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SEEPAGE: DEVELOPING AND CONSERVING GLOBAL LITERARY
ENVIRONMENTALITIES

by

CHRISTINE ANLICKER

Under the Direction of Randy Malamud, PhD

ABSTRACT

My dissertation identifies and compares the literary techniques that form narratives of environmentalism in Global Anglophone Literature, ecocriticism, environmental science, and environmental policy in the twentieth and the twenty-first century. I analyze the environmentalism afforded by these techniques in terms of their inclusivity and accessibility to a planetary democratic public using a method of critical analysis that is informed by postcolonial, ecocritical, queer, critical race, and democratic theorists. Due to the global, intersectional, coalitional, and democratic requirements of environmental justice, I selected literary texts to include as much of the planet as possible and to exclude texts with explicit environmentalist commitments. In order to address concern about participatory parity among diverse stakeholders,

I examined the environmental conversations that emerged between works by marginalized authors and more canonical literary texts. Each chapter considers the potential formation of environmental coalitions in the absence of critical precedent or common ground by grouping texts around a shared stake in a particular narrative form of environmentalism, environmental justice, and fictional literature: development, restoration, conservation, and preservation. I connect each form to distinct literary techniques and elaborate how these techniques organize reader interactions with environmentalism relative to historical, cultural, environmental, and scientific contexts. Each chapter evaluates different scales of environmental politics in the narratives based on the extent to which the narratives support the participation of individuals, groups, ecosystems, communities, nations and the planet in imagining environmentalism. I evaluate these imaginative spaces in terms of their accessibility as a site of political deliberation, their inclusion of relevant stakeholders, their conductivity to critical engagement, and their creation of parity among participants. My readings offer insight into participation as a concern of postcolonial and political ecocriticism. This dissertation provides evidence that the shared imaginative spaces engendered in novels and public art serve an ethical role in creating cultural conditions necessary for planetary democratic practices that pursue environmental justice.

INDEX WORDS: Ecocriticism, Twentieth-century literature, Twenty-first-century literature, Environmental justice, Narrative theory, Democratic theory, Participation, Environmental ethics

SEEPAGE: DEVELOPING AND CONSERVING GLOBAL LITERARY
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by

CHRISTINE ANLICKER

A Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in the College of Arts and Sciences

Georgia State University

2020

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2020

SEEPAGE: DEVELOPING AND CONSERVING LITERARY
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May 2020

DEDICATION

Mom, Dad, Katherine and Parker: thank you for supporting me as I've pursued this dream. Mom and Dad, by teaching me to treasure reading, to imagine a better world, to think critically and to pursue ethical goals in my life, you inspired this wonderful journey. Over the course of my degree program, I have experienced the good fortune of participating in a supportive intellectual community comprised of friends and colleagues too numerous to recognize individually. I drafted significant portions of this dissertation over many writing sessions during which my spirits were buoyed by the company of Jen, Jenn, and Darren. Thanks also to Stephanie, Meagan, and David St. John for sustaining my belief in the generative power of food, film, and friendly discussion.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	V
LIST OF FIGURES	VII
INTRODUCTION.....	1
SUBSISTENCE READING: QUEER ENVIRONMENTS OF MODERNITY	21
RESTORATION: CONFRONTATIONS WITH ABLEISM AND COLONIALISM.....	63
WETLANDS AESTHETICS: NAVIGABILITY AND ORIENTING CONSERVATION	112
PROBLEMS OF PRESERVATION: EPHEMERAL ENVIRONMENTAL PUBLICS AND THEIR GLOBAL NOVELS	152
WORKS CITED.....	188

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1 "Protestors," original image taken in Amsterdam, Netherlands. August 2017.	21
Figure 2 Original photograph of Cambren's mural "Monuments: We Carry the Dreams."	183

INTRODUCTION

“I’m telling you there is hope,” the acclaimed climate activist Greta Thunberg proclaimed outside the United Nation’s twenty-fifth Conference on Climate Change, a hope that Thunberg qualified: “But it does not come from the governments or corporations. It comes from the people, the people who have been unaware but are now starting to wake up. And once we become aware, we change” (Thunberg qtd. *Democracy Now*). The leader of the Fridays for Future movement and recipient of the Right Livelihoods Award continued: “People can change. People are ready for change. And there is the hope, because we have democracy. And democracy is happening all the time, not just on Election Day” (Thunberg qtd. *Democracy Now* n.p.). Thunberg, who has become one of the most prominent voices in global climate change activism, emphasized the power of the people participating in an environmental public to drive changes to social policy—a point that resonated with the words of other protesters who assembled outside the conference. The direct democracy that Thunberg references requires the participation of its people in the processes of deliberating collectively about policy decisions. This form of democracy contrasts with the proceedings within the United Nations’ COP 25, which provided a platform for the corporations and governments referenced by Thunberg. Democratizing environmental politics is an urgent issue that requires increased understanding of the constitution of public participants.

My dissertation, *Seepage: Developing and Conserving Global Literary Environmentalities*, examines the aesthetics of fictional literary narratives according to the organizational criteria of direct, participatory democratic environmentalism. My dissertation adds to the ecocritical field by focusing on the unique configuration of participants crucial to democratizing processes as they relate to planetary environmental politics. Through readings of individual novels in counterpoint to environmental policy, it supports an understanding of fictional literature’s engagement of reader participation and argues that these collaborative forms

of imaginative engagement are uniquely suited to encouraging collaborative and non-coercive practices of public deliberation on environmental policy.

I conceptualized this dissertation as an extension of Dipesh Chakrabarty's command to postcolonial scholars: "globalization and global warming. All thinking about the present has to engage both" (1). Climate change and globalization encompass most realms of thinking—whether the thinkers would recognize their surroundings or not. The patterns of weather conventionally referred to as climate change have inspired more than contemplation during the last century: social movements, government operations, and global financial systems are responding to changes into collective environmental relationships. This dissertation identifies and analyzes the aesthetics of environmentalism. I explore forms of imaginative practice particular to narrative fictional literature. From an intersectional position, I connect aesthetics to the creative agency through which individuals support one another in democratic and just environmental communities. In doing so, I problematize the "we" who comprises environmental communities in order to re-imagine the activity of novels as participating in creating conditions of creative agency in the environmental life in a planetary democratic public.

My dissertation analyzes the environmental ethics of literary techniques by comparing the narratives of literary fiction, environmentalism, and environmental justice. It extends the field of ecocriticism by addressing the saliency of public participation and deliberative democratic procedures to environmentalism that pursues environmental justice. My focus on the significance of public participation in political deliberation to environmental justice complements the work of Jane Bennett, which tethers its ecology of distributive agency in public life to "vibrant matter and lively things" that "act as quasi agents or forces with trajectories, propensities, or tendencies of their own" (Bennett viii). Bennett summarizes vital materialism's

political goal as being “not the perfect equality of actants, but a polity with more channels of communication between members” (104). Given Bennett’s assertion “that the appropriate unit of analysis for democratic theory is neither the individual human nor an exclusively human collective but the (ontologically heterogenous) public coalescing around the problem,” I consider the hermeneutic and imaginative potential of the participant as an alternative to agent, subject, or citizen (108). Practices of environmentalism mobilize and conceptualize competing ideas of environmental justice. Environmental politics should be democratic because environmental justice is intertwined with processes of democratization that seek to remedy global inequality. As a category of political organization, democracy corresponds to multiple models, all of which are not necessarily compatible with a planetary social organization that practices environmental justice.

As the purpose of this dissertation is not to assess the validity of democratic models of environmental politics—such surveys already exist—my overview of democratic theory in this introduction should primarily serve to situate the premises that propel my analysis of environmental politics mobilized through engagement with different examples of fictional literature. Like Thunberg, I emphasize the necessity of forms of democratic organizing that are direct, participatory, deliberative, and agonistic to environmentalism that is just and robustly democratic. Direct or deliberative democracy differs from representative and liberal conceptions of democracy by emphasizing the inclusion of those affected by political decisions in the processes of deliberating (Diani and della Porta 240). Unlike representative democracy, where “citizens elect their representatives and exercise control through the threat of their not being reelected at subsequent elections” and features “decision-making concentrated at the top,”

decision-making in direct democracy is “decentralized and emphasizes that decisions should be taken as near as possible to ordinary people’s lives” (240).

The legitimacy of democratic social organization hangs upon “the ability or opportunity to participate in effective deliberation on the part of those subject to collective decisions,” which political theorist John Dryzek emphasizes necessitates that individuals also possess the ability to opt out of deliberations” (1). Outcomes of deliberations must “be justified to these people in terms that, on reflection, they are capable of accepting. The reflective aspect is critical, because preferences can be transformed in the process of deliberation” (Dryzek 1). Thus, deliberation is a social process, that occurs in the public domain, in forms of communication. For communication to be deliberative, participants should be “amenable to changing their judgements, preferences, and views during the course of their interactions, which involve persuasion rather than coercion, manipulation, or deception” (Dryzek 1). In keeping with the requirements of democratic practice that emphasize the value of contestation, democratic theorists disagree regarding the precise definition of communication, with some theorists proscriptively defining the content and genres.

In keeping with the democratizing front of ecocriticism, Stacy Alaimo has proposed the property of trans-corporeality and the importance of citizen-scientists in allowing the people of democracies to understand communications pertaining to issues of environmental governance. In *Bodily Natures*, Alaimo advocates for arming citizens with scientific knowledge so that they can “trace the flow of substances and forces between people and places,” which provides the mechanism for conceptualizing un-bounded trans-corporeal materiality as the principle instrument in a system of ecological accountability (54). Awareness of trans-corporeality is undoubtedly one tool that would aid citizens in deliberating about environmental matters. Yet,

Alaimo's tight focus on epistemology and the role of the citizen implicitly invites further consideration. In this dissertation, I will draw attention to how responsibilities associated with participation in democratizing environmental politics and the environmental politics of democratizing communities seep beyond the intellectual system of epistemology and the discursive position of citizen. As the previously mentioned example of the protestors suggests, environmental policy operates through the production of affective discourses, and its communications require forms of including and guaranteeing participatory parity of divergent groups of environmental stakeholders—a participatory position that cannot be reduced to the citizen, equated with any national subject or other political identity group.

I deploy Dryzeck's one condition of communication: that it "induce reflection upon preferences in non-coercive fashion," which "rules out domination via the exercise of power, manipulation, indoctrination, propaganda, deception, expressions of mere self-interest, threats (of the sort that characterize bargaining), and attempts to impose ideological conformity" (2-3). Dryzeck's description of the functional attributes of deliberative communication allows for the consideration of literary aesthetics in terms of their support of environmental deliberation.

By focusing on the relationship between environmental justice and fictional literature, my dissertation builds on Rob Nixon's 2011 study of non-fiction narrative as a form of allocating representative power to marginalized, postcolonial subjects in *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor*. Nixon considers writer-activists who use their privilege "to give life and dimension to the strategies—oppositional, affirmative, and yes, often desperate and fractured—that emerge from those who bear the brunt of the planet's ecological crises" (23). I share Nixon's concern with the communicative properties of certain narrative aesthetics and build on his understanding of their role in non-fiction opposition to structural violence in my

consideration of fictional literature as an opening of the participatory field in environmental politics. I compare the environmental politics of novels and critique them according to values of inclusivity, accessibility, and participatory parity from an intersectional position. Alongside this critique, I introduce evidence that shows imaginative agency's significance to the ethical practice of democratic and just planetary environmentalism.

Environmental degradation and climate change pose different problems for a diverse global society and strain theoretical and practical democratic models of political organization to such an extent that a deliberative approach might seem naively idealistic. In 2007, Nancy Fraser reflected on a trend in democratic theory expressing concern regarding the legitimacy of the theory of deliberative democracy relative to political concerns in the twenty-first century. Fraser's concern proceeded from a feminist position to highlight limitations in the theorization of the public sphere, which was "conceived as a space for the communicative generation of public opinion" through processes that must be "inclusive and fair" and which should "discredit views that cannot withstand critical scrutiny and to assure the legitimacy of those that do" (7). With political concerns frequently exceeding the limits of the nation-state or dividing the citizens within a nation-state, a theory of political organization contingent upon the geo-political territory of the sovereign state lacks critical efficacy. Fraser argued that the integrity of a democratic society depends on the inclusion of interested parties in the public sphere's processes of decision-making as well as in the governing state's mobilization—or perceived mobilization—of their will (7). Although thirteen years have passed since this article's publication, we continue to lack public spaces, institutions, and infrastructures necessary for supporting the participation of culturally diverse and distant members of a planetary public in deliberating planetary issues such as environmental degradation. Fraser finds serious impediments to deliberative democracy

serving as a viable social model in that form of government's reliance on "bounded political community" and its elision of the public of democratic society with the citizenry of a geopolitical nation-state. My readings support Frasers critique of the public by advancing an intersectional inquiry into the imaginative practices of democratic participation that have been adopted by planetary environmental publics. Fraser's original article, however, expressed concern about the "the enhanced salience of the visual within culture, and the relative decline of print and the literary" (19) given "the assumption that a public sphere rests on a national vernacular literature, which supplies the shared social imaginary needed to underpin solidarity" (18).

My dissertation demonstrates how different literary strategies of fiction invite critical reflection, a condition requisite of participation in the public of planetary environmental life, by analyzing their generation of deliberative and direct democratic practices. Formal conventions of novels engender reader participation in imaginative practice as environmental coalitions by supporting and mobilizing environmental imaginations through aesthetic infrastructure. The critical and creative practices engendered through novels encourage what the political theorist Jeremy Gilbert describes as "ground-up democracy", which, unlike the liberal model, requires "modes of discussion and decision making" that are "egalitarian" and "highly participatory" (90). Disciplinary norms and literary ethics develop, sustain, and critique the creative agency that constitutes the environments conducive to participation in public life.

My dissertation examines environmental problems on global, regional, local, and individual scales before pivoting to speculate on the planetary as a scale of critical inquiry. My multi-scalar approach reflects the problem of Anthropogenic climate change. Climate change and the Anthropocene share the feature of describing a global problem deriving from modern lifestyles in the developed world. Controversy continues to surround usage of the term

“Anthropocene.”¹ In an article addressed to the scientific community, Paul Crutzen deployed “Anthropocene” in 2002 to indicate the emergence of human activity as a dominant force in shaping the geological record.² However, Crutzen notes that the Anthropocene follows from “effects [that] have been caused by 25% of the population [of earth]” but that have serious implications for the entirety of the biosphere, which includes all of the planet’s life-systems (23). In “mainstream” manifestations, the Anthropocene registers threats to the way of life that we in the global north presume as our right as inhabitants of modern civilization. While I engage the nomenclature in subsequent chapters, I prioritize the experience of environmental problems as occurrences in quotidian life and draw attention to conflicts with institutional histories. By emphasizing the latent environmentalism in daily activity, my readings should encourage reflection on the ways environmental responsibilities are imbricated in familiar tasks.

As is customary in research projects in many fields, my dissertation identifies limitations in existing material written on its subject matter in order to illustrate how this project contributes to the conversation. I point out limitations not to pillory or denigrate a particular discipline or methodology but, rather, to demonstrate specific points where literary modes of inquiry afford different, complementary, and necessary perspectives on an issue that might seem more obviously suited to scientific analyses of subject-matter experts. Consider Dipesh Chakrabarty’s observation that “scientific literature on global warming thinks of humans as constitutively

¹ For an example, see *Capitalism in the Web of Life: Ecology and the Accumulation of Capital*, in which Jason Moore finds the word “profoundly misleading” and argues for replacing it with “the Capitalocene” (2) while in *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene*, Donna Haraway coins “the Chthulucene” to express the imperative of recognizing multi-species kinships and justice.

² In “Geology of Mankind,” Crutzen, describes the “human-dominated” Anthropocene as “supplementing the Holocene” (23).

one—as species” (2). While Crutzen calls for “large-scale” international cooperation to achieve “appropriate human behavior at all scales” through “environmentally sustainable management,” those interested in the pursuit of environmental justice would do well to confront the historical role of inequity in modifying the norms of appropriate environmental behavior (23). While I share Crutzen’s concern about the current exploitation of the planet, increased regulation of behavior by a centralized authority will be unlikely to address the confounding effect of systemic problems of injustice. Environmental lifestyles operate according to the framework of intersectionality, and responsible behavior is relative to class, nationality, gender, (dis)ability, and race. Publics convene themselves through processes of environmental synthesis, yet the practice of environmental governance marginalizes and oppresses certain populations. Thus, in addition to confronting the issue of resource management, climate change intervention must be pursued through increased support of publics as responsible participants in a democratic environmental campaign. Throughout this dissertation, I investigate and critique ethical frameworks featured in environmentalist thought, such as utilitarian, eco-centric, and communitarian systems.

An environmental campaign becomes legitimately democratic by enabling interested members of the public to act as responsible participants. Thus far, such support of publics being included in deliberation has been all but absent from policy discussions. At a 2017 meeting of the Arctic Council, the Swedish Foreign Minister Margot Wallstrom of Sweden reportedly personified the planet: “I wonder about what the planet would say if she had a seat at the table” (Yardley n.p.). The Foreign Minister continues this fiction by adopting the planet’s miffed perspective: she has been a “friend” since the “Industrial Revolution” who has shared her riches with us without submitting an “invoice” (Yardley). While the minister acknowledges the

extensive history of resource exploitation, the personification reduces environmental relationships solely to Anglo-European economies. Wallstrom's ethical imagination exceeded, by far, that of the former United States representative Rex Tillerson, who reportedly acknowledged "ecological change" but not human activity's significance in the forces driving climate change. Committing to a response that furthers *only* the interests of the United States, Tillerson's comments highlight the necessity of considering how climate change, global warming, and environmental degradation legitimate radically different political and governmental strategies of conservation, sustainable development, and preservation. The Arctic Council demonstrates the practical need for considering social and environmental justice as circulating in ways that are discontinuous with geo-political territories.

I compare literary techniques with environmental technologies and environmental policies. As an emerging political discursive field, the Anthropocene compels critical theorists rearticulate environmental thought's situation relative to social organization. Thing theorist Ian Hoddard associates an expansion of administrative power with the view that "the whole environment (in the Anthropocene) is itself an artifact needing care, fixing, and manipulation" (33). Rather than acquiescing docilely to the Anthropocene's compulsion towards total objectification of the planet, the novels and literary techniques considered in the following chapters re-imagine environmental care as ongoing and non-coercive processes, practices, that occur in the daily actions and interactions of participating reading publics. Natural resources, infrastructure, ecosystems, and public art as things or objects emerge in counterpoint with social processes, practices, and procedures of "environmentalizing," which I argue are necessary to imaginative engagement in planetary democracy. I consider how elements of content and form afford environmental practices. These practices of creative and imaginative agency should be

attuned to value systems that oppose the impetus of a “modern world” that, in striving to “use things sustainably and responsibly, to care for things,” expands hegemonic systems of “management and control, of animals, plants, landscapes, resources, and humans” (Hoddard 33). Through comparison, I identify different modes of environmentalizing: development, restoration, conservation, and preservation. Theories of narrative aesthetics, democratic practice, and political theory create social conditions that have supported the cultivation of distinct modes of conceptualizing environmentalism. Critical engagement with narrative infrastructure exposes how obstructions, excesses, circulation, and coalescence of narration allow creative space for “other possibilities of apprehension” that will create imaginative conditions for the apprehension of “something about what or who is living but has not been generally ‘recognized as a life’” (*Frames of War*, Butler 12). Environmental thought and practice take place within and are capacitated by racist, colonialist, and misogynist systems of thought and socio-political structures. This dissertation undertakes the task of exposing points of exclusion, oppression, and domination in the conceptualization of environmentalism.

Butler links generic norms of life to a public’s recognition of its obligations to craft policy that addresses “such issues as shelter, work, food, medical care, and legal status” and that extend beyond the territorial boundaries of nation-states (13). Environmentalism’s connection to collective thriving seemed to become one such norm with Wangari Maathai’s receipt of the Nobel Peace Prize in 2004 for her environmental political activism with the Green Belt Movement. At the time of the award, the committee noted that it seemed to have “broadened its definition of peace” to reflect the threads connecting the protection of the environment, the distribution of resources, and the functioning of democratic societies that respect human rights (Nobel Prize). Maathai’s award directs our attention to connections between nature (in this case,

trees), the functioning infrastructure of a stable society (forests that prevent soil erosion, among other effects too numerous to catalogue here), and the pursuit of justice.

Speaking in 2016 on the “2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development,” former United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon notes “The link between peace, development and human rights is most clearly apparent where nations are in turmoil. But, it is also evident when we look in our own back yards.” Following the Secretary-General’s observation, I consider how fictional narratives without explicit environmental ideologies configure the environment as a participant and support for participants in daily life. In considering the common and distinct environmental politics enacted in concert with ecocriticism, postcolonial studies, and infrastructuralism specific to the Anthropocene, this dissertation will contribute to a relatively small but increasingly crucial area of study. I call this crucial for several reasons. First, because the phenomena and denomination of the Anthropocene remain hotly contested by “popular” and “scholarly” discourses. Second, the utility of literary studies in addressing a biological problem does not seem evident to the general public. Third, little existing research considers the implications of the Anthropocene for infrastructure development from a postcolonial perspective.

This dissertation primarily focuses on environmental attention that is mobilized through infrastructure. My understanding of infrastructure follows Laurent Berlant’s redeployment of the term by examining infrastructure forming narrative conditions of environmental responsibility, which I introduce in chapter one. Given that “infrastructures are finite forms with boundaries and limits” (Rubenstein 582), certain lives take place beyond those limits. As such, the positions of democratic theory and environmental justice necessarily require critique of infrastructure relative to inclusivity, accessibility, efficacy, and participatory parity. Although certain infrastructures of the modern state might not be necessary to sustaining biological life; aesthetic

forms provide infrastructures for the emergence of democratic participants. Thus, infrastructure is tied to the distribution of agency.

A project that addresses the issue of “global” and “world” literatures as they pertain to democratic practices must consider the risk that its critical position will erase difference and exacerbate forces of marginalization in ways that undermine the ethical values of environmental justice. I emphasize points of difference as constitutive priorities of democratic practices and will not attempt to sublate all critical arguments within a homogeneous environmental public. However, a concept of world literature problematically presupposes an existing homogeneous culture representing the literature of equally participating cultural communities. My dissertation follows Gayatri Spivak’s lead in thinking about world literature as a “persistent task for the experiencing being” (*An Aesthetic Education*, Spivak 460). If “world” indicates the assumption of a collectively inhabited reality, external to the experiencing being, then the world of Global Anglophone literature should be imagined otherwise or risk the continued globalization of the Anglo-European human as universal subject.³ My readings consider the “task” of world literature by emphasizing the participatory nature of environmental politics supported by the narratives of the novels. From the perspective of literature as task, we are able to gain insight into the constitutive role of aesthetic work in democratic participation. My dissertation re-weaves relationships between literary texts in order to engender further thought about the different participatory modalities afforded by the political infrastructures of habitats, nation-states, and other geo-political scales of comparison.

³ Literary theorists currently use multiple definitions of “world”, as Ruth Ronen Ryan notes in *Possible Worlds in Literary Theory* (97).

Following Spivak's use of the term, being "global" locates the object in question within the field of capitalism (*Aesthetic Education* 338). From this vantage, the objects studied as world literature can only be texts circulating in the global market. As this market prioritizes the cultural aesthetics of an audience largely located in the Northern Hemisphere, such a definition of world literature confronts the problem of disregarding the significance of literature that does not appeal to this particular audience. Spivak proposes the planet as the "catachresis" for inscribing "collective responsibility." To recognize planetarity, we must collectively and continually reimagine practices of recognizing social connections relative to our diverse environmental conditions. Thus, education and aesthetics must be engaged in shifting reading practices towards a deeper and more expansive frame of accidental neighborliness. In order to follow this script, we must learn to think the modes of relating in collective life beyond the extant structures of a state. Rather than civic engagement, we must think of our planetary engagement as creatures responsible for conserving a shared habitat with no presumable original state.⁴

Postcolonial studies, indigenous studies, and ecocritical critical practitioners have, in the past, come into conflict. The ecocriticism of first wave environmentalism idealized a concept of an original, pure state of nature that omitted the existence of societies and ways of life prior to (and co-existing in conflict with) European colonization.⁵ William E. Connolly observes in his

⁴ According to the *OED*, "Conserve," in some instances denotes "to guard" and "to preserve or store, esp. for later use." Notably, "conserve" and "preserve", also describe the process applied to fruits and vegetables to keep them from spoiling. Although most individuals would never confuse eating a strawberry preserve with eating strawberries, Western society persists in conceiving a nature preserve as nature itself.

⁵ Ursula Heise describes how environmental preservation efforts undertaken in the global North foreclose communities of the global South in "Globality, Difference, and the International Turn in Ecocriticism" while Rob Nixon addresses the "rhetoric of purity" and imperialism in "Environmentalism and Postcolonialism" (235).

2017 monograph on the politics of global environmentalism that, despite some efforts to remedy this divide, in practice, the long history of “holes and blindness” continue to impede the fields (155). Connolly observes that “intellectual exchange is needed, or better, overdue. Euro-American and postcolonial ecostudies must inform each other” (157).

Democratic theorizing of the global environmental movement has introduced the form of “planetary” as a catalyst for social engagement. Spivak suggests we pursue “an imperative to re-imagine the subject as planetary accident” by treating “collective responsibility as right” (*An Aesthetic Education* 339).⁶ In other words, we should not limit understandings of social meaning and justice to a selfhood constituted through self-recognition and the exercise of individual freedom. Spivak invites us to abandon the *ipseity* that Jacques Derrida identifies with the US model of democracy, which has embedded the subject of rights within coercive strategy as “‘I can,’ or at the very least the power that *gives itself* its own law, its force of law, its self-representation, the sovereign and re-appropriating gathering of self” (*Rogues* 11). Imagining ourselves as “accidents” suggests that we simultaneously abandon the notion of political meaning as being produced in recognition of an autonomous and rational self. Judith Butler argues for “rights of protection and entitlements to persistence and flourishing” through apprehending “a new bodily ontology” (*Frames of War* 2). I consider how literature in particular supports the kind of paradoxical imaginative action necessary for collectively imagining a (common) planet supportive of other, divergent ways of life and for creating social conditions supportive of agential participation in collective life.

⁶ I do not use the terms “planet”, “globe”, and “world” as interchangeable concepts. I follow Spivak’s use of “globe” to refer to the inscription of the international world within the system of capitalist exchange (*An Aesthetic Education* 338). “World” refers to the phenomena of perceiving oneself as a being in relation to an exteriority...it is socio-politically situated (see Spivak *ibid.*).

I draw my account of literary fiction's democratic environmentalism from novels that were written in English during the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Each chapter focuses on two primary works of literary fiction. In these fictional works, I consider a selection of literary techniques and form in terms of how they enable thinking about cultural norms of environmental care on continuums of preservability, despoliation, conservability, or sustainability. Fictional literature supports and acts as an accomplice to the roguish critical reflections necessary for imagining planetary responsibilities through narrative strategies such as focalization, duration, narrative voice, and narrative diegesis support, control, exclude, and extinguish particular possibilities of environmental stewardship. Alongside narrative strategies, the disparate environmental publics of these novels form at times through paratexts and in deliberation of myth, legend, and reality. In recognizing that *we* enact environmental publicity through inclusion in and access to particular aesthetic disciplines, cultural communities, identity groups, and governmental regimes, we might learn to engage more critically with those norms to re-imagine environmental values to support the agency of others.

I examine how these fictional works support, confound, and filter the accretion of disparate publics through a particular narrative's incorporation of environmental concern. As a result, the fictional publics that assemble in anticipation and in response to these novels correspond with different regimes of environmental power that, while at times embroiled in matters of governmental legitimacy or national ethos, correspond just as frequently to environmental politics of race, gender, class, and bio-region. Narrative fiction like Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* compares the Congo's dark depravity with that of Britain prior to Roman conquest. After questioning his listeners' ability to grasp his story's meaning, Marlow attributes their imaginative limitation to the daily experience of "stepping delicately between the

butcher and the policeman, in the holy terror of scandal and gallows and lunatic asylums” (49). The character faults the social environment created by modern institutions with impairing his readers understanding: they cannot comprehend the meaning of his tale because they inhabit an environment where social behavior is (in)capacitated by infrastructures. Marlow somewhat pessimistically suggests that his listeners cannot imaginatively inhabit an environment untethered by these social supports and, therefore, lack the capacity to realize his story’s significance exceeds the details of its plot. Although I do not engage with *Heart of Darkness* at length in this project, Conrad’s tale illustrates the pervasiveness of environmentalism in literary fiction and exemplifies the literary concern with institutionalized environmental management, infrastructure, and ethical relationships that this dissertation examines.

Each chapter of this dissertation addresses different vectors of participatory possibility that emerge at intersections of environments by focusing on the relationships of identity politics and democratic forms of life to issues of environmental caretaking. Chapter One examines the development of resource management as a facet of government and political identity in Virginia Woolf’s *To the Lighthouse* and Yvonne Vera’s *The Stone Virgins* to consider the configuration of class and nation in who sits at the table in political deliberation. Chapter Four focuses on the foundational effects of infrastructures relative to planetary publicity in *Swing Time*, a novel in which Zadie Smith exposes the fabrication of subjectivity. Her autodiegetic narrator—paradoxically—reveals the infrastructural forms of action. Chapter Four shifts from critique to speculate about planetary identity as it relates to recognition and citizenship.

I compare how narrative strategies of organizing time in Yvonne Vera’s *The Stone Virgins* and Virginia Woolf’s *To the Lighthouse* critique the institutionalization of environmentalism as a power of government legitimating the nation-state’s political economy. I

examine how each novel responds antagonistically to the institutionalization of national natural resource management and its organization in terms of chrononormativity through distorting the narrative effect of predictable space-time. By leaving space for different modes of experiencing a collectively inhabited environment, *To the Lighthouse* invites environmental consideration along ethical lines. According to its own social and environmental exigencies, *The Stone Virgins* resists the coherence of a grand historical narrative by allowing Nonceba's story to remain her own rather than be absorbed into that of the newly formed nation. Although the archivist Cephas thinks, "A new nation needs to restore the past," Vera's narrative challenges the plausibility and ethics of requiring a return to a consensually agreed upon past as the basis of a nation (Vera 184).

After considering the development of governmental power through resource management in Chapter One, in Chapter Two I examine the challenge of accessibility by focusing on urban infrastructure. Accessible infrastructure is a necessary part of democratic public life that comprises the "technological structures we rely on all day every day in the modern world" ("Infrastructure: An Introduction"). Chapter Two examines gender and (dis)ability in political movements in the thematization of restoration in James Joyce's *Ulysses* and Michael Ondaatje's *Anil's Ghost*. I demonstrate the saliency of queer disability theory to environmental criticism. My readings draw attention to how the literary construction of disabled bodies treats those characters as narrative infrastructure enabling national and trans-national state-power over environmental conditions. By comparing the return of Ananda to artistic practice in *Anil's Ghost* with the unnamed sailor's ongoing vagrancy in *Ulysses*, my comparative analysis provides evidence qualifying how the rehabilitation of a character's disabled body is effectively exploitative. Rather than creating conditions conducive to their participation in public life and

that increase the accessibility of public environmentalism, their treatment in both narratives validates stereotypes of norms that govern relationships between human bodies and environmental conditions. My comparative readings engage with ecocritical scholarship by illuminating the ethical necessity of thinking about environmental justice in restorative terms that attend to marginalized and dehumanized lives. Although activists and scholars in disability studies frequently confront environmental injustice, collaboration has been infrequent, and, in some cases, environmental advocates and activists have perpetuated ableist frameworks.⁷

Chapter Three returns to the issue of participation by contrasting the exclusionary environmentalism of William Faulkner's *Big Woods: The Hunting Stories* with the open invitation for participation in environmental coalitions that Jesmyn Ward's *Sing, Unburied, Sing* extends to its readers. In Chapter Three, I consider the construction of race, class, and indigeneity particular to environmental politics by placing *Sing, Unburied, Sing* and *Big Woods* in conversation with conservation law to navigate the narrative ethics of wetlands ecosystems, race, and gender. I indicate the necessity of Kimberlé Crenshaw's intersectionality theory to environmental justice by evaluating wetlands conservation in terms of inclusivity and participatory parity. This chapter argues that Ward's novel uses the genre of legendry to critique the historical narrative of prison as an infrastructure of social conservation. While I find that Faulkner's narrative environmentalism falls short of participatory parity, I suggest that Ward's

⁷ Sarah Jaquette Ray and Jay Sibara introduced their edited collection on the prospect of an "ecocrip theory" by noting the indifference of scholars working on corporeality and slow environmental violence to the work in disability studies based in "the contingency between environments and bodies" (1). Allison Kafer has noted that ecocritics "deploy the figure of disability to further cultural representations of nature as a rugged proving ground, making disability the dystopic sign of human failure, or potential failure, in nature" (131).

narrative tactics form an environmental coalition responsive to differences based in gender, race, and class.

I conclude by considering Zadie Smith's *Swing Time* as a vanguard of planetary publicity in Chapter Four. I argue on behalf of the sufficiency of the novel, as a genre, to the demands of publicity by way of Nancy Fraser's critique. I assess the viability of reading Smith's novel as a cultural infrastructure and explore the role of public art as moving environmental imagination towards Spivak's notion of planetarity. By recognizing the environmentalism existing in the discussed forms of creative practice, I argue that environmental movements would support public imagining of a democratic and just form of planetary collective life.

SUBSISTENCE READING: QUEER ENVIRONMENTS OF MODERNITY

In August 2017, I was walking through Amsterdam's Dam Square after having presented a paper at the Modernist Studies Association's annual conference. Crowds of pedestrian tourists surged around me, darting to avoid the rushing cyclists. Tiring of being jostled among the groups of sight-seers, I wandered toward the nearby edge of a canal to observe the square. As I stood to the side of the flowing traffic, I noticed a large number of people were pausing to stare across the canal and take pictures. Curious about what had distracted so many people, I followed their gazes and was startled to see a mass of protestors standing on top of what seemed to be a construction barge. The protestors, surrounded by the roar of the square's gushing crowds, seemed quiet as they held their banner, "Greenpeace Saves Whales, Jesus Saves You."



Figure 1 "Protestors," original image taken in Amsterdam, Netherlands. August 2017.

The protestors' message as well as the platform that enabled them to engage in the public protests present an example of this chapter's concerns: distinguishing between mythologies of environmental subjectivity and the participatory practices of environmental political deliberations. The two signs juxtapose the relationship between Jesus and the sign's audience with the relationship between Greenpeace and whales. Implicitly, the use of two signs rather than a single one separates the reader's salvation from that of the whales. Whether or not marine life flourishes should be of no concern to the reader, whose attention, the sign suggests, should be focused on a spiritual plane that transcends material life. Thus, the signs engage in species-ism by suggesting ethical obligations are delimited by species membership.

The protesters exclude other occupants of the public space from engaging with parity in the environmental politics of their communication through the culturally specific premises of their appeals. The second-person address interpellates its readers into English-speaking, Christian identification; thus, lives of Muslims, Atheists, Hindus, Buddhists, Sikhs, Zoroastrians, or any number of religious (or irreligious) individuals do not figure as persons with interests in environmental ethics. They appeal to what Donna Haraway calls the "dubious pleasures of transcendent plots of modernity and the purifying division of society and nature" (Haraway 41). The salvation myth relies on a pre-determined ending—the extraction of the human spirit from the physical world—that obscures the significance of environments as the enabling conditions and ends of the practices that make living as humans possible.

