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A Sense of Unending: Apocalypse and Post-Apocalypse in Novels of Late Capitalism

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A Sense of Unending: Apocalypse and Post-Apocalypse in Novels of Late Capitalism

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy in English

by

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Abstract

From Frank Kermode to Norman Cohn to John Hall, scholars agree that apocalypse historically has represented times of radical change to social and political systems as older orders are wiped away and replaced by a realignment of respective norms. This paradigm is predicated upon an understanding of apocalypse that emphasizes the rebuilding of communities after catastrophe has occurred. However, in the last half-century, narratives that emphasize the destruction of human civilization without this restorative component have begun to overshadow the more historically popular post-apocalyptic models that were particularly abundant during the early days of the Cold War. In light of the sentiment discussed by both Fredric Jameson and Slavoj Žižek that it is now easier to imagine the end of the world than the end of capitalism, this project examines the effects of late capitalism on our conceptions of catastrophe, specifically the erosion of public welfare in the wake of corporate deregulation that seeks to maximize private profit. These literatures also interrogate the utopian political messaging coded within the failed promises of capitalism's advancement. As such, apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic texts function in a mode of the anti-utopian genre that Jameson calls for, as they reveal the political strategies of division that impede progress toward social, environmental, and economic justice.

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Dedication

To my mother, who was always there for me, until she wasn't. I miss her every day.

Table of Contents

I. Introduction: Apocalypse, Post-Apocalypse, Capitalism	1
A. Junkspace and Apocalyptic History: The Rise of Apocalyptic Literature	1
B. Apocalyptic Equivocation	6
C. The Last Man Narrative	11
D. The Post-Apocalyptic Paradigm	17
E. A Spatial Sense of Apocalypse.....	25
II. Chapter One: Consumption and Apocalypse in the Postmodern Age	33
A. Spatial Instability in Paul Auster's <i>In the Country of Last Things</i>	33
B. Consumption and Death in Don DeLillo's <i>White Noise</i>	51
C. Apathy and Decay in M. T. Anderson's <i>Feed</i>	68
D. Chapter One Conclusion	80
III. Chapter Two: Reading Reversals in Wastelands	83
A. Reversals and Refrains in Cormac McCarthy's <i>The Road</i>	88
B. Whiteness and Weapons: Political Difference at the End of the World in Peter Heller's <i>The Dog Stars</i>	103
C. Chapter Two Conclusion.....	122
IV. Chapter Three: The Double Apocalypse of Margaret Atwood's <i>Maddaddam</i> Trilogy	125
A. The Story and Structure of the <i>Maddaddam</i> Trilogy	125
B. The Letter to America	138
C. Posthumanism in the <i>Maddaddam</i> Trilogy	145
D. Terrorism and Resistance.....	154
E. Language, Ritual, Religion.....	168
F. Chapter Three Conclusion	180
V. Conclusion	186
A. McDonald's in Moscow	187
B. Urbanity and Other Developments.....	191
C. The End of History, the Ends of Endings.....	195
VI. Works Cited.....	199

I. Introduction: Apocalypse, Post-Apocalypse, Capitalism

People are being completely confused, you know, and that's what global culture's going to bring. Is this Brazilian or Arabic? Eventually, there will be 300 million States of America around the world. It's just kind of this, this feeling of sameness, you know? Like when you drive through America, you're like, 'Okay, well, this is Massachusetts, and this is Connecticut. What's the difference? I don't fucking know. Gas station, McDonald, McDonald, gas station, gas station, McDonald. Pretty soon you'll go over to Slovenia and see the same shit, too. In a mall.

--Eugene Hutz, "Globalization: Preventing the Sameness of the World"

A. Junkspace and Apocalyptic History: The Rise of Apocalyptic Literature

The recent emergence of SpaceX and its competition with Blue Origin and Virgin Galactic in the area of space tourism calls to mind the Space Race between the American and Soviet governments during the height of the Cold War. SpaceX, headed by Elon Musk, has made several significant steps toward its goal of providing tours of space for the world's wealthiest individuals (the recent September 1st disaster of an explosion during fueling on its Cape Canaveral launch pad notwithstanding). As such, they have cobbled together enough of an infrastructure to make what once would have been possible only in the imagined worlds of science fiction a potential site of future real corporate enterprise. Such an endeavor would have proven much more difficult had the company not been able to purchase abandoned United States Air Force sites such as the Cape Canaveral Air Force Base in Florida and the Vandenberg Air Force Base in California. These once abandoned spaces, with their expansive infrastructures that outlived the governmental desire or ability to further develop programs revolving around manned space flights with the same vigor as in the last half of the twentieth century, exemplify the term *junkspace* as conceived by Rem Koolhaas and further examined in Fredric Jameson's "Future City" essay, first published in the *New Left Review* in 2003. Essentially, junkspace is the residue

of mankind, the spaces once useful for models of human existence or consumption that remain abandoned after human existence itself becomes obsolete.

Aside from the move toward the privatization of large public structures, such as in the case of SpaceX mentioned above, junkspace itself has been weaponized in terms of corporate tax reliability, which can be seen in the case of Walmart. During the 1990s, when Walmart shifted its focus from general retail toward their “Supercenter” model, many of the old stores were abandoned and new stores built within the general vicinity of the former operating location, leaving large structures empty and seemingly useless in the wake of this transformation. Sometimes these buildings are sold through Walmart’s own real estate division to non-competing entities¹, but many times the old structures remain unused for years or even decades instead. Although restricting the potential for competing entities to utilize their old spaces seems somewhat straightforward enough in corporate strategy, the abandoned buildings themselves can oftentimes lead toward a reduction in the corporation’s tax liability, as outlined in a 2007 article by Jesse Drucker in *The Wall Street Journal*:

One Walmart subsidiary pays the rent to a real-estate investment trust, or REIT, which is entitled to a tax break if it pays its profits out in dividends. The REIT is 99%-owned by another Walmart subsidiary, which receives the REIT's dividends tax-free. And Walmart gets to deduct the rent from state taxes as a business expense, even though the money has stayed within the company.

Furthermore, the abandoned buildings themselves are used to devalue the buildings currently in operation, a practice known as “Dark Store Theory”:

¹ Those attempting to purchase or lease former Walmart buildings are required to submit a “Letter of Intent” that is subsequently reviewed by Walmart’s real estate division. This document contains a section entitled “Standard Use Restrictions” that outline prohibited uses of the structures, including “(i) a discount store in excess of eight thousand (8,000) square feet in floor size; a wholesale membership/warehouse club, grocery store/supermarket, or pharmacy/drug store; a variety, general or “dollar” store; (ii) gas station, quick lube/oil change facility, automobile tire sales; (iii) movie theater or bowling alley; and (iv) health spa/fitness center greater than three thousand (3,000) square feet” (“Letter of Intent”).

These retailers contend that their fully operational, often thriving businesses should be assessed the same as vacant buildings or “dark stores.” They claim this tax strategy is both market-based and lawful—and they’ve been raising these points in court.

Local governments have pushed back on this strategy because, when argued successfully, a victory for a big box retailer can mean the loss of a substantial amount of tax revenue for a county or a municipality. As a result, the local government must either shift the tax burden to its citizens and/or make cuts in local services. (Badgett)

The effects of such practices undermine the ability for state and local governments to operate fully while also strengthening the bottom line of corporate entities like Walmart and others who use this flawed method of valuation. As costs for services shift away from corporate giants and toward individuals and smaller businesses, the overall economic health of these communities becomes more and more dependent upon these larger structures, which in turn wield such power as leverage for more exemptions and even lower taxes. Such a shift would seem an obvious violation of anything resembling a social contract, and the legality of such practices has yet to be fully determined in the American court system. Place becomes space; space becomes effectively wiped out of practical existence, or at least use-value. Public good is pitted against corporate good. Emptiness is a profitable enterprise these days.

While Koolhaas's "Junkspace" essay is itself, as Jameson notes, a rhetorical manifestation of the very form it describes, for Jameson, the concept of junkspace leads more specifically to a contemplation of History and the markers left upon the world by large structures of obsolescence:

But I think it would be better to characterize all this in terms of History, a History that we cannot imagine except as ending, and whose future seems to be nothing but a monotonous repetition of what is already here. The problem is then how to locate radical difference; how to jumpstart the sense of history so that it begins again to transmit feeble signals of time, of otherness, of change, of Utopia. The problem to be solved is that of breaking out of a windless present of the postmodern back into real historical time, and a history made by human beings. (“Future City” 5)

This is not a new line of argumentation from Jameson, who has long argued that postmodernism is the cultural arm of the political and economic orders that govern our existence in a globalized era:

[T]he new political art (if it is possible at all) will have to hold to the truth of postmodernism, that is to say, to its fundamental object – the world space of multinational capital – at the same time at which it achieves a breakthrough to some as yet unimaginable new mode of representing this last, in which we may again begin to grasp our positioning as individual and collective subjects and regain a capacity to act and struggle which is at present neutralized by our spatial as well as our social confusion. (*Postmodernism* 54)

At stake here is the connection of history to the lived experience of the contemporary individual and the inability to think along larger and longer timelines that connect the postmodern subject to the events and developments of society in the past. It is precisely the junkspace of the past—and of History itself—that reorders the postmodern experience toward a sense of closure of possibility: we see around us the remnants of past civilizations and past senses of order that have been consumed by the late capitalist model and repackaged to emphasize the immediacy of the present. Late capitalism is all-assuming; it takes whatever it can and produces hollow effects for the sole design of making or preserving wealth among the world's economic elite, creating a disparity with lesser developed regions and even nation-states themselves. Late capitalism preaches democracy while practicing oligarchy, endowing corporate interests with governing power to modify rules and regulations in the favor of the wealthy while destroying the fundamental principles of equality and egalitarianism that compose little more than a hollow mask behind which dark money fuels political policy and the ongoing side effects that degrade the environment and the security of the populace itself. The totalizing effects of late capitalism assume the very counter-arguments that oppose it, creating a system that would appear impervious to the criticisms the very system well deserves.

I would like to argue that the contradiction that lies at the heart of this postmodern sense of history – that we seem to be at the end of things with no possible future and that things will go on like this forever – is the apocalyptic logic that drives texts that concern the end of the world or the end of concentrations of institutional power in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. I believe this to be separate from the post-apocalyptic logic of nationalism and political empire that dominates the genre in the middle of the twentieth century and which informs much of the critical discourse to date.

That cultural products concerning the end of the world or civilization are in abundance in contemporary culture is without question: *The Walking Dead* and *Game of Thrones* are two of the most popular television series currently in production, and the genre in both novelized fiction and film is experiencing a revival that perhaps even outpaces the genre's popularity in the 1950s. As such, it is increasingly important to acknowledge the differences in both form and concept in these fictions, beginning with the problematic terminologies which seem to dominate the discourse. In *Archaeologies of the Future*, Fredric Jameson, in distinguishing the generic divide between the dystopian and the anti-Utopian, notes that “we probably need another term to characterize the increasingly popular visions of total destruction and of the extinction of life on Earth which seem more plausible than the Utopian vision of the new Jerusalem but also rather different from the various catastrophes . . . prefigured in the critical dystopias” (199). Certainly, there are potentially problematic issues in the terminology surrounding the subgenre of apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic fiction, and almost every critical approach takes its own turn at defining or redefining *apocalypse*. As the term *apocalypse* has its root in the Greek word for revelation and carries that meaning into English, that revelatory aspect has become associated with the catastrophic vision of John of Patmos and has by association become standard rhetoric

for any type of hypothetical catastrophe of wide concern. The paradigm of what we commonly think of as apocalypse is based primarily on Revelation: the world is rotten and must be destroyed; through destruction a new and better world or future awaits.

I would like to turn, then, to a brief discussion of terminologies as they will be used in this dissertation project, especially as equivocation permeates the discourse at nearly every level.

B. Apocalyptic Equivocation

Apocalypse isn't the end of the world, apparently: such is the overwhelming message of apocalyptic theory from Kermode to Cohn to Berger. Yet the popular sense of the term remains focused around the destruction of all civilization, bolstered in the West by its etymological and cultural roots in the Book of Revelation. This tension between the popular and critical definitions of the term *apocalypse* necessitates further evaluation of the concept. As such, a quick overview of the topic and common confusions surrounding the topic must be made.

The biblical connection to apocalypse is one source of major confusion surrounding the term, and a point any serious discussion needs to address. From the Greek word for "revelation," the term takes its name from the final book of the Christian Bible, which, in its location within that larger religious compilation, has been taken since the early days of the New Testament canon to symbolize finality and the judgment of both mankind and the earth. But also caught up in this view of apocalypse is a sense of prophecy, as the book sets out the coming signs of the end of the world (or at least the end of a particular order of the world). It is perhaps this prophetic angle which has caused the most issue, for at once the prophetic confidence of the text present a hypothetical future as though it were as sure to happen as history already has.

This prophetic aspect of the text is taken up by Frank Kermode in his seminal work *The Sense of an Ending*. For Kermode, the sense of the past and the future become so intertwined that ends and beginnings become intimately connected. Kermode focuses intently on the litany of attempts to place the narrative (if we can call it such) onto various historical moments and movements, each obviously a failure. This series of failure never ends, however, in a refutation of the details of Revelation itself; instead, each failure of the emergence of the biblical apocalypse to occur only results in a reworking of the narrative such that its potential for future prophecy remains intact. As such, what is supposed to stand as the end of all narrative becomes rather a position from which to renegotiate a sense of history such that the predictions are always pushed forward: “Apocalypse depends on a concord of imaginatively recorded past and imaginatively predicted future, achieved on behalf of those who remain ‘in the midst.’ Its predictions, though figurative, can be taken literally, and as the future moves in on us we may expect it to conform with the figures” (8). For Kermode, the predictive success of apocalypse is less important than its ability to shape discourse in the more immediate present: this or that figure or action is evil, while this or that figure or action is redemptive. Furthermore, when the apocalyptic prediction misses its mark, the ideas simply transfer to the next best (and perhaps next most immediate) set of ideologically amenable historical circumstances, and hence “apocalypse can be disconfirmed without being discredited” (8). The mutability of apocalyptic visions to fit our positions in the relative historical middle illustrates the potential breaking points in the continuity of our narrative of civilization and order while simultaneously reaffirming the ideological historical narrative surrounding the text. As such, Kermode locates *apocalypse* as a redefinition of an individual’s or culture’s relationship to time in order to accommodate to the tides of historical change.

While Kermode's theory of apocalypse remains perhaps the most prominent in the area, the historical approaches of Norman Cohn and John Hall are also essential to understanding the term. Both Cohn and Hall focus on the effects of apocalyptic rhetoric, belief, and organizations in the continual upheavals that mark the course of human (and particularly Western) religious and political history. Although the basic approaches of Cohn and Hall are similar, the tone of each is drastically different. In *Cosmos, Chaos, and the World to Come* (1993), Cohn discusses apocalypse in terms of its mythological and cultural connections to chaos or agents of discord². Such a view is important as it begins to fold in some of the popular understanding of apocalypse through an examination of shifts of order within cultures and historical narratives.

John Hall's *Apocalypse: From Antiquity to the Empire of Modernity* (2009) centers more around apocalypse as historical change. For Hall, apocalypse is the energy that transitions between one system of order and another order takes over:

Apocalypse as disclosure may unveil aspects of the human condition or present historical moment that pierce the protective screen.[...] Previously taken-for-granted understandings of "how things are" break down. Historically new possibilities are revealed, so awesome as to foster collective belief that "life as we know it" has been transgressed, never to be the same again. Events or prophecies mark a collective crisis so striking that it undermines normal perceptions of reality for those involved, thereby leading people to act in unprecedented ways, outside their everyday routines. Sociologically, then, the time of the apocalypse encompasses more than the religious end time of God's final judgment, or some absolute and final battle of Armageddon. Rather than the actual end of the world, the apocalypse is typically "the end of the world as we know it," an extreme social and cultural disjuncture in which dramatic events reshape the relations of many individuals at once to history. (3)

Hall's view of apocalypse contains much in common with that of Kermode: both view history as somewhat cyclical, punctuated by the extreme manifestations of shifts in order coded as predicted disaster, shouldered on one side by the marvels of civilized life and on the other the

² After all, in addition to its direct translation of "revelation," apocalypse is also etymologically linked to Calypso, best known for her role in *The Odyssey*, wherein she traps Odysseus in an extra-marital relationship, delaying his return to Penelope.

extreme cliff of seemingly ultimate destruction. The sense of hopefulness one might expect to find in Hall's work, with the reference to future possibilities through lived historical experience, is undercut by the book's final chapter. In stark contrast to Cohn, whose mythological exploration ends with an emphatic "what a story it has become!" (233), Hall instead focuses on the historical shifts that seem most evident in our own time, particularly relating to climate change: "apocalyptic responses to collective experience of crisis stand every likelihood of being exacerbated by ecological conditions – in part induced by the technical advances and inexorable spread of modernity – just as they sometimes had been triggered by famines and plagues in the past" (226). The increasing attention paid to the element of disaster as history in Hall's work echoes the larger cry for urgency regarding various potential threats to the established order of society on the global stage.

Of course, as with Kermode, such visions of ultimate destruction are as much figurative as literal. In all these senses of the term *apocalypse*, the historical world is in a constant state of defining and redefining itself, with the present moment always seemingly just out of reach, somehow beyond a future we have yet to experience. It is then through this anticipation of shifts in historical order that the apocalyptic gains relevance and meaning. As such, perhaps another examination of Jameson is appropriate here.

In "Globalization and Political Strategy," Jameson discusses the impact of globalization through its five distinct levels: technology, politics, culture, economics, and social structures. His general thesis revolves around an examination of the process of globalization and its connection to American policy, particularly the spread of American-style democracy and capitalism to the rest of the world:

Irreversibility has been a feature of the story all along. First mooted at the technological level (no return to the simpler life, or to pre-micro chip production), we also encountered

it, in terms of imperialism domination, in the political sphere – although here the vicissitudes of world history should suggest that no empire lasts forever. At the cultural level, globalization threatens the final extinction of local cultures, resuscitatable only in Disneyfied form, through the construction of artificial simulacra and the mere images of fantasized traditions and beliefs. But in the financial realm, the aura of doom that seems to hang over globalization’s putative irreversibility confronts us with our own inability to imagine any alternative, or to conceive how ‘delinking’ from the world economy could possibly be a feasible political and economic project in the first place – and this despite the fact that quite seriously ‘delinked’ forms of national existence flourished only a few decades ago, most notable in the form of the Socialist bloc. (“Globalization”)

What Jameson highlights here is the transition of order toward a network of globalized economies based on American economic and political domination, a process that seems without end (or at least without serious alternative). Building on this sense of inevitability, Teresa Heffernan posits in *Post-Apocalyptic Culture* that the twentieth century has necessitated an alteration in our understanding of apocalypse, and that the traditional paradigm that includes both disaster and renewal in our contemporary era no longer applies so easily:

[T]he twentieth century sense of the post-apocalypse is of a different order than apocalypse [...] [A]s Kermode has suggested, apocalypse is increasingly understood as synonymous with catastrophe, in the history of both its religious and secular usage it is intricately linked to the emergence of a better world, to revelation and disclosure. Catastrophic narrations (and catastrophe is defined as the ‘final event’) that are bereft of redemption and revelation are not apocalyptic in the traditional sense. (6)

While Heffernan does draw this distinction in an attempt to further probe the equivocation amongst different uses of apocalyptic terminology, she uses this perspective to investigate various fictions of the twentieth century in terms of their relationships to narrative ends and the implications of this dubious sense of endings to suggest that the (post) apocalyptic tenor of twentieth-century general fictions reveals the century’s dual and perhaps contradictory attitudes toward apocalypse: “The sense that the power of the end in narrative is exhausted leads on the one hand to the anxiety that we exist after the catastrophe, after the end, and on the other to the hope that the very openness of a narrative that cannot be claimed by a unifying telos, that resists

the pull of imagined or real absolute ends, keeps alive infinite directions and possibilities” (14). Heffernan’s understanding of the post-apocalyptic is one in which “we live in a time after the apocalypse, after the faith in a radically new world” (6) outside of which we cannot imagine our future as anything else.

As such, for this project, I would like to use a definition of *apocalypse* that incorporates the popular as well as the critical, while making an important distinction that perhaps can pierce the equivocation surrounding the discourse. I will attempt to define *apocalypse* itself as the destruction or failure of an existing system of order, not necessarily linked to the development of a reaffirming narrative³. Additionally, I hope to demonstrate that, in the postmodern age, the apocalyptic is a more specific marker of a society that fears itself moving further away from Utopian order, swallowed by the seemingly unstoppable force of consumption and the spread of global (American) capitalism. Apocalyptic imaginations at the end of the twentieth and beginning of the twenty-first centuries reflect this sense of inevitability in the transition toward a totalizing system of transnational capitalism on a global scale and distinctly away from Utopian possibility.

C. The Last Man Narrative

The most easily identifiable apocalyptic trope is the Last Man narrative (sometimes called the extinction narrative), of which Mary Shelley’s *The Last Man* is likely not only the first but best-known example. The genre of fiction concerning the end of the world in the West began with a decidedly apocalyptic tone in that many of these texts were void of the post-apocalyptic promise of the new Jerusalem, and many of these apocalyptic imaginations emphasized an

³ As one would find in the post-apocalyptic paradigm, to be discussed in the section bearing that name.

attitude of warning toward existent political structures or ideals. The genre has a propensity for emphasizing (perhaps even in melodramatic ways) particular aspects of society that are held in some esteem, often passing judgment on a particular order or system of thought.

The novel begins with an invocation to temporal dislocation, in which Shelley describes the account of her finding a set of prophetic documents supposedly written in the twenty-first century. These documents contain the narrative of the remainder of the novel, told through the first-person perspective of Lionel Verney, the titular character of the novel. Verney describes how his abandonment issues caused him to mistrust the institutions of political power and the figures associated with those institutions until he meets Adrian and Lord Raymond, who are often considered idealized versions of Percy Bysshe Shelley and Lord Byron, respectively. Through their moral superiority and their kindness, these figures indeed redeem the republican government to Verney's satisfaction. Unfortunately, a plague developing in what seems remote areas of the world runs its course through humanity, eventually claiming the lives of everyone until only Verney remains.

Although perhaps too much of the criticism of Mary Shelley's *The Last Man* focuses on biographical connections that ultimately paint her as writing primarily as a method of coping with her grief, such accounts fail to consider the spirit of activism that remains in such high esteem throughout the novel. The novel itself is an attempt to bring her voice into the fold, even though those around her all seem to be disappearing at too fast a rate. What her voice says is the important thing: she uses the novel as a vehicle for criticizing the flaws she sees in the republican form of government. The ending of the novel is also interesting in that it presents a vision of uninhibited access to the extravagance of the artistic collections found in Italy. The last scene of the novel paints a picture of such extravagance with a (hopeful, if not ironically optimistic) sign

to a potential reader pointing toward the future direction of the traveler. This is striking on multiple levels: as the scene does not shift away from the centralized extravagance, the perspective of even our omniscient narrator becomes distracted by the dazzling beauty of artistic achievement, much the way the glittering emptiness of shiny trinkets dazzles the consumer in postmodern society; secondly, we are given the impression of a future without actually presenting one in the direction of the protagonist's graffiti (oddly contrasted to the art) claiming a direction while the narration fails to follow through on the informative aspect, thus history itself is halted; thirdly, this promise of a new direction without its follow-through mirrors the rejection in Mary Shelley's novel of the religious conventions that might have been expected by readers, as most end-of-the-world narratives in English have been centered around the Revelation narrative, a secularization trend that continues on into our present day.

As for the biographical readings of this novel, which are many, Betty T. Bennett in her article "Radical Imaginings: Mary Shelley's *The Last Man*" calls such approaches "limited assessments [that] preclude understanding the essential Romanticism – and Radicalism – of *The Last Man*" (Bennett 147). Bennett picks up on the fact that the anxieties expressed by the political philosophies within the novel are not just concerns about England but instead about the rise of republican governments across Europe in the preceding century. For Bennett, the logic of the novel is constructed around its narrative strategy of dislocation, from the opening narrator's lack of identity to the collapse of traditional gender roles and norms to the disruption of humankind's privileged position at the top of the food chain. Bennett believes that this strategy of dislocation, combined with an early nineteenth century audience that was reluctant to accept philosophy or politics from any woman, led to the novel's poor initial reception:

The reasons for their rejection are clear: in a post-Napoleonic age, when conservative Europe restored monarchs to thrones, when a middle-class wanted its share of power

within a newly established order that it could control, when both classes in England were frightened by working-class uprisings, the idea of a republican government replacing the monarchy was disruptive enough. *The Last Man*, however, suggests that even a republican government could prove to be inadequate. (Bennett 149)

The failures then, of both monarchy and republicanism (particularly in their masculine forms) in *The Last Man* lead to cultural anxiety regarding societal instability. Specifically in regards to government, the critique of republicanism, even in its rejection of the social stratifications that inevitably accompany monarchy, the novel reveals a distrust for insular nationalistic logic:

even when a seemingly capable leader is chosen – Raymond for a while, then Adrian, as compared with Ryland – there is an endemic failure in the parliamentarians, who function much as congresses and parliaments function today, enthralled by politics and power. Further, England is presented as politically insular, a nation that initially believes if it can remain within its own shores, it will be safe from the plague. What is lacking in Verney's England, but critical to its success, is a system that prepares the populace for republican government; and a republican government, that like Mary Shelley and her circle, was genuinely engaged and concerned with world politics. That system is embodied in the concept of universal education, strongly advocated by the Shelleys, Godwin and Wollstonecraft, and envisioned as the source of an evolutionary conversion that over time would condition nations and individuals for self-governance, that would lead to global peace and well-being. (Bennett 149-50)

The plague, however, is a force that neither recognizes nor respects national boundaries or identities, and with the spread of disease to the shores of England, such insular thinking proves ineffective against global problems. Thus *The Last Man* can at least in part be seen as a rejection of the limitations regarding humanity as a whole through viewing the world with a specifically nationalist lens.

In "Mary Shelley's Malthusian Objections in *The Last Man*," Lauren Cameron examines *The Last Man* in terms of the long-standing debate her father William Godwin had with Thomas Robert Malthus regarding their vast political disagreements. Cameron argues that Shelley's novel indicates that she mostly sides with Malthus and uses fiction as the necessary realm through which she must express her own political philosophy. The novel under such an examination is an

exploration of the finer points of her disagreement with Malthus, as she “instead argues that humans are subject to the whims of nature, which behaves blindly and randomly; that disease is the most significant limiting factor on populations; and that ethical experience is grounded in individuating targets of empathy” (178). Cameron sees this ethical foregrounding as a response to Malthus’s detached consideration of large populations in the characters of Raymond and Merrival: “Systems that, like Malthus’s, consider people en masse are represented as ethical failings and lead to the destruction of the erring individual and his goals” (196). In this way, the novel intends to individuate the concept of suffering instead of adhering to the totalizing visions that obscure empathetic connections and alienate people from one another.

Although the genre of apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic fictions began with the *Last Man* narrative, such approaches are relatively uncommon when compared with the post-apocalyptic novels that appeared later. Still, such novels do exist, notably among them Kurt Vonnegut's *Cat's Cradle* (1963). Although the conservative voices of 1950s post-apocalyptic fiction employ strategies of undermining existing political structures in creating or perpetuating a culture of fear, Vonnegut's novel satirizes such approaches to provide commentary on the military-industrial complex and the relationship of America to foreign powers, in this case not a superpower like the Soviet Union but instead the tiny third-world nation of San Lorenzo. The plot of the novel follows the narrator Jonah's journey to San Lorenzo, initially searching for information related to the construction of the atomic bomb, meanwhile becoming involved in an international intrigue involving a far more deadly and dangerous substance known as ice-nine, which has the seemingly magical ability to change the molecular structure of any substance containing water (including the human body), essentially freezing the structure into a solid state of matter.

During Jonah's journey to San Lorenzo, he meets H. Lowe Crosby, who wants to move his factory to San Lorenzo to take advantage of the availability of cheap labor in the overpopulated island, a place where nearly half a million people are crammed into a geographical space "fifty miles long and twenty miles wide" (61). Crosby's wife Hazel strikes a conversation with Jonah about their shared Hoosier background; Jonah later explains that Hazel's preoccupation with Hoosiers is "a textbook example of a false karass, of a seeming team that was meaningless in the ways God gets things done" (67). This false karass, just one of many components of the fictional religion of Bokononism, is indicative of the flawed tendency to define individuals and their worth through artificial categorizations, such as when we limit experiences of identity to particular racial, gendered, or ethnic restrictions.

The Crosbys themselves serve as the antithesis to Julian Castle, who made millions in America and built with the money a hospital in San Lorenzo. Through the Crosbys, and with help from Bokononism, *Cat's Cradle* subverts the myths of American Exceptionalism and the cultural superiority of America and instead emphasizes the hypocrisy of American values that are centered upon fundamentalist Christian principles of exclusion. While most critics focus primarily on Bokononism in their analyses of the novel, the religion of Bokononism is little more than a group of pithy sayings covering the humanist stance for which Vonnegut is widely known. The more important connection is with the development and economy of ice-nine.

Though ice-nine's development begins out of the drive to simply keep marines from having to deal with the nuisance of mud, the substance turns out to be far too efficient, as the substance ends up killing its creator, the doctor who examines his body, and eventually everyone in the world. When the destructive potential of the substance becomes known, ice-nine becomes a very valuable substance, signifying Vonnegut's distaste for the commodification of science

while also indicting the military for its attempts to manipulate scientific discovery for the purposes of war. But unlike Shelley's *The Last Man*, *Cat's Cradle* is not necessarily about one human surviving perhaps against all odds to witness a world without humankind but instead about a full group of people who transcend various stratifications in society. Whereas the force of epidemic disease in Shelley's novel punctures the artificial boundaries of nationhood, in Vonnegut's novel, the penetrating force is that of the nation-state itself, specifically the United States government in its attempts and dealings with bringing about, either through capitalist exploitation or by military development and deployment, the perpetuation of a stratified global order stamped by American dominance.

What narratives such as these tend to do is draw into focus the nature of totality. The destruction in each novel encompasses the entire globe, and while Shelley's novel offers Verney as a singular resistance to such totality through his own biological immunity, Vonnegut's narrative a century and a half later is all-encompassing. But as Charlotte Sussman argues, the lack of an audience for Verney "brings him to the edge of narrative's capacity to preserve and communicate experience" and that "language in the novel is predicated on communication—with none to listen to him, the last man is voiceless" (298). Much like Jonah, then, Verney is essentially powerless in the face of totalization. The implications of such narratives are to emphasize a need for establishing the normality of difference, of building community predicated not upon defining otherness but upon embracing it.

D. The Post-Apocalyptic Paradigm

The sense of renewal and of connections between beginnings and endings is the heart of the post-apocalyptic paradigm. While it does involve elements of chaos or destruction, these are

merely the means that typically wipe humanity away to start over with this or that ideology guiding the principles of survival in some new world. Such can be seen in Cohn's historical theory, in which new ideas of the future envelop the destructive energies of various failures into narratives of mythical or historical origin; or indeed Hall's, wherein political order is built upon the wreckage of previous political orders; even in Kermode we have the failure of the various narratives of eschatological endings, out of which new beginnings (and consequently new prophecies of endings) develop.

Apocalypse as destruction is therefore only one part of the overall paradigm, and although it may be the most awe-striking or sublime aspect, traditionally it has been seen as less important than what comes after the catastrophic event. The central underlying feature of the standard approach to the genre is the priority of the “post” of the post-apocalyptic, the revelation in the paradigm as Berger has described it: “The end itself, the moment of cataclysm, is only part of the point of apocalyptic writing. The apocalypse as eschaton is just as importantly the vehicle for clearing away the world as it is and making possible the post-apocalyptic paradise or wasteland” (6). Thus the emphasis on what comes after catastrophe tends to dominate the discussion of apocalyptic criticism. The remnants of civilization emphasize or exclude various characteristics of society to establish, in the most traditional of cases, an alternative ideology to their respective contemporary cultures. Most simplistically, the post-apocalyptic paradigm is a recipe for society’s future based on prioritizing particular aspects of the present or the past. It thus requires a reproduction of a sense of time always separate and distinct from the time it attempts to capture and reproduce, much like Utopian texts in their need to distance themselves (often both in time and in space) from the course of experienced history.

Despite this shortcoming in the historical view of post-apocalyptic recreation, the deep

connections of the term and concept of *apocalypse* to religious belief bolsters the sense of expectation that the paradigm, in its full form, will lead to a better world. While this expectation is without doubt the central idea behind most post-apocalyptic fiction, the secularization of the idea of apocalypse has been one in motion since the publication of Mary Shelley's *The Last Man*⁴ in 1824.

Along these lines of thinking, Elizabeth Rosen argues in *Apocalyptic Transformation* that the secularization of the new Jerusalem paradigm provides a space to develop projects of a hopeful future that fills the space beyond apocalyptic destruction and chaos. Rosen argues that “[a]rtists are understandably drawn to examining the apocalyptic myth in all of its forms: as a metaphor, a story, a sense-making structure, or a promise of hope” (176). Her argument rests on the transformation of the vision of the New Jerusalem at the end of Revelation to secular narratives, locating the new Jerusalem as “less a place than a new way of seeing: a new vision” (xxiii). By examining popular culture narratives in the late twentieth century, Rosen demonstrates how the principles of renewal and hope attempt to fill the voids left behind in the wake of disaster or destruction, physically, psychologically, and even environmentally.

Lois Parkinson Zamora's approach takes into consideration the element of hope that often (but not always) accompanies fictions and predictions that deal with apocalyptic destruction: “While it is true that an acute sense of temporal disruption and disequilibrium is the source of, and is always integral to, apocalyptic thinking and narration, so is the conviction that historical crisis will have the cleansing effect of radical renewal” (10). What these two fairly optimistic

⁴ Before Shelley's *The Last Man*, most literary depictions of apocalypse took on a mythological or even mystical perspective, such as Jean-Baptiste Cousin de Grainville's *Le Dernier Homme*, which involves Adam, the first man, convincing the last human couple to essentially discontinue the species. Inspired by Milton, Grainville's work relies heavily on religious imagery and allusion. *The Last Man* not only depicts an end of the world without religious intervention but also a world in which all hope for a future humanity indeed dies with the last human being's farewell as he sets out to sail the oceans and explore the world.

approaches to apocalyptic thinking demonstrate is that the expectation of renewal consistently accompanies the chaos of disaster, and the power of narrative and its ability to transcend the trauma of disaster are the sources of this sense of renewal or hope.

James Berger's theory in *After the End* develops in a similar manner. For Berger, the emphasis on what remains after catastrophe sheds light on the problematic issues of a writer's contemporary or historical world, manifesting in various ghosts of history that haunt the present and the future because of their affiliations with oppressive forces, such as slavery in the United States South or the extermination of the Jews under Nazi leadership. Though Berger does occasionally address the post-apocalyptic "wasteland" scenario, his primary project lies in the assertion that our own historical world has already undergone apocalypse, particularly in the forms just mentioned, and the reconstruction of society after such human rights abuses always contains remnants of those damaging institutions of the past.

According to this paradigm, then, the first true post-apocalyptic novel is Richard Jeffries's *After London* (1885). In this novel, the vast majority of civilization has very quickly died off from an unspecified cause, and survivors must relocate in an undeveloped landscape north of London to rebuild society in a more ideal form, one without the dirty horrors of rapid urbanization. Though certainly lacking in much of the literary merit of *The Last Man*, *After London* nonetheless provides an interesting contrast to the last-human narrative. The novel emphasizes a simple life, not so subtly suggesting that urbanity is the source of death, not just of people but of civility itself, if not just civilization. Written in the Victorian period, the pastoral ideal becomes the focus of what Jeffries seems to suggest is the cure of all modern ills: discarding the modern world altogether. The novel quickly devolves into primitivism (another common turn of the post-apocalyptic genre, particularly in early forms) wherein the protagonist

Felix finds himself in conflict with a group of minorities who have also escaped London.

Although he manages to escape, the novel ends before Felix arrives back with his group (opening the reading to the possibility that he does not in fact return safely); however, the importance of this particular fiction is less on how it ends on more on the development of narrative around this ideal society that fulfills a restorative process through pastoral retreat. It is this paradigm of destruction and rebirth that dominates much of the genre through the next nearly hundred years, wherein the post-apocalyptic becomes one of the most sensational outlets for nuclear fear in Cold War science fiction.

In the revival of post-apocalyptic fiction through conservative politics, many writers in the Cold War era seized on the fears of nuclear holocaust that had gripped so much of the public consciousness in the Western world. In what M. Keith Booker refers to as "the long 1950s" (3), anxieties over nuclear warfare and communist infiltration and invasion seem to dominate the genre, and the popularity of many of these texts helped to bring the paradigm new cultural life. Produced against the backdrop of the global political tensions of the Cold War, many of these novels used the form to express attitudes and tensions between the Soviet Union and the West. But as Booker points out, many of the stereo-typical fears of this decade were only the beginning:

Some works can be taken as cautionary tales and seem genuinely designed as attempted interventions in contemporary debates concerning the Cold War arms race. Others function in a largely satirical vein, using their depictions of post-holocaust worlds as devices of cognitive estrangement that add critical force to the author's commentary on the ills of his or her own contemporary society. These ills, as with other science fiction works of the decade, can quite often be encompassed within the twin topics of routinization and alienation. (65)

As Booker goes on to argue, these texts focus on the interruption of the development of an American society that fosters such routinization and alienation in the course of an emergent late

capitalism in addition to their concentration on the relationship between America and a global world.

George R. Stewart's *Earth Abides* (1949) centers around Isherwood (Ish) Williams and other survivors of a plague that killed most of the population of North America. Like Jeffries's novel, *Earth Abides* presents a vision of primitivism and a regression toward a hunter-gatherer society in relation to the cold brutality of the industrial world. While Stewart's novel lacks explicit reference to the Soviet Union, the novel's exclusive focus upon North America is a typical shrinking away from global thinking in the novels of the long decade and beyond. Like many of the post-apocalyptic novels that followed, *Earth Abides* contains through this regressionism a distrust in the ability of technological advance to contribute to sustainable positive community growth. Society only seems to recapture the seeds of progress and a sense of time once people have become more localized in space while freed from the constraints of a modernized, urbanized, interconnected global experience.

The Day of the Triffids (1951) by John Wyndham contains elements of the horror genre in its depiction of a world overrun by deadly walking plants that prey upon the human population. Although this novel also lacks a direct depiction of the political threat of the Cold War, the connection of the Soviet Union to the development of the deadly plants through genetic modification and experimentation is quite clear. It is the Soviet Union that created and lost initial control of the plants' development (although their evolution seems to be extremely fast in comparison to the rest of the biological spectrum). The invasion of these plants into Western urban spaces, specifically London, eventually restricts its protagonists to a localized space outside the former urban space of London. In their small community of survivors, the

protagonists create an agrarian society literally walled off from the rest of the world and these threats from the weaponization of nature itself posed by the global conflict of the Cold War.

Richard Matheson's *I Am Legend* follows its hero Robert Neville in a post-apocalyptic America where vampires have taken over the human population, leaving Neville as the last remaining human. Interestingly, Matheson's novella takes a strange turn at the end, when Neville finally realizes his historical position in relation to the apocalypse taking place in his immediate present: "And suddenly he thought, I'm the abnormal one now. Normalcy was a majority concept, the standard of many and not just the standard of one man" (159). Recognizing himself as the sole remnant of a previous world order, Neville decides to accept his fate, and the novella's title comes from the ironically empowering final line as he realizes that his place in history has been fulfilled. Neville is a figure of awe and fear, and his execution as the last of his species mirrors the skepticism of otherness that often pervades the long 1950s. That Neville manages to move beyond his own fear of otherness and accept his role as the marginalized subject brings the novel to a strange Utopian ending in the dominance of the new order of vampiric supremacy.

Alas, Babylon (1955) focuses on the individuals in Fort Repose, Florida, where Randolph Bragg and his neighbors and friends band together to survive despite the best efforts of the Soviet Union to annihilate the United States through nuclear warfare. Pat Frank's novel takes a fetishistic approach to the end of democratic civilization that Booker states "leads, not to anarchy, but to a military dictatorship, a situation that most of the locals, yearning for strong leadership in a crisis, welcome warmly" (87). When the government sweeps in at the end of the novel, dropping leaflets from overhead that announce the survival of the United States government, "it was disappointing. But it was something. It was something you could put your hands on, that you could feel, that had come from the outside. It was proof that the government

of the United States still functioned. It was also useful as toilet paper" (Frank 307). This disappointment at the survival of the government, albeit only barely functional, emphasizes the desire to withdraw from global relations and the national concerns that govern it in the wake of the Second World War. That the residents of Fort Repose will presumably literally wipe their asses with these notifications exaggerates the point. It comes as no surprise when they reject the offer of governmental assistance, especially as the offer is couched in a larger, global setting, with the United States now either a second- or third-world power: "[The technician] talked of farm areas out of production for an indefinite period, and how the South American nations had begun lend-lease shipments to the northern continent, and how Thailand and Indonesia were contributing rice. Eventually, it was hoped that the Venezuelan oil would alleviate the transport fuel shortage" (314).

Nevil Shute's *On the Beach*, like Pat Frank's *Alas, Babylon*, takes place after the detonation of nuclear weapons. This novel, however, is set in Australia, which is supposedly protected from nuclear fallout by its location in the southern hemisphere, at least in the beginning of the novel. Slowly, a cloud of radiation creeps upon them from the numerous explosions in the north. The beginning of the novel also provides a level of optimism that fades by the end of the text: the survivors are initially consumed with finding other survivors elsewhere in the world, but as their fate closes in around them, this sense of doom disconnects the novel's characters from any hope of humanity's survival and turns consequently into a death-wish to consume as much as possible.

In Philip K. Dick's *Dr. Bloodmoney*, we see a world radically altered by nuclear armageddon. Though the novel seems to clearly focus primarily on the aftermath of this destruction, the utopian elements in this post-apocalyptic imagination are undermined

consistently by the characters and their actions. For Jameson, the way *Dr. Bloodmoney* centers itself around a group of marginalized characters – Stuart, the phocomelus Hoppy Harrington, and the homunculus Bill Keller – sets up the novel to approach the subject of various marginalizations and their effects in relation to the access of power, both paranormal and institutional. Andrew Gill and Bonnie Keller, two of the most "normalized" characters from before the nuclear destruction, become relatively marginalized in the restructuring of the new, post-nuclear order and return to Berkeley. Booker sees this development as potentially problematic in the critique of capitalism, as “they move there in order to pursue a business partnership with Hardy and McConchie, a partnership that clearly takes them a step closer to the reestablishment of corporate capitalism, which proves not to be so easy to kill off after all” (94). This development, in light of the post-nuclear marginalizations they have endured, can perhaps be seen as something of a defense mechanism, an attempt to revert to the prior order of capitalism to regain a more centralized social position; as such, the novel creates a space in which to view capitalism as a normalizing force within Western society, and the genre as a whole begins to shift toward this estranging technique.

E. A Spatial Sense of Apocalypse

In *Postmodernism*, Jameson discusses what he calls the "spatial turn" (154), which he describes as one of the key differences in the shift from considerations and forms of modernism to their postmodern counterparts:

The initial approach to this particular 'great transformation' -- the displacement of time, the spatialization of the temporal – often registers its novelties by way of a sense of loss.[...] [F]rom this nostalgic and regressive perspective – that of the older modern and its temporalities – what is mourned is the memory of deep memory; what is enacted is nostalgia for nostalgia, for the grand older extinct questions of origin and telos, of deep time and the Freudian Unconscious, . . . for the dialectic also, as well as the monumental

forms left high and dry by the ebb tide of the modern moment, forms whose Absolutes are no longer audible to us, illegible hieroglyphs of the demiurgic within the technocratic world. (156)

This shift in thinking away from time and toward space and the corresponding loss of thinking historically forms much of the basis of Jameson's concept of the postmodern and the reconstitution of the world according to late capitalist logic. In the passage above, there is a sense that time itself becomes subject to space in their binary relationship, a pivot in the organizational strategies of not only economic systems of production but concepts of civilization itself. The result is a series of abstractions of abstractions, further wrenching us away from the tangible developments of historical transitions and leading us collectively into a mode of thinking in which what exists currently is the only option for the future. The vague recollections of difference have themselves been consumed by the absence of difference in regard to our historical imagination; the failure to see and imagine tangible and productive change through the ubiquity of the sprawl of late capitalism creates a radical distance between the perception of contemporary life and the older orders of the past. The potential for change is diminished by the overwhelmingly powerful influences and systems that force us to focus on the immediate present, hindering our ability to affect historical difference by forcing us to concentrate on the more immediate task of mere survival. The abstraction is that of history itself, as we become less connected to avenues of progress and change through the manipulation of our perceptions of time and space.

In the context of "conceptual art," Jameson notes that the impact of the emphasis on spatial design creates "perceptual paradoxes that we cannot think or unravel by way of conscious abstractions and which bring us up short against the visual occasions" (157). He goes on to note that, in relation to projects that attempt to address the systematic relationships of postmodernism,

when they succeed, they fail. And the more powerfully one has been able to underscore and isolate the antipolitical features of the newer cultural dominant—its loss of historicity, for example—the more one paints oneself into a corner and makes any repoliticization of such culture a priori inconceivable. Yet the totalizing account of the postmodern always included a space for various forms of oppositional culture: those of marginal groups, those of radically distinct residual or emergent cultural languages, their existence being already predicated by the necessarily uneven development of late capitalism, whose First World produces a Third World within itself by its own inner dynamic. (158-9)

The obfuscation of direct political messaging in postmodern art must then be countered through interrogation of such works in terms of their networks, the resources behind these networks, and a whole series of relationships that largely resembles the global system of resource and wealth migration that sustains contemporary life. The abstraction of such systems in the process of daily routines, Jameson argues, calls for an allegorical approach in relation to the interpretation of art—indeed of "texts" of any sort:

[the allegorical] can be minimally formulated as the question posed to thinking by the awareness of incommensurable distances within its object of thought, and as the various new interpretive answers devised to encompass phenomena about which we are at least minimally agreed that no single thought or theory encompasses any of them. Allegorical interpretation is then first and foremost an interpretive operation which begins by acknowledging the impossibility of interpretation in the older sense, and by including that impossibility in its own provisional or aleatory movements. (168)

If, as Jameson suggests, we are to think of forms of art as allegorical representations, we must here return to the question of apocalyptic imaginations, acknowledging simultaneously the attempt to offer a projection of the end of capitalist order and the failure of the cultural imagination to accept such a radical historical difference that would wipe capitalism and its effects from the face of the earth. The fragmentations of civilizations and even individuals within such texts highlight the traumas of the postmodern age, while also acknowledging the horrific impact of the potential loss of the very totalizing systems and networks of production and consumption that distract us from thinking in such historical frameworks. Assuming that it is

actually less difficult now to imagine the end of the world than it is to imagine the end of capitalism, which is the idea that truly frightens us?

The old modes of thinking about apocalypse are no longer the most effective. Despite the weight with which spatial thinking has been prioritized in the recent decades of postmodern theory, our understanding of apocalypse itself is still primarily temporal in nature. Kermode, for instance, characterizes apocalypse in terms of the "tock-tick," or the time in between our concepts of the end of temporal measurements and the beginning of the following unit, an order that is at once both expected and ignored, the changing over from one moment to the next. Berger's theory presupposes a temporal understanding as well, in that the historical ruptures of the past linger beyond the moments of their historical truths, or revelations, impacting society well beyond the temporal heights of their historical contexts.

Additionally, such temporal strategies in relation to thinking apocalyptically still cling to the idea of the End of Days as presented in *Revelation*, while the fictional representations from Mary Shelley to present day emphasize rather the secularization of such ideas, relegating them more to representations of social and spatial reconfigurations than to religious prognostications that oversimplify history into a shallow battle between monolithic and outdated archetypes of Good and Evil. Even within this series of developments we can witness the evolution of the genre out of its political basis in nationalisms (particularly evident in the twentieth century) into the globalized contexts that hold a mirror to the privileges of the first world in light of the flawed and destabilizing forces that threaten not only underdeveloped nations but the habitability and sustainability of the entire world. Under the present trajectory of capitalism, nowhere is safe.

If we are to regain a sense of history, such must be accomplished, at least in part, through narrative itself. If narrative is, as Jameson suggests, the attempt to establish a connection

between the present historical moment with the developments of the past, then it is only through the careful construction of such narratives that a Utopian future may be allowed to manifest. Only by thinking more historically about change and the nature of changes can we hope to create a better tomorrow.

Chapter One of this dissertation examines texts that represent apocalypse as urban and suburban spaces. Paul Auster's *In the Country of Last Things* illustrates the spatial instability of life in the often fast-paced world of late capitalism. The urban resources are exhausted and all the wealth seems to have transferred elsewhere, leaving the population of the city in utter destitution and without options in the wake of a capitalist system that has collapsed. The excessive consumption within the city brings on dire circumstances to the city's inhabitants, depriving them of agency unless they can find refuge in safe spaces where those who occupy such spaces can develop a spirit of cooperation instead of the excessive competition of the outside world. Don DeLillo's *White Noise* explores suburban consumption and the cultivation of isolation through the distribution of media and media culture, including the pervasiveness of advertising in American society. M. T. Anderson's *Feed* examines a futuristic world where the internet can be wirelessly connected directly to one's brain, which provides enough distraction for the world to fall apart with people barely noticing.

Chapter Two takes a look at two recent postmodern depictions of post-apocalyptic wastelands, Cormac McCarthy's *The Road* and Peter Heller's *The Dog Stars*. Building upon Carl F. Miller's reading of *The Road*, I argue that the strategy of reversal he employs is an appropriate method through which to view the proliferation of postapocalyptic wastelands in the postmodern era. Through these reversals, wasteland texts primarily reveal the anxieties of the contemporary white male in light of societal movements that seek to more representationally incorporate voices

of women and minorities into the greater social consciousness. The man in *The Road* embodies this anxiety, as he seeks to shelter his son against any and all exterior forces in a novel that mostly obscures differences of race and gender, painting a bleak outlook of the divisions that regularly occur in our own historical circumstances regarding immigration and the distribution of transnational resources. This perspective in *The Dog Stars* is most obviously signaled through the character of Bangley, whose own past in a seemingly forgotten rural America fuels his bloodlust in the wake of civilization's downfall. Furthermore, the novel's protagonist Hig presents only a semblance of tolerance toward Otherness, as his capacity for empathy is often subdued by the acts of killing rationalized as acts of survival. Key to this text is the development of the hierarchy of a weapon-based culture which emphasizes both the private and public militarizations of American individuals and institutions.

Chapter Three delves into Margaret Atwood's *Maddaddam* trilogy, interrogating the reconstruction of space toward the aims of multinational corporations and the subsequent geopolitical allegory of polyphony that develops in the wake of 9/11. The narrative strategy of the trilogy relies on the expansion of voices as we progress from the pseudo-mononarrative of Jimmy in *Oryx and Crake* toward the incorporation of the more marginalized voices of Toby and Ren in *The Year of the Flood*, eventually including also the literal post-human development of the Crakers, genetically engineered individuals designed specifically to replace humans on the planet to usher in a world free from the abuses that capitalism seems destined to produce. In light of Atwood's "Letter to America," published shortly before the release of *Oryx and Crake*, the novels are framed such to offer a critique of the current trajectory of the globalization of American culture. The trilogy further presents the contradiction of corporate order from natural order and examines the relativist ethical standpoints between terrorism and resistance. All of this

is problematized by language and the development of History, entangled as both are in mythologies and social narratives that obscure various truths and separate people from a clear understanding of operative principles of corporate order and the destructive potential inherent within.

Central to these texts is the development and even the failure of narrative. Anna Blume's notebook is the central text itself of *In the Country of Last Things*; her journal is the only information available to those living outside this seemingly borderless apocalyptic city and stands as the sole examination of the disappearances the novel concentrates upon. Jack Gladney's narrations of Hitler in his classes take on the rebranding of history in commodified form in *White Noise*. The failure of Violet to fully escape the consumerist impulses of her capitalist existence are laid bare when she tries to imagine her life in the form of a movie plot, finding herself unable to create a cinematic vision of herself and Titus void of the clichés of the cultural production that surrounds her. The stories the man tells the boy in *The Road* place both characters into an allegorical representation of a world that has been lost, and as the stories lose their power of regenerative hope, the man and the boy both lose a sense of historical purpose. Hig's attempts to keep a journal reveal his fragmented relationship with language, a fragmentation that appears in the world around him and also points to our own social fragmentations. Finally, the *Maddaddam* trilogy offers a host of commentaries on language and narrative, from Jimmy's attempts to keep words and phrases alive to the mythology he creates for the Crakers to the development of Blackbeard as primary storyteller among the Crakers themselves. The vast majority of these commentaries into narrative deal with failure, either through the failure of the narration to adequately capture an experience or emotion to the broader cultural failures of the seeming loss of innocence inherent in the Craker dependence on a mere

metaphorical understanding of why they were created that obfuscates the tangible violence and loss necessary to clear the path toward their harmonious existence with a nature void of humans.

II. Chapter One: Consumption and Apocalypse in the Postmodern Age

Remember through towns
 With fear and fascination
 On what was here
 And what's replacing them now.
 Interchanges, plazas and malls
 And crowded chain restaurants
 More housing developments go up
 Named after the things they replace
 So welcome to Minnow Brook,
 And welcome to Shady Space!
 And it all seems a little abrupt
 No, I don't like this change of pace

-Modest Mouse, "Novocain Stain"

A. Spatial Instability in Paul Auster's *In the Country of Last Things*

In his book *Inside Architecture*, Vittorio Gregotti introduces his theory of atopia, which he briefly defines as "settlement based on something other than the idea of place" (78). Writing about the transitions of the Italian landscape and its usage with the spread of urban development through the twentieth century, Gregotti describes "a shapeless system of aggregations, with large built spaces and vast service-related terrains, which is connected to the great highway infrastructure and which remains partly hidden in those undefined spaces of conurbation that open themselves, with illogical leaps in scale, into the historical-natural landscape, squandering it completely" (79). While Gregotti simply refers to "extra-European models," the homogenization of the Italian landscape he describes follows the pattern laid out in the United States by the sprawl of commercial expansion along interstate systems and major highways, peppering the spaces in between with oases of concrete shopping centers and fuel stations. Among such developments Gregotti includes "[s]upermarkets, parking lots, highway service stations, airports and their parking areas, transfer points between various means of transport" (79-80), among others. These atypical typologies, according to Gregotti, "might be interpreted as

a sign of an inevitable mechanism of international interdependence that is cultural as well as political and economic in structure" and "often takes the form of control and domination, opposing attempts by existing communities to secure the largest possible scope for their own traditions within the process of unification" (82).

Within Gregotti's analysis, we can see the tensions between the local, the national, and the global. His concern lies primarily with the erasure of the local landscape and culture in favor of spaces designed not to coordinate with those spaces or emphasize the individuality of the place but to merely present the atmosphere most conducive to the exchange of capital, spaces that obscure the relations behind the international processes of present-day capitalism and inherently isolate those within such spaces from any sense of individuality or power through a sense of overwhelming alienation. This erasure of the local is important precisely because Gregotti contends that it is through identification with such local spaces that we define our own senses of identity; additionally, and particularly from a European perspective, the sense of national identification through landscape is obliterated altogether: as built upon primarily American models of distribution, these spaces no longer contain referents to their actual geographic locales but instead vague implications of foreign land, culture, and capital accumulation. In other words, the national and the local both are obscured by the capitalist trend toward global homogenization, a sentiment that echoes the philosophy of Henri Lefebvre in *The Production of Space*.

Lefebvre's work is perhaps best known for its conception of the social production and reproduction of space and the examination of changes in relation to space; the ways in which space is produced and reproduced by various levels of society indicate that each society has a particular sense of ordering spatial paradigms. His work revolves around a tripartite concept of

space: spatial practice (perceived space), representations of space (conceptualized space), and representational space (lived space). Lefebvre describes spatial practice under neocapitalism as a practice that "embodies a close association, within perceived space, between daily reality (daily routine) and urban reality (the routes and networks which link up the places set aside for work, 'private' life and leisure)" (38). Representations of space are the systems through which space is conceived and implemented to establish a set of ordering principles by which spatial practices are enacted; Lefebvre specifies "scientists, planners, urbanists, technocratic subdividers and social engineers, as of a certain type of artist with a scientific bent—all of whom identify what is lived and what is perceived with what is conceived" (38). Through representations of space comes the abstraction of space and the institution of order, "and hence to knowledge, to signs, to codes, and to 'frontal' relations" (33). Representational space he notes as "the dominated – and hence passively experienced – space which the imagination seeks to change and appropriate" (39). These three conceptions of space all interact with one another to form "social space":

Social space contains – and assigns (more or less) appropriate places to – (1) the social relations of reproduction, i.e. the bio-physiological relations between the sexes and between age groups, along with the specific organization of the family; and (2) the relations of production, i.e. the division of labour and its organization in the form of hierarchical social functions. These two sets of relations, production and reproduction, are inextricably bound up with one another: the division of labour has repercussions upon the family and is of a piece with it; conversely, the organization of the family interferes with the division of labour. Yet social space must discriminate between the two- not always successfully, be it said - in order to 'localize' them. (32)

Lefebvre maintains that every society creates its own social space, which inevitably imposes itself upon previously ordered spaces. These productions of space are intimately related to the modes of production within a society. Tim Woods builds upon this approach in "Looking for Signs in the Air': Urban Space and the Postmodern in *In the Country of Last Things*," examining Paul Auster's novel through a spatial lens. Woods maintains that "*In the Country of*

Last Things explores, in particular, the urban space in a putative apocalyptic future, and the manner in which it is occupied, inhabited, and experienced both phenomenologically and emotionally, by individuals and communities" (108). Auster's epistolary novel takes the form of a journal written by Anna Blume, who enters the unnamed titular nation and becomes subjected to extreme poverty, institutional failure, and personal loss. Blume initially goes to the country in search of her lost brother (a brother she never finds), armed with only a picture of her brother's co-worker named Samuel Farr, her wits, and her personal belongings. However, the instability she finds in this new country not only derails her from her initial quest but also funnels her life and her identity into narrower and narrower spaces, both physically and psychologically. Over the course of the novel, Blume occasionally finds refuge within traditionally institutionalized spaces that lose their function and continuity, most notably within the library and later at the Woburn House. Each of these spaces is an attempt to resist the logic of the city at large, a city where the effects of capitalism are still quite apparent, even though all systematic logic behind capitalism as an institution in itself has disappeared.

In particular, Woods argues that the novel "constantly confronts one with the intersection of private and public spaces, as [Anna's] urban experience allows public space to become the stage for private experiences, and private spaces to be unfolded onto public spaces" (108-9). This occurs via the destabilizations that take place throughout the novel, both in the physical and mental spaces examined, wherein everything seems to have a bewildering ephemeral basis: "You have seen none of this, and even if you tried, you could not imagine it. A house is there one day, and the next day it is gone" (*ICLT* 1). Instead of totally succumbing to such instabilities, however, Woods maintains that the narrative of the novel itself stands as an attempt to reformulate the organizations of lived space into representational space and highlights the

tensions between these two conceptions of space. The spatial instability of the novel, argues Woods, reveals "how fragmentation, ruptures, and discontinuities, far from being construed as liabilities and weaknesses, can be transformed into political strengths and opportunities for social resistance" (126). The challenge of Anna Blume's record to the city whose history has been severed through the discontinuity of historical narrative is, for Woods, a hopeful space of modification against totalizing narratives that appropriate and manipulate the past through the reproduction of language and ideology.

Woods's argument has become one of the dominant perspectives on Auster's novel. As such, much of the criticism falls in his footsteps, analyzing the spatial turbulence of the city Auster presents in a Lefebvrian model. Such an approach is well suited for the novel, where spatial prioritization and the instability of the city run as a constant theme throughout. This prioritization of the spatial also has an effect on the presentation of the destroyed sense of time that further undermines Blume's capacity to center herself within the city or find any external tether for identity construction. Early on in the novel, amidst the description of some of the city's spaces, Blume's notebook reads:

You remember what you said to me before I left. William has disappeared, you said, and no matter how hard I looked, I would never find him. Those were your words. And then I told you that I didn't care what you said, that I was going to find my brother. And then I got on that terrible boat and left you. How long ago was that? I can't remember anymore. Years and years, I think. But that is only a guess. I make no bones about it; I've lost track, and nothing will ever set it right for me. (2)

The above passage demonstrates the breakdown of time as a cohesive marker of order amidst a desperation regarding her subsequent experiences of spatial instability. The passage opens on recollection, a reaching back across time to locate a particular event for the purposes of framing not just this event itself, but the entire narrative purpose for the beginning of Blume's journey. But the chronological underpinnings of narrative are fractured by the frequent shifts in tenses:

"has disappeared", "would never find him", "were your words", "was going to find him".

Furthermore, the repetition of the "And then" structure at the beginnings of the fourth and fifth sentences of the passage reveal the temporal structure that appears to be the form of the novel itself: its near-chronological structure carries the appearance of order, but that sense of order, like everything else in the novel, breaks down soon afterward, as the attempt to think through time meanders into the recognition that time itself has been lost.

This in itself would seem to resonate with a view of apocalypse that forms around the historical paralysis brought on by late capitalism. Still, the apocalyptic nature of *In the Country of Last Things* is perhaps a matter for discussion itself. In a 1988 interview with *Bomb*, Auster discusses the initial popular classification and marketing of the novel as apocalyptic fiction:

That was the farthest thing from my mind while I was writing it. In fact, my private, working subtitle for the book was "Anna Blume Walks Through the 20th Century." I feel that it's very much a book about our own moment, our own era, and many of the incidents are things that have actually happened. For example, the pivotal scene in which Anna is lured into a human slaughterhouse is based on ... the siege of Leningrad during World War II.... Even the garbage system that I describe at such length was inspired by an article I once read about the present-day garbage system in Cairo. Admittedly, the book takes on these things from a somewhat oblique angle, and the country Anna goes to might not be immediately recognizable, but I feel that this is where we live. It could be that we've become so accustomed to it that we no longer see it. (Interview)

Auster's explanation of his intent here is particularly interesting in its relationship to time and senses of history. The working subtitle Auster gave the novel illustrates the compressed relationship between space and time: Anna's experiences of the twentieth century are in fact dictated not by a temporal logic (as time has been cut off from historical meaning) but through her experiences of space via the walks she takes around the city. What she encounters on her various journeys around the city are the historically decontextualized spaces of some of our own twentieth century's most dysfunctional points. Time itself, as a result, becomes compressed in relation to the spaces of historical horrors that emphasize antagonism and destruction in political,

social, and environmental relationships. This is similar to the development of the more efficient process of capital accumulation in late capitalism, wherein the connection between time and space takes on an analogous compression and has similar effects in both personal and environmental relationships.

In "The End of Temporality," Jameson notes "the deformation of space when observed from the standpoint of time, of time when observed by the standpoint of space" (698). Building on Arno Mayer's *Persistence of the Old Regime*, Jameson posits the idea of "something like existential uneven development; it fleshes out the proposition that modernism is to be grasped as a culture of incomplete modernization and links that situation to the proposition about modernism's temporal dominant" (699). He goes on to explain that the uneven development of modernization left premodern remnants that coexisted with the modernizing world and left those living during its most transitional phases as inhabitants of two worlds—and therefore two radically different experiences of time—that provided a cognitive dissonance lacking in those later generations who experienced only the post-transitional relationship to time.

Still, the uneven development of postmodern space continues even today in the transition into "some new organization of power and exploitation in the form of transnational corporations and banks and by way of capital investment" (702). Such structures and their high dependency on an acute sense of timing result in a compression of time and an intense focus on the present. The present moment of action is all that matters, which leads to further abstraction and loss of historical time. The uneven development of this new organization draws into focus the stark differences of the so-called first- and third-world nations, or perhaps the differences in rural and urban areas within a single country.

Jonathan Crary, in *24/7: Late Capitalism and the Ends of Sleep*, argues that the sense of time in the postmodern world has been manipulated such that time itself seems to disappear. He describes this condition as "a generalized inscription of human life into duration without breaks, defined by a principle of continuous functioning. It is a time that no longer passes, beyond clock time" (8). This manipulation of the public experience of time emphasizes the dominance of a synchronic sense of time, essentially obliterating a more diachronic understanding of the world surrounding us. According to Crary, this condition of the postmodern experience has severe effects:

24/7 is a time of indifference, against which the fragility of human life is increasingly inadequate and within which sleep has no necessity or inevitability. In relation to labor, it renders plausible, even normal, the idea of working without pause, without limits. It is aligned with what is inanimate, inert, or unageing. As an advertising exhortation it decrees the absoluteness of availability, and hence the ceaselessness of needs and their incitement, but also their perpetual non-fulfillment. The absence of restraints on consuming is not simply temporal. We are long past an era in which mainly things were accumulated. Now our bodies and identities assimilate an ever-expanding surfeit of services, images, procedures, chemicals, to a toxic and often fatal threshold. The long-term survival of the individual is always dispensable if the alternative might even indirectly admit the possibility of interludes with no shopping or its promotion. In related ways, 24/7 is inseparable from environmental catastrophe in its declaration of permanent expenditure, of endless wastefulness for its sustenance, in its terminal disruption of the cycles and seasons on which ecological integrity depends. (9-10)

The acceleration of time in a 24/7 culture has its spatial effects as well, as Crary notes, playing out in our bodies and in the environments that pollute them. The apocalyptic shift in structures of time is also an apocalyptic reordering of space, one which exposes the individual in the postmodern world to excessive risk.

In *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Inquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change*, David Harvey discusses time-space compression in relation to the postmodern condition, as space is reorganized to facilitate the reduction of turnover time in the accumulation of capital: "Accelerating turnover time in production entails parallel accelerations in exchange and

consumption. Improved systems of communication and information flow, coupled with rationalizations in techniques of distribution . . . made it possible to circulate commodities through the market system with greater speed" (285). This has the dual effect of creating volatility and emphasizing the instantaneous and disposable aspects of commodities themselves, an attitude that leads to "being able to throw away values, lifestyles, stable relationships, and attachments to things, buildings, places, people, and received ways of doing and being" (286). Furthermore, this time-space compression impacts the relationship of individuals to their directly experienced world: "Time-space compression always exacts its toll on our capacity to grapple with the realities unfolding around us. Under stress, for example, it becomes harder and harder to react accurately to events" (306). On a widespread scale, this increasing difficulty in directly interacting with the world as it unfolds is the focus of Auster's novel, the destruction of a sense of society or collective unity through the gross mismanagement of unequal wealth distribution. After the dissolution of the marketplace, the logic of flexible accumulation still holds its grip on the practiced behaviors of the individuals in the city, producing a society bound in competition and chaos.

Let us examine for a moment the human slaughterhouse Anna is tricked into entering that Auster has historically located in the Siege of Leningrad. During the siege, the infrastructure itself was destroyed by Nazi forces, a destruction of the representations of space that sustained the city (via the roadways and supply lines into Leningrad). As the representations of space deteriorated, the effects of that destabilization had significant effect on the rest of the spatial triad. Spatial practices disintegrated to such a point of despair that the Leningrad citizens running the slaughterhouse preyed upon other Leningrad citizens, a complete breakdown in social order and established social practices that mark such spaces as traditionally safe. While this may not

seem apocalyptic in the sense of the world's final end (or a temporal sense of apocalypse), it does indicate the breakdown of the spatial triad and the expectations of civility that accompany modern and postmodern spaces. I would argue that the disruption of the spatial triad is in itself apocalyptic in a spatial sense, and the disruptions in the social triad throughout the novels in this chapter illustrate the spatial apocalypses that point toward the spatial instabilities in our own world.

Auster, of course, presents such historical glimpses within the framework of what is presumably a North American geography, one that has been ravaged by the aftermath of advanced capitalism. Such a juxtaposition is quite odd until one examines the modes of production that produce such inequalities in wealth and resource distribution. The transposition of historical referents of trauma, like those found in the human slaughterhouse and the garbage system of the unnamed city, highlights the underlying logic of Auster's city, namely in the castration of supply and of production itself. Though the system in Auster's novel may seem to have much in common with a sense of capitalism gone completely awry, a closer examination reveals that capitalism itself has dissolved. What remains, if we may borrow from James Berger's *After the End*, is its aftermaths and remainders, hollowed out modes of production without product, capitalism without capital, as all wealth has been extracted from the city: "Rich people absconded, stealing out of the country with their gold and their diamonds, and those who remained could no longer afford to be generous" (*ICLT* 131).

What remains, then, in Auster's novel, is an illustration of constant consumption paired with a dearth of resources. As the specific modes of production of the city disappear, the society that is left behind continues to consume until nothing is left, bringing on a transition in which the attitudes toward consumption remain unchanged despite the lack of local production. The social

space of the city becomes one based in competition, as acquisition through taking advantage of the disadvantaged is the driving logic of the city. As Brendan Martin notes, "Blume is appalled to discover that she has become a participant in a warped contest: the continual battle for survival. Her antagonists are her fellow city dwellers. Although Blume's plight mirrors that of others, the homeless direct their frustration inward. Rather than a shared sense of comradeship, each individual poses an ominous threat" (154-5). The result of this transition is a logic of society in which human beings are deprived of their individuality and subjectivity, reduced ultimately to objects to be consumed by others. Furthermore, the elimination of material goods creates an additional level of separation between individuals within the city through the disintegration of language and the destruction of the codes that define the city's logical and historical underpinnings. Woods argues that "[t]he disappearance of the material realm destroys the realm of representation, and this in turn destroys collective understanding and comprehension" of the characters in the novel, and that the "attempt to resurrect these 'lost,' 'absent' objects or words becomes a form of social insurrection" (121). The deterioration of the common system of referents in language has a totalizing effect on inhabitants of the city: no spaces exist for people to gather or exchange ideas. As they are further separated through a lack of communication and thus coordination, their individual struggles become prioritized on the level of spatial practice, hindering any chance at reform through collective and institutional change. In other words, utopian thinking and potential are consumed by the totalizing impact of the eradication of collective space and activity; as a result, the individual narratives of consumption, competition, and survival in the face of danger eclipse the potential for any sense of substantial change. As Woods puts it, "Totalitarianism appears to be the organization of the bewildered masses who react to their personal incomprehension, the manipulation of their

economic weakness, and their spiritual insecurity. Life is organized in the state by accident or whim" (117).

Blume does encounter some sites of resistance to this overwhelming destructive process. Mark Brown identifies such spaces in Isabel's apartment, the National Library and the Woburn House: "Anna finds companionship with Isabel, love with Sam and friendship with Victoria" and that through these spaces of sanctuary "small and local experiences of calm can provide the metropolitan subject with a degree of stability and even the chance to establish some equilibrium with stable points of reference in other people" (150). Joseph S. Walker locates these social reference points with the correspondence, in each space, with "a defined role: first daughter, then wife, and finally nurse/employee" (408). In each case, Anna is also afforded a degree of privacy, though this privacy is mediated with other individuals listed above, each of whom has carved out a resistant space based on cooperation and communality. This limited privacy along with the resurrection of clearly traditional social relations provide enough space for the development of a more continual sense of identity through the establishment and practice of social identity in recognizable communal forms. However, in each site of resistance, the logic of the city and the instability that undergirds it eventually consumes even these spaces of refuge: "[e]ach of these structures is precariously balanced on the lip of disaster from the beginning; as their complexity increases, their struggles to maintain discipline and order become increasingly futile" (Walker 408). Time after time, space after space, the city encroaches on these communities of safety and destabilizes the institutions and interpersonal relationships associated with each.

Anna meets Isabel after having been in the city for what she estimates to be a couple of months, although she repeatedly admits that she has lost all real sense of time. She rescues Isabel from being trampled by a group of Runners, individuals who are dedicated to the task of running

themselves to death: "For some reason, and even now I don't know why I did it, I unhooked the umbilical cord from my waist, ran from where I was, grabbed hold of the woman with my two arms, and dragged her out of the way a second or two before the Runners passed" (*ICLT* 44-5). In an instinctive moment of selflessness, the saving of Isabel's life opens an opportunity for limited stability within social interaction and cooperation, as Isabel extends an offer for Anna to live with her and her husband Ferdinand.

With Isabel and Ferdinand, we also have what Martin calls "direct comparisons between Blume's inadvertent discovery of this post-apocalyptic country and the exploratory voyage of Christopher Columbus to America" (156). But this version of Ferdinand and Isabella have been decontextualized historically, and their vast territorial acquisition, which at one point spanned what seemed possible of the known world through global political empire, in Auster's novel has been reduced to a small apartment. Likewise, the modes of the production of global political empire, namely a strong naval system, become reduced to a series of ships that Ferdinand constructs in bottles of various sizes. Ferdinand's refusal to sell his ships in bottles, which perhaps could bring the group into relative (although likely temporary) financial security, illustrates the evolution away from outdated notions of global expansion through political empire, essentially rendering the monarchy and the monarch powerless.

Ferdinand additionally turns out to be a complication for any sustained attempts at renewal through cooperation and coordination. After having been beaten by a group of men, "[n]ow he refused to budge, sitting in their small apartment day after day, rarely saying anything and taking no interest in their survival" (47). Ferdinand's self-imposed isolation, itself a product of the antagonistic social space created by the city, divorces him from the natural family unit upon which a cooperative notion of the household exists. When Isabel becomes too weak to

accompany Anna on her object-hunting trips, Ferdinand must "spend his days at home with Isabel – which deprived him of his freedom and solitude" (61), without which he devolves into the same behavior he witnesses from the window, reproducing the combative space of the outside world within the apartment. His strategy of isolation turns out to be no better than the social interactions he has come to fear, as he eventually attempts to rape Anna in the middle of the night, at which point she apparently kills him without realizing it when she chokes him in self-defense. Each of them regresses to primal modes of violence brought on by the traumas of the reality in the streets, but Anna ultimately seems the better suited character for this mash-up of the twentieth century. Both the isolation Ferdinand attempts and participation in the outside competitive world seem reductive of a sense of humanity in otherness, and the domestic divisions resultant from that dehumanization culminate in Anna's retributive attack and his subsequent demise.

Still, Anna enters her living situation with Isabel and Ferdinand filled with a sense of hope despite the poor living conditions in this and the surrounding buildings: "Squalor and comfort are relative terms, after all. Just three or four months after coming to the city, I was willing to accept this new home of mine without the slightest shudder" (50-1). Indeed, Anna and Isabel are relatively successful when working together: Anna provides the physical labor necessary for their object-hunting expeditions, while Isabel seems to possess the knowledge of where valuable objects might be, despite her inability to communicate such information. Anna notes that "I kept asking her to explain how she did it, but she was never able to say much. She would pause, think seriously for several moments, and then make some general comment about sticking to it or not giving up hope – in terms so vague that they were of no use to me at all" (56). The disorientations of the city and the obscured logic behind its organization leave Isabel

without the tools necessary to communicate the modes of production, and the codes by which the logic of the city and some possible escape from its more destructive tendencies are obscured. Isabel therefore fails in the reproduction of spatial practice, without which Anna eventually fails after Isabel's death.

After Isabel's death, Anna sells almost everything she can find in the apartment that might be of value: "dishes, clothes, bedding, pots, pans, God knows what else – anything I could get my hands on. It was a relief to be getting rid of it all, and in some way it took the place of tears for me" (81). Such an effect is interesting in terms of the capitalist logic of accumulation. Instead of assigning material objects with personal identification, the value of the objects becomes reduced to the point of being burdensome. Disposing of such objects is a positive force for Anna which can replicate much of the process of grief without subjecting her to the emotional process itself. Purging of physical goods leads to the purging of the need for emotional response, the accumulation of even a small amount of capital serving as an adequate substitute for human experience.

Soon after Isabel's death, Anna is run out of the apartment by housebreakers, a group of people who invade the personal spaces of apartments and houses and physically remove the current inhabitants. After spending a harsh winter homeless, she finds refuge in the National Library after barging through a random open door. When told to leave, she responds, "I'm not leaving here until someone drags me out" (93). Her forceful declaration of presence, as well as her quick retreat into the labyrinthine passages of the library, assure her at least a temporary respite from the horrors of the city. While in the library she is introduced to Samuel Farr, the reporter she whose picture she obtained from her brother's editor. Farr had been sent to both find Anna's brother William and to write a book on the conditions of the city, neither of which

project has resulted in success. Anna convinces Farr to let her stay with him in his room, where the two retreat from the chaos of the outside world and inhabit what develops into a more familial space; eventually Anna becomes pregnant, an odd occurrence for the city.

The library itself represents an older form of space, one that Harvey locates in attempts to address the local effects of capitalist manipulation of time and space in modes of production leading up to 1910:

[T]he museum, the library, and the exhibition usually aspire to some kind of coherent ordering. The ideological labour of inventing tradition became of great significance in the late nineteenth century precisely because this was an era when transformations in spatial and temporal practices implied a loss of identity with place and repeated radical breaks with any sense of historical continuity. (272)

Celebrating the past and emphasizing the continuity of human experience through the display of artifacts and the housing of written documentation, these spaces grew in popularity and established connections both between individuals and ideas over vast distances and helped to locate individuals and societies within larger historical contexts. That Anna finds herself in such a space in the novel is no coincidence; the library itself is a symbol of this larger type of order, one that itself has become, in her experience of the twentieth century, also subjected to the disruptions of order and the attempted erasures of human narratives.

While at the library Anna befriends a rabbi who stays there, and the two of them discuss the fate of the Jewish people in what is ironically their last conversation together: "Every Jew, he said, believes that he belongs to the last generation of Jews. We are always at the end, always standing on the brink of the last moment, and why should we expect things to be any different now?" (112). The subsequent disappearance of the rabbi and the other Jews from the library catches Anna by surprise, as she walks into his room a few days later to find a strange man by the name of Henri Dujardin there instead, who tells her that the disappearance is due to "[t]he

new laws. Religious groups have lost their academy status" (112-3). Anna later notes that the expulsion of the Jews was a cover for political ineffectiveness: "The eviction of the religious groups had been no more than an absurd and desperate show of force, an arbitrary attack on those who were incapable of defending themselves" (113). But the political order of society also demonstrates a sense of personal political impotence: democracy has disappeared, and the changes in the political power structure of the city seem far away and disjointed from the everyday horrors of life in the city. As Harvey states, "[A]ny place-bound identity has to rest at some point on the motivational power of tradition. It is difficult, however, to maintain any sense of historical continuity in the face of all the flux and ephemerality of flexible accumulation" (303). The loss of traditional spaces such as the library further alienate the populace in a political sense. Regime change in the novel takes place in some distant imaginary realm, and the changes that occur there offer little other than superficial changes in the experienced world, as various groups are scapegoated and subjected to authoritarian attack without any chance to interact with the larger elements of order through personal or collective action.

When Anna is tricked into entering the human slaughterhouse mentioned above, she jumps out of a window to survive, nearly dying in the process, after which she is separated from Sam and from the safety of the library. Instead, she finds herself at the Woburn House, a place dedicated to trying to in whatever way possible save those suffering from the most desperate cases of disease and injury in the city. Mark Brown describes the Woburn House as "a 'positive utopia' embedded in the 'negative utopia' of the city," stating that the large estate "produces a very particular sense of place at odds with the dystopic city precisely because of its utopian, unreal qualities. Anna experiences time, for example, differently to the way that she experienced it on the streets. This is because the social relationships inside the house contrast starkly with

those outside" (152). The stability of the Woburn House, at least as we are initially introduced to it, allows for time and space to find balance and for Anna to reground herself through the rituals of routine and the strengthening of interpersonal relationships. As a result, she is able to work on the first-person narrative account that makes up the bulk of the novel and participate once more in the process of narrative that seems so vital to the preservation of cultural continuity and stability.

At the Woburn House, Anna meets several key figures, most notably Victoria Woburn and Boris Steponovich; eventually she is even reunited with Sam. Brown locates the figure of Victoria Woburn historically as a representation of Rose Hawthorne, Nathaniel Hawthorne's daughter, who "founded a religious sisterhood known as the Servants for Relief of Incurable Cancer . . . dedicated to helping victims of cancer who were without friends or resources" (152). Conceived of as a space to care for not only the physical health of the individual but also the social relations that frame social practices, the Woburn House and those within it are ultimately able to undo some of the damaging effects of fragmentation and isolation that the city brings out in others. Its restorative power rests in its manipulation of the space-time relationship. With the Woburn House, particularly for the desperately ill whose stay at the makeshift hospital is determined more by physical progress than definitive but arbitrary timespans, a space is created through which time is no longer compressed in the destructive nature of the city at large. Instead, individuals are offered "a respite from their troubles, a chance to gather strength before moving on" (132). That individuals are able to experience time in clearer relation to their own physical bodies strengthens their sense of personal identity; the shared experiences and cooperation from several such individuals together produces a space of potential resistance to the negative effects of the outside world.

However, the lack of resources in this city means that most of their help comes in the form of illusions: Boris makes up stories when selling items in an attempt to make for money for the Woburn House; after Victoria's father dies, Sam dresses in his coat and pretends to be a doctor. Eventually a Woburn House employee by the name of Frick dies, and the group decides to hold a funeral, which is illegal in the city, as all bodies are ordered to be burned at designated sites. The bribe that must be paid to protect the Woburn House also causes its downfall: the encroachment of the logic of the outside city, that of the illusion of stability against the backdrop of the seeming stability of illusion, finds its way into the space of the Woburn House, and it, like everything else, is consumed by the inability to overcome the unequal distribution of wealth that defines postmodern urban logic.

B. Consumption and Death in Don DeLillo's *White Noise*

Whereas *In the Country of Last Things* focuses on Anna Blume's journey through a transmogrified New York where capitalism appears to have already consumed itself, Don DeLillo's *White Noise* depicts consumer-driven culture still in the process of self-consumption. The novel follows the story of Jack Gladney, the chair of the Hitler Studies department at College-on-the-Hill, as he and his family navigate a world full of corporate disasters and disaster narratives that compete with individual narratives of identity while shaping and altering perceptions of death and consumerist culture. When a toxic waste spill occurs near their residence, the Gladney family is forced to evacuate, a process during which Jack himself is apparently exposed to the potentially deadly chemical Nyodene Derivative, often referred to as Nyodene D. The preoccupation with death that pervades the novel but is exacerbated by Jack's

new awareness of his own mortality pushes him to the edge in a world which is defined by extremes and which seems designed to drive people toward catastrophe.

It may be useful here to examine Ulrich Beck's notion of a risk society. Beck defines contemporary risk as "a systematic way of dealing with hazards and insecurities induced and introduced by modernization itself" (21). Beck's analysis of Western capitalist society rests on the notion that the contemporary world is structured around the management of these risks and that they are increasingly difficult to manage or contain. In differentiating his notion of contemporary risk society, Beck draws a distinction in his conception of the risks of late capitalism versus older conceptions of risk and risk distribution. He argues that the form risks take today is greater in scale, potentially encompassing the globe and putting all life in harm's way. These risks, like the unequal distribution of capital, are themselves distributed unequally: "The history of risk distribution shows that, like wealth, risks adhere to the class pattern, only inversely; wealth accumulates at the top, risks at the bottom. To that extent, risks seem to strengthen, not to abolish, the class society" (35). In the contemporary age, however, "[t]hey possess an inherent tendency towards globalization. A universalism of hazards accompanies industrial production, independent of the place where they are produced" (36). When such risks are unable to be contained, hazards become uncontrollable and unpunishable, and the risks themselves spread in terms of geography and degree, often disconnecting the disaster from the immediate referent of place. One may think of the problems with waste management or degrading environmental conditions that seem unstoppable and perhaps even unapproachable on the large scales at which they present major problems not just for individual communities or geographies but for the entire world.

In response to the risk society created by the global processes of late capitalism and the disastrous effects localized in the exterior world, what develops in *White Noise* is the development of a society which seeks to reaffirm itself in relation to one another's consumption of both physical commodities and media programming to compensate for the disasters awaiting people at seemingly every turn. The novel reveals the ways in which the substance and identity of the middle class in middle America are threatened by the unseen networks of media and capital flow. The overwhelming prospect of catastrophic risk in the everyday world leaves these characters unable to make choices that might upset the balance of their consumer identities and draw attention to their difference. Additionally, the overabundance of material goods available offers a convenient distraction from the evident danger surrounding society; shopping itself mitigates threats and funnels attention toward more pleasing activities, which are further reinforced by the recognition of similar shopping practices in others. The social implications are just as crucial as the physical, and just as circular. To be different is to be outcast; to be outcast is to disappear; to disappear is to die. Identity, and even existence, is bound up in the maintenance of consumption as a socially reifying practice. Those who do not consume well (or at all) are erased from history.

Additionally, *White Noise* has often been read in relation to Baudrillard's theory regarding America as the site of the hyperreal through media technology and the disappearance of the real in a vast network of systems of empty signs. Leonard Wilcox takes up the connections extensively in "Baudrillard, DeLillo's *White Noise*, and the End of Heroic Narrative," wherein he argues that "The informational world Baudrillard delineates bears a striking resemblance to the world of *White Noise*: one characterized by the collapse of the real and the flow of signifiers emanating from an information society, by a "loss of the real" in a black hole of simulation and

the play and exchange of signs" (346). Indeed, the connections between the novel and Baudrillard's notion that, under the abstractions of contemporary space, "[I]t is a question of substituting the signs of the real for the real" (Baudrillard 2) are many. For instance, Jack and Murray visit "The Most Photographed Barn in America," where people constantly set up cameras to perpetuate and "maintain" (DeLillo 12) the image of the barn being the most photographed barn in America. Conversations in the novel routinely progress through characters talking over each other; communication in a larger sense is eradicated by the interjection of advertisements that come to substitute for actual knowledge or experience, such as when Steffie mutters "Toyota Celica" in her sleep, or when she exhibits the symptoms of exposure to the airborne toxic event as they are revealed to her. Furthermore, the simulations practiced by the disaster crews become virtually indistinguishable from disasters themselves, often substituting generated data for actual statistical significance.

White Noise opens on a seemingly innocuous scene of Jack Gladney watching students unload their parents' vehicles. The opening paragraph is a catalogue of consumerism, listing everything from clothes to electronics to junk food to recreational items such as drugs, skis, and saddles. Gladney, watching from the safety of his office, calls this phenomenon a "spectacle" and "a brilliant event" (3) and notes the ritualistic tendencies of the annual gathering of students and parents, not to mention his own voyeurism. His list of consumables and consumer goods is presented without emotional connection, simply an overload of objects that lose relational value to one another. This objectification extends to the people present as well:

The conscientious suntans. The communal recognition. The women crisp and alert, in diet trim, knowing people's names. Their husbands content to measure out the time, distant but ungrudging, accomplished in parenthood, something about them suggesting massive insurance coverage. This assembly of station wagons, as much as anything they might do in the course of the year, more than formal liturgies or laws, tells the parents they are a collection of the like-minded and the spiritually akin, a people, a nation. (3-4)

As such, the college serves as the first of several spaces representing societal institutions overrun by capitalism and its somewhat disorienting but ultimately reaffirming effects. The participation of these parents in the rituals of college move-in day creates a homogenous social space that carries with it a sense of communal safety, grounded as such in their easy identification with one another's surface level appearance. The recognition of their own image in the images of the other parents present shows the tendencies of mass consumerism toward a homogenization of identity through similar consumption practices: wearing the same clothes, driving the same cars, paying the same \$14,000 per year tuition has a hive-mind effect that, interestingly, binds people together more than any sense of traditional institutions within the novel, such as religion or patriotism. Consumerism itself has become a form of patriotism—and of religion.

This sense of consumer patriotism is predicated upon the destabilization of the sense of the local within the global framework of postmodern modes of production. As Karen Weekes points out, the names of the towns mentioned in the novel operate under a logic of nostalgia that emphasizes the loss of local identity to these global forms of capital accumulation: "Blacksmith, Bakersville, Watertown, and Glassboro are all town names that evoke a nostalgic clarity and simplicity yet are . . . misleading" (Weekes 290). This is due to the empty referents the names contain, remnants of an older economic order based more on local material production than consumption or image maintenance, the simulacra left over by the evolution of the modes of production that define the reordering of space in postmodern society that draws the accumulation of capital away from such localized and small-scale communities of specialized labor. Collective identity at the level of the town becomes obscured by this nostalgic drive to connect with its outpaced logic, eliminating real grounding of the town collective and even the individual self by obscuring the very the historical production of these places.

When we contrast this idea of the loss of town identity with an examination of the spaces where identity is affirmed, it becomes immediately apparent that the priority has shifted to interior spaces – the supermarket, the college classrooms and offices, and (particularly) at home in front of a television screen. This further divides characters from their immediate environments, creating a binary of interior and exterior spaces, where the interior spaces create the safety necessary for a formation of the idea of self (although in an isolated fashion) while exterior spaces are the spaces where disasters occur. The window that connects these spaces, the safe interior world and the dangerous exterior world, is the television: "That night, a Friday, we gathered in front of the set, as was the custom and the rule, with take-out Chinese. There were floods, earthquakes, mud slides, erupting volcanoes" (64). The ritual comfort of consuming disaster from the safety of their living room reinforces the sense of safety such interior spaces provide while also confirming the dangers of the outside world.

Jack's preconceptions regarding disaster are apparent throughout the novel. When the toxic waste spill occurs, his first series of thoughts is that the family is safe within their own home; in an argument with his daughter Steffie over the fallout of the event potentially reaching their house, Jack's only reassurances of the family's safety relies on a stubborn unwillingness to see past the conceptual framework of disaster always occurring somewhere else, in another income bracket:

"These things happen to poor people who live in exposed areas. Society is set up in such a way that it's the poor and the uneducated who suffer the main impact of natural and man-made disasters. People in low-lying areas get the floods, people in shanties get the hurricanes and tornados. I'm a college professor. Did you ever see a college professor rowing a boat down his own street in one of those TV floods? We live in a neat and pleasant town near a college with a quaint name. These things don't happen in places like Blacksmith." (114)

But, of course they do. Jack's inability to come to grips with the dangers of capitalist risk culture outside his own home betrays the extent to which he blindly shields himself with his own image of social standing. Because he cannot identify his own social position with the disaster narratives he has witnessed through the television screen and media programming, he delays the evacuation of his family until well after the sirens from their local firehouse sound: "Air raid sirens sounded again, this time so close to us that we were negatively affected, shaken to the point of avoiding each other's eyes as a way of denying that something unusual was going on" (118). That Jack, in his narration, cannot even refer to the catastrophe as anything more devastating than "something unusual" indicates a deep sense of denial. Even when Heinrich sees the fire captain drive by "screaming out" to evacuate, Babette asks, "Did you get the impression they were only making a suggestion or was it a little more mandatory, do you think?" (119). The act of evacuation itself helps little in breaking Jack free of the illusion of safety with which he has come to expect, as he still calls it "the absurd fact of evacuation" (120). Furthermore, he is embarrassed when he sees people trapped in various marketplaces, imagining their social superiority (perhaps an effect exacerbated by the fact that these individuals are trapped within what he and others consider the socially superior spaces of the marketplace): "We were a parade of fools, open not only to the effects of chemical fallout but to the scornful judgment of other people" (121). The displacement of the family and their exposure to such a disaster as the airborne toxic event threatens both the physical body and the image of social standing. After all, if events like this are only supposed to happen to those at the lowest levels of income, the Gladney participation in the evacuation clearly presents them as the disadvantaged; it is this social humiliation, not the present threat of physical danger, that concerns Jack the most.

Stephen doCarmo, in his article "Subjects, Objects, and the Postmodern Differend in Don DeLillo's *White Noise*," argues that the novel is "full of characters caught between two equally seductive urges, one toward autonomy and individuality, or 'subjectness,' as we can all it, and another toward absorption and dispersal of the self into larger systems – a diametrically opposed 'objectness'" (3). This duality, doCarmo argues, derives from the simultaneous desire to "stand above and perhaps 'understand' in an almost anthropological fashion" the consumer culture of contemporary society and the "strangely liberating surrender of self to such 'mass' phenomena as shopping malls, media, or any other institutions that educate and discipline us" (3-4). This duality is reflected in the ways that individuals in the novel mostly isolate themselves in their own homes in front of television sets yet congregate at the same places at the same times (indeed, almost all the time) to participate in the social rituals of shopping and consumption. Jack's discomfort during the airborne toxic event comes from his displacement from this set of rituals. For doCarmo, this attitude indicates a shift toward "objectness" in contemporary culture; mass participation in these same rituals and routines creates what John N. Duvall characterizes as "a cultic aura to absorb the fear of dying" (147), reflected in "proto-fascist urges in an aestheticized American consumer culture," urges which, as Duvall points out, are less of "a conscious choice, as it was for the National Socialists, and instead becomes in contemporary America more like the Althusserian notion of ideology as unconscious system of representation" (128). Thus, the fascist urges discussed by Duvall are effects of the "objectness" created by the consumption and participation in mass culture.

Jack must leave the car to refill the gas tank, and in the two and a half minutes he is outside at the gas station, he is exposed to the potentially deadly Nyodene Derivative. The exposure to Nyodene D., however, does impact Jack in some potentially positive ways by

making him come face to face with the fear of death that has so long been cultivated within him through the repetition of consumption of death through media. After his exposure to Nyodene D., Jack visits the doctor quite often in relation to before his exposure, much to his doctor's pleasure: "How nice it is to find a patient who regards his status seriously. . . . People tend to forget that they are patients. Once they leave the doctor's office or the hospital, they simply put it out of their minds. But you are all permanent patients, like it or not" (260). The visits themselves demonstrate Jack's own avoidance strategies, answering the doctor's questions with questions of his own, trying to find a "correct" answer instead of attempting to communicate accuracy through detail. The process is one based on routine instead of facts:

"In my own mind, in real terms, I feel relatively sound, pending confirmation."

"We usually go on to tired. Have you recently been feeling tired?"

"What do people usually say?"

"Mild fatigue is a popular answer."

"I could say exactly that and be convinced in my own mind it's a fair and accurate description."

He seemed satisfied with the reply and made a bold notation on the page in front of him. (277)

In such scenes, Jack's fear of being different from the mainstream compromises the information he provides to the doctor. The doctor, in turn, operates from the printout of Jack's data and a script that seems to work for most patient interactions, eliminating the need for questioning the veracity of the data these patients provide. Such interactions, based on the practice of routine more than the need to gather information, signifies the extent to which information in the novel cannot be trusted. Jack isn't interested in answering truthfully; he is interested in answering normally. This shift in the exchange of information, mediated through language, reveals the extent to which the reality of a situation has faltered in importance next to its image: substance is subjugated to semblance; the sign substitutes for the real; the simulation of the doctor's visit becomes the only substance of the visit itself.

After such interactions, where Jack comes close to coming face to face with the acknowledgment of his eventual death, he goes on massive material purges, throwing out long lists of items that have built up around his home: "The more things I threw away, the more I found. The house was a sepia maze of old and tired things. There was an immensity of things, an overburdening weight, a connection, a mortality" (262). By unloading the useless material goods that have built up around the house, Jack seeks to alleviate his own burdens of existence, associating the ends of these things with the end of himself. Throwing them out seems to give him a sense of power over death, as though by consigning them to the refuse pile, he can come to terms with the reality of his own passing. When finished, he "sat on the front steps alone, waiting for a sense of ease and peace to settle in the air around me" (262). This is one of the few times that Jack seems eager to experience the world outside his own home, even if it is just the liminal space of his front doorstep. But this waiting period is interrupted by a woman walking by talking, presumably to herself, about medicine, at which point the chapter abruptly ends. The peace and sense of ease Jack hopes to find never actualizes, cut off by the reflection of Jack's dilemma: no medicine for death itself exists, only Dylar, the supposed medicine for the fear of death that Babette has been taking in secret.

Similarly, when Jack visits the doctor for a second time, he takes the night to walk the streets of Blacksmith, where he witnesses a young man explaining to his grandparents that he wants to leave school to work as a grocery bagger: "He tells them he *likes* to bag groceries. It is the one thing in life he finds satisfying," justifying his decision by stating that "A thousand people pass me every day but no one ever sees me. I like it, grandma, it's totally unthreatening, it's how I want to spend my life" (281). The traditional middle-class dream in this scene – that of obtaining a college education and eventually a career instead of a bare minimum wage job – is

subverted by the young man's desire to remain invisible within society while still holding a participatory role in the consumption of goods. This desire for invisibility is one that nearly all characters in the novel share. Just like Jack at the doctor's office, standing out in this society is a cause of anxiety, an expulsion from the "objectness" doCarmo examines into the "subjectness" of difference and the responsibilities of interaction that come with it.

What has been lost in the novel is the relationship its characters have with authoritative information. Throughout the novel, the bombardment of information in fragments and deprived of cohesive signification displaces not only the pieces of information themselves but also the methods of communication through which information is generally received. The vast majority of the characters in the novel talk over one another repeatedly, offering factual mistakes and advertising taglines to substitute for contributing useful information to ongoing conversations. This tendency has the effect of fracturing narratives and strands of discourse, implying that communication has been complicated by the more powerful and more effective totalizing power of consumption in a world full of corporate advertising and messaging. The common base of referent in such communication methods has shifted from that of language to an even more abstract form, as language itself is co-opted and decontextualized into an array of catchphrases and taglines, often independent of the words used.

But where Wilcox finds that Jack is essentially a modernist hero struggling against a postmodern world, Teresa Heffernan challenges this notion in *Post-Apocalyptic Culture*, arguing that "Wilcox, in his invocation of Gladney as the bounded, coherent, autonomous, heroic agent that defeats postmodern spectacle and surface, seemingly turns a blind eye to Gladney's attraction to Nazi Germany: the bounded, strong, masculine self that is celebrated by Wilcox, in DeLillo's novel, overlaps with the dangerous self/other binary that set Germans against Jews,

gypsies, and gays" (49). She goes on to suggest that the juxtaposition of advertisements and nostalgia for a Nazi Germany "suggests that perhaps we have never known the difference between the true and the false, the saved and the damned, the sign and the referent" (51). The loss of the real to the triumph of the referent reveals the shift in order that destabilizes attempts at coherent meaning under such conditions. The hyperreality of the novel, obscuring the fact that the real has been entirely obliterated, remains one of the prominent features of the society DeLillo depicts.

It may be useful here to examine Jack's position as Chair of Hitler Studies at College-on-the-Hill. His position of Chair of Hitler Studies is based on a false presentation of self. As an early chapter tells us, the chancellor at the university has insisted that Jack "do something about my name and appearance if I wanted to be taken seriously as a Hitler innovator" (16). In response, Jack dons dark, thick glasses he does not need and proceeds to "invent an extra initial and call myself J. A. K. Gladney, a tag I wore like a borrowed suit" (16), characterizing himself as "the false character that follows the name around" (17). That the packaging of his presentation means more than the actual work or innovation involved alienates Jack from his role in society, as he must play a character of himself to participate in the collegiate labor scheme. Jack's role in production is the fabrication of an appropriate image, not the reproduction and dissemination of knowledge. Furthermore, his lack of facility with the German language creates a barrier that distances Jack from both his subject matter and potential colleagues, as he feels the need to disguise his lack of knowledge by avoiding the native Germans at his college's local Hitler conference: "All I could do was mutter a random monosyllable, rock with empty laughter. I spent a lot of time in my office, hiding" (274).

This professional simulation is further elaborated upon in the novel when he walks in on a lecture on Elvis by Murray Siskind, a visiting lecturer and Jack's friend in the Popular Culture department. Jack frequently interrupts Murray's lecture, and the scene devolves into a one-upmanship where the two relay facts about their respective figures in relation to their mothers:

"Gladys walked Elvis to school and back every day. She defended him in little street rumbles, lashed out at any kid who tried to bully him."

"Hitler fantasized. He took piano lessons, made sketches of museums and villas. He sat around the house a lot. Klara tolerated this. He was the first of her children to survive infancy. Three others had died." (71)

The two provide several points of reference, but the passage above particularly stands out. In this comparison, we have an Elvis figure who experiences violence in the social sphere and is protected by his mother, as opposed to the Hitler figure who withdraws into an isolation "tolerated" by his mother. The description of Hitler sitting around the house all the time draws attention to Jack's own occupation of home space throughout the novel, which is quite significant. Jack's consumption of Hitler as a product to repackage in a collegiate context fails to produce in him any sense of cognitive dissonance.

Additionally, it should be noted that Jack's course load includes "Advanced Nazism, three hours a week, restricted to qualified seniors, a course of study designed to cultivate historical perspective, theoretical rigor and mature insight into the continuing mass appeal of fascist tyranny, with special emphasis on parades, rallies and uniforms, three credits, written reports" (25). In this course, he routinely shows a self-compiled montage of propaganda footage with "no narrative voice. Only chants, songs, arias, speeches, cries, cheers, accusations, shrieks" (26). So much for perspective, theory, and insight. Mediated through video, the compilation takes on an authority of its own in this media-based culture. The repeated broadcast of this video over several years, in its failure to address the historical conditions of the rise of fascism, winds up

merely reproducing the fascist space represented in the video itself. The emphasis becomes that of the development of crowds, the power associated with popular forces deprived of analysis of the destructive ideology of fascism itself. This reproduction is mirrored in the students themselves, who wear their own cultural "uniforms" of "poplin walk shorts and limited-edition T-shirts, in their easy-care knits, their polo styling and rugby stripes" (26). Such identifications through image instead of substance are perpetually placed before Jack, but his failure to notice indicates his complicity in the rise of the consumer fascism Duvall discusses through his inability to develop substantial criticism in both his academic field and its connections to the world immediately surrounding him in the highly-commodified consumer-driven existence of life in late capitalism.

Jack's consumer activities are undoubtedly a cover for his fear of death; his fear of death, in turn, may be a fear of obsolescence. In the figure of Vernon Dickey, Jack's father-in-law, Gladney comes face to face with his own fears of overspecialization. When Dickey first shows up on Gladney's lawn, Gladney sees in him the figure of death: "He would be Death, or Death's errand-runner, a hollow-eyed technician from the plague era, from the era of inquisitions, endless wars, of bedlams and leprosariums. He would be an aphorist of last things, giving me the barest glance – civilized, ironic – as he spoke his deft and stylish line about my journey out" (243). That Gladney's fear of death devolves into the cinematic illustrates how the image of death manages to overcome his fear, if only momentarily. Upon discovering that the figure in his yard is only his father-in-law, Gladney's observations become less mythic in proportion and focus on smaller details, such as "[h]is chronic cough [that] had taken on a jagged edge, an element of irresponsibility" and his hands, which are "[s]carred, busted, notched, permanently seamed with grease and mud" (245). The judgmental tone of these lines demonstrates Jack's own projection

here, as later in the same paragraph he notes how foreign the concept of skilled labor is to his interaction with the world around him: "He saw my shakiness in such matters as a sign of some deeper incompetence or stupidity. These were the things that built the world. Not to know or care about them was a betrayal of fundamental principles, a betrayal of gender, of species" (245). Jack's judgment of Vernon displays his own fears at having overspecialized in his academic career; in Vernon he sees someone who can interact with the conveniences of modern life through his understanding of their constituent parts and their correlations, whereas his own alienation from such processes disrupts the narrative of masculinity Vernon, as Babette's father, represents.

It should also be noted that Vernon himself seems quite down on his luck, as though sources of labor are eventually dying away. He looks around rooms "trying to spot something that needed replacing or repair" (245) and "waiting for garbagemen, telephone repairmen, the mail carrier, the afternoon newsboy. Someone to talk to about techniques and procedures" (248-9). The world as Jack Gladney experiences it has left Vernon Dickey behind; while the garbagemen take away the items for which he constantly scans rooms, his attempts to ground himself in new knowledge through understanding of telephone operations and print media are outmatched in the television-based culture of the novel. In fact, the last we see of him is when he asks Jack if people were so stupid before the existence of television. That Jack neither answers the question nor returns to the figure of Vernon again demonstrates that Vernon's rejection of television media defines him as an out-member of the society of television-consumption culture, even divorcing him enough from the family unit to ignore him completely from that moment forward. Once he declares his resistance to television, he is no longer a participant in the social practice of consumption and is thus erased from the narrative altogether.

The fate of Vernon Dickey is somewhat similar to the fate of Blacksmith and the surrounding areas itself. In the development of a passive economic society, one that relies on the one-way communication strategies of media distribution, we must remember the structure of the networks that govern such transmissions. Programmed and developed in major cities like New York and Los Angeles, the culture of commercialism gives way to a displacement of local economies and the transfer of capital to these metropolitan, corporate-driven areas. As such, the production of media space radiates outward from these urban areas to the suburban and rural locations, homogenizing cultural practices around the redistribution of wealth away from these suburban and rural areas back toward the international networks of production that amplify unequal wealth distribution under global capital accumulation models. The result is one of significance on the level of community, as smaller cities and towns lose their identity – much like Vernon Dickey – amidst the backdrop of mass media culture.

It is perhaps also significant that Vernon is the source of the gun Jack uses on Willie Mink at the end of the novel. The gun itself symbolizes the image of power, as Jack has seen its use on screens often. In fact, that Jack associates the weapon more with the entertainment industry than with his own specialization in Hitler studies bears note. His descent into violence at the end of the novel stems from his inability to ground himself in anything other than the fantastical media narratives he is subjected to routinely. His personal narrative and the knowledge that his wife Babette had an affair with Mink, who illegally supplied her with Dylar, is consumed with the fantasies of disaster he consumes on the television. Like the young Hitler, he fantasizes. His fantasy of the event unfolds in the narrative as it might on screen – Jack enters the motel, has a relatively meaningless conversation with Mink, unloads the only three bullets of the gun into Mink's belly, then puts the gun into Mink's hand to stage a suicide scene. But Jack's

romanticization of this act is inherently flawed, overrun by fantasy more than rationalization or fact; no one, after all, commits suicide through gutshots. Mink himself turns out to be staggeringly incoherent, apparently addicted to the Dylar pills he shells out for sex. Furthermore, Jack's plan is poorly executed, with Jack being unable to concentrate enough to realize that he has only fired two bullets instead of three – assisted at least in part by the rambling incoherence of Mink against the backdrop of the television broadcast – and after he places the gun in Mink's hand, Mink shoots Jack in return. The failure of Jack's plan illustrates the effects that of a culture built on the overabundance of decontextualized information; the resultant sensory overload fails to focus the senses, and rationality is lost.

The novel itself is overwhelmed by a sense of loss; as local means of production are replaced with networks of consumption – both on the television screen and in the marketplace – life itself fades into an imagistic reproduction of simulacra that interrupts historical narratives and cultivates passivity as doCarmo describes in his analysis of the "objectness" of the novel's society. This breeds apathy and propagates the fascist tendencies of consumer culture, where everyone is concerned with obtaining the correct image of social status to hopefully avoid the disasters they incorrectly associate elsewhere, in other social classes. As Beck notes, it is no longer a matter of risks being isolated to the lower classes but that risks are unavoidable. The reticence with which these characters deal with this fact illustrates the power of contemporary media producers to warp and distort truths of late capitalist society and obscure the dangers associated with the very behaviors consumer society reproduces on large scales.

C. Apathy and Decay in M. T. Anderson's *Feed*

If exposure to danger is unavoidable in *White Noise*, it is ubiquitous in M. T. Anderson's *Feed*. Whereas *White Noise* can serve as an examination of mass media, *Feed*, published almost twenty years later in 2002, demonstrates a cultural shift in which experiences of the world are created not through the homogenization of mass media alone but instead through the effects of targeted media exerted through mechanisms of brute force⁵. While apocalypse runs throughout the background of the novel, many critics have approached it from a dystopian lens⁶. Clare Bradford notes that the novel “functions as a critical dystopia, implying through its imagining of a dysfunctional future how human subjects might make ethical choices” (136). M. Keith Booker in “Postmodernism and the Cultural Logic of Dystopian Fiction: *Brave New World* and M. T. Anderson’s *Feed*” locates *Feed* in the tradition of dystopian fiction, comparing Anderson’s novel to the dystopian future of Huxley’s more recognized work: “while Anderson’s possibly pre-apocalyptic world is the result of ignoring a crisis, it is striking how similar those worlds actually are” (214). The similarities certainly are striking: the pervasive media industry distracts the population from the degradation of the surrounding world; education has become a process of indoctrination; both sets of populations are cut off from thinking or participating in terms of historical change (219, 226). The sense that the world is headed toward unavoidable disaster becomes obscured by, as Booker notes elsewhere, “the use of the media to further the consumerist agenda of the powers that be” (“Media Culture” 76). Indeed, in this sense, the

⁵ I use the term “brute force” here with the mindset of the account hacking technique by the same colloquialism. In such a technique, the hacker attempts to gain access to an account by repeated (and often mechanized or algorithmic) attempts to find the same combination of letters, numbers, and symbols as the password to the account in question. Similarly, the advertisements in the novel employ a similar strategy through the bombardment of corporate messaging until the consumer drive kicks in, signaling a particular sort of “access” to a person’s behavior and, consequently, sense of identity.

⁶ For more on the connections between dystopia, apocalypse, and post-apocalypse, see the section of the introduction entitled “Apocalyptic Equivocation.”

destructive and potentially irreversible change that has affected the world and sent it down this apocalyptic path has occurred in the past, in the consolidation of power and wealth, combined with the strict application of technological advance to preserve and multiply that wealth while simultaneously subduing any attempts to affect historical change.

Feed centers on Titus, a barely-literate but wealthy teenager in an imagined world where the internet is streamed directly into the brains of those who can afford such technological advancements. On a recreational trip to the amusement-park-themed moon with his friends, Titus meets Violet, a girl who attempts to resist the totalizing effects of the feed. While there, the whole group is victim to a cyber-terror attack, eventually resulting in the death of Violet due to complications from the late installation of her feed and the refusal of corporate entities to repair her interface. Their refusal stems from Violet's resistance to targeted advertising techniques and the algorithms that define consumer identity in the electronic world.

The greatest difficulty for the reader of *Feed*, much like for the inhabitants of its world, is assembling information from the world outside the feed itself. Such information comes through in bursts of details, much of it co-opted by symbols of corporate ownership. The novel ultimately depicts a world where extreme economic and environmental degradation is obscured by the constant interruptions of literal direct marketing techniques. Interaction with physical environments is often limited by the interruptions of advertisements and internet shopping. As such, the physical world falls away into fragments, and we are only reminded of the deteriorations surrounding these characters as such deteriorations are inscribed on their bodies, mostly through lesions and disease. Even these, however, are aestheticized and fetishized to distract the world's inhabitants from the catastrophes which surround them constantly and keep them from actively affecting change in the physical world.

In *From Apocalypse to Way of Life: Environmental Crisis in the American Century*, Frederick Buell explains his theory of accommodationism. Building on the work of Jacques Ellul, who argues that the dual processes of amplification and accommodation have driven the expansion of technological innovation, Buell notes that technology itself is, like Homer Simpson's description of beer, both the cause of and solution of all of life's problems: "The unintended consequences and disasters that result from technology must be dealt with, and the diagnosis is usually that they are resolvable only by further applications of technology and technique" (161). Citing the energy sector and the development of technologies to address shortages as a prime example of this process, Buell argues that our addictive obsession with technologies designed to cover the disasters associated with previous technologies and implementations would, in a society filled with such disasters, "accompany and accelerate society all the way down the resulting spiral to a continually postponed, never-quite-reached bottom – and that slow-motion spiral will be our social-environmental catastrophe, one that we are already decisively in" (166). The driving force of this accommodationism is, of course, the accumulation of wealth, the processes of which both suck all the value out of a region while simultaneously subjecting them to environmental dangers.

Just as the wealthy in *In the Country of Last Things* are conspicuously absent, those living in extreme poverty seem to have mostly disappeared from view in *Feed*. In a conversation about democracy and the American political system, Titus has to be reminded that "only about 73 percent of Americans have feeds" (112). Having grown up as the son of a banker, Titus is blind to the plights of those less fortunate. The feed distracts him from the problems he sees in the world and in his own life, and with almost unlimited credit, he and his friends, like many of the characters in *White Noise*, shop their way out of discomfort. Violet and her father, in contrast,

serve as foils to this seemingly unlimited consumption. Having grown up relatively poor and therefore less reliant on technology, Violet's relationship with the processes of capitalism is strained, and through her Titus begins to see the effects of the way of life he enjoys without consideration of others.

The novel opens on the trip to the moon Titus takes with his friends, and the signs of the frenetic pace at which society seems to move can be seen in both the moon's landscape and the bodies of Titus and his friends. Initially, Titus seems excited about the trip, but soon he realizes that "the moon was just like it always is" and that "there's just the rockiness, and the suckiness, and the craters all being full of old broken shit, like domes nobody's using anymore and wrappers and claws" (4). After their ship docks, Titus notices "all the air vents were streaked with black" (8), and they wind up staying in "a pretty crummy hotel" with "hardly any gravity" (9). The Ricochet Lounge, where they play a game knocking each other around in low gravity, "had been hip, like, a year and a half ago" but "[n]ow the place just looked old and sad" (11) from overuse. Maintenance seems to be an outdated concept, not profitable in an entertainment capacity and geared toward the wrong segment of society. The corporations that are responsible for the infrastructure of the moon have eliminated such costs from their budgets, and new structures are easier or cheaper to build than slightly older ones to maintain. Thus everything in the novel takes on this same entropic aspect: the environment, the government, and even the human body becomes subjected to decay under corporate risk culture.

The feed itself proves instrumental in the techniques of distraction that divert energy away from the decay surrounding humanity. For instance, the arrival of the group on the moon triggers a flurry of advertisements in the form of feed banners as soon as they land: "The hotels were jumping on each other, and there was bumff from like the casinos and mud slides and the

gift shops and places where you could rent extra arms. I was trying to talk to Link, but I couldn't because I was getting bannered so hard, and I kept blinking and trying to walk forward with my carry-on" (8). No longer is Titus focused on his physical surroundings, and in fact he can barely seem to use his own body under the bombardment. A short time later, when Titus first notices Violet and tries to focus on just what it is about her he finds so attractive, the feed breaks in again: "I just stared at her. I was getting some meg feed on the food bar and the pot stickers were really cheap" (13-4). The diversion toward the advertisement of the food bar is short-lived but contains more accuracy than its subsequent attempt to substitute for Titus's poor language skills: "Maybe it was her spine. Maybe it wasn't her face. Her spine was, I didn't know the word. Her spine was like . . . ? The feed suggested 'supple'" (14). Clearly not the appropriate word here, the feed distorts the nature of subjects in relation to language. Titus's poor language skills, mediated by the influence of the feed, prohibit him from fully engaging in a reality outside the feed. Without the feed, Titus is left with his own solitude: "Everything in my head was quiet. It was fucked" (44). Once Titus's feed is restored at the end of part 2, the interruptions from corporate institutions become more frequent and more intrusive. And when our characters return to Earth, we see the even greater extent to which human narrative has become the corporate narrative.

The overall effect of this first part of the novel is an emphasis on inescapability, specifically of the feed and its impact on his thought processes. Titus can no more escape the corporate influence of the feed than he can his friends or even his own sense of loneliness and isolation. The biotechnical implant largely erases the division between public and private spaces, as thoughts can be transmitted through chat instead of spoken aloud. Corporate advertisements routinely break into the narrative, disrupting the flow of events. In the beginning of the novel, these interruptions are, with a few exceptions, mostly limited to the ends of chapters; however,

even at the end of the chapter entitled "the nose grid," we see an advertisement for the Rumble Spot, which happens to be the same club they visit the following night, the same club where their feed is hacked.

This problem of understanding through efficient communication is apparent in the scene during which Violet attempts to get Titus to join her in resisting consumerist lifestyle. On a trip to the mall, she organizes what she initially calls a "project" (95) in which she asks for information regarding several different products in an attempt to subvert the data mining principles that organize the distribution of information over the feed. Her goal is "'to create a customer profile that's so screwed, no one can market to it. I'm not going to let them catalog me. I'm going to become invisible'" (98). For Violet, this attempt at invisibility is a process of resistance, though Titus sees it merely as "pretty funny" (100) and deflects her attempts to get him to join such a resistance tactic on a long-term basis. For people like Titus who control enormous wealth and credit, the feed is less a burden and more a digital space centering around the construction of identity through constant consumption. In other words, Titus's relationship to the feed runs counter to Violet's; where she wants to be invisible, he has an overwhelming need to be seen.

This inability to escape for Titus comes largely from the changes in institutional spaces within the novel, particularly spaces involving education. With individuals directly connected to the internet at all times, the need for learning itself has seemingly dissolved: through School™, we learn that the nature of education itself has changed significantly: "Now that School™ is run by the corporations, it's pretty brag, because it teaches us how the world can be used, like mainly how to use our feeds" (109-10). This usage of the world, however, comes mainly through consumerism itself, as the lessons focus on "how to work technology and how to find bargains

and what's the best way to get a job and how to decorate our bedroom" (110). The need for knowledge has become secondary to facility with technology and the usage of said technology to participate in the consumption practices that insulate people in their bedrooms – or wherever – instead of focusing on the disappearance of safe and livable spaces outside, spaces destroyed by the unchecked risks brought on by the production models of advanced capitalism. Technology, much as Buell's theory of accommodation argues, becomes the solution for the problems of technology, leading to a vicious cycle in which reliance on technology and the distancing from life's connections to the outside world multiply with each new implementation of so-called progress.

In the background of the teen love-story narrative between Titus and Violet, the political turbulence of the world in which they live also becomes increasingly clear. The vast majority of the world's wealth has been accumulated in America, leaving the rest of the world – and many of America's own citizens – in poverty and subject to the degradation of the environment. Tensions between the United States and the Global Alliance escalate throughout the novel until at the end it seems a massive war is imminent. The visibility of this conflict and its presentation are, of course, filtered mostly through the feed, designed to obscure the concerns of the anti-capitalist sentiment that swells within the global population of the underprivileged. Riots and protests occur throughout the novel, though they are primarily relegated to background noise, and of the primary characters of the novel, only Violet seems to care or even pay attention.

From Violet, we learn that "things were getting really bad in South America" (111), and that in the sea, "Everything's dead. Everything's dying" (180). What doesn't die above ground is considerably altered: "There were new kinds of fungus, she said, that were making jungles where the cables ran. There were slugs so big a toddler could ride them sidesaddle. The natural world is

so adaptable,' she said. 'So adaptable you wonder what's natural'" (191). Indeed, nature itself seems to have been integrated into models of corporate production. Natural clouds have been replaced with Clouds™, swirls of gases that are dispersed and then sucked back into their ducts. When she expresses concern to Titus's father about the trees being cut down in Jefferson Park to make room for an air factory, his response is callous and unconcerned: "'It's about people. People need a lot of air'" (126). Returning to Violet's statement about adaptability, we see the overall effect of living with the feed: not only are individuals with the feed more cut off from a cohesive sense of history, they are also cultivated to believe themselves wholly apart from nature itself, or at least what remains of it.

This disconnect from nature can also be seen in the modes of human reproduction itself, as people are engineered as much as (if not more than) a product of their parents' genetic material. Genetic modifications are rather commonplace among Titus's friends. Marty was engineered to have excellent physical skills, such that he could take up almost any activity with ease; Link was cloned from the dried blood of Abraham Lincoln taken from the dress Mary Todd wore to Ford's Theater. Even Titus himself is bestowed with the physical appearance of DelGlacey Murdoch, an attractive actor his parents had thought would be successful but instead had fizzled. This gives these characters a biological privilege that stems from their families' economic prosperity, furthering the divisions in the distribution of opportunities.

Still, the environmental and biological hazards of the novel are inescapable, even for those with substantial economic means. One of the more striking ways in which the effects of capitalism show upon the body is through the lesions that most if not all the characters have by the end of the novel. In the beginning of the novel, the lesions are signs of ugliness and decay. It is not until the stars of the popular reality show "Oh? Wow! Thing!" Begin to get lesions

themselves and start showing them off that the lesions become less stigmatized and more fashionable. Even Quendy, who had initially been disgusted by the idea of lesions, covers her body with artificial lesions, desiring to participate in the newfound cultural fad. The feed dictates everything in this world, from consumer practices to the personal identities of individuals, which, as Booker notes, become practically the same thing: "Their identities are largely shaped by the feed, which constantly monitors their behavior and interests so that it can tailor its content, especially advertising, to individual tastes, even as it plays a central constitutive role in developing those tastes" ("Media Culture" 75). The circularity of the process of the feed and the alienating effects toward the environmental and political spheres of the novel keep individuals from participating in more organized responses to the world in which they live. As everyone is more concerned with fitting in with a predetermined concept of normality, even the idea of difference is incorporated into the consumer-driven logic of the feed, cutting off hope for effective and meaningful social, political, or environmental change.

When Titus finally visits Violet's home about halfway through the novel, we get our first look at the world as she knows it: "Creville Heights was all one big area, instead of each yard having its own bubble with its own sun and seasons. They must've had just one sun for the whole place. All the houses were really old and flat. The streets were blue and cracked, and they were streets, I mean, like for when things went on the ground. Their sun was up and you could see the sky was peeling" (134-5). This contrasts to Titus's own home space, where his family can afford their own independent bubble with its own artificial sun.

The differences in their experiences often turn out to cause problems in their relationship as well. When the bond between Violet and Titus becomes strained, she points toward the

horrors of the world outside his experience quite frequently. As they find themselves fighting during one of Violet's bucket-list experiences, she addresses Titus's privilege:

"Do you know why the Global Alliance is pointing all the weaponry at their disposal at us? No. Hardly anyone does. Do you know why our skin is falling off? Have you heard that some suburbs have been lost, just, no one knows where they are anymore? No one can find them? No one knows what's happened? Do you know the earth is dead? Almost nothing lives here anymore, except where we plant it? No. No, no, no. We don't know any of that. We have tea parties with our teddies. We go sledding. We enjoy being young. We take what's coming to us. That's our way." (272-3)

Titus's ignorance of the historical and political realities beyond his own experience of the feed reveals the extent to which his political power has been muted by the cultivation of apathy. Such a barrier to change as privileged apathy is difficult to permeate by conventional means.

We do see some signs of resistance in the novel, most of which are in the background until thrust violently forward by the feed itself. Titus hears through the feed news stories about riots and protests, which are often in competition with the advertisements that occupy the feed. Reports of terrorist plots occasionally make their way through the noise, but these messages are usually rather easily drowned out. Only through aggressive acts, like the hacking of the feeds of those present at the Rumble Spot and the invasive nightmare of rioters that Violet and Titus dream about, do the narratives of anything potentially negative about this advanced capitalist system break through to those who have the resources the rest of the world needs. Both of these scenes, consequently, deserve a closer look.

The attack by the hacker at the Rumble Spot reveals the extent to which individuality, instead of being reinforced by consumption practices, is actually put at risk within the novel. As the group dances at the club, most of the characters in the scene are infected by a virus, transmitted through the touch of a strange man. The virus itself forces all those touched to scream out repeatedly in unison: "We enter a time of calamity! We enter a time of calamity!" I

couldn't stop" (38). The lack of control on display in this scene turns the table on the flow of information on the feed: where the corporations generally dictate what individual users see and experience over the feed, the hack causes forced transmissions, transmissions which draw attention to the dangers immediately present in the natural world as a result of long-term apathy toward environmental and political degradation.

A later dream sequence emphasizes the deterioration of political stability. We as readers are told of the experience through Titus's perspective, as his dream begins with images of khakis for sale but transform to a darker picture: "[T]hen I saw them torn and there was blood on them. It was a riot on a street, and people were screaming in some other language" (151). The scene devolves into one of violence, ultimately ending in "fields and fields of black, it was this disgusting black shit, spread for miles. I saw walls of concrete fall from the sky and crush little wood houses" (152). The riots depicted in the dream are attempts to resist the imperialism of the American capitalist culture. However, once these riots become less avoidable by the wealthy segment of society, the resistance is itself commodified by the pushing of riot gear as fashion⁷. As Loga explains, "'It's Riot Gear. It's retro. It's beat up to look like one of the big twentieth-century riots. It's been big since earlier this week'" (159). The pushing of such trends by the feed and the subsequent fetishization of the markers of resistance through fashion reveals ultimately the ability of the feed to co-opt or suppress narratives of resistance. The actual riots occurring in the novel's background are reduced to commodifications which rob them of their ability to spread awareness of experiences outside the dominant mode of the feed, reinforcing the apathetic consumer responses that keep such areas in environmental and political turmoil.

⁷ One might consider T-shirts featuring Che Guevara or Angela Davis earrings, among the seemingly countless other commodifications of resistance easily available for purchase through multiple commercial internet sites.

Violet's own attempts at resistance are also met with disappointing and disastrous results. The rejection of her medical care is directly linked to her consumption habits, or lack thereof. Her earlier attempts to resist the feed and become invisible to the corporate powers literally result in her death. As her automated shopping assistant/support technician explains: "We're sorry, Violet Durn. Unfortunately, FeedTech and other investors reviewed your purchasing history, and we don't feel that you would be a reliable investment at this time. No one could get what we call a 'handle' on your shopping habits, like for example you asking for information about all those brag products and then never buying anything" (247). In a way, Violet has achieved her goal: though she may not be strictly invisible, her shopping habits have set her apart in such a way that the corporate power structures essentially disregard her as a non-compliant, and therefore non-valued, entity. Once she realizes she will die, she begins making plans of the things she wishes to do before she is gone. Even in this, though, Violet expresses horror at the realization that her own thoughts and fantasies have been engineered by what she consumes on the feed: "Everything I think of when I think of really living, living to the full – all my ideas are just the opening credits of sitcoms" (217). In such a reality where everything is filtered through the feed and experience is dictated as much by algorithms as independent thought, existence itself is reduced to fragments of images and fabricated desires.

Life itself, in such a scenario, becomes the product at the heart of the consumption practices highlighted in the novel. As the corporations that control power in the novel consolidate such power through the accumulation of wealth, in the process distracting the novel's characters from the dissolving connections between the physical world and its referents, the importance of Being in such a world revolves around the willingness and ability to purchase and consume. Without the access to resources necessary for such consumption, life, from the

corporate point of view, is reduced to meaninglessness. While the characters in *White Noise* live under the constant fear of death in a consumer-driven world, the practices of *Feed* demonstrate that the novel's characters live instead under the actual threat of death and can only consume their way through life.

D. Chapter One Conclusion

Despite Paul Auster's optimism regarding *In the Country of Last Things*, postmodern apocalyptic fiction tends to emphasize the seeming inevitability of chaos amidst the world's transitions while at the same time reaffirming the idea that history has moved beyond the sense of systemic change. One does not necessarily have to look far to see the spatial instability Auster describes in *In the Country of Last Things*. Urban shopping centers with vacant spaces, a seeming revolving door of smaller businesses being snuffed out of existence by the mega-corporations of commerce, the movement of wealth outside large urban centers: these are well-worn images of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. The recently revealed Panama Papers illuminate the extent of off-shore wealth hoarding from affluent and impoverished nations alike. Similarly, the effects of mass media and the spread and appropriation of technology seem ubiquitous in today's world, and indeed throughout the last half-century at least. Despite the move toward the targeted media approaches and data mining operations *Feed* describes, the operations of mass media as seen in *White Noise* are perhaps exacerbated by the emergence of the "binge-watching" trend of on-demand streaming services such as Netflix and Hulu, among others. Although the television from *White Noise* could perhaps today be replaced with the cell phone screen, cell phones themselves are still a long way off from having our brains directly networked to the internet; however, the sense of need for constant connection and the overwhelming atmosphere of advertisement overload is all too familiar.

What the inhabitants of Auster's city, Titus and his friends, and even the vast majority of the characters in *White Noise* have in common is their overwhelming need to consume. Although the stakes are different for each of these groups, the consequences of not consuming are apparent and apparently deadly. As the novels in this chapter would seem to indicate, the drive toward the essential social practice of consumption can have distracting effects that intellectually divorce us from the radical spatial changes occurring every day. The concept of the "atopia" that Gregotti explores, the loss of a location's identifiable connections to its geographical logic, reappropriated into the logic of capital accumulation, certainly resonates in the spaces created by late capitalism as it begins to transition toward its more advanced stage.

But the spatial ramifications apparent in texts such as those in this chapter remind us as readers of the stakes of the spatial organizations and reorganizations that mark the progress of history. The spread of risks throughout much of the developed world fuels in some cases a sense of hopelessness that devolves into apathy. But if we consider apocalypse as a near-opposite of utopia, perhaps a reversal in reading is in some ways appropriate. The dangers alluded to in such texts are perhaps fundamental to a more democratic organization of society and power, through which further progress might be made through the implementation of political space organized around physical community activism. A partial, but by no means full, solution to such developments is possible with an organization of space which emphasizes the mitigation of the risks associated with the development of global capitalism and emphasizes the collective power to affect political and perhaps social change. The production and reproduction of spaces of risk create the political energy through which what Jameson calls the "party of Utopia" (*Postmodernism* 180) are perhaps more easily facilitated. Disasters can, at times, lead to progress. Take, for example, the recent marches involving gun control in Florida after the

Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School shooting in Parkland and the subsequent passing and signing of (albeit minor and potentially problematic) regulations regarding the ownership of certain weapons accessories, measures that only a year ago would have seemed unlikely at least. Demonstrations such as this remind us of the importance of maintaining avenues of the expression of difference: only through active participation in the political process and a public that holds its officials accountable can historical change be positively affected.

III. Chapter Two: Reading Reversals in Wastelands

Frozen eyes, sweaty back
 My family's sleeping on a railroad track
 All my life I pack/unpack
 But man I got to earn this buck
 I gotta pay representation
 To be accepted in a nation
 Where after efforts of a hero
 Welcome start again from zero

-Gogol Bordello, "Immigraniada"

Without question the apocalyptic genre of fiction has been dominated—like so many other areas of cultural production—by the white male perspective. The frequent marginalization of women and racial minorities in the vast majority of the fictions of the genre are well noted. The emergence of voices in the 1960s and 70s that attempted to shatter such homogenous worldviews did have some impact; writers such as Octavia E. Butler and Ursula K. LeGuin added diversity to the range of perspectives producing narratives in science fiction that mirrored the diversity of cultural production in other spheres as well. In discussing the Utopian potential for language, Jameson notes that “feminism has been virtually alone in attempting to envision the Utopian languages spoken in societies in which gender domination and inequality would have ceased to exist: the result was more than just a glorious moment in recent science fiction, and should continue to set the example for the political value of the Utopian imagination as a form of praxis” (*Postmodernism* 107). Central to this Utopian possibility is the question of the degree to which language may or may not be useful in its ability to interrogate existent hierarchies of power and domination. While this particular question may remain unsettled, it is obvious that the opposite is true: the breakdown of language closes off possibilities of change and thus of the potential for progress toward greater equality. At the same time, however, language is a tool of domination in its own right, as participation in and consumption of common

narratives provides in-group association that drives conceptions of “good” and “evil”⁸ through the production and reification of various systems of ideologemes.

It is through such oppositional frameworks that we can perhaps best approach the concept of the wasteland in postmodern post-apocalyptic fiction. The social progress that comes with movements that seek to decenter the hegemonic white male perspective of the West has brought about a backlash that seeks to re-center these dominant frameworks through the reification of Otherness. The emergence of “masculinity studies” and white nationalist rallies prominent in recent years reveal the underlying anxieties of a white male culture in fear of losing the privilege that has historically been granted them. The result is an intensification of the fractured social fabric of the postmodern age. Teresa Heffernan writes that “[a]t least part of the anxiety about the fragmentation and meaninglessness of the modern world stems from the diversity of perspectives in contemporary global culture and from the resulting breakdown of a shared sense of language. The sense of ‘loss’ that pervades the late twentieth century is, thus, due in part to the abandonment of the sense of ‘Man’ as universal” (13-14). The failure of the Enlightenment concept of “Man” to adequately capture the universalism the very term presupposes contributes to the perceived loss of a sense of shared language, problematized and exacerbated by the globalization of the contemporary world in its diversity.

The texts examined in this chapter, Cormac McCarthy’s *The Road* and Peter Heller’s *The Dog Stars*, present post-apocalyptic visions of the wasteland that echo the anxieties of the privileged white male perspective through the presentation of worlds that erase the markers of diversity inherent in the Utopian march toward racial and gender equality. Reading these fictions through a strategy of reversal juxtaposes white male dominance against worlds ravaged by

⁸ A further and rather in-depth analysis of this process is taken up in the second chapter of Jameson’s *Political Unconscious*.

catastrophe. As such, these novels brush up against questions surrounding identity politics and reveal the divisions inherent in discussions of boundaries, borders, and the body.

Additionally, in stark contrast to the ongoing apocalyptic energy of the urban atmospheres found in the first chapter of this project, these novels challenge the underlying assumptions of renewal and order inherent in the tradition of the post-apocalyptic paradigm through the failure of urbanization in the face of catastrophe instead of the seemingly persistent perpetuation of urban development *as* catastrophe. Where typically such novels that see the destruction of civilization will undertake the project of reconstructing society, *The Road* and *The Dog Stars* both resist this phenomenon to varying degrees, although in each case urban spaces are sources of emptiness and danger, their potential inhabitants unknown and unknowable. In these novels we see the emergence of landscapes of waste and wastelands that replace the expectations of hope and renewal with loss and grief. This sense of loss is further reinforced in the sparseness of language in each novel's narration and the racial homogenization that emerges from each post-apocalyptic narrative.

The Road follows two unnamed primary characters, referred to only as "the man" and "the boy," as the father and son make their way on foot from the space of the former United States toward an unnamed coast on the American continent. Civilization seems to have completely fallen apart in the novel, and almost everyone they meet carries hostility toward other people. Along the journey, the boy falls into long periods of reticence, from which his father must pluck him consistently. They live in a world where they must scavenge for resources, and the environment is so harsh that they must wear masks constantly to protect themselves from the pervasive and irritating ash that pollutes the air.

In *The Dog Stars*, the action revolves around Hig, a survivor who has taken up residence in an airport hangar near Denver. Hig is helped by Bangley, a former farmer from the Midwest whose love of assault weapons and skill in their use keep both Hig and Bangley alive. Although the two have several disagreements throughout the text, their relationship with language and its successes and failures in large part defines the novel. Language in the text, much like nearly everything else, is often weaponized between the two, and the breakdown in the natural world that resonates through the novel is mirrored both in the arguments between Hig and Bangley and in the sparse narration of the novel itself. The world surrounding their hangar is one that fell apart rather quickly; as a result, many resources—especially fuel—are still surprisingly available, though the natural world, in particular the waterways and agricultural areas, are shown to be slowly in the process of environmental degradation. Fish, livestock, and agriculture all are at risk of being erased from existence due to persistent droughts across the Midwest and the warming of all the waterways in which Hig regularly fishes. The devastation to animal life through the deterioration of the environment demonstrates the hostility of late capitalism to the non-human world that surrounds and sustains us.

The worlds presented in both these texts are worlds ultimately defined by their relative traumas. It may therefore be beneficial to incorporate some of the work of James Berger in his formulation of apocalypse as historical trauma. Berger writes that "historical events are often portrayed apocalyptically—as absolute breaks with the past, as catastrophes bearing some enormous or ultimate meaning" (xii). He sees texts that take the post-apocalyptic form as "a strange prospective retrospect [of] what the end would actually look like: it would look like a Nazi death camp, or an atomic explosion, or an ecological or urban wasteland. We have been able to see these things because they actually occurred" (xiii). Berger's focus on historicization

particular to such texts and their remnants of trauma leads him to define the post-apocalyptic text as one that depicts a world in which a totalizing historical trauma has already taken place and its characters must deal with its aftermath⁹ in the form of ghosts, bodily referents, or other sites of such traumas.

The temporal strategies of novels such as the ones featured here tend to run counter to the qualities of postmodern time explored in the previous chapter. The capitalist structures have fallen away. Both novels depict a world where the modes of production have vanished; consequently, their treatment of time takes the underlying assumption of the end of history. Time itself is decompressed, free of the pressures of a postmodern world, and the ruptures of both historical time and social progress would seem to persist in each of these texts. In other words, the experience of time is lengthened: days and moments seem longer without the distractions of the postmodern world; at the same time, the disjointedness of individuals from modes of thinking historically and in terms of equality are left over from the experience of the postmodern world. This sense of the expansion of time is contrasted in each novel by periods of intense action and quick suspense, which will examine below. The differences between the experience of time as described by Crary and the experience of time encountered in these novels requires then another sense of reversal—that of the treatment of time (and consequently history)—in the examination of these works.

⁹ This makes for a very broad definition of the post-apocalyptic, particularly as outlined in my introduction to this dissertation. As such, Berger includes novels such as Toni Morrison's *Beloved* and D. M. Thomas's *The White Hotel*. Though novels such as these fall outside the scope of the post-apocalyptic definition proposed in the introduction, the emphasis on historical referents of trauma that comprises the bulk of Berger's theory remains relevant.

A. Reversals and Refrains in Cormac McCarthy's *The Road*

Although Michael Chabon described *The Road* as an adventure novel in a post-apocalyptic setting, and although the critical approach to the novel often deals with an environmental allegorical reading, Carl F. Miller's reading in "Apocalypse without Borders: The Dialectic of Migration in Cormac McCarthy's *The Road*" provides another interesting lens. For Miller, the novel provides a context through which to discuss migration issues along the U.S.-Mexico border by what he refers to as "reversing" the racial and economic stereotypes that fuel much of the political discourse regarding immigration issues and even national boundaries themselves:

The man and the son are light skinned, they are crossing south across some variant of the Rio Grande border, and the primary environmental issue they must contend with is global cooling instead of global warming. Furthermore, while a work like *No Country for Old Men* focuses on the shipment and sale of narcotics across the Texas border, McCarthy establishes a culture of purely human migration in *The Road*, one with a motive of survival instead of material accumulation and transport. (54)

These reversals of the trends of migration in the corpus of Cormac McCarthy offer a glimpse into the restructuring of human order in apocalyptic works in general. This is not dissimilar to Berger's theory of glimpsing the historical traumas of the past in cultural representations of the present (or in this case, a possible future wasteland), through which the ghosts of history can at times be discerned, in the case of these quasi-post-apocalyptic novels, through a reversal of the circumstances consequential to the uneven development of material and capital, not to mention social and political rights.

Miller focuses in particular on the migratory aspects of the novel and the political contexts for international migration, forced or freely chosen, in our own world. In contrast to the hopelessness of the harsh circumstances apparent in McCarthy's novel, Miller identifies the key phrase "keep going," which occurs several times throughout the text, most notably in the man's

dying instructions to the boy and in a somewhat religiously charged conversation the man and the boy have with a mysterious traveler who calls himself Ely.

This phrase in particular, as Miller reminds us, is a mantra of Alain Badiou's treatment of ethics, reappears at critical junctures in the text, creating what Miller terms "the rallying cry for perpetual migration. The system of nomadism and barbarianism in *The Road* is predicated on the understanding that the past is impertinent and the future uncertain—only the immediate present is relevant, and survival in the moment most often depends on continual displacement" (68). Miller links this to the failure in the novel of religious and governmental institutions that previously offered encouragement and support to individuals in need, specifically in the context of those seeking forced migration due to economic, environmental, or political disaster. Thus, for Miller, the utopian aspect of the novel is the freedom of open migration across national borders without limitation. The harsh circumstances of the novel, instead of offering a mere vision of the wasteland, underpin the need for rethinking boundaries in the face of necessity.

While this is an interesting enough argument in itself, the emphasis on the immediacy of the present requires further examination. Although Miller is astute in recognizing the novel's repetition of the phrase "keep going," we can also find its dialectical opposite, "looking back," repeated often as well. Where "keep going" is a signal of immediacy with the (perhaps dim) hope of a future attached, "looking back" is a concept that is bound in reflection and a signal of the attempt to recognize and make sense of a past, whatever past is available. Such historical grasping in the novel harbors a vague echo of nostalgia, obscuring the focus of future-thinking and forward progress due to the pressing immediacy of current concerns. The repetition of both phrases indicates the tension between past and present without our contemporary postmodern world.

Although various forms of "keep going" or "keep moving" appear in the novel more than a dozen times¹⁰, the phrases "look back," "looked back," and "looking back" appear more than forty. In many ways, this phrase can be seen as the counterpoint to the survivalist mantra Miller discusses. Whereas "keep going" would seem to reduce the moment to the immediate present in hopes of obtaining some future yet discovered, the relationship of "looking back" to both time and space is much different. This phrase itself implies at the very least some physical progress, some distance covered over time. This implication of progress, set against a backdrop of ever worsening living conditions, illustrates the tensions between a social progress championed by American political rhetoric¹¹ and the deterioration of upward social mobility during the erosion of the middle class. With the road itself as the primary symbol of the novel, the lack of a destination reveals the plight of the working class under late capitalism. The impetus to "keep going" inherently traps individuals who must live paycheck to paycheck; "looking back" often contains a nostalgic charade as the idea of the American Dream—such as the lifestyle that the man experiences before the apocalypse—eludes the grasp of the lower and even the middle class more and more. Time moves forward, but living conditions deteriorate as privilege fades. The harsh jolt that often accompanies "looking back" shakes the reader out of more historical thinking and refocuses attention on the present and impede historical thought and change. In an allegorical sense, the contemporary struggle for individuals to make ends meet in an economic system that moves further from methods of production toward a greater concentration on the

¹⁰ The vast majority of these instances occur in the last few pages of the novel, particularly with the man's dying instructions to the boy. This in itself would lend credence to Miller's assertion that the statement carries with it an ethical mandate in the search for some sort of continuity that extends beyond the man's direct experience.

¹¹ Donald Trump's "Make America Great Again Slogan," itself stolen from Reagan, presents such a nostalgic contradiction, particularly as many of his policies have disadvantaged the very individuals who constitute his political base, such as the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act, which shifted the tax burden away from corporations and onto individuals, or the tariff war with China which has left many farmers in the Midwest—a key demographic for Trump—with unsold produce as a result.

production of methods. The abstraction of capital and the inaccessibility of economic self-sustainability outside of all but the most financially elite members of society leaves everyone else fighting over the ever-dwindling pile of scraps, much like most of the characters in the novel roam the various highways without a clear sense of purpose or direction, save those who have enslaved large numbers of other people in selfish goals of conquest.

One of the early scenes where this looking back occurs frequently is when the man and the boy meet another traveler on the road who has been struck by lightning. As this is the first traveler they encounter in the narrative, the scene sets something of a tone for the remainder of the human interactions within the novel. When they first come across his tracks in the road, the boy asks who it is, to which the man replies, "I dont know. Who is anybody?" (49). The vague apprehension the man feels captures the novel's spirit and tone regarding humanity in its perception of threat in the unknown. The boy, in contrast, has more questions about action than identity:

What should we do, Papa?
 We're all right. Let's just follow and watch.
 Take a look, the boy said.
 Yes. Take a look. (49)

The emphasis on looking before they reach the strange man is centered on observation and learning. It is through this action of looking that the man and the boy acquire the information they need for survival. Though the phrase itself may seem to contradict the edict of "keep going," as it draws out an experience through time, the focus on appropriate action is necessary for the possibility of going at all.

Correspondingly, as the man and the boy pass this figure, the man struck by lightning "looked down. As if he'd done something wrong" (50). The safest path for this disadvantaged individual is complete withdrawal and resignation of agency and identity. He seems willing to

allow whatever should happen to come to pass without resistance. Once the man and boy have moved beyond the figure, "The boy kept looking back. Papa? ... Cant we help him? Papa? No.

We cant help him" (50). The boy cannot let the experience go, however, and

kept looking back. When they got to the bottom of the hill the man stopped and looked at him and looked back up the road. The burned man had fallen over and at that distance you couldnt even tell what it was. I'm sorry, he said. But we have nothing to give him. We have no way to help him. I'm sorry for what happened to him but we cant fix it. You know that, dont you? The boy stood looking down. He nodded his head. Then they went on and he didnt look back again. (50)

The concept of looking, as we see in this scene, is somewhat amorphous. When they approach the man, it seems to contain a sense of investigation, but as they pass, this investigation becomes replaced by a sense of pity in the boy and the passing of judgment in the man. Additionally, when they look back from further down the road, the lightning-struck man becomes indistinguishable from the road itself, falling from the privilege of subjectivity into simply "it." It isn't until the father explains to his son that he does feel pity for the man that the boy is able to leave the situation behind and focus more on the road ahead of them. While the father controls the supplies and the strategic decisions for the two, the boy is the ethical compass that guides them along the way.

Concerned as the man is throughout the novel regarding the resources available to himself and his son, his reaction is immediately antagonistic toward any conception of otherness. Even though this stranger is obviously no threat to either the man or the boy, the dire circumstances of life when reduced to survivalist impulses erode the man's sense of humanity as his responsibilities reduce to include only himself and the boy. As such, this scene presents an early dichotomy in approaches to otherness; the novel can thus be seen through the ongoing struggle between pity and judgment. The boy's instinct to help the ill-fortuned man struck by lightning is shut down by his father's pragmatism.

The boy's reaction to this first stranger carries significant weight. It is no coincidence that just after this the man discards the contents of his wallet: "Some money, credit cards. His driver's license. A picture of his wife. He spread everything out on the blacktop. Like gaming cards. He pitched the sweatblackened piece of leather into the woods and sat holding the photograph. Then he laid it down in the road also and then he stood and they went on" (51). After the boy's ethical probing, the man must re-evaluate his identity, turning his initial question about the identity of the man struck by lightning inward, realizing that who he is now is vastly different from the person he identified with before the catastrophe. By spreading everything out on the road, the man is effectively memorializing his previous identity in light of the new ethical context of survivalist experience in which he now finds himself. The contents of his wallet, the connections to the world of late capitalism and the person he identified with under its order, has little in common with what the circumstances of this post-capitalist world have done to his character. He can no more identify with the man he used to be and the comforts he used to have than with the man in the road who has been struck by lightning.

Such a moment of self-reflection perhaps draws attention to the concept of reflection itself in *The Road*. One of the early images presented in the text is that of a mirror placed on the side of the shopping cart that the man and the boy initially use to carry supplies. While the mirror obviously reflects the path behind them, its attachment to the shopping cart draws attention to the connections between this type of thinking into the past and its connections to contemporary consumerism. Linda Woodson says that this symbol "becomes home for him and the boy, fittingly because the shopping cart symbolizes the materialism and consumerism of contemporary society. Shopping carts are a stay against hunger, not just for the evening meal but for coming weeks, symbols of our power to maximize the moment, holding as they do not just

immediate needs, but desires and potential needs" (89). She further explains that in the novel, this symbol has been placed into a new context for the father and son, challenging the general idea of the cart as a temporary vehicle for the movement of goods with the idea that of the cart as a permanent fixture in their lives. In this sense, the cart is reconstituted as a permanent remnant of the former capitalist order of consumerism in a reality where consumerism has become obsolete.

The shopping cart itself, while helpful in the general transport of the meager possessions the man and the boy carry with them, is also often an impediment to their progress. For instance, when they encounter a truck that has turned over and blocked the road, the cart proves difficult to manage: "He pushed the cart up under the trailer but the handle wouldnt clear. They'd have to slide it under sideways. He left it sitting in the rain with the tarp over it and they duckwalked under the trailer" (45). One of the wheels becomes wobbly, and in more extreme conditions the man often has to drag the cart instead of push it. Often the cart must be abandoned when the father and son come upon dangerous individuals on the road, and retrieving it not only delays their progress each time but also places them in potential further danger. Eventually they must leave the cart behind after a large snowdrift, the extreme effects of environmental catastrophe ultimately separating these characters from the burden of this last symbol of consumerism. This abandonment of the cart draws attention to the growing concerns over environmental damage caused by contemporary production methods that destroy ecosystems and pollute environments all in the name of capital accumulation.

Not all looking back is a potentially positive opportunity for growth. In fact, most occurrences of the phrase revolve around probable dangers, and in those situations, some version of the phrase occurs repeatedly. We must remember that the man and the boy are fleeing

destruction, and the world they are leaving behind, as Miller's analysis makes quite clear, is the wasteland that America has become. In some of these instances, the phrase looking back revolves not around an extension of a sense of time, its unfolding into space for potential reflection, but instead compresses the experience of time through the heightening of a sense of danger.

Many of these scenes turn out to be the most memorable scenes of the novel, such as the scene wherein four men and two women nearly trap the man and the boy during their exploration of the house where people are stored in a basement to be slowly eaten. Richard Crownshaw in his article "Deterritorializing the 'Homeland' in American Studies and American Fiction after 9/11" uses this scene as an illustration that "the father's historical memory remains, it seems, intact. He brings a memorative perspective to what he surveys" (774). In particular, as the man crosses the threshold into this plantation home, he "held the boy's hand and they crossed the porch. Chattel slaves had once trod those boards bearing food and drink on silver trays"(106). This particular instance of looking back should be an alert to the man of danger, and perhaps the foreboding thought to the remnant of slavery is what allows him and the boy to escape capture, a fate those held in the basement storeroom have failed to avoid. Crownshaw maintains that "[t]he historical reference to plantation slavery frames the post-apocalyptic exploitation of bodies" (774). While this connection to plantation slavery is an intriguing point, the man also notices that "[p]iled in the window in one corner of the room was a great heap of clothing. Clothes and shoes. Belts. Coats. Blankets and old sleeping bags. He would have ample time later to think about that" (107). As this image calls to mind the piles of clothes that accumulated at Dachau and other concentration camps, the scene recalls not only slavery but the Holocaust as well. The man's reluctance to initially interpret the ghosts of history in this landscape place him and his son in

danger, and his sense of extended time, the "ample time later," becomes compressed once he recognizes the house for the trap that it is. At this point, his experience of time shifts, and they must "Hurry. For God's sake hurry" (111). The compression of time, again and again in the novel, is associated with a sense of danger and a drive toward survivalism in the face of brutal circumstances.

The phrase "looking back" occurs three more times when the two see "[s]hapes of dried blood in the stubble grass and gray coils of viscera where the slain had been field-dressed and hauled away. The wall beyond held a frieze of human heads, all faced alike, dried and caved with their taut grins and shrunken eyes" (90) and are nearly overtaken by "marchers . . . four abreast" (91), followed by

An army in tennis shoes, tramping. Carrying three-foot lengths of pipe with leather wrappings.... Behind them came wagons drawn by slaves in harness and piled with goods of war and after that the women, perhaps a dozen in number, some of them pregnant, and lastly a supplementary consort of catamites illclothed against the cold and fitted in dogcollars and yoked each to each. (92)

The dehumanization of this army and their conquered slaves points back through the whole of human history and its sweeping narrative of the dehumanization of the dominated by the dominating. While we might like to think our contemporary world free of such abuses, the turbulent global political environment and the never-ending cycles of war present us with a much different reality than our position in America often allows us to clearly see, as institutions such as slavery in the postmodern era hide behind terms such as forced labor, bonded labor, or even servile marriages.

Another notable example of this looking back occurs when a truckful of cannibals breaks down near the two, and one of the cannibals who has wandered into the woods to urinate finds them and takes the boy hostage. The man "looked back" twice to notice that some are wearing

canister masks and one is in a biohazard suit. Here the repetition of the phrase in quick succession calls attention to the action specifically in relation to the environmental catastrophe of their world but also to the world in which we all presently live, which brings up one of the novel's apocalyptic hypotheses: our treatment of our environment in a culture of production, consumption, and waste. Such protections as the gas mask and the biohazard suit are more prevalent in our contemporary society than most realize, necessary to deal with toxic substances like asbestos, industrial processes, tear gas, or even the pesticides used to treat the foods that many people consume on a daily basis. All this seems to support Buell's argument¹² that we already live in an apocalyptic world; it's just that none of us seem to have noticed.

In yet another refrain, McCarthy provides us with something that on the surface appears to be an ethical epithet, namely that the man and the boy "carry the fire." As this phrase becomes codified between the boy and the man, it comes to symbolize their ethical relationship to the world around them and to their own sense of self-identification. The affirmation that they carry the fire is the ethical foundation on which their relationship survives beyond the mere biological connection of father and son that the two share. The fire becomes emblematic of a sense of purpose, but at the same time, like the shopping cart, it carries implications of the world before and suggests a backward glance into our own history and our ethical responsibilities to a world not yet ashen with destruction.

That the phrase has ethical implications—however vague or indeterminate—is without question. Randall S. Wilhelm maintains that the phrase indicates "the metaphysical fire synonymous with goodness" (140). Indeed, the boy insists even that the strange man he meets at the novel's end conform to his ethical presuppositions regarding the carrying of fire:

How do I know you're one of the good guys?

¹² See Chapter 1.

You don't. You'll have to take a shot.
 Are you carrying the fire?
 Am I what?
 Carrying the fire.
 You're kinda weirded out, aren't you?
 No.
 Just a little.
 Yeah.
 That's okay.
 So are you?
 What, carrying the fire?
 Yes.
 Yeah. We are. (283-4)

Whatever optimism exists in the novel seems to emanate from this final encounter. With the man recently dead, the boy potentially can reach out to others who will help care for him in a more altruistic way than the man's prioritization of the familial model. As such, the final scene can be read as one in which social relations have the power to produce societal change and a rescue from the tribalisms that seem to define contemporary politics in the postmodern world. But if we deploy a strategy of reversal in the examination of this motif, the fire itself is something of a confusing symbol. The positive ethical implications of carrying the fire arise from a contrast to the cannibalistic nature of the individuals the man and the boy have encountered on the road itself.

Ann Brigham argues in "Reviving (Re)Productivity: Post-9/11 Stories of Mobility in the Homeland" that "[t]he free market of the road transforms humans into the goods and services to be consumed, and the incentives to compete and increase productivity are starkly grim: base survival, avoidance of being eaten" (221). As those who consume others through cannibalism are often referred to by the simplistic term "bad guys", the novel presents us with at least a superficial opposition through which to investigate a more ethical logic of the novel. In such oppositions, the fire itself would seem to contrast the collapse of human coordination and

cooperation in the face of brute survivalism. The fire also has its value as a necessity for survival, sometimes keeping the man and the boy just barely warm enough to make it through the cold wet nights, and its light also provides the man with the ability to read stories and reinforce narratives for the boy.

But the fire is also a symbol of danger throughout the text. The fires they build to stay warm at night must be made far enough from the road itself to avoid their discovery by those with cannibalistic intent, and the man often has to put out their fire early or attempt to cover it when others approach. Furthermore, a particularly harrowing scene in the novel depicts the two primary characters approaching an area that has been annihilated by a massive fire in the past, and the bodies on the road are caught in various poses of death. This scene calls attention to the spread of wildfires across the western half of the United States, a trend that seems to grow worse with every passing year. Without the modern conveniences of information technology, people stand little to no chance of avoiding such disasters. Much like the fire that surprised and consumed the individuals within this section of road, the realities of catastrophic climate change are likely to leave us with no escape route should we continue to lack the political willpower to change. In the end, even technology is unlikely to be able to help us, and all life will be left to suffer the consequences.

A broader look to the world in which the man and boy live would also signal danger in the form of past fires. The air they breathe is filled with a toxic ash, obviously the remnant from the burning of the land, and they must literally shield themselves from the danger of inhaling this ash with the use of masks that they must wear at all times. The world McCarthy represents in the novel is one which has already burned, although the source of that burning remains ambiguous. That the toxic ash kills the man at the end of the novel only reinforces the sense of danger

contained in the symbol of the fire and its consumption of organic matter, further emphasizing the dangers associated with a lack of attention to the environmental degradation occurring hand in hand with international development and the race to participate in global capitalism.

Fire itself cannot be so easily contrasted with the obvious evils of cannibalism. In fact, as fire consumes all its resources without boundaries, including in particular the scene of the deadly wildfire's aftermath, it has much in common with the cannibalism found throughout the novel. To a large extent, this has to do with models of consumption, although—at the risk of drawing awkward comparisons—the consumption of human flesh by cannibals is somewhat different even from the consumption of human flesh in the wildfire: the cannibals presumably do so in order to survive in such a harsh world; the wildfire itself is raging hard enough at that fateful spot on the road that the consumption of the human flesh it devours matters little to its continued existence.

Carrying the fire, then, is more complicated than merely not eating other people. While the man and the boy obviously refrain from such activities, we must also remember that the fire they carry is a remnant of an older time, a time that, in looking back, occasionally provides resources which prove vital for their continued survival. In an early scene in the novel, the man returns to a small service station once he realizes that its scraps may yet be useful: "In the service bay he dragged out the steel trashdrum and tipped it over and pawed out all the quart plastic oilbottles. Then they sat in the floor decanting them of their dregs one by one, leaving the bottles to stand upside down draining into a pan until at the end they had almost half a quart of motor oil" (7). Interestingly, this last sentence stands stylistically in stark contrast to much of the rest of the novel, which is mostly communicated in short, declarative sentences. The language of the sentence itself lingers, creating a sense of time that extends beyond the mere moment one might

take in the reading of it and imposing a second, slower sense of time that more precisely positions the man and the boy inhabit in their post-capitalist reality.

But by drawing upon his memories of the older world of consumer capitalism and the oft-forgotten remnants of its consumables, the man discovers that what has been generally regarded as waste is indeed still useful. Of course, the oil he collects from turning the old containers upside-down fuels the lamp they carry with them for much of the novel, "to light the long gray dusks, the long dray dawns. You can read me a story, the boy said. Cant you, Papa? Yes, he said. I can" (7). Again, the emphasis on the length of dusk and dawn, with nothing in between, would seem to carry with it also the sense of inevitability and the futility of hope for change.

Yet the juxtaposition of this inevitability with the story proposed by the boy presents yet another dualism that bears investigation, namely that of the function of language as a potential historicizing force. This emphasis on the telling of stories and on the value in being able to think in older frameworks of material accumulation is both made possible by and symbolized in the light of the fire. When the boy receives a story, his routine changes, as does his experience of time. The activation of his imagination can help him to escape the drag of the prolongment of suffering because of the narrative connection to time—in which the boy listens to the story until he falls asleep, itself perhaps some allegorical Utopian change that lasts him to the ends of his consciousness—that produces a more sequential and coherent order. This then serves as perhaps a guide as we return to the subject of cannibalism.

The distinction between cannibalism and carrying the fire then would seem to have little to do with consumption itself, as consumption is the constant between both. The positivity of the fire and its symbolism to the boy is located more in its light than in the fire itself. What the opposition turns on is in fact the limits of consumption. The fire in the lantern is contained

through the enclosure of physical space, as is the fire of their various campsites along their journey, to keep such fire from getting out of control and destroying everything in its path. This level of control is how the man and the boy can carry the fire and not be consumed by it. The "bad guys" then are those who consume without limit, in such a destructive manner that leads to the death of those not within its in-group members (and at times even within their own groups). The "good guys" in contrast, are those who at least attempt to make a more responsible and sustainable approach to consumption and have the will to help others they do not and cannot know.

Through this contrast, the man and the boy take up different ethical positions. It is only through the boy's insistence that the two ever help others, and the boy's adherence to the moral code of "carrying the fire" indicates that the phrase also relies on the willingness to help others, even when in dire circumstances oneself. The man's inconsistency with such a code of ethics is a remnant from the late capitalist culture, wherein even the national system of the United States, with the repeated attempts to strip away social programs that assist individuals in need, leaves the individuals under its care in various states of instability and where, isolated from interactions with a diverse set of other people, otherness is radicalized and estranged. The boy, in contrast, has a genuine compassion for other people and a desire to help them along their way, indicating that even in the face of grave danger and a lack of resources, our willingness to look beyond ourselves and our own circumstances to those less fortunate is the touchstone for humanity that must be cultivated and protected.

B. Whiteness and Weapons: Political Difference at the End of the World in Peter Heller's *The Dog Stars*

In relation to *The Road*, Peter Heller's *The Dog Stars* much more closely aligns to the traditional post-apocalyptic paradigm discussed in the introduction of this dissertation project. When the novel opens, the two main characters, Hig and Bangley, have taken up residence around an airport hangar just outside Denver, where they must fight off the occasional intruder with the help of Jasper, Hig's dog and faithful companion. After Jasper's death at the end of Book I, Hig plans a long journey to Grand Junction in the attempt to find respite from Bangley and potentially a better future. Through a diversion on his journey, he meets Cima and her father, and by the end of the novel, all four of them have joined forces back at the Colorado airport. However, while this general plot line would seem to fit the cycle of destruction and renewal that lies at the heart of the post-apocalyptic paradigm, the end of the novel presents the future of these characters in a precarious situation as the specters of 9/11 haunt the last book of the novel. Additionally, the landscape is revealed to be in a state of irreversible decay to the point of hostility toward the natural world, in particular the animals related to the human food chain. As such, the emphasis on death and loss throughout the novel undermine any sense of hope that might be present at the novel's ending, drawing focus instead toward the failure of relationships and the disintegration of the sense of future community in the post-9/11 era.

Hig's relationship with Jasper serves as a vital narrative component of the first book of the novel. The trips with Jasper often serve as a source of respite from Hig's post-apocalyptic acquaintance Bangley and his overbearing personality. In contrast to the relationship between Hig and Bangley, Jasper and Hig do not share language but instead operate on a more metaphysical level, each responding to the anticipations of the other's actions. Whereas with

Bangley Hig thinks more about "all the stuff I should never say" (22), his relationship with Jasper is free of linguistic constraint and language's corresponding political divisions, making the relationship between Hig and Jasper therefore more open to an ontological symbiosis wherein Hig can participate in what he perceives as a more authentic bond.

Their symbiosis is the source of the potential hope of the first book of the novel; Hig makes choices regarding his plane and their flying trips specifically because of the privileged nature of his relationship with Jasper: "Why do I fly my eighty year old Cessna four seater? Because the seats are side by side. So Jasper can be my copilot. The real reason. The whole time I fly I talk to him, and it amuses me no end that the whole time he pretends not to listen" (75). Although Hig speaks to Jasper quite often, the obvious language barrier between them creates a distancing effect, though it is one that is able to be overcome, not through any ideological connection but instead through simple companionship and familiarity. They don't have to speak to one another; each is allowed to simply exist alongside the other in a system of total trust devoid of the explicit expectations of labor, a stark contrast to Hig's partnership with Bangley. In the midst of a world which Florian Mussnug calls "devoid of genuine compassion" (2), Jasper is a constant source of escape from a world with only Bangley; this sense of escapism emerges particularly when they go on various excursions together under the guise of hunting or fishing – what Bangley would call Recreational activities – to attempt to get away from Bangley's authoritarian presence.

These Recreational activities, "which [Bangley] called with scorn anything that didn't directly involve our direct survival, or killing, or planning to kill which amounted to the same thing" (56), are themselves fraught with complications: fishing is ruined by the presence of global warming, which has disturbed the balance of the ecosystems in which Hig attempts to

fish; flying, while somewhat more satisfying for Hig, is ultimately a dissociative act: "From up here there was no misery, no suffering, no strife, just pattern and perfection. The immortal stillness of a landscape painting" (50). But flying depends on the presence of fuel, and while fuel is surprisingly abundant in this iteration of catastrophe, Hig knows that eventually it too will inevitably become contaminated by lack of maintenance. At that point, even flying will be impossible. These doomed "Recreational" activities serve in the novel to link Hig to the environment and the natural world in contrast to his more ideologically antagonistic interactions with Bangley; they also open his experiences to a larger sense of time. As such, he can imagine the possibility of escape from what remains of the human structures of civilization, which has, from his perspective, resulted primarily in misery, suffering, and strife. Jasper, connected to these potential escapes—as a fishing partner and as a copilot—assumes a position as conduit between Hig and the posthuman world.

The opening of this sense of time is predicated upon Hig's departure from the labor scheme set up by Bangley, wherein "I flew. He killed. Jasper growled. We let each other be" (14). These duties all serve the purpose of Bangley's refrain, to "secure the perimeter" that includes the eight-mile radius around the airport, which Hig explains is a dangerous location: "Survivors, it seemed they picked it out on a map. On a big creek, check. So water, check. Must have fuel, check. Since it was an airport, check. . . . Mostly the intruders came at night. They came singly or in groups, they came with weapons, with hunting rifles, with knives, they came to the porch light I left on like moths to a flame" (9). Indeed, such is how Bangley himself seems to have found the location, striking the deal with Hig to work together toward survival, despite their obvious personality differences.

The daily flights Hig makes to watch over the landscape for potential invaders keeps them safe for the roughly 24-hour period it would take to make the journey by foot, while Bangley's survival skills seem to revolve around guns and little else: "Bangley made no excuses about knowing nothing about engines, wood, carpentry of any kind, agriculture, especially agriculture, gardening, cooking, especially cooking, languages, history, math beyond arithmetic, fashion, leatherwork, gin rummy, sewing, or especially rhetoric—the decorum, the customs of a respectful rhetorical debate" (141). Because of Bangley's deficiencies, particularly with domestic responsibilities, Hig must take up the majority of these activities. This brings into play a division of labor predicated upon an older gender-driven model; here, in the absence of female presence, Hig must take up the majority of these tasks. However, Hig's domestic responsibilities stem less from any position of masculinity and more from Bangley's inabilities—presumably due to lack of experience in a past where such gendered domestic responsibilities are normalized. The end of the world demonstrates more of Bangley's incompetence than masculine superiority.

The presumed disappearance of women at the beginning of the novel also thrusts Jasper into a different relationship with Hig, as Jasper serves as a makeshift replacement for Hig's wife Melissa, who died in the epidemic outbreak that killed the vast majority of the world's population. During one of their nights sleeping away from Bangley, Jasper's sleeping position prompts memories of Melissa: "He was lying flat on his side with his butt against me and his legs sticking off the cushion and he was snoring. Is it possible to love so desperately that life is unbearable? I don't mean unrequited, I mean being *in* the love. In the midst of it and desperate. Because knowing it will end, because everything does" (70-1). The ambiguity of Hig's musing here is interesting in that Jasper and Melissa essentially become conflated due to sensory

memory; hence we have a juxtaposition of two types of companion: the human life-partner and the posthuman companion species¹³.

Additionally, the duality of sentiments expressed in this passage offer the recurring theme of the novel, that of simultaneous compassion and despair: passion for Melissa and despair over her death, passion for Jasper and despair over the knowledge of his eventual death. As such, past and future become also conflated in the present, but the overall effect of this conjoinment is not the promise of reconnecting in a meaningful way with any historical narrative; instead, as it is rooted in the personal, Hig's lack of power in the face of the forces of time and circumstance beyond his control overwhelm his sense of action, which is only intensified after Jasper's death. The paralysis that he experiences in the beginning of Book II is the paralysis of trauma, of the realization that the next day is not always better. This trauma is indicative of the destructive nature of the post-capitalist world and the inevitable losses carried in the late capitalist model of pollution and waste.

Granted, the relationship between Hig and Jasper is a major driving force throughout the first third of the novel. In many ways, their relationship is much like one of life-partners: they sleep curled up next to one another, they at times bicker then appease one another, and they of course share affection through both expression and silence, much like an old married couple. But the relationship with Jasper ends quite early in the novel, and its function in Book I is more a device to contrast Hig's relationship with Bangley than it is to build any affirming principles within the novel. The forced cooperation of the two men often emphasizes the radically different points of view that inform the ideologies of each.

¹³ For further examination of the concept of companion species, see Donna Haraway's *The Companion Species Manifesto: Dogs, People, and Significant Otherness*, in which she uses the historical relationship between canines and humans to illustrate a cooperative model for interspecies relations, a common theme of posthumanism. Posthumanism itself will be taken up in more detail in the third chapter of the dissertation.

For instance, the first appearance of Bangley in the novel focuses on a conversation during which Bangley questions Hig's repeated trips to assist a group of Mennonites who have been infected with a blood disease and have since occupied a turkey farm alongside a creek within Hig's regular flying radius. This disease is noted as being "something like AIDS" (7), but just as with the AIDS epidemic, misinformation about the disease and its spread seems to have more effect in isolating those individuals. Bangley insists that Hig stop making his trips to visit the Mennonites, fearful that Hig will spread the infection to both of them, while Hig attempts to explain that his precautions have so far worked and that helping other people fulfills a void inside himself:

The families know to stay fifteen feet back. I've trained them. Not once not ever have they showed any aggression, nothing but gratitude, kind of embarrassing gratitude when I fix a pump or show them how to make a fish trap for the creek. Truth is I do it as much for me as them: it kinda loosens something inside me. That nearly froze up.

Bangley works the jaw stares at me. That last thing – it's like I just spoke perfect Japanese, a whole paragraph ending with a slight bow. Like A, he can't believe I fucking said it, and B, he doesn't understand a single syllable. Psycho spiritual language it leaves him, well, less than cold. (19)

Though the tension between the two characters is often more pronounced than in this early scene, Heller quickly sets up a clear binary by establishing that Bangley's philosophy is to withdraw and protect, an isolationist perspective, whereas Hig's humanitarian values drive him to potentially put both himself and Bangley at risk to negotiate his immediate "post"-apocalyptic identity with that of his former self. Hig's insistence on assisting those Bangley defines not only as Other but also as dangerous is the impetus for a significant communication barrier that pervades the relationship between the two characters throughout the novel. If we take into account that Bangley always appears "wearing his honking sidearm. Night and day" (16), occasionally spouts homophobic slurs, and operates a surveillance-state within the perimeter of

the airport hangar and the surrounding area, he seems almost a caricature of the post-9/11 fervor over national security, a subject to which we will return later. While Hig is perhaps more defined through his oppositions to Bangley than through any coherent or consistent ideological principles, the two provide a useful lens through which to examine the political landscape of the twenty-first century's first decade, especially in terms of changing conceptions of survivalism that has resulted from a shift in the perspectives (and perhaps even the constituents) of survivalist groups in America.

Toward the end of an interview with *Unbound Worlds*, Peter Heller responds to a question regarding whether he knew any real-life Bangleys: "Oh sure. One of my best buddies has something like seventy assault rifles. He likes to show me the new one over dessert" (Interview). While Bangley in the novel doesn't strut his guns around in front of Hig while they eat crème brûlée, the name-dropping of weapons in the novel is almost constant, particularly with Bangley. Bangley is extremely comfortable in the language of violence and artillery but less so with anything having to do with emotion or the past. For Bangley, the world after the end of civilized order is like a new life:

I'm not sure if he thought of himself as a soldier or even a warrior, but he was a Survivor with a capital S. All the other, what he had been in the rigors of his youth, I think he thought of as training for something more elemental and more pure. He had been waiting for the End all his life. If he drank before he didn't drink now. He didn't do anything that wasn't aimed at surviving. I think if he somehow died of something that he didn't deem a legitimate Natural Cause, and if he had a moment of reflection before the dark, he would be less disappointed with his life being over than with losing the game. With not taking care of the details. With being outsmarted by death, or worse, some other holocaust hardened mendicant. (71)

This musing on The Life of Bangley calls attention to the contexts of survivalism through the binary of these two primary characters. While the theme of survival runs throughout the text for both Bangley and Hig, the emphasis on *Survivor* as opposed to *survivor* also indicates deeper

ideological divisions predicated upon weaponry and violence toward others, something Hig has problems with but Bangley does not.

This emphasis on weapons also highlights the culture of weaponry that has developed in the United States in recent years, particularly since the 2004 expiration of the assault weapons ban. If any order emerges in the novel, it is a hierarchy of weaponry. Along the course of the narrative, Hig (sometimes with Bangley, sometimes alone) encounters various levels of threat from other groups of people who are armed to various levels. Most of these marauders have scant weaponry, and almost all of them die nameless and forgotten to the world because of their reliance on older weapons technologies, such as swords or crossbows. Hig overwhelmingly relies on the AR-15 Bangley has given him to use, while Bangley is armed with a variety of assault weapons, including an M-203 grenade launcher and "his favorite assault rifle" (308), the M-4.

These specific weapons bear further scrutiny, however. All are based on the M-16 assault rifle, a weapon initially designed for exclusive United States military use. The M-203 is basically the M-16 with a grenade launcher beneath the barrel of the gun, the M-4 has a shorter barrel, and the AR-15 is the semi-automatic and civilian-legal version of the M-16. Thus, while most post-apocalyptic imaginations imagine the proliferation of nuclear weaponry on a global scale, *The Dog Stars* is in some way a useful lens through which to examine the proliferation of militarized civilian weaponry, both domestically and internationally.

Recent news stories such as those revolving around the mass shootings that occur very frequently in the United States¹⁴ and the polarized political reactions from the American

¹⁴ The most notable of these since the writing of this chapter began are the Las Vegas shooting on October 1, 2017, which resulted in the deaths of 59 people including the shooter; the Sutherland Springs, Texas, church shooting on November 5, 2017, which resulted in the deaths of 27 people including the shooter; the Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School shooting in Parkland, Florida, on February 14, 2018, which resulted in seventeen deaths and a great amount of political response from the teenage community; and most recently, the Santa Fe High School shooting in Santa Fe, Texas, on May 18, 2018, which resulted in ten deaths. Even though these events are all much more recent than the publication of *The Dog Stars*, the prevalence of mass public shootings before the novel's release are nearly

electorate reveal the extent to which American culture has become obsessed with guns and the connection of the perceived right to bear arms as fundamental to preserving an American culture based primarily on the idea of exceptionalism. In a 2009 book entitled *Gun Crusaders: The NRA's Culture War*, Scott Melzer analyzes the impact of the political landscape of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries on the argument surrounding gun rights in America and the NRA's manipulation of the public political discourse around firearms. Melzer investigates what he calls "frontier masculinity," which he defines as "[c]haracterized by rugged individualism, hard work, protecting and providing for families, and self-reliance" while maintaining that it "is the mythologized version of manhood from America's frontier past" (16). Furthermore, Melzer argues that the power of the rhetorical argument in favor of guns is one in which

the driving force behind these gun activists is fear, and not just of gun control foes but also of feminists, criminals, terrorists, gays, and Communists. They perceive that liberals are plotting to take away their gun rights and give women, gays, and people of color not equal but 'special' rights. The gun-owning, rural, conservative, straight, white man is the new victim of discrimination, the new minority, they believe. (11)

But the fear associated with the loss of guns, as this passage makes clear, is not the loss of rights but the loss of privilege. Through the rhetorical strategy of appealing to identity politics and particularly this fear of the loss of privilege as more diverse members of society become more culturally visible, Melzer argues that the Civil War became associated with the rise of gun culture, and that the "Union victory secured a standard of marketplace manhood—breadwinners must compete against and outperform other men to achieve success—that continues to be a measuring stick of masculinity to this day" (34). To this point, the backlash against social progress is repeatedly framed in terms of not only the race-based warfare of the Civil War but

as startling, with even four incidents resulting in double-digit death tolls occurring in 2012, the year of the novel's publication.

also a reactionary movement against a construction of masculinity that favors the financial superiority of urbanization and industrialization, often leaving rural white male members of society feeling outcast and abandoned by progress.

A quick look at some advertising from gun manufacturers supports this argument. In an article for *International Business Times*, Max Willens and Eric Markowitz draw attention to the fact that "Bushmaster, one of America's largest gun manufacturers, uses the slogan 'Justice for All.'" Its print ads tell prospective buyers: 'Consider your man card reissued.'" Other manufacturers routinely present images of scantily-clad women in their advertisements brandishing assault rifles or other guns to sexualize gun ownership, apparently to great success. In the room where Bangley has set up his gun workshop, he has covered the walls with aggressive, hyper-sexualized posters such as these:

He had also brought with him about fifty posters, all girls in bikinis or less holding various weapons and bannered with the great names in small armaments from Colt through Sig to Winchester. They were tacked up all over the walnut paneled walls where framed paintings used to hang, taped even to the edges of the windows. They were shooting submachine guns holding pistols in the low ready position like a fig leaf and sometimes not bothering to cover their total nakedness at all and the pain they caused me, I mean the sight of unclad women, actually constricted my throat so I kept my visits to the bare minimum so to speak. (142)

Hig is left feeling uncomfortable by the exploitation of the women in these posters, but the fact that Bangley plasters them around his workspace reveals precisely the opposite experience: it is through these propagandistic marketing ploys that Bangley's sense of identity is constructed. He has fully bought into the narrative of the white man singled out by the progress of capitalist development, and the sexualization of the women in these posters—the only women he assumes he will ever see again—fuels his relationship with guns. Furthermore, the superiority that Bangley feels through his relationship with guns bleeds over into his relationship with Hig, as he often accuses Hig of being partially gay or woman-like. It is in this way, through consistently

antagonistic and demeaning behavior, that Bangley competes with and attempts to dominate Hig in their post-capitalist partnership.

The weapons used in the novel also have nationalistic connection, however, as the Cold War also resonates in one of the action scenes early in the novel. Upon return from a hunting trip, Hig and Jasper find themselves being tracked and hunted by another group of survivors:

They were crouched, the biggest closest to the dumpster had a rifle with scope, was twisted back doing the talking, signing with his right hand, touching the watch cap cocked on his head, the one just beside him had some sort of assault rifle probably an AK, the three others: two shotguns and a ranch rifle all clear at ninety feet with the goggled eye. The third from the left with a shotgun wore a cowboy hat a short man in a big hat. (43-44)

Interesting here is the identification of the AK assault rifle, a design of weapon originally used by Soviet armed forces and still used by militaries worldwide, combined with the additional detail of the cowboy hat. The AK stands out in relation to the rather generic terms used to describe most of the weaponry carried by other groups in the novel: shotguns, rifles, arrows, knives, and even swords fill the list. In comparison to the AK, however, the stockpile of weapons used by Bangley and Hig are primarily American-manufactured, with brands like Colt and Sig Sauer¹⁵ leading the list. Even the Glocks used by both Hig and Bangley, while produced by an Austrian company, are the most prevalent sidearm used by agents of local and federal law enforcement officers in the United States. In this situation, the novel initially uses the identifications of the weapons as the sorting of the other, with the good, 'Merican Hig and Bangley, and the evil, unnamed Soviet weapon-wielders who have invaded their territory.

¹⁵ Sig Sauer was originally established as Schweizerische Waggon Fabrik (Swiss Wagon Factory) in Switzerland in 1853. In 1985 the company moved to Virginia under the name SIGARMS and later in 1990 relocated to New Hampshire, where the business is now headquartered. According to a June 27, 2016 article in *Newsweek*, the company in 2004 “was on the brink of collapse” until former CEO Ron Cohen turned to the production of assault rifles, including the MCX, one of which was used by Omar Marteen in the June 12, 2016 attack on the Pulse Nightclub in Orlando.

This scene is further complicated, however, by the discovery of "the short man, the one in the cowboy hat, the hat now tumbled into a drainage furrow a few feet off. It's a boy. Maybe nine. About the age. Melissa seven months pregnant when. Nine years ago" (46). The conflation of national images presents an awkward juxtaposition that would seem to highlight the connection between the United States and the Soviet Union through the international firearms trade and its victims across the globe. Of course, where Hig finds reason to grieve the young boy, Bangley's reaction is to chastise him for his emotions: "Hig you haven't learned a goddamn thing in all this time. You're living in the past. Makes me wonder if you appreciate any of this. Goddamn" (47).

But Bangley is also obviously living in the past, as his former life experiences under capitalism's development shape his post-apocalyptic perspective. The end of governmental authority represents a freedom from an old way of life, one that Bangley found unsatisfactory due to a lack of upward mobility from his family's agricultural roots. This animosity toward his background is especially present the first time Hig learns of Bangley's family: "He confessed that he'd sworn that he would never on this earth be a farmer, that the only dirt he'd ever dig in his life would be the dirt of a grave" (148). The same conversation ends with a refrain of this animosity, as Hig probes deeper into Bangley's obvious hatred for his father and his old way of life: "We stood there. The water in the furrows conversed one to another in overlapping rills. No words and I knew with certainty that Bangley had killed his old man" (150). This shift away from Bangley's family's agricultural past, culminating in the idea of Bangley killing his father, is indicative of the shift away from traditional agricultural practices in the late-capitalist era. As food sources move further and further away from small farms and more toward large corporate entities, the rural remnants of America are smothered by the ubiquity of corporate efficiency.

Even if Hig's musing regarding Bangley's patricide is merely hypothetical, the metaphorical significance of this usurpation is apocalyptic in itself at the familial level and emphasized in the scene at the novel's end wherein Hig finally discovers Bangley's room:

It was the son's room and it was Bangley's. This is where he lived. Fucking A. Preserved like a room in one of those historic museums. I flashed on Bangley's father, the one he had hated – and I thought, He never had a room like this I bet. He was healing himself or following some instinct of compensation or maybe something more weird, who knew, living in this museum, this play set of a room. (303-304)

The presentation of Bangley's room, provided through Hig's perspective and fairly late in the novel, structurally stands as the final climactic reveal for Bangley's character, the piece of the puzzle that should fill in the gaps between the Bangley of the world before catastrophe and the Bangley we encounter through the course of the narrative. The room itself is decorated with a barrage of nostalgic imagery based in fetishistic commodifications:

Poster of Linu Linu in a bikini over the bed, the bed covered in a quilt patterned with cowboys on bucking broncos. Butterflies pinned in frames on the wall and an electric guitar in the corner. Also slalom skis. Surfboard, a shortboard mounted on the angled ceiling, bright green graphic of the serpent in the apple tree and a naked Eve standing half turned away, her breast barely covered by the curls of her hair: SIN SURFBOARDS. A signed NASCAR poster. Car number 13. (303)

The décor of the room itself, mostly leftovers from the boy who lived there before disease wiped out the population, indicates a wide array of potential avenues of escape from generational labor: the butterfly collection connects to scientific classification practices; the electric guitar is an oft-sought instrument of those seeking expression or fame through music; the sports equipment represents recreational activities often connected to an affluent or leisure-based lifestyle which appropriates the mythological imagery of Eden, transforming the concept of the forbidden into a hyper-sexualized graphical marketing ploy; the NASCAR poster itself is a fetishization of excess (particularly when contrasted against the ruined world in which fuel is becoming increasingly scarce due to its lack of treatment) and celebrity, especially in its signed state.

As appealing as all these ideas and artifacts may be, however, they are all static: the butterflies are pinned and framed, the guitar relegated to a corner, the sexualization of the surfboard frozen in an image and displayed more like a piece of art than a piece of functional equipment, the NASCAR poster a signifier of a world at motion through an image at rest. Thus, of all the rooms Bangley could have claimed as his own, he chose one geared toward the fantasies of youth, cut short by the realities of a world where such dreams are practically out of reach.

The one piece of decoration presumably added to this room by Bangley himself is the poster of the model in the bikini, much like the posters of women with guns he has placed on the walls of his shop as well. The posters in his shop room connect the nostalgic emptiness of the boy's room where Bangley sleeps with the shop where he strategizes and works on traps and weapons, almost as though the shop and the weaponry maintained therein stands, in Bangley's mind, as the pathway to the fulfillment of the dreams cut short in the boy's room and consequently in his own visions of the past as well. This commodification of weaponry also emphasizes the prevalence of weaponry that runs throughout the novel and forms the new structuring principle of the "post" apocalyptic world of *The Dog Stars*.

Once Jasper dies of exposure, however, Hig feels even more inclined to leave the hangar and Bangley behind, striking out to find the source of a transmission from Grand Junction that he initially had heard years earlier. On this journey he finds the small ranch where Cima and her father live in isolation. They have livestock, medicine, and good food, difficult resources to find after apocalyptic destruction. All this pales in comparison, in Hig's mind, to Cima's female body, which serves as the locus for his narrative preoccupations in the second and third parts of the novel. The love story here is embarrassingly thin, and Cima seems to be developed primarily to

serve Hig's sexual functions, first to satisfy his spectator gaze while bathing and later as a sexual partner, though in scenes where Cima and Melissa become virtually interchangeable.

But Cima herself is perhaps more interesting when viewed as a mediator between her father – an ex-Navy SEAL commonly referred to as "Pops" in the narrative – and Hig. Pops turns out to be more like Bangley than any other named character in the novel, but in contrast to Bangley, who is at least cooperative with Hig in most respects, Pops is initially more adversarial. He nearly shoots Hig out of the sky upon their first meeting, and it is only through Cima's pleadings that Hig's life is spared when they finally meet on the ground.

Eventually, of course, they come to accept if not respect one another, and the novel could very well have ended in Book II and almost perfectly fit the post-apocalyptic paradigm: a chance at a meaningful future with familial ties and a reinvestment in a small, extremely localized and exclusive community, well protected from the ills of apocalyptic disaster through geographic isolation and an abundance of natural resources. But the news of drought and the impending loss of both landscape and livestock force the departure of all three, at which point they decide to follow up on the third possibility of renewal, the airport message from Grand Junction. The common thread between these first two types of failure lie in the destruction of the American landscape and its potential for sustaining non-human life.

The transmission from Grand Junction is, by contrast, a human devastation. Hig first heard the transmission many years before the opening of the novel, and its specter haunts his relationship with Bangley, always persisting in the back of his mind whenever their relationship is strained. Of course, the message of hope in a novel so devoid of compassion turns out to be a trap. As planes would come in for landings, hopeful for re-establishing communication and interpersonal connection, an older couple who ran the airport would pull a steel cable taut and

destroy the planes and presumably their passengers. Our hero Hig manages to deftly detect the trap at the last possible moment and save both plane and crew, after which Pops cleans out the airport Navy-SEAL style without much in the way of hesitation or questions regarding why this couple would set such a trap: "We're gonna clean her clock and whoever else. No questions asked" (287).

While the plot here is as thin as Cima's character development, taking Berger's strategy in this last site of hope provides a useful lens through which to view the weaponization of institutions, which can lead later into a discussion of weaponization in more commodified and political terms. Berger locates the traumas of the "post" apocalyptic in the reflections of the past:

Modernity is often said to be preoccupied by a sense of crisis, viewing as imminent, perhaps even longing for, some conclusive catastrophe. This sense of crisis has not disappeared, but in the late twentieth century it exists together with another sense, that the conclusive catastrophe has already occurred, the crisis is over (perhaps we were not aware of exactly when it transpired), and the ceaseless activity of our time – the news with its procession of almost indistinguishable disasters – is only a complex form of stasis. (xiii)

Of course, the historical impetus most easily aligned with the failure of this last site of Utopian hope is the weaponization of planes during the 9/11 terrorism attack. Interestingly, however, the couple behind this plot are not Islamic extremists but old white people. In fact, *The Dog Stars*, like *The Road*, has a startling lack of racial diversity, at least before its final chapters. Hig, Bangley, Cima, Pops, and the random groups of people met along the way are all white. In fact, if we take the strategies of reversal as demonstrated in Miller's examination of *The Road*, particularly in relation to this scene in Grand Junction and the weaponization of this airport, the novel seems to develop its own hierarchy revolving around the capacity for violence—and specifically a white violence—absent a force of government that is supposed to provide a source of protection to its citizens.

Let us begin with this scene in Grand Junction and its seemingly obvious echo of 9/11 and the planes that flew into the World Trade Center. While Flights 11 and 175 were overtaken by Al-Qaeda members and intentionally weaponized to attack what could arguably be called one of the greatest symbols of capitalism in the Twin Towers, the similarities between this intentional attack and the trap set by the old couple at Grand Junction end with the rather superficial element of plane crashes. Instead, the trap set at the airport would seem to point more toward airport security, most specifically to the tightening of restrictions in airports throughout the United States and the racial implementation of such enforcements.

To return to the novel, the positioning of Hig, Cima and Pops in relation to what could be considered an extreme version of airport security in Grand Junction presents an interesting coupling of perspectives of victimhood. Their violent retaliation against the couple running the airport seems rational (if not sensationalized) within the logic of the novel, where firepower means everything. In such a situation, especially with Pops's Special Forces background, our group of protagonists would seem superficially to allegorically represent the retaliation of the United States after the 9/11 attacks.

However, as the concepts of national boundaries and authorities fall apart, so too do national allegiances. Hig, Pops, and Cima are just as much potential invaders here as all those unnamed and unidentified groups of people who have appeared at the airport where Hig and Bangley have taken up residence. Hence, they are also positioned to be outsiders here, drawn in by the hope of a bigger and better world and nearly devoured by the predatory nature of the source of that dream, resonating with both the retaliatory nature of United States global action in the wake of 9/11 and also subject to that same set of effects. Oddly then, they simultaneously are

both the vengeance of terrorism and the immigrant under fire during post-9/11 racially-based security policies.

The return of Hig to the airport hangar in Colorado with Cima and Pops presents an interesting contrast to this scene and the political ramifications of post-9/11 national security policies. Hig is startled to find "the charred husks of the houses, saw foundations, saw one half of my hangar ripped open as if by a tornado and burned" (300). Their return is one marked by destruction, with Bangley badly injured and barely alive, clutching his M4 in a near death-grip. Before they find him, however, they discover his surveillance post, from which he can see nearly everything: "over the low berm across the runway where I slept with Jasper, right to the dumpster we had dragged away from my house, my house that was a decoy. . . . Not much he couldn't see from here, which is of course why he had chosen it" (304). This revelation causes a series of mixed emotions from Hig: "I felt standing there rising up in me the revulsion and admiration and I have to say—what? Love, maybe, that I had grown to feel for that certain fucked up individual" (304-5). The surveillance state that Bangley has set up, while providing protection from possible invaders, simultaneously produces in Hig a sense of security and one of fear for Bangley's authoritarian appropriation of space.

We have very little information regarding the group who attacked Bangley in Hig's absence. Through Bangley, we learn that they were carrying a portable cannon—which caused the devastation that Hig noticed flying into the area—and that they were what Bangley refers to as "Mongols," which is impossible to read clearly through Bangley's overt racism. What this designation does accomplish is the further definition of in-group/out-group status, where outsiders, particularly those of a non-white racial identification, are seen as a threat. This information also draws attention to the law of the gun: there will always be bigger, more

powerful weapons, and the narrative of being able to always protect oneself through firepower falls short when one realizes that the technology of the military-industrial complex is far too advanced for any sort of small-force success against national or international militarized operations.

The placement of this revelation, just after the airport scene in Grand Junction, also draws into clearer focus the conversation regarding national security already begun in the previous scene. Both the old white couple in Grand Junction and Hig and Bangley have set up traps for those people entering their airport spaces. The trap at Grand Junction is the airport itself, whereas the trap Hig and Bangley have set up is the house Hig once lived in. This second trap is interesting in its domestic implications, drawing in outsiders with the vision of a comfortable home life with a stable infrastructure through the available of resources such as electricity. In this view, the vision of the domestic structure mirrors the narrative of opportunity within America's borders for those fleeing other nations.

In the context of the post-9/11 world, however, such a draw carries with it the dangers of exclusion and potentially even elimination in the face of a whiteness that fears its loss of privilege so much that outsiders of any kind are a constant threat. When, at the very end of the novel, Hig hears over the radio two pilots speaking to each other in Arabic, he doesn't know how to react: "I stared after them kind of stunned. Good or bad?" (318). As the weeks go on, more and more planes with Arabic-speaking pilots pass overhead, but the lack of communication between the group at the airport and the pilots flying west to California leave the novel with a sense of foreboding and an ambiguity that by the end undermine the sense of safety the successful grouping of the four main characters initially projects.

All of this is placed within the larger context of getting along despite obvious ideological differences. The allegory created through the extreme differences emphasized in the two primary characters shows a nation divided in how to treat others on a global scale. While Hig's approach is to take his time and develop dialogue with others, Bangley would much rather shoot first and ask questions never. Placed in the context of airports and air travel in a world without national borders, the connections to 9/11 and the resultant security policies that emphasize white privilege invite discussion on how we interact with one another, how we identify ourselves as a part of a larger group, and how we handle otherness in a world filled with diversity.

C. Chapter Two Conclusion

Ultimately, the elimination of national boundaries and national identification in *The Road* and *The Dog Stars* has a much different effect than in the traditional post-apocalyptic novel, such as Pat Frank's *Alas, Babylon*. In the post-apocalyptic novels of the long 1950s, the nation is often rebuilt on a smaller scale, with the ideals of nationalism taking on a more local flavor. Hegemony is reified at a smaller and more controllable scale. Here, however, we have a sense of the loss of security instead of the hopeful promise of renewal, which would seem to be a distinct departure from the traditional paradigm. What emerges from these novels instead of a vision of a reconstituted future American space is a disintegration of the connections through which people identify each other as legitimate citizens and human beings, each with rights to equal treatment and opportunity under law. The overwhelming whiteness of these novels further underscores the racism regarding immigration policies in the United States in the wake of the 9/11 attacks, pointing toward the fear of the loss of privilege in the face of increasing global consciousness and economic deterioration in traditionally white middle-class and working-class communities in

the present day. The anarchic political realities of these novels reveal the apocalyptic desires of an American white male subculture that seems unable or unwilling to move past its misogynist and racist foundations. The result is a declaration of victimhood predicated upon the inability to distinguish between privilege and right, culminating in an anarcho-libertarian desire to destroy rather than build, to dominate instead of cooperate, to eliminate instead of co-exist.

This also draws attention to the fading power of the nation-state in the global development of late capitalism. As national interests are tied more and more to the development of capital, the emphasis on the accumulation of wealth, these novels demonstrate a growing fear over the loss of social institutions that secure people—as opposed to corporations—a reasonable standard of living. Every year, more people fall below the poverty line in the United States. The fear of the loss of the privileged economic space of white people, in particular white men, feeds into the perceived erosion of the standard of living in late capitalism.

These two senses of loss, those of privilege and of class, have only amplified in the years since these novels were published. The re-election of Barack Obama to the Presidency, the Black Lives Matter movement, and the #MeToo movement spawned the birther movement, #AllLivesMatter, and #HimToo, respectively. These oppositional movements to the progress of a more equally representational American experience seek to rupture the notion of progress inherent in a cohesive view of historical change. Furthermore, the expansion of detention centers for those trying to cross the United States border underscores the priority of in-group identification that has only amplified in the post-9/11 era. Americans seem drawn toward divisive rhetorics and distorted political messaging that wear away at the social fabric of the country, pitting citizen against citizen based on superficial concepts of difference and otherness. The unity of the United States seems tenuous at best.

Looking back upon the novels discussed in this chapter, the wastelands presented in each illustrate the breakdown of societal values and the possibilities in communication strategies that seek to unify disparate segments of a diversified world, revealing the fragile anxieties of white male identity politics in the face of the potential loss of privilege, while at the same time pointing toward the growing dangers of division inherent in political ruptures that aggravate what would appear at the time to be an American Cultural Civil War.

IV. Chapter Three: The Double Apocalypse of Margaret Atwood's *Maddaddam* Trilogy

Fuck the world, damn straight malaise,
 It may be just us who feel this way,
 But don't ever doubt this, my steadfast conviction.
 My love, you're the one I wanna watch the ship go down with.
 The future can't be real, I barely know how long a moment is
 Unless we're naked getting high on the mattress
 While the global market crashes.
 As death fills the streets, we're garden-variety oblivious.
 You grab my hand and say in an I-told-you-so voice:
 'It's just how we expected.'
 Everything is doomed.
 And nothing will be spared.
 But I love you, honeybear.

-Father John Misty, "Honeybear"

A. The Story and Structure of the *Maddaddam* Trilogy

The *Maddaddam* trilogy is Atwood's second major foray¹⁶ into what she calls speculative fiction. In her introduction to *In Other Worlds: SF and the Human Imagination*, Atwood attempts to draw a distinction between the concepts of science fiction and speculative fiction. After a 2010 conversation with Ursula LeGuin, Atwood's definitions of science fiction and speculative fiction become somewhat more defined; for Atwood, her *Maddaddam* trilogy would belong to the realm of speculative fiction, which she defines as being the natural and logical outgrowth of current trajectories of human development¹⁷, or in her own words, "our own planet in a future" (5). This future is designed to represent but one possible outcome of the world in progress as we know it. Regardless of the accuracy of Atwood's definitions, the imaginative

¹⁶ The first being her most popular and well-known novel, *The Handmaid's Tale*.

¹⁷ In contrast, Atwood asserts that "science fiction" is more predicated upon the imaginative configurations of the world that incorporate elements of fantasy, using *War of the Worlds* by H. G. Wells as her prototype. Science fiction, she argues, is a genre that draws upon impossibilities—or at least improbabilities—to present an exaggerated perspective. For Atwood, this type of fiction comes off as less serious, as its tangible relationship to the model of development of human civilization is tenuous at best. Understandably, she has received quite a bit of well-deserved negative critical attention over this dichotomy. Such is the general problem, in fact, of many of Atwood's views regarding the purpose and nature of fiction; ironically, her critical essays take a tone of the very kind of totalizing reformulation of information that so often her fiction critiques.

intent of the trilogy indicts the destructive capabilities of human actions in the present day, where corporate interests delay the advancement of environmental responsibility and take it upon themselves to reinvent and reorganize society in their favor through marketing techniques and the obfuscation of systems of production. The result is a vision of the world under the continuing processes of a global distribution of “American” production and consumption in a world that seems hell-bent on destroying itself and everything in it.

The novels depict two distinct apocalyptic reorganizations: firstly, the sense of apocalypse as cultural and historical change through the transition into corporatocracy and secondly, apocalypse as cataclysmic ending through the near-extinction of the human race. Through the juxtaposition of these two conceptions of apocalypse—apocalypse as historical change and apocalypse as annihilation—Atwood examines what it means to live in a postmodern world that strays from order into chaos in the name of deregulated, unrestricted capitalism and struggles to break free from the oppressive order caused by such. As the trilogy develops, a narrative strategy of polyphony emerges, as the narration over each book opens the experience of the reader into multiple perspectives that intertwine and affect one another, often in complicating and contradictory ways. In the process, Atwood questions the ability of language and literacy through emphasizing the failure to establish a more equal ground upon which to build a better tomorrow.

Each novel within the *Maddaddam* trilogy has its own mostly self-contained narrative and a structure that corresponds to the narrative presented. As the novels progress, they open up in both a narrative sense and in the relationship of language to past, present, and future of Atwood’s imaginative world. The novels also increasingly delve into the ethical complications regarding resistance to the processes of capitalism and the forces that impose capitalist order on

the world. Overall, the trilogy presents a multitude of voices and perspectives from survivors of a bioengineered catastrophe and their relative positions to the resistance of the dominating structures of capitalist imperialism and the commodification techniques upon which that order depends.

Oryx and Crake (OC), the first novel of the series, opens on Jimmy, who has taken on the name of Snowman after the catastrophe. The structure of the novel revolves around alternating clusters of chapters that tell the story of Snowman's journey in the post-apocalyptic aftermath of destruction. The present storyline focuses on Snowman's attempts to replenish supplies and later to assist the Crakers, a breed of bio-engineered human replacements spliced together by the genetic codes and traits of many surviving and extinct animal species, by moving them to a safer location where they are less prone to attack from the encroachment of other surviving humans. Within these present-timeline chapters, Atwood includes Jimmy's reflections on his life before the catastrophic apocalypse that wipes out the majority of humanity, wherein we meet many of the characters most important to the remainder of the trilogy. Glenn, also known as Crake, is the most prominent of these figures, as his work with the pharmaceutical corporation HelthWyzer leads to the near-absolute destruction of human existence through the incorporation of a deadly virus into a pill called Blyss-Pluss, which is marketed as a sexual performance enhancer. Jimmy's perception of Glenn is initially one of admiration, as Glenn guides the young Jimmy through the warped corporate structure of Atwood's imaginative reorganization of human society. As the novel progresses, so does Jimmy's attitude toward Glenn, and eventually Jimmy regards Glenn as monstrous because of the unleashing of the BlyssPluss virus into the world.

The Year of the Flood (YF) provides a little more perspective than does *OC*. The novel revolves around not one but two primary characters, both members of a radical environment-

based religious group that call themselves the God's Gardeners, who have nearly separated themselves entirely from capitalist society and subtly work against its mechanisms. The sections of this novel alternate between Toby, a middle-aged woman who rises through the ranks of the God's Gardeners even though she lacks faith in the religion itself, and Ren, a former girlfriend of Jimmy's whose arrival and departure within the God's Gardeners group depends on her own mother's willingness to participate in the world outside of the Compounds; throughout the novels this Compound life represents the experience of first-world living in a world already experiencing the decay of environmental and social order amidst the radically uneven development of capitalism and the modes of production and separation that obscure such destructive effects. Furthermore, each section begins with a sermon from Adam One, the leader of the God's Gardeners, followed by a hymn that focuses on a particular environmental saint from the natural sciences. Such a framing emphasizes the ethical balance that the world seems to be lacking; the fact that these saints are recognizable through our own world's scientific history points toward the dubious relationship between participation in our own capitalist existence and the destruction by degrees occurring in the natural world under American leadership.

Maddaddam (MA) continues the story of the group, focusing primarily on the characters of Toby and Zeb, another member of the God's Gardeners group who skirts the more pious rules of the group and represents one of the more aggressive participants in the resistance to the capitalist movement. Again, an alternating structure forms the basis of the novel. The sections of the novel that focus on Zeb open with Toby preparing to tell a story about him to the Crakers, who at this point have developed a symbiotic relationship with the remaining humans from the God's Gardeners group. Zeb's backstory also reveals his relationship with Adam as they grow up together as brothers. The stories Toby tells the Crakers are mythologized versions of these stories

of Zeb's personal history, and thus are often metaphorical in their handling of more sensitive events. Also integral to the novel is the development of Blackbeard, one of the Craker children, as he learns to read and write and ultimately takes over the story-telling duties for the Crakers in the final pages of the novel.

Taken together, these novels present an interrogation of the dominant global approach taken up by American capitalism, while at the same time investigating the role of language and narrative in the development of our conceptions of history itself. Language ultimately connects the past to the present to the future, often offering us rationalizations for complicity in capitalist order while obscuring the less attractive details of participation in such order. Such then is the ethical conundrum of the trilogy as a whole: how do we break away from the simpler narratives, such as those told to the Crakers to shield them from the realities of the remnants of the human world, into the more complicated narratives that challenge our stations in life and propel us forward toward a more unified and comprehensive view of the consequences of such living? Atwood produces little in the way of such answers, but the trilogy presents several points of inquiry regarding ethical relativism and the responsibilities of humankind in the face of impending doom caused by a corporate order that seeks profit and domination on a global scale to the detriment of everything else.

Underlying all of this is an examination of the relationship of the United States to other global entities, and the narrative strategy presented here would seem to suggest that the largely unilateral approach to global politics through American domination is in dire need of challenge to preserve what possibilities remain for future human civilization. Here we may turn to Brian Edwards's *After the American Century: The Ends of U.S. Culture in the Middle East*. Edwards argues that the ways that American cultural products are taken up by other cultures and

reappropriated undermine the dominant intent of the American culture industry in the digital age: “the cultural product—and sometimes more importantly the form that it takes—detaches from the source culture from which it comes. In this way, that which might have an American origin ceases to be American; rather, its national origin is left behind as a trace, and as *fragment* it is propelled into the world” (12-3). As such, global models that emphasize production as a marker of national dominance fail to account for the various ways in which such products are consumed: “American studies as a disciplinary formation is therefore associated with the American century—and therefore with the analog age—because of the logics by which it has been understood and interpreted the products of culture in terms of national origin and has missed their potential to circulate as fragments” (15). Although Atwood’s vision of American dominance in global cultural development is evident in *OC*’s intense focus on corporate development, the later two novels challenge the hegemony of *OC*’s Compound world, adding diversity to the narration and to the ways in which culture is experienced, much in the same way that Edwards describes the uncontrollable evolution of American cultural products once they enter the international scene and are rebranded, often with anti-American political purpose. For instance, with Jimmy as the singular voice of *OC*, when we encounter scenes through other perspectives in later novels, such as when he reads Ren’s diary without her permission, we are forced into questioning the perspectives and motives previously presented to us. Though still foregrounding an American perspective through Jimmy’s voice in *OC*, by expanding the narrative in *YF* and *MA* through the incorporation of multiple and conflicting perspectives, Atwood maps a possible future through polyphony and posthumanism while also warning us of the dangers of taking for granted the information presented to us through powerful entities in the present day that seek to control the larger narratives that prohibit radical or productive change.

At the same time, we are reminded that it is within our power to reframe our conceptions of cultural consumption: the narratives that American media attempts to dominate are subject to rebranding that reflects that hypocrisy of American political messages on the global stage.¹⁸

The narrative strategy that Atwood employs in *OC*—and indeed expands upon in the rest of the trilogy—is one devoted to developing a system of relationships that challenge and subvert established positions. This system of positioning is characterized by subordination, a concept Atwood deals with in many of her novels, and the introduction to the character of Jimmy/Snowman at the beginning of *OC* illustrates the fragmentation of perspective that the trilogy as a whole examines in its most basic structure. Overlapping perspectives in subsequent novels regarding the same event or person complicate what we know—or what we think we know—about the world Atwood creates, causing us as readers to constantly reassess and reevaluate our own preconceptions and the ways such views and positions are formed and maintained. The effect of this is a constantly shifting sense of reality, one that the reader must work through to provide cohesion to the fragmented personas and perspectives that fill the void in the wake of humanity’s near disappearance.

OC seems quite simple on the surface: the present, post-apocalyptic timeline is told through the thinly veiled perspective of Snowman, a perspective that degrades as the novel progresses, while the flashbacks through which we see the world before the destruction of human society focus on Jimmy’s development and ultimately his designation as the hand-picked privileged survivor of said destruction. Through Jimmy’s backstory, however, we see his

¹⁸ For example, Adam One’s reappropriation of evangelicalism with the God’s Gardeners criticizes evangelical movements that deny climate change or environmental responsibility while simultaneously offering a model of its usage toward a more ethical treatment of life itself.

constant marginalization within his privileged world, a key feature of his concept of self and source of the fragmentation that defines his postapocalyptic identity.

When *OC* opens, we are presented with “Snowman,” and as readers, we do not yet know of “Jimmy,” the perspective through which we receive the novel’s narrative form. Interesting here is the duality at play: Jimmy has, from the beginning of the narrative, subjected himself to a (useless and extinct) persona he has created, allowing his more cohesive Jimmy-self to fade into the background behind the façade of the Snowman-image. The explanation for his self-division is presented to us rather late in the novel, as Jimmy recounts his first face-to-face meeting with the Crakers:

He no longer wanted to be Jimmy, or even Jim, and especially not Thickney¹⁹: his incarnation as Thickney had not worked out so well. He needed to forget the past – the distant past, the immediate past, the past in any form. He needed to exist only in the present, without guilt, without expectation. As the Crakers did. Perhaps a different name would do that for him. (406-7)

This willing subjugation to an alternate identity is built upon several internal contradictions. As both snow and presumably mankind have been erased from existence by the time of the novel’s opening, Jimmy’s insistence on adhering to the Snowman persona reveals his necessity to subordinate himself to more dominant figures. However, as no such figures exist in this post-apocalyptic world (or so he thinks at the novel’s opening), he must recreate himself in an absurdist figure behind which he hopes to shield himself from the trauma of living in the wasteland, a trauma that strangely resembles the marginalization he experiences within his flashbacks.

¹⁹ Thickney is Jimmy’s name in *Extinctathon*; Glenn assigns this name to Jimmy “after a defunct Australian double-jointed bird that used to hang around in cemeteries, and—Jimmy suspected—because Crake liked the sound of it as applied to Jimmy” (93). The assignment of this name to Jimmy serves as an act of domination, much like Glenn’s approach to everything.

Jimmy experiences several such marginalizations throughout the novel. In his early childhood, among the Compounds owned and operated by the pharmaceutical corporations that dominate the organization of the world, Jimmy's relative mediocrity amongst a society of geniuses leaves him socially undesirable. As a result, Jimmy resorts to erratic behavior, often acting out in the classroom and the cafeteria to superficially gain some level of popularity: "it was one of his weaknesses, to care what other people thought of him" (83). He is early on labeled as a "words-person" in contrast to the "numbers-people" that dominate the landscape of the Compound world, a label which causes him both personal and professional dissatisfaction. This orientation alienates him from having a connection with either of his parents, makes him something of an outcast at school, and leaves him with a less than ideal position at the Martha Graham Academy, the liberal arts institution that pales in comparison to the more math and science-oriented Watson-Crick Academy, where his autistic boyhood friend Glenn finds himself among the best minds in the world. As such, much of Jimmy's educational experiences are lackluster, and he takes to seeking out like forms of outdated media, such as the DVDs where he learns of Alex the Parrot and the CD-ROM version of the *Encyclopedia Britannica* through which he learns of the Petchenegs that help him for once defeat Glenn in Blood and Roses, one of the sadistic historically-based games they play for fun.

But Jimmy's most substantial early identity is constructed through his failures to become anything more than a marginalized concern in his parents' lives. Jimmy's mother Sharon, who suffers from at the very least a crippling depression, is depicted through his early memories "sitting at the kitchen table, still in her bathrobe when he came home from school for his lunch. She would have a cup of coffee in front of her, untouched; she would be looking out the window and smoking . . . As a rule there would be no lunch ready for him and he would have to make it

himself, his mother's only participation being to issue directions in a flat voice" (35). Sometimes she would be "crying, with her head down on her arms. She would shake all over, gasp for breath, choking and sobbing" (37). It becomes apparent over the course of the novel that her despair stems from her participation in the mechanisms that continue to degrade the conditions of the deteriorating world, and eventually she leaves the Compound—and Jimmy's family—to carry out subversive acts of protest and violence. As her depression worsens over the early chapters, her interactions with Jimmy alienate him more and more until he sees the relationship ultimately as one of conflict:

He loved her so much when he made her unhappy, or else when she made him unhappy: at these moments he scarcely knew which was which. He would pat her, standing well back as with strange dogs, stretching out his hand, saying "I'm sorry, I'm sorry." And he was sorry, but there was more to it: he was also gloating, congratulating himself, because he'd managed to create such an effect. (37-8)

The sense of power he feels in such situations is dependent upon being able to have affect upon his mother instead of finding agency independently. As such, Jimmy's relationship with perhaps the most important figure of his early life—his mother—is dependent upon an organization of subversive behaviors that necessitate a subjugated role; this early formation of identity becomes the construct through which he must see himself to have any sense of self at all.

Jimmy's father is little different in this regard, though Jimmy tries to stay mostly out of his way: "he can recall his father only in details: the Adam's apple going up and down when he swallowed, the ears backlit against the kitchen window, the left hand lying on the table, cut off by the shirt cuff. His father is a sort of pastiche. Maybe Jimmy could never get far enough away from him to see all the parts at once" (56). Despite this description, the distance between them is evident enough that Jimmy easily imagines that through his father's perspective, "he must have seemed dull normal: maybe that was why his father stopped telling him he could do much better

if he'd only try, and switched to doling out secretly disappointed praise, as if Jimmy had a brain injury" (57). But Jimmy's disappointment in his father's—and indeed in society's—eyes arises mostly out of his identification as a “words-person” ill-suited for the demands of the corporatocratic world of research and development. Once Sharon leaves and Jimmy's father takes up a relationship with Ramona, his assistant, father and son are further separated from one another: “The two hormone-sodden love bunnies might have had the decency to do it in the garage, instead of rubbing Jimmy's nose in it all the time. They made him feel invisible. Not that he wanted anything else” (75). The desire for invisibility, however, seems here to be more than just the embarrassment of Jimmy's acknowledgement that his father is having sex; Jimmy seems instead to revel in solitude, as interpersonal communications themselves serve as a source of early emotional trauma, which he replicates throughout his own personal and sexual relationships later in life.

The departure from the narrative of Jimmy's mother makes way for the introduction of Crake—whose given name is Glenn—and signifies the shift for Jimmy away from a family-oriented role as a son to that of a friend. But much like Jimmy's relationship with his parents, where he is often an afterthought, Glenn always seems to overshadow Jimmy. He is taller, smarter, and generally able to get along better even with Jimmy's own mother. Jimmy is thus thrust into a role as a secondary character even within his own narrative, a strategy Atwood also later employs with Toby to some degree in *YF*. In contrast to Glenn, Jimmy portrays himself as dumb, awkward, and generally inferior, although Glenn recognizes and appreciates Jimmy's capacity for empathy, an emotional range Glenn lacks access to. It is this relationship between the overly-logical, STEM-oriented, sociopathic Glenn and the humane, “words-person”,

empathetic Jimmy that forms the larger geopolitical allegory between the United States and Canada that Atwood focuses upon in her "Letter to America."²⁰

Although the strategy of establishing geopolitical relationships fades from the trilogy after *OC*, the expansion of narration through secondary positioning continues in both *YF* and *MA* through the incorporation of various narratives from the God's Gardeners. In Toby's recollections of her childhood, Atwood presents the onset of the earlier of the two apocalypses present within the series. In contrast to Jimmy's relatively privileged upbringing as a child of a Compound scientist, Toby's youth is filled with economic and familial hardship. Her father, an air-conditioning salesman, represents the plight of the middle class in the midst of the corporate reorganization of material property and wealth. When a developer for the CorpSeCorps—the private security force that enforces the will of corporate entities—seeks out his land, he refuses to sell: "He thought the world was still the way it had been fifty years before, thinks Toby. He shouldn't have been so stubborn. Already, back then, the CorpSeCorps were consolidating their power" and "sending their tentacles everywhere" after "the local police forces collapsed for lack of funding" (25). The power of the CorpSeCorps, unrestricted by a rival (and public) security force in the police, is aided by the outlawing of all personal firearms "in the interests of public security, reserving the newly invented sprayguns for themselves, and suddenly people were weaponless" (24). With no avenues for people to cause problems, the population is kept in line through martial law, with the corporate security forces controlling the rules and seizing through power whatever they can, further enriching the corporate elites and draining the potential for revolution from the society's poorer subjects.

²⁰ See the following section.

Toby's mother, an owner of a local health-club franchise, comes down with a disease that greatly resembles cancer: "she became weak and confused and lost weight rapidly: it was as if her body had turned against itself. No doctor could give her a diagnosis" (25). Unfortunately, "because the condition had no name, her parents' modest health insurance plan refused to cover the costs" (25-6), leaving the family with nothing. After Toby's mother dies, Toby's father commits suicide in the garage with an illegal rifle, causing Toby to have to clean the mess and abandon the home in fear of the CorpSeCorps. Her ejection from the middle class with the loss of her parents to her mother's unexpected disease invites an interrogation of the poor structure of the health care system in the United States, where terminal disease itself leaves many survivors in financial ruin, much like what we see in Toby's early story.

Toby's subsequent narrative focuses on her tutelage under the supervision of Pilar, also known as Eve Six, in the God's Gardeners group, where she learns herbology and how to speak with bees; Ren meanwhile competes for attention in relation to her best friend Amanda while she and her mother live with Zeb, a wild and boisterous member of the Gardeners who aligns more with his own ethical principles than those of the larger group. We learn additionally that Ren's story is intimately connected to Jimmy's, even though she plays a relatively minor role in his. Similarly, Zeb's story in *MA* often places him in a secondary position in relation to his presumed half-brother Adam, who eventually takes the title of Adam One as founder of the God's Gardeners. Atwood further problematizes the relationship of the centrality of narrative voice in the last section of the novel, which is narrated by Blackbeard, the Craker boy who throughout the novel learns literacy on his path to becoming the central voice of Craker mythology.

This incorporation of what are initially marginalized perspectives in *OC* to a greater and greater degree in subsequent novels opens the possibility of reading the trilogy as a project in polyphony, which Bakhtin discusses at length in his discussion of the novels of Dostoevsky:

The position from which a story is told, a portrayal built, or information provided must be oriented in a new way to this world—a world of autonomous subjects, not objects. *Skaz*, representational, and informational discourses must develop some new attitude toward their object.

Thus, all the elements of novelistic structure in Dostoevsky are profoundly original; all are determined by that new artistic task that only he could pose and solve with the requisite scope and depth: the task of constructing a polyphonic world and destroying the established forms of the fundamentally *monologic* (homophonic) European novel. (Bakhtin 7-8)

While Atwood's trilogy may fall somewhat short of the degree of success Bakhtin finds in Dostoevsky's work, the narrative structure of each subsequent novel always looks outward to previously marginalized perspectives to remind us of the possibility of narrative difference and expansion that asks us to look beyond the increasingly monologic American effect on global organization through the domination of alternate geopolitical entities and interests. Although the geopolitical allegory somewhat fades from these later novels, this expansive reorganization at every level of the trilogy opens instead an exploration of the concept of resistance to power structures and an increasing focus on the necessity and difficulties of posthuman thinking, as the trilogy itself leads us ultimately into a literally posthuman voice in its final pages.

B. The Letter to America

On March 27, 2003, shortly before the publication of *OC*, *The Nation* published Atwood's "Letter to America," in which she expresses concern over the direction of the United States at the beginning of the twenty-first century. In her letter, she addresses the long-standing relationship between Canada and the United States:

We've always been close, you and us. History, that old entangler, has twisted us together since the early seventeenth century. Some of us used to be you; some of us want to be you; some of you want to be us. You are not only our neighbors: In many cases—mine, for instance—you are also our blood relations, our colleagues and our personal friends. But although we've had a ringside seat, we've never understood you completely, up here north of the 49th parallel. (“Letter”)

The statement captures the sense of international cooperation and cultural exchange one might expect from the longest friendly border in the world, but it also contains a sense of alienation and the perception that Canada has been relegated to a second-position status in relation to the United States. In her book *Survival: A Thematic Guide to Canadian Literature*, she makes a more explicit connection regarding the two nations when discussing Ray Smith's “Cape Breton is the Thought-Controlled Centre of Canada” and David Godfrey's “The Hard-Headed Collector”: “They are stories about failure and victimization; but they are naming real causes of victimization. . . . [T]hey include political realities—the United States as an imperial master—among the causes of victimization that can be explored” (241). Atwood herself takes up the torch of exploring the nature of this international neighborhood and Canadian victimization (which she also notes is one of the prime characteristics of Canadian fiction in general) in much of her own fiction. *OC* particularly focuses on America's disregard for environmental safety and regulations; its interference in the private lives and personal freedoms of the individuals caught in its grasp; the deletion of the liberal arts as a viable professional and intellectual endeavor in favor of the more profitable scientific research used for corporate commodification and exploitation; and extremism in global affairs, which breeds counter-extremisms that strain the tenuous balance of a global conception of peace built on a fragile framework of uneven development. While the relationship between the United States and Canada is certainly one that has held special privilege, the growing tensions between them indicate a significant rupture.

The ruptures between the United States and other nations are even more intense, as anti-American sentiments were already globally deeply-seated while Atwood was writing *OC*. In an interview with *Bold Type* for the Random House release of her novel in America, she discusses how the escalation of terrorism within the United States in the early years of the twenty-first century temporarily halted progress on the novel and put its completion in jeopardy: “I didn't change the plot. I was too far along for that. But I almost abandoned the book. Real life was getting creepily too close to my inventions—not so much the Twin Towers as the anthrax scare. That turned out to be limited in extent, but only because of the limitations of the agent used” (“Author Q&A”). The plot of *OC* does in ways come eerily close to the anthrax incident Atwood mentions, and combined with American reactions to the World Trade Center attacks, the relationship of Atwood's novel to the unfolding historical realities of the early twenty-first century becomes perhaps even more pressing than her initial concerns might have been. As the World Trade Center attacks in particular were carried out against what was at the time of their construction the world's tallest structure, unsurprisingly one of the foremost American symbols of capitalistic enterprise, the fallout in the political realm brought with it a shift in the creation of American policy and American social space as well.

Although Atwood notