. the practices (including speaking) which are part of the social identity of groups. The relationship is mutual and bidirectional: changes in one order are both the cause and the effect in the other. In this sense, language is socially determin*ing* as well as determin*ed*: language represents social realities and changes responding to social changes, but also constitutes social reality and is part of these social changes, as it shapes people's knowledge and social behavior. In this sense, Critical Discourse Analysis can be particularly useful in uncovering the hidden discursive strategies used by dominant groups to marginalize socially marginal groups, or outgroups: social differences (including those leading to social exclusion, discrimination, and marginalization) are encoded in language, whose repetition, especially by dominant discourses, such as politics and media, could lead to the naturalizations of such differences and to their general acceptance in the public sphere as "common sense."

Discourses on environmental hazards and migration are a very good example of how discourse and language shape, and are shaped by, a changing social reality. While a changing environment poses new challenges to society, discourse and language respond to such challenges—and become part of them. Social groups are routinely evaluated in discourse through a number of strategies, such as nomination or referential strategies, by which groups are given certain qualities by the way they are labelled, and this may shape their identity as ingroups or outgroups (Reisigl and Wodak 2001, 45). Nomination strategies are connected to predicational strategies, i.e. the way implicit or explicit predicates lead to certain evaluative attributions of social actors; another set of key discursive strategies which show the importance of language in the way knowledge about social actors is spread in society (Reisigl and Wodak 2001, 54-56). Nomination of social groups is crucial in their evaluation, as different appellations may direct people's judgement. The lexicon representing the groups of people fleeing from environmental disasters reflects the social instability and precariousness of these groups, as terms of address of this new phenomenon in the public sphere are still uncertain. In fact, there are many appellations used by refugee agencies, the media, and politicians, and they

include *environmental migrant*, *environmental refugee*, *climate change refugee*, *environmentally displaced person*, *eco-refugee*, *environmentally motivated migrant*, etc. (Boano, Zetter & Norris, 2008; Russo 2018). Of these, the phrase "climate change refugee," often shortened to "climate refugee," has become very common in the last decade. This lexical and semantic instability is a sign of the fact that discourse evolving around climate refugees still relies on previously used language: for example, *refugee* and *migrant* are widespread appellations which refer to well-known social categories (even though their meaning is often mixed up, especially in racist discourse). However, these nouns are premodified in order to provide the public with a meaningful definition of new social actors in a new social reality. The different nominations given to climate refugees in media and politics reveal the attempt to frame these social actors according to pre-existing categories which at once allow and limit their interpretation.

In discourse, even simple and seemingly uncontroversial nomination strategies may foreground or background certain features of the social actors involved, their agency and the causes of their condition and, as a consequence, different evaluations of the relationship between migration and the environment. For example, there is a marked preference in non-specialized media discourse of denominations such as *environmental migrant* or *climate refugee* over, respectively, *environmentally induced migrant* and *climate change refugee* (Demata 2017, 27; Russo 2018, 126). This may be seen as a way to compress information and facilitate comprehension, but the effect is that the ultimate cause of migration, i.e. man-made environmental or climate change, is somewhat backgrounded and left vague, as it is not spelled out clearly. Furthermore, climate migrants are associated to standardized predicates which characterize them within a narrow range of actions: according to a study on climate refugees in *The Guardian* and *The New York Times*, migrants *flee*, *stream* or *escape*, but are *recognized* and *protected* by external entities and are the recipients of help from other nations through verbs such as *accommodate*, *relocate*, and *support* (Demata 2017). As happens with the representations of other outgroups, these discursive strategies which emphasize socially subordinate and marginal positions are used in media and political discourses to create stereotypical representations of climate migrants. As a

consequence, climate migrants are confined to fixed social roles narrowly defined in the narratives representing them. Other standard discursive strategies used to represent climate migrants are the same as those used by other "outgroups," such as refugees, migrants or asylum seekers, i.e. humanization, victimization, and aggregation. Humanization implies the representation of climate migrants in discourse as individuals, reporting their names and personal stories. Their everyday lives are often presented in detail, also with the help of images, which often portray women and children. Victimization is what Reisigl and Wodak call "social problematization" (Reisigl and Wodak 2001, 52), that is, the presentation of a social group by using language that communicates a threat or a problem to society. Information on the dramatic conditions experienced by people escaping from climate-induced catastrophes and their day-by-day activities are often described with very personal and subjective details, often by quoting the accounts of refugees themselves. Aggregation is the quantification of participants as groups through figures or indefinite quantifiers. Presenting migrants as figures has the double effect of dehumanizing them, as they are seen merely as statistics, and this also aims at causing a sense of threat because of their massive number (Demata 2017, 30-32).

The linguistic strategies discussed above reflect (and are part of) the social tension caused by changes in the environment in the narratives both by and about displaced communities. Indeed, this tension operates at two levels: 1) the geographical and social environment of the host countries, where media tend to marginalize displaced communities, often by making use of tropes routinely associated with racism; and 2) the narratives of the displaced themselves, whose social pleas are often unheeded and whose narratives are hardly visible. Indeed, the social identity of the environmentally displaced is still questioned, which makes their interactions with the host communities quite problematic, to say the least. As environmental changes unfortunately become more and more dramatic, the social changes that will inevitably take place will increase the necessity of a critical approach to the language used in the narratives focusing on migrations.

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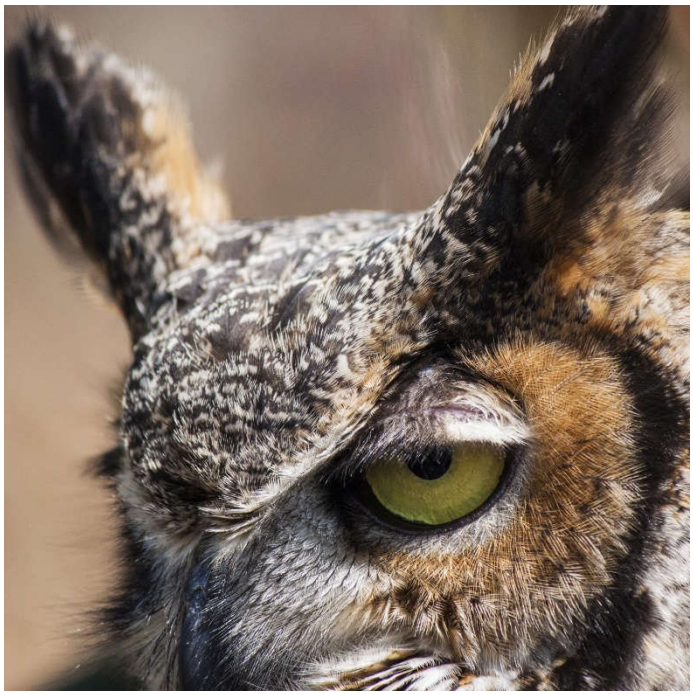
| Photo Essays |

The following photo essays depict the vivid memories of the Wisconsin-based workshop Animating the Landscape. *This trip was organized by the Center for Culture History and Environment (CHE) at the University of Wisconsin-Madison in May 2018. This was the fifth time that students and academic staff of the Rachel Carson Center for Environment and Society in Munich had taken part in this interesting initiative and the authors are among those who decided to jump on board.*



Above: Great horned owl (REGI)
Cover: Barred owl recovering from a head injury (REGI)
Essays Authors: Noemi Quagliati, Claudio de Majo
Photographs: Noemi Quagliati

Noemi Quagliati

IMMATERIAL COLORED FRAGMENTS OF LANDSCAPE

How can I convey with words or images the sound of thousands of buzzing honeybees, the smell of a mixture of cows' milk and excrement, and the astonishment in realizing how much an owl's neck can twist? An experience speaks much more than many words or pictures.
However, visual narrations can give the sense of a subjective experience in a specific environment. Photographs, for example, function as visual stimuli communicating through one of the five traditionally recognized sensory faculties. Unlike texts, photos cannot dig deep into a phenomenon: they only accurately describe the external appearance, offering a partial perspective of the scene. Nevertheless, pictures have the power to immediately activate visual memories: they give a direct feeling, provoking instantaneous emotions in the viewer. Moreover, thanks to great accessibility, photography is often considered a more democratic tool compared to other means of communication.

What strikes me about photographs is their ability to visually exhort the observer to explore histories. As fragments ripped from time and space, photos represent only limited tracks of more intricate narratives; despite this, they still have the mysterious capacity to catch the eye and draw people's attention towards "something more."
To write this piece, I will let the artificial memory of my camera be a *memento* of the intense experience I lived on the other side of the Atlantic. Functioning as a tool of remembering, the immaterial colored fragments on my computer screen represent pieces of much more complex environments.

Before visiting Wisconsin, I could not clearly picture it in my mind. Hollywood has certainly distributed many depictions of the United States of America, but most of them portray either the Northeast megalopolis or the "Wild Far West." An unusual destination for Europeans, the Dairyland—Wisconsin is a leading dairy producer—is often regarded as a flyover state by a large portion of Americans. Although the flora and fauna of this state echo in the pages of Aldo Leopold's *A Sand County Almanac* and in Henry Hamilton Bennett's photographs of the Wisconsin Dells, the available material was not enough to get an early sense of the place.

This lack of images was perhaps the reason that drove me to take an unusually high number of pictures. Now collected in a digital photo album, this material illustrates not only visual features of different places visited in Wisconsin, but it also shows the specific relationship occurring between observer (myself) and the subjects of the pictures. For instance, one element immediately recognizable in my album is the disproportionate number of close-up shots compared to landscape pictures. The secondary presence of landscape photographs based on natural aesthetic appeal, namely panoramas represented in the manner of painters, reflects the aim of the place-based workshop to explore the dynamic multi-natural environment of Wisconsin, examining the points of contact and collision between human and nonhuman lives.

In fact, the type of landscape participants experienced during the trip was first an "instructive multisensory landscape" narrated by indigenous communities, local food producers, and experts of environmental and conservation organizations. Traveling by bus from Madison to Lake Superior to comprehend the natural diversity of the state, we also encountered a "landscape in passing" characterized by forests, lakes, streams, marshes, and lowland shrub (fig.1). Silos, farms, and center pivot irrigations were also on the edge of the horizons.

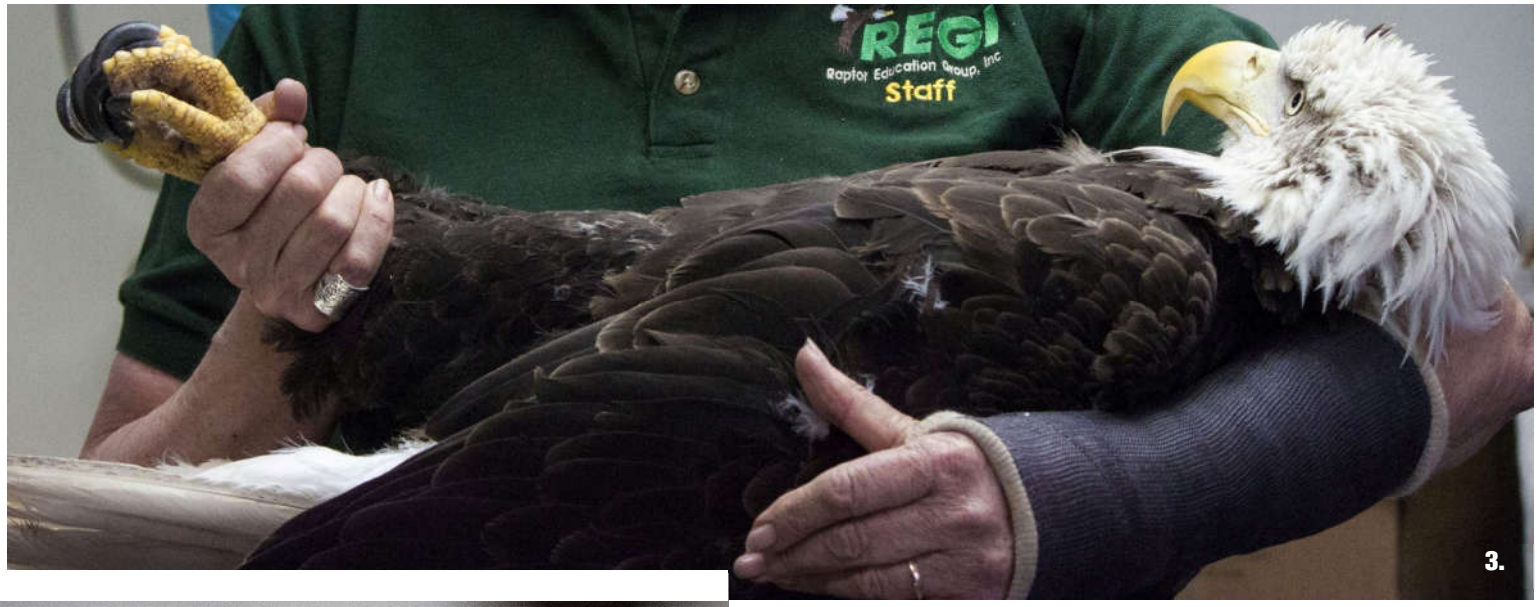
1.

However, animals caught my eye much more than anything else. Mostly recorded with a telephoto lens that has a long reach, both domesticated and wild animals constitute the main presence of my pictures. Maintaining a certain distance from the subject in order not to disturb it, the camera allowed one to magnify details of its body: the hawk's cryptic coloration of plumage, wing shape, and curved beak; the bee's large compound eyes, long proboscis, and antennae (fig.2); and even the ear postures of cows, which seems to indicate their emotional state.

2.
Bees at the Henry's Honey Farm

Although choosing to photograph a certain subject is not always a conscious exercise, the unfamiliar proximity to these animals was probably the major factor in leading me to focus on non-human creatures. The narration of experts and caretakers accompanied these physical encounters, and most times helped me observe animal behaviors and understand their specificities: therefore, influencing the process of taking pictures. What affected the act of recording was confronting myself with the difficult cohabitation between humans and animals. When our group encountered these animals, they were living in captivity: some of them, like the raptors, were injured, and caretakers worked to release them back into the wild once recovered; others, like the dairy cattle, spend their entire life in factory farms without knowing the smell of grazing on a sunny day.

Many photos I took in the raptor rehabilitation center REGI (Raptor Education Group Inc) show the special relationship established between birds and their caretakers. It is hard to find a picture in this series portraying animals alone: rehabilitators persistently take care of these injured birds. With their mysterious body language, these people are a constant presence able to calm down even the biggest eagle (fig. 3-4-5-6). Movements, gestures, breathing, sounds, and especially touch pressure play an incredible role in building trust between birds and humans. With the motto Rehabilitate, Educate, Research, Release, the REGI team knows every aspect regarding behavior and habitat needs of the native birds of Wisconsin and it communicated to our group the precious importance of wildlife.