This chapter examines how two novels, Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse* (1927) and, later, Yvonne Vera's *The Stone Virgins* (2003), participate in an increasingly fiery dialogue about the development of the nation-state's governmental legitimacy. Initially, this chapter focuses on *To the Lighthouse* and connects domestic concern with resource scarcity and

consumption to a latent anxiety about the environmental nation. After reviewing the objective and temporal dimensions of environmentalism in Woolf's novel, the chapter examines *The Stone Virgins* as a critique of the weaponization of environmental power, first by warring political actors in post-independence Zimbabwe and later by the authoritarian government. In the final portion, I read passages of each novel alongside one another. Throughout the chapter, I put the fiction into conversation with environmentalism in literary theory and empirical accounts to compare their engagements with the issue of natural resources.

Woolf's novel takes place at a beachfront home in the Hebrides, on the Isle of Skye. The house belongs to the Ramsay family: Mrs. Ramsay, Mr. Ramsay, Andrew, Prue, Jasper, Roger, Rose, Nancy, James, and Camilla. The first of the novel's three parts, "The Window," addresses the Ramsays' visit prior to World War I and their interactions with their eclectic group of guests, who include Charles Tansley and Lily Briscoe. The second part, "Time Passes", addresses the period during the war and is punctuated by the deaths of Mrs. Ramsay, Andrew, and Prue. The final section, "The Lighthouse", focuses on Lily Briscoe's return to the home with the remaining members of the Ramsay family after the war. In the final section, Mr. Ramsay finally succeeds in rowing with his children to the lighthouse, which marks their achievement of a plan that weather had frustrated in the novel's first part.

Throughout my dissertation, I will examine different permutations of environmentalism that recur in quotidian life. My readings of the primary texts demonstrate environmentalism that operates internal to human society rather than as an engagement with an external "natural" world that precedes society. Thus, environment is:

a dialectical scene where the interaction reified as structure and agency is manifest in predictable repetitions; an environment is made via spatial practices and can absorb how

time ordinarily passes, how forgettable most events are, and overall, how people's ordinary perseverations fluctuate in patterns of undramatic attachment and identification (Berlant 760).

Social practices, affective experiences, and the passage of time determine the shape of an environment. Based on this description of environment, I contend that narrative development enacts and contests environmentalism through its circulation in culture.

My contention draws on Roland Barthes's description of realist fiction. Barthes connects the "reality effect" of "those narratives which consent to fill in the interstices of their functions by structurally superfluous notations" to "the regnum of 'objective' history, to which must be added the contemporary development of techniques, of works, and institutions based on the incessant need to authenticate the 'real'" (146). Barthes calls the description of the narrative's environment "superfluous," which implies that all textual components beyond those necessary for the actions involving human characters are mere accessories. Thus, the "reality effect" is tied to presenting an experience of the unnecessary. Narrative leverages the power to represent what exists through strategic use of concrete details, which create a "referential illusion" that simulates the existence of an external, material reality. The availability of technologies and institutions that generate the possibility of documenting and verifying "the real" world engenders the possibility of its use as a mode of fictionality or narrative fabrication. Although Barthes's description of the reality effect focuses on nineteenth-century realist fiction, the psychological realism that is associated with modernist fiction similarly constructs a human mind as an environmental reality. This chapter focuses on two concerns of narrative environmentalism—time and focalization—to examine how Woolf and Vera form their environmentalisms.

If relationships among human beings are to operate democratically and if relationships with other entities of the planet are to be any less hegemonic, priority needs to be given to the ethical circumstances of those encounters. Agency might account for the capacity of matter to affect other agents. However, agency circulates in cultural discourses organized through a binary demarcation of life and nonlife. As agency is perceived or sensed, it is constituted within the hierarchy of animacy that Mel Chen links to the organization of subjectivity within culturally constituted value-systems (11). Jasbir Puar and Elizabeth Povinelli also echo Chen—both note that binary concepts of human/non-human omit the detail that “only some modes of human sociality” have contributed to our present environmental pickle (Povinelli 13). Drawing on Chen’s work, Puar argues that object-oriented scholarship effectively deracinates and desexualizes human populations when using the concepts of vibrancy and agency (26). Puar notes that, historically, agency has been used to describe “the capacities of the liberal humanist subject, an anthropocentric conceptualization of movement” (172 n. 67). Agency, when used without any modifiers, presumes the conscious, self-determining individual who acts deliberately to actualize their own interests in biopolitical regimes.

Theories of narrative fiction demarcate characters and narration by engaging with aesthetic conventions that rely on and perpetuate existing social norms of animacy. I consider how strategies of resource management configure the imagination of narration and characterization in two novels of modernity. By incapacitating narrative extraction of plot events, *To the Lighthouse* estranges readers from the normative development story of Anglo-European control of nature. Woolf’s formal practices of resource (mis)management call into question the coherence of a concept that defines modernization’s development as always following an “anti-natural” trajectory. Woolf’s modernity maintains an anxiety about perceiving a value-scale of

reality that encrypts a static nature as reasonable social order. I begin to expose the relationship between infrastructure, characterization, and environmentality by comparing Woolf's prototypically modernist novel with an environmentally distant companion, *The Stone Virgins*. Although *To the Lighthouse* was published in 1927 and *The Stone Virgins* was published in 2002, each novel presents the lives of characters relating to the environment in localized, social situations alongside and on par with the reverberations of those transactions on the planetary scale.

Scales of Time: Temporal Rhythms

Duration and frequency form infrastructures of narrative fictions, resource management of states, and canon formation among literary critics. Rob Nixon emphasizes the issue of temporality that is central to environmental conceptualization with the introduction of "slow violence" to "keep front and center the representational challenges and imaginative dilemmas posed not just by imperceptible violence but by imperceptible change whereby violence is decoupled from its original causes by the workings of time. Time becomes an actor in complicated ways" (*Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* 11). This chapter builds on Nixon's observation that the Global North's preference for singular narratives of spectacular events distorts environmental politics. Berlant's description of environment as constituted through ordinary social practices extended in space and time enables me to extend Nixon's argument to consider environmental management in and by fiction. Imagining literary philosophies of sustainability and resiliency relies on a politics of novelization and fictional narration. If environmental politics and law are to be just, if environmentalism is to be anything other than the rehabilitation of a planet for the (re)production of a heteronormative society

centered in the Global North, then the field must cleave itself from the strictures of periodization narratives that require beginnings, middles, and ends.

Woolf's novels are commonly studied within the environment of "modernity," a diffuse alliance of heterogeneous social associations and collaborations. Through the environment, I connect the creation of the subject to the critical practices of periodization to the rhythmic interactions that Berlant describes. To an extent, comparing *The Stone Virgins* with *To the Lighthouse* inhabits the critical infrastructure of the "planetary" that Susan Friedman adopts to dethrone history from its position of sovereignty in order to advance an associative reading of modernism as a verb to describe a particular manifestation of artistic agency⁸. Ben Okri's scathing remonstrance of readers for confining African writers to the production of subjects "that reflect the troubles of Africa and black people as perceived by the rest of the world" while they uncritically accept canonical reverence for Woolf's "poetry" (n.p.) furthers my comparison of the respective environmentalisms of two novels noted for their poetic style. In *The Stone Virgins* and *To the Lighthouse*, allocation of resources controls the environment of character development. Resource development emerges as significant to the idea of a socio-political modernity. Woolf offers the hypothetical "if we can imagine the art of fiction come alive and standing in our midst, she would undoubtedly bid us break her and bully her, as well as honour and love her, for so her youth is renewed and her sovereignty assured" ("Modern Fiction").

⁸ Friedman notes, "A relational approach to the meaning of modernity/modernism looks for the latent structure rather than the manifest contents of the root term. Instead of locating modernity in the specific time of the post-Renaissance or post-Enlightenment West, a relational definition stresses the condition or sensibility of radical disruption and accelerating change" (33). While I borrow Friedman's rejection of historical discourse based on the understanding that it is just one possible strategy for assembling a group of literary texts, given that social practices configure relations—including my own—I will occasionally emphasize that I am NOT constructing an equivalency between Zimbabwe in the late-twentieth century and England in the early twentieth century.

Woolf's anthropomorphic statement positions fiction as a biopolitical body that demands conservation through its vulnerability to readers and writers.

As scholars increasingly assemble through the mobilizing common grounds of the Anthropocene, we are complicit in the institutional production of a planetary subjectivity that regulates interactions toward sustainable (i.e., efficient) reproduction of human life. While considering the problem of scaling the earth to a human perspective, Jeffrey Cohen and Linda Elkins-Tanton ask, "Where do these long, long lifetimes intersect with our own short lives?" (37). In this instance, collectively engineered climate change creates the space for the demand that humanists operate through geological schema, which follows strategies of what Elizabeth Freeman terms "chrononormativity." By chrononormativity, "naked flesh is bound into socially meaningful embodiment through temporal regulation" so that time becomes an instrument "to organize individual bodies toward maximum productivity" by appealing to and forming a collective identity on the basis of biological order of space-time (3). Freeman argues "in a chronobiological society, the state and other institutions, including representational apparatuses, link properly temporalized bodies to narratives of movement and change" (4). The range of chrononormativity organizes the scaling of narrative duration and frequency in both novels, which contain events of cataclysmic violence in syncopation with the rhythm of the quotidian. In each, infrastructure failure posits without capturing natures that exceed the animacy and exigency mobilized by the institutions that make states habitable.

Infrastructures, Animacy, and Hierarchical Tables of Development

I focus on a type of infrastructure that connects domestic life to the formation of an environmental public. As Judith Butler and Lauren Berlant have shown, restricting political

significance solely to public spaces excludes bodies that deviate from normative standards of gender, race, and ability from participating in the sorts of power relations that would precipitate the assertion of political demands. According to Berlant,

Infrastructure is not identical to system or structure, as we currently see them, because infrastructure is defined by the movement or patterning of social form. It is the living mediation of what organizes life: the lifeworld of structure. Roads, bridges, schools, food chains, finance systems, prisons, families, districts, norms (“The Commons” 394).

The conventions of fiction, like social norms, serve as infrastructure that supports reader-participants in contributing to the literary work’s environmental organization. Within the narrative’s environment, the table links food chains as a similarly normative infrastructure.

Tables operate in the same register as pipes and sewers by delimiting members of a community or a public that share common socio-political interests that should be recognized by a state that provides for that assembled grouping of peoples.

In the dining room, the table serves as a stage upon which food cultures and individual habits of consumption participate in political actions that mobilize classed and national identities. The table might seem a counterintuitive focus for my inquiry when the titular lighthouse is such a spectacular example of infrastructure that is also central to the novel’s plot. Is the lighthouse not, after all, out in the world of nature, exposed to the elements of the natural environment? As a monument to the relationship between coastal denizens and their natural environments, Woolf’s lighthouse seems to diverge from forms of modern infrastructure in its distance from urban development. As lighthouses tower above shorelines, they guide our attention to the precarity of humans who traverse the high seas in networks of global shipping trade and in the fishing industry. However, the occasions of eating and gathering around the table showcase the

daily rhythms of living beings engaging with the confounding environmental ethics of cultural and bodily life in a globalizing society.

The gathering of bodies as living beings in a ritual of self-care and pleasure slows the rhythm of subject-development in *To the Lighthouse*. The table renders the configuration of “the human body as a certain kind of dependency on infrastructure, understood complexly as environment, social relations, and networks of support and sustenance that cross the human, animal, and technical divides” (Butler 133). The extended dinner scene around the Ramsays’ table dramatizes food’s potential to provoke attention to the political demands human cultures make of and through their natural environments. Food is a resource necessary to sustaining economic, political, and cultural institutions. The supposedly personal actions of cooking, consuming, and privately sharing food are performative assertions of embodied agency that expose environmental mediation of food security as a central responsibility of any legitimate state to its citizens. The scene of the Ramsays’ human guests converging to share sustenance after a day spent in various adventures around the coastal town contrasts with the condensed scenes of eating in which characters belonging to the servant-class participate. As an event in the novel’s narrative, the dinner engages with social patterns delimited by class, gender, nationality, and species.

The narration of the scene is focalized predominantly through the character of Mrs. Ramsay, who organizes and controls the dinner. The meal consists of dishes cooked in the French culinary style and is served according to a pattern that adheres to a rigorously choreographed culinary tradition. This choreography configures certain bodies speakers, some as consumers, and others as silent workers who are unable to share the table. By arranging bodies of characters, the table demarcates the distinction between the upper-middle-class Ramsays, their

guests, and their servants, Ellen and Mildred. The table supports a developing critique of the gender-inequity of environmentalism while sustaining classism. Thus, it participates “in a complex play of autoethnographic impulses to document one’s own processes of thought, thereby engaging her [Woolf] in a set of ethical and aesthetic questions” (Simon Joyce 157). Woolf’s ambivalence about class in this scene and throughout the novel reveals the role of class as one of the environmental political subject’s facets.

The issues of environmental management raised by the dinner party respond to societal concerns contemporaneous to the novel’s publication. Their conversation’s association of sustainable resource management with individual economic interests participates in contemporaneous concern about England’s coastal environment. In her fictional narrative, Woolf transposes her memories from family vacations spent in St. Ives, Cornwall to a remote area of the Hebrides. Although St. Ives was once the center of a thriving fishing industry, years of heavy fishing gradually devastated the local fish population. The depleted fish population caused upheaval in the human community that had depended on the fish as a source of income.⁹ The fish in question were predominantly pilchards, of which scientist Michael Culley observes that the adults follow their preference for particular types of plankton, which “can delay the arrival of the fish in marketable numbers” (31). Culley notes a historical example of this behavior occurring “in 1913, when the Cornish fishery was unable to work profitably until October” (31). The chronotypes of the fish conflict with that of the local fishing community. Locals bound to the seasonal rhythm of a national market are out of time relative to the fish season. The narrator summarizes effects that are similar to a phenological mismatch: “That the fishing season was

⁹ For a reflection on the connection between Woolf’s novel and the historical fishing village, see Daphne Merkin’s *New York Times* article, “*To the Lighthouse and Beyond.*”

bad; that the men were emigrating” (94). Woolf describes the friction between different temporal rhythms in terms of its impact on the local population. On the one hand, in “Woolf’s work, it is possible to understand the places where she inscribes the limits of understanding the human self or the moments of ‘failed’ human community, as the invitation to recognize other nonhuman communities we already belong to” (Sultzbach 85). However, this failure of resource management does not lead to an interrogation of the relationship between human fishers and their objects. Instead, the fish remain instruments through which the local community sustains itself rather than receiving ethical standing.

The party’s discussion of environmentalism at the dinner table develops the characters as participants. Through the technique of free indirect discourse, which shifts among multiple points of focalization, the narrative creates patterns of inclusion and exclusion. Focalization, in Gérard Genette’s theory of narration, refers to the “narrative situation” (190). Focalization differentiates the narrator, who delivers the narration, from the characters and stories accounted for by the narrator (Genette 186). Thus, the focalization situates us relative to the story by emphasizing points, omitting details, and by defining the range of relationships within the different components of the novel (Genette 186). Woolf’s free indirect discourse and shifting focalization are well known. I will draw attention to how the freedom of the narrative position depends on controlling our view of events and characters.

The narration of the dinner party situates us relative to characters who are primarily spectators rather than participants in the conversation. By associating the narrator in this way, the story emphasizes statements not uttered during the conversation. In general, this presents a skewed perspective of the social gathering by stressing the significance of what has been withheld from the community rather than what has been shared in common. Although I will

review some of the problems of social exclusion that the dinner gathering produces, the internal perspectives articulated in the narrative share a preoccupation with the assertion of a masculine subject as an authority on environmental knowledge.

For example, during the meal, Mr. Tansley fervently desires to demonstrate his experience in the matter of fishing by dominating the conversation about the local fishing industry. Ironically, the character's passionate desire to articulate his own position and to claim power by forcing others to recognize his knowledge, temporarily incapacitates his powers of speech. Rather than seeing himself as a participant in sustaining the community's dialogue, "He wanted somebody to give him a chance of asserting himself. He wanted it so urgently that he fidgeted in his chair, looked at this person, then at that person, tried to break into their talk, opened his mouth and shut it again" (Woolf 90). By focalizing through a character who is not able to articulate his thoughts in the conversation, the narrative emphasizes the roles of social conventions and communities in an individual's capacity to participate in political deliberation. Tansley's desire to "assert himself" predicates his intention to speak. The narrative thus emphasizes the collaborative and agonistic attributes of conversation by documenting the failure of Tansley's urge to dominate the discussion.

The narrative discourse provides a political space, which Woolf's narrator governs. The narrator fluidly switches between free indirect discourse and direct reported dialogue, which has the effect of organizing the colloquy to focus on a strategy of governing in which political legitimacy is achieved strictly through an economic means, in which, "one started by giving oneself a certain economic function which was the very basis of the state and of its existence and international recognition. One gave oneself this economic framework, and it is then that the legitimacy of the state emerged" (Foucault 90). Individual economy supports the English state's

governmental authority. Rather than an authorizing national ideology, the young men contend that “wages and unemployment” legitimate the liberal state (Woolf 94). The failure of the English government to manage the employment of its citizens serves as the rationale for criticizing English policy. The environmental basis for the economic quandary, however, is unmentioned.

This focalization dramatizes political tensions within the dinner party. On the one hand, the biopolitical order promoted by the young men whose conversation is summarized by Mrs. Ramsay in the previous paragraph, and on the other, more authoritarian and hegemonic modes. Mrs. Ramsay, like Tansley, is not participating in the conversation that she describes and, again like Tansley, she desires that a male authority would dominate the conversation. In her wish for her husband to participate in the conversation, she imagines the philosopher of poetry, “would make a difference. He went to the heart of things. He cared about fishermen and their wages. He could not sleep for thinking of them” (95). Although the organization of concern overlaps with the young men’s, she shifts emphasis from government responsibility to prevent “unemployment” and to manage “wages,” to caring about the persons involved. Thus, Mrs. Ramsay expresses the dependence of social order on care for the workers rather than the guarantee of there being work. In a conversation that focuses on government, the literary perspective hoped for by Mrs. Ramsay would focus on the ethics of personal relations by focusing on “the heart”—the people—rather than the economic and governing structures.

At the turn of the century, around the time Woolf would have been visiting St. Ives with her family during the summers, the English government began to include the environment as a policy issue. In 1912, the Board of Agriculture and Fisheries created a committee that extended aid to fisheries in Devon and Cornwall by creating a grant for the installation of motor power on

fishing boats. The committee recommended that the government provide “loans to co-operative groups of fisheries” and that state grants should be made to create such groups, which was “a significant extension of the role of the state” (Thorpe 14). The following year, a report argued for the centralization of financial control under the national government along with the establishment of the Fisheries Organization Society “to spread co-operative credit and good practices among fishermen” (14). Rather than leaving the survival of fishing communities to the course of nature, private enterprise, or local communities, the national government intervened. The recommendation presupposed the national government’s prerogative to manipulate the processes and technologies through which the fishers extracted resources from the environment to benefit the community. Their decisions demonstrated the dependence of governmental legitimacy on developing the capacity of the nation’s workers to flourish economically through education. Though this shift in national government introduces development as a strategy of the modern state, it did not extend to considering the position of good fishing practices relative to England’s coastal environment.

Although the conversation at the dinner party engages with the discussed expansion of government power, the expressions of concern over the government’s neglect of the local industry differ sharply from the legislation by occluding the participation of the fishers. The oral gesture towards the excluded fishing community betrays middle-class paternalism toward the working class. Despite its members expressing concern over the local fishing community’s inhabitants, the party seated at the table does not include any of these individuals. The omission of the workers as rational subjects is a recurring trope in which the Ramsays and their guests position themselves as bourgeoisie in a cosmopolitan society by opining about the work of others while sitting at leisure. Though none cook, they compare French and British cooking practices:

“It is roasting meat till it is like leather. It is cutting off the delicious skins of vegetables. ‘In which,’ said Mr. Bankes, ‘all the virtue of the vegetable is contained’” (Woolf 101). Mr. Bankes identifies a national culinary tradition as that of excessive waste that also violates the aesthetic and functional value of the food. His criticism of British food preparation offers a moralizing discourse that implicitly indicts British service workers for corrupting national society. As the conversation moves on, the middle-class speakers pass further judgement on the unrepresented service workers: “And the waste, said Mrs. Ramsay. A whole French family could live on what an English cook throws away” (101).¹⁰ Their dialogue contrasts the lives of the middle-class national consumer with the actions of the service worker, whose own life never figures in the equation. As it stands uncontested, the assertion defines national cuisine without regard to regional diversity and without input from those who prepare the food. Service workers like Ellen and Mildred, the unnamed fishermen, and the lighthouse keeper linger in the novel’s margins. Though their daily actions will become the antecedents of treating environmental issues as matters of government, they are not recognized as agents of environmental events and do not participate in their public deliberation.

The narrator is inattentive to the persons whose labor supplied the party’s food—for body and thought. When the conversation’s sphere of concern widens to consider additional components of the meal, Mrs. Ramsay asserts herself to express worry about “real butter and

¹⁰ Writing about the working poor, Berlant notes, “for most, the overwhelming present is less well symbolized by energizing images of sustainable life less guaranteed than ever by the glorious promise of bodily longevity and social security, than it is expressed in regimes of exhausted practical sovereignty, lateral agency, and, sometimes, counterabsorption in episodic refreshment” (“Slow Death” 780). Unsustainable lifestyles and habits, for the working poor or the socio-politically oppressed, provide an alternative avenue of exerting agency that does not contribute towards the (re)production of life under an exploitative system.

clean milk” given “the iniquity of the English dairy system” and she questions “state milk was delivered at the door” (Woolf 103). In this instance, Mrs. Ramsay both focalizes the narrative and participates in the dialogue being reported. Her interruption of a conversation about coffee, a commodity fraught by the implicit waning of England’s empire, turns the narrative’s attention back to domestic agriculture. This shift further betrays the nationalist basis of the narrative’s treatment of food supply as a social welfare issue rather than a problem of individual responsibility, which precludes identifying it as a good model of environmental governance.

By describing butter as “real,” the dialogue implies the possibility that the butter’s composition might in some way be compromised. The composition of dairy products is tied to Britain’s national security. Alysa Levene attributes widespread preference for butter to the association of margarine with austerity measures implemented during both World War I and World War II. Though the conversation occurs prior to either, Woolf would have lived through the first war and would have been familiar with this austerity. Thus, Mrs. Ramsay uses the commodity to allude to her cultural fluency and economic agency, by implicitly invoking margarine’s “unfavourable comparison with butter on the grounds of taste, appearance, health-giving properties and ‘naturalness’ (147). Although Levene’s genealogical account of margarine consumption in Britain prioritizes the role of butter in rituals of socio-economic identification, she also finds that people perceive butter as being healthier because they perceive it as natural. Thus, the dialogue folds nationalism into what the twenty-first century reader understands to be ecological concerns.

Yet the assertion of concern about authentic dairy products depends less on actual properties of the dairy products than on moralizing discourses of natural purity and authenticity. By implying the instability of the dairy system, Mrs. Ramsay provides cause for extending

government administration into the dairy sector. Roland Barthes finds commonality between commodity marketing and the ideological material of totalitarian states. Barthes explores how myth in both discourses normalizes particular behaviors in their audiences, predisposing them to certain patterns of action based on a utilitarian ethical system. Margarine advertisements provide a case study of how “the Established Order relieves you of your progressive prejudices” (42). The consumer complacently adopts the position “What does it matter, *after all*, if margarine is just fat, when it goes further than butter, and costs less? What does it matter, *after all*, if Order is a little brutal or a little blind, when it allows us to lie cheaply?” (Barthes “Operation Margarine” 42). In both formulations, consumers of the propaganda become complicit in justifying problems of value by appealing to total economic utility. Barthes connects consumer logic to the economization of social life through their role in supporting social environments conducive to totalitarian forms of government, which rely on a society’s subscription to an absolute system of value. Food consumption takes on a political function: through their implication in national propaganda, eating practices allow individuals to enact their commitment to, concern about, or contestation of government policy,

Mrs. Ramsay’s concern about flaws in the national dairy system performs a double function within the novel’s environmentalism. First, anxiety about the dairy system encodes a confession of doubt about the production of the English nation and the nation’s capacity to effectively govern. Second, the implicit invocation of margarine, which functions similarly to butter in food, signifies anxiety about the threat of non-essentialist systems of identity. The latter extends the earlier discussion regarding the relationship between virtue and the constitution of vegetables and meat. Although choosing to consume real or natural foods seems to mobilize environmental politics, in the absence of corresponding public social systems such private

consumer behavior maintains social inequity by making participation in environmentalist politics a commodity rather than a right or responsibility. Without consideration of food as a public, environmental issue, it remains a topic of dinner conversation among a privileged view. Mrs. Ramsay has the freedom to express her nationalist environmentalism by worrying about the qualities of her English dairy, yet the cook is excluded from the conversation about food preparation. The table's social conventions also preclude the family's household helper Mrs. McNabb from engaging in conversation, though she nourishes herself by supping on a milk soup that is almost an after-thought to both the character and the narrator (136). The contrast between the narrative representation of the eating practices of the middle-class characters and those who work as their servants denies the power of environmental politics to those who cannot purchase it.

Thus, we can begin to see how a pattern of exclusion, which in this instance is based in class and national citizenship, outlines the setting of environmental conversations. The fishermen remain undeveloped backdrops; they never focalize the narration. Nor are the producers of dairy and coffee represented in the novel as persons. Although the discussion of the national dairy system indicates that a national government's legitimacy follows from guaranteeing access to healthy food, the conversation does not allow for imagining this political consideration in terms of democratic equality and inclusivity. In the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, global food systems tend to be left to private enterprises with minimal and uneven government interference. Though they operate on a planetary scale that links geo-political territories around a common concern about the accessibility of the means of engaging in the collective life that is necessary for thriving democratic societies, as an issue in most democratic states food infrastructure remains the province of private, individual consumers.

In the final section of *To the Lighthouse*, “The Lighthouse,” the narrative discourse finally answers Mrs. Ramsay’s projection by developing Mr. Ramsay’s actual thoughts on the fishermen. Following the deaths of Mrs. Ramsay, Prue, and Andrew in “Time Passes,” the diminished Ramsay family finally undertakes their journey to the lighthouse. As they row through the water, Mr. Ramsay meditates, thinking: “He liked that men should labour and sweat on the windy beach at night; pitting muscle and brain against the waves and the wind; he liked men to work like that, and women to keep house, and sit beside sleeping children indoors, while men were drowned, out there in the storm” (164). The fishermen’s struggle, as a population, to catch fish in a tumultuous sea, slips, through synecdoche, into a universalized struggle between all men and nature. The character imagines human life as working in opposition to the forces of their external environment. Through this aesthetic response to their group-identity, Mr. Ramsay unequally distributes vulnerability by presuming distinct, essential divisions of class and gender. The fanciful digression reduces the persons of the men to a single stereotype of the fisherman whose life lacks the potential for individual significance beyond occupational exposure of his toiling body to environmental harm. Mr. Ramsay imagines them as an absence of political or ethical properties beyond the disappearance of a body amid waves. Their vulnerability is uninterrogated and, as such, the acceptability of their exposure to harm constitutes the limits of their participation in an environmental politics and is treated as lacking any claim to an environmental ethics.

Mr. Ramsay’s necropolitical aesthetics, of course, do not express Woolf’s treatment of the relationships among art, life, and materiality. Though the narrative discourse does not sufficiently provide textual support for developing an inclusive environmental politics, the passage’s free indirect discourse does imperfectly enact Woolf’s aesthetic vision: that the art of

fiction extends beyond the limitations of an individual “body” as subject to favor living, which “is not a series of gig lamps” but, rather, “a luminous halo” (“Modern Fiction”). This halo effect is generated through the free indirect discourse, which flows among different points of focalization that include the Ramsay family members as well as Lily Briscoe, who waits on the beach. As Mr. Ramsay ruminates, the characterization of his identity as a natural trait of his body is fragmented by his children’s imaginations, which whimsically and repeatedly reinterpret the patriarchal figure by transfiguring him into a tyrant, a father, an old man, and, finally, view him as being like a bird. The presentation of the narrative discourse minimizes the spatial distance between the shore and the craft, which projects a community of concern between the different ecosystems of land and sea. However, class distance is sustained through the continued exclusion of the lighthouse keeper or fishermen from adopting the identity of focalizer, which means they are denied the power of self-representation. Though the narrative technique enables Woolf to ironize the aesthetics of the heroic myths of seafaring that Mr. Ramsay “likes”, the events continue to mobilize the members of the working class as objects of concern. By not according them the opportunity to anchor the narrative by serving as focalizing characters, they are silently exploited and dependent on the narrator and bourgeoisie characters for representation of their environmental concerns. Thus, the “free”-dom of the discourse depends on the exploitation of certain individuals as naturalized resources of the narrative’s development.

Hothouses: A Climate of Over-Development

In the novel as a whole, the three sections overlay processes of development onto processes of slow death and disintegration. The first section, “The Window,” describes the home during the Ramsays’ visit prior to the war; “Time Passes” describes the home during the war;

and “To the Lighthouse” describes the Ramsays’ visit in the years following the war. The three distinct sections, “The Window,” “Time Passes,” and “The Lighthouse,” seem to accommodate the diverse tempos and forms of modern life. In the middle section, Woolf juxtaposes the disintegration of the Ramsays’ house with the destruction of World War I.

Ecocritical scholars seem especially drawn to the seemingly non-human focus of “Time Passes.” Based upon “her narrative experimentations in writing a section of a novel that is not focused on human characters,” some assert that “Woolf is able to categorically represent the agency of the nonhuman” (Lostoski 61). Perhaps the pantomime of denuding the narrative of a human character as the center of focalization acknowledges non-human agency. However, the minimization of the novel’s protagonists is not the total absence of human characters. “Time Passes” stands out for utilizing a weak anthropocentrism rather than a strong anthropocentric model typical of other Modernist psychological realism. The section ironizes Mrs. Ramsay’s wish for a narrative that liberates subjectivity from its social and corporeal contingency. The narration creates the effect of a discourse freed from the particularity of corporeality by articulating an entirely free, directionless discourse untrammelled by the environmental vulnerability of a character-based focal point.

Rather than scenes of non-human agency, the section offers an example of what Lauren Berlant calls lateral agency: “a condition of being worn out by the activity of reproducing life, agency can be an activity of maintenance, not making” (Berlant 759).¹¹ Although the middle section deviates from “The Window” and “The Lighthouse” by increasing the narrative discourse’s speed, it overlays the section’s summary of a world war with descriptions of two

¹¹ Although Berlant focuses on cases of obesity in post-Cold War United States, the concept describes a response to the strategies of biopolitics.

different human characters going to sleep and waking. By juxtaposing these two different scales—the passage of many years stands against the human activities associated with a single night’s rest—the narrator distorts the spatial and temporal duration of the narrative’s actions. Each of the section’s chapters, except for the seventh, describe the actions of particular human characters such as Mrs. McNab, Mr. Carmichael, and the Ramsay children. “Time Passes” responds to the political dilemma of collectively organizing social movements around differing rhythms of bodily life in the absence of a stable conceptual frame providing natural time signatures and tempo markings.

By condensing the immense casualties and destruction of a world-encompassing war into the backdrop of just twenty pages, the narrative tempo accelerates on a world-history scale that far outstrips the imaginings of individual historical agents. The section conveys the inadequacy of individual imagination in the face of such complexity as an experience of not understanding a pattern: “which the ear strains to bring together and is always on the verge of harmonizing, but they are never quite heard, never fully harmonized, and at last, in the evening, one after another the sounds die out, and the harmony falters, and silence falls” (Woolf 141). Despite the listener’s attention, they lack the skill to organize their perceptions into a developed composition. Rather than a dialectical play that yields the effect of a human consciousness, the sonic environment dissolves into a cacophony of unresolvable fragments.

Woolf uses this conceit of artistic practice as a metaphor for the relationship between human beings and the natural world. The listener’s struggle to develop an aesthetic law from the disparate sound elements responds to concern about the attunement of living beings to their environments. From this place of disconnect, the narrator asks, “What power could now prevent the fertility, the insensibility of nature?” (Woolf 138). The question implicitly entrusts human

societies with custodianship of nature. The designation of “insensibility” precludes acknowledgement of nature as a participant in environmental politics. By suggesting that nature lacks sensibility, the narrator seems to find nature incompatible with the communicative capacity required for democratic participants. Yet, considered within the wider context of the passage, the question indicts the human participants with failing to support the sensibility of nature. Thus, the passage offers a negative model of environmental politics. By leaving the failed collaboration of environmental stakeholders with an unanswered question, Woolf appeals to readers to acknowledge their participation in imagining environmental sensibility inclusive of diverse positions.

Woolf wrote in the midst of a society aware of the impact human action might have on the planet. However, there is not a continuous chain of development between the climate science of the turn of the twentieth century and the twenty-first century. In Woolf’s time, most scientists were concerned with the potential return of an ice age and were “not concerned with the effect of the industrial revolution” (Crawford 11). The views of the few who worried about warming are epitomized in the views of the Nobel Laureate, Svante Arrhenius.¹² In the popular treatise *Worlds in the Making*, Arrhenius summarizes contemporary concern, “We often hear lamentations that the coal stored up in the earth is wasted by the present generation without any thought of the future,” before continuing optimistically with the revelation that resource exhaustion would change the earth’s atmosphere so that “we may hope to enjoy ages with more equable and better climates, especially as regards the colder regions of the earth, ages when the

¹² James Rodger Fleming notes: “Arrhenius, who has recently gained re-newed attention as the ‘father’ of the theory of the greenhouse effect, held assumptions and produced results that are not continuous with present-day climate research” (Fleming 64).

earth will bring forth much more abundant crops than at present, for the benefit of rapidly propagating mankind” (Arrhenius 63). Arrhenius’s anti-Malthusian prophecy imagines that the wasteful use of coal, in fueling the productive powers of industry, contributes to the increasing fertility of the natural world to the benefit of the increase of humankind. The “we” who benefits from the altered environment are those of the Global North, whose growing seasons will lengthen with the increased surface temperatures.

Woolf’s narrator struggles to determine the relationship between humans and their environments. Although the narrator remains steadfastly tethered to the particular location on the Isle of Skye, the seemingly provincial point of focalization emphasizes the significance of peripheral communities in the global development of environmentalism. However, Woolf’s narrator does not share Arrhenius’s view of a sympathy shared between human and environment. When the narrator muses, “should any sleeper fancying that he might find on the beach an answer to his doubts, a sharer of his solitude, throw off his bedclothes and go down by himself to walk on the sand” (Woolf 128), the familiar beach shore is refigured as alien, a place where “no image with semblance of serving and divine promptitude comes readily to hand bringing the night to order and making the world reflect the compass of the soul” (Woolf 128). In contrast to Arrhenius’s vision of nature, the sleeper’s quest for resolution allegorizes a frustrated search for meaning based in the natural world. In the absence of an external compass, the possibility of environmentally attuned social relationships, is foreclosed.

To the Lighthouse offers narrative alternatives to the exploitative trajectory of social history through the literary technique of sustaining narrative development. The unresolved tension in the novel’s conclusion sustains the potential for creative relationships between human communities and the environment by first confronting the use humans make of nature as a

resource for the extraction of subjectivity. However, Woolf's imagination of environmentalism falls short of a conception of practice responsive to class-based inequality.

Of Livable Places that Remain

Yvonne Vera's *The Stone Virgins* struggles with the fraught development of Zimbabwe into a postcolonial and democratic nation-state. *The Stone Virgins* begins with the uprising that ended Britain's political rule of Rhodesia in 1980 and evokes the subsequent violence that sundered the Rhodesian nation for two years and that continues despite the purported recreation of the nation of Zimbabwe that accompanied Robert Mugabe's assumption of power. Despite the disparate national and historical origins of the two novels, I compare how each novel responds to the idea of modern states as gaining their legitimacy to govern through the management of environmental conditions and counters through stories of quotidian environmentalism in collective life. In the pages that follow, I will compare Woolf and Vera's critique of the "tragic story with only one real actor, one real world-maker, the hero" (Haraway 39). I argue that Vera uses narrative tactics that distort divisions of geo-political space and time, through which the novel offers a more inclusive and democratic alternative to hegemonic environmental governance.

"Subsistence Reading" focuses on the aesthetic responses of Vera's novel to friction among Zimbabwe's government, the Ndebele, and the Shona. I explain how the abstraction of the novel's environment operates as a reaction to political exclusion that was enacted through the weaponization of the country's infrastructure during the conflicts. The novel resists the cooption of historical realist narration by nationalist ideology through its distortion of perspective. The oscillations of the national conflicts run parallel with the story of two sisters, Nonceba and

Thenjiwe, whose home in Matabeleland is swept up in the violent massacre known as the Gukurahundi that followed the war for independence. By maintaining balance between national and particular experiences, the novel counters the risk that its narrative reiterates the stereotype of the under-developed postcolonial nation.

The sections of *The Stone Virgins* are organized according to ranges of time that create distinct historical periods in Zimbabwe's development into a nation-state. By eschewing numbered chapters in favor of historical epochs, the discourse emphasizes the power of national history in organizing collective life. National histories can provide ideological infrastructure significant to the collaboration of individuals as a people. However, these temporal divisions also mark the violent conflicts among the Rhodesian government, the Zimbabwe African People's Union, and the Zimbabwe African National Union. The novel's chaotic narration of environmental ruptures undercuts the unifying force of the nation. While the time of the nation might order the lives of its subjects, the declaration that "We are out of bounds in our own reality," which issues from an ambiguous point of focalization, connects historical time to the naturalization of a geopolitical organization of environment (Vera 83). From this aporetic sense of space-time, narrative resources and natural resources can be seen as configuring a subject marked by (neo-post)coloniality.

The novel begins with a stretch of time that the discourse labels 1950-1980. Its introductory passage shares with Woolf's "Time Passes" the absence of an identified character-reference for its focalization. As a result, the untethered narrator soars over the streets of the city of Bulawayo. The passage immerses the reader in the cultural milieu of the urban environment by describing "Satchmo" playing his trumpet in an underground jazz club. These sketches of the city yield glimpses of a cosmopolitan society. Ann Willey argues that the novel represents the

circulation of jazz music, such as “Skokian,” to examine the significance of global popular culture in city life. The depiction of jazz music reveals “ambivalence about how texts get translated during the process of diasporic circulation” and skepticism about the emancipatory effects of participation in “competing modernities,” particularly for those who identify as female and indigenous. (135). Willey links tepid globalism to the exclusion of female indigenous individuals from accessing the support necessary for acting as subjects. claiming the powers of the subject in Anglo-European politics.

As Willey suggests, Vera hedges on the social effects of culture-sharing in the African diaspora. How can Zimbabwe’s inhabitants, let alone those who are marginalized within this nation, participate with parity as creators and consumers of culture given problems of social infrastructure? This issue of social infrastructure finds expression in the complexity of the narrative environment of Bulawayo. The description of the city’s inhabitants subverts a teleological narrative of nation-building by displaying a vibrant urban community anterior to the nation-state’s official creation. However, the survey of Bulawayo’s cityscape constricts the narrative space-time. This foreshortening of space and time responds to the exclusion of indigenous inhabitants from enjoying freedom of movement under colonial rule. The distorted movement of the narrative instrumentalizes the urban environment to encode the restriction of cultural participation under colonial oppression.

The national government controls resource distribution as a technique of developing subjects. These environmental strategies amplify what Gayatri Gopinath describes as the “violent effacements that produce the fictions of purity that lie at the heart of dominant nationalist and diasporic ideologies” (4). The initial view of Bulawayo wanders streets of the pre-independence city teeming with plant life that blooms amidst public and commercial buildings. Rather than

offering a tour that lays out the urban infrastructure as a reality, the narrative's opaque tone obscures as much as it identifies. Thus, while the seemingly transcendent narrator names the buildings, streets, and plants, the city's inhabitants are defaced by the trees: "On the face of every passerby, the flickering movement of the leaves traces shadows of the trees like spilled dye, while light swims from above through their dizzying scent; the shadow is fragrant, penetrating" (4). The chiaroscuro treatment of Bulawayo and its inhabitants creates impressions of urban life.

Notably, characters in the introductory description do not receive names. The absence of identification is significant to the novel's initial aesthetic response to colonial power over the environment. Per Uri Margolin, proper names are crucial to producing the effect of individual identity and are "like a social insurance number or an identifying tag," so that the use of a proper name introduces the effect of an individual person "into our, or a character's mental representation of a domain," which is "why writers quite often introduce the names of characters early in the discourse" (109). By making the stylistic decision to deferral developing characters into named individuals and then setting these unnamed figures against the proper place names of landmarks of colonialism, Vera emphasizes the role of urban infrastructure as an environmental and ideological vehicle of colonial hegemony. The shadows turn characters into scenery, which emphasizes the brutal violence of apartheid rule while also suggesting that the experience evades development within the narrative environment.

The introduction narrates the interaction of the region's climate with the city's landscape. By focusing on the city's canopy, the narrator offers trees as an alternative infrastructure for formulating collective life. The narrative describes an ongoing cycle of seasons, when "from the beginning of October come a relentless heat and a gushing rain; November beats the petals

down. The heat is intense” (Vera 4). Vera offers a more detailed account of nature’s cycles than Woolf allows for in *To the Lighthouse*. The descriptions of seasonal weather patterns possess a coherent sensibility: they yield distinct periods of cyclical time that the narrator identifies with particular events. Vera imagines diverse forces of “nature” at work in the urban environment, forces that extend beyond the weather in an account of how the “blooms have withered” and “the small leaves turn yellow and then dry” (Vera 4). However, the passage plays with the differentiation of weather event from environmental process by describing leaves that “rain down” and seeds that, eschewing the land’s soils, “waft into the glassy sky” to “land in the sky” (4). The transformation of sky into land and leaves into rain confounds the reality effect in even this seemingly descriptive passage. The cyclical quality of the environment counters the chrononormative continuum of national development.

Vera’s treatment of trees should be read as being in conversation with Zimbabwe’s nationalist and anticolonial movements. The ecological movement known as “The War of the Trees” borrowed the rhetoric of *chimurenga*, a mode of political propaganda that unified and mobilized the different tribes during the war for independence against Britain (Dakin 181). The struggle for independence from Britain, rather than recovering the ‘lost lands’ of Zimbabwe for indigenous inhabitants, left “war-ravaged environments” that “were becoming ecologically more lost than ever as a result of deforestation, overpopulation, and exploitive land use” (Daneel 1). The postcolonial government instrumentalized the nation’s trees, symbolically and materially, to develop the national subject. While this concern for Zimbabwe’s resources fueled government action on more sustainable development and conservation, the pursuit of these environmental goods by the government and private entities occurred alongside anti-democratic repression of portions of the Ndebele. James Graham notes that the “narrative of uprising—of *chimurenga*—is

incorporated into a nationalist narrative continuum to justify elite resource-grabbing in the context of ‘Africa’s land rush,’ a new phase of accumulation” that responds to anxiety about resource-scarcity (356). Vera’s panorama of Bulawayo disavows the narrative of competition and paucity. The summary treatment of the story’s environment mobilizes the land as a social infrastructure for the growth of a pluralistic assembly of the nation’s inhabitants.

Vera’s panorama of the city of Kezi follows that of Bulawayo. This narrative tactic shares a similarly fluid quality of focalization with Woolf’s chimerical summary-description in “Time Passes.” In Bulawayo, Vera’s narrator pauses on certain scenes, such as the aforementioned performance in a club, while accelerating in its enunciation of events constituent of the political struggle prior to the war. These rapid tempo changes disrupt the temporal relationship between narrative discourse and events internal to the narrative, which obfuscates the imperative of clarity that organizes the form of historical realist narrative. For example, when the focus turns to Kezi, which is located in Matabeleland, the narrative sweeps briskly across desolate rural land intersected by a river that “has been so burned by the sun you can measure it grain by glittering grain, and by the number of children swarming on it like bees” (20). The figurative description of the parched river banks interrogates the unit of measurement necessary for representing the barrenness of the site. Notably, the narrator slips into second-person address, referencing an audience that haunts the early scenes of the novel, making them complicit yet powerless in the unfolding events. The analogy between the children and bees builds on the implicit comparison of the children to the grains of sediment. By layering the figurative configuration of the details, Vera rejects the normative power of the reality effect as the generic measure of fictional action. The exaggerated descriptive mode elides the differentiation of human actors from their environment, even as it continues to flaunt their vulnerability to it. As a

result of the dodging of narrative development, we are left to question the practices necessary for the imagination of democracy.

Although *The Stone Virgins* describes Kezi and the landscape of Zimbabwe as a whole, the narration does not develop into a map of that material reality. The description of the environment seems to fit the stereotypically underdeveloped African nation that Okri reviles. Children clamber the banks of an absent river, playing among “empty packets of Willard potato chips—onion flavored, vinegared, salted. Then broken bottles of Coca-Cola, sharp and dangerous, empty red one-liter cartons of Chibuku beer. The smell of urine emanates from every nearby rock” (20). An abundance of litter verges on reifying the mode of reportage and the subject of an underdeveloped African nation. With continued inspection, the scene’s components reference specific brands that locate the rural area in a pan-African and global food chain. The litter of empty Chibuku cartons, a commercial brand of a sorghum beer once brewed by individuals, encodes not only the environmental reality of pollution, but the waste of a consumer culture that severs any appreciation for the proximity of the locale of production. The jagged glass of broken Coca-Cola bottles connects environmental degradation to global capitalism’s consumption-driven culture. These broken bottles reference the false trust of equal inclusion in global modernity.

Vera articulates the war’s devastating personal-political plots as a critique of the government’s debilitation of many of the land’s inhabitants. The shadows of doubt cast by the atonal narration recall a problem noted in the genre of documenting human rights abuses: “we are supposed to arrive at forensic truths, and place them nicely in tables with totals at the end of columns, saying how many did what to whom, where, when and with what. But on the ground, these forensic truths sometimes become a great deal messier” (Eppel 974). In response to this

“messier” perspective outside the table, Vera also shifts into the first-person plural voice, seeming to assume the voice of Zimbabwe’s people after “Independence...has proved us a tenuous species” (Vera 82). Securing control of a state’s resources involves limiting access to those resource; thus, enacting environmental policy restricts individuals, places, and times. Vera probes the distinction between the idea of national sovereignty and its effect on citizens, who must live on “a continent that has succumbed to a violent wind, a country with land but no habitat” (Vera 82). National sovereignty claims redefine the relation between political spaces and environments; however, the new government does not fulfill its obligations by extending infrastructure to support the lives of its people.

In addition to the division of colonialism, Vera also confronts the significance of tribalism to the environment of Zimbabwe. She distinguishes the British capitalization of property from the Shona’s, which “was a belief that the land was protected by the ancestors, that the ancestors, the departed...were guardians of the soil so to speak. They were the ancestral shelter for the land and they themselves were taken care of by the land, by the ancestors” (Vera 76). Sovereign rule does not yield the material structures necessary for supporting the lives of Zimbabwe’s population. Nor does it reconstitute a pre-colonial relationship to the land.

The narrator takes on a political function, issuing an indictment of the national government. Yet the statement also affirms the biopolitical imperative of the nation-state. Graham describes the local politics of land reforms undertaken by the fledgling Zimbabwean government as a “politicized social ecology of land” that *The Stone Virgins* shows to be imbricated in “the *gendered* violence of accumulation” on a “world-ecological scale” (363). However, the problem with nationalist government has been denying the political dialogue of difference, an understanding that depoliticizes the nation’s resources even while the nation’s

governing authorities enact their politics by weaponizing the land as one method of oppression. The mode of delivery of these statements, which issue from a seemingly disembodied narrator lacking a clear intra-diegetic character as reference, foregrounds the absence of a site for imagining collective life collectively.

Vera uses botanical forms to comment on public and personal relationships. The imagery of trees and birds in Woolf's writing have been linked to commentary on British Imperialism by Melissa Bagley, who suggests that the metaphoric use of nature critiques the normalization of gender hierarchies by exposing the metaphor's production through nationalist discourse. However, Vera shows the possibility that "a new rhizome may form in the heart of a tree, the hollow of a root, the crook of a branch" and spark new political alliances (Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus* 15) by articulating the relationship between Thenjiwe and her foreign lover through the metaphor of a seed and soil. Rather than reproducing the nation, their consideration of multiple types of root systems explores social differences through environmental disparities between different regions.

To an extent, Vera's land and natural imagery erode the myths of purity and cultural homogeneity that undergird nationalist discourses. A flow of undifferentiated scenes depicting Thenjiwe with her lover—whose name is withheld by the narrator—generates questions about the political conflicts that surround their intimate relationship. The uneven treatment of their names enables them to signify, as characters, individual and collective genres of social life. Vera deploys free indirect discourse to narrate a scene that Thenjiwe and her lover jointly focalize. The plot's grounding within domestic interiors differs from the previous passage's expansive overlook on Kezi's landscape. However, the synopsis of their romance sustains the critique of nationalism by using a metaphoric bioregionalism.

Within the metaphoric bioregionalism, trees describe the couple's relationship to community life through environmental stewardship. Thenjiwe weighs the viability of a relationship with her partner as a matter of environmentalism. Their ecological relationship orients them to a particular cultural system in which taking a foreign lover is a risk. The concept of trees in abstract terms is detached from the obligation to achieve a realistic representational effect: "Thenjiwe knows that the roots of trees have shapes more definite than leaves" (42). In this example, Thenjiwe's understanding of the principles of plant identification expresses the complexity of constructing social relationships and their contingency on environmental factors. Their relationship provides a form from which to imagine environmentally just living.

The struggle of the two lovers to create common ground critiques the ruling party's erasure of means of enacting political expressions of tribal difference through the figurative vehicle of trees and their root systems. Thenjiwe sketches the growth pattern of tree roots "using a piece of charcoal" as part of their burgeoning relationship (Vera 43). As she delves further into the nuances of their patterns, Thenjiwe builds a complex analogy: "Some of the roots are thick, smooth, lost treasures between a man and a woman," while "Some roots spread farther and farther apart, and it is clear that though they have the same source, they will never touch again. These are the strongest roots of all" (43). Vera uses the root systems to develop the female character as a steward of environmental knowledge. Thenjiwe's focus on the roots themselves overlooks the environmental factors—such as soil, climate, and animal life—that impinge on the course of a plant's life. This oversight overshadows the course of the couple's individual paths: although they "never touch again," it is due to the shifting conditions of their world.

Though she confronts the devastating effects of the war, Vera's shifting narrative abstains from objectifying her characters as passive victims of the Gukurahundi. "Gukurahundi"

possesses multiple significances: massacre, as well as “The first rains” are “known as gukurahundi in the Shona language,” though they “are usually hailed as a symbol of life, fertility and prosperity. But here the term gukurahundi is also a symbol of blood and violence” (Swarns n.p.). References to the coming rains allude to the government’s violation of unarmed citizens without attempting to represent the events within the narrative. The allusion insists on the non-mimetic properties of the Gukurahundi and obstructs the reality effect. By obstructing the reality effect, the allusion emphasizes the responsibilities of the reader, who participates in differentiating between the word’s multiple meanings. By engaging the reader’s imagination in the organization of the novel’s environmental politics, the non-mimetic narrative of Vera’s *The Stone Virgins* becomes infrastructure from which a planetary environmental public might emerge.

Environmental Disconnect

Vera’s ornately figurative language uses organic material to gesture toward inexpressible suffering as well as romance. Her figurative devices point toward the a-mimetic quality of experiences of the Gukurahundi’s violence. In a passage describing the violent rape and mutilation of Nonceba and the murder of her sister Thenjiwe, the reader is confined to the character’s individual pain: “Nonceba longs for the flight of eagles. The flight of thought. There is only discord. Release as deaf as stone” (Vera 76). Although the narrator’s “mind” can fly between characters, Nonceba’s longing for escape from the binds of corporeality incapacitates the narrative. I use “incapacitates” to differentiate between this example and the general function of narration, which delineates events, actions, and objects in order to develop the effect of a

world. Vera's narrative details non-events, non-objects, and the impossibility of articulating action or agency within these conditions.

This incapacitation of the narrative also includes its account of time. The narrator expresses the psycho-somatic effects of the brutalization of Nonceba's body in a passage that decouples sequential events. The dissonance and disconnect between the character and environment disintegrate any semblance of world developed by the novel. As a result, the narration eschews mimetic representation and, thus, frustrates the nationalist desire for the rendering of the resolution of violence into a clear trajectory toward national unification. Vera's prose reflects the illegibility of the subalterns who have not been woven into the newly produced national narrative, as well as the strangeness of their environment to readers in the Global North. In preserving confusion, the novel inscribes an ethical distance between its readers/consumers and the novel's subject. This story does not facilitate the passage of a reading subject through the narrative: the novel's infrastructure is provisional and necessarily jarring as the future is tenuous; it is the denial of the catharsis of representation.

Although Nonceba survives an attack on her family home, the attacker's murder of her sister and subsequent rape and mutilation of Nonceba's body, leave her "vanquished. She makes no claim to living, to her own survival" (91). The character's awareness of the contingency of her subjectivity, the limits of her agency, manifests in an initial wordlessness in which "She thinks of the language of animals, which has no words but memory" (91). Nonceba's internal meditation on "the language of all wounded beings" and "a language in the ending of the mind, of all minds" seeks the grounds for meaningful, ethical relations not reliant on the controlling concept of rational intellect. Previously, scholars have suggested that Vera can be seen as critiquing "what one might call the false movement of time that war creates" (Samuelson 104) in

order to generate “an aesthetic style capable of interweaving different time periods and psychological perspectives into an ultimately forward-pointing vision” that diverges from the misogynist discourse characteristic of twentieth-century nation-building (Samuelson 101). I extend Samuelson’s observation that the novel exposes the illusion of time as a single metronome that precedes historical events and organizes their dispersal into regular, unchanging intervals, but my reading deviates to note the queerness of Vera’s temporal plurality, which, I argue, eschews the utopianism Samuelson posits.

Trapped in the arms of her captor, Siabaso, Nonceba concludes, “That was not true about time moving relentlessly forward, leading us toward the grave. Time stands still, like now” (Vera 77). Rather than determinism about the inevitability of an orderly march to our death, the novel presents the possibility of the impossible: being frozen in time. While *To the Lighthouse* confronts readers with the awareness of other, unrecognizable temporalities, *The Stone Virgins* turns time into a figure. As the point of focalization stops organizing the environment to extract a recognizable self and world for the reader, the reader is forced to inhabit the excruciating events of the character’s rape and mutilation. However, Vera’s novel does not immerse the narration of events in recognizable reality or history.

Some critics have faulted Vera for adopting narrative contortions that obscure the horror of the events of the Gukurahundi. Edna O’Brien writes, “Vera loves language and sometimes immerses herself and us in it to the point where emotional impact, the raw moment of terror, is blurred or lessened. She gives the reader a feast of sensations when what is required is the pivotal confrontation of drama.” Of particular concern for O’Brien is that “The rape proceeds with a trancelike ambiguity, an overwhelming phantasmagoria in which both our sympathy and our revulsion are withheld” (n.p.). O’Brien acknowledges the strength of Vera’s novel by noting the

distinction between the ethics of fictional narratives, which seem to be the production of empathetic relations, and those of reporting, which seem to be the representation of actual events. Despite acknowledging the necessarily different strategies for achieving these different ends, the criticism's focus on the writer's obligations does not account for the neo-colonial environment's unequal distribution of power. Although the events of the Gukurahundi massacre and ongoing conflicts in Zimbabwe are between different tribes—in this case, the Shona and the Ndebele—the “our” whose emotions the author is being demanded to satisfy is an English-speaking, *New Yorker*-reading assembly of people.

O'Brien does raise significant questions about the responsibilities of writers to their subject matter and to their readers. For Woolf, the conventions of writing novels function like English manners: “Both in life and in literature it is necessary to have some means of bridging the gulf between the hostess and her unknown guest on the one hand, the writer and his unknown reader on the other” (Woolf, “Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown” n.p.). Woolf posits that the fiction writer participates in a social relationship in which their primary obligation is to create a shareable space for the reader, some “common meeting place” or “common ground” (ibid.). While she notes intergenerational shifts in the character of the impoverished Mrs. Brown and the expanding agency of the figure of the cook, she does not imagine either as her reader. As a result, she does not configure the “common ground” of her novel to include them as participants in the relationship of fictionality.

In her views of writerly ethics, Vera emphasizes the reader's choice to participate in the fictional relationship. When questioned on the responsibilities of writing in English for an international public, Vera does not shy away from the potential criticism of elitism in her work, noting that her abstruse style or the English language itself likely precludes rural Zimbabweans

from enjoying her writing. Instead, Vera offers, “I think that your audience sort of finds you” (Vera 82). Rather than the literary relation being determined by the economics of publishing or the writer’s will, a reading public possesses the bulk of the agency in the interaction because, “You do identify whom you want to read. So its not for me to say whether I’m writing for this group or that group” (82). The power of identification, in Vera’s account, lies primarily in the reader’s selection of authors as opposed to being a responsibility of the author.

The final passages of *The Stone Virgins* leave Nonceba in the city. Although she has moved to the city and lives with her sister’s former lover, Nonceba’s wounds remain. Her injuries, internal and external, function as a glaringly explicit synecdoche for the suffering of many of the new nation’s female inhabitants. The former lover, Cephas, is a national archivist who works to produce a history for the new country. The national archivist faces the task of sequencing documents and artefacts to produce a narrative of the nation’s formation. Yet Cephas acknowledges an incapacity—the limits of the archive—to accommodate Nonceba’s experience of the war within the history of the Great Zimbabwe. Gaps and fissures remain in his knowledge of Nonceba’s history—a failure of knowledge’s grasping power. The lack of closure foregrounds how the narrative of Zimbabwe excludes the stories of some of its people. Thus, the conclusion emphasizes how the novel models the role of fiction as an imaginative environment that would include and support the conceptualization of the habitat necessary for public life.

Vera’s conclusion models what fictional literature might afford those excluded from an account of the people. However, the conclusion remains ambivalent on the work of the historical archivist. Cephas echoes Thenjiwe’s earlier consideration of foot patterns as a synecdoche for social relations within Zimbabwe as he contemplates his responsibilities “to learn to re-create the manner in which the tenderest branches bend, meet, and dry” in order to replicate “the way it

protects the cool, livable places within—deliverance” (184). The conclusion reiterates the difference between developing environmental conditions necessary for supporting individual lives and the cultural infrastructure inclusive of diverse imaginative practices. Both, it suggests, are necessary responsibilities of any legitimate government to its people. The repetition of “the way” connects the development of the nation to restoring cultural traditions of environmental stewardship. Cephas’s archival work is figured as environmental work that engages a never fully realized subject. The outcome of Cephas’s historical account remains undetermined. While the branches and roots of tradition no longer grow, their drying could become the opportunity for developing the infrastructure of a habitat for public life.

Conclusion and Pivot

Yvonne Vera’s *The Stone Virgins* and Virginia Woolf’s *To the Lighthouse* might seem odd as points of departure for an inquiry into literary environmentalism. This chapter has begun to identify how the interiority and immediacy of these two novels make them counter-weights to the totalizing narrative of The Anthropocene. Admittedly, a global environmental crisis would seem to demand a subject characterized by its ability to organize the environment as a resource for a coherent narrative state on a planetary scale. Such a form of the human obscures the lives of the socially marginalized.¹³ The Anthropocene has been used as the platform for calls for literary environmentalists to prioritize works of committed non-fiction as well as speculative fiction of alternatively utopian or dystopian genres. Yet environmentalism is an ordinary and recurring habit enmeshed in the daily rhythms of life that need not be co-opted for the reproduction of the established social order of Anglo-European Modernity. Environmentalism is not an explicit

¹³ See Chakrabarty, especially “The Climate of History: Four Theses.”

commitment of either of these two fictional texts, and it is not a political cause associated with either author. But, in each novel, I've traced environmental development as a significant feature of narrative politics and also considered how each novel addresses environmentalism as a thematic object. Environmental conservation and sustainable development have been instruments of modern nation-states and have characterized socio-political identities by attaching particular values to the temporal organization of biopolitical discourses according to chrononormative teleologies.

Woolf obfuscates the boundary delineating domestic and foreign by showing the dinner table as the nexus of global networks of cultural, material, and political interaction. The novel fragments the illusion of homogeneity that haunts discussions of nation-states' populations when undertaken on a global scale. Vera diverts the text's narrative stream to suspend the "full" development of the story-environment into a fulfilling account of Zimbabwe. By withholding from the narrative total restoration of land and the abolishment of all possibility of exploitation, *The Stone Virgins* engages in an ethics of co-habitation. These two novels blur the distinction between individuals and environments and eschew the "tragic story with only one real actor, one real world-make, the hero" (Haraway 39). Like *To the Lighthouse*, *The Stone Virgins* offers communities tangled in grief and seeking more livable places by sustaining the existing social structures. This chapter has begun to describe the narrative environmentalism that accompanies the characterization of participants.

RESTORATION: CONFRONTATIONS WITH ABLEISM AND COLONIALISM

As planetary environmental degradation and a warming climate threaten present and future life, the accompanying concept of the Anthropocene has reorganized deliberative processes of environmentalism as a politics of survival that recategorizes the humanity of lives as part of material nature. This chapter considers the accessibility of environmental politics in Michael Ondaatje's *Anil's Ghost* and James Joyce's *Ulysses*. "Restoration: Confronting Ableism and Colonialism" considers environmental justice as a pursuit that should be inclusive of diverse participants and that necessitates accessible, healthy, clean environments. Throughout the chapter, my readings address the influence of ableism and colonialism in delimiting safe, healthy, and clean environments. I examine how each novel supports environmental accessibility through complex narrative movements. My analysis allies itself with postcolonial and queer disability studies to elaborate a pluralistic account of each novel's paratextual infrastructure and the conceptual infrastructures of forgiveness. By examining how each novel engages with restoration and understanding through mimesis, the chapter also models reading as a tactic of engaging environmental ethics supportive of public life.

The Anthropocene Working Group (AWG) voted in May 2019 to define the Anthropocene as a slice in the geological record with a starting point in the mid-twentieth century; however, they will not submit a formal proposal to the International Commission on Stratigraphy—the organization that oversees the official geological time chart—until 2021 (Subramanian n.p.). In a response to the AWG's vote, a dissenting member noted that the evidence "overwhelmingly indicates a time-transgressive Anthropocene with multiple beginnings rather than a single moment of origin" and registered concern that tethering the epoch to a single beginning "impedes rather than facilitates scientific understanding of human involvement in Earth system change" (Edgeworth qtd. Subramanian n.p.). The ecocritic

Lawrence Buell notes that, although geologists introduced the Anthropocene to describe the unparalleled dominance of human influences in the geological record of planetary history, the environmental humanities and Western popular culture have been its primary adopters while the International Union of Geological Sciences has yet to reach an agreement (1). Although the Anthropocene might never be institutionally recognized by scientific experts, critical practitioners have responded to the term's proposal with discussion about the political organization of human life relative to environment.

Public attention to the geological period, the Anthropocene, has been accompanied by increasing sensitivity to changes in the planet's systems—environmental degradation, climate change, and the Sixth Great Extinction. Amid increasingly mainstream worry about the earth's health, the United Nations contracted a Special Rapporteur to study the relationship between human rights and environment. In 2018, the Rapporteur reported to the Human Rights Council that its existing framework of human rights depends on “a safe, clean, healthy and sustainable environment” (5). Significantly, the Rapporteur found that the order of human rights currently in operation already contained an implicit environmentalism. Rather than requiring additional articles to the U.N.'s framework of human rights, the environmental obligations of states were already features of the system, and the U.N. needed to explicitly emphasize these environmental obligations to its member states. Human rights and environmental stewardship should be recognized as mutually constitutive and obligatory. By recognizing their role as necessary conditions for justice and democratic life, the U.N. lends legitimacy to environmental movements. However, thus far, it has continued to overlook the necessity of inclusivity and accessibility to environmental politics.

The framework developed by the UNHRC connects the health of environments to the existing obligations of national governments to their populations. While democratic legitimacy depends upon a public having access to thriving environments, legitimacy also necessitates the enablement of community members to act as environmental stewards. The U.N.'s findings ground environmentalism in extant government strategies of subjugating "life to the power of death" that Achille Mbembé has called "necropower" (39). Necropolitics is the time-transgressive organization of colonialism, through which "vast populations are subjected to conditions of life conferring upon them the status of *living dead*" (39-40). By linking environmental rights to the obligations of states to their populations, proposals for transnational environmental law and policy build on corrupt grounds that offer no theory of reforming extant global environmental inequalities and injustices. The U.N. appeals to reproductive futurity by targeting the restoration of a common humanity that, paradoxically, has yet to exist in practice. I introduce literary narratives as participants in environmentalist deliberation. I consider: How do novels respond to the imperative to reproduce our lives as the ideal form of future life? How do novels afford consideration to polymorphous social realities?

Anil's Ghost and *Ulysses* have strikingly dissimilar contents and narrative structures. Yet, the dissimilarity of their narrative structures and stories do not preclude the novels' sharing a stake in the issue of accessibility. *Ulysses* unfolds within a single day in a single city, while *Anil's Ghost* shuttles back and forth across years and continents. Each novel evinces skepticism about realist representational politics by mimicking the form of mimetic genres and stretching the limits of affinity. While *Ulysses* and *Anil's Ghost* critique the materialization of history as a singular discourse, critical emphasis on each novel's allegiance to the anti-mimetic tradition of the avant-garde has obscured the extent to which each novel situates its subjects within

infrastructures of human social histories. Aarti Vadde explains Joyce and Ondaatje's experimentations in the mediating properties of generic conventions as participating in a trend toward a politics of cosmopolitanism. Jay Rajiva also observes Ondaatje's "decidedly modernist" style but differentiates Ondaatje's skepticism about "the hallowed past" from the more reverent attitude in *Ulysses* (156). Although reverent might seem a surprising adjective for Joyce's novel, the positivist presentation of the past—though intended as ridicule—does enact a hermeneutic relationship that treats accounts of past events as matters of truth and affirms the authority of such accounts through their repetition in parody.

Ulysses and *Anil's Ghost* exaggerate the narrative infrastructures that turn stories and texts into the books that create the possibilities of a literary body politic. Joyce's complicated Linaati Schema, which correlates each episode with an organ of the human body along with a particular hour of the day and an episode in the Homeric epic is a well-known framework for describing the organization of *Ulysses* (Ellmann 523). Critics of *Anil's Ghost* tie that novel's aesthetics to material problems of social coherence. Margaret Scanlan has suggested that, in *Anil's Ghost*, Ondaatje manages "to create a narrative structure that replicates the experience of terror" and that the "tightly condensed fragments" of his prose ask "the reader to engage in an act of reconstruction, piecing together stories and psychologies as the Sri Lankan artist, Ananda, will piece together the ruined Buddha" (302). His novel "is woven around the plot of 'witnessing the body' as an epistemological tool for scientific inquiry and successful dissemination of political indoctrination" (68) through what Milena Marinkova describes as Ondaatje's "haptic aesthetics," which cultivate "non-appropriative appreciation of opacity" (69). Marinkova argues that, in *Anil's Ghost*, "artistic recreation offers a site where those disempowered by political structures can voice their position" (80). I find that Ondaatje's formal experimentations, when paired with

those of Joyce, support consideration of how literary aesthetics organize global literary publics as critically engaged participants in environmental life by affording access to diverse notions of living in a collective future.

My claim might seem implausible. Given that both Ondaatje and Joyce's novels are known for their "difficulty" and alienation of readers, what can they contribute to an account of literary environmentalism aimed at access to the means of responsible participation? Moreover, my argument might seem to instrumentalize the stories of former subjects of colonialism for the service of a hegemonic global totality, which would be an ethical failure. To counter these potential pitfalls, my readings engage with each novel as an interlocutor in the processes of imagining the constitution of environmentalism in a planetary democracy: rather than instrumentalizing the disempowered, as Marinkova suggests, I observe how receptively reading the books opens channels supportive of collective deliberation on a global scale.

Deliberating Aesthetic Values

Readers of *Anil's Ghost* and *Ulysses* have stridently disputed the validity of the aesthetics and ethics of each novel. *Ulysses* is infamous for its discordant reception. Scholars have thoroughly commented on the novel's fraught publication and reception history.¹⁴ In the United States, the Post Office "confiscated and burned four issues of the *Little Review*" containing episodes from the novel, raising fears that "the government would prosecute the publisher for obscenity" (Ellmann 497). Government agencies in the United States and in the United Kingdom attempted to limit the circulation of *Ulysses* during its serialization as well as when

¹⁴ Kevin Birmingham's *The Most Dangerous Book: The Battle for James Joyce's Ulysses* thoroughly recounts the gritty transnational legal battles sparked by the novel's confrontational approach to norms of civility and decency.

Sylvia Beach published it in book form in 1922. Reader responses to the fourth episode in the *Little Review* participate in collectively disputing the significance of Joyce's experimentation. One reader exclaims, "the much bepraised Joyce's 'Ulysses' is punk" and "Joyce's pleasing habit of throwing chunks of filth into the midst of incoherent maunderings is not at all interesting and rather disgusting" (64). Many in the twenty-first century continue to agree with the earlier reader's evaluation of *Ulysses* as "Something worthless; foolish or meaningless talk; nonsense, rubbish" (*OED*, "punk"). In contrast, another letter lauds Joyce's insight and describes the character Stephen Dedalus as "all too good for this world," arguing that "the most nauseating complaint against his [Joyce's] work is that of immorality and obscenity" (65). While the responses diverge on the object of their ire, these letter writers share a common sense of disgust and act from an interest in the stakes of fictional narratives. Although the readers disagree on the effects of *Ulysses*, each assumes the necessity of deliberating fiction's ethical function. Thus, they model a practice of participation in dialogues about the make-up of collective life and the responsibilities of readers, writers, and books entailed in this public.

In a seminal survey of the representation of reality in European literature, Erich Auerbach offers an alternative view that attributes a leveling effect to "James Joyce's tremendous novel" (547). Auerbach praises *Ulysses* for being "an encyclopedic work, a mirror of Dublin, of Ireland, a mirror too of Europe and its millenia—has for its frame the externally insignificant course of a day in the life of a schoolteacher and an advertising broker" (547). Auerbach ascribes a documentary effect to *Ulysses* that allows its mundane subjects to possess significance on a grand scale. Auerbach's comparison of the novel to a reference source differs from Joyce's attitude toward reading, which is exemplified by his terse query -- "Do you have to understand it?" -- in response to a friend's expression of frustration with the incomprehensibility of another

modernist epic, *The Waste Land* (Ellmann 493). In this exchange, Joyce offers an alternative account of reading ethics that rejects assumptions that the purpose of reading literature is to subjectivize the artwork through logical inquiry. His query responds to the obligation placed on authors that reduces writing to the production of clarity—a complementary tactic to Ondaatje’s opacity. In this instance, Joyce imagines the literary task to be different from informational discourses. Literature invites readers to engage in relationships without a guarantee of a resolution qualified by mutual understanding: a quality vital to restorative environmental justice.

While Joyce celebrates confusion, Michael Ondaatje’s explains his writing as “a kind of archaeological act” that should assist readers in “a discovery of a story. You’re unearthing and you’re learning. The drama is to find out about the characters” (Ondaatje qtd. Gussow, E 1). Joyce and Ondaatje differ on whether the consequences of reading determine the legitimacy of a writer’s strategy. They also differ on the amount of efficacy and agency a reader possesses and how much control should be held by the infrastructure and structure of the novel. However, both writers demonstrate a strong commitment to the settings of their novels. Through their invocation of Dublin and Sri Lanka, Joyce and Ondaatje’s stories suggest a representative obligation of the fiction writer to the actual environment of their subject. According to Gussow, “Sri Lanka is, in fact, the reason for the book [*Anil’s Ghost*]. He [Ondaatje] began with a place, a time and an event: a civil war in the mid 1980’s” (E 5). Ondaatje commits to representing his homeland and the interest of Sri Lankans by disclosing the truth about the civil war’s causes, which included “the economic effects of postcolonialism, the religious conflict between Hindus and Buddhists, the ethnic hatred between several groups of Tamils and the dominant Sinhalese,” (Leclair 32). Reviewers have found Ondaatje’s enactment of his aesthetic claims to be flawed and have criticized the novel’s narrative style for an evasiveness that undermines the author’s stated intent

because “the reader never learns about this history” of internal conflict (Leclair 32). Leclair recognizes their confusion as a problem that undermines the integrity of a literary work. Such criticisms seem to imply that a novel’s objective is to produce a conclusive and comprehensive understanding of the socio-political environment that conditions its story. However, might novels engage readers in deliberating the cultural politics of environments and their relationships to literary encounter? *Ulysses* and *Anil’s Ghost* reallocate responsibilities in a literary encounter through paratextual infrastructures. Jane Bennett’s alternative account of aesthetic encounter in the sympathetic terms of mimesis provides an example of the imaginative infrastructure crucial to creative practices of forgiveness necessary to restorative environmental justice.

Unkind Kinships: Mimesis and the Environmental Politics of Detachment

Laying out a case for transnational justice, Nancy Fraser observes that environmental degradation seems to have uncovered the limits of “territoriality as the sole basis for assigning obligations of justice, given patently trans-territorial problems,” which “prompt many to think in terms of functionally defined ‘communities of risk’ that expand the bounds of justice to include everyone potentially affected” (Fraser 5). Global environmental degradation, the Anthropocene, and climate change challenge understandings of political systems by exceeding traditional modes of organizing and defining boundaries. In a rousing *New York Times* interview, environmental law philosopher Adrian Parr also rejects the territorial contingency of jurisprudence. Instead, Parr uses the species to order political obligations: “The human species is the agent of a terrible injustice being perpetrated against other species, future generations, ecosystems and our fellow human beings” (n.p.). Despite acknowledging ecosystems and other species as victims, Parr must argue for the adjudication of climate change and environmental degradation as crimes against

humanity given the absence in international law of categories of rights outside the human and citizen. Legal and political systems will continue to enact environmental crimes if those rights leave uninterrogated the social construction of species-logic and its imbrication in the rhetoric of sympathy.

The rise of “species” as a community of risk in environmental justice has been accompanied by a similar turn to common affinity as a mechanism for describing inter-species relations among ecocritics of politics. Jane Bennett uncovers “affective encounters between humans and those between human and nonhuman forces” that can be understood as “mimesis qua ‘sympathy,’ where sympathy names a natural force akin to gravity, a material tendency to affect and be affected” that affords “alternatives to the phantasmatic image of self-possessed subjectivity” (1198). Bennett returns aesthetic theory to a congenital potential for mimetic relationships: encounters between humans and nonhumans, through which the subject becomes object-like or the object becomes subject-like as a result of an innate vulnerability to impression that is common to all embodied lifeforms.

Mimesis cleaves the human from actions of sovereign autonomy by highlighting the “vibrancy and effectivity of nonhuman forces” (Bennett 1198). The theoretical tradition that includes Homi Bhabha’s seminal account of mimicry in postcolonial theory identifies it as an aesthetic technique of critiquing social hierarchies: “what emerges between mimesis and mimicry is a *writing*, a mode of representation, that marginalizes the monumentality of history, quite simply mocks its power to be a model, that power which supposedly makes it imitable. Mimicry *repeats* rather than *re-presents*” (125). However, Bhabha examines how simulation can disrupt the illusion of a natural or “real” identity that is essential and given authentic expression

through the performance of culture. Repetition is not representation: it is a specter of discursive injustices that calls attention to the insufficiency of existing structures.

Bennett does not describe mimesis as a critique of species-identity. Instead, mimesis arranges political life through the rule of sympathy. Theoretical accounts that recognize common attributes are necessary steps in efforts to re-imagine the relationship between humans and non-humans. However, redistribution of agency will depend on dismantling cultural frameworks built on exclusion from accessing sympathetic capacities. What is simulated and what elicits sympathy has long been what suits the narrative models of those in power. Displays of sympathy and similarity that challenge norms elicit disgust, fear, aversion. For example, in *Ulysses*, the narrators' articulations of defecation, digestion, orgasm, and menstruation appeal to the reader through sympathy based in being in a body. Consider as well Mbembé's argument that individuals indigenous to colonized lands were treated as lacking "the specifically human character, the specifically human reality" and were deemed "savages" out of "fear that they behave like a part of nature, that they treat nature as their undisputed master" (24). The force of sympathy, thus, is imbricated in identity politics and systems of difference. I contend that novels such as *Ulysses* and *Anil's Ghost*, which de-naturalize moral and epistemological structures, engage readers in deliberating criteria for environmental ethics.

Ulysses, with its extensive history of alienating readers and of sparking contention even among contemporary participants in the modernist community, offers an environmental politics attuned to a plurality of affective and aesthetic scales that inform repulsion, sympathetic attraction, and other forms of encounter. For example, the previous section discussed expressions of disgust accompanying the publication of "Calypso" in *The Little Review*. That episode begins with Leopold Bloom's extended reflection on breakfast. The narrator recounts in detail Bloom's

enjoyment of the inner organs, the unclean meat, of animals. Bloom's musing thoughts trail through various preparations of different fragments of meat before shifting to Bloom's reflection on himself as just one terminal of a complex social system of food circulation. Bloom first attempts to see himself through his cat's gaze (Joyce 4.29). The character models sympathy before puzzling over the cat's physical power and how high the feline might jump. Bloom simulates the process of feeling *like* the cat before returning to the difference between their forms. It is this difference that enables them to cohabitate.

Bloom models social practices that convey sensitivity to environmental ethics. While carefully preparing and delivering Molly's breakfast (4.297), Bloom considers how his own breakfast, specifically the quality of his eggs, has been impacted by a drought (4.43-4) and worries over the supply of meat at local grocers (4.45). Finally, Bloom imagines how irrigation might impact the potential expenses of growing oranges or olives (4.196). The character's thoughts connect domestic life, public life, and natural environment in Ireland's food supply. Tethered to Bloom, the narration meditates on the material conditions that are foundational to personhood in civil and economic senses. While the episode accomplishes the Marxist task of recognizing the individual as a part of a larger social macrocosm, it also pluralizes the systems through which individuals accrete as political agents. By acknowledging multiple, diverging social organizations that lay claim to individual energy, the episode advocates for an environmental politics supportive of complex and diverse participants.

The character's contemplation of his private consumption habits in the context of global systems of production encourages the reader to similarly ponder the implications of private individual consumption for collective life. Bloom's thoughts dash from fragmented meat products to imagining the original creatures in their entirety (4.201). Thus, the animal's role in

the meat industry is made apparent, which seems to place the novel's politics of subjectivity in opposition to the culture of masculinity critiqued by Carol Adams and other ecofeminists (Gaard 272).

The scene's mimetic practice, however, remains imbricated in Western patriarchal cultural practices that tether subjectivity to consumption--particularly of meat—and to masculinity. The role meat plays in the plot, like its meaning, is unresolved in the narrative. The object of Bloom's thought "Sound meat there: like a stalled heifer" (4.153) is ambiguous: is the word used literally to indicate the meat in the butcher's display or is it a metaphor for the young woman Bloom admires? The narrator does not clarify the matter, which leaves readers to hypothesize without any textual evidence sufficient to absolutely disprove either reading. Adams connects the symbolic function of the consumption of meat in Anglo-European culture as "an act of self-definition as a privileged (male-identified) human" (Adams and Calarco 34). The scene conveys the extent that "women and animals" are similarly "positioned as overlapping absent referents in a patriarchal culture" (Adams and Calarco 34) through the narrator's elision of female character into a cow. From the narrative's focalization through Bloom, who is identified with the male subject of rights, female and beef are "like" one another. Despite the human-animal resemblance and the extent that Bloom is affected (with hunger and desire), their affinity shores up the identification of the subject with the role of consumption and human masculinity. However, the unresolved identity of Bloom's affection registers the arbitrary distribution of affective appeal. This tension in meaning draws on readers to deliberate the novel's casting of political agency.

Anil's Ghost similarly exposes the epistemological systems that condition sympathy through the narrative simulation of affective encounters. In a scene similar to Bloom's mimicry

of cat speech, Anil puts “herself into the position of the bird as it took off, and was suddenly vertiginous, realizing how high they were above the valley, the landscape like a green fjord beneath them. In the distance the open plain was bleached white, resembling the sea” (Ondaatje 45). As Anil fantasizes about inhabiting the bird’s position, her attention diverts the narrator’s attention from Sarath’s response to her question about what the president of Sri Lanka is “really like” (45). Although Anil attempts to understand the world from the view of a bird, she ignores an opportunity to understand her colleague’s informed perspective on a matter significant to her actions in Sri Lanka. Although Anil projects subjective experience onto the bird, her brief engagement with the animal is fleeting and relatively uninformed by any work to bolster that understanding: her mimetic efforts remain limited to visual impressions. Anil—and the novelist—instrumentalize the bird as a resource for the narrative’s development of its political subject. Moreover, while imaginatively encountering the bird, the character neglects her responsibility to listen to her fellow conversant’s response to her speech. While seemingly a frustrating digression, the scene outlines Anil’s character in ways significant to the novel’s storyline by dramatizing the character’s efforts to detach herself from the local politics through different mental contortions that create distance. Rather than using mimesis as an aesthetic technique for redistributing access to environmental agency, the narrative and the character’s imaginative actions limit access to the means of participating in dialogue about the politics of the Sri Lankan government in order to preserve the global, cosmopolitan subject’s hegemony.

The Human Body Politic: Some Assembly Required

Despite falling short in some narrative practices necessary to the pursuit of environmental justice, the development of Ondaatje’s protagonist does support imaginative exploration of the

dependence of affective communities on infrastructures of sympathetic epistemology. Anil's medical training recurs as a device through which the character and by proxy the reader, understand her place in the world. Anil sacrifices her Sinhalese language and "curd and jaggery" to replace it with "the language of science" and the bowling habits of fellow forensic anthropologists, and her training in human anatomy (145). Through the character's remembrance of her adoption of the new cultural habits, we develop an understanding of the ideological components of her professional attachments. Her transformation from Sinhalese Sri Lankan to global forensic anthropologist reveals the hidden role the latter performs as a cultural and political identity. As a cultural and political identity, her position as a member of a community, which entails certain relationships, commitments, and responsibilities, generates the conditions that make sympathies possible and impossible.

The reader accompanies Anil in a struggle to organize the novel's events through the epistemological and affective logic of her profession. Within this episteme, Anil attempts to understand an affective encounter hostile to sympathy and antithetical to mimesis: fear. Anil struggles to explain behaviors and emotions of fear through species biology in a recollection of an anatomy lesson on the amygdala—the part of the human brain associated with the fear response (134). The anatomy lesson transforms the human brain into a symbol of the sovereign, autonomous human upon which politics and law depend. Along with Anil, the narrative encourages us to wonder whether humans and their world are determined by essential neural patterns, which have been dictated by genetic make-up and environments beyond individual control.

In confronting the knot of nerves that constitutes the amygdala, the narrative faces the tenuous position of human agency. The character attempts to rescue free will from biological

determinism with the question, “So it’s something created and made by us, by our own histories, is that right? A knot in this person is different from a knot in another, even if they are from the same family. Because we each have a different past” (Ondaatje 134). Anil searches for a scientific mechanism that would connect an individual’s capacity for emotions and patterns of behavior to individual choice in order to restore autonomy to the human being.

Her professor responds to Anil’s question by admitting the limits of their profession’s knowledge: “I don’t think we know yet how similar the knots are, or if there are essential patterns” (Ondaatje 135). Studying the material structures of the brain has yet to yield an understanding of a definitive ontology of personhood. In continuing his remarks, her professor digresses: “I’ve always liked those nineteenth-century novels where brothers and sisters in different cities could feel the same pains, have the same fears...” (Ondaatje 135). The professor uses a literary genre as an alternative window into appreciating the possibilities of human behavior. The professor models how literary form complements scientific description. By supporting the imagination of affective encounters and shared experience unencumbered by the disciplinary conventions of scientific knowledge, the novels create conditions that support the conceptualization of social connections and responsibility in the absence of their existence.

Like *Anil’s Ghost*, *Ulysses* uses bodily organs as vehicles of political commentary. When Bloom participates in a funeral procession in “Hades,” the character’s interior monologue overshadows the physical environment. As Bloom follows Dignam’s funeral, he ruminates on the fuzzy boundaries between the metaphorical heart, the physical heart, and machinery: “Broken heart. A pump after all, pumping thousands of gallons of blood every day. One fine day it gets bunged up: and there you are. Lots of them lying around here: lungs, hearts, livers. Old rusty pumps: damn the thing else. The resurrection and the life” (6. 673-677). Bloom’s thoughts blend

the anatomical function of the heart with its figurative use in romantic discourse. Randy Malamud suggests Joyce's consignment of "the heavily-used (and overdetermined) symbol mostly to the realm of naturalism, just pumping blood, in *Ulysses*" refreshes the trite symbol (92).

Through synecdoche, the broken heart and then the rusty pump stand in for the whole of a human life. The physical heart is crucial to human life. Alone, though, the muscle is insufficient to propel blood through the body: it does not fully determine the quality of an individual's circulatory system, and myriads of conditions external and internal to a person's body affect the heart. Bloom's thoughts, as they ruminate on the differing moments when human hearts become too "bunged up" to maintain a steady tempo, point to this variability in the heart. The inconsistency among hearts holds space for the reader to participate in parsing the meaning among those beats to interrogate the efficacy of a political system that functions via the reduction of collective human interests to a single representative part.

Lost in Restoration

Citizenship, like species and kin, has provided conceptual infrastructure for participation in political relationships. However, citizenship requires the nation-state, which makes it a problematic mechanism for galvanizing participation in environmental politics that often divide or exceed national communities. The extension of social entitlements seems to progress international law in the more just direction of greater inclusivity. Dipesh Chakrabarty has noted that "the unevenness of postcolonial development" constrains individuals within a "politics of survival" where existential need overdetermines actions ("Postcolonial Studies and the Challenge of Climate Change" 7). Global southern studies, postcolonial studies, and indigenous studies

have repeatedly criticized the humanism of rights discourses for generalizing Anglo-European values without regard for the culture of non-Western nations. Given that “human rights are based on the western idea of rational individuals” and that “the concepts and processes embedded in human rights discourse remain culturally Eurocentric,” environmental justice requires confronting oppressive and exclusionary bases and countering through a restorative justice aspiring toward accessibility of political pursuits beyond bare survival (Meekosha 678).

Human rights discourses naturalize rights as features of the human form. However, the recognition of rights by nation-states and transnational institutions depends upon interpretive processes that instrumentalize human life for the purposes of national economy¹⁵. This process of instrumentalization invests in the protection of human life—one of the intents of rights—so long as the investment contributes to (re)productivity. This organization of liberal policy attaches rights to the production of capital. Environmentalism mobilized solely as a prerogative of state government will, inevitably, replicate existing, systemic injustices. Environmental justice depends upon universal access to the means of participating skillfully and practices of political participation that recognize diverse socio-cultural needs, the latter of which notably exceed those contained by the categories of biological life or national citizenship. Moreover, environmental justice requires that stakeholders collectively acknowledge their participation in enacting these conditions in daily life.

¹⁵ Judith Butler describes how the increasingly nationalistic timbre of global politics has encouraged the tendency of Anglo-European persons to uncritically rely on “national affinity” and “culturally specific notions” as criteria for judging the appearance of human life. Butler is interested in how geopolitical borders frame privilege certain lives as more human and more integral to contemporary global society. I argue that environmentalism and environmental justice in the Anthropocene similarly vest beings with rights through the extent that they can be made to “fit” into present Anglo-European societies.

Environmental politics frequently appeals to a politics of future survival embroiled in cis- and heteronormative social practices that conceptualize human life in terms of reproductive capacity. “Futurism,” from the perspective of queer theory, draws attention to the constitution of heterosexual and cisgender identity as norms. Rebekah Sheldon connects environmentalism to “a two-sided salvation narrative: someday the future will be redeemed of the mess our present actions foretell; until then, we must keep the messy future from coming by replicating the present through our children” (Sheldon 35). Sheldon’s critique leads to my question: does environmentalism necessitate an appeal to heteronormativity and the gender binary in order to mobilize support for environmental restoration? The biological child continues and stabilizes the present state of affairs. Though children are denied the ability to represent themselves in present governments, they are instrumentalized in environmental politics. This section contends that futurism is a problem for environmental justice movements as it precludes challenging systemic injustices that marginalize and exclude those who imagine kin using non-reproductive methods, such as some affiliates of LGBTQIA+ communities.

In *Ulysses* and *Anil’s Ghost*, the figure of the child situates the narrative present relative to the collective futures of their respective societies in terms of biological family. Rudy’s ghost appears in “Circe”, which utilizes the generic conventions of drama. Jerry Won Lee describes Bloom as seeking “to find a *replacement* for Rudy, a viable male heir” by cultivating a paternal relationship with Stephen. Bloom’s efforts are thwarted by the appearance of Rudy’s apparition, which Lee suggests “reminds Bloom that Rudy is the biological and ‘real’ son” (292). Erwin R. Steinberg outlines common readings of Rudy as a “sign of renewal” (Tindal qtd. Steinberg 954), the “symbol of sacrifice in Passover” (Steinberg 955), and the idea of a unified Jewish community (955). Although these critics diverge on the precise reference of Rudy as a symbol,

all describe the child as instrumental to articulating an image of collective future life. Rudy's ghost symbolizes the emptiness of a future life constrained to replicating the species in terms of a politics of survival. The child's unspeaking manifestation is exceptional in an episode that allows for the speech of Yews and Waterfalls. Rudy's appearance ends Bloom's (and Stephen's) sojourn through the margins of Dublin civil society. Through its silence, the ghostly child emphasizes the unknowable and undetermined future of collective life. The ghost child synthesizes past and future, muddying the realism of *Ulysses*.

Restorative Work: Environmentalism in Narrative Care

Realism indicates an arrangement of material experience within a literary work in accordance with accepted social beliefs. The referent of "social beliefs" could entail the episteme comprising the scene of writing or that of reading—the reading public is implicated in the realization of a narrative. In chapter one, I discussed Roland Barthes's definition of realism as the narrative production of the *effect* of reality through the cataloguing of material environments, which Barthes connects to the development of history as a discourse, or horizon, of meaning. According to Jacques Rancière, realism develops "a historical process and the movement that brings all people regardless of their social elevation, to an equal surface of visibility" (232). Realism supports the recognition of experience by limiting what is experienced, who can have experience, and what experiences are possible. Rancière notes limits to realism's infinitely expansive egalitarianism that are built into the formal logic of the novel in "a division located in the very simplicity of that moment" that occurs "in the relationship between the whatever that qualifies that moment and the anyone who can experience that quality" (239). The aesthetic criteria of realism delimit the senses of reality that can be experienced as such, whose

experiences matter in such judgements (Rancière 230). Rancière and Barthes emphasize realism's political affectivity: it uncovers the facts of a situation and describes those facts through narrative development. Anil's work as a forensic anthropologist in *Anil's Ghost* and the failure of her quest for justice complicate Rancière's account of the equalizing power of visibility.

Anil and Sarath struggle to identify an uncovered corpse and provide proof of his assassination by the Sri Lankan government in a hostile environment. Anil concludes that Sailor worked in the mines by observing the "mark" of his labor—a deformed heel—on the skeleton. These marks connect Sailor and Ananda with other victims of a global mining industry. Anil focalizes the narrative of this scene, and the character's mind drifts between her previous work in the United States and her present in Sri Lanka. Anil's epiphany follows an extended reflection on her male mentors' identifications of corpses through physical deformities correlated to their work. The character's reflection synthesizes the different events of injury and disease within the exploitative conditions of a global system of resource extraction. The sentence fragment, "These were the markers of occupation..." catalogues but does not explain the significance of the deformities relative to a larger social context that deprives poor, indigenous Sri Lankans of agency (Ondaatje 177). Although Anil uncovers the skeleton's past and makes him visible to readers, Ruwan/Sailor remains an object that propels the novel's plot rather than a formerly experiencing person.

The marks on Sailor's skeleton reveal a history of human rights violations that predate the events that Anil has been sent to investigate in Sri Lanka. Sailor's body provides evidence of what Jasbir Puar describes as "the work machine and the war machine," which "need bodies that are preordained for injury" to fuel global society (65). Puar describes a system of social

production that fabricates the necessity of subjecting certain groups of human beings to inhumane conditions of living and working. The novel locates Sailor in this group of individuals who are denied access to the conditions of asserting personhood. Helen Meekosha observes that globalization has been accompanied by disproportionately large populations of impaired people in the global South. Resource control has led to social conditions in which “impaired people are ‘produced’ in the violence and war that is constantly provoked by the North, either directly or indirectly, in the struggle over the control of minerals, oil, and other economic resources” (Meekosha 668). In Sri Lanka, centuries of colonial occupation for the production of commodities like gems, rubber, coffee, and tea have left a land splintered among warring militias hiding behind the legitimating masks of free-market global economy and government that restricts power to a political elite (Camisani 694). Although Anil and Sarath identify Sailor as Ruwan Kumara, a former toddy tapper who turns to working in a local mine after being injured in a fall, Anil is unable to leverage the name to procure official recognition for Ruwan as a victim of state violence. His skeleton, his death, and his exploitation in the mines eclipse his life in the novel’s narrative. While Sailor stands in for Sinhalese and Tamil Sri Lankans subjected to a politics of fear by an ongoing civil war, Ruwan represents the victims of an exploitative global economy managed by private corporations, who are denied access to meaningful modes of self-representation.

Anil’s explanation of Ruwan’s “markers of occupation” are part of the events constituting the Anthropocene. A handful of media outlets dedicated to reporting global news—such as *Democracy Now!*, *The New York Times*, and *The Guardian*—provide coverage that describes events in terms of planet-wide “climate crisis” (Carrington n.p.). News media should document current events in support of an informed public. However, news media and other forms of

communication are not sufficient to the task of social change. Individuals must choose what they do with the information and, frequently, social change requires the collective imagining of possibilities in addition to understanding the actual world. If the news cannot provide an infrastructure for mobilizing environmental sympathies, what can? In response to another crisis of communal relations, the historical materialist Walter Benjamin turned to the *flâneur* to describe an ideal disappearing from modern life. Benjamin recalls the *flâneur* wandering city streets that are under siege in “the inhospitable, blinding age of big-scale industrialism” (Benjamin 157). Benjamin blames the social structures of industrialized capitalism with preventing “man” from taking hold of sensory data—information—and synthesizing it to form memory (158). The conventions of journalism, according to Benjamin, preclude its readers from being able to “assimilate the information it supplies as part of his own experience” (158). Thus, readers remain isolated, alienated from the possibilities of collective life.

Benjamin’s reading connects the *flâneur* to the *conquest* of an urban environment by an exceptional individual. The subject of the crowd in nineteenth-century European literature reduces the emerging public of democratic politics to the material existence of bodies gathered on common ground without the organizing structures of social class (166). Benjamin quotes Friedrich Engels’s horror at London streets teeming with masses who seem to have abandoned the best of human nature in order to survive in industrialized environments (166). In opposition to the faceless crowd, the *flâneur* skillfully navigates through the streets, darting among the crowd. Benjamin finds literary works tend to characterize the crowd through “fear, revulsion, and horror”: a dehumanized mass beyond the reach of affective encounter and inaccessible to mimetic encounters of sympathy (174).

The episode “Wandering Rocks” imagines a mimesis of the industrial crowd by redistributing access to narrative infrastructure. Marginal characters occupy the narrative landscape and draw attention to the dependence of governance on capacity and debility. Sharon Snyder and David Mitchell coin “ablenationalism” to describe the creation and instrumentalization of disability in “aesthetic efforts to represent the nation as synonymous with a narrow array of acceptable body types. Bodies that function across a range of variations are characterized by their possession of a fluid, adaptive ease among inflexible, human-made environments” (115). They write that society attributes disability to bodies that have incidentally fallen “short of modernity’s lowest qualification bar of citizenship,” a category mistake that defines disability as an “unsalvageable biological” property “rather than socially produced—deviancy. Their incapacities render them too objectionable to be understood as unfairly barred from citizenship as opposed to justifiably relegated to special class options” (116). The Anglo-European cultural construction of disability that Snyder and Mitchell describe draws attention to how disability has been moralized in affective terms that delimit horizons of sympathy and overdetermine individual identity. “Wandering Rocks” and “Circe” provide evidence of how “the notion of the ‘built’ environment provides a common way to designate architectural and structural features devised as obstacles to people with disabilities” (xiv).

Criticism has previously drawn attention to Joyce’s subversion of normative human forms. In “Nausicaa,” Dominika Bednarska suggests, “disability becomes an example of the exceptional becoming ordinary” (75). In her reading of Gerty and Bloom’s reciprocal voyeurism, Bednarska argues that “Gerty’s embodiment” overturns “conventional notions of disability and desirability” through “an alternative structure of desire that moves away from ocular centrism” (83). Bednarska shows the connection between heteronormative reproductivity and the

normative concept of the able-body. In another account that questions the ethics of visibility politics, Robert Volpicelli identifies an aesthetic of “low vision” in modernists such as Joyce and Joseph Conrad that “culminates in what I am calling weak narrative, or the tendency to explore disability aesthetic possibilities at the expense of narrative resolution” (62). Although Volpicelli focuses primarily on *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, his observation that Joyce’s narrative ethics subverts the value of producing unified resolutions supports my examination of the qualities through which *Ulysses* participates and enables participation in democratic deliberation of environmental politics, which demands the sacrifice of consensus in favor of debate and open discussion.

Built environments provide the conditions through which individuals gain access to the ability to participate in democratic life. Michael Rubenstein asserts that Joyce wrote *Ulysses* “at a historical moment when an emergent Irish state, and thus an emergent Irish definition of the common good, that is to say, of Irish utility, was for the first time historically realizable” (Rubenstein 28). The stylistic innovations of *Ulysses* respond to contemporaneous engineering innovations that improved the living conditions of Irish citizens, so that “Joyce, we might say, is less a nationalist than a statist, and he has some very specific things to say about the state through his consideration of the social infrastructure of the city of Dublin” (48). Rubenstein describes Joyce’s “pragmatic utopianism” as reinventing extant social infrastructures in a kind of conservative development—rather than revolution—that enables the kind of public life that is the foundation of the modern democratic state. *Ulysses*, and especially “Wandering Rocks,” withhold a full celebration of the public infrastructure by drawing attention to the entwined crises of sympathy and understanding.

The roving narrative of “Wandering Rocks,” which follows the circulation of bodies through city streets, focuses on the environment that supports the fantasy of automobility that dominates political life. The narrative digresses from the protagonists of *Ulysses*: Leopold Bloom and Stephen Dedalus. Through focalization that shifts among a diverse cast of characters who move through the city on foot, by tram, and by automobile, the episode draws attention to the third parties and environments that support narrative movement. Even as the narrative position shifts freely through the streets, the passages of the episode indicate individuals the streets do not mobilize. The one-legged sailor and the blind piano tuner recur throughout the novel as explicit representations of (dis)abled bodies. Their deviation from normative human bodies overshadows other features of personhood and individual identity, attesting to disability’s overdetermination of personhood and intersectionality. The one-legged sailor stands in for the debilitating toll of military institutions and the necropolitics of national security. Although the narrator does not explicitly state that he served in the military, the sailor sings a song composed of lyrics describing military service that acts as a *leitmotiv* that makes the sailor a symbol of the debilitating toll of military service.

The state instrumentalizes the ideological infrastructure of nationalism by conscripting Irish citizens in service. The sailor stands in contrast with Mr. Kernan, who appears as a figure of virile masculinity through the narrator’s description of his features. His “High color” and “Grizzled mustache” serve as signs that he is a “Returned Indian officer. Bravely he bore his stumpy body forward on spatted feet, squaring his shoulders” (10.756). Although his body is stumpy, Kernan, focalizing the narrative, imagines himself with healthy color and the ability to propel himself “bravely.” The sailor, however, wanders the streets begging for money. While, to a certain extent, the sailor remains within the stereotype of a vagrant, he also connects the

disparate narrative orientations of the episode. The character implicates the nation-state's instrumentalization of disability that, by fusing economic productivity with ethical value, casts certain individuals outside the affective horizons of civic participation. By contrasting the figuration of the sailor with that of Father Conmee and Mr. Kernan, the surface of the streets, the subterranean "historic spots," and the markets reveal the necessity of re-imagining environmental design to support non-normative forms of life in accessing the means of exercising environmental agency.

The sailor's jolting stride doubles Stephen Dedalus, whose gait Buck Mulligan mockingly describes: "You should see him, he said, when his body loses its balance. Wandering Aengus I call him" (10. 1066). The sailor, to an extent, becomes a foil for Stephen, who in "Scylla and Charybdis" is teasingly called "wandering Aengus of the birds" and questioned "Can you walk straight?" (9.1093, 9.1002). Mulligan's mockery of Stephen presumes balance and mobility to be effects of an individual's inherent power to affect material phenomena with their free will. Describing a body as losing "its balance" neglects the dependence of balance on the relationship between the center of gravity belonging to any individual body and a given terrain, which is to suggest that balance can never be a property wholly within an individual's control. Mocking Stephen for failing to remain upright or walk straight criticizes him for falling short of the norms of male subjectivity that connect auto-mobility with citizenship. Stephen's potential to function as a useful protagonist and as a normative subject of a sovereign Irish nation, through synecdoche, raises questions about the capacity of the environment in Dublin to sustain the development of an Irish public.

"Wandering Rocks" problematizes the politics of accessibility through narrative techniques that obviate how the design of built environments creates conditions conducive to the

exercise of social ability and agency. Through the satirical rendering of Father Conmee, the episode distinguishes among autonomous motion, structural authority, and a person's capacity for participation in collective life. As the priest wanders through Dublin's countryside, his religious occupation determines the terms with which he qualifies his observations: "It was idyllic: and Father Conmee reflected on the providence of the Creator who had made turf to be in bogs whence men might dig it out and bring it to town and hamlet to make fires in the houses of poor people" (Joyce 10.103-6). Conmee espouses a romantic fantasy that divine order sanctions impoverished, rural life. His belief system allows for the conceptualization of poverty as inevitable and normalizes the existence of a population with neither access to the conditions of a healthy, clean, safe environment nor the resources to improve their environmental conditions. This reverie of pastoral life contrasts with the modern urban technology, the tram, that enables Conmee's own progress through Dublin. Conmee becomes a caricature of indifference. The narrator of "Wandering Rocks" draws attention to the character's failures as a *flâneur* and connects the priest's imaginative limitations to social systems that normalize environmental inaccessibility through poverty and disability.

Infrastructure and Building Forgiving Environments

Calls for the criminalization of environmental despoliation and the normalization of environmental behaviors appeal to an existing system of punishment and forgiveness that is rife with problems. Would the law of the Anthropocene expand the prison institutions of liberal states? The next chapter explores the connection between prison infrastructure and environmental injustice. This chapter considers the imaginative actions of sympathy and understanding necessary for conceptualizing universal access to participation in environmental

relationships. Rather than expanding prison systems and increasing already widespread incarceration globally, we need to imagine modes of healing environmental relationships, exercising mercy, and restorative environmental justice. From an ecocritical perspective, the possibility of forgiveness faces some challenges given that, according to Rey Chow, forgiveness is “the type of action specific to human relations” (107). Chow associates the power of forgiveness with “the sovereign individual anchored in (arguably modern) Western psychosocial models such as action versus passivity, rationality versus irrationality, ownership versus privation, emancipation versus incarceration” (108). Given the concept’s contingency to Western culture, globalized practices of forgiveness face limitations. Rather than casting forgiveness aside as an impossibility, however, Chow asks: “What conceptions of forgiveness, translation, and secularizing (or humanizing) would be necessary for them to be able to coexist with us, other than through the familiar mechanism of *our* transcendent benevolence?” (125). Forgiveness connects with Bennett’s account of mimetic sympathies, as both ruminate on modes of imaginative interaction not beholden to existing relationships of power and individual sovereignty.

Ulysses explores conditions of forgiveness by staging the trial of its protagonist, Leopold Bloom. Far from restoring a classic, heroic structure to the novel, “Circe” overturns epic convention by placing its protagonist at the mercy of other characters. By setting “Circe” in Dublin’s “nighttown,” Joyce draws attention to the role of environments in the creation of illegality and the determination of access to sympathy. Bloom’s rescue from the trial’s arbitrary outcomes calls into question processes of criminalization and the justice system’s legitimacy. Through the narrative strategies of fiction, justice emerges as a potential event through the intervention of a ghoulish-canine hybrid: a chimera that combines two legal non-entities into a legal

impossibility. Paddy Dignam, whose funeral Bloom attends in “Hades,” appears as a rotting corpse to save Bloom from the absurd proceedings of the trial. Dignam’s emergence as a character occurs by way of a beagle transforming into the grotesquely decayed remains of the man. We are prevented from interpreting Dignam as a sovereign individual through his characterization, which shifts among different species and states of being. The imaginative movements enabled by the infrastructure of fictional narrative, which swerves away from verisimilitude, engender a sympathetic environment conducive to forgiveness. While the terms of Bloom’s forgiveness are not fully resolved, “Circe” suspends judgment to offer an effective pardon.

In “Circe,” narrative processes of decay operate as formal and thematic strategies. While dramatic conventions involve the occurrence of speech acts and events, the episode consists largely of diegetic material that describes changes in states of being that prescribe different perceptions of characters. Within the story, “Circe” dramatizes the decomposition of the legal person as the character of Bloom transforms into different species and characters, as do a host of other characters. The ‘drama’ of this performance denaturalizes the reality of the narrative. Along with dispensing with the narrator, “Circe” transforms the character of Bloom in a series of physical and emotive contortions. Earlier episodes like “Nausicaa,” where Bloom’s arousal in response to Gerty tinges the narrative, or “Lestrygonians,” where Bloom’s hunger impinges on the plot, exemplify Joyce’s hallmark interior monologue. Bewilderingly, “Circe” casts aside the illusion that narration mimicked original consciousnesses and an original reality. Readers who have persevered through Joyce’s previous aesthetic affronts might even be tempted to doubt the author’s tactics. The aesthetic audacity fits within established views of contemporaneous avant-garde movements that were “at once representational and yet highly, even grotesquely, stylized,

with a heightening of gesture and emotion and the evocative deformation of space and time” (McCourt 271). Critics contextualizing Joyce contend that the author responded to the work of his contemporaries and adapted techniques from the Dada movement, expressionism, and surrealism into his prose and poetry (McCourt 271). I differ from these critics in considering these aesthetic techniques alongside the question of material phenomena. In “Circe”, space and time are not *deformed*. Rather, the episode extinguishes the rationalizing conceptual systems, sensual processes, the political systems, and the governmental strategies that formed environments through arrangements of space-time.

The final episode of *Ulysses* deviates from the organizational principles of the Homeric epic that governed the preceding episodes and thus reveals the present to be only partially determined by what has passed both in the novel and in the model that it ostensibly “copies.” The episode contaminates the original mythic schema through the addition of Molly’s perspective. Introducing Penelope’s thoughts engenders questions about the Homeric epic that cannot be answered strictly through an account of what can be observed in the text itself. Jacques Derrida calls Molly’s yes “always a response” that is part of a circle of literary circulation maintained through “repetition, citation, simulacrum, comedy, parasitism, technology of communication, bank archives, telephone, typewriter or gramophone, a loan for a datum” (*Acts of Literature* 19). The “yes” repeats as accents to the episode’s mimicking the flow of a character’s thoughts roaming unconstrained by the conventions of discourse that previous episodes parodied. As one point in an ongoing cycle of literary transmissions, the meaning of *Ulysses* remains undisclosed.

Affirmation concludes the character’s extended interior monologue and emphasizes the issue of consent. As a whole, the episode stages a mutual forgiveness: Molly accepts Bloom into

her bed after his night carousing in Dublin streets, and Bloom accepts the possibility of Molly's affair with Blazes Boylan. Their estrangement has spanned only a day. However, their reunion also marks a return to erotic intimacy after grieving the death of their son, Rudy. While this ending presents the possibility of "restoring" their relationship, the ending does not mark a return of the couple's behavior to conform with norms of domesticity and monogamy. Derrida writes, "Throughout Joyce's oeuvre, the yes and laughter are intertwined. They form one and the same condition of possibility, a kind of transcendental that for once provokes laughter while making one think" (19). Derrida points to a recurring effect in Joyce's writing that confronts readers with the future as a site of difference, a portion of a conversation in which the sovereign individual has not been given the final word. Joyce's editing of this particular phrase further supports this reading. Molly's final yes reflects the changes made by one of Joyce's translators, who changed the original "I will" that ended "Penelope" to "Yes:" "the acknowledgement of the universe should end optimistically with 'yes' rather than authoritatively with 'I will'" (Ellmann 522). The collaborative composition and the collaborative text exemplify the participatory practices of fictional narrative. The "condition of possibility" created through that final 'yes' in the context of Joyce's environmental ethics, impels consideration of the conditions through which caring and being forgiveness become social practice.

Paratextual Infrastructures

Anil's Ghost and *Ulysses* ask their readers to reconcile the scales and qualities of reality according to terms of democratic politics of environmentalism. In support of their respective contents and narrative strategies, paratextual materials enable each novel to probe the paradox of its own materiality alongside that of society. Their paratexts create an infrastructure that orients

each fictional book as a material artifact to external environments comprised of literary discourses as well as the political-bodily life of readers. The expansive paratextual material directing readers through *Ulysses* made the book the definitive example in Gérard Genette's monograph on the matter of paratexts. Genette defines the paratext as "what enables a text to become a book and to be offered as such to its readers and, more generally, to the public" (1). In Genette's descriptions, paratextual materials metaphorically and physically act as the "threshold" that capacitates (and limns) a reader's access to the text and its story (2). Paratextual materials associated with each book provide order to the story's contents and establish the political stakes of reading. Paratexts reconcile the textual bodies with external contexts and attempt to restore a connection between representational forms of subjects and material surroundings.

In the author's note that introduces *Anil's Ghost*, Ondaatje outlines the novel's situation as "fictional work set during this political time and historical moment" (n.p.). The paratexts locate the novel's plot in a larger environmental logic. As a consequence of its environmental dependency, the novel 's coherence depends on the collaboration of external parties—its readers and critics—to restore it to the particular political environment that will supply the necessary resources for its interpretation. In this instance, the paratext becomes the infrastructure that enables the literary public to act and assemble together as such. Broadly speaking, paratexts consist of "a heterogeneous group of practices and discourses of all kinds and dating from all periods" (Genette 2). Like the stakeholders of environmental justice, Genette's paratextual features possess a "common interest, or a convergence of effects, that seems to me more important than the diversity of their aspect" (2). Environmental justice and paratexts might seem disparate lines of inquiry. However, Genette's account of paratexts casts the term's functions and effects in terms akin to definitions of democratic public infrastructure. Paratexts delimit the

possibilities of entry into a text: they capacitate the circulation, critical reception, and dissemination of a text to a reading public. In doing so, they create the possibility of assembling reading publics.

In *Anil's Ghost*, the novel's paratextual material verges on eclipsing the text itself. The epigraph is attributed to a miner's folk song. Given Genette's observation that the epigraph provides "the sense of indirect backing that its presence at the edge of a text gives rise to a backing, that, in general is less costly than the backing of a preface and even of a dedication, for one can obtain it without permission" (159). By introducing *Anil's Ghost* through an epigraph derived from local folk culture implies the support of the Sri Lankan populace, Ondaatje borrows the name of the common folk of Sri Lanka to bolster the credibility of his critique of global legal institutions. By framing the novel within the cultural practices of Sri Lankan workers, the epigraph initiates a strategy that recurs throughout the text itself that instrumentalizes the image of the subaltern in order to align the novel with the interests of a common, unified Sri Lankan populace.

The cosmopolitan, successful author bolsters his claim to speak for the "people"—that is, the oppressed workers of a southern nation—through the epigraphic community created by using their cultural artifact as a paratext for his book. Ondaatje claims to represent Sri Lanka and, in doing so, begins to efface cultural and ethnic diversity into the restored, coherent nation-state of Sri Lanka. Perhaps the folk song effectively foregrounds the character of Sri Lankan life as the grounds for a story of global life. An evaluation of its significance should consider content alongside form. The first line of the song foreshadows Anil's own entry into Sri Lanka on professional business: "In search of a job I came to Bogala" (Ondaatje 3). Employment correlates with entry into the position of speaking subject coincide. The dependence of

representation and political life on employment is a trope throughout the novel and the epigraph. The text's sustained use of inconsistent pagination muddles the relationship between the epigraph and the novel narrative discourse. The absence of regular numbering foregrounds the permeability of paratext, text, book, and the sphere of the reading public. The uncertain paratextual infrastructure destabilizes the book's deliberate framing of the text's plot as occurring recorded political history and actual events. The epigraph's contents acknowledge the dependence of the miners' bodies on the technologies through which human societies exploit their environments, which seems to prioritize bodily vulnerability as well as dependence on environmental surroundings. In the final lines quoted within the epigraph, the miner blesses the scaffolding, the life wheel, and the chain (3). The continuity of human existence is threatened by the very system that constitutes its reality and guarantees its continued viability.

The miner's song invokes the exploitation of the global South's workers by a global marketplace that devours their bodies as a mechanism for extracting resources. Despite the prominence of the epigraph within the text, the miner who speaks describes himself as "Invisible as a fly, not seen from the pithead" (3). The lyrics contained by the epigraph, acknowledge that development of Sri Lanka's natural resources provides some with opportunities for employment. The use of the fly as a metaphor to signify the condition of Sri Lankan miners asks readers to consider whether possession of an occupation satisfies the rights owed to miners. Rather than liberating the miner by providing means for full participation in a global society, the industry obscures the workers from a global society that exists beyond the pithead. The two clauses juxtapose "invisible" and "not seen." The latter shifts the onus to the viewer, attaching culpability to ignorance by casting it as a form of participating in a global society's failure to actively support the social agency of working-class Sri Lankans.

The epigraph attempts to locate Sri Lankan folk culture within the plot's global frame. With the understanding that Ondaatje appropriates indigeneous knowledge without right, Antoinette Burton accuses the novel of "fetishizing indigenous knowledges" (50). The boundaries between the song, a subsequent italicized passage, and the beginning of the novel's primary plot stream remain undisclosed. The flat view yielded by the undisclosed relation of paratext and text obscures the relationship between the consumers of fiction and the producers of the knowledge of the narrative's contents. Ondaatje's privilege as a cosmopolitan author enables him to appropriate an intellectual tradition to which he lacks rights. However, the vacant spaces on the book's pages enact a confrontation with the shadows of local workers denied access to the types of infrastructure that would capacitate participation as political subjects in global society.

The epigraph of *Anil's Ghost* criticizes the anti-democratic effect of excluding producers of economic wealth and social capital from inclusion as participating subjects in global public life. Folk culture becomes a critical practice that dismisses the legitimacy of arguments for world development projects by exposing the narrative of development as freedom to be negligent of its subject to the point of degradation. If economic development does not recognize workers' rights and inclusion in global society as agential subjects, then where does this un-democratic inconsistency leave international bodies premised on the extension of human rights through democratic institutions of law and justice?

Miners—like Ruwan—do not appear within the structures of sympathetic identification due to infrastructural degradation. Where infrastructure transgresses the boundaries of private-public spheres and domestic-foreign territories, it denaturalizes the identification of these spaces. Roads that transport the citizen's body and cables that provide internet access can be channels for interactions that constitute public life. But these formations of modern society, as Michael

Rubenstein notes, can also “act not as a form of social provision” but instead enact violence against particular groups through oppression and exclusion (580). Rob Nixon notes that infrastructure represents “national self-assertion—independence writ large across the landscape—an act of natural conquest” (“Unimagined Communities” 66). Such a conceptualization of nationalism replicates the chauvinistic logic of imperialism, which inscribes the “imagined community” onto a blank, undeveloped space. In India, as well as in Sri Lanka, “the glittering prestige projects of the megadams depended on submergence: of disposable people and ecosystems, but also on the submerged structures of dependence that lay beneath the flamboyant engineering miracles” (Nixon 66). Nixon and Rubenstein focus on infrastructure within the sphere of national publics. While Nixon examines the neocolonial beliefs and effects governing global investment in infrastructure projects to “develop” nations, his inquiry still maintains the coherence of nation-states as the frame of comparison. Through its coercive enforcement of debility, or living-death, infrastructure does not unify a national public. Rather, Anthropocene infrastructures ostensibly restore the public of a biosphere.

In an account that diverges from Auerbach and Bennett, Chow ties the aesthetic strategy of mimesis to ritual sacrifice and victimhood. Chow’s essay strains the imaginative tension that is generated through (re)producing humans as biological life, which she ties to strategies of government that necessitate the sacrifice of nature as “the real.” By probing this aporia, Chow critiques the biopolitical desires of modern governmental institutions, law, and post-structuralist representational ethics. Chow’s readings lay a framework for exploring the incomplete incorporation of raw material and patterns of biological life into systems of representation that operate according to a seemingly antithetical logic. Biopolitical care takes the material human body as its ward and in doing so, makes corporeality a warrant that legitimates the use of

environmental governance to maintain an oppressive Sri Lankan regime. Correspondingly, maintaining and cultivating *human* life becomes a duty of social subjects: “It is in this sense of a coercive imperative to live and stay alive that Foucault’s work resonates” (85). Chow asks, “what if sacrifice is part of an effort to (re)imagine and (re)narrativize an otherwise lost, because inaccessible, past—part of a collective, retrospective striving for coherence?” Her description of sacrifice parallels the coercive angle of environmentalism, particularly in the Anthropocene, which mobilizes anxiety about restoring the collective life of a human species that has yet to truly live in common (86). *Anil’s Ghost* performatively evokes the absence of a collective species-life and the contingency of this vacancy upon a global governmental system that perpetuates the degradation of life worlds.

Environmentalism and bio-necropolitics converge in the administration of health and well-being. For better or worse, hospitals frequently appear as structures pivotal to the institution of healthcare as a strategy through which governments control their publics. Gamini, Sarath’s brother, works as a doctor in Sri Lankan hospitals overrun by victims of guerrilla and military conflicts as well as victims of the environmental chaos wrought by the civil war. The character frequently ventriloquizes polemics against the international order that echo the effects of the novel’s aesthetics. In an inventory of the obstacles facing staff in the hospital where he works, Gamini observes that “The real problem was water” and notes that “Doctors needed to scavenge the countryside for equipment—buckets, Rinso soap powder, a washing machine” (Ondaatje 243). The passage, focalized through Gamini, describes an ongoing plight rather than a specific instance of supply shortage. Caring for human life requires resources, tools, and technology that the Sri Lankan government and global political bodies like the United Nations neglect. From the perspective of biopower, this failure undermines the credibility of these institutions.

Gamini, as a doctor, is juxtaposed in the narrative with Anil, who literally and figuratively acts as a representative of the international community, and Sarath, who similarly acts as representative of the Sri Lankan government. Sarath, backed by the Sri Lankan national government, and Anil, a contracted emissary of the international community, are occupied with guaranteeing the rights of individual human subjects by investigating the terms of their deaths. However, through exceptionalizing death by direct government action upon a single body, the investigation is doomed to fail as they neglect the environmental and systemic conditions necessary to *living* in Sri Lanka. The narrator, focalizing through Gamini, comments on the distorting effect of exceptionalizing military events by observing that “Their hospital existed like a medieval village” where “The most frequently seen problems were snakebite, rabies caused by fox or mongoose, kidney failure, encephalitis, diabetes, tuberculosis, and the war,” which places the nation in a feudal past while situating the war in the natural order of life and death (Ondaatje 243). This implies that war operates not in the domesticated territory of civil society but in a state of chaotic nature, in which insensible environmental causes impact human mortality.

Sarath and Anil are aided in their efforts to restore Ruwan’s identity by Ananda, an alcoholic struggling with the loss of his wife to violent guerilla conflicts. During their work, Ananda attempts suicide. In order to “save” him—that is, to save Ananda’s body from physical death—Sarath departs in search of aid. Sarath’s struggle to access medical assistance from their remote location exemplifies the debilitating power of a necropolitics that designates bodies in former colonies like Sri Lanka disposable and devoid of meaning within the field of rights discourses. As a former gem miner who has turned to alcohol as a mechanism for coping with the presumed murder of his wife, Ananda’s body has been marked by toxic labor conditions found in what Achille Mbembè calls “topographies of cruelty” (39). Ananda’s recovery from the

“living dead” follows a process of being rehabilitated to the service of the law and the Global north’s efforts to position Sri Lanka within the global economy.

Sarath tells Anil “You should live here. Not be here just for another job,” when her quick actions save their companion Ananda’s life following his attempted suicide (200). Although Anil rebuts his accusation with an indignant exclamation to the contrary, that she desired to come back, her obligations to Sri Lankans lack a positive identification. The exchange between the two protagonists reflects a central conflict in criticism of James Joyce and Michael Ondaatje: the ethics guiding migrants’ interactions with their former homelands. The conversation dramatizes the conflict between professional knowledge and the needs-based approach of embodiment. While Anil says that using epinephrine to slow Ananda’s blood loss was luck rather than knowledge, their good fortune is not entirely because of Anil’s bee allergy as the character claims. Reading their “luck” as just an effect of natural--biological--events would mistakenly overlook resource accessibility and vulnerability as a convergence of social, cultural, and economic privileges. This instance exemplifies the problem of positing humans as a unified category in sympathetic affective encounters with other non-humans. Anil shares sympathy with Sarath and Ananda. Although Anil might fancy herself “citizenized” by a friendship with Sarath and Ananda, her ability to stockpile epinephrine and to have it available for Ananda’s use comes from a political identity situated in supply networks stocked with this resource. Her affectivity is mired in the privilege of class, her cosmopolitan status, and her education in Western universities. In this passage, Anil is haunted by the weaponization of vulnerability on global and national scales. Her personal stash stands in stark contrast to the depleted resources available to the public in Sri Lanka’s hospitals.

Ondaatje's novel describes conditions of Sri Lanka in the 1990's. However, a 2012 World Health Organization (WHO) report found Sri Lanka to be still in flux after the havoc of the civil war. There were significant disparities between developed and rural areas: while urban centers had established networks of health centers by 2000, "the peripheral health network suffers from limited development of human resource and inadequate geographical distribution," with medical professionals residing primarily in metropolitan areas (World Health Organization n.p.). In addition to the absence of governmental institutions, the WHO reports that the worst of the war's impacts—damage to infrastructure, restricted mobility, loss of life, and disruption of social networks—are concentrated along the nation's borders. *Anil's Ghost* transposes the facts into stories of victims whose lives are summarily sacrificed during the course of a war that destroys environments necessary to communal life.

Victimhood and sacrifice are central, if unnamed, tropes in ecocriticism of *Ulysses*. James Fairhall commends *Ulysses* for exposing the contingency of human autonomy on a hegemonic suppression of nature and observes, "If we admit that the ghosts of Ireland's lost forests haunt biodiversity-depleted Irish landscape, then they haunt the pages of *Ulysses* as well" (381). Fairhall excavates a historical tradition linking environmental exploitation with colonial domination that ties Joyce's epistemic reference in "Cyclops" to the harnessing of trees by settler colonialism and Irish nationalism. Ireland's landscape continues to be marked by economic and ecological distortions of a colonial domination that is sustained in the coercive imperative to "make live." Fairhall's sacrificial logic locates the ecological in environments beyond sites domesticated by human inhabitants: "nature" and animal life are always already the victims of human perpetrators, passive recipients of human care, or co-opted in the mandatory pursuit of sustaining (human) life.

The division of labor between human and material environments occurs as a relation of environmentalism, while environmental justice manifests within the legal systems governing the citizens of nation-states. Restorative environmentalism promises to reunite the material force of human life and the discursive power of the citizen subject through the cultivation of bodily-environmental relations of vitality and health in a species-state. The final two sections of *Anil's Ghost*, "Life Wheel" and "Distance," blur the binary of degradation/restoration. The sections oppose the fates of two fragmented icons: President Katugala's assassination by an unnamed rebel and Ananda's restoration of a Buddha that was destroyed during the conflict.

Following a passage that describes the assassination of the president from an objective vantage point, the novel returns to Ananda, who has been restored to health and now works to reassemble desecrated statues of the Buddha. The narrative style of the Buddha's story, which is focalized through the intra-diegetic character Ananda, contrasts with that of the President. Using Ananda as a vehicle for narrative seems to emblematically recuperate some of Sri Lanka's "voice" from its dependence on Western-dominated global institutions. This might seem to ask Ondaatje's cosmopolitan audience to sympathize with the former miner by giving "the first and last look...to someone so close" (306). However, excluding the socio-economic conditions of Ananda's inclusion (working for an international aid organization) and instrumentalizing the character for the benefit of a predominantly Western reading public falls short of capacitating Ananda's environmental participation (306).

The disclosed perspectives of Ananda and the unnamed miner of the epigraph frame the text; however, the organization of the narrative discourse confines them to the book's peripheries. "Distance" exploits the trope of restoring maimed, diseased, or debilitated bodies to biopolitically reinstate the national government. Ananda, whose glasses Anil frantically returns

to his face following his attempted suicide, restores the Buddha's eyes—and sight--while simultaneously achieving extra-human sight. Ananda's narrative seems to transcend the physical limits of the human body (in particular, the body of an elderly recovering alcoholic who depends on glasses). The narrator acknowledges the unusual ability afforded the character, which starkly contrasts with the extra-diegetic reportage that documented Katugala's assassination from an apparently omniscient position. Differentiating the aesthetics of narrating political-historical events and natural-historical events affirms the sacrificial logic of the binary of environmentalism/ environmental justice that obscures the instrumentalization of biology in politics and law.

Ananda's panorama fabricates the fantasy of a location beyond the scope of politics as it surveys the Sri Lankan landscape:

now with human sight he was seeing all the fibres of natural history around him. He could witness the smallest approach of a bird, every flick of its wing, or a hundred-mile storm coming down off the mountains near Gonagola and skirting to the plains. He could feel each current of wind, every lattice-like green shadow. (307)

Here, Ananda's vitality is restored even as his artistic labor unifies humans with environments. The recovery of his body for work accompanies the recovery of the environment for the production of life.

Despite the previous critiques, the novel's preoccupation with the place of human actors in natural history anticipates recent debate over the implications of Anthropogenic climate change in which "humans are now part of the natural history of the planet" (Chakrabarty 10). As the scientific community expands the definition of humanity to include "a geophysical force," Dipesh Chakrabarty notes that "we then liken humans to some nonhuman, nonliving agency"

(11). *Anil's Ghost*, like *Ulysses*, struggles with the binary of living human subject and human species as environmental force. Each concludes in a mockery of "human" as a coherent identity through an exaggerated performance of human knowledge and biological sight.

Federating the Real: Mimesis and Verisimilitude

Joyce's and Ondaatje's novels use their paratextual materials to allege the fidelity of their representations to their homelands. The initial episode of *Ulysses*, "Telemachus," begins in a Martello tower. This tower is one of fifty built by the British Empire in Ireland and in other colonial territories around the world ("Martello Towers," James Joyce Tower and Museum website, n.p.). The environment of the story internalizes the problem of creating a coalition between humans and environments given a history of mastery.

Although Martello towers predate the rise of security states, by hardening the coastal borders of Britain's colonial territories in support of their domination, the tower exemplifies Mbembè's argument that *colonial history* contains the genealogical basis of the modern geopolitical state. Even following the establishment of the Irish Free State, the tower continues to legitimate the sovereignty of national power over its territory. The former curator of the Joyce Museum, Robert Nicholson, lists the 1962 opening of the Joyce Museum at the tower alongside the opening of Ireland's national television station as signs of the state's entry into "maturity" (293). Although the tower and museum do not contribute to the material invulnerability of the Irish republic's national territory, the government's preservation of the former imperial military structure as a repository of cultural artifacts aligns the nation-state and colonial state through their shared strategy of governing by the defense of material and social limit of environments within the confine of "territory."

The political domination of colonialism is sustained in an economic relationship in which tourists desiring connection to the historically accurate Dublin of Joyce instead follow the path of his fictitious characters. Joyce's Martello tower, like Woolf's lighthouse, is often read autobiographically as a referent to an actual place. While individuals make pilgrimages to St. Ives, the Martello tower in question has been transformed into a museum for Joyce aficionados. If, as Nicholson notes, "The Tower is a portal of discovery, a gateway to a new and sensational world" (298), then the tower also exemplifies how the material structures of environments contribute to political exclusion and marginalization by limiting the flows of ideas, peoples, and bodies.

As tenants of this monument to the lofty aspirations of imperialism, Stephen Dedalus and Buck Mulligan inhabit a long history of British preeminence in Ireland. This past is not lost: it continues to shape their environments in ways that delimit the field of political subjects. Tracking the tower in the writing of "anti-modernist" writers as a refuge from "the urban technological world of modernism to which they saw themselves in opposition," Theodore Ziolkowski finds the "classic modernists often adduced the tower as a negative icon, as a symbol of the past that they hoped to overturn" (xiii). In *Ulysses*, Stephen "descends from the symbolist tower—not to die, however, but to set out in search of an authentic life and art" (Ziolkowski 155). Joyce's Martello tower commemorates British imperial authority as a spectacular erection over the land of its colonial territory: Ireland. As the setting of the initial episode, the tower introduces Britain's domination of Ireland as an inevitable point of departure for any modern Irish identity. Ziolkowski connects the built structure to the guarantee of future life. The tower becomes the platform that launches the character in an unresolvable investigation of the relationships between "life" as a human, vocation, and political identity.

In *Anil's Ghost* and *Ulysses*, human efforts to master nature and harness it as a resource converge in the trope of built environments that continue to order postcolonial landscapes to conform to colonialist cultural values and governmental strategies. As Anil, Sarath, and Ananda attempt to identify Sailor's remains, they seek refuge in a *walawwa*. The *walawwa* is an environmental vestige of the relationship between political control and the material world. While the tower served military power, the *walawwa* exemplifies the centrality of agricultural practices that exceptionalized the lives of British subjects as grounds for colonization of Sri Lanka. Sharae Deckard connects the material and discursive structure to an aesthetic of "Sri Lankan 'plantation gothic'" that uses the *walawwa* for "either critique or nostalgia" and is "usually abandoned, decaying" (46). For Deckard, the "literature of the 1990s and 2000s draws on plantation gothic aesthetics to express a double haunting" including "both the civil war and continued plantation" (46). Deckard highlights the continued presence of the *walawwa* to demonstrate the persistence of the convergence of colonialism's environmental injustices and the environmental exploitation of agriculture: "even as the regime is portrayed as being even more unstable and vulnerable to exhaustion" (47). The relationship of domination cannot be reduced to a binary of colonizer/colonized. Anil recalls that, as a young woman, her choices were between a husband in rubber and a husband in tea. This memory, an offhand remark in the narrative, marks the convergence of class and gender in a character's experience of colonialism. The brevity of the reflection and its expression as third-person narrated description position Anil's seemingly autonomous decision about her personal life within community struggles to access political agency within environments organized by interwoven systems of colonial oppression, national chauvinism, environmental exploitation, and heteronormative patriarchy. From Anil's perspective, the narrator observes "the aesthetics of the *walawwa* never surfaced among the three

of them. It had been a location of refuge and fear, in spite of calm consistent shadows, the modest height of the wall, the trees that flowered at face level. But the house, the sand garden, the trees had entered them” (202). Although the *walawwa* does not receive space within the events of the novel’s plot, its place in the narrative discourse means it is not entirely the victim of human self-absorption. Instead, the non-descript *walawwa* remains an un-restored structure of Sri Lanka’s colonial environment.

The monumental Martello tower and the “modest” *walawwa* seem to conform to strikingly dissimilar aesthetic and political relationships. The former structure functions in the militaristic securing of territory, while the latter enacts the agricultural control of the land within the state (nation and colonial empire). Additionally, each manifests the power of states to make their populations live, suffer, or die. The *walawwa* remains in the background of *Anil’s Ghost* as a flattened, shadowy canvas for Anil and Sarath’s dramatic fight for truth and justice. The naturalness that characterizes Anil’s observation of workers harvesting its tea, its uninterrogated aesthetics, the casually implied colonial history: these all enact a narrative environmentalism that leaves uncritiqued the plantation home’s legacy of complicity in colonialism as well as its ongoing contribution to global inequality in the tea industry.

In contrast, *Ulysses* cleaves the tower from the material environment that serves as background for human character actions. Stephen’s increasing disenchantment with his friend, Buck, follows from Buck’s demand for control of the Martello tower’s key and is part of one of the novel’s central plot-lines. The tower becomes the stuff of child’s play, when Tommy Caffrey decides his sand castle would “be architecturally improved by a frontdoor like the Martello tower” (Joyce 13. 44). When Tommy fights with his brother Jacky over their control of the property, the miniature tower is crushed. Various plot scenarios repeatedly deploy the Martello

tower in struggles for control over a particular terrain, implicating it as a technology of domination.

Conclusion

Science and technology are necessary to arranging planetary communities during and after the Anthropocene. “Oxen of the Sun,” however, contains a (sardonic) truism to temper the optimism of the twenty-first century citizen-scientist movement: “Science, it cannot be too often repeated, deals with tangible phenomena. The man of science like the man in the street has to face hardheaded facts that cannot be blinked and explain them as best he can. There may be, it is true, some questions which science cannot answer” (14.1226-9). We can engage critically with the notably sexist statement, which posits an analogous relationship between the participation of everyday individuals and scientists in the interpretation of material life through their interactions with environments. The narrator’s presumption of the scientist’s and the political subject’s gender, like presuming the location of empirically meaningful phenomena to be in a street, exemplifies the limitations of scientific observation to which the narrator alludes. If I put this assertion into conversation with the miner who is given voice by the epigraph of *Anil’s Ghost*, the worker made “invisible” regardless of whether or not one blinks, we can see how for the purposes of restorative environmental justice, intangible phenomena—like gender, class, (dis)ability, ethnicity, and nationality—are crucial to remedying the exclusion of individuals from having access participatory parity in environmental political life. Scientific observation should be accompanied by imaginative actions that would explore inclusive ethical and interpretive forms of environmental engagement.

With the United Nations and the World Bank adopting positions of power in arbitrating debates around climate justice, ecocritical scholarship that focuses on the history of development's global implementation—not just the present—is crucial to understanding the problem. My reading of *Anil's Ghost* draws attention to how the novel's confusingly fragmented passages suspend the emergence of humanity as a common state of biological life in natural history. The aesthetic showcases the restorative narrative of a human rights discourse that legitimizes its own sovereignty through the presentation of a postcolonial environment degraded by civil war. Mrinalini Chakravorty observes that “stereotypes of death and violence in the postcolony are evoked as the condition for making and unmaking the abridged form of humanity admitted under rights discourses sanctioned by the West” (549). Rather, conceptualizing the narrative in terms of the biosphere highlights the novel's exposure of the illusion of a Western exception from ongoing violence that is based on “the primal nature of existence in Sri Lanka” (Chakravorty 549). Considering the category of the human as a product of the biosphere does not seek to instate “a universal law” (549), but rather to emphasize how the narrative undermines the conceptualization of a hermetically enclosed “other” place for violence.

I have paired *Anil's Ghost*, a novel written during the proposed Anthropocene, with *Ulysses*, a novel that might not fall within that geological epoch. The latter holds up a mirror to strategies of environmental management as mundane problems of daily metropolitan life, while the former uncovers and archives the exceptional environmental catastrophes of war and colonialism. Their divergences are legion, their commonalities few and mostly addressed in the preceding pages of this chapter. *Ulysses* and *Anil's Ghost* stake their common interest in planetary environmental justice through aesthetics that disrupt the mythic story of environmentalism that ends with the restoration of unity. I have shown how the naturalized unity

of legal person, human as anatomical subject, and self-conscious *flâneur* dissolves in these novels that suspend the restoration of humanity to its environments.

WETLANDS AESTHETICS: NAVIGABILITY AND ORIENTING CONSERVATION

“I want to hear about the ways they are different. The ways we are all different,” Jojo states in Jesmyn Ward’s *Sing, Unburied, Sing* (17). The thirteen-year-old’s request for stories indicates a gap in his acquired knowledge: an affirmation of difference. Global environmentalism has rallied around the survival of one human species and one planet while, simultaneously, many democratic nations reject the pursuit of pluralism in favor of a return to ethnic nationalism.

These changes to our social models galvanize the ethical significance of attending to fluid differences in living, as Jojo requests, within our environmental politics. Public spaces and democratic institutions dedicated to environmentalism should be re-imagined, but by whom? Processes of re-configuration must facilitate access and participation of those who have, historically, been excluded from political life. Within developed nations, conservation practices have been integral to the political landscape of the nation-state, yet governmental agencies, legal systems, and cultural norms imbue particular environments and their inhabitants with negative moral value. In the southern United States, a hierarchy of environments accompanies the familiar channels of race, gender, and class, dispersing powers of life and existence.

This chapter places pressure on conservation law in the United States. I extend the critical framework of intersectional feminists to consider the convergence of gender, race, class, indigeneity, and environmentalism in the legal, ethical, and environmental swamps of Mississippi in order to examine how legend and anecdote operate as tactics of environmentalism. Intersectional analysis is “posed more as a nodal point than a closed system—a gathering place for open-ended investigations of the overlapping and conflicting dynamics of race, gender, class, sexuality, nation, and other inequalities” (Cho et. al 788). As a catalyst for analyzing systemic environmentalism, intersectionality stresses “the problem of sameness and difference and its

relationship to power” as the problems emerge in the distribution of environmental burdens and the limitation of participation in the public domain (795). Within these processes of environmental justice, identities particular to an environmental-cultural relationship—not just that of human/non-human—accrete through narrative processes. The particular readings that follow will identify and differentiate literary techniques in fictional literature, environmental justice, and environmentalism specific to wetlands of the United States. In the final section, I will follow the expanding circle of ethical consideration to international wetlands protection enacted in the Ramsar Treatise.

In this chapter I will compare the construction of race, femininity, indigeneity, and the swamps as issues of “navigability” through two novels. This accentuates the aesthetic and thematic construction of wetlands pairing in Jesmyn Ward’s *Sing, Unburied, Sing* (2017) and William Faulkner’s short story collection *Big Woods: The Hunting Stories* (1955). *Sing, Unburied, Sing* follows Leonie and her son Jojo’s journey to retrieve Jojo’s father, Michael, from Mississippi’s Parchman Prison. Leonie’s white friend and co-worker, Misty, and Leonie’s toddler, Kayla form the road-trip party. We understand the events from the perspectives of adolescent Jojo, his mother Leonie, and the spirit of his grandfather’s young companion from prison Ritchie. The three-point focalization raises questions regarding the problem of navigating fictional stories. I will connect the problem of navigability in literature to the term’s role in wetlands law of the United States. Pop, Jojo and Kayla’s grandfather’s, experiences as forced convict labor at the same prison farm during the Jim Crow era increasingly accumulate in the novel’s narrative present, first in the mode of story and then as a character, the ghost, Ritchie. Jojo’s grandmother struggles silently with cancer in the background of the road-trip plot and the

prison legends that dominate the novel's earlier parts¹⁶. Her slow death to the disease is followed by the family's climactic confrontation with the revenants of past victims of white supremacy. Plot threads elaborate Leonie's interracial relationship with Jojo's father, Michael, her drug addiction, and her tense friendship with a white woman, Misty. The family's personal stories comment on structural, political, environmental, and cultural facets of racism's intersection with gender and class in rural Mississippi.

In *Big Woods*, Faulkner worries over the loss of wilderness lands to expanding industries and social order in rural Mississippi. *Big Woods* merges Faulkner's hunting stories into a meta-narrative of conservation in the southeastern United States through a narrative infrastructure of italicized passages. The four stories revolve around Ike and his hunting comrades as their culture disappears over the course of several decades. In the background of their exploits, a growing logging industry and the establishment of legal institutions bring the morality of their southern frontier culture into confrontation with North American modernity. The stories mourn a myth: the extinction of a predominantly white, male community's landscaping of nature. "The Bear" and "The Old People" focus on Ike's coming-of-age and his exposure to the remnants of a mystical hunting tradition. "A Bear Hunt" and "Race at Morning" shift forward to a time when the mystical rituals of hunting have given way to greedy and debauched forays into the woods. Throughout, the collection fetishizes local Chickasaw cosmology and tokenizes the character of Sam Fathers. Like Ward, Faulkner toys with the function of navigability as a mode of relation. However, despite shifts in time and individual focalizers, the stories privilege the worldview of a white, male hunter.

¹⁶ While she does not speak in the narrative present, Leonie recalls private conversations from more than a decade prior to the novel's beginning and earlier.

Conservation's Limits

In the twenty-first century, governing bodies manage environmental health primarily through environmental law, which operationalizes conservation policies through systemic forms that include regulatory acts and treaties. In many democratic societies, mechanisms exist for mobilizing national and state resources on behalf of territorially significant environments in the name of a respective public. However, the structures that would convene democratic publics on a planetary scale remain nascent relative to the robust problem of environmental brutality. In addition to needing a radical shift in approaches to environmental issues, extant legal methods of enacting ecosystem protections fall short of democratic values¹⁷ in terms of distributive and participatory justice. In the following section, I will examine how conservation law in general and water protection in particular create patterns of sameness and difference that exclude wetlands—and their inhabitants—from protection.

Theodore Roosevelt brought environmental issues into the field of American politics as a part of his presidential campaign strategy. Under his presidential administration, he exercised his power by assigning responsibility for the protection of the natural world to the federal government. These actions did not, in practice or in effect, bring about just treatment for ecosystems and their non-citizen inhabitants. Nor did they conceptualize these responsibilities in ethical terms. Roosevelt advanced a feudal notion of the relationship between human beings and their natural world that encouraged citizens to imagine the natural as needing human protection in order to successfully perform as “servant of human needs” (Purdy 153). For members of

¹⁷ Wendy Brown identifies self-rule as a definitive value of democracy, understood as “the shared rule by the people” (11). Like Brown, I recognize the incompleteness of democratic processes and the term’s complicity as an alibi for neocolonialism under the flag of humanitarian nation-building. Environmental justice is one facet of democratic endeavors becoming freed from a “particular form” and “the people” identified as a constant (Brown 11).

Roosevelt's party, "the continent needed administration by trained and public-spirited officials" who leveraged their expertise to manage the natural world on behalf of America's voting public (154). As president, Roosevelt expanded the structures of government by creating the U.S. Forest Service as an organization within the Department of Agriculture in 1905 (National Parks Service n.p.). In 1906, he enabled the Act for the Preservation of American Antiquities, which had the immediate effect of setting aside public lands for protection. The Act also added a new discretionary power to the organization of the federal government, which allowed a president to declare public lands as National Monuments based on "historical and scientific interest" (NPS n.p.). Reforms to the structure of the law and government shifted the relationship between the nation and the natural world; however, new conservation policies, laws, and institutions managed the environment primarily in terms of economic interests rather than through democratic procedures (Purdy 163). Roosevelt's legacy folds these protective features of government, which expand the field of the federal government's administrative power, into protecting the future of a national population. While his legacy contains a messianic notion of the American democracy to come through conservation, the environmentalism is enforced from the top down. As a strategy that secures natural resources on behalf of the American public, conservation, in this context, denotes the instrumentalization of environments as strategies of identifying and unifying a national population along normative and exclusionary trajectories.

Roosevelt's conservation policies and legislation limited environmentalism to the power of expert administrators with serious implications for future public participation and the distribution of environmental benefits/burdens among populations. Despite the moral values popularly associated with conservation, in practice it has not led to an ethical relationship between a public and a natural world. The federal government operated partly from a negative

definition of conservation: it “was partly defined by its antithesis, ‘waste,’ an old word that conservationists endowed with a new sense” based on an ideal of maximizing the profit extracted from “minerals, trees, or human bodies and energy” (Purdy 164). Conservation creates the public threat of waste in order to appeal to a national public interest in the federal government’s protection. The argument creates a nexus of environmental interest-groups, who are hierarchically ranked in terms of their potential contribution to a normative national economic state. This hierarchy allocates environmental privilege through the distribution of resources and protection based on a normative conception of national identity. According to Jedediah Purdy, conservation “embraced a moral vision of the national community, centered on a government with the power and competence to maintain the health of all the country’s systems, economic, environmental, and cultural” (163). By organizing environmental life normatively around a single, homogeneous national public, conservation has, in practice, frequently usurped environmental choices from the peoples inhabiting the United States’s territories by concentrating the power of environmental policy-making in the domain of the administrative state and scientific experts.¹⁸

The federal government’s narrative of environmental responsibility has often reductively simplified environmentalism to protecting a generalized public’s interest. Although I am

¹⁸ I am arguing that in creating this act, Roosevelt adopts an understanding of government power that allows it the prerogative to impose a unified national identity onto individuals. This form of environmental conservation shares organizational features with the welfare state, which is more traditionally associated with Franklin Delano Roosevelt. Rather than allowing for members of the public to directly influence the actions of state government, the welfare state develops a “conception of solidarity” and implements it “from the top down. It is the state, rather than the people, who are the arbiters and dispensers of social solidarity” (May 57). Thus, the government’s wielding of environmental power on the national public oppresses the democratic organization of power described by Wendy Brown as well as the coalitional politics promoted by Kimberlé Crenshaw.

focusing on the systems of environmental management, I would be remiss if I did not note that those systems were designed by individuals such as Madison Grant, whose contributions to saving the redwoods were matched by his contributions to the eugenics movement (Purdy 181). Roosevelt's participation in hunting and experiences as a land owner with overgrazing precipitated his interests in conservation. His political campaign leveraged personal anecdotes of hunting bears in Mississippi to establish his masculine ethos with voters nostalgic for frontier culture (Matthew Smith 169). Roosevelt's personal experiences, filtered through his identity as a white male, became national norm and the legend for the subsequent mapping of a national public's environmental resources.

Roosevelt's administration also pursued massive development projects that exemplify an idea of government power conserved in the projects enacted by Franklin Delano Roosevelt with the New Deal. The two legislative programs complicate the federal government's administration of conservation by exposing an economic motivation. While the New Deal generated a "surge in water resource projects and agricultural assistance investments," these infrastructures stressed and destroyed swamplands (Herrick 83). The New Deal extends a legislative tradition that had been in practice since the colonial period, which viewed swamplands as blights requiring reclamation for agriculture or other types of human development, with one method of rehabilitation being drainage (Herrick 77). These practices of environmental governance operate normatively on behalf of a collective society, yet they also maintain disciplinary strategies. These disciplinary strategies conceive certain environments as too deviant from a norm centered on the national interest. The deviance of swamps excludes them from protection, rendering them the focus of rehabilitative efforts that ultimately destroy the ecosystem and its inhabitants.

The previous overview of the assumption of conservation as a power of the nation-state, indicates the government's predication of an environment's moral status upon its relationship to a national population. Government agencies limit the terms of moral consideration to relationships occurring on a historical and economic continuum that is then weighed against national economic interest. Must an environment's relationship to the national population—or any species-group—be the frame for ethical consideration? Some environmental ethicists have proposed systems grounded in particular types of ecosystems that take into consideration their present as well as historical relationship with humans:

until recently, wetlands were not viewed as valuable, but rather places to be 'improved', 'brought under control' and 'civilised' in a process that enabled the substitution of a dangerous chaotic and unproductive landscape with one that was perceived to have a greater utility, comprising drained and ordered land that was agriculturally productive (Armstrong and Bradley 86).

Literary fiction has been complicit in the creation and circulation of the stereotype, as "individual authors were reflecting and, perhaps to a lesser degree, moulding the understanding and perceptions of the reading public" (Armstrong and Bradley 86). The authors' account of the popular association of wetlands with the idea of landscape "waste" places them on the outskirts of Roosevelt's conservation movement as the negative symbols affirming productivity and social order.

Faulkner's short story "The Bear Hunt" enacts a conservation politics steeped in hunting culture that uses the swamp's reputation to attack the logging industry. Initially, this story, like others in the collection, seems to mobilize an environmental ethics inclusive of swamps. In the story, a hunting party that includes Ike, his uncle McCaslin, General Compson, Major de Spain,

Sam Fathers, and the renegade Boon conduct their annual hunt through the Mississippi woods for the legendary bear, Old Ben. The deaths of the bear, Sam, and an especially ferocious hunting dog, Lion, dramatize the end of the ritual hunt for Old Ben that results from General Compson's sale of tracts of land to a logging company. Despite criticizing the subsumption of the natural world into a profiteering industry for the sake of modernity, the rights of the white hunters who make up the party orient the terms of the appeal for conservation. Throughout the collection, the restrictive understanding of interests and rights informing the environmental politics exclude female, black, and indigenous identities. In this particular story, Faulkner depicts the "swampers" or "swamp dwellers" as degraded, nearly grotesque caricatures who lack the capacity to participate with parity in the hunting party. They function as backdrops for the party's exploits. On the hunt for Old Ben, Ike speeds past "a swamper, a pointing arm, a gaunt face, the small black orifice of his yelling studded with rotten teeth" (Faulkner 63). The man, who happens to dwell in the swamp, serves as background for the noble quest of young Ike and his companions. He appears as static fragments of a corrupt body rather than as a whole person capable of active participation in the events.

Faulkner's characterization differentiates the swamp dwellers from the group of hunters in Ike's party. Their difference, rendered in terms of class and culture, excludes their group from participation as subjects of the environmental action. However, of the identities convened in the party, the swamp dwellers stand to have the most at stake in the outcome of any logging endeavor. After all, "the swamp-dwellers, the gaunt men who ran traplines and lived on quinine and coons and river water, the farmers of little corn- and cotton-patches along the bottom's edge whose fields and cribs and pig-pens the bear had rifled" have clear investments based in their eco-cultural relationship as inhabitants of the ecosystem (Faulkner 72). While the woods and

their use directly impact the residents of the swamp, the narrator only allows them to act as spectators rather than participating members of an environmental public. Given that swamp residents live in and contribute to the swamp community, they would be considered its public. Yet their proximity to the stigmatized ecosystem renders their environmental politics unrecognizable as such within the narrative. Faulkner's reductive characterization of an environmental community prevents the participation of its members in the environmental narrative.

The relational wetlands ethics developed by Adrian Armstrong and Chris Bradley integrate values complementary to ethical systems currently operating in global environmentalism. Overall, Armstrong and Bradley define the following criteria particular for wetlands protection: rarity, disturbance, biodiversity, productivity, dynamism, remoteness, threat, and utility. They explain that wetlands possess "intrinsic beauty," have the "potential to yield valuable resources," and perform "important hydrological and water quality functions" (93). Past stigma has conditioned public acceptance of wetlands loss—they are not part of the landscape of modernity—that is disproportionately greater relative to other ecosystems (Armstrong and Bradley 93). One of the largest threats to wetlands has been agriculture industries (98), which visibly possess a large portion of the existing national economy and attention. Armstrong and Bradley's sketch of wetlands ethics extends the domain of value covered in existing legal and normative systems that currently operate on global and national scales, yet their ethics leaves open questions of practice. What procedures and which communities should be involved in decision-making to achieve environmentally just results? The following section turns to these questions by considering the agencies and particular legislative acts involved in wetlands conservation in the United States.

Wetlands, Empirically

Twentieth- and twenty-first century environmental law deploys navigability as a norm of its environmental management. In the United States of America, experts dispute how (and whether) government institutions and private organizations should address the facts about wetlands. Environmental scientists and the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) agree to classify swamps, marches, bogs, and fens within the category of wetlands (Cosens 268). Federal regulations that establish norms for wetlands conservation focus on their function as a “substantial nexus” within a national system of waterways and their utility to “the water quality of a navigable water” (Cosens 269). In contrast to the view of government agencies, Barbara Cosens, speaking for wetlands specialists, asserts their concern that “it is the plant, animal, and soil characteristics of a particular area as well as the frequency of saturation that delineate the wetland, not the continuous presence of surface water” (Cosens 270).

One piece of legislation grounds the complex system that manages public, private, and governmental handling of water protection in the United States. The Clean Water Act of 1972 endeavored to protect the American public from pollution in the nation’s waterways. Subsequent legal challenges have led to the refinement of its terms of application to focus on bodies of water used in or adjacent to those used for interstate commerce and navigation (Cosens 268). The act expanded a 1948 Water Pollution Control Act, which was the first major U.S. law to address water pollution, “as a response to pressure from an American public concerned with water pollution” (EPA n.p.). Scientists differ from elected representatives. For the latter of the two, “In environmental and natural resource disputes, finality serves those with economic interests in the resource, whereas science serves those concerned with sustaining the resource itself” (Cosens 264). In addition to prioritizing stewardship of resources, political processes should allow for the

intersectionality of stakeholders in environmental disputes and should create openings that would enable excluded or marginalized stakeholders to participate with parity in deliberating environmental political issues.

The Clean Water Act responded to concern about pollution on the Upper Mississippi River, but its regulations have shaped the flow of the river system in ways that distribute environmental justice unequally among the river's ecological communities. On the Mississippi River System, increased flooding has drawn media attention to the policies of recent environmental administrations and the agencies that enforce them. In 2019, The Army Corps of Engineers responded to "the wettest 12 months in recorded history" (Upholt n.p.). While choosing to protect land used for farming and developed population centers, the Army Corps devastated oyster populations and fisheries in the gulf coast (Upholt n.p.). The agency's decision raises significant issues of environmental justice regarding the distribution of risk. The Corps' actions disregarded certain lives and industries. The Corps might have acted consistently with existing law by exercising its power to alter the river's flow in protection of current national socioeconomic interests. But, should the Corps possess unilateral power over the flow of the massive river system? Who should participate in creating the policies that guide their decisions? Moreover, how can the environmental risks of those present and future denizens of flood-prone lands be more equitably distributed among the environmental stakeholders?

Although the Clean Water Act (along with other federal environmental regulations) specifies a model of public participation in decisions impacting environmental quality, its definition of inclusion can best be described as either "partial" or "pseudoparticipation," states Michele Simmons (96). Though agencies take steps to seek public input, such as setting up meetings and comment periods, the meetings seem to perform a largely cathartic function as

there is no actual guarantee of accountability to public will within the participatory models of the regulations. In other words, public input is sought primarily for the purpose of satisfying the terms of the regulations rather than for the purpose of taking public will into consideration while formulating a course of action (97). Moreover, the CWA's model of public involvement "does not allow for input until after the policy/plan/decision has been made," which impedes any revision that might be made (99). The organization of the process encourages a strategy of agency decision-making that superficially acquires public comment by not setting any criteria for measuring responsiveness to the substance of the comments. Simmons concludes that citizens must "be brought into the decision-making process early enough to contribute to the *design* of the policy" and that their contributions should be treated as "valuable knowledge capable of *constructing* risk through discourse with technical experts" (99).

These questions continued to lurk when the Corps decided to open the Bonnet Carré spillway for the second time in 2019. A continent's worth of freshwater rushed into the saltwater ecosystems along the basin's coast, polluting those ecosystems and disrupting the fishing industry for potentially decades to come (Upholt, n.p.). The spokesperson for the Army Corps of Engineers, Ricky Boyett, stated in an interview that "we've picked the worst enemy in the world, and that's Mother Nature" because "Mother Nature can do what Mother Nature wants, and we're just trying to hold it on pause" (Upholt, n.p.). Boyett uses personhood as a metaphor to shift responsibility for flooding from the government agency. The spokesperson uses nature as a patsy by implying that the flooding is a natural disaster rather than the results of government agencies encountering the limits of their power over the nation's waterways. Despite this lack of public accountability, the Corps continues to hold the power to manage the river system's

infrastructure. This instance shows an anti-democratic exclusion of the public from policies that leaves communities without power in environmental decision-making.

The public implicated in the Mississippi River System infrastructure encompasses a large and diverse group of people occupying lands stretching from Ohio into the delta in Mississippi and Alabama. The flood event reiterates the saliency of a thematic thread running throughout this dissertation: that infrastructure enacts violence upon particular individuals and groups as an effect of excluding them from an environmental public. Modifications to the river have exacerbated episodic flooding in the regions surrounding the river basin and its tributaries. The federal government's Mississippi River & Tributaries Project (MR&T) has altered the volume of the MRS's flow and path through the construction of artificial channels, levees, and revetments. These infrastructures, though implemented to protect "communities and croplands within the floodplain from inundation, have "accelerated the rate of land loss in the Mississippi River delta" and compounded the effect of climate change, which "can also shape the dynamics of continental drainage networks" (Munoz, et al., n.p.). As a result, these flood events dramatize the gap between the public referenced by the project and the multiple publics submerged by the MR&T's operators. Recently, newly developed techniques of paleoflood hydrology have enabled scientists to positively identify "the intensification of anthropogenic modifications to the lower Mississippi River and its basin" with the increased intensity of flooding in the last 150 years (Munoz, et al., n.p.). The scientists conclude that "the costs associated with maintaining current levels of flood protection and navigability will continue to grow at the expense of communities and industries situated in the river's floodplain and its delta" (Munoz, et al., n.p.).

The Mississippi River System includes wetlands that have "rapidly" disappeared during the past few decades (Khan, et. al, 391). In the delta, floods, like hurricanes, impact the sediment

of wetlands; however, floods only add new materials rather than redistributing the river-sediment as is the case with hurricanes (Khan, et. al, 393). In addition to location relative to the river system, types of weather events as well as the changing climate create vectors that shift the intersection of identities. Government agencies like the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) combine victims of floods and hurricanes under the category of natural disaster victims for the purposes of doling out aid. While their care for disaster victims presumes a certain degree of interchangeability of those individuals, given that the costs and time of recovery periods differ among members of this group, there seem to be some significant differences in their experiences that are going unrecognized as an effect of the forced homogeneity of the disaster victim category. FEMA, following the 1988 Stafford Act, was reorganized so that its responsibilities included conducting a civil rights program in compliance with Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (FEMA n.p.). In June 2007, Section 308 of the Stafford Act was amended to include “distribution of supplies, the processing of applications, and other relief and assistance activities shall be accomplished in an equitable and impartial manner, without discrimination on the grounds of race, color, religion, nationality, sex, age, disability, English proficiency, or economic status” (n.p.). While FEMA’s mission includes preparedness and mitigation as it pertains to natural and human-made disasters, the terms of its commitments remain limited to a nondiscriminatory recognition of rights in recovery and relief efforts.

Hurricane Katrina, which propels the plot of Jesmyn Ward’s second novel, *Salvage the Bones*, is a climactic, and therefore compelling, specimen of environmental injustice in fiction. However, before the hurricane “the Gulf Coast states of Louisiana, Mississippi, and Alabama had among the highest national levels of race, class, and gender inequality and the worst quality of life indicators among the poor, people of color, and women” (Weber et al. 1834).

Mississippi's recovery prioritized those already participating within the economic state: "the gaming and tourist industries and homeowners who already had insurance" (Weber et. al, 1834). With support from the federal Department of Housing and Urban Development, officials in Mississippi deliberately diverted funds earmarked for low-income housing to a purportedly public infrastructure project: the expansion of the Port of Gulfport (Weber et. al, 1834). State and federal responses to the hurricane certainly constitute environmental injustice. However, an appreciation of the inequities and exclusions that characterize the ordinary environmental state is necessary for the public to recognize how federal and state responses were, in effect, unjust and infringed on the civil and human rights of people of color, the poor, and women. Ward's third novel, *Sing, Unburied, Sing*, conveys a story that cleaves environmental injustice from climax events—such as natural disasters—and renders them in terms of "slow violence" by foregrounding the presence of environmental injustice within the mundane functioning of the United States government, its laws, and its institutions prior to and following Hurricane Katrina.

Southern Environments and Global Commitments

Criticism articulates an experience of navigating with regard to legends determined by conventions of the profession. For Jesmyn Ward, this initially entailed establishing her relationship to literature of the southern United States by identifying her as heir to William Faulkner's legacy as opposed to by her association with environmentally concerned genres. A *New York Times* review of *Sing, Unburied, Sing* prefaces the review with an excerpt from Faulkner's Nobel acceptance speech. Implicitly, Ward's appeal comes through her affiliation with the canonical figure, whom the review uses to set the scene for Ward's own literary production:

The novelist Jesmyn Ward pinned this speech above her desk. Her memoir and three novels...feel hewn from these grand Faulknerian verities. Not for her the austerity and self-conscious ironies of so much American fiction; her books reach the sweep, force and sense of inevitability of the Greek myths, but as translated to the small, mostly poor, mostly black town in Mississippi where she grew up and where she lives (Sehgal n.p.).

Literary history couples with the socio-economic conditions of rural Mississippi as the environments brought forth in Ward's fiction. Comparison to the white male author is the obligatory term for literary recognition, which assumes the necessity of articulating literary significance approximate to a white masculine tradition. The reviewer also imagines Ward as the agent of this comparison. She pins, hews, and reaches forcefully to translate her environments into the system of literature. Other reviews emphasize the mythic and global qualities of *Sing, Unburied, Sing*. They describe it as an "American Odyssey" and Ward as "the newest bard of global wisdom" (Begley 58); suggesting a novel that emerges at the intersection of distinct literary forms: the (apparently) ahistorical and universal myth with the sociohistorical conditions particular to Mississippi. This chapter examines Ward's re-telling of the legend of Faulknerian Mississippi, which provides a counterpoint to the novel's presentation of Mississippi legends particular to rural, poor, black families. This combination of aesthetics touches on "the grand narrative," while Ward's invocation of Faulkner's Yoknapatawpha resembles intertextuality, which invites the question of whether we should understand this novel by way of postmodernism.

Ward's novels demonstrate the previously mentioned signs of postmodern aesthetics and share postmodernism's concern with truth's relativity. However, as I will elaborate in the chapter, the effects of these critical strategies are intersectional in their analysis of

epistemological power. They raise the question of potential coalitions rising from environmental communities. If postmodernism describes “fragments, hybridity, relativism, play, parody, pastiche, an ironic, sophisticated stance, an ethos bordering on kitsch and camp” (Hassan 16), then, no. Jojo and Leonie live in a grim world where they are haunted by their ancestor’s pasts as slaves and Jim Crow-era convicts. Postmodernism directs its irony: the capitalist organization of Anglo-european socio-cultural life. Postmodernism spoofs a particular framework of knowledge located in a particular cultural philosophy. *Sing, Unburied, Sing* should not be categorized within these terms. The novel navigates Mississippi through reference to a rural, mixed-race family’s perspective. We should situate it within Ward’s aesthetic politics, which struggle to cement cultural grounds for diasporic Black identity that integrate the histories of white supremacy and slavery without reducing the cultural identity to the opposition of Angloeuropean cultural and epistemological production.

Postmodern inquiry centers on capitalist modes of organizing social life around finance and the failure to enclose material reality within linguistic systems. At its most fundamental, the concept of reality depends on the organization of physical bodies from material particles in relationships determined by gravitational forces. On this level, swamplands denote the gap between what is theoretically possible and what is consistent with known laws of our material universe. In 2005, philosopher of mathematics and physics Cumrun Vafa adopted “swampland” to describe those possible universes imagined by string-theory that due to being inconsistent with quantum theory and gravitational laws of our universe, are therefore incompatible with the “string landscape” (1). Although universes that, fall within the swampland are internally consistent, they are differentiated from the landscape due to their incompatibility with our understanding of how matter operates, which renders them unverifiable through experimentation

(1). Swamplands indicate the normalizing of realities to the laws of material existence. Theories are excluded from the landscape of universes based on our inability to reconcile them to the laws governing our own material conditions through experimentation.

Despite the apparent abstraction of theoretical physics from the politics of life, swamplands reveal a bias of even the most theoretical of sciences toward theories that *conserve* its own laws: scientists navigate possible universes by relating them to what they, as a community of experts, know. Scientists decide to exclude swamps from the material landscape that includes our universe in order to conserve scientific beliefs about matter, treated as a species that is constant and unchanging in terms of gravitational law. The experiment authenticates theoretical propositions that can be expressed within the laws of this universe. Despite claiming to presume nothing, experimentation presumes certain procedures, logics, and constants. In the case of swamplands in string-theory, these are the laws of quantum mechanics and Newtonian gravity. Experimentation is surprisingly antithetical to experimental modes. Swamplands reveal a significant distinction between theoretical bodies and material bodies: though swamplands occur in discourse, they cannot interact with the material realm in which species-life unfolds. Yet Vafa's landscapes also shows that, fundamentally, there is a continuum of potential realities rather than only a relationship of domination and exclusion.

This chapter reconsiders the anecdote and the legend as potential experimental practices of coalitional organizing. Members of different publics experience environmental events and use anecdote and legend as experimental practices of communicating, creating, and judging environmental sense. Individuals relate to their environments and participate in ecological communities through anecdotes and legends. A legend is "the performance of truth" as a narrative (Oring 160). As a category, they make claims about the "truth of the account as it is

given” and invite listeners to assess the narrative’s validity (129). In communities, they create occasions for “discussion about the constitution of the world and the principles by which it operates” (128). Legends operate through “the language of tradition—a common fund of knowledge that forms the ‘belief vocabulary’”, a system of “agents, objects, forces, and signs” that enable a particular narrative to be understood by an audience (128). The belief languages “have specific histories situated in the life of particular communities. They are only sometimes shared” (129) and they “generally recount unique experiences” and/or “some aspect of the world and its operation” so that, in some instances, “the extraordinary becomes somewhat ordinary” (Oring 152).

Parchman Farm: Prison and Land Use in the Southern U.S.

Environmental injustice and intergenerational incarceration converge at Parchman Prison Farm. The prison of Ward’s novel functions as a node through which the story navigates the strategies of an unjust legal system. Parchman modulates the story of a single family into a trans-historical and global narrative scale. The novel’s young protagonist, Jojo, expresses the institution’s ineffable cruelty through naïve materialism. In a moment of dramatic irony, the thirteen-year-old hypothesizes the name’s etymology in terms shadowed by the actual prison’s history:

Sometimes I wonder who that parched man was, that man dying for water, that they named the town and the jail after. Wonder if he looked like Pop, straight up and down, brown skin tinged with red, or me, an in-between color, or Michael, the color of milk. Wonder what that man said before he died of a cracked throat (63).

Jojo's reflection operates from the premise of common interests uniting men regardless of race—such as thirst—while also maintaining the significance of skin color as an aspect of identity. Despite the absence of a name or demographic information, the man's demise as a result of his thirst is offered as a foregone conclusion, as if a world where want might be met with aid is unimaginable.

This neglect of want was the strategy of the federal government, states, and local officials. Through government institutions and their agencies, the strategy targeted inhabitants for extermination or exploitation by rehabilitating environments for the development of a particular type of agricultural enterprise: the prison farm. The state of Mississippi built Parchman on former wetlands in the Yazoo-Mississippi Delta. In the first half of the twentieth century, the prison farm was surrounded by “tangled swamps and swollen rivers” and dense forests patrolled by threatening bears and other large predators. In contrast to the hostile environment created for inmates within the prison, the rich sediment deposited in the surrounding lands from the Mississippi river was incredibly rich, fertile, and abundant (Oshinsky 111). Historians have suggested that “in no other region did nature provide such lush inducements for success” (Oshinsky 114). However, this notion ignores the human beings--primarily black men and women—who erected levees, cleared the land, and built the railroads that made the environment ideal for cotton growers (114). The legal system maximized the utility of the prison farm by violating the civil and human rights of black communities in Mississippi, whose members were denied adequate compensation as workers in addition to their exclusion from the rights of citizens.

Parchman brings Jojo's then teenage “Pop” into contact with a child, Richie. Parchman was one of the South's horrific penal farms and one example of the effects of Jim Crow laws that

targeted black communities. National and state laws, enacted through legislative bodies, allowed local authorities to exploit inmates through forced labor. Historian Michael Higginbotham offers an example from Mississippi, where in 1917, “90% of the prison population was black” (110). However, Mississippi’s racist political regime designed economic, legal, and environmental conditions to which generations of writers and musicians have responded. While positioning the novel’s interests in the United States’s cultural imaginary of environmental racism, Parchman connects *Sing, Unburied, Sing* to a corpus of writers and musicians who have been drawn to the farm’s brutal history. Fiction writers including Faulkner and Eudora Welty, as well as blues musicians like Washington “Bukka” White “seem almost mesmerized by the mystique of the huge Delta farm” (Oshinsky 1).

Ward’s evocation of Parchman veers away from this mystique, exposing the racist and classist coordinates that underpinned the design of the prison farm. Jojo orients the narration of Parchman, which occurs in the novel as his memories of hearing his grandfather’s stories about the prison farm. Along with the temporal distancing enacted by the doubled memory frames, the narrator alternates between offering the stories as direct reports of the grandfather’s speech and as summaries. Jojo’s memories of past conversations locate his grandfather’s telling about the prison on the same plane with epic westerns, which are populated by “the outlaw hero Kinnie Wagner and the evil Hogjaw” (Ward 72). Jojo listens to his grandfather speak at the dinner table or “sitting in front of the television in the living room watching westerns in the afternoon, when Pop would interrupt the cowboy on the screen to say this about Parchman: *It was murder. Mass Murder*” (Ward 72-3). Through Jojo’s media environment, his grandfather’s story contributes to the southern United States’s frontier legends, which flow into the popular genre of the western. The positioning within the narrative likens individual lore with mass entertainment and finds in

both the power to govern worlds. In Pop's interruption of the show, the opacity of "it"'s reference allows a potential double: the indigenous experiences and black experiences with a law and government empowered to confer life and death. The grandfather's statements of memory indict the genocidal instrumentalization of a prison and legal system through which the state and the nation-state dominated black and indigeneous communities.

Although the federal government had banned the institution of slavery prior to Parchman's establishment in 1904, state laws and local culture perpetuated plantation conditions in local agricultural industries. Michael Higginbotham explains that "Under Jim Crow laws, in the early 1900s, blacks were arrested, imprisoned, and forced into labor. Moreover, longer sentences for blacks were encouraged in order to extend their labor commitment" (110). When local industries needed more workers, an increase in vagrancy arrests, sometimes by as significant an amount as 800%, followed, along with trials of members of black communities without legal representation, often with "an all-white jury, or without any jury at all" (Higginbotham 110). The prisons and the legal system oppressed black individuals in order to economize on black communities as a "pool" of laborers.

The prison structure itself was deceptive: "no walls or guard towers, no cell blocks or stockades. From the outside, it looked like a typical Delta plantation, with cattle barns, vegetable gardens, mules dotting the landscape, and cotton rows" (Oshinsky 137). The absence of attention to securing the prison's perimeter reflected the degree of control guards held over prison life. Despite the fifteen camps comprising the plantation, which were each surrounded by barbed wire, race and sex alone were recognized as prison identities within "a brutal, predatory culture made worse by the prison's vast and isolated expanse" (Oshinsky 138). Each camp resembled a "cage" that housed prisoners in quarters designed for cost-management and sustainability. The

prison followed the structural design, organizational systems, and social practices of the plantation but replaced slaves with convicts as the source of captive labor: “both [plantation and Parchman] relied on a small staff of rural, lower-class whites to supervise the black labor gangs” who “mixed physical punishment with paternalistic rewards in order to motivate their workers” (Oshinsky 139).

In theory, liberal democratic governance ostensibly uses prisons to restore individuals to behaviors associated with political personhood and in order to conserve the system of laws that constitute a given social order. However, the historical phenomenon of prison farms like Parchman belie this function by implicating the legal system, through its instruments, in the violation of human rights as well as in necro-politics. The brutality and inevitable cruelty of corporeal abuse as a strategy of discipline became legendary; songs about “Black Annie,” a whip used on prisoners, grappled with the dehumanizing practices of plantation life. Higginbotham describes the inhumane conditions: “Black prisoners would rise before dawn and march, at gunpoint, all the way to the fields, sometimes a mile or more, with prison guards trailing on horseback” (110). While in the fields, workers were compelled to maintain the pace of whomever was quickest; they “generally worked until they dropped dead or experienced sunstroke” (Higginbotham 110). They were brutally punished if they could not keep up, and were shot without question if they attempted to escape” (Higginbotham 110). Parchman utilized convicts for a “trustee system, in which selected inmates, called trustee-shooters, watched over the regular convicts” (Oshinsky 140). As a prison inmate, Pop was used by guards to hunt escaped fellow prisoners. The guards force Pop to comply by pointing a rifle muzzle into his face (76), yet he “hated” himself for using his affinity with animals and his knowledge of the woods on

behalf of the prison. The trusty system enacts a necropolitics that snares the human in relations of power over debilitation or death.

Reference to Parchman might seem to exceptionalize the pervasiveness of racism in the structures and institutions of the United States government, yet Ward's novel punctures any illusions about the prison as an isolated specimen. In *Sing, Unburied, Sing*, the events of Richie's death after his failed attempt to escape floods the story-world. The stories frustrate our sense of connectivity as saliency by perforating the diegetic frontiers between characters, narrators, times, and environments. Yet, the effects of the prison are not limited to the interactions between Jojo and his Pop. Leonie's drug addiction and Mam's slow demise from cancer in her home evidence the subordination experienced by black women. These slow deaths enact a lateral agency in response to the absence of social and political systems supportive of their specific pain. Their suffering does not occur as a direct effect of the prison farm. Instead, these pains emanate from an environment made uninhabitable for black communities in the name of protecting a United States public. Legends enable us to locate Parchman Farm in a global system of governance via domination and oppression that denies those forms as navigable.

Anecdotal Story-telling

Federal water protection legislation has frequently excluded wetlands ecosystems as an effect of formal criteria. For example, the Clean Water Act articulates an aesthetics that predicates a body of water's environmental value upon that body's connectivity to a central, national waterway that is "navigable." I use the term aesthetics to describe what most would call the act's criteria. Aesthetics draws attention to the subjective judgments involved in the development of criteria for protection. The act has arbitrarily privileged permanence, which has

excluded many types of wetlands outright (Guehstorf and Martinez 73). President Barack Obama’s Clean Water Rule clarified the contentious quality of “navigability” with the effect of extending recognition to many of the excluded wetlands, but this rule was revoked in September 2019—under the guise of simplicity—by a Trump administration intent on restoring “ a longstanding and familiar regulatory framework” by destroying “an ongoing patchwork of clean water regulations” (Andrew Wheeler qtd. in Flesher n.p.). The act’s framework might be familiar due to its frequent appearance in court cases, most dramatically in 2001 and 2006, when the Supreme Court issued diverging opinions regarding the act’s meaning.

Reconsidering the formal requirements for accessing platforms in environmental politics would be the beginning of (re)designing a more just system. Environmental justice shares with other justice movements the need for a more complex understanding of the content and form of reason in order to enable parity because it includes participants of diverse expertise and experience. This entails considering forms of expressing experience based in individual and community experience, such as occurs in *Sing, Unburied, Sing*¹⁹. A first-person singular narrative voice anchors *Sing, Unburied, Sing* in traditions of personal narratives that counter the narrative landscape of the United States public. In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, “the founders of the black intellectual tradition found it crucial to use the personal to gain access to the rights of citizenship in this nation” and did so “by establishing their selfhood through literacy, telling the stories of their experiences” (McKay 1155). When government institutions have rationalized a tactic as common sense or based in the popular will, they assert properties of permanence, singularity, and homogeneity that exclude intersectional and coalitional identities.

¹⁹ In order to be just, Stacia Ryder argues that policy makers and publics involved in decision-making about environmental resources must consider “individual and group identities” as factors in participation as well as distribution (n.p.).

Intellectual traditions and popular culture have defined fields of objective knowledge and common sense that exclude members of non-dominant communities from feeling recognized and/or included as contributing members. Under these conditions of epistemological exclusion, personal narrative has become a tool through which the oppressed claim personhood and, by extension, civil and cultural rights. “Objectivity and universality” leverages “power” to “mystify our personal investments so as to speak for everyone” (Tate 1147). Ward aligns herself with minority writers who confront conflicts between their assigned public identities and their personal, “private,” selves by deploying personal narrative as “a means of survival” or a “tactic” with potentially “liberating” results (Huh 1156).²⁰ Their narrative responses wield personal identity as a technique of rendering the operation of governmental power discernible and as a platform for social organization from below.

Personal narratives can function as environmental practice by conserving ecological relationships and by enabling communities to self-organize around common interests. In *Sing, Unburied, Sing*, the intergenerational transmission of stories is “an opportunity for the silenced to seek a voice, identity, space” (Huh 1156). Pop’s stories from his childhood saturate Jojo’s world to create a living culture of environmental life:

This is what Pop does when we are alone, sitting up late at night in the living room or out in the yard or woods. He tells me stories. Stories about eating cattails after his daddy been out gathering them from the marsh. Stories about how his mama and her people used to

²⁰ Gayatri Spivak, in *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason*, comments that universal narratives and truth in intellectual tradition have masked their “European ethico-political selfrepresentation” (9). In these objective epistemological systems, “the subject remained unmistakably European” (Spivak 8).

collect Spanish moss to stuff their mattresses. Sometimes he'll tell me the same story three, even four times. (Ward 17)

The stories connect Jojo to family and cultural traditions ecologically grounded in experience living with their environment, unlike “The Bear”’s treatment of swamp-dwellers. Jojo’s recalls his acquisition of environmentalist skills through active learning processes. The character’s accumulated experience as a practitioner of mundane tasks of ecology, through the anecdotal narration, enriches his environmental present. The memory contributes to the development of a personal and environmental identity for the adolescent. In this example, story-telling functions as a viable method of transmitting experience relating to the environment and creating a cultural-bodily life. It balances his grandfather’s stories of the prison and prevents his becoming a suffering object of pathos.

Ward’s style of narration disperses narrative authority. Three first-person narrators guide the novel’s navigation of reasoning, beliefs, experiences, and environments. Unlike Virginia Woolf’s free-indirect discourse, extra-diegetic labels indicate shifts in orientation between intra-diegetic characters with the correlated character’s name. As a result, the novel becomes a platform through which each voice emerges as a stakeholder in the narrative proceedings. Each shift in focalization fully reframes the terms of the aesthetic relationships with respect to the focalizer of the section.

This narrative style introduces participatory parity in the novel’s coalition. Reframing narrative passages re-organizes the story-world relative to gender, generation, and animacy. Each focalizer participates in constructing the world of the story and fills in gaps in the others perspectives. For example, although Jojo begins and ends the novel, Leonie’s sections add insight into his grandmother’s life and their family’s tragic past. Jojo has developed what

Delgado calls “patterns of seeing” based on his grandfather’s stories. As a result, he remains ignorant of Given—his murdered uncle—who only materializes as a character in Leonie’s memories. The characters’ disparate patterns of seeing and differing experiences of their story-world’s events do not compete with one another for “truth”.²¹ Instead, their deviations give rise to a more powerful coalition informed by unique positions grounded in difference. Thus, Jojo’s sections, which primarily view his mother as a drug addict and his grandmother as a cancer victim, are balanced by Leonie’s passages, which articulate her trauma, her grief, and her memories of her mother as a skilled herbalist and midwife who cared for her community.

Despite the novel granting parity to a plurality of experiences, the relationship between these views occurs as an extra-diegetic feature of the novel. Within the narrative’s story-world, the individual characters remain immersed in their individual experiences of their world. As a result of conserving their differences, the novel creates a dramatic irony that neither fully defamiliarizes nor evaporates in a cathartic closure. This dramatic irony saturates the reader in the stakes of the novel. The ethics of saturation as an aesthetic tactic are distinct from the familiar “immersion”. An aesthetics of reality “immerses a virtual body in an environment that stretches in imagination far beyond the confines” of the frame (Laure Ryan 3). Postmodernism responded to realist naivety by seeking to hold “immersion in check through a playful, intrusive narrative style that directed attention back and forth from the story told to the storytelling act” (3) Laure Ryan compares the reader’s absorption into a story’s world with the experience of swimming in an ocean churning with strong currents, where the strokes of the reader to draw out “a vivid mental picture of a textual world” can hardly be conceived as “passive” (11). An

²¹ Richard Delgado observes “there is no single true, or all-encompassing description. The same holds true of events” (72).

immersive text “must create a space to which the reader, spectator, or user can relate, and it must populate this space with individuated objects” (Laure Ryan 14-5). Fiction depends on the collaboration of a reading public, so that the world is “mentally constructed by the reader as environments that stretch in space, exist in time, and serve as habitat for a population of animate agents,” then we should understand Ward’s political aesthetics in terms of coalition (Laure Ryan 15-6). In *Sing, Unburied, Sing* the identities of audience/reader, character, and narrator fluctuate. Saturation is the reader’s experience of their own differences (even among other readers) as contingent to the positive identity-assertion of the fiction. Stories form political engagements through which “we participate in creating what we see in the very act of describing it” (Delgado 72). We cannot fully occupy Jojo or Leonie’s positions or fully realize them via self-will. Rather, we join them to collaborate in creating a more just environmental platform that would enable them to participate with parity in the environmental movement.

When Richie’s ghost emerges as a point of focalization upon Jojo’s arrival at the Parchman prison of his present, the new perspective complicates the novel’s realism. Stories conserve a given arrangement of social life while counter-stories, such as those filtered through *Sing, Unburied, Sing*, constitute the swamplands of social reality. They are absent from a narration or description because they diverge from dominant cultural beliefs that pre-ordain what can or cannot be in this reality. As the novel concludes, Jojo faces Richie along with a forest teeming with the ghosts of black persons victimized by white supremacy. Richie addresses Jojo: “‘I thought once I knew, I could. Cross the waters. Be home. Maybe there, I could’—the word sounds like a ripped rag—‘become something else. Maybe, I could. Become. The song’” (Ward 281). Jojo’s report of Richie’s speech centralizes listening. The sensory experience of hearing and then perceiving the meaning of Richie’s discourse multiplies the frames of materiality. Like

the playful relationships between signifiers and signifieds, the aural vibrations that are heard by Jojo are in excess of the phonemes of the enunciated word. In order to convey the exchange, the listening narrator must invoke the physical experience of hearing the ghost's words. The interrupting analogy foregrounds the culturally embedded 'sensorium' that attenuates the emergence of particular vibrations in the scene of hearing.

The adolescent's exchange with the specter composes the direct report of speech as neither the sound itself nor the vibration of particles echoing in the ear. Pitch, timbre, and volume coagulate in the exchange. The sensuous details of listening to a ghost's voice pause the engrossing emergence of the reader in those haunted woods. The torn fabric draws attention to the relative silence of solitary reading in which fingers graze the surface of a fabric page (or glide over the screen of a tablet or e-reader). These environments of exchange and their material conditions differ significantly, yet the punctured story-narrative levels also gesture to an ethical obligation and complicity on the part of the reader in the injustices disclosed in the novel; this obligation is clear despite distance and difference. Despite a climactic scene that attempts to rid Jojo and his family of the haunting, the specters remain inextricably immersed in the mud and dirt of the present. Although Jojo returns to his grandfather and his younger sister, the book's last pages suspend judgment on the actions of its characters.

The novel contains two climaxes, and, though the pages end, the problems raised in the plot remain unresolved. No character appears as a pathetic stereotype: Leonie, Richie, and Jojo's voices disturb the sedimented dyads of victim/perpetrator, life/death. Like sediment carried along by a stream, Richie shifts from being a character in Pop's personal legend to being a ghost. Richie finally becomes a point of focalization like Jojo and his mother, Leonie, for two chapters before fading from Jojo's world in the novel's conclusion. Richie's function as a point of

focalization complicates the relationship between belief, knowledge, and understanding through *mise en abyme* and *metalepsis*. Richie's transposition among different diegetic levels prevents the instrumentalization of the character for the reader's sympathy by allowing him to shape the course of narration. The experience of saturation that accompanies the challenge of navigating among different points of orientation implicates the reader in addressing injustices. The wetlands aesthetic provides a platform for a coalitional approach.

Cruel to be Kind: Hunting and Conservation

"The Bear" claims an alliance between the hunter and the wilderness based in an intimate penetration of the hunter by woods. Ike's willing "relinquishment" of the tools of the white, male hunter—gun, watch, and compass—enables him to participate in "the ancient rules of hunter and hunted" as he loses his self in "the markless wilderness" (Faulkner 29). Faulkner's obsession with a primordial wilderness affirms what Ursula Heise terms "the wilderness aesthetic," "landscapes untouched by human beings as the standard" (Heise 507). This "transhistorical" framing of the space hides the historical and cultural processes through which the fiction of wilderness became valorized (Heise 507). Colonialism, slavery, patriarchy, imperialism, racism, nationalism, and neoliberalism configure the conservation narrative, yet the narration and critical consensus disregards the operation of difference in systems of domination and oppression. Ike's identity becomes the basis of a relationship with the environment and use of its resources. The story presents the myth of an immersive experience in which the hunter simultaneously ceases to navigate the woods as an individual while also only being authorized to hold this privilege via his identity. While Ike appropriates the culture of local indigeneous tribes like the Chickasaw to enter into a relationship with the wilderness, the narrative denies their existence in the woods in

order to verify the claim of white hunters. The stories rally an environmental public by invoking inherent rights in need of conservation from being trampled by governed society. This environmental public excludes and erases female, indigenous, and black identities.

Big Woods commemorates a singular story of men and wilderness as the totality of relationships in this environmental world. Throughout the collection, *Big Woods* deploys a third-person narrator associated with the psychological realism of Faulkner's modernist contemporaries. "The Bear" focalizes through Ike, who describes his first trip, as a sixteen-year-old, to hunt the legendary bear Old Ben with his cousin, Sam Fathers, Boon Hogganbeck, and Major de Spain. The consistent usage of voice creates the effect of a metaphysical, permanent narrator. No other voice is granted the authority to participate within the narrative. As a result, the stories are oriented to the view of white hunters, who enact a universal environmentalism that juxtaposes human with non-human nature.

The content of the narration aspires to universality, yet by invoking racial identity to reject its saliency, the narrator undermines his claim that environmental politics lack intersectionality. His story "was of the men, not white nor black nor red but men, hunters, with the will and hardihood to endure and the humility and skill to survive, and the dogs and the bear and the deer juxtaposed and relieved against it" (Faulkner 11). The passage only allows hunters to have a stake in the environmental issue. As a result, it generalizes this one identity-group's environmental needs and wants at the expense of other parties and eulogizes a culture that almost exclusively supports white male sociality, which can hardly be said to have died out. By privileging the purity of this singular account of man and nature as well as by locating it in an a-historical, a-political space, Faulkner's conservation precludes the participation of indigenous, black, and female people.

Recent scholarship has begun to address Faulkner's place within the disciplinary struggle to redress the exploitation and erasure of indigeneity in the study of culture in the southern United States. Jay Watson and Annette Trefzer identify a traditional reading of "The Bear" and its protagonist Ike with an environmental imaginary particular to "the American studies template of framing U.S. literature in exceptionalist terms" that is accompanied by a tendency to fetishize Sam Fathers's role without "question of Sam's native lineage and how it might or might not inform his ceremonial and pedagogical functions as 'wilderness' mentor" (xv-xvi). Robbie Ethridge connects the character of Sam Fathers with the "ecological Indian," a stereotype descended from Rousseau's "Noble Savage" (137). Ethridge finds that "the binaries in 'The Bear' persist today in insidious ways. Both non-Native and Native writers and scholars continue to extol the American Indian as having a special, ecological, and protective relationship to the natural world" in opposition to "the white man's destructiveness" (141).

Faulkner's story collection mourns the loss of privilege experienced by white men under the mask of honoring a dying wilderness tradition. The stories develop an exclusionary environmental politics that seeks to conserve the powers of subjectivity within these woods for a limited population of white men. Collectively, they manifest this politics in a miscarriage of environmental justice that marginalizes particular groups within the human-ecological community by misrepresenting black and indigenous communities—like the Chickasaw—in order to assimilate fragments of their cultures into the conservation argument. Joseph R. Urgo define the Faulknerian sense of environment as a vessel containing "all that is involved in the sociological idea of nurture, the philosophical notion of interlocutors (readers and writers), and the political conception of human negotiation, It contains the natural world, including the world of hunting and of agriculture" (n.p.). Abadie and Urgo draw attention to the significance of

hunting and agriculture as defining the Faulknerian environmental aesthetic. Thus, Faulkner aligns with Roosevelt's politics of conservation, which was also oriented to the concerns of agriculture and hunting.

Plantations are a locus of power within a global agricultural system and they have managed global human life through a biopolitics of life, death, and debilitation. Faulkner's writing was deeply rooted in the local culture and history of Mississippi. "He scoured this compost, mixing the past with the present, and the wild, 'big Woods' with cultivated lands," Edouard Glissant observes in (re)visiting Faulkner's works in relation with their geographical and critical contexts (37). Despite the geographical particularity of Faulkner's subjects, Glissant finds the pervasiveness of the plantation system around the world extends the reach of Faulkner's commentary beyond those specific to Mississippi. Glissant attends to the confluence of racial and ecological themes in Faulkner's aesthetics and suggests that the "'reason' for the emblematic presence of Blacks in Faulkner's work is that they form a link between the land and the animals that inhabit it" (61). Rather than representing persons, Glissant finds that Faulkner's black characters are tools for generating comments on the moral qualities of the fictions' white subjects.

Each story in the collection instrumentalizes the wilderness to orient its respective subjects to a homogeneous culture of hunting. Ike's emergence as an adult person elides that social status into masculine identity and links it to the necessary condition of taking animal life. Unlike *Sing, Unburied, Sing, Big Woods* introduces its young protagonists when he has already assumed this identity. The second story of the collection, "The Old People," articulates Ike's first experience successfully killing a game animal. The order presents masculinity as an inevitable and, therefore, natural event in fulfillment of the telos of an extended patriarchal history. Ike's

successful shooting of a buck occurs prior to the beginning of the narrative of “The Old People,” which strips the event of suspense so that the boy replicates what his grandfathers have done and what his descendants will continue to do (Faulkner 115). The story centralizes Ike’s inevitable participation in a ritual tradition that connects him to his male family members, such as his cousin. This order of the collection’s discourse suggests that participation in environmental governance requires experience taking animal life. By emphasizing the inevitability of modern society’s encroachment onto the natural world, *Big Woods* obscures the political decisions and governmental agencies responsible for the imbalance of power. This arrangement of the narrative style forecloses any counternarratives from occurring by allowing one group to dominate the concerns of conservation politics even as members of that group profit financially from the logging and development of the railroad.

The patriarchal environmentalism of *Big Woods* presupposes an exclusivity between the frontier culture of the hunter and the values of law and economic interests. However, the tradition of bear hunting legendry has been significant within United States political history. During the first decades of the twentieth century, bears and other large predators in the Delta region became victims of “overhunting and habitat destruction” that materially and figuratively marginalized the creatures, who were driven to swamps and rugged mountains (Smith 169). Bear hunt stories in particular were prized for existential, economic, and cultural reasons: along with the valuable stores of fat and lush fur, the bear “was the ultimate testament to manliness” and the dominance of whiteness over American land (167). Behind the façade of the single frontier, gender, race, and indigeneity intersect in the creation of environmental identities.

An array of scholars have raised the issues of race and indigeneity in relationship to Faulknerian ecology. Yet Faulkner’s stories also explicitly link hunting prowess to the successful

enactment of a masculinity understood as the preeminent specimen of subjectivity in environmental politics. Women are mostly absent as characters in the collection's stories. When they do appear, it is as accessories to male identities—as in the case of “Bessie’s Jim”—or as victims of white male aggression. Ike casually recalls a memory of Boon accidentally shooting a black woman in the context of justifying the improbability of Boon successfully shooting the bear. The manner in which the story is integrated into the narrative as well as the events themselves are indicative of the collection's exploitation and erasure of black women. The narrator draws the anecdote from Ike's memory to illustrate Boon's inadequacy as a hunter: the woman is treated as a non-agentic prop that serves as material evidence supporting Ike's verdict on Boon's ineptitude. Ike remembers a past occasion when Major de Spain and his cousin McCaslin “cut cards” to decide which would pay for a broken glass window and which would pay for the unnamed woman's leg (60). Their game presumes the exchangeability of a broken window and an injured black woman. Despite the insistent impenetrability of Faulkner's pure wilderness, this disgusting economy infiltrates the terms of the bear hunt as a revenant. From this anecdote, we can see how denying the saliency of race and gender in conservation politics dooms that environmentalism to conserving oppressive social structures.

Ward's treatment of personhood and vulnerability contrasts with Faulkner's brutalizing determinism. Jojo struggles to orient himself within the identities of adult, male, and black at the beginning of the novel. Forebodingly, the narrator begins, “I like to think I know what death is. I like to think that it's something I could look at straight” (Ward 1). Adulthood means confronting the limits of life, showing that “I can get bloody,” recognizing life as necessitating death of oneself or bringing death to others. Jojo is familiar with the mechanics of animal bodies and is ready “to pull what needs to be pulled, separate innards from muscle, organs from cavities” (1).

This ceremony of transforming living creature to dead flesh is categorically different from the spectacle of purchasing meat discussed in the previous chapter.

While Ike's passage into manhood presents the fiction of dissolving into a pre-political merger with nature, Jojo's rituals of adulthood emphasize the exercise of critical judgement through the skillful separation of the goat's distinct organs. Jojo's narration enlivens gruesome details of dismemberment, yet the conceptualized adulthood accretes in relationships with an environmental community. The goat's flesh becomes the instrument through which Pop cares for his ailing wife, for Jojo, and for Jojo's sister Kayla. While the family will consume the goat's flesh, their engagement with the goat brings the family into contact with the whole trajectory of the goat's life. The narrator elaborates with unflinching specificity the experience of taking the goat's life and transforming the creature into meats. Jojo's description of the warmth of the goat's body and the stench that emanates from the flayed carcass might shock or nauseate consumers accustomed to the cloistered illusion of distance facilitated by the United States's system of industrialized meat production. Rather than functioning as a vehicle for chauvinist individuation, the goat's death and adulthood are sites within a community network of subsistence in the absence of access to social support.

The coalition of Jojo's family and their livestock does not dissolve humanity as an identity group privileged over other life. Rather, it is the legacy of legal slavery and the present interdependence of lives connected in an ecological community. A family tradition extends from Pop's great-grandmother, who tells her children how, on the slave boat, "her skin grew around the chains" so that "her mouth shaped to the muzzle. That she was made into an animal under the hot, bright sky" (Ward 69). Laws and the prison institutions of Mississippi continue this oppression on Jojo's Pop, who also knows "what that was, to be made an animal" (69). Ward

provokes the dispersal of legal rights based in a realist account of human/animal identities, yet she does so not do so by dissolving the grounds for human impunity from natural law. Rather, she commands attention to how racism maintains white supremacy by manipulating the legal and governmental processes through which black lives continue to be treated as non-human.

Each author responds to the normative connection of personhood, which is what we mean by adulthood, with the management of animal life. Faulkner attempts to locate this boundary as enclosing political life. Each author situates the practice of hunting human beings alongside the practice of hunting animals. *The Hunting Stories* acts as the subtitle of *Big Woods* and clarifies the unifying theme of the collection: the murder of hunting as a socio-cultural practice capable of organizing and sustaining a political community by encroaching civil and economic society. While a less overt theme in *Sing, Unburied, Sing*, Ward's novel also takes issue with this pillar of rural southern culture. The mud with which Pop covers his body as a remedy for insect bites is the same mud used by the unnamed black man whose flight from those who have enslaved him provides the plot subject of the second italicized passage of *Big Woods*.

Conclusion

The Mississippi River System poses a problem of environmental justice and ethics, not just a question of science. Scientific methods cannot ascertain experiences of environmental harm; however, fiction can help qualify these experiences. Ward's novels are examples of how the institution of fiction can provide the disempowered with a mechanism for mobilizing and assembling in public space. If environmental movements are to function according to democratic norms and if they are to pursue democratic ideals of participation and social justice, we must redress our incrimination in regimes of oppression and domination by creating inclusive

platforms of assembly, conditions conducive to parity among participants, and equality of benefits-burdens.

Environmental justice requires navigating from multiple points of orientation, through multiple identities, and relative to specific ecological systems as well as scales. Wetlands are no longer “synonymous with drainage” and “an increasing number of wetlands globally are now being actively conserved, managed and in some places restored” (Armstrong and Bradley 87). International agreements aim at conservation by designating an individual ecosystem for protection by tying it to a particular geo-politically situated identity. While the policies detail conservation as an instrument of good and an end-value, they tend to operate with an overwhelming bias toward national identity and geopolitical territories.

That a nation’s laws should preserve that nation’s environments seems reasonable; however, a system that only allows for conservation power generated through the nation-state framework will be profoundly anti-democratic and anti-environmental, as it will occlude the intersection of identities and potential coalitions in a given environmental issue. Take for example, Ramsar Sites, which are the most significant international mechanism for the protection of wetlands. Ramsar Sites emphasize the significant value of wetlands to their respective countries and “for humanity as a whole” (Ramsar, “About” n.p.). Wetlands in India, Sri Lanka, and Nepal are all threatened by global phenomena like climate change and local confrontations with development. On World Wetlands Day in 2019, the International Union for Conservation of Nature’s commission on Wetlands Ecosystem Management issued a press release on the effects of climate change on South Asia’s Wetlands, which include 47 Ramsar sites. Madhav Karki, the commission’s deputy chair, observed that, unlike in Europe and the United States, wetlands have historically been the occasion for celebration: “In Nepal and India, more than 12 major religious

celebrations and festivals are connected to the wetlands and rivers. In the festival time, people go to wetland areas to: bathe, collect water, worship” and “have cultural fairs on the river banks” (Karki, n.p.”). Despite being culturally appreciated, wetlands are still being converted into land usable for housing and land for agriculture, and they are polluted by run-off from farms. The festivals themselves stress the ecosystems, as “the paraphernalia used by the pilgrims to worship is dumped in the waters” (Karki, n.p.). I offer this example in closing to illustrate the limits of ecological absolutism: environmental justice must also consider the cultural and political valences of conservation.

**PROBLEMS OF PRESERVATION: EPHEMERAL ENVIRONMENTAL
PUBLICS AND THEIR GLOBAL NOVELS**

My dissertation has considered how qualities of certain literary techniques encourage democratic practices conducive to the pursuit of environmental justice on multiple scales. By identifying common concerns (and differences) with participatory parity, inclusivity, and accessibility in literary works, environmental governance, and ecocriticism, I have analyzed their legitimacy as processes of direct, democratic, intersectional, and planetary environmental justice. Given that governments are complex entities that operate through a variety of instruments, institutions, agencies and techniques, my inquiry has been polyvalent. I have identified instances of meaningful differences between environmental justice and mechanisms ostensibly used for the purpose of enacting justice—such as environmental laws or regulations.

A particular system of government and its actions are not sufficient conditions for a collectivity to be called a democracy. A public, joined by sustained participation in negotiating the terms of their collective lives, supplies the necessary support for the socio-political practice of democracy. The non-essential quality of publicity has led me to critique the qualities of the public in environmentalist politics in terms of inclusivity, accessibility, and parity—respectively—in the chapters on development, restoration, and conservation. I have explained how different examples drawn from literary fiction imagine environmental publics and drawn attention to how these examples offer practice environments to their readers for participating in public imagining. Chapter Four connects the narrative narcissism of Zadie Smith's 2016 novel, *Swing Time*, to the deliberation of planetary modes of collaborative public creativity. I will examine how the novel's organization of narrative discourse and focalization position its readers to reconsider the politics of identity currently regarded as foundational to agency in a planetary society.

Agency, as I discussed in Chapter One, is not an untarnished good. Gayatri Spivak's tactical usage of agency proposes the possibility of the term's utilization as a temporary path for excluded individuals and groups to gain access to means of participating in political life. Agency requires an informed choice to participate in artistic creation, which describes figurative and representative processes. Creative agency as a part of public life, I will argue, depends on others responding to one's actions as practices of art. Thus, I will show how inclusive creative culture is vital to supporting the necessary public imagination of environmentalism in a participatory democracy. Creative agency involves supportive and critical collaborators of many kinds. It depends on material, environmental, economic, and cultural conditions. Political forces also impinge upon the exercise of creative agency through the practice of cultural recognition.

This chapter considers preservation as a particular form of cultural recognition and identifies the environmentalism nascent in its practice. I will compare theoretical statements of preservation, preservation practiced by national and global entities, alongside Zadie Smith's fictional meditation on preservation in *Swing Time*. Together, these administrative systems and institutions recognize and protect existing cultural traditions that are integral to a recognized group. I will elaborate a critique that situates preservation relative to cultural representation. From this point I will shift to consider the conceptual and practical transitions necessary to support creative agency and genres supportive of planetary life. My examination of transitions will specifically highlight environments that participatory practices of creative agency create and how such environments support constituents joining together to imagine collective environmental justice.

I engage with Zadie Smith much as I did with the previous authors: as a collaborator and fellow practitioner in imagining planetary creative life. This chapter treats her novel *Swing Time*

as performing the previously described creative agency, as outlining a practice of critical-creative generosity, and as encouraging/inspiring the creative agency of its reading public. Public art-making in *Swing Time* imagines tactics of grounding creative, collective publics by negative masquerade. In *Swing Time*, an unnamed narrator recalls her coming-of-age story. The narrator is a self-described “shadow” who lacks any “light” or “substance” of her own (Smith 4). In the prologue, the narrator hints at the end of her career in opaque terms—the conditions of this ending/beginning will be developed hundreds of pages later in the novel’s final sections. The first chapter immediately jumps to her childhood, an arrangement that juxtaposes an ending with the beginning of her friendship with Tracie, as well as her introduction to dancing. As the novel proceeds, instances accumulate in support of the narrator’s initial self-characterization: we see the narrator during her childhood as her mother’s “accessory” (10); later, as an accomplice and back-up dancer to childhood friend Tracie; and, as an adult, personal assistant to an internationally famous pop star, Aimee. These details of the character’s development, along with the fact that Smith never reveals her name, encourage inattention to the narrator, whose retrospective narration selectively shines light on particular details of her story.

The events of her adult life occur in the narrative discourse alongside events of her childhood and adolescence. Five parts are subdivided into chapters that, in no clear order, reveal the narrator’s childhood life on an estate in north London during the 1980s, her experiences of university life, and her work as the assistant to the globe-trotting singer. As the bi-racial daughter of a white postal worker and a Jamaican-born feminist, the narrator struggles to find meaning in the gendered, racialized, and classed identities used by either of her parents. The plot follows the frequently bored and politically disaffected narrator who immerses herself in her work for Aimee, which includes assisting Aimee with establishing a school for girls in an unnamed West-

African nation. Throughout the novel, the narrator remains preoccupied with her childhood friend, Tracie, and struggles to adjust to her mother's increased political prominence as she rises from community organizer to become a Member of Parliament.

Swing Time focuses our attention on the narrator's interpretation of events rather than on the events themselves. Frequent interjections by the adult narrator during the revelation, coupled with the minimization of a clear frame to ground the enunciation of the narrative, discourage settling into any one plotline, as the narrative style focuses on the effects of preservation. Smith's novels tend to deploy narrators to provoke reader skepticism. Previous novels, like *White Teeth*, have similarly adopted postmodernist strategies to interrogate the roots that connect present histories to past events in global diasporas. In contrast with *Swing Time*, however, previous novels have utilized third-person narrators and given them names. This difference has preoccupied critics. Dayna Tortorici asks, "Why has Smith given her narrator no name? Its absence leaves a hole at the center of the novel, for what do we know about the narrator, in the end?" (n.p.). A less sympathetic reviewer categorizes the narrator within "the current zeitgeist of lost and self-absorbed young protagonists" and "unsympathetic characters" (Bass n.p.). The latter reviewer's attribution of self-absorption to the character (and their elision of the distinction between narrator and character) draws attention to a previously unnoted continuity between the formal concerns of this work and the rest of Smith's oeuvre: narcissism.

As a participant in the deliberation of Smith's novel, I will offer a reading that connects the narrator's self-absorption to strategies of creative agency that protest the exclusionary boundaries of participation. By adopting narrative narcissism, Smith's novel insists on recognition for the political and ethical position of its narrator. This insistence furthers democratic praxis by demanding that readers attend to the agency owed to the marginalized

identities associated with the narrator: mixed-race, single female, daughter of an immigrant. Linda Hutcheon uses the term “narcissistic narrative” to emphasize the literary relationship conventionalized by metafiction—a formal style that she dislocates from historical periodization. For Hutcheon, “Modern metafiction is largely what shall be referred to here as a mimesis of process: but it grows out of that interest in consciousness *as well as* the objects of consciousness” (3). Thus, the fiction’s seeming self-absorption serves an ethical purpose because, “though free to interpret, the reader is also responsible for his interpretation” (Hutcheon 49). In her elucidation of the category, Hutcheon emphasizes the significance of paradox to the genre, which renders the horizon between life and art indistinct by demanding that the reader recognize their participation in the imaginative enterprise of fictionality (Hutcheon 5). Given the preoccupation of metafiction with “parody and self-consciousness about novelistic conventions” (52) and the “the thematizing within the story of its storytelling concerns” (Hutcheon 53), *Swing Time* deliberately re-imagines the genre of metafiction to respond to the environment as well as to the episteme of her present. The era of Brexit and the global wave of increasingly isolationist national policy rely on the simulation of a strong “I” that distances itself from global political and ethical problems. *Swing Time*, however, draws readers into the realization of a planetary public through its performance of embodied movement.

Like a Tree: Masquerade of the Kankurang

In a novel in which such iconic dancers as Fred Astaire, Michael Jackson, and Nijinsky occupy the stage, the narrator proclaims “the greatest dancer I ever saw” to be a masked kankurang in West Africa (Smith 163). Although a connoisseur of Anglo-European dance, she experiences her foreignness as epistemological and conceptual confusion amid a dancing

community that surrounds the kankurang parade through the street. After admitting that the kankurang strains her critical powers of discrimination, the narrator describes “the apparition” as “a wildly swaying orange shape, of a man’s height but without a man’s face, covered in many swishing, overlapping leaves. Like a tree in the blaze of a New York fall that uproots itself and now dances down the street” (163). The kankurang’s costume is composed of actual leaves, yet the performance simultaneously operates in a figurative mode: it is “like” a tree. The kankurang, a synecdoche/metonymy of the novel’s own masquerade, encapsulates the force of public art-making in enacting a planetary collectivity.

If inclusion within the figurative mode is a necessary antecedent to political participation as a collective, then the kankurang could provide a beginning to recognizing a planetary environmental agency that enacts the task of humanists to emphasize the ethical situations accompanying political actions in the Anthropocene.²² In the kankurang passage, the costume and movements inspire the British viewer to compare the leaves of West African trees to those seen during autumn in New York. In making this comparison, she takes parts of the kankurang ritual—the costume’s components—to stand for the whole of the ritual while also comparing it to a generalized *topoi*—a tree. Through this imaginative connection, she creates a metaphor that is both synecdoche and metonymy. In watching the kankurang, the narrator performs critical interpretation that gathers the aesthetic *topoi* necessary to the constitution of planetary publics. The kankurang performance blurs the binary of icon/simulacrum, mimesis/allegory and exemplifies the aesthetic modes that this chapter examines in public art.

²² Gayatri Spivak asserts “This is where aesthetic education kicks in, sees the way reasonable agency is nestled in the permission to be figurative—the right to the metonym/synecdoche political performance of collectivity” (*Aesthetic Education* 437). Although her “this” specifically inquires about the responsibilities of humanities in the singular situation of globalization, our interests are commonly aligned.

A planetary public would require this figurative mode that would also take into consideration the cultural and material environments that are accessories in artistic-critical collaborations. “Planetary,” in the context of literary and political theory, indicates ethical and political relationships enacted through living on planet earth. My use of the term follows Gayatri Spivak’s and shares some commitments with William Connolly’s. Collectively, we use planetary to describe a condition and aspiration that compels re-imagined modes of social organization. Connolly emphasizes the environmental exigency of planetary politics by drawing attention to the multiple physical and energetic systems, processes, and fields that make up the planet, which include a “series of temporal force fields, such as climate patterns, drought zones, the ocean conveyor system, species evolution, glacier flows, and hurricanes that exhibit self-organizing capacities to varying degrees and that impinge upon each other and human life in numerous ways” (Connolly 4). However, planetary environmental justice also entails “justification for giving care, for considering the capacity to help others as a basic human right” through which we might “inscribe responsibility as a right rather than an obligation” (Spivak 341). The planetary nature of the Anthropocene politics involves an “aspirational assemblage,” an “evolving, complex, cross-regional ‘we’ that propels diverse constituencies into larger assemblages, even as each constituency retains a host of differences” (Connolly 34). As “planetary creatures,” we re-think the liberal democratic value of freedom as the right to create conditions that support others as they engage in performances of creative agency. To put it differently, this planetary conceptual structure entails privileged individuals, states, and transnational organizations of the global north evacuating the messianic posture of global humanitarianism, which creates dependents rather than participants in global society.

What are the actions of a planetary public engaged in democratic environmentalism? Agency is a condition of participation. It requires “permission to be figurative” and “responsible.” Collective agency finds fertile grounds in the imaginative pursuit of public art. Preservation, when undertaken by political entities as a function of governance, seems to recognize the cultural rights of a social group by acting on material-cultural environments. Preservation can be understood as an instrument of political agency that enacts environmentalism. Gayatri Spivak observes that: “Agency presumes collectivity,” as any individual requires the support of others as well as environmental support (Spivak, *Aesthetic Education* 437). A public comes into being when individuals identify a part of themselves that they share with other individuals to act as a public based on that common part. The whole “engage in action validated by that very collective” (Spivak, *Aesthetic Education* 437). Collective action requires a figurative genre, it is a metaphoric technique, “a performative contradiction” that creates “agential identity” (*Aesthetic Education* 437).

The narrator responds to the kankurang as an instance of public art-making that is generative, participatory, and inclusive. As the other members of the party join the dancing crowd in the streets, the narrator “was dancing involuntarily” (164). Yet, despite her physical presence in the crowd, the performance of the kankurang evades her interpretive powers by reminding her of her own foreignness to the performance (165). As such, the kankurang perceived by the foreigner enacts this performatic contradiction as an environmental identity. It leaves the narrator with questions, which indicates its support of contesting interpretations of public membership.

In cooperation with the narrator’s response to the dance, the order of the narrative discourse requires the reader to act as a participant in making meaning from the dance. By

collapsing this episode with the narrator's attempts to recover the meaning of the kankurang dance months later by researching it on her iPhone, Smith's chapter locates critical interpretation within the continuum of an ongoing creative process composed of material artifacts as well as more evanescent aesthetic practices (166). Her research contextualizes the dance relative to the cultural and social conditions from which it originated. The kankurang is a particular type of masquerade that is associated with the local culture in the West-African nation of The Gambia. In the last decade, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) has taken actions to preserve the practice of masquerades, and especially the kankurang, as a part of initiatives targeting "intangible cultures." UNESCO describes the kankurang as an initiatory rite that teaches young men "rules of behavior for the ordering their community, the secrets of plants and their medicinal values, and hunting techniques" (UNESCO "Intangible Heritage List: Kankurang, Manding initiatory rite"). Loss of forest canopy to cultivation and rapid urbanization have threatened the ritual (UNESCO).

The category "intangible heritage" generates ethical issues. The recently introduced concept challenges preservation as we explore our role relative to "living and not only material culture" (Alivizatou 18). In caring for living culture, how can it be preserved so that the process does not result in "fossilization?" (de Jong 161). Smith's narrator grapples with Ferdinand de Jong's question of hermeneutics. Is something of the dance's meaning lost in digital reproduction? Do the recordings alter the dance and present us with only self-satisfaction in our effort to preserve a culture that has been endangered by globalization and the development of modern social structures?

Given the disparity of power, when UNESCO "requires cultural visibility and the visualization of culture" as a criterion for display in its digital archive, can the inclusion of

kankurangs on this list be considered an example of preservation leading to agency for the indigenous tribe (de Jong 162)? Anthropologists note the secrecy that traditionally surrounds performances of kankurang rituals. In addition to traditions that limit the audience's access to the masked figure, "Spectators should feign fear so as not to subvert the masked figure's claim to occult power. This prohibition sets the conditions for a successful performance and is *performed* as part of the masquerade" (de Jong 165). Now, however, the conditions of an increasingly urban society have transformed the environment and social life of communities so that the power of the ritual has become a form of entertainment. This has led to a "nostalgic discourse on the loss of the secret" that "situates the mask in a regime of revelation in which kankurang should be seen only by initiated men" (de Jong 169). These conditions have led experts on the tradition to conclude that UNESCO's "operation is not forward-looking but focused on the restoration of selected values associated with an imaginary precolonial past. Essentially nostalgic, the restoration of kankurang is part of the salvage paradigm that denies the coevalness of the 'other'" (De Jong 175). Although the heritage designation brings economic support for the ritual's protection that assigns value to the indigenous culture, it also raises ethical questions about preservation and the translation of cultural significance.

By pairing the narrator's individual response with her digital research, the chapter models the interpretive work that differentiates the practices of cultural criticism from, say, the historical archivist or communications specialist. Smith offers a practice of cultural criticism in which personal response must accompany research into the structural and cultural factors imbricated within and surrounding the aesthetic work. One method does not cancel the other out; however, their combination allows for some of the necessary conditions of creative agency and democratic public art that I have outlined previously. These conditions include the preservation of

interpretive conflict. The passage suggests aesthetic relation as an opportunity to avoid the “salvage paradigm” that worries De Jong. By allowing multiple meanings to accumulate and remain open to contestation around the kankurang and by concluding the chapter’s recollection with a question about audience, the dance provides an invitation to readers to act as accessories in the formation of a planetary creative public.

The salvage paradigm would fossilize the kankurang by preserving it as a “thing,” the meaning of which the Anglo-European archive documents as a fixed reality. Throughout the novel, Smith probes the relationships that distinguish public art through *mise-en-scène* and *mise en abyme*. “Things” have become an object of contention in recent critical theory. In Bonnie Honig’s recent work on the durability of public things in democratic theory, “public things” shares with “public art” the need to correlate to the public of a particular place and time. As I began discussing in the previous chapter, environments share the feature of supporting gatherings of publics. I am extending Honig’s analytic focus to a planetary reference for publics. Public things may be necessary to democracy; the perspective of creative agency emphasizes practices of making and responding to art works that are intangible, immanent, dialogic, and imbricated in participatory processes of collective meaning-making and revision.

In contrast to deliberative and procedural takes on democratic theory, Honig demonstrates the utility of public things to the “ongoing work of democratic citizenship” (11) by bringing members of the *demos* together to “build public things, maintain them, and (re)secure them as the truly *public* things--the transitional objects--of democratic life” (1). The quality of publicity allows a thing to educate the public by providing a “sense of futurity” that reminds “us that they are more permanent than we, or less so” and “that, in any case, we are not always in charge” (Honig 1). A “public things perspective,” which shifts political focus from questions of

“‘who are we?’ to ‘‘what needs our care and concern?’” (Honig 28) is significant to an environmental justice movement struggling to focus attention to the planet. Things support us so that we can “encounter others, share the experience of being part of something that is larger than ourselves, and work with others, acting in concert, to share it, to democratize access to it, to better it , to desegregate it, to maintain it” (Honig 36). Thus, the perspective is salient to an elaboration of the practices of environmental justice.

Art is not isomorphic with things, or objects, or even the work itself. As the example of UNESCO’s work with the kankurang shows, art is a quality of participation that is performative and intangible. Thus, it is rarely comprised in a thing as a self-evident property. Artistic practice is a necessary condition to democratizing life around the planet. The public things perspective highlights the significance of art to a democratic environmental movement intended toward the planetary in its pursuit of justice. The planetary mode extends the public things perspective beyond the direct object of “our” particular concerns to our caring for other participants in an entwined planetary collective of collaborators in environmental stewardship.

Although different phenomena, the fate of public art and things are enmeshed. As Smith’s narrator repeatedly demonstrates, her critical facility is supported by access to particular knowledge resources, infrastructural conditions, and technological devices. UNESCO’s display of the kankurang places it within an ecological web on a public website. Notably, an iPhone and satellite towers enable the narrator to conduct her internet research. Thus, the public is conditioned by private wealth and different information infrastructures. If public things “gather people together, materially and symbolically, and in relation to them diverse peoples may come to see and experience themselves--even if just momentarily--as a common in relation to a

commons, a collected if not a collective” (Honig 16), Smith’s novel shows through *mise en abyme* the need for analysis of practices along with things in the absence of a planetary public.

Cultural Rights and Environmental Rights

How might we shift toward an understanding of public art as a social good to public art-making as a right necessary to performing as a planetary public? For this change of orientation, we must shift from envisioning the role of the public as deriving from the caring for, or preservation, of public things to the position of creatives. Public art enables individuals to participate together as democratic societies by affording imaginative enactment—and revision—of a public. Unlike monuments, which legitimate governmental and national regimes by commemorating historical events and individuals as sites of singular truth, public art should support the articulation of diverging political positions by members of a community. A pluralistic and democratic society needs public art, which is uniquely suited to horizontal social organization among community members who use public art to contest inequality, exclusion, and other problems of a polity. The following section reviews the convergence of public art with democratic forms of social organization and politics of differences in the theoretical literature. However, institutions of public art diverge from theoretical accounts of public art-making by conflating the identity of a public with taxpayers or citizens, by eliding public art into the category of monument, and by conceptualizing the public and the art through realist and/or naturalistic logic.

Public art defines, organizes, and mobilizes the groups of individuals understood to be members of that public in processes of conceiving and deliberating the attributes of common life in a given society. Such projects “are sutured by tensions within the diversity topos that

encapsulate broader contradictions within the liberal democratic project itself” (Rai 113). They assist in organizing the social interactions through which imaginative conflicts can be voiced in public life. For them to perform this function, they must be accessible and should be located in everyday public spaces (Rai 11). In contrast to the propaganda of nationalist ideology, the art provokes and supports disputing views about common life among the members of that public.

Critics attribute art to the public domain based on “a family of conditions including the object’s origin, history, location, and social purpose” (Hein 1). Notably, “publicity” is not an essential property of the object itself. Rather, the quality occurs as relations external to the art object that might be described as environmental, cultural, economic, or political. The location of the art is as crucial to its functioning as public as its contents and style. The design can include a “diverse set of visual gestures” (Pinder 12). Crucially, the function and value of public art cannot be wholly reduced to its institutional origins.

Thus, public art “seems to engage more abstract concerns and more ephemeral interpretations of site, memory, and meaning” than, for example, a monument (Hein 2) because the art must engage those publics in deliberation over the meanings of past and potential collective life. Historically, the relationship between an artwork and the public of a particular space has been central to that artwork’s remaining in that space. Michael Kelly argues that “controversies about public art involve such interpretive conflict” about competing notions of the public addressed in a particular work of art. The central question is, how can conflicts “be adjudicated without imposing a singular identity on the public or indulging the mere play of multiple identities? Moreover, what is the relationship between this issue of ‘the public’ and the rights and responsibilities of the artist engaged in public art?” (Kelly 16).

In order to be considered “public,” art must emerge and remain in the public domain. It is not just an object or infrastructure, it is “spatial practice, the ways in which people envisioned, planned, and inhabited the city” and effects “laying claim to city spaces” through an “imaginative political act by which social space and political citizenship are produced together” (Trumper 7). These imaginative political acts must be tied to an understanding of a public as dynamic, changing, and porous. Pragmatically, public art is protected in terms of preservation and community heritage (Smith). However, “without destruction, there will be no space for creation. Landmarks that no longer reflect a community or that are no longer celebrated by the community perhaps should be allowed to expire, especially where their preservation no longer nourishes a sense of community” (Cathay Smith 413). In urban environments, public art responds to complex issues of civil and human rights.

Internationally, excluded and oppressed groups have asserted recognition for their contributions to public life through the production of art in and for the public. By engaging in public creative praxis, these activists make visible their contributions to a community, thereby forcing governments to recognize the right of these groups to be included as agents in public life. Thomas Swerts argues that unrecognized actors like undocumented migrants draw on a community’s “political scripts and imaginaries” and “enact these scripts in public through performative staging of citizenship” (390). Publicity of art is relational and performative: it is not innate to a particular work. Rather, art achieves its publicity as an articulation of commonly inhabited social space by a community deliberating its relationship to past and future common life.

Residents create and mold urban space through political participation (Trumper 7). Camilo Trumper describes everyday practices of organizing, inhabiting, and using material space

as constitutive of democratic politics: “laying claim to city spaces became an imaginative political act by which social space and political citizenship are produced together” (7). Thus, creative work in the public sphere, public art, as a means of spatial practice, is a realm of recognized political action through which movements can assert their claims to representational rights and social justice. The city is the frame, medium, and effect of aesthetic and urban practices conducted by experts (such as policy makers) and members of the general public. The organization of structures in the city perpetuates systems of oppression and exclusion; however, the city is also constructed through the practice of human creativity (Calhoun, Sennett, Shapira 195). While public art can accompany development projects that serve community members, like other types of public infrastructure, it “expresses ideas about what kind of society one wants to build, who deserves what, and what kind of social relations ought to be promoted” (198).

For informal participants in public life, “evanescent public art can be a significant means of shaping the city into an arena of fraught political debate (Trumper 2). According to Trumper, public art emerges through the “everyday urbanism” of residents who, through creative actions, articulate and contest the arrangement of political life (7). As a way for residents to shape political life materially and symbolically, public art is the vehicle for acts of democratic agency and the claiming of social mobility within recognized systems of social participation. Public art includes built environments along with living and material culture, or “the literal, concrete aspects of place that affect rhetorical frames that circulate within and are tied to literal places” (34). A planetary public sphere must accommodate the cultural differences of evanescent publics in order to transform the public’s will into the actions of government. Thus, planetary collectivities will need to eschew the static concepts of “cultural heritage” and “preservation” that underpin extant discursive treatments of public art.

Midway through *Swing Time*, Aimee grows impatient with the arc of justice and global diplomacy. In a declaration issued from her treadmill, the singer decides to use her wealth and influence to build a school for girls in Africa. The narrator spends a significant amount of time researching prospective sites and visiting the village community selected for the school. During her visits, a local family hosts the narrator, who befriends Hawa and Lamin, both teachers at the school. The village community organizes a ceremony to celebrate the ground-breaking. Leading up to the ceremony, the narrator grows increasingly concerned by rumors that the country's president and foreign dignitaries will join the festivities.

Despite the narrator's worry, the ceremonial visit from dignitaries turns into parody when the narrator sees "in the first car, standing up through the sun-roof, was an eight-year-old version of the President himself," guarded by miniature versions of security guards who sit in a "real jeep" accompanied by "two adult versions of these security type" (Smith 269). The narrator observes "I had the thought that if the President himself had come the effect would not have been so very different. A show of power is a show of power" (270). The narrator interprets the parade as instance of mimesis and attaches to the simulation of power the assumption that it should be interchangeable with any other "show" of power.

As in the instance of the kankurang, the narrator's power of critical observation runs afoul of her foreignness to the aesthetic community. She listens as two fellow members of Aimee's legion of supporting staff, Judy and Granger, discuss the parade's significance only to find their reading of the scene undercut by another unnamed woman, who, unlike the narrator, is a member of the local tribe. As she breastfeeds her infant, the woman contradicts Judy and Granger's incredulity regarding the enthusiastic response of the crowd to the spectacle. It is not "love" for the president that the ceremony conveys, the woman asserts: "No. Nobody here loves

him or what he has done here. Everybody who can leaves. Back way, back way, back way.” (273). The woman’s response suggests that the outsiders miss the parodic tone of the performance by mistaking the crowd’s energetic response for sincere admiration of government officials.

In this brief instance, the woman assumes the power to speak for her community by representing their struggle to the outsiders. Judy, Granger, and the narrator wait for her to speak again, “it seemed only she could bring a final meaning to the episode, but her baby had finished feeding and her speech was done. She pulled up her yellow wrapper and stood to burp him” (274). When the narrator fails again to uphold her claim to the power of critical observation by losing track of the woman in the crowd, the episode, like *Swing Time* as a whole, suspends the closure of the novel’s aesthetic process in an ending to its imaginative practice. By suspending the arrival of a final meaning, the passage contributes to *Swing Time*’s creation of public space and its invitation for readers to recognize their different responsibilities as participants in imagining the fictional community.

Simply occurring in a public space and including members of the public does not constitute public art. Although both dramatize figures of authority, the play featuring the president-dictator contrasts with the dance of the masked kankurang in the sort of society constituted through the performance. Although the kankurang provokes questions about the use of gender as an axis of exclusion from collective life, the narrator contrasts the dancer’s reception with the role of the soldiers who block use of the roads (164). Although both disrupt the order of quotidian life, the soldiers silence any opposing voices of the public and corrode the publicity of the transportation infrastructure in a symbolic display of governmental power over

the public's movement. In contrast, the kankurang engages the public in a participatory ritual that merges tradition and modern systems of socialization.

The role of the public in the enactment of public art appears in *Swing Time* through the trope of red dust that connects Aimee's art with the kankurang dancer. Red, clay-like dust recurs as an accompaniment that connects these two potential instances of public art-making. Aimee, who attempts to assert herself as a benefactor of a neglected public, shoots a video promoting her vision of the school for young girls. As the narrator lurks in the background of an editing session for the video, she watches Aimee dancing in Africa, her stamping feet raising "great clouds of red dust" (Smith 126). Aimee's motivation for creating the school remains ambiguous throughout the novel. However, it is not necessary to view the character's actions as critiquing the cooption of creativity to the profit motive for us to deny the publicity of her art—as well as the school she builds.²³ The school and the propaganda video that she creates to promote her vision enact her individual will. Rather than recognizing any ethical obligations or political claims of community members, her dancing occurs as an assertion of her own privileged freedom, her own control, and her wealth without seeking to support the participation of others in deliberation or art-making and interpretation.

From Stakeholders to Environmental Stewards

How are we to rethink a public of public art-making to inhabit the proposed planetary position? In *Swing Time*, the narrator characterizes her mother's and her father's differing methods of identification. Her parents model socio-political paradigms that have dominated

²³ Liz Kinnamon argues that "our culture's 'creatives' no longer critique the profit motive, they partner with it" (18).

Western politics in the twentieth century. She glosses her mother's concern with "culture and color" and her father's focus on class as expressions of the absolute criteria significant to their respective theories for organizing and unifying social life (311). Her father preserves a family tradition of labor: her memory of her father presenting his own father's birth certificate to her, which stated "the professions of his grandparents," connects the family's past identity to their future as members of a working class regardless of "whether they wanted to be or not" (311). By making his family's socio-economic position and work the significant criteria for their identity, the father personifies a Marxist tradition of labor. The character's backwards gaze toward the past manifests the historical determinism that has been a significant criticism of Marxism.

The father character also mobilizes a second trajectory of political identity. The twist of making the father a postal worker adapts that tradition to the public institutions that condition the advent of the welfare state in Britain and the liberal democratic societies that predominate in the global north. Like the worker of private enterprises who does not own the material means of production in Marxism, the public service worker in the latter twentieth century is alienated from the means of producing public and political life.

The narrator contrasts her father's rooted identity with her mother, who she links to emancipatory political struggles. Mockingly, she reports her mother stating "People like us, we can't be nostalgic. We've no home in the past. Nostalgia is a luxury. For our people, the time is now!" (310). Her mother's form of group-identity predicates the goal of social organization as the realization of cultural rights and freedom. The field of cultural rights shares concerns with the issue of environmental rights in that each aspires to accommodate diverse peoples in accordance with normative values of global, pluralistic, and democratic societies. From the perspective of recognition ethics, "ethnic or cultural identity takes on more importance as a criterion for

defining communal membership” in the context of waning national ethos (Turner n.p.). Along with more recently conceded environmental rights, “Cultural rights have become fundamental to human rights as a whole, because they attend to issues relating to personal identity and minority rights. They mediate between specific national citizenship rights and global legal entitlements. They are significant in defining what it is to be human; hence, peoples or individuals without secure cultural rights are highly vulnerable” (Turner n.p.). Given that “securing cultural rights is an important precondition for the enjoyment of other human rights” and that “culture defines identity...culture is an important aspect of the basic right to have rights” (Turner n.p.).

Although the narrator presents herself as detached from her parents and political dispute, she articulates her disdain in terms that betray her even as they point to shortcomings in her parents’ respective positions. Frustrated with her mother’s political ambitions and disgusted with her mother’s relationship with “the noted activist”, the narrator fumes to herself: “Our people! Our people! And now, lying in the funk of my father’s bed, turning the phrase over in my mind—for lack of anything better to do—it reminded me of the overlapping quack and babble of those birds, repeating over and over the same curious message, delivered from their own bills into their own feathers: ‘I am a duck!’ ‘I am a duck!’” (311). The comparison of “Our people” to “I am a duck!” uses humor to indicate that the self-expression of identity is not the object of collective life—it is not a robust politics. Recognition as a people is an instrumental value. Any political theory that only offers an account of group membership, has, of course, not provided an account of inevitable differences of priority. Without space and methods for the deliberation of difference, the theory has yet to arrive at a politics.

In pointing out this limit; however, the narrator slips from her mother’s first-person plural, “our,” to the first-person singular, “I.” This change of pronoun shifts the determination of

identity from group to the individual. The narrator's disengagement from societal issues draws on a political theory, individualism. Her sarcastic equation of her mother's political self-expression to a duck's assertion of species-membership highlights the need for social theorization that is concerned with how we should act so that we might interact in concert; a transition in thinking that would be prologued by a supportive public culture.

Preserving Authority

The organization of the narrative discourse encourages inattention to the grounds from which Smith's novel's events emerge. The narrator's inattention provides an aesthetic education in environmental care and the public-making force of art. Her claim to lack a positive identity deprives her of a particular ethos, leaving the reader with a problem of participating in the construction of a fictional world in the absence of social capital. What motivates us to "suspend our disbelief"? Perhaps we do not need to dis/believe to read the story. In the gray apartment where the prologue begins, where "everything *had been designed* to be perfectly neutral," details, like the room's photos "of the Buddha" and "an elephant kneeling next to a little Indian boy," reveal the power through which the narrator governs her story (1). British orientalism marks the décor, which, like the iPhone that the narrator uses as an analogue for the space's design, is hardly neutral. Dis-believing is an action based in the agent's interpellation in a particular ideology. Like the room, the ideology is a conceptual environment designed to constrain and afford particular behaviors and peoples.

In the absence of traditional methods of authority, Smith's narrator performatively authorizes the story. She acknowledges that her interest in others is based in her own experiences, which are themselves informed by environmental conditions: "I was at the center of

things, the only person in the world with true freedom. I moved from here to there, observing life as it is presented itself to me, but everybody else in these scenes, all the subsidiary characters, belonged only in the compartments in which I had placed them” (336). The narrator struggles to manage the story by preserving the identities of human characters in fixed positions. Her efforts to categorize fellow actors in the story dominate the narration, which inclines readers to join the narrator in being inattentive to the environmental grounds that link characters in ever shifting groups. For example, the “iconic” Rainbow Room at the Rockefeller Center gathers Lamin, Fern, and the narrator around their common class position as employees of Aimee. Standing in the Rainbow Room, faced with the failure of her “compartments,” the narrator wonders “What were they doing here, now, in my New York?” as she faces Fern and Lamin (336). Her use of the possessive in this rhetorical question raises additional questions, given that the narrator is from London rather than New York.

Though the narrator asserts nominal ownership of the city, she has physically turned her back on the cityscape moments prior to making this statement. Although “the whole city lay before us,” the narrator “set my back to it” to “study” Fern and Lamin (336). Implicitly, the narrator’s choice of bodily positions responds to Fern’s admiration of the famous view afforded by the room, which immediately precedes this diegetic turn. Focus on their “doing” confines the narrative’s internal reflection of commerce and politics to the conscious exercise of human agency. Her emphasis on her own “freedom” to exercise her will in knowing the other characters, ironically, restricts her knowledge by limiting it to a single center of meaning—herself.

Despite the narrator’s self-identification as a centripetal force exercising a vertical authority over the plot, the narrative grounds shift beneath her. Though the character and narrator

attempt to turn away, the Rainbow Room displays the failures of a democratic society predicated on the liberal individual as its absolute value. The room itself is an artefact of the extreme socio-economic disparity that has divided metropolitan centers like New York throughout modernity. The “obscene amounts of money” that Aimee spends on decorations and professional violinists stand as a grotesque postmodern spectacle, on this fossil of inequality erected in capitalist modernity (337). The Rainbow Room markets itself as an “iconic” luxury space that “epitomizes quintessential New York glamour” from its position over “the landmark Rockefeller Center” (Rockefeller Center “Best Summer Dining”). The Rockefellers opened the bar and dining space in 1934 and it has since been a location famed for catering to the social elite (Rainbow Room “Our History”). Although the space closed during the Second World War and the twenty-first century financial crisis, the room was granted landmark status by New York’s Landmarks Preservation Commission in 2012 (Landmark Conservancy).

The designation of the restaurant/nightclub as an interior landmark highlights the tension in the environmental public served by the conservancy. The space’s candidacy was based in its historical reference—“magnificent public rooms” that “are symbols of the greatness of New York” and the room’s continued ability to simulate that “fabled past” for “the modern visitor” who is “fortunate enough to visit” (n.p.). Like Aimee’s oscillation between acting as “diplomat” and “superstar” (Smith 340), the practice of preservation occurs as the combined exertion of government agencies and private corporations. Though theoretically and reputedly representative of a given public, preservation efforts often attempt to realize a fixed and exclusive *sense* of the public. The New York Landmarks Conservancy’s Andrea Goldwyn supported its selection by calling it an “icon of New York’s architectural and social history” that was “synonymous with New York City glamour” and “was already a landmark ‘in the hearts and minds of many

throughout the world” (CITYLAND). Undoubtedly, the city’s “powerful” landmarks law counteracts the dominance of finance capital over the organization of social space in the city by insisting on alternative systems of value. Yet, the monolithic models of the alternative systems of value effectively preserve landmarks of inequality and oppression. In the case of the Rainbow Room, the law preserves a landmark of extractive capitalism as a practice of democratic equality.

Gardens and the “Things” of Planetary Publics

Smith’s novel explores public art-making as imaginative germination of the epistemological basis for planetary public life. The scenes cultivate notions of different environmental publics that can emerge within a single geopolitical public as a result of different relationships to caring for and instrumentalizing the soil. Smith’s *mise en scène* consistently draws attention to the complexity of the environments underneath the narrator’s musings. At the diegetic level, the narrator’s wavering attention fuses the character’s immediate and present environment with temporally and spatially distant environments. This environmental wavering occurs in the *kankurang* episode when the narrator renders the spatio-temporal boundaries between the character’s initial encounter with the *kankurang*, her research into the cultural phenomena months later in New York, and her extended research in the field. Although her initial encounter with the dancer seems immediate, visceral, and unreflective, the comparison with New York’s trees used to introduce the figure precludes a definitive differentiation between an initial encounter and subsequent recollections by sewing elements from the “later” episode in the narration of the earlier encounter.

In addition to a distorted narrative scene, environments within the narrative blur into one another as a result of the character’s foci as well as through different technologies. Early in the

novel, the narrator recalls childhood visits to her uncle Lambert's home with her father. The narrative presents a palimpsest of remembered visits, which occurred repeatedly throughout her childhood, that the narrator generalizes as an impression of fertility—the soil of her uncle's South London garden allotment supports an “abundance” of fruits and vegetables (Smith 21). The adult narrator recalls “being confused,” blaming her childish ignorance for her childhood belief “that when I visited Lambert I was visiting Jamaica, Lambert's garden was Jamaica to me, it smelled like Jamaica” (21). The narrator's confusion stems from recognizing the difference between the rich soil beneath her uncle's community and the clay beneath her own home in a north London estate. The disparity between their living conditions disrupts the continuity of the common public to which they belong—residents of London. Within the passage, the narrator frames the issue as cultural and national. Although her uncle's garden is not located in the territory of Jamaica, her uncle's care for his environment turns his allotment into a public thing that symbolically connects him to a diasporic Jamaican community. However, the soil itself generates the conditions that accommodate these differences between their public spaces.

Conditions of deprivation do not preclude cultural value and aesthetic experiences of beauty. Amid its chaotic fertility, the narrator's uncle's garden provides an example of environmental community organizing in the absence of government infrastructure. The narrator's visit to his home also shows the exclusion of migrants and black citizens from London's public. Despite the abundant garden, the uncle lives in an impoverished area of London where the city's sewer system does not serve his home, which forces him to rely on an outhouse (20).

The narrator's mother takes an interest in public gardening and attempts to “dig up the communal grass” to realize her “idea of establishing a vegetable garden that everybody could enjoy” (Smith 59). Although the narrator arranges the details to ridicule her mother, the “illegal

hole” materializes the neglect of diasporic African communities in London (60). The thing in question—the soil—thwarts her mother by turning out to be clay. Rather than being wholly subsumed, the natural material endures as a constitutive feature of the social space’s exigency. The narrator’s mother responds by skillfully improvising a new community project: pottery, which she roots in African art that expresses “*we were here, at this moment in time, and this is what we made*” (62). The shift between the two projects creates an analogy between garden and art as modes of acting as a public of democratic environmentalism. Tending to the material environment by fashioning it for a community’s enjoyment operates as a political assertion that claims a place for that community in global history.

If readers find themselves implicated in the processes of building the novel’s environments, then we might understand our social presence—and responsibility—as creative agents of a planetary public. Philosopher of post-naturalism Steven Vogel describes twenty-first century life thus: “the two characteristics of the environment we fail to notice under contemporary conditions of alienation are its builtness and its sociality,” (96). According to Vogel, “sociality finds its expression in building” (96). The narrative style and thematization of embodied performance draws attention to the novel as an artefact—a print or digital book—and as constituting an environment. However, it also blurs the distinction between the artifice of fiction and an organic or natural mind through the simulation of an “I”. This narrative praxis affirms the connection between art and nature, as “human artifacts are not ‘ontologically’ distinguished from natural entities but rather recognized as continuous with them” (Vogel 105).

Substantiating Environmental Rights in Everyday Things

Public art supports creative agency and is also an effect of creative agency. For the residents of urban communities, like the characters of Smith's novel, the public is a practice of environmental care. The non-profit organization "Living Walls, The City Speaks" is a resident-led group that sponsors public murals in the Atlanta area. Although the non-profit is composed of unelected individuals, it presents itself as the voice of the common people of Atlanta. By appending the clause "The City Speaks" in its full name, the organization claims to speak in the place of Atlanta's urban public. On the "About" page of its non-profit group's website, Living Walls states that it "creates intentional, thought-provoking public art to inspire social change and activate public spaces." "Public" frequently appears on the group's description of their accomplishments as a frame that directs the group's addressees. The organization describes its artistic collaborators as globally based and part of presenting the city to the world "as a destination for provocative arts and culture."

In 2018-2019, Living Walls partnered with the city, WonderRoot, and the Atlanta Super Bowl Host Community for "Off the Wall: Atlanta's Civil Rights and Social Justice Journey." Mayor Keisha Lance Bottoms announced the campaign during a press conference held under the iconic mural of legendary civil rights activist and U.S. Representative John Lewis (Godwin n.p.). Bottoms situated the new public art campaign in the civil rights history of the city by referencing the surrounding churches that housed the early movement: "It is really important that we have these lasting reminders in our city, of obviously what the civil rights movement means to Atlanta, but also what arts and culture means" (Bottoms qtd. Godwin n.p.). The description of the campaign's purpose appeals to the city's identity as the birthplace of the civil rights

movement of the 1960s and 1970s. By taking the memorialization of these public events as its subject, the campaign nominally aspires to one criteria essential to public art's publicity.

The campaign created a series of thirty murals that reflected the results of over forty public discussions on the selection of artists, subjects, and locations (Living Walls n.p.). The discussions resulted in an array of civil-rights related subjects including anti-ableism, immigrant rights, and challenging racism. Many of the artists nominated included members of Atlanta's community whose previous work addressed social justice. This description of the group's purpose aligns with its recent collaboration with large, private corporate sponsors as a part of the recent Super Bowl-affiliated mural campaign. Whether riding Atlanta's public transportation system, MARTA, driving through downtown, or visiting the state capital building, members of the public can pass Yehimi Cambron's "Monuments: We Carry the Dreams." The mural puts pedestrians and Marta riders in close proximity with the words and faces of members of Atlanta's immigrant community. In this sense, the publicity of the mural can be seen as legitimate in terms of its inclusion of Atlanta's transnational public and efficacious in that it became a public platform for a public demand for attention to a deficit of participatory parity in civil law.

For art and murals to be considered "public," they should appear in spaces and discourses of the public sphere. According to Nancy Fraser, the public sphere is "a space for the communicative generation of public opinion," where the state and its officials can be held accountable to "the will of the citizenry" (7). Fraser terms communication generated by the public sphere publicity and describes it as a channel for "empowering" citizens to hold governing officials accountable (11). Public sphere theory generates interrogations of states and citizens in terms of equality, inclusivity, and legitimacy (Fraser 11). As such, public art "occupies public

space and memorializes a public event” in addition to questioning “the meaning of that space and that event and draws the public into intelligent discourse with it” (Hein 4). It affirms that “the forum is a place for debate—and not just a site for communion or collective affirmation” (Hein 4).

Cambron’s previous collaborations with Living Walls have addressed the immigrant community that constitutes an underrepresented public in Atlanta. Her monarch mural, once located on the wall of Havana Sandwich Shop on Buford Highway, was created as a part of a series of ten mural that brought “public art to the corridor known for its diversity while also raising awareness about the stories of the immigrants who live and work there. Cambron, who grew up in the area and has since returned as an art teacher, is familiar with the struggles of DACA recipients. The subject of the mural, a monarch butterfly, “is known as the Education is Liberation Monarch, with one of its wings fluttering like the pages of a book” (Bagby n.p.). Cambron describes the mural’s significance: “we are all immigrants and I want people to think of the history of this country. Everybody who is here came from somewhere else...I want people to recognize we are you and you are us” (Cambron qtd. Bagby n.p.). Cambron’s description of the mural links it to the progressive vision of American-style democracy. For the artist, “The symbolism of the monarch...is that migration [is] a natural process, to survive, to give better opportunities for their children,” (Cambron qtd. Bagby n.p.). Cambron’s work references a synecdoche of citizenship, education and social movement, laying claim on behalf of other undocumented immigrants to a common desire for efficacy in democratic life.

Cambron’s murals inspire deliberation in individuals who pass through the area in their daily lives. “Monuments: The Dreams We Carry” displays the faces of migrants and refugees frozen in different expressions of individual emotion (see Fig. 2). The subjects of the mural

contest the habitual usage of citizen and public as coextensive and singular terms. The mural manifests the debate between residents and citizens over the term public by confronting pedestrians and drivers with the faces of what Michael Warner, following Nancy Fraser, calls “counterpublics.” Unrecognized by a geopolitical state’s government, these migrants and refugees are excluded from the public of civil rights because they are not citizens. However, the massive faces appear before a background of the red stripes of the U.S.A.’s flag, which features lines of black text written in the English language. The juxtaposition of the faces and the patterns of a fabric symbolic of collective national identity commands attention to the contributions of migrants and refugees to the fabric of social life in the United States. The selection of visual images makes an argument about the identity of the public by highlighting the extensive history of migrants and refugees contributing to the common life of the United States.

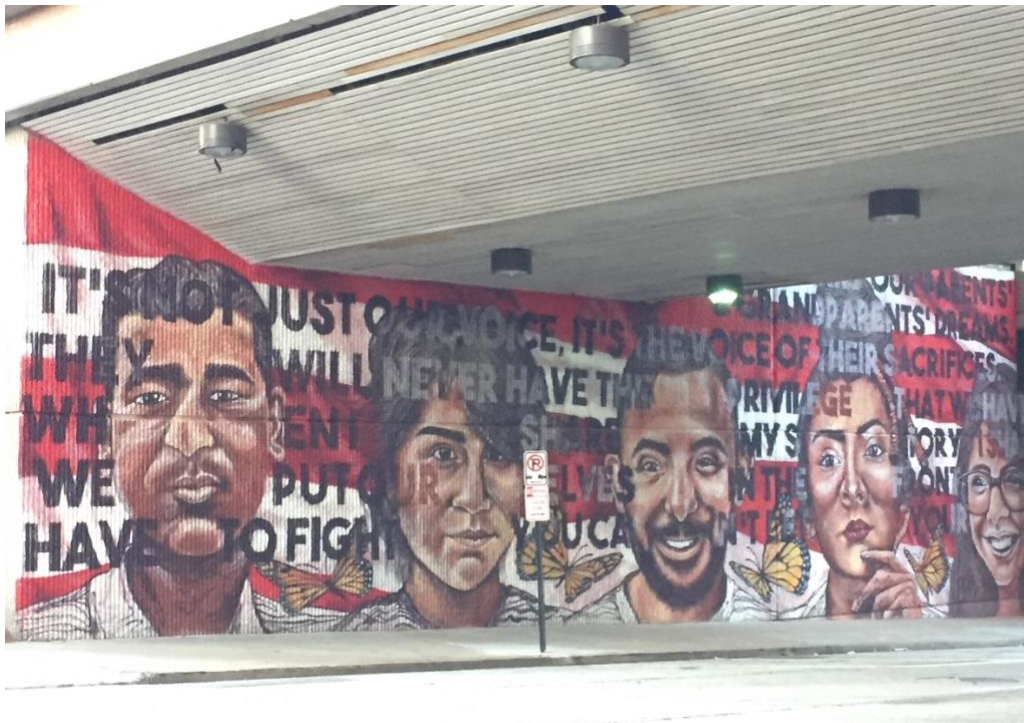


Figure 2 Original photograph of Cambron's mural "Monuments: We Carry the Dreams."

The mural draws attention to the centrality of migrants and refugees to the constitution of public life in the past, present, and future of the city. Cambron interviewed migrants and refugees detained in the United States and superimposes their recorded statements as bold, black print over the familiar stripes of the U.S.A's flag. The mural draws on the existing political imaginary of citizenship in the United States through its subject matter and its position at the intersection of two of the major infrastructures of urban public life: rail and road. The situation of the term contrasts the metaphoric erasure of the migrant and refugee's "movement"—as subaltern-- through the public spheres of Atlanta with the nation, state, and city's acknowledgement of its obligation to capacitate the movement of residents on the grounds of their contribution to collective life.²⁴ Quite literally, the mural materializes the concept of the vernacular that is essential to the theory of public art. The large type and stark font boldly display the speech of those individuals denied a voice and denied representation in the official structures of public life. The mural's location claims allegiance to the public. While site-specificity is one factor in determining a work's publicity, an artwork's significance is relational. It no longer addresses an audience "figured as passive onlooker but as participant, actively implicated in the constitution of the work of art. Effectively, the work's realization depends on the audience's bestowal of meaning upon it, a contentious social and political undertaking" (Hein 3). By presenting the voice of migrant counter-publics, Cambron's murals seizes on democratic topoi like public art, monuments, and education to contest the exclusion of migrants from the cultural life of the urban public.

²⁴ According to Gayatri Spivak "Subalternity is where social lines of mobility, being elsewhere, do not permit the formation of a recognizable basis of action" (*Aesthetic Education* 476). In other words, "the subaltern" emerges as an effect of a state or power structure's denial of political reason or refusal to acknowledge the legitimacy of a particular movement, cause, or individual. Subalternity describes a denial of access to the means of exercising social agency or mobility.

Conclusion

Swing Time confronts the uneven terrain of global society. The margins of the narrator's attention chafe against environmental conditions that, by triggering variations in characterization, frustrate her control over the story and invite contradictory interpretations of events. Throughout the novel and especially in its final look at Tracie, *Swing Time* insists upon holding space for unpredictable and ephemeral moments of planetary creative-coalitions responsive to multiplicities of environmental conditions. In the novel's concluding scene, the narrator finds her fantasies interrupted by the apparition of Tracie, "right above me, on her balcony, in a dressing gown and slippers, her hands in the air, turning, turning, her children around her, everybody dancing" (453). Through this encounter, the narrator's planning and perpetual internal interpretation of her world fall silent. The novel ends simply with the narrator's view of Tracie's family dancing. This silence creates space for Tracie's creative agency to take hold of the narrative so that the narrator becomes an accessory to Tracie's movement and the ending becomes the beginning of the planetary imagination that Spivak describes. *Swing Time* develops an infrastructural awareness that focuses on the public and private systems of technologies that can erode as frequently as they allow for the temporary coalescence of spontaneous environmental publics. Through these shifting publics, the novel tills the sedimented individualism in environmental democracy, preparing us to, perhaps, engage in imagining planetary creative agents.

Despite the potential for cooption, public art remains a channel through which excluded and oppressed members can assert claims of belonging and agency in public life. A mural might lack permanence and can be destroyed by private property owners, as was the case for Cambron's "Education is Liberation Monarch." As I've shown here, though, the publicity of the

public artwork emerges in its shaping of social relationships among its public. Through the creative practice of reimagining urban spaces, individuals who stage and circulate public art demand recognition for themselves as agents of public life. In this opening of public space, oppressed and excluded individuals are able to envision themselves not as mere recipients of public good will but as recognized members of that public.

My dissertation has analyzed four modalities through which twentieth- and twenty-first century literary narratives generate environmental force: development, restoration, conservation, and preservation. Such an intervention is necessary as it responds to the tunnel vision of theories of literary periodization, which have been predominantly geared towards a socio-centrist understanding of cultural and economic production. In place of subtending environmental-cultural production to an overarching (late) capitalism or (neo)colonialism, my framework reorganizes and pluralizes the trajectories of potential literary analysis around relationships in different political and ethical configurations of environmental societies.

Preservation, development, restoration, and conservation: these modes do not exhaust past, current, or possible configurations of environmental force. As my individual chapters have shown, when we shift among critical scales we register different strains through which environmental force can be exerted. I have written this dissertation over the course of several years during which scholars in my discipline have increasingly flocked to the previously denigrated topic of environmentalism's convergence with literary concerns. This project contributes by insisting on the continued saliency of critique to the pursuit of environmental justice and, as such, has adopted an intersectional approach to its lines of inquiry. I have examined how a critical paradigm premised in global or universal environmentality exacerbates existing systems of oppression, domination, and marginalization by hiding how environmental

relations correspond differently to different identity groups. But, I have also shown that environmental relations are neither static nor reducible to a single group identity. For the purposes of this degree, I have shown how literary techniques enact environmentalism as creative social practices of public living and are, thus, vital to participatory politics of difference in a just, democratic planetarity.

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