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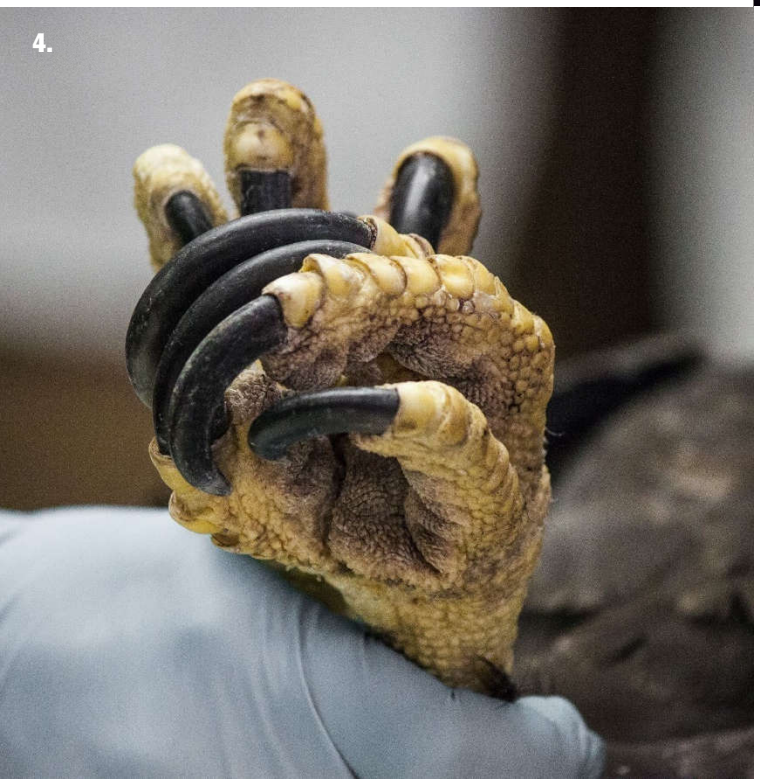

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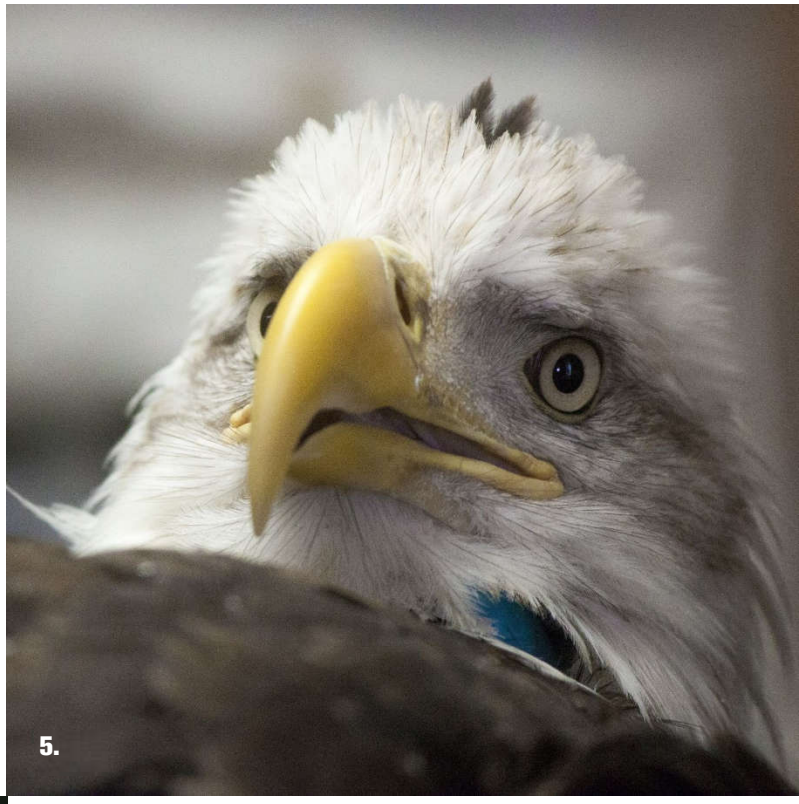

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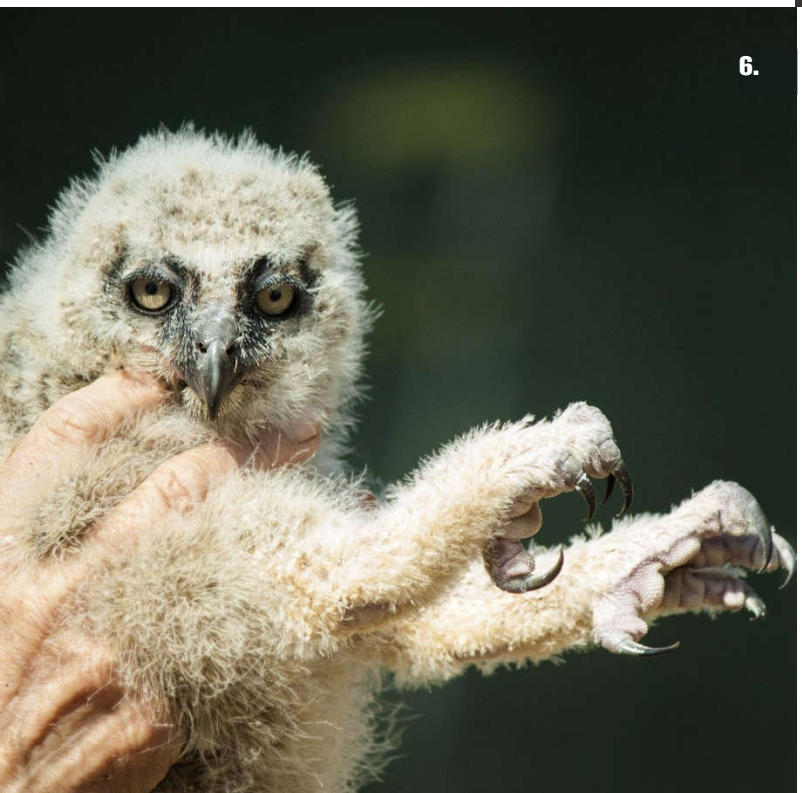


6.

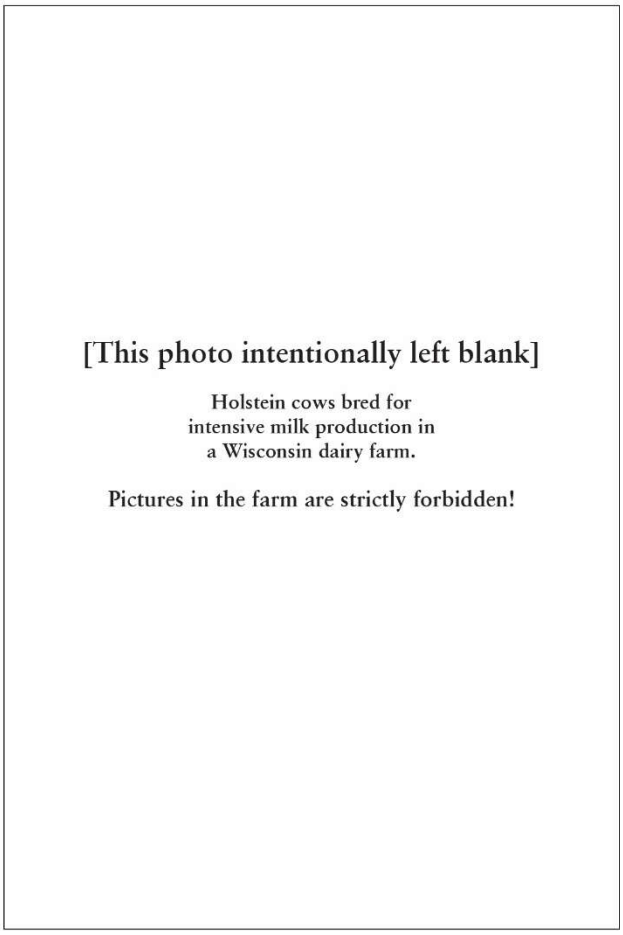
3-4-5.
A bald eagle patient receives a physical exam

6.
An orphaned bald eagle

Opposite in terms of human-animal relationship is the case of cows bred for milk production. The dairy farm we visited near Wausau can milk 3000 Holstein cows three times a day through a high-tech automatized process. People working in this business refer to bovines as "workers."

Starting from a spiral staircase, our visit included a 1/4 mile tour on a catwalk above the near constant movement of the cattle towards the milking machine. If taking pictures had not been strictly forbidden, I would have shown the position of the visitors in relation to the cows. It was an uncomfortable sensation: a God's eye view above the animals' backs, which were pushing one another in the small, dark, and artificial farm space. Although I have to trust only my "natural memory," I vividly remember curious dark eyes looking at me from down there.

7.



Even the absence of certain pictures has an important meaning in portraying and understanding an event. I believe that if the film could not be exposed or the digital sensor has not detected any light waves to make an image, leaving a space for the unrepresented but existing content is crucial. Sometimes books contain vacant pages where is reported: "This page intentionally left blank." In the same way, a deliberately empty photographic space with an explaining caption gains a special meaning (fig. 7).

Entering the International Crane Foundation (ICF) in Baraboo we are informed instead: "Visitors are welcome to take pictures and video during their visit. Flash photography is allowed." This organization works worldwide to protect and restore wild crane populations and the ecosystems on which they depend. Its headquarters hosts a captive flock of approximately 100 cranes, including the only complete collection of all 15 species in the world. Equipped with many facilities, including a gift shop, the center is stormed by schoolchildren that want to see cranes dancing in spring. There is even a sort of theater, where the audience can appreciate this spectacle.

Obviously, the charisma of these animals attracted my gaze—white wings with feathers ranging from white to brown, head topped with stiff golden feathers, intense red cheek patches (fig. 8). Our group had a lively discussion with experts about the value—but also the challenges—of endangered species management and conservation, connected with the importance to engage new generations' interest in environmental issues.

8.
A black crowned crane with the head topped with stiff golden feathers (ICF)

However, in most snapshots, I portrayed cranes staring out from behind a pen made of iron and Plexiglas (fig. 9-10). Although the close-ups emphasize the visitors' closeness to the animal, the visual obstacle of the fence reminds one, once again, of the ongoing collision between human and nonhuman beings. These photos make me think of Rilke's poem *The Panther* (tr. Walter Arndt).

In the Jardin des Plantes, Paris

His gaze has been so worn by the procession
Of bars that it no longer makes a bond.
Around, a thousand bars seem to be flashing,
And in their flashing show no world beyond.

The lissom steps which round out and re-enter
That tightest circuit of their turning drill
Are like a dance of strength about a center
Wherein there stands benumbed a mighty will.

Only from time to time the pupil's shutter
Will draw apart: an image enters then,
To travel through the tautened body's utter
Stillness—and in the heart end.

9.
A white-naped crane (Vulnerable Species ICF)

10.
A black crowned crane (Vulnerable Species ICF)

Arriving with a blurry image into my mind, I left Wisconsin with a much more detailed sense of its environments. My way of perceiving the landscape during the workshop was not only determined by desiring to look, know, and record, but I attempted the perhaps impossible challenge of emphatically feeling the diverse creatures that inhabit these places. Although memories fade quickly, especially in a modern social life characterized by technological acceleration, the visual material I brought back to Europe after this experience now drives me to remember and describe the sensations perceived during the workshop.

A landscape deserves to be experienced directly, with no mediations...only with the greatest respect. However, I hope these pictures could be a starting point for further reflections and inquiries about human and nonhuman coexistence in specific environments.

Male American Kestrel (REGI)

Claudio de Majo

THE DAY I MET BIG JOHN: NATIVE RIGHTS, COMMONS AND CONSERVATION ON THE SHORES OF LAKE DU FLAMBEAU

The bus rides over long roads surrounded by tall woods stretching for kilometers before you can see a single living being or a building. We are literally cutting a forest in half, riding a fossil fuel vehicle in between what two centuries ago would have been a remarkable natural monument and, perhaps more than three-hundred years ago, an essential source for the survival of Chippewa Indian tribes and a great diversity of non-human animals and plants. The feeling is similar to the first 10-15 minutes of an S-Bahn ride from the pre-alpine area south of Munich, where I used to live last year, to the city-center. However, the trees of Wisconsin are much taller, the woods thicker, and you literally cannot see the end of them.

The skimming images of the pine tree forest is the main memory I hold onto in regard to the field trip through rural Wisconsin. Although the trip mainly consisted of interminable daily bus rides, only interrupted by short visits that in most cases did not imply any direct contact with nature, the workshop gave me very important lessons on a personal level, as well as valuable inputs as a doctoral student who grew up between Europe and South America.

The Animated Chippewa Landscape: Lac du Flambeau

From a personal perspective, this experience was very valuable in reminding me of a very important truth: in most parts of the world the concept of distance functions on a set of proportions that for people from the so-called Old World is very hard to imagine. In spite of my multiple life experiences in several countries on the other side of the ocean, to this day this difference in proportion still amazes me. No wonder that visiting the US-American state Wisconsin, and attempting to cover several locations in a few days, meant sacrificing our actual time outdoors to long concrete motorways. Personal considerations aside, I have also benefited from this trip as a doctoral researcher in environmental history with a strong interest for ecology and collective action. In particular, visiting the Chippewa Indian reserve at Lake du Flambeau, a great example of perseverance and activism, taught me a lesson that I will never forget. So the story goes.

On the second day of our workshop, May 15th, 2018, we reached the Chippewa reserve early in the afternoon. Tired from the ride and stunned by the damp hot climate of the lake region in the early afternoon, I got off the bus looking for members of the reserve, excited by the tales of environmental justice told us by our travel companion, Prof. Larry Nesper, a friend of the tribe for a long time who has carried out fascinating ethnographic work in the region. My first reaction in looking at the man who received us was a mixture of surprise and amazement - that sort of cathartic feeling that happens when mental projections and reality collide. The strong-looking and polite big man standing in front of us was Brooks Big John, chair of the tribal council of one of the most powerful native tribes of Wisconsin, perhaps of the whole federation. Aside from showing his leadership in every action, Big John has an amazing curriculum, and his knowledge spontaneously emerges during his talks. He communicates his heritage and sense of belonging with every action and word he pronounces. After a brief welcoming, he led us to their community museum, a former boarding school aimed at "re-educating" native people, where several members of his family had been forced to live in the past. He also introduced another historical figure of the tribe: Tom Maulson, the man whose political efforts led this tribe to its current prosperous and privileged condition.

As they tell us the story of their tribe, these two people do not show any signs of what David Riesman - in an attempt to describe the inquietude of our times - would have defined as 'outer-direction.' Although at a first glance they would not look as such, these people are ***the real environmental activist of our times*** - people who embody a different gradient of values, who fought for social justice in the attempt to preserve their tribe's traditional way of life, consisting of practices based

Tom Maulson's Tribe Medal

on different socio-ecological patterns of life. Among them, we were informed about fishing and hunting for survival. Yet, in their talk they also mentioned activities of fishing and hunting on the reserve for recreational reasons, mainly led by non-native people. As this information paved their way from my sensorial perceptions to becoming actual thoughts, I struggled to understand how these two very opposite ideas of nature could possibly coexist: on the one hand cultural patterns for the management of natural assets based on centuries-old patterns of collectivism, on the other hand, nature as a asset for recreational activities.

This weird yet functional arrangement has led me to formulate some reflections on the study of the commons. So far, scholars have investigated the commons as an institutionalized pattern of resource management alternative to governmental centralization or to market-led systems. Both present and historical studies of the commons have insisted on the centrality of risk-sharing in collective action as the main advantage of this system. Other studies have adopted the commons as a key concept to interpret sustainable strategies based on collectivism that could inspire current governance processes and post-developmental agendas. Over the last years, systems of collective action for the management of natural resources have been investigated by researchers on the field of environmental humanities, demonstrating instances of collectivism in various contexts. Much research has

Members of the Tribe Who Joined the Army

emphasized the interconnections between traditional subsistence activities of indigenous people all over the world and the universe of the commons, emphasizing their relations with theoretical academic frameworks such as environmental justice and political ecology. In this light, the struggles of indigenous people in defense of their way of life can be read as an attempt to protect their societies based on the collective management of natural resources against the privatization attempts of the capitalist system.

Hearing the story of the Chippewa tribe, I could not help noticing the perfect fit of this example: since the 1980s, animated by leaders such as Big John and Tom Maulson, the tribe has been fighting as a collective for the survival of its traditional activities, defending its way of life against different political and economic interests. Moreover, the example of the Chippewa tribe can be considered as another instance of the thin line between wilderness and conservation, as observed by authors such as William Cronon and Roderick Nash. Multiple are the challenging questions arising from this complex interplay of factual evidence and conceptual constructions: 1) should we consider the traditional practices of the Chippewa tribe as commons? 2) if yes, to what extent do institutional actors, such as the state of Wisconsin or the federal government influence the functioning of the tribe's original rules? 3) can traditional practices, conservation, and recreational activities harmoniously coexist in such a complex fame of social and ecological values? Can the recent history of this tribe still be defined as an exemplary struggle of

Larry Wawronowicz explaining the activities of the Native American Fish and Wildlife Society

political ecology, despite its current compromise with local institutions?

These are only some of the major questions that arise from such a short consideration, mostly supported by personal reflections and intuitions rather than valuable documentary evidence. Certainly, judging from the amount of reflections that such a short experience was able to convey, a more in-depth investigation on the state of the Chippewa tribe might constitute a challenging future research endeavor.

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LEVELS OF REALITY IN STEVEN SPIELBERG'S *READY PLAYER ONE:* UTOPIA, DYSTOPIA, AND RETROTOPIA

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University of Bergamo

ABSTRACT

In this paper, I would like to address the way in which the three levels of reality (utopian, dystopian, and retrotopian) in Steven Spielberg's movie *Ready Player One* catalyse the plot and allow for a reflection on the role of nostalgia in our contemporaneity.
Following Zygmunt Bauman's definition of retrotopia as a leaning towards the past in search of the ideal society, I argue that the metafictional references scattered throughout the movie represent well the contemporary need to evoke the past and seek refuge in it through the assimilation of pop culture of the 80s and 90s. Moreover, I argue that the movie allows for a critique of the categories of utopia and dystopia, highlighting their intricate relationship and their nuanced meaning, and advocating for a shift of our attention towards the issues of the present.
Keywords: utopian fiction; dystopian fiction; nostalgia; geek culture.

INTRODUCTION

In this essay, I would like to address the way in which *Ready Player One*, the latest movie by director Steven Spielberg (2018), presents and builds upon three levels of reality whose interactions catalyse its plot and allow for a reflection on the role of nostalgia in our contemporaneity. In what follows, I will attempt to describe the features of the utopian, dystopian, and retrotopian planes of reality featured in the movie, arguing that their interconnected nature builds up a unique narrative in the field of utopian studies and supports Zygmunt Bauman's perspective on nostalgia as the contemporary locus of the utopian impulse, as he explains in his *Retrotopia* (2017).

Ready Player One is based on Ernest Cline's 2011 namesake novel, from which it draws its dystopian setting and main themes and characters, while tweaking the plot to make it suitable for a 140-minute, action-packed blockbuster. Due to the heavy alterations to the plot in adapting it for the big screen, this essay will mainly focus on Spielberg's movie. Nonetheless, the general remarks on the layers of reality in *Ready*

Player One apply to the novel as well, and there will be a few passing references to Cline's work when discussing the 'actual world' setting.

SETTING THE SCENE

The action begins in 2045 Columbus, Ohio, where the teenage protagonist, Wade Watts, lives with his aunt and her abusive partner. Their neighbourhood is known as the Stacks, a run-down district made of trailer homes piled on top of each other. The aerial shot at the very beginning of the movie introduces us to the misery of a poverty-stricken metropolis struggling to house all the people flocking to it after it became the most attractive city to live in.

Class difference driven by uncontrolled capitalism still exists and is evident, although no neighbourhood seems to escape the filthy, unkempt look we first witness in the Stacks, and the economic and social system seems to have somewhat survived the "Corn Syrup drought" and the "Bandwidth Riots," just to name two of the many violent events of the early 2020s. The setting is introduced at the beginning of the movie by the offscreen voice of Wade, who quickly mentions the misery and turmoil that characterised the years before he was born.[1] In 2045, he reports, "people [have long] stopped trying to fix problems and just [try] to outlive them."

This is the reason why most people turn to the OASIS to escape reality. The OASIS is a virtual reality simulator born as an MMORPG[2] that quickly evolved into a

[1] Cline's novel, the source material for the movie, is similarly vague in referring to the real causes of the social decay we witness in 2045, but offers a somewhat clearer glimpse into what has happened and what they are still dealing with: [T]he people of Planet Earth had other concerns. The ongoing energy crisis. Catastrophic climate change. Widespread famine, poverty, and disease. Half a dozen wars. You know: "dogs and cats living together … mass hysteria!" Normally, the newsfeeds didn't interrupt everyone's interactive sitcoms and soap operas unless something really major had happened. Like the outbreak of some new killer virus, or another major city vanishing in a mushroom cloud. (Cline 2011, 1)

[2] MMORPG is the acronym for 'Massively Multiplayer Online Role-Playing Game.' In this type of video game, players control an avatar which is highly customisable, with unique features that are defined by the skills of the player. The game takes place in a 'persistent state world' (PSW): the story continues even when the user is logged off. Whereas for most other types of video games the aim is to complete the game, MMORPGs do not have a linear progression, nor a set ending. Most of the gameplay revolves around 'leveling up' one's avatar by interacting with other users, taking up challenges, and trading with NPCs (Non-Playing Character—the avatars controlled by the game, rather than by a real user). Famous MMORPGs are, just to name two, *World of Warcraft* and *Aion.* More on

complex virtual world, in which transactions are real and class status is determined by the skills of the users—a hymn to the myth of the self-made man so dear to the American Dream. People can access the OASIS using visors and haptic technology such as gloves or a full-body suit, and everyone begins at the same level, so it is up to each user to find their way into the many possibilities offered by the virtual platform, whose limits "are your own imagination," to borrow Wade's words. The audience quickly catches up with the fact that the OASIS has virtually substituted actual reality in all but the purely bodily functions. In it you can earn and lose money by taking part in races and challenges, but you can also get an education, a proper job, and married or divorced. The avatars can be customized according to how much coin you have; weapons, clothes, features, and even real-world products can be bought in the virtual stores, since the currency of the OASIS is fully recognized and accepted by the markets.

The plot revolves around the race to the Easter Egg prompted by the death of James Halliday, the creator and majority shareholder of Gregarious Games, the software house that produced the OASIS. An Easter Egg is generally described as "a hidden feature present in a video game that is intentionally put in by the game's creator and is often made difficult to discover . . . Easter eggs can be writings, pictures, sounds, videos, minigames, or even more complicated productions" (Bonenfant 2012, 177). In his taped will, Halliday informs all the users that the first to find the Easter Egg he has planted in the game and protected with three challenges will inherit his money and shares, consequently becoming the owner of the OASIS.

The key to win the challenges is in the user's deep knowledge of pop culture of the 80s and 90s, with particular reference to what Halliday liked and played as a child. Wade, just like many other users, spends his free time learning about cult movies and books, studying Halliday's life, and retrogaming, which is understood as "a hobby of playing older console-based games, computer games, and arcade games. Although there are no universally accepted criteria for inclusion in the 'retro' category, the label is

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MMORPGs can be found at https://www.techopedia.com/definition/1919/massively-multiplayer-online-role-playing-game-mmorpg (last accessed 09/02/2020).

typically used in reference to discontinued platforms and software developed for such" (Budziszewski 2012, 534).

After successfully deciphering the riddle of the first challenge Wade wins it and gains the first place in the race. He subsequently teams up with a small group of virtual friends to solve the rest of the riddles. However, his achievement is noticed by IOI, a corporation trying to gain control of the OASIS, which tries to bribe him into working for them. After Wade's refusal, IOI locates him in real life and bombs the Stack in which he lives, killing his aunt and her partner and prompting him to hide in the old van in which he normally plays. While progressing in their quest for the Easter Egg, Wade and his team also meet in real life as they try to avoid IOI's manhunt. Wade becomes aware of the fact that IOI is actually exploiting indentured servants to track down the egg and, as the final confrontation approaches, turns to every other user in the OASIS for support against the IOI. Having survived IOI attempts to kill him both virtually and in real life, Wade finally obtains the Easter Egg and becomes the owner of Gregarious Games, a role he decides to share with his team and use to improve the too often ignored real world.

FIRST AND SECOND LEVEL OF REALITY: UTOPIA AND DYSTOPIA

Ready Player One is quite a unique story within the field of utopian studies: the movie is set in a bleak, gloomy future and the actual world of 2045 hits all the marks to be considered dystopian due to its exploitation of the masses, derelict metropolises, totalitarian-looking corporations, and constant feeling of danger. However, a large part of the action takes place in the utopian world of the OASIS, which is so starkly different from actual reality that it is almost instinctive to think of it as a completely separate reality.

According to Lyman Tower Sargent, a dystopia is "a non-existent society described in considerable detail and normally located in time and space that the author intended a contemporaneous reader to view as considerably worse than the society in which that reader lived" (1994, 9), while a critical dystopia adds to that definition that "it normally includes at least one eutopian enclave or holds out hope that the dystopia

can be overcome and replaced with a eutopia" (2001, 222).[3] *Ready Player One* does depict a society that is worse than ours, located in the future, and described if not in detail, at least enough that we can understand what is going on in the actual Columbus. At the same time, Sargent's definitions of eutopia and critical eutopia fit the OASIS quite well, the former being a "non-existent society described in considerable detail and normally located in time and space that the author intended a contemporaneous reader to view as considerably better than the society in which that reader lived," and the latter adding that such a positive society has "difficult problems that the described society may or may not be able to solve and . . . takes a critical view of the utopian genre" (1994, 9).

The two levels of reality in *Ready Player One* fit well into the critical utopia and critical dystopia definitions respectively, yet the movie as a whole struggles to find a category that suits it. As Justin Nordstrom remarks about the novel, "*Ready Player One* features overlapping paradoxes—a utopia within a dystopia, a futuristic setting obsessed with the past, and characters playing elaborate games within the broader gaming environment of the OASIS itself" (Nordstrom 2016, 244).

The OASIS was originally created as a form of escapism, a video game that allowed people to hide from the real world for a while. During his final appearance in the movie, Halliday himself recounts this: "I created the OASIS because I never felt at home in the real world. I just didn't know how to connect with people there. I was afraid for all of my life, right up until the day I knew it was ending. Now that, that was when I realized that as terrifying and painful as reality can be, it's also the only place that you can get a decent meal. Because reality is real."

The OASIS was born as a safe place for everyone who felt uneasy in actual reality, somewhere else to be, a parallel world, a pure and virtual utopia of the twenty-first

[3] A note on Sargent's choice to use *eu*topia, *dys*topia, and *u*topia: Thomas More's neologism Utopia is built with a non-existent prefix *u-* which describes an ideal society that does not exist. It is an elaboration of two different Greek prefixes: *eu-*, meaning 'good', and *ou-*, meaning 'not, non-existent.' Due to this ambivalence, scholars in the field of utopian studies have been debating on the right terminology to describe an ideal society versus a dreadful one. Sargent, for clarity's sake, uses eutopia to describe the former, dystopia to describe the latter, and utopia as an umbrella term for imaginary societies. Although this tripartite usage is generally accepted in the field, most commentators still use the word utopia to describe the ideal society, deploying the term eutopia only when they need to stress its positive value.

century.[4] However, as a project the OASIS was flawed by its very nature: it was made by people for people. The same conflicts of the real world quickly appeared in the OASIS, and the same power relations were eventually perpetuated. 'Real' life moved to the OASIS to the point that actual reality was almost discarded. Two initially parallel worlds, a dystopian one and its utopian counterpart, come to a convergence that becomes more and more evident throughout the movie. The protagonist himself spells it out at the beginning, in rather blunt words: "since people spend most of their time in the OASIS, losing your shit means, well, losing your shit." But what can initially be interpreted as a mere deep attachment to one's avatar, soon becomes much more sinister. Early on, the partner of Wade's aunt loses all their money betting on a competition in the OASIS. Soon after, Wade is warned by his friend Art3mis, after she has helped his avatar Parzival to escape from an ambush at a club in the OASIS:

> Art3mis: this isn't a game. I'm doing this to stop IOI. I'm talking about real-world consequences. People suffering. Actual life-and-death stuff.
>
> Parzival: I know, I know.
>
> A: No, you don't know! My dad died in a loyalty centre. He borrowed gear, he built up debt. He moved in with the promise of working it off, but he never did. IOI just raised his living expenses, then he got sick and he couldn't afford to get out, and then he died!
>
> P: I'm so sorry, I—
>
> A: No, you don't live in the real world, Z. From what you've told me, I don't think you ever have. You live inside this, this illusion, and I can't afford to let you distract me.

Just a few moments later, Wade learns first-hand how virtual danger can mean danger in real life as IOI actively tries to kill him by bombing his trailer. Later in the movie, Samantha (Art3mis' real name) is imprisoned by IOI and forced into physical

[4] Although in the movie the OASIS is never referred to as a utopia, in the novel it is labelled as such several times. See, for instance, Cline 2011, 33 and 59.

labour in the OASIS as a way to repay her father's debts toward the corporation. Of course, the most obvious real-life repercussion of competing for the Easter Egg in the OASIS is that the winner gets the fortune left behind by Halliday, together with the power to decide what happens to the OASIS.

By the end of the movie, Wade and his team have learned the many ways in which the OASIS can be a danger to actual reality and act accordingly, making decisions that definitely bring the two worlds together into one integrated, symbiotic system: they ban slavery in the OASIS, and close the platform on Tuesdays and Thursdays because, as they remark, "people need to spend more time in the real world," the only one that truly exists. Quoting Justin Nordstrom once more, "Clines's novel embodies a . . . nuanced understanding of utopianism itself—in which the seemingly idealized world of the OASIS is actually perilous and the apocalyptic conventional world is one worth saving, even celebrating. By playing with the conventions of gaming, *Ready Player One* embodies the paradoxical elements of utopian fiction itself" (2016, 254).

A THIRD LEVEL OF REALITY

To the actual reality of Columbus and the virtual reality of the OASIS we should add a third level of reality which I would like to call 'metareality.' Metareality permeates the entire movie through a continuous streak of references to 80s and 90s pop culture and acts as a key to decipher both the riddles of the Egg Hunt for the protagonists and the meaning of the movie for the audience. This level of reality brings together actual and virtual reality through a sense of nostalgia for a world that does not exist anymore. Retrogaming, which is featured in many instances and determines the entire third challenge of the Egg Hunt (where an avatar needs to play Adventure on an old Atari 2600 console until he finds the first Easter Egg ever created in a video game), is only accessible to the protagonists through the OASIS, in a fascinating Matryoshka effect that sees retro games being played within a virtual reality game that is portrayed in a movie.

Ready Player One is a feast of *retromania*, to borrow the title of Simon Reynolds's work. It bristles with references to vintage pop music, old movies and TV series, comic

strips and novels, and video games. It is a constant walk down memory lane for the audience. It is surprising, though, that a narrative addressed mainly to young adults is such a vessel for nostalgia. As Reynolds writes, "Pop ought to be all about the present tense, surely? It is still considered the domain of the young, and young people aren't supposed to be nostalgic" (2011, xviii).

Zygmunt Bauman similarly reflects on the topic of retromania and the advent of an age of nostalgia in his book *Retrotopia* (2017), a word he uses to describe "visions located in the lost/stolen/abandoned but undead past, instead of being tied to the not-yet-unborn and so inexistent future" (2017, 5). In it, he derives the concept of nostalgia as related to retrotopias from Svetlana Boym's work *The Future of Nostalgia*, in which she writes:

> The twentieth century began with a futuristic utopia and ended with nostalgia. [We are experiencing a] global epidemic of nostalgia, an affective yearning for a community with a collective memory, a longing for continuity in a fragmented world [which can be interpreted as] a defence mechanism in a time of accelerated rhythms of life and historical upheavals. [Such a defensive mechanism consists essentially in] the promise to rebuild the ideal home that lies at the core of many powerful ideologies of today, tempting us to relinquish critical thinking for emotional bonding. . . . The danger of nostalgia is that it tends to confuse the actual home and the imaginary one. (Byom quoted in Bauman 2017, 2-3)

Nostalgia has become the keyword of our time, when it comes to building ideal worlds. Young and old people alike rely on the past to find utopia, rather than on the future, which looks increasingly bleaker. Thus, nostalgia is relevant both to the audience and to the characters of the OASIS. Halliday re-created his whole childhood in the OASIS, then encouraged everyone on the platform to become familiar with the 80s and 90s culture that he was so passionate about. The Halliday Journals hold copies of every movie, song, video game, and book that Halliday loved in his life, all accessible to the Egg hunters. As Angela Maiello notes, Halliday even evokes the need to return to the past in a hint for the first challenge, when he says, "Why can't we go backwards, for once?" (2018). Wade and his friends find comfort in old games and movies, in their deep knowledge of their dynamics, and in the evocation of a simplicity of life that was unattainable in the bleak world of 2045. Moreover, it is especially by looking at the past

that they become aware of the mistakes Halliday made while running the OASIS and understand the importance of avoiding repeating them.

At the same time, the continuous nods to the 80s and 90s transport the audience into a tale of nostalgia for a time that the viewers have either lived in first person or known through references in the media, eliciting an emotional response and allowing the viewers and readers to expand the meaning of the story through their knowledge of popular culture.

As Megan Condis acutely states,

> It is possible to finish the novel, like a video game, with various levels of completion. Some will read the novel as a stand-alone text and stop there. But the most devoted fans of the text will seek out the works referenced within, thereby extending their experience in Cline's world, achieving what games would call "100% completion." These readers are engaged in a friendly competition with both the text and each other to catch all the hidden references and find all the novel's Easter eggs, thereby proving their affinity with the gamer subculture that the book claims to both define and serve. One cannot simply consume Cline's narrative. It must be played. (Condis 2016, 4)

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, *Ready Player One* seems at first glance a typical action movie set in a futuristic scenario. At a closer look, though, it is possible to identify three interconnected levels of reality that comment on our contemporary tendencies towards utopian, dystopian and 'retrotopian' thinking. Their interactions highlight the faults each of them presents, underscoring the fallacies of a starkly utopian enterprise such as the OASIS, retrieving some positive aspects of a dystopian world such as Columbus in 2045, and commenting on the current tendency to retreat to an idealised past in order to escape the gloomy reality we inhabit. The three layers of reality collide in a narrative that underscores the need not to indulge uncritically in nostalgia, stressing how utopian—that is, unattainable—a wish for a return to the past is, and how detrimental a lack of attention to the present and the future.

Masked as a sci-fi blockbuster, *Ready Player One* lays bare the necessity to turn our gaze towards the present once more, so that the dreadful future it depicts might be

avoided. At the same time, it warns us against pure utopianism, which inevitably hides the seeds of dystopia within itself, in favour of a more realistic vision of the future which, having lost its gloss, now seems darker than ever. *Ready Player One* implies that nostalgia and utopian thinking can coexist and, if approached critically, can be the key to divert the bleak future that talks about impending catastrophe have sketched in the past twenty years. At the same time, it argues for a concrete approach to the issues of our time, showing that this reality, the world we inhabit, is, after all, the one thing worth fighting for.

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CROSSING THE THRESHOLD OF TEMPORALITY: "STORY OF YOUR LIFE" AND *ARRIVAL*

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ABSTRACT

In Denis Villeneuve's 2016 science fiction movie, *Arrival*, the world is disrupted by the sudden arrival of a fleet of alien spaceships, an event that is going to challenge human conceptions of time, language, and free will. The aliens (named Heptapods) are indeed unfathomable creatures, whose language and sense of time resembles nothing on Earth. However, human life, with its burdens of death and grief, proves to be no less challenging, and in this regard the mysterious "gift" the aliens carry with them will turn out to be disconcerting and illuminating at the same time.

The movie is based on Ted Chiang's 1998 novella "Story of Your Life," and both the original text and its film adaptation deal with the understanding and coming to terms with the otherness—alien language, time, death, grief—through the encounter of human and extraterrestrial existence and the exploration of the threshold that connects (or separates) life and afterlife.

The essay examines the ways in which the novella and the film address the modes of the eerie, a concept which has been theorized by Mark Fisher as "a failure of absence or a failure of presence." These modes offer a key to analyzing and understanding the strategies that Chiang and Villeneuve employ to narrate a story—two complementary stories indeed—which affects the communal as well as the individual existence. With its ostensibly impossible language, such a story bears a significance that lies beyond and outside human perception. "Story of Your Life" deals with the "out of"—that outer dimension which lies beyond our experience of the categories of time and space (Fisher 24-25), not necessarily from a scientific perspective but rather from an existential one.

Thus, the Heptapods' arrival raises questions (Why are they here? What do they want?) and poses challenges (How can we speak to them?) which open the way for other, more existential questions and challenges. These issues are not valid only in the narrative environment of science-fiction, but they deal with fears and doubts which are very tangible outside the fictional world, too, whenever the mind is shaken by an image or an event that breaks through our pre-established certainties regarding the life we inhabit.

Eventually, failure of absence (the appearance of the spaceships) and failure of presence (the death of the daughter of the protagonist) meet here, and their encounter provides a powerful meditation on the eerie feelings that haunts human agency and affects our understanding of reality.

Keywords: sci-fi; eerie; time; trauma.

INTRODUCTION

According to Mark Fisher, while the weird is constituted by "the presence of that which does not belong," the eerie "by contrast, is constituted by a *failure of absence* or by a

failure of presence" ([2016] 2017, 61).[1] My essay will explore how these two liminal features of the eerie find expression in Ted Chiang's 1998 novella "Story of Your Life" and in its 2016 film adaptation *Arrival*, directed by Denis Villeneuve. Drawing on Fisher's work, I will examine the way in which time can be considered the ultimate eerie landscape where consciousness faces the other, the unknown, and strives to "communicate" with it, thus providing some interesting insights into the human condition.

Although there are some inevitable differences between the novella and the movie, in both cases the story centers on the sudden appearance of a fleet of alien ships and on the encounter between humans and the extraterrestrial creatures named "heptapods," narrated by Dr. Louise Banks, a linguist who has been hired by the U.S. government to establish communication with the aliens. Not surprisingly, the relation between humanity and "the other" is central in the story, whose concept of alterity embraces extraterrestrial life and outer space, as well as human life and death. Indeed, as is evident from the beginning, the aliens are unfathomable creatures, whose language and sense of time resembles nothing terrestrial. However, human life, with its burdens of death and grief, proves to be no less challenging, and in this regard the mysterious "gift" the heptapods carry with them will turn out to be disconcerting and illuminating at the same time. Therefore, while certainly Louise's story deals with her encounter with the heptapods and her efforts to learn their languages, at the same time, it is also the

[1] In *The Weird and the Eerie*, Fisher specifies that "The sensation of the eerie occurs either when there is something present where there should be nothing, or if there is nothing present when there should be something" ([2016] 2017, 61). He subsequently provides examples of these two opposing but complementary features. First, the notion of "eerie cry" is representative of the failure of absence because it implies "a feeling that there is something more in (or behind) the cry than a mere animal reflex or biological mechanism" thus generating forms of speculation and suspense in the mind of the individual. Fisher stresses how "the eerie concerns the unknown; when knowledge is achieved, the eerie disappears," even though not all mysteries are eerie or generate the eerie: "There must also be a sense of alterity, a feeling that the enigma might involve forms of knowledge, subjectivity and sensation that lie beyond common experience" (62). For what concerns the failure of presence, Fisher identifies it mainly in landscapes and visual scenes, taking as an example "the feeling of the eerie that pertains to ruins or to other abandoned structures"(62) which makes us wonder about their purpose and, especially, their meaning, as it is in the case of places like Stonehenge or the statues on Rama Ni. Moreover, the sense of the eerie is amplified here because standing in front of such ruins makes us speculate not only on them but especially about how the relics of our own culture will look in the future and, therefore, "we are compelled to imagine our own world as a set of eerie traces" (62).

narration of her daughter's life and premature death. It is a story about grief and loss, and about coming to terms with the limited time of human life.

A MEETING WITH THE UNKNOWN

I used the expression "at the same time" because the novella really manages to make a sequential mode of awareness and time-perception (human) interact with a simultaneous one (heptapod), as is apparent in the way Chiang structures Louise's narration. While recalling the events of her meeting with the aliens and her life with her daughter, she moves forward and backward in time, often linking the pieces of her story together through non-chronological associations, as shown by her distinctive usage of verb tenses, in which past, present, and future are often oddly sequenced, to the point that it is difficult to tell them apart. Yet her "being unstuck in time" is not the syncopated and schizophrenic journey of a wrenched Billy Pilgrim in *Slaughterhouse-Five*.[2] Unlike Vonnegut's character, her experience is marked by a desperate but nonetheless fluid awareness that she has acquired from the aliens. The same effect is achieved in the movie *Arrival* by introducing a series of flashbacks at various points in the narration, which will turn out to be memories from the future, and not from the past (they might be called "anti-déjà-vu," as a striking mid-film disclosure may suggest).

Given these premises, I believe that the modes of the eerie provide a useful key for interpreting a story whose structure and content challenge human cognition of outer and inner otherness. Here, *failure of absence* lies in the extraterrestrial element—the heptapods, the spaceships, the looking glasses—an element that can be evocative of the weird, too, and surely shares something with it, especially in the film, in which the

[2] Kurt Vonnegut's 1969 anti-war masterpiece, *Slaughterhouse-Five*, is the story of Dresden bombing survivor Billy Pilgrim, who travels back and forth in time without having the possibility to control his "power" in any way. The second chapter of the novel (when Billy's story starts) famously begins with the words, "Listen: Billy Pilgrim has come unstuck in time" ([1969] 2000, 19). Interestingly, in the notes of "Story of Your Life," Chiang directly refers to Vonnegut: "As for this story's theme, probably the most concise summation of it that I've seen appears in Kurt Vonnegut's introduction to the 25th anniversary edition of *Slaughterhouse-Five*: 'Stephen Hawking . . . found it tantalizing that we could not remember the future. But remembering the future is child's play for me now . . . To Stephen Hawking and all others younger than myself I say, 'Be patient. Your future will come to you and lie down at your feet like a dog who knows and loves you no matter what you are'" ([1998] 2000, 333–34).

"arrival" of the spaceships is met with panic, hysteria, and random violence, as if the world were about to end.[3] Even if the aliens never manifest aggressive intentions, their mere presence is enough to make humanity feel increasingly menaced and act irrationally, a reaction to the unknown very representative of our society, where any event that might imply a disruption or restructuring of our everyday certainties often generates violent and chaotic reactions.

In the novella, the spaceships do not land on Earth, instead alien devices, called "looking glasses," are sent on various locations on the planet to allow heptapods to communicate with humans while remaining in orbit—whereas in the movie, there are twelve ships actually landing on different locations all over the planet. Teams of experts (military forces, physicists, linguists) are established by governments for the purpose of communicating with them. Among these experts are Louise Banks and the physicist Gary Donnelly (Ian Donnelly in the movie) who, after various attempts, eventually manage to interact with the aliens using their peculiar language or, more precisely, languages.

The task is extremely challenging, since nothing in the heptapods' way of speaking or writing, nor in their physical appearance, resembles anything human, as Louise's first description testifies:

> [The heptapod] looked like a barrel suspended at the intersection of seven limbs. It was radially symmetric, and any of its limbs could serve as an arm or a leg. . . . Its limbs had no distinct joints . . . Whatever their underlying structure, the heptapod's limbs conspired to move it in a disconcertingly fluid manner. Its "torso" rode atop the rippling limbs as smoothly as a hovercraft.

[3] Nicols notes how this is actually one of the main differences between the movie and the novella: "While founded upon a time-honoured science fiction scenario *Arrival* also clearly articulates the sense of global peril which is typical of much of the cultural production of our current times, manifested in fears about ecological catastrophe, terrorist attacks, and the anthropocene, etc. *Arrival* may be overly sentimental . . . yet this is a movie which uses science fiction tropes to express an anxiety which now seems very 'post 2016,' about how liberal values are in danger of being overtaken by a self-interested, forceful, intolerant kind of politics" (2019, 123).

> Seven lidless eyes ringed the top of the heptapod's body. . .. [A]t no point did he ever turn around. Eerie but logical; with eyes on all sides, any direction might as well be 'forward.' (Chiang [1998] 2002, 117-118)

As for their behavior, heptapods are said to be "completely cooperative" (128) with regards to teaching their language to humanity. Unfortunately, when asked why they have decided to land on Earth, they simply answer "'too see,' or 'to observe.' Indeed, sometimes they preferred to watch us silently rather than answer our questions. Perhaps they were scientists, perhaps they were tourists" (137).

Both in the novella's description and in the movie rendition, the heptapods' physical appearance anticipates something disconcerting about their worldview, since the radial symmetry and fluidity of their bodies will turn out to reflect their way of understanding and representing reality. Through their obscure language, "they have many wonderful things to teach" humans, as Kurt Vonnegut would say, "especially about time" ([1969] 2000, 21).[4]

A breakthrough happens when Louise discovers that the heptapods' spoken language (constituted by fluttering sounds but organized in a syntax somehow comparable to human languages) is a completely separate communicative system from their written language, which "didn't appear to be writing at all; it looked more like a bunch of intricate graphic designs" (Chiang [1998] 2002, 129). It is a logographic writing, but very peculiar, since the script is not word divided: every sentence is represented by a new logogram, composed by the necessary words, joined together, stretched, rotated, modified, but still recognizable.[5] Louise names the two languages "Heptapod A"

[4] In *Slaughterhouse-Five*, Billy Pilgrim is captured by an alien spaceship and taken to the planet Tralfamadore. Its inhabitants, the Tralfamadorians, see reality in four dimensions and therefore experience time in a way that is completely different from the corresponding human experience. The above quotation is taken from a letter in which Billy Pilgrim describes the Tralfamadorians as "friendly, and they could see in four dimensions. They pitied Earthlings for being able to see only three. They had many wonderful things to teach Earthlings, especially about time" ([1969] 2000, 21).

[5] In "Story of Your Life," the heptapods write through a screen, as Louise explains: "One heptapod spoke, and then inserted a limb into a large socket in the pedestal; a doodle of script, vaguely cursive, popped onto the screen" (124). In *Arrival*, the alien uses a limb to physically "spray" a sort of black ink in the air and draw the logograms. The movie rendition of heptapod writing is particularly evocative and effective: the logograms are roughly circular, they may be reminiscent of either water paintings or Shodō art (Japanese calligraphy), and they slowly disappear like

(speaking) and "Heptapod B" (writing) and, after studying and practicing both of them, she eventually theorizes that Heptapod B is "semasiographic writing, because it conveys meaning without reference to speech," something far more complex than human picture writing, since it employs a real "visual syntax" for constructing sentences, unrelated to that of Heptapod A. Louise believes that behind such apparently unnecessary complexity lies the possibility that "for the heptapods, writing and speech may play such different cultural or cognitive roles that using separate languages makes more sense than using different forms of the same one" (132–133). Her hypothesis proves correct when she learns that heptapods have a simultaneous mode of consciousness in which time is a non-sequential dimension, hence impossible to express through speech. The semagrams of their writing, on the contrary, make every moment, every thought, "every mark on a page . . . visible simultaneously" (161), in accordance with a conception of time in which chronological order does not qualify as meaningful.

The ongoing communication eventually leads to a series of "exchanges" which, although somehow interesting (Dr. Banks reports various "lectures" on xenobiology and heptapod history), do not seem to offer anything particularly useful for understanding why the aliens decided to visit Earth in the first place. After several of such exchanges and without notice nor apparent reason, the heptapods declare they are about to leave, and so they do, as suddenly and unexpectedly as they arrived, "All at once, all over the world, their looking glasses became transparent and their ships left orbit. . . . We never did learn why the heptapods left, any more than we learned what brought them here, or why they acted the way they did" (171). Apparently, the alien encounter has not resulted in any technological development or specific knowledge for humanity, so the eerie, the transparent obscurity of the looking glass, remains for everyone on Earth, although perhaps not for Louise Banks.

In the movie, this is more explicit since, before leaving, the heptapods declare they have come to help humanity because in 3000 years they are going to need

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mandalas, thus conveying a sense of ephemerality and fluidity which will prove fundamental to understanding their worldview.

humanity's help. To do so, they have come to Earth to offer a "weapon" that "opens time." The word "weapon" spreads panic again, and a war against the aliens seems to be dangerously in sight. However, as Louise immediately understands, "weapon" may not be the correct word for the meaning the heptapods wanted to express, which is more "tool" or better "gift." Such a gift is their language, the semagrams through which even humans might be able to experience time differently, in a non-sequential way, as she does now.

The encounter with otherness thus operates to deconstruct and examine our perception of reality from various perspectives, individual and communal, and offers a notable example of what Fredric Jameson considers "the historical function of present-day SF," a genre which displays a significantly "complex temporal structure: not to give us 'images' of the future . . . but rather to defamiliarize and restructure our experience of our own present, and to do so in specific ways distinct from all other forms of defamiliarization" (2005, 286).

This happens in "Story of Your Life" and *Arrival*, too. Their eerie sceneries are not images nor fantasies of the future, but rather they operate as defamiliarizing devices, with regards to the attitude of our society to the unknown (be it an unexpected event, a scientific discovery, or a living being). Moreover, as David Lucking notes, "Among the themes addressed in both the story and the film are what might generically be described as the problem of communication, the manner in which language encodes and perpetuates ways of perceiving and conceiving reality, and the nature of time and the related issues of free will and predestination" (2017, 132). Indeed, the two works deal with the possibilities and limits of language and, therefore, of human agency.

Louise learns a new language which opens her a door on a completely different understanding of time and experience. Apparently, the time she spent with the heptapods learning their language has affected her way of perceiving reality, suggesting that "the alien language induces a new manner of thinking [a linguistic experience that has been described in] the strong version of the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, which in essence states the same: 'language shapes thought' (Sapir, 1949; Whorf, 1956)" (Milani

Queriquelli 2019, 3809).[6] Actually, even though the movie appears to be implying the supremacy of language over perception, it does not look like the heptapod worldview is shaped by their language, quite the contrary. Moreover, rather than really reinforcing the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, Louise's experience testifies that in order to become proficient in a language which expresses a different mode of awareness, a single individual should be able to experience that kind of awareness, at least partially. That is, to achieve an effective intercultural communication, it is necessary to empathize and identify ourselves with other cultures. As a linguist, Louise must know this principle well and she manages to put it into practice even when "the others" literally come from outer space. Therefore, rather than determining our way of thinking, language is an instrument that helps us communicate with the senses and minds of other kinds of awareness, without necessarily abandoning our own modes of perception—it enriches and may influence our cognition of reality, but it does not determine it. Thus, linguistics is presented as a science that, just like physics, provides tools that enable us to deal with alterity, and with the unknown. Different worldviews call for different languages, and Louise has come to experiment such assertion in a most extreme way and apparently with great success.[7] However, this instrument she now masters looks more like a damnation—not a gift—when it comes to the story of her daughter's life. This is the

[6] The Sapir-Whorf hypothesis expresses linguistic relativism and it consists of two versions, a strong version (linguistic determinism), which is the one referred to in *Arrival*, and a weak version, which proposes that language influences, without being determinative of, thought (linguistic influence). In its strong version, the theory has been widely refuted. Luiz Henrique Milani Queriquelli notes how the reference to the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis is explicitly stated in the movie adaptation, whereas in *Story of Your Life* there is no direct reference to it, even though it seems quite clearly implied in Louise's actions and way of telling the story (3809–3810).

[7] As Milani Queriquelli notes, Chiang's story articulates a delicate "balance between the sciences that underlie the plot" (3810), in which linguistics (and therefore all human sciences) are as necessary as the so-called "exact sciences" in the world of science-fiction. The movie is more unbalanced in this respect, and indeed Nicols proposes that "we might even refer to the film as an example of a sub-genre of science-fiction, i.e. humanities-fiction, 'Hu-Fi'" (2019, 117). In any case, both works certainly accord human sciences an important role in science-fiction. Darko Suvin had already stressed such importance in a 1977 essay, when he pointed out that: "*sciences humaines* or historical-cultural sciences like anthropology-ethnology, sociology, or linguistics (that is, the mainly non-mathematical sciences) are equally based on such scientific methods as: "the necessity and possibility of explicit, coherent, and immanent or non-supernatural explanation of realities; Occam's razor; methodical doubt; hypothesis-construction; falsifiable physical or imaginary (thought) experiments; dialectical causality and statistical probability; progressively more embracing cognitive paradigms; and so on. These 'soft sciences' can therefore most probably better serve as a basis for SF than the 'hard' natural sciences; and they have in fact been the basis of all better works in SF" (2010, 72).

most important of all the stories she may ever tell, but her daughter is not there (or will not be there) to listen to it. From this perspective, Fisher's *failure of presence* can be identified in the house from which the reader imagines Louise telling her story—a house which should not be so desolate, but the premature death of her daughter has turned it into her personal post-apocalyptic space. From where Louise stands, she is rehearsing a monologue, a bedtime story for an empty bed, her narration becoming at last the story of a trauma—the loss of a loved one. Trauma, in the words of Cathy Caruth, "is the confrontation with an event that, in its unexpectedness or horror, cannot be placed within the schemes of prior knowledge . . . and thus continually returns, in its exactness, at a later time" (1995, 153).[8] This becomes even more complex in Louise's story, since now that she has access to a simultaneous awareness, there is no "prior" or "later" to relate to; yet, at the same time, the combination of unexpectedness and continuous return that characterize trauma[9] finds an explanation when observed from a heptapod point of view and, perhaps, allows her a way to find a kind of closure—somehow, sometime. And yet, to make sense of what happened, she ultimately chooses the act of telling a story, the most sequential and human gesture she could resort to as a way of coping with trauma. It does not matter much if she already knows how that story ends, the act of narrating constitutes the performative and therapeutic experience through which that experience can find its right place in her life (Nicols 2019, 115).[10]

WEAPON OPENS TIME

At this point, it is clear that Heptapod B is more than a "foreign language:" it is the visual representation of a culture in which time does not flow chronologically but appears to

[8] See Caruth (1995, 151–157) and (1996, 1–9).
[9] As Nicols pointed out, "Chiang's story is also about the paradox of coping with the inevitability of something which is at the same time entirely unexpected" (2019, 112), implying a similar combination of apparently contrasting but complementary traumatic elements in Louise's story.
[10] Indeed, as C.S. Lewis observed, "Sorrow, however, turns out to be not a state but a process. It needs not a map but a history" (1961, 47).

be very fluid nevertheless,[11] in a way that is well represented by the aliens' mandala-shaped semagrams (Chiang [1998] 2002, 152); in other words, learning Heptapod B allows the opportunity for unprecedented intercultural communication. In such a culture, time becomes the eerie landscape in which the story of Louise's daughter's life and her own can be told, where past, present, and future merge together, carrying with them hope and loss, and shaping the perception of reality, while language is the true agent able to enact an otherwise impossible temporality. As Louise says at the beginning, "I know how this story ends; I think about it a lot. I also think a lot about how it began" (112). Since knowing the future is incompatible with free will, being human and having come to know one's own future inevitably raises questions about agency and free will and their relevance in cosmic history. Yet "what distinguishes the heptapods' mode of awareness is not just that their actions coincide with history's events; it is also that their motives coincide with history's purposes. They act to create the future, to enact chronology" (163),[12] they are, we might add, agents of fate. The concept of "fate" is problematic from a sequential mode of awareness, as Fisher points out, because it implicates the combined presence of weird and eerie:

> The concept of fate is weird in that it implies twisted forms of time and causality that are alien to ordinary perception, but it is also eerie in that it raises questions about agency: who or what is the entity that has woven fate?
>
> The eerie concerns the most fundamental metaphysical questions one could pose, questions to do with existence and non-existence. ([2016] 2017, 12)

Such questions are not meaningful within a heptapod worldview, but they have been haunting the human mind for ages. There is no sense in wondering which interpretation

[11] The inherent fluidity of the aliens' mode of awareness should not come as a surprise since, as Jameson notes with regard to "the great structuralist formula itself—the distinction between the synchronic and the diachronic . . . is always accompanied by a label that warns us not to confuse the diachronic with time and history nor to imagine that the synchronic is static or the mere present" (2003, 699).

[12] This concept is further developed in Chiang's novella and, though more superficially, in Villeneuve's movie through Fermat's principle of least time, to explain the difference between choice-oriented and purpose-oriented consciousness. See Noletto and Lopes (2018) for an analysis of the metaphorical usage of Fermat's principle in "Story of Your Life" and its relation to the philosophical interpretations of time and temporality.

is correct because, "both are equally valid. But you can't see both at the same time" (Chiang [1998] 2002, 163). Perhaps, this is the reason why Louise is unable to reject her human worldview, nor can she embrace heptapod reality as fully as she would like to: she lies on the threshold between human and alien, between sequential and simultaneous awareness.

She notices how Heptapod B seems to have affected mainly her memory, and not her consciousness. Before learning the alien language, her memories grew sequential "like a column of cigarette ash," the consciousness providing the ignition, whereas after they "fell into place like gigantic blocks, each one measuring years in duration," without a specific order. While all this happens, her consciousness keeps going forward regardless, only with more difficulty, since now "the ash of memory lies ahead as well as behind." But sometimes there is more, however sporadically, and she has "glimpses when Heptapod B truly reigns, and I experience past and future all at once; my consciousness becomes a half-century-long ember burning outside time" (166–167); an apparent paradox that might represent a possible conciliation between the time of physics and the time of human experience.[13] She wishes she could achieve more: "I would have liked to experience more of the heptapod worldview, to feel the way they feel. Then, perhaps I could immerse myself fully in the necessity of events, as they must, instead of merely wading in its surf for the rest of my life" (171–172). But somehow she already has, humanly speaking, since "our species," as Oelschlaeger points out, has "intimate relations to time: we are truly *time binders*" (1991, 333) or, as Don DeLillo would express it, "we [are] the only crucial clocks, our minds and bodies, way stations for the distribution of time" (1997, 235), and this is what she is indeed, and what she does by telling her story using what she has learned from the heptapods.

Even if Louise's knowledge is necessarily problematic, the psychological landscape created by her narration constitutes the environment in which to

[13] See Hayles ([1990] 1991, 91–114) and Oelschlaeger (1991, 320–353) for an analysis of the way in which the scientific principles regarding time and temporality have been interpreted and have affected the perception of reality in contemporary culture and literature.

contemplate our experience of time, a meditation that is particularly compelling in a society marked by a pathological acceleration of time and by what Jameson defines as the "physical and psychic dissociation of the human subjects who inhabit it" (2005, 287). "Story of Your Life" and *Arrival* escape such dissociation, as they show us Louise talking to her unborn-yet-already-dead daughter and wonder, "What if the experience of knowing the future changed a person? What if it evoked a sense of urgency, a sense of obligation to act precisely as she knew she would?" (Chiang [1998] 2002, 157). Like a modern-day Sisyphus, she, too, knows that her fate belongs to her even if it is already written,[14] and she knows that,

> eventually, many years from now, I'll be without your father, and without you. All I will have left from this moment is the heptapod language. So I pay close attention, and note every detail. From the beginning I knew my destination, and I chose my route accordingly. But am I working toward an extreme of joy, or of pain? Will I achieve a minimum, or a maximum? (172)

Louise's questions, with all their burden of suffering, remain unanswered, but she nonetheless keeps following the path which will take her to a future that is already past—or rather, to the simultaneous present of her fate. Having faced the unknown has given their protagonist no higher agency on her own story, however, "Story of Your Life" and *Arrival* both seem to imply that consciously living through time and experience is enough for a non-simultaneous creature. Through the lens of science fiction, Chiang and Villeneuve provide their audience with a penetrating account regarding what it means to be human, a condition always on the liminal state between different modes of temporality and perception, between life and death, and constantly challenged by their eerie languages and manifestations.

[14] The reference is to Albert Camus' essay "The Myth of Sisyphus." Like Sisyphus, Louise must forever bear the heavy rock of her awareness, the knowledge of her own fate. And yet, Sisyphus's fate "belongs to him. His rock is his thing," and "he knows himself to be the master of his days. . . . One always finds one's burden again. But Sisyphus teaches the higher fidelity that negates the gods and raises rocks. He too concludes that all is well. This universe henceforth without a master seems to him neither sterile nor futile" ([1942] 1955, 109–110). Likewise, Louise's experience shows a reality in which one's fate cannot be changed, but nevertheless it can be embraced and even chosen—through a delicate but necessary balance between a simultaneous and a sequential awareness.

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RETURNS OF WAR: SOUTH VIETNAM AND THE PRICE OF REFUGEE MEMORY

Long T. Bui (Author)
New York: New York University Press, 2018, pp. 251, ISBN 9781479871957
Reviewed by Giacomo Traina

For the cover of *Returns of War*, Long T. Bui chose an artwork by fine-arts photographer Dinh Q. Lê, *Untitled* (1997). In this montage—woven on linen tape utilizing a traditional Vietnamese technique for crafting grass mats—the face of the artist is indissolubly interwoven with a map of the Indochinese Peninsula. Lê's eyes are shut, like the eyes of a corpse, or of someone who is trying to focus on distant memories of lost sounds, colors, and fragrances of a country that does not exist anymore. Indeed, the borders and the toponyms displayed in the polaroid prints clearly date back prior to April 30, 1975, when the North Vietnamese army entered Sài Gòn, concluding thirty years of continuous warfare and putting an end to the short-lived Republic of Vietnam, or South Vietnam, as it was commonly referred to.

The specter of this ill-fated lost nation is the focal point of Long T. Bui's research. Subverting both the Communist national rhetoric about the inevitable collapse of a bygone client-state and the American self-indulgent narrative about the pitiful demise of an inept ally that just was not up to the task, Bui tries successfully to introduce a new critical perspective. Yet his focus is not on South Vietnam's brief history, nor on its sudden ending. What chiefly interests him of South Vietnam is its "*absent presence*" in the collective memory, with the various forms that a national identity takes decades after the death of a nation.

Bui defines his critical approach as "Vietnamization," a term commonly associated with Nixon's policy of handing the war to the Vietnamese as a political façade, while simultaneously preparing the American withdrawal. His is a professed political re-appropriation: stripped of its original meaning—and of its implied neo-colonial and patronizing subtext—the word "Vietnamization" is resemantized. For Bui,

"vietnamizing" the memory of the Vietnam War is to patiently dismantle a collective narrative that since 1975 has been heavily "re-americanized" both in the fictional and non-fictional retellings of the conflict. A narrative that, in the American popular imagination, often reduces the complex alliances and divisions of a long fratricidal struggle to a simplistic confrontation between the GIs and the enemy, with the South Vietnamese usually sidelined and depicted as "helpless subjects and hapless allies." As Viet Thanh Nguyen famously wrote in his 2016 essay *Nothing Ever Dies*, "[a]ll wars are fought twice, the first time on the battlefield, the second time in memory" (4). Quoting Michel Foucault, Bui echoes Nguyen, stating that "the cultural politics of remembering the Vietnam War" and the forgotten South Vietnam are therefore "la guerre continuée par d'autres moyens" (1997, 16).

In the first chapter, "Archival Others," Bui tries to make sense of the exclusion of this "ghost nation" from the American public memory, going back to the very foundation of any historical discourse, the archive. In the Vietnam War Center and Archive (VNCA) of Lubbock (TX), the scholar faces the paradox of struggling to find relevant documentation or photographic material under the keyword "Vietnamese," having no problem, instead, finding such material when typing ethnic slurs such as "gook." The policy adopted by the VNCA of filing the material without censoring or altering the original captions in any way allows Bui to see the South Vietnamese through the dehumanizing gaze of the American soldiers. The invisibility of the Vietnamese subjects in the American memory is thus made evident by the "hypervisibility" of their specular counterparts, the treacherous and faceless "gooks."

However, as Bui argues, this archival invisibility is also partly due to the reluctance of many members of the Vietnamese American community in taking part to the activities of the VNCA: the fierce anti-communism widespread in the community prevents many Vietnamese Americans from visiting the archive, probably because of the VNCA's policies regarding the inclusion of the North Vietnamese and NLF (Việt Cộng) perspective.

Throughout the book, Bui's point of view is at the same time biased and objective. As he states in the very first page of the essay, he is definitely part of the story

he is telling. Born in the United States from a refugee family, he grew up without direct memories of South Vietnam. Therefore, in the second chapter, "Refugee Assets," Bui is admittedly driven by his own family history to attempt an extensive reading of Aimee Phan's refugee family saga *The Reeducation of Cherry Truong*, a staple of contemporary Vietnamese American literature. However, his deep sympathy for the "historical excesses of America's involvement in Vietnam," the Vietnamese refugees, does not prevent him from exposing the flaws and the internal divisions of his own community with impartial eyes. This emerges in his personal involvement in some political disputes that took place in the Californian Vietnamese community during the early 2010s, that he reconstructs comprehensively in the third chapter, "Dismembered Lives." In this chapter, Bui looks in detail at the Vietnamese American tendency to exclude themselves from anything even remotely associated with Communism.

Bui reports the case of an art exhibition in Santa Ana (CA) in 2009, in which one of his own artworks was also included. He remarks how the simple inclusion of a Communist flag next to a bust of the late North Vietnamese leader Hồ Chí Minh in a provocative and thought-provoking photographic work elicited a fierce and violent reaction in the local community. Likewise, Bui reports the case of the contested inclusion of LGBTQ representatives in the annual Tết Parades held in the Little Saigon of Westminster (CA). According to him, the outcry that followed this inclusion showed clearly how wide the generational divides and the political rifts are within the Vietnamese American community. More importantly, in this chapter Bui suggests that the wounded masculinity of ARVN veterans (defeated on the battleground but proudly marching in uniform with the insignia of a defunct army) possibly played a role in the controversy.

In the fourth chapter, "Militarized Freedoms," Bui shows how the shame of the 1975 defeat drove many second generation (or 1.5 generation) Vietnamese Americans to enlist in the American Army, so as to recover somehow the lost pride of their fathers. Bui reports the symbolic act of a Vietnamese American soldier that raised the golden flag of South Vietnam in Baghdad during the Second Gulf War, an event that provoked an official protest by the Vietnamese government. According to Bui, the soldier

intended that gesture as a silent and implicit comparison between the Iraqi insurgents and the NLF guerrillas fought by his forefathers thirty years before. A significant comparison, considering the repeated allusions to the Vietnam War (and to the "Vietnam Syndrome") made by politicians and journalists during both the Gulf Wars. According to Bui, the stories of these soldiers show the paradoxes underlying the mainstream "re-americanized" memory of the Vietnam War.

In the fifth chapter, "Empire's Residuals," Bui concludes his research in the tree-lined avenues of Sài Gòn/Hồ Chí Minh City, the city that embodied and symbolized the very spirit of South Vietnam. Rechristened by the Communists in the name of their founding father in the desperate attempt to purge it of its colonial and 'western' past, this 'city with two names' has recently recovered its role as the undisputed commercial hub of modern Vietnam. Sài Gòn is now a bustling Asian metropolis, in which the pastel-coloured walls of the old French villas are shadowed by towering glass skyscrapers, and where it is not rare to spot a McDonald's or Starbucks logo next to a Communist propaganda billboard with the red face of Uncle Hồ. Sài Gòn, argues Bui, has come full circle: in this new era of "Vietnamized Capitalism," the formerly reviled trading expertise of the Saigonese people is now celebrated and exploited by Hà Nội's government. After a few decades, under the thin veneer of its new socialist façade, Sài Gòn is thus once more the rich and decadent city that once was. It has been like throwing a rock into an anthill: in the first moment, there's panic and confusion; but after a while everything goes back to normal, readjusting quickly to the new order.

In this new scenario of changes and contradictions, Bui identifies a new Vietnamese figure, the "*returnee*." In the final chapter, Bui tells the stories of some of these second or 1.5 generation Vietnamese Americans that have finally traced backwards the journey of their parents. Settling in modern Vietnam and remaking their lives thanks to their talents and their American dollars—now both welcomed by the socialist government—*returnees* like Dinh Q. Lê, Alex Hoa or Kynam Doan have truly reversed the South Vietnamese refugee paradigm. This is one of the last paradoxes of *Returns of War*: sons fleeing their country in order to seek their fortune, in the same city that their

parents had to flee for their same reasons; finding Sài Gòn in Hồ Chí Minh City, and South Vietnam in southern Vietnam.

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BREAKING THE FRAMES: POPULISM AND PRESTIGE IN COMICS STUDIES

Marc Singer (Author)
Austin: University of Texas Press, 2018, pp. 292, ISBN 978-1-4773-1710-5
Reviewed by Mattia Arioli

Marc Singer's *Breaking the Frames: Populism and Prestige in Comics Studies* (2018) boldly enters the critical conversation about comics scholarship as the author advocates for more rigorous critical methods without renouncing to the rich and diverse critical methodologies that compose this multidisciplinary field. He makes the case for a discipline that can embrace different perspectives in order to expand our understanding of comics. Interestingly, this lucid discussion surfaces in a moment in which the medium has received more scholarly attention than ever before.

In his book, Singer criticizes the approach taken by many scholars who are not familiar with the medium, and he tries to demonstrate how the field could benefit from a more careful engagement with comics. He argues that academics should pay close attention to comics' material, historical, and cultural contexts, especially when they cross over from other fields. For example, he criticizes Lillian S. Robinson's (2004) *Wonder Women*, as the author rarely acknowledges the writers and creators behind the female superheroes she analyzes. Therefore, her approach ends up essentializing the characters she examines, making them archetypes. As Singer suggests, this methodology is somehow fallacious as it treats comics as anonymous mass cultural products, removing them from the process of their own creation.

Marc Singer also challenges other comics scholars who are often devoted fans and thus somewhat uncritical of their beloved comics' artists. He insists that comics scholars should not champion the comics or the authors they study in order to make a place for them in 'legitimate literature,' and by default legitimize their research subject. He observes that some academics engage in special pleading on behalf of comics, in a desire for the medium to be taken seriously. However, he maintains that scholars should seek to prove comics' worthiness for study by showing they can stand up to ideological

critique regardless of the result of such processes of validation. He rephrases and reiterates Joseph Witek's dictum, 'Never apologize, never defend.' Indeed, according to both academics, comics scholars should never apologize for their field of study, nor should they concede any doubts about the importance and rigorousness of their research.

These observations about the current state of the art of comics studies prompt Singer to make the case for a more balanced and thorough field that is less hagiographic, and less prone to establish canons, which are often dictated by ideologies of literary critics and based on elitist hierarchies of taste. He indirectly challenges the insularity of the comics canon, which is formed by a narrow range of authors, genres, and production methods.

Moreover, Singer observes how the critical discourse about comics has often been shaped by what he calls a populist rhetoric that he attributes to some cultural studies scholars whom he describes as defensive, anti-elitist, and often neglectful towards economic and historical contexts. He argues that popular-culture studies has often "hardened into a mode of cultural populism that celebrates any and all manifestations of popular culture while dismissing their critics as elitists" (9). Building upon Jim McGuigan (1992) and Thomas Frank's (2000) works on cultural populism, he maintains that the endorsement of popular taste is often in line with neoliberal ideology and the concepts of consumer sovereignty and popular will. He blames this ideology for creating a climate of suspicion towards critical analysis, too often dismissed as a form of elitism.

In particular, he refutes Henry Jenkins' call to "return to the treehouse where we used to talk about the latest comics with our buddies, or perhaps something which is one part local comic shop and one part university bookstore" (2012, 2). Whereas Jenkins wants to avoid comics studies isolating itself from fans and creators by establishing canons and hierarchies of taste, Singer (reprising Witek's arguments) argues that comics scholars should not renounce the markers of academic discourse, e.g. specialized discourse and citations, as these elements are necessary in order to establish one's work as part of a larger critical conversation. Indeed, as already observed by

Charles Hartfield and Hillary Chute, comics scholars often fail to engage with other relevant studies in the field. For example, Singer notices how Hye Su Park neglects to mention Witek's (1989) chapter on *Maus* (one of the first scholarly works on Spiegelman) in her bibliographic essay (2011) on the same topic. However, I believe that accessibility and academic rigorousness should not be constructed as antithetical and opposing entities. Scholars should not renounce the attempt to make their work comprehensible to a wide audience of non-specialists. Even though Jenkins advocates for an anti-elitist field, his (comparative) research is well defined.

Singer holds this uncritical populist drift to be responsible for the celebration of unreflective reading and the suspicion of academic scholarship. He also problematizes the construction of anti-elitist (but equally patronizing) condemnation of critical judgement, noting that the uncritical endorsement of popular taste often echoes with consumer sovereignty. In his opinion, the desire to speak to many different audiences has led many to abandon the standards and practices of academic scholarship, not allowing the field to expand its knowledge.

In his opinion, the lack of knowledge and/or misreading of some comics scholarship has limited the possibilities to expand our understanding and craft as comics scholars. He illuminates this point with particular care and skill in his chapter 'The Myth of Eco,' where he demonstrates how some populist scholars misrepresent Umberto Eco's criticism while presenting similar axiomatic assumptions. Yet, he also observes a substantial difference among these two approaches: whereas Eco encourages the necessity of criticizing popular texts, anti-elitist scholars do not. He concedes that even though Umberto Eco's oneiric climate may not be the best or exclusive tool for interpreting superhero comics, Eco's arguments are still relevant and deserve more credit that his critics are usually willing to acknowledge. Indeed, since comics started to challenge Eco's oneiric climate at the same time the English version of Eco's essay ('The Myth of Superman') was published (1972 [1962]), this reiterative mode has neither disappeared nor been completely supplanted. However, Singer's argument is not an apology for Eco's work, as he criticizes the Italian scholar for overlooking the historical development of the medium and the role of economics.

The engagement with the relevant works in the field is here described as a fundamental practice in order to avoid 'reinventing the wheel' (30). However, the strength of Marc Singer's argument does not rely just on his criticism of other scholars, but mainly on his meticulous work of close reading, historical contextualization, and examination of the economic and material factors underlying comics production and publication. In order to achieve this aim, the rest of the book is organized around specific works by acclaimed comics creators (Warren Ellis, Alan Moore, Chris Ware, Marjane Satrapi, and Kyle Baker) and the academic and critical analysis of such works as well as Singer's own criticism.

In his second chapter he uses Warren Ellis work to demonstrate that historicism, hybridity, and hyperconsciousness are not relics of a vanished age, but consequences of an ongoing transformation in the production processes and culture, and consequently postmodernism. This point is further developed in the third chapter through a systematic analysis of Alan Moore and Kevin O'Neill's *The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen*, which features characters taken from late Victorian and early twentieth-century literature. Indeed, the possibility to (not) use certain characters influenced Moore and O'Neill's plot progression. Consequently, the development of their work was deeply shaped by copyright law. Therefore, the intertextual references are not only determined by artistic choices, but they also reflect material power relations. Singer observes how the practices of ownership and appropriation of this graphic novel makes the story oscillate between criticism of the Victorian age and idealization of it, as the graphic novel shows indulgence towards the controversial aspects of the period and reenacts nineteenth century racial stereotypes.

The second half of the book deals with 'realistic' comics. This discussion starts with Chris Ware, who is criticized primarily for his statements and anthologies about comics (rather than his work itself), which according to Singer aim at establishing a narrow canon. *Breaking the Frames: Populism and Prestige in Comics Studies* (2018) illustrates that the aesthetic value that underlies Ware's anthologies inevitably reinforces the same hierarchies that contributed to the medium's marginality.

Similarly, Singer points out that the impulse to form canons has led some comics scholars to neglect David B. and L'Association's (Marjane Satrapi's editor) influences on *Persepolis* (2000-2003), an erasure that had the effect of making this comic appear more unique than it actually is. Singer also minimizes the influence of Persian miniatures on Satrapi's style, and he labels the claims that her art is specifically Persian as attempts to exoticize her work. This example serves the author as an admonition against scholars' championing of their beloved comics as rare gems with no connection to the medium's history.

Perhaps the last chapter on Kyle Baker's *Nat Turner* (2008) contains the most interesting contribution to the field. In this chapter, there is less academic and critical response to other works, and it mainly features Singer's own original analysis of Baker's book. He shows how this comic does not fit into the definition of historiographic metafiction, as the author disregards any form of truth, accuracy, and referentiality, engaging in a narrative that Singer labels as "bullshit," a non-accurate rendition of the events that relies on a series of clichés and is unquestioningly accepted.

Breaking the Frames: Populism and Prestige in Comics Studies makes an interesting contribution to the field by problematizing some methodological procedures. It might be interesting to see if such points are able to trigger a debate about analyzing comics, defining standards, and elaborating models that encompass the contribution of different disciplines. Singer's examination of the current state of the art of comics studies offers some interesting reflections on how to make the field advance; however, his emphasis on mainly if not exclusively acclaimed comics artist, and the criticism about their works, reinforces the narrowness of the canon that he somewhat criticizes throughout his book. Indeed, comics scholars have often limited their analyses to two different genres, superheroes and (auto)biographies. It would have been interesting if the author had included less explored comics genres (war, horror, romance, fantasy, western, adventure, sci-fi, etc.) and criticism of them. Many genres are poorly covered or completely neglected. The current state of the art might be attributed to both the freshness and novelty of the field, but also the stigma that the medium has suffered until recently. This is particularly evident if we consider the fact

that there are only few works on comics aimed at children even though these titles have had great success, such as *Archie*. One of the reasons behind this lack of engagement and recognition might be attributed to the pressure to justify one's own research field that many comics scholars suffer. Indeed, in order to be accepted as a research subject, the medium had to demonstrate that it was not "just for kids." These considerations clearly demonstrate how academic research is often influenced by external forces and the desire for acknowledgment from the community.

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AN INTERVIEW WITH TINO VILLANUEVA

Angelo Grossi
Ca' Foscari University of Venice

Poet, painter, professor of Spanish literature at Boston University, among the forerunners of the 'Chicano Literary Renaissance' of the 1970s, Tino Villanueva (born in 1941 in San Marcos, Texas, to a family of migrant workers) has managed in his long-standing career to defy any easy classification thanks to a passionate insistence in innovating his craft and embracing increasingly universal (and archetypal) themes with a very distinctive voice. Each one of his poetry collections constitutes its own world and requires its own language: Spanish or English (sometimes both), the two linguistic codes between which Villanueva is able to switch with the same level of intensity and subtlety in the results.

And each collection contains its own distinguished exploration: his bilingual debut *Hay Otra voz: Poems* (1972) uses the two languages interchangeably to express the "other voice" originating from the Mexican migrant experience; *Shaking Off the Dark* (1984) enacts a struggle between the spoken word and the shadow of nothingness, silence and chaos; *Crónica de mis años peores* (1987) stages an autobiographical immersion in childhood and adolescence; *Scene from the Movie GIANT* (1993, winner of the American Book Award) deploys a cinematic ekphrasis to relive a traumatic moment; the chapbook *Primera Causa / First Cause* explores memory, writing and the struggle with the blank page; and *So Spoke Penelope* (2013) provides Odysseus' wife with a lyrical voice. Villanueva's work is transversed by an existentialist understanding of the self as the product of a relentless work, a characterization of the poetic voice—always poised between two idioms and two sensibilities—as the result of a patient conquest, and a conception of memory and writing as privileged tools in a struggle against silence and annihilation. His work has been partly translated into Italian by Paola Mildonian, who edited the anthology *Il canto del cronista: antologia poetica* (Firenze: Le Lettere, 2002) and *Così parlò Penelope* (Milano: Edizioni Ariele, 2017).

This interview was conducted via email while I was researching an essay focused on the use of ekphrasis in Villanueva's work. Having the privilege to converse with an author while researching her or his work is something never to take for granted, and Villanueva's generosity proved to be priceless. Villanueva has always been interested in the practice of ekphrasis itself ("the verbal and literary representation of a visual representation," according to the poet's reformulation of James A. W. Heffernan's famous definition) and he even devoted an essay to it (Villanueva 2010). As a matter of fact, the ekphrastic practice is particularly suitable to create an intersemiotic borderlands, a correlative objective of the in-betweenness often addressed by Villanueva's poetry. Besides ekphrasis, we also discussed his upcoming collection, which will be devoted to the theme of flânerie.

Do you consider Scene from the Movie GIANT as belonging to the ekphrastic tradition, and, if so, do you think that a cinematic ekphrasis differs from a classical ekphrasis?

Most certainly it's an ekphrastic work. Allow me to explain. *Scene*, to me, is representative of what the term *ekphrasis* means in modern times, not of how it was understood in antiquity. This contemporary definition of ekphrasis comes to mind: A verbal and literary representation of a visual representation. And *Scene* most certainly reflects that. On the other hand, ekphrasis in antiquity (beginning about the eighth century BCE, in classical Greek and Roman times) was considered a rhetorical device with which, making use of words, you could bring something "vividly before one's eyes." That's how it was understood in the beginning. If you were a Greek boy fortunate enough to get some sort of educational tutoring, at some point you had to take a class on ekphrasis. If you were going to become a lawyer, you most definitely had to attend seminars on ekphrasis, for one day you would have to appear in court, with your client, in front of a judge, and, depending on the particular circumstances, you would have to describe: a brawl or an accident in the street, let's say; a breaking and entering case; a murder, perhaps; thievery at the marketplace; a fire, etc. . . something your client had

been involved in. And you, as lawyer, had to bring all those facts "vividly" before the judge's eyes.

This manner of understanding ekphrasis stood until about the third century CE (late antiquity), when a Greek philosopher, Philostratus the Elder, wrote a book called *Eikones*, meaning "images." In it he suggests that ekphrasis should be reserved exclusively to commenting and describing paintings, sculptures and statues—that's it. By considering ekphrasis in this fashion, Philostratus took this term out of its rhetorical home and introduced it into the world of art criticism. Philostratus could not have imagined that centuries later ekphrasis would migrate again, and become a literary term as well.

To reiterate, and with my *Giant* in mind, the standard contemporary definition of ekphrasis is: a verbal and literary representation (the written text of *Scene from the Movie GIANT*) of a visual representation (the moving pictures of the film *Giant*).

Finally, present-day ekphrasis is not limited to describing paintings, sculptures, and statues only. One can write poems on etchings, watercolors, collages, comic books, calendar pictures, canned goods labels, postcards, billboards, ties, T-shirts, rings, earrings and belt buckles (should they have some kind of recognizable design on them), and any image from advertising.

Some of the poems in Shaking Off the Dark *are in haiku form. I've read in an interview (Lee and Villanueva 2010) that what led you to compose them was reading Sergei Eisenstein's essay "The Cinematographic Principle and the Ideogram." I wonder if, when you wrote the poems in Scene, you also had that essay in mind, or perhaps other essays of film theory. It seems to me that some of the devices you employ in Scene (the frequent use of enjambments, the titles of some poems, several passages that seem to come directly from a script) reveal a certain awareness of film theory, especially as regards montage techniques.*

Some background: In the summer of 1972—after having finished my first full academic year as a doctoral student—I was teaching Expository Writing at Boston University, and

the head instructor had us read and discuss with the students, as one of the assignments, the aforementioned Eisenstein essay. I confess I'd not read it before, so it was quite an eye-opener for me—a revelation, quite frankly. After having read and discussed "The Cinematographic Principle and the Ideogram," and having subsequently bought a couple of anthologies of Japanese haikus and tankas, I felt inspired enough to write some myself, which appear, as you rightly point out, in my second book, *Shaking Off the Dark* (1984). But, no, it never did occur to me to go back and read said essay when I was writing the twenty-one poems of *Giant*. It never crossed my mind.

With the genre of ekphrasis you manage to incorporate the devices of one language (cinema) into another (the poem). It is difficult not to think about this blending of artistic media as connected to your ability to dominate different languages, and I see it as also linked to an existentialist take that defies essentialist binary oppositions. At the same time, do you think that employing ekphrasis somehow also underscores the specificity of each language, namely what the poetic word can do and the cinematic image cannot (and vice-versa)?

I believe your question has two parts, one dealing with the language spoken, and one dealing with the specialized language—that of cinema. Let me begin with the two languages that I express myself in: English and Spanish. One thing is to be bilingual, and able to get along competently in two languages by making oneself perfectly understood in different social circumstances. It's quite another to be bilingual and able to take these two linguistic systems to a literary level—to be resourceful enough to play with the language, to manipulate its syntax, and to act upon its morphology and phonetics in creative ways. What I'm suggesting is that writing literary texts in either language—English or Spanish—is quite the challenge, at least for me.

As for fusing poetic language with that of cinema, yes, I find it unique, but, in writing this book, it made sense to have done so; it couldn't have been any other way. At the moment I was writing the poems, I didn't realize I was fusing two languages. I was all too busy concentrating on each line, each stanza, from which, finally, emerged

a poem to some degree of satisfaction. You may consider these poems as having been written not in the essentialist mode, but in the existentialist spirit, to use your terminology. As the book progressed, I often held the thought that I was in uncharted territory; that I was a pioneer of sorts; that I was doing something no other American author had done, which was: to write a whole volume of poetry on a movie, or on a scene from one. Such realization was exciting, and it drove me on to keep writing.

The same seems to occur between English and Spanish. For instance, in "Tú, por si no otro" you use the word "duende" (Garcia Lorca's "duende"?), which is very difficult to translate into another language.

"Duende," yes, proves difficult to pin down with a definition. It's a pouring out of artistic inspiration, for sure. It's when a melody, a song, or a poem "has soul," I've heard it said. García Lorca said that it was "a mysterious force that everyone feels and no philosopher has explained."

Carl Phillips reads "Field of Moving Colors Layered" (2016)—your ekphrastic poem on an abstract painting by Alberto Valdés—as a political metaphor of assimilation that resonates with the migrant experience. He maintains: "these lines are very much about the tension between being oneself and assimilation, and also about the challenge of assimilating without having to be compromised." Do you find this interpretation in line with what your purpose? Does "Field" obliquely address the themes of exile and migration?

Some time ago, I did read Carl Phillips' understanding of my ekphrastic poem as it appeared in *Poetry* (March 2016). As you know, any critic or commentator is at liberty to interpret a work of art as they see fit. What ekphrasis allows the poet is a freedom to react to a work of art anyway (s)he chooses. Bear in mind that a work of art is a product of an artist's imagination. And to me it seemed as if these humanoid shapes in Alberto Valdés' painting were moving right to left. As you mention, it's an abstract rendering,

and so the field of blue on the left I arbitrarily called "the blue abyss." What's going to happen when they get there and fall into "the unknown?" Who knows. In short, I simply attempted to create a coherent narrative at the center of which are these figures in "wayward" motion. I have envoiced the painting, i. e., the writer of an ekphrastic poem gives the work of art a voice. Clearly, then, ekphrasis as a rhetorical device goes beyond personification and prosopopeia.

Finally, it must be obvious now I did not have in mind what Mr. Phillips observes in the painting and in my poem. As with any exercise of interpreting a work of art, be it a painting or a piece of literature, you get out of it what you bring into it.

This is just a curiosity of mine. I see some analogies between the way you crafted a cinematic ekphrasis, putting it in dialogue with time, history, and memory in Scene and some poems by Jorie Graham, especially "Fission," from Region of Unlikeness *(1989), which revolves around a screening of Kubrick's* Lolita*, interrupted by the news of J.F. Kennedy's assassination. Another poem (more a prose-poem, actually) where something slightly similar occurs is John Ashbery's "The Lonedale Operator" (from* A Wave*). I just wonder if you admire these contemporary poets and feel somewhat close to their sensibility.*

I wish I knew where I have my copies of *Region of Unlikeness* and *A Wave*. I have recently moved to a new apartment, and I still have many boxes to unpack . . . and sixty more in storage. It's ridiculous I can't find what I want when the need arises. But yes, I admire both of these poets. I once met Ashbery at the University of Texas - Austin (Fall of 1996), and I'm more familiar with his work. I don't write in any way like him, but I much admire his extraordinary ekphrastic long poem, "Self-Portrait in a Convex Mirror." The poem wonderfully blossoms on the page with an abundance of detail as it explores a painting by Parmigianino from this angle and that angle. I published a poem in 2008 dedicated to Ashbery in which I try to imitate his style. It's titled, "What We Mean by Barcelona." At the moment, it doesn't belong to any particular book.

Angelo Grossi |

Your next collection will be focused on the theme of the flâneur, the urban wanderer, while in your previous effort, So Spoke Penelope*, you chose as your alter ego Penelope, an apparently sedentary heroine, traditionally confined to a domestic role and to a reiterative routine. What is the link between these archetypal figures (if there is one)?*

It's beyond my ken as to what these thematic and artistic choices might mean and how they are linked together, other than to say, in the case of Penelope, her character in *The Odyssey* was so compelling that it drew me to her. Oftentimes it's not the author who chooses the topic to write about; it's the topic itself that chooses the author. With regards to Penelope, she can be viewed as an underdeveloped character in Homer's work, thus my aim was to flesh her out a bit so as to more fully comprehend her as wife, mother, and artist (she's a weaver). If *Scene from the Movie GIANT* (1993) is an ekphrastic book of poems, *So Spoke Penelope* (2013) can be considered a midrashic work. Here's the best definition I've found on midrash. "[Midrash] . . . fills in the cracks . . . puts flesh on the bones . . . reinterprets stories and characters . . . gives voice to those in the story who have no voice."

As for choosing to write a set of poems in the *flâneur* tradition, well, it's a subgenre of poetry that intrigued me when I first began reading Baudelaire years ago, the originator of this type of poetry. Much later I read, and am still reading Walter Benjamin's writings on Baudelaire. A *flâneur* poet is the walking around urban poet who observes his city, describes his city, he loves it, he critiques it, he engages it, he dialogues with it . . . and writes about it. I thoroughly enjoy *flaneuring* and observing the city I may be in, with hopes of something sparking my imagination. Once that happens, then begins the real task—the struggle with finding "the best words in the best order," as Coleridge said, in order to create a poem.

With your next book you are again joining a very cosmopolitan and universal literary tradition, which goes from Baudelaire to Robert Walser's The Walk*, from Poe to Hoffmann, and so on. What elicited your interest in the theme of flânerie?*

As I mentioned above, it was having read some of Baudelaire's poetry and prose poems that got me started down this path. And also reading a poem by Pablo Neruda called "Walking Around." I read this poem in the early 1970s, but I didn't know exactly why he was using an English title; I didn't know there was a *flâneur* tradition, much less that Baudelaire was its precursor. By the way, you may have noticed that there's no question I've addressed different themes along the way, especially if you consider into the mix, *Shaking Off the Dark* (1984) and *Primera causa* / *First Cause* (1999). They all treat different subjects and varied themes. In previous interviews I've stated I simply do not want to be known for having written one type of poetry. And then I say that in a hundred years I don't want to be known as having been a "one-trick pony."

If there is one theme that runs through your whole oeuvre, it's memory. In your poetry, memory often plays the role of a muse, but a tough one, a muse that requires a patient and somewhat stoical wait, a constant return to the blank page (your chapbook Primera Causa / First Cause *comes to mind, but also Penelope's work as metaphoric of your work as a poet). Will your next book also have memory as a central theme?*

True enough that Mnemosyne as muse has been a protagonist in my poetry ever since my third book, *Crónica de mis años peores* (La Jolla: Lalo Press, 1987) / *Chronicle of My Worst Years* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1994). But to be precise, the theme is not *memory* alone—it's *memory and writing*. At readings I feel inclined to explain that everyone in the audience possesses memory, but that writers take it a step further. . . they use it as a muse, as inspiration to write about those recollections.

As to your specific question, my sense is that memory will make an appearance in my *flâneur* poems, but minimally, I suspect, inasmuch as the *flâneur* or *flâneuse*, by definition, is absorbed by the drama and substance of the present moment, and, as such, busies himself/herself by registering those daily impressions which will give rise to the poems.

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Villanueva. He has completed the translation of a philosophical book-length study on the relationship between comedy and philosophy, *Comedy, Seriously* by Dmitri Nikulin, which will be published soon by Quodlibet. E-mail: angelo.grossi@hotmail.com.

Tino Villanueva is a contemporary American poet. Writing in both Spanish and English, at times sliding back and forth between the two languages, Villanueva writes poems exploring themes of memory, longing, and history. He is the author of several poetry collections, including *Hay Otra Voz: Poems* (1972); *Scene from the Movie GIANT* (1993), which won an American Book Award; and *So Spoke Penelope* (2013). He translated Luis J. Rodríguez's *La Llaman América* (1998), and his own poems have been translated into Italian, French, German, Portuguese, Greek, and Korean. The founder of Imagine Publishers, Inc., Villanueva has edited *Imagine: International Chicano Poetry Journal* and the anthology *Chicanos: Antología Histórica y Literaria* (1980). Villanueva received a Distinguished Alumnus Award from Texas State University-San Marcos. He has taught at Wellesley College, at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, and Boston University.

ELEGY FOR THE MEDITERRANEAN SEA

Ashna Ali

As of 2019, the estimated body count for migrant deaths in the Mediterranean Sea, the planet's most surveilled stretch of water, reaches up to 40,000. This makes it the deadliest crossroad in the world.

Ancient blue conflagration…
Boundless source of Ionian adventure
marking men for myth with pride,
sword, and fireside imagination.
Amphitheater of Poseidon's huff and puff.
Provider of moonlit daydream
and the tideswell of homecoming.
Crucible of contradiction. Pluriversum.
A planet for holiday breeze and stolen kisses,
guitars plucked in serenade for seashells
and laurel leaves carried in the pocket for luck.
Giver of wordless wisdom, cherrybark skin,
and brine. Your Ivory cowlicks winking through space
at your galaxy sisters, your Sunday satellite face.
Oh you primordial bubble of so much human church.
The bodies you hold and hold.

Your thankless sorcery of breath
from phytodetritus. Praise oh praise
the afterlife of green plunge
feeding fish mouths, tucking carbon fragments

for a million years into deep sea nestle
until they magic into oil, coal, shale.
All the stuff of human weakness
exploding into the rich sweet of breath.
Simple bounty chaining its offerings
to the planet for free. Human artstory.
You held us even when entwined with time.
The Neolithic Atlit-Yam as frozen
as the citizens of Pompeii. The bodies
you made scenes of. The bodies you let go.

Who was it that said to drown
is the most maternal of deaths?
Were these our words when we weaponized
your body into militarized mobility regime?
Held you down with the hands of invisible men?
Denuded you of mysteries for a life
perpetually watched by an army
of extraterrestrial eyes? Now your body
is daily dotted with the blink of lights
that bear the names of vessels:
the Welcome, the Unwelcome, the Destined
for Murder by Neglect. Your body a border
in swarm with blasted hope and fuel leak.
The story that dies inside the trawled remains
of the bodies of the unbeloved—the ones you hold
and hold until the bitter stings and you spit them
from your poisoned mouth. That's the thing about myth:
it is marked by its living long after the memory
has died. If we let you, you would have told us

a thing or two about ghosts. Instead we stare
through the space eye at your blue arms and legs
akimbo under navy night, your own eyes seared
forever open, unblinking.

Ashna Ali is a Brooklyn-based poet and serves as assistant professor of literature at Bard High School Early College Manhattan. Their poetry can be found in *Nat. Brut.*, *HeArt Online*, *The Felt*, *Bone Bouquet*, *No Dear*, *femmescapes*, and more. Their academic work is published or forthcoming in *Journal of Narrative Theory*, *minnesota* review, and *Intervensions*. They hold a Ph.D. in Comparative Literature from The Graduate Center, CUNY.

FULL FATHOM FIVE

Beatrice Carnelutti

My best friend could conjure up a storm of magic just by being present. She held the mysteries of this world in her palm and sometimes I had the privilege to be let in on the wonders that only she knew.

On a moonless night we were coming back from the club. We had asked a couple of strangers we had kissed to drive us to the beach, near the rocky cliffs. They didn't complain when we refused their company – they just left us there. We stepped out of the car, and started running towards the shore, her hand squeezing my forearm, her soft "I wanna show you something" melting into the waves that crashed against the rocks.

Then, she let go of me, and I lost her in the night. I couldn't see her, her dark hair, her dark skin, in the pitch black of 3 a.m.: it was as if she had condensed her whole self into a spirit that blew over the sea and dissolved into the north wind. I could only hear her voice in the air, and I felt like I had no choice but to follow it, my feet sinking in the cold sand, the cold sand turning into hard stone, and the hard stone turning into foam. I stood on the edge of a rock, calling out her name and hearing nothing but her laughter in return, rising from the water. I inhaled the salt air and abandoned myself to the wind that carried her voice, before jumping into the quiet and sinking under the waves – the silence pulling me down, the tide holding onto my waist. I kept sinking in the blue, the blue of high waters, the blue of late nights, the blue of my dress that kept puffing and flattening on my body, and the further I sank, the warmer the water got, until the gentle perpetual motion of the ocean lulled me into a bliss.

I don't know how long I was underwater before a hand, *ex machina*, brought me back to the surface, to a calm sea in the rosy hues of dawn, and dragged me onto a flat rock in a hollow in the cliffs. The spikes and shells cut my skin, and my watercolor blood gathered in the rock's cavities. It was then, in the cold breeze of the early morning, that I heard my name in my best friend's voice. I had been so worried she might have been

lost at sea, that I started pestering her with questions. Yet, she came closer and said nothing – not even a sign of relief on her face. "We're just in time!" she exclaimed, looking into the distance. I followed suit and was blinded by a lilac light emerging from the waves and gleaming in the rising sun.

A sense of uneasiness slowly started washing over me. I needed to leave, I needed to be on dry land, away from the water, when suddenly the air began to reek of seaweed and rot. I felt stranded, with no way out, and I was mad at my friend for leading me there, so far from home, and what for? Just to show me a violet sunrise?

I scanned the horizon, looking for a way out, and I urged my friend to leave, as my anxiety grew overwhelming. When it became clear that she wouldn't listen, I resolved to leave without her. I turned to the water, ready to jump and swim as fast as I could, when I caught a glimpse of holographic scales slithering just below the surface. Petrified, still staring, I cried out my best friend's name and held out my hand looking for hers: the rock where we were sitting was surrounded by mermaids, looking at us, smiling, waiting.

I grew up to tales of mermaids. Their voice is sweet like wine and honey, their songs a distant call from the land of heart's desire. They hold the beauty of everything you've ever wanted and the soothing grace of requited love. But the stories of my youth say that one should turn away from the sugar-baited words of mermaids, for their songs are full of empty promises; they hypnotize humans and, once they're in their thrall, they drag them to their death. Some myths recount that mermaids turn to stone when they can't seduce their victims, but have you ever heard of anyone resisting their call? When I was a kid, my grandmother would kiss my forehead and pray over my head that if I ever met a merfolk I would be strong enough to stand my ground and feel the presence of the earth, firm and steady, below my feet.

I wanted to kneel, cover my ears, and close my eyes, but before I could abandon myself to the terror of certain death, my best friend held my hand – still outstretched for hers – and pulled me deeper into the cave, where it was damp, dark, and sultry, and a

pungent smell of salt and decay hovered in the air. “Did you know about them? Why would you take me here?!” I cried as I curled up, feeling betrayed and powerless.

As a hopeless sadness carved a space behind my eyes, trickled down my throat and into my chest, my friend’s voice, gentle and deep, started echoing in the lair.

"One day when I was ten, I was playing on the beach, collecting shells and making up stories in my head – you know, the way kids do when they daydream of adventures in far away lands – when I heard a woman's voice calling me from the water. I turned towards the sea, and I almost couldn't believe the beauty of this woman… well, creature. See, I knew about mermaids, how they appear out of thin air and drag you to the depths of the ocean, but I couldn't run away; her voice had such a soothing sweetness to it, like the first ice cream after winter, melting on your tongue. I felt like I could have really been happy if, just once, I could have touched her hand. So I did. I stepped into the water, and it felt so warm, so cleansing. I tried to beat the resistance with long steps and powerful strokes, half walking, half swimming, as fast as I could. She didn't move, she just waited there, smiling the most welcoming motherly smile. On my last stroke, she caught my arm mid-air. I touched her hand, and I held it, but the longer I held it the more unreal and distant it felt, and the joy that I was sure was at my fingertips seemed to be withdrawing, moving further and further away.

And then I saw her skin turn greyish and crumpled, and her angelic smile molding into a devilish grimace. She opened her mouth and, through sharp, rotting fangs, she let out the loudest shriek that pierced my chest – I felt my heart breaking in half, as fear's icy flames flared up from my belly to my head. She clung onto me, her nails digging into my skin, and she plunged under the surface, dragging me deeper and deeper.

And the deeper we reached, the darker the water turned, until everything around us was black, and black was all I could see, and it was as if all that nothingness seeped through my eyes into my body and ate away at me, piece by piece, until there was nothing left.

In that desperate loneliness, I witnessed it all. I heard the magic voice that asks everything of you and blows conscience off its course, I felt the destructive force of water and seduction, and I saw how a quiet yearning can turn into a violent urge to the tune of a distant song. I touched the bottom of the maelstrom and dwelled amongst the dead, and from there I saw sea monsters swarming up to the surface.

One day – God only knows how long it had been, a few hours, a few weeks? – I woke up, naked and cold, on this rock. To this day, I still don't know why they let me go. The

hideous monster was there, next to me, back to its delightful form, waiting for me to wake up. It said that one day the merfolk would have claimed me back. In the meantime I would have had to go back to the shore everyday at dawn: I'd die a painful death if I were to turn into a mermaid away from the water." Then she started crying, uncontrollably, and among her tears she sobbed "the mermaid also demanded that on the day of my return I'd take one life as an offering to the sea."

It sounded like a slap across my face that left me dumb and startled.

"You're coming with me."

Before I could fully grasp the danger I was in, her voice turned into the most delightful melody that made a nest for itself at the center of my chest, soothing all my fears and longings, and all hints of resistance disappeared. Within my heart I felt a force that nudged me and affirmed "if the power of life and death is in the tongue, let her voice decide my fate, and let her song erase my memory, let this creature take me by the hand and lead me to the chambers of the sea."

We stood up and walked out of the cave, slowly, hand in hand, towards the water.

She jumped in the water first and from there outstretched her hand towards me – I held it tight, and I looked at her. It was then that the horror woke me from my drowse. Her eyes had turned black, her teeth hungry fangs, her neck crumpled with gills, and I could see a long tail swaying under the surface. I swiftly drew my hand back, but she grabbed my ankle and clawed her nails into my skin, dragging me into the water up to my waist, as her sweet siren's song turned into a banshee's cry. I tried to scream but no avail. No sound came out, and my whole body was numb with fear, but I held onto the rock with both my hands, with all the strength I had left.

As I was facing the heartbreak of losing a friend and myself, in that rock, I felt my grandmother's kisses on my forehead, like a balm on my skin. They say that prayers are bindings: they tie a knot with the veins around your heart and seal your soul to the intention of the plea. My grandmother spoke blessings and wove my name in them.

In that very moment, I remembered what it felt like to lie on a meadow, watching cherry tree branches swaying in the gentle April wind, feeling new grass, bumpy under my

back, fresh under my palms. In that very moment, I felt the earth, firm and steady, below my feet. And the more I sat with the memory of the earth – its strength, grace, and dirt – the stronger my arms and my body felt. I screamed "NO! NO! NO!" relentlessly, like a mantra that echoed in the back of my head and throughout the bay, as my fingernails started bleeding from holding onto that rock, I managed to drag myself and the mermaid – still hanging onto me – out of the water. Her hand suddenly hardened around my ankle and I heard the snap of my bone breaking in her fist. I went blind for a second, as the pain radiated from my foot to my head, and recoiled in my chest, where it exploded in a cry that emerged from my throat and ended in hers. We screamed in unison. I turned around and I saw her hand, grey and bumpy, petrified. I saw a grimace of pain disfiguring her face as I heard the sound of flesh being torn apart: her skin was breaking out in large bubbles and spikes that swelled until she lost what human features she had left. My best friend had turned to stone – rough, dark, rigid.

I was alive.

Cemented in the rock up to my calf, but I was alive, and out of the water.

Cemented in the rock up to my calf, bleeding and tired, I fell asleep.

By the time I woke up, the sun was already high.

Staring at the sky, my whole body itching with dry salt, I thought of the meadows, and the new grass, and the cherry tree branches swaying in the gentle April wind. I thought of the earth, firm and steady, far away from me. I thought of my grandmother, and her forehead kisses – I closed my eyes and I prayed to her.

"If I can't leave this rock and the sea, let the earth live through me. Let me grow roots that dig deep into the stone, into the floor of the silent sea, but let my chest grow tall, let flowers grow where my hair was, let me spurt branches and let me stretch them up, up towards the sky, up, up and away from the water, and let me sway in the gentle April wind."

Beatrice Carnelutti is an independent scholar who got duped into getting a Law Degree at the University of Milan and now researches and writes about literary texts and intellectual histories. Her interests range from American Studies to the Western Occult Tradition, from Women's Studies to popular culture.

THE BOOK OF EXODUS, OR HOW I CAME TO BE HERE

Megan Pindling

I like to imagine that I sprung up from the earth somewhere beneath the Unisphere in Flushing Meadow Park. The topography of Queens, the invisible, firm lines bisecting the borough are the lines drawn on the palm of my hands. If you cup your hands together so that the bases kiss and your fingers stretch out like grasping tree branches, you can hold the world in your hands, not on your back as Atlas was burdened to do. The world is written across my face, pumping blood from my heart to the rest of me.

I wanted to be able to point to a place on a map and say to myself, "there." Stick a red pushpin through the paper and into the wall. I took a DNA test, and yes, Africa, but the lines now are not the lines then, and so the surface of my map remains unblemished, and disappointment manifests as the clack of a keyboard.

What I have is an approximation of time and place and blank spaces that I have to fill in myself.

BEFORE 1800

My ancestors were fruitful. I don't mean in the Biblical sense, though that could apply. I mean that they were kind to the earth and the earth was kind in return. They weren't called African, because the word had not been written yet. Their Gods weren't all-knowing and singular, but legion and free.

1800

By 1800 my people had left from over there and come over here. I say, my people because I am desperate for some kind of ownership. I desire to own my history and the people who have been so removed. Ironic, that. And from the removed, a palimpsest people emerged, constructed through re-memory. Constructing a re-memory means collecting

a million little pieces in your hands knowing full well that some pieces will slip through your fingers and be left behind.

1825

My grandmother used to tell me, *We're not African-American you know*. A pause and then, *I am not an African-American*, she said as if to convince herself of a bottomless wish. *What are we then?* I'd ask. *We're Negroes*, she'd say smiling with all of her teeth. "African-American" was perhaps too heavy a burden. It frightened her to touch it, much less pick it up and carry it on her shoulders.

1850

I say I am West Indian because I am. There is no single island in the expanse of blue that I can point to and say, Look! There I am. The map on Ancestry.com lights up on the land where we touched down, no matter how briefly. Trailing dots of restless feet. To follow their path is to follow them everywhere. They crisscrossed across the blue so much, I wonder if they could walk on water. Or if I am descended from the Mami Wata and we travelled beneath the water instead. I can breathe underwater. I bite. There's more water than land, the spaces between the land are the true living waters. I don't mind the salt.

Jamaica, Barbados, Guyana, St. Maarten, Suriname, French Guiana, Trinidad and Tobago, Grenada, Dominica, Saint Lucia, Montserrat, Antigua, Virgin Islands, Puerto Rico, St. Kitts and Nevis, I am legion.

1900

My family built the Panama Canal with dynamite and bone. They dug into the land with their bare hands and made mountains with the displaced earth. The word isthmus rolls with pleasing resistance off of the tongue. And I know that the earth cannot bleed, even if it does in my nightmares, but did it hurt when they cut across the land to allow for the waters? Two great oceans forced to coexist.

1925

My great-great grandmother's name is Eugenia Montague. I believe she was a poet. I have no evidence of this. She came from one of the French islands: Martinique or Guadeloupe. And yet, Martinique or Guadeloupe are two of the only pieces of land that do not light up on my ancestry page. My grandmother insists, however, even though all we have of her is her death certificate. She gave birth to my great-grandmother Martha in 1920 and died in 1928. She was 30.

1960

When my grandmother was seventeen and three months pregnant with my mother, she looked up at the Unisphere, newly minted and gleaming, and tried to imagine living a world made of steel. People from all around the world descended on Flushing Meadow Park to see the world suspended. The Unisphere, commissioned for the 1964 World's Fair, is a representation of the Earth and not a reflection of it.

2000

The Unisphere seems a lot smaller now. It barely casts a shadow over the children playing in the pool that surrounds it. Children fill their water guns and water balloons from the fountain. They splash water on their faces, at each other. My mother groans. *The pool is decorative.* But I think that they are on to something.

Megan Pindling is a writer based in Queens, NY. She writes poems that aren't very poetic, literary criticism that is a little too poetic and is working on a novel which is absolutely terrifying. She is suspicious of words like "literary" and "genre" and is probably, more than likely, daydreaming at this very moment.

ARCHITECTURAL DESIGN (A NOVEL)

Robert Moscaliuc

ZERO

The man with the beard and the round glasses who sold luxury bags for a living said: "leave your history at the door when you enter." I complied and poured it all over the carpet that said WELCOME HOME.

I tried to see myself as the person whose home it was.

I saw the light in the living room through the eyes of an astronaut: emptied of dichotomies and air. Lightheadedness I often confuse with ecstasy. Freed from the color of my skin. Finally, free of my womanhood. Finally, the thought crossed the street bespattered with my brains, I am free to do as I wish with my body. Lay eggs for that matter, grow a long tubular tumor between my legs, flaunt it like a sword. Behold, I am the master of the earth, I may now treat this earth the way I handle the bodies of women: with the dexterity of cheap magicians who ask for volunteers at birthday parties.

I told the man: "look, the trees are dying, the polar bears are starving, the oceans are depleted. All these are withdrawing to a place from where none returns. *As we speak*, somewhere in the world, someone is performing unspeakable acts poisoning woods and waters." As He nodded to the rhythm of my list of atrocities, His features smoothed out and He became young again. A punk Jesus. He said: "I know, it's terrible. Can I offer you a drink or something?" I said: "NO, thank you, CAN'T YOU SEE," and the Man of all Men began to undress. I said: "JUST LIKE THAT, the ice caps are melting." To that, He said: "and my dick is getting hard. Let's not talk about global warming right now. There are more *pressing* matters at hand." He then grabbed my hand and placed it on His crotch. A smile of sorts blossomed on His lips. He said: "this place right here is hotter than global warming."

Repeat after me: first-confusion-and-then-clarity. Make this your mantra as you sit on top of your bed at dawn to holler at the world. At times it will feel as if you're reading through my madness, which does not have a face with dark circles under the

eyes. The body, a *home* in itself, comes first. Then comes the rage of missed opportunities, love lost in the big city, the failed attempts to secure a comeback, and everything else that keeps a body together. Ligaments, saliva, words said in anger, ice cream, and potatoes.

This our talent: to grab things and turn them to rot.

The Man with the beard said: DO YOUR JOB. I felt like laughing, instead, I went under the blanket, turned and tossed like a possessed woman, and spilled His truth over His pajama pants. Who on earth keeps his clothes on at such times? He fell asleep afterward. In His sleep, He said: "the future is not in the drones hovering above us." I hugged him and thought: my Man, the Prophet, my little Punk Jesus. He continued: "the drones flying above us do not carry the future on their fairy wings; the highest truth has already been reached in the past when we put armchairs in the air. The future is in the memory of it." I thought, oh be my husband, at least for now, while we're asleep and consume less resources.

I sang like this: I am my own mother, but also the mother of three, as you shall see, a small child, a solitary adolescent, and a full-grown man, with chest hair and all. History, my past, laid out in a graph like the seats in a stadium. I'll start with the child, born with the umbilical cord around his neck. I saw his suicide with my hands, slowly helped him as he descended into the pool of light below. A whiff of dust, then the hands of men taking him from me. Oh, how I wished to descend with him, guide him, show him the ways of men.

As I sang all this, I saw dust motes lit by sunlight, and I saw the weights He trained with on the windowsill, I saw His arms holding them and wondered whether He felt the same when He held me down, against the bed. In His sleep, He was implacable, adamant about the future. He would disappear soon, along with His nation, and His most significant contribution to this hotbed of ideas will have been His inability to see beyond His dick's length.

I am the woman who has been given the wings of an eagle to escape her former lovers. I am my own genitalia.

I cried, and I sang because I was no different: *oh*, the stadium where I was little and ashamed, put down on the grass for the first time, heavy men working above me, all of them *sweating*. I thought: is this an initiation ritual? By the time they were done, I had understood that the earth's inability to act, to react, to help me in any way, was indeed a form of revenge. Gravity was but a form of torture. It held the men down against my body.

I saw the tip of a needle pushing through the skin, stretching it to the point of rupture. On that skin, the faces of people spread, too, like soft butter on hardened bread.

I took my history back on my way out and left the Man with the beard in the doorway. He said: "let's see each other again." We hugged, I kissed him on the cheek, but the Man wasn't in it, and I was already somebody else. I'm very good at it. So, I walked up and down the street, hoping the world would not recognize me. That was the last time I saw Him and myself. Gravity did not bring us together again.

FIFTY-FOUR

[...]

I stopped to watch and hoped nobody would notice me. He paused, too, at my feet, like an accumulation of sediment on the sidewalk.

In time, I got better at it. Going unnoticed, that is, becoming invisible. The trick is to do what everybody else is doing.

A man with long blonde hair was sitting across the table from an unnaturally blonde woman who kept smiling at whatever the man was saying, his hands drawing movements into the air. I did the same. I followed my hands with his hands, and tucked my long blonde hair behind my ears, hoping, if only for a brief moment, that it will stay there forever. The mug in front of me was empty, the teabag still oozing juice. She had some drink left in her tall transparent glass, and I could smell the tinge of alcohol.

Watch this, watch me dance.

I was telling her about my art project because she seemed interested. She clung to every word with the despair of a damsel in distress. I was telling her about the pictures

and the three-dimensional filters I created explicitly for the photographs. The photos showed different body parts. A hairy armpit there, a leg here, a vagina even. She asked whose vagina it was. I told her it was the vagina of a girl I chatted with for a while on a dating site. There were pictures of my dick as well, seen from every possible angle. It has become incredibly easy to talk about my dick.

Well, not *every* possible angle, but still, there were plenty of them. There were more than one hundred pictures in the art project. She asked what the ratio was.

"You mean the ratio of the pictures?"

"No," she said, "were there more pictures of your dick than of her vagina?"

More dick pictures, I guessed. She raised her eyebrows, and for a moment, I thought how ugly she would turn out to be the morning after. How her face would look bigger than it really was and how we're going to have to cross long moments of awkwardness. How we're going to say goodbye to each other. Promising each other that we were going to keep in touch.

Watch this, watch me dance.

I switched places and felt my fingernails heavy with color as if they were conscious. I thought of touching my hair but then remembered the amount of work I had put into it and decided not to do that. Not that the guy cared, anyway, but it was part of my orchestrated composure. I mean, the guy was talking about his dick all the time, as if his dick was a god. He didn't mention it casually: his dick was the protagonist of an art project. Naturally, I felt curious about the project, because then I knew it was his dick and some woman's vagina that were featured in the collage.

I hoped he would invite me to see it, and I knew that he would, because that's what he was like. I could see it from the moment I had met him, at the bookshop, where I was fishing for an art album for a friend of mine. That's when he closed in on me, and the lights in the room suddenly dimmed, literally, he was towering above me, blocking the sun. He said something about the art album I was looking at, and I thought he was, in fact, talking to somebody else, so I didn't raise my eyes. He repeated it, and the way he said it seemed to dig into the texture of the day, pulling it, the way you would stretch a sweater when you take it out of the dryer. The way you would crush the fabric between

your fingers to test it, to make it feel worn down. I looked up, and around his head, I could see a halo of stray hairs and fluorescent light.

He told me he was an artist. I didn't feel like standing up from where I was crouching, the art album still in my hands, opened at page eighty-six. The page showed a black and white photograph of a woman's bare thighs. It wasn't sexually explicit. The picture was an accumulation of curved lines to the point where you couldn't tell whether it was a woman being photographed or the accretion of dark pigments materializing out of the latte-colored background. You couldn't tell what color it was, but the way the whiteness fermented underneath the surface of the photo made me think of pastel colors and milk foam. His hair was unwashed and tied into a ponytail, and I felt sorry for him, but I had gone for so long without human touch that he seemed good enough to me. I stood up; eventually, I must have, and I was able to look at him better. But for the rest of our time together, I felt as little as the woman in the photograph. An accretion of black pigments that turned out to be a woman. And he turned out to be a man. And what should a man and woman do except look for each other?

He followed me around, he stood behind me in line. He boasted about a book he had found, which was some rare book, and he had had the luck to find that rarity at discount price. I thought of telling him that he hadn't been lucky, that in fact, the bookstore must have lowered the price because nobody was willing to buy the book. I did not tell him that because I thought he would leave and never come back, and I wanted to feel desired. We exchanged phone numbers, and he promised to call me.

On the subway, while I held the art album close to my chest the way girls in American high school movies did, I thought of how badly I wanted to get rid of the book, about how the woman in the picture was always going to remind me of him, and the way he towered over me as if he was entitled to do it, as if, rightfully, he was himself. I thought of the looks we exchanged at the counter when I caught him staring at my ass. I felt this tiny black hole open up just beneath my stomach when he smiled boyishly at me after I caught him staring.

And there was that stare again, on the subway, lustfully vacant but filled with the intent of a child who thinks that if he stares long enough and intensely enough at an

item in a toy store, it will eventually become his. But there was that dying light in the sky again, and I looked at it and caught it vibrating uncannily, as if with life.

We will collide, I thought, myself and the men around me because that is what we expect of each other. And there we were, clashing over our drinks, stubbornly believing that what was happening inside were private matters, thinking we could abscond with our thoughts, hide them well enough to be able to say that we didn't mean what we've just said. And here was his face, this fishnet of human emotions, contracting with the waves going beneath and over it. When I asked him about the ratio of the photographs of his art project, something got caught in the fishnet, something as undesirable as a sea creature that doesn't count in the final weigh-in and has to be thrown back into the sea. I did my best to feign domesticity as if the feelings in his face went unnoticed. They had to go unnoticed because when I saw him waiting in front of the teashop, he looked like the best version of a man. It wasn't the long hair, which made him slightly feminine. As it wasn't the beard that appeared white in the sunlight that December morning. Instead, it was the way he waited.

His head pointed to the windows, at the man across the street, watching us. "Look at that weirdo," he said, and I instantly resented it. He was wearing a long dark coat and a green pair of trainers. I could see him clearly in the light, his face almost like my own, a fishnet of emotions.

Spit it out.

I had to move along because the two realized that I was looking at them. I tried my best to act as casual as possible, not seem out of place, but I knew my face will stay with them forever, and they'll be able to recognize me in a crowd. I had to find other things to look at. As I kept going down toward the heart of the city, I kept thinking of how much I'm looking at other people, of the sheer number of random strangers who had become a part of my mind's life.

When I got my first color printer, I went on a printing spree, printing photos of half-naked men bathing in the sun. But before all that, before the full-bodied men, I used to print pictures of men's underwear. I didn't want to see their faces, only the

underwear. Of all colors and sizes, laid out in an infinite sequence, and I wanted to be all of them.

Robert Moscaliuc teaches English and creative nonfiction writing at the University of Turin, Italy. He holds a Ph.D. in contemporary American literature from the University of Genoa, Italy. Along the years, he has conducted research in various fields including the ethics of fiction, the AIDS crisis of the 1980s in the United States, and representations of Italian culture in American literature and film. Among his most recent publications is an article entitled "The Proximal – Ancillary Coverage Continuum and the Discourse of the American 'War on Terror'," included in the volume *Harbors, Flows, and Migrations: The USA in/and the World* (Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2017). He has conducted part of his research at the City University of New York and the John F. Kennedy Institute, Berlin, as a visiting research scholar. He lives with his partner in Turin, Italy.

HIM

Asha Salim

He's like the dong at midnight
The storm after the quiet
The rain after the rainbow
Unreal, yet so true to me
He's confusion and illusion
He is the decision and the conclusion
Of my wonder round for love
Of my wonder round formore
Than silly words and finished thoughts
Than pretty faces and silent souls
He's the secret essence, I've been craving
He's a rose petal misbehaving
Found him at the finish line
Of my wonder garden
Took him away with me, as if it wasn't a problem
Where he came from
Or where his roots had been
As long as he would plant a seed in me
And we would grow our roses' tree
We complement so well
I fall short to understand
How a petal so small
Turned my winter wonderland
From freezing ice, and crystal floor
To a warm fire and nothing cold
From the madness of the hatter

To the madness of my heart

Mad, oh! If I a mad, madly! …

Thorn between what he is

And what I want him to be

Thorn between what it is

And what I think it should be

Lately it has become hard

I water this garden, with him being far

I try picking up the petals

But the wind is blowing hard.

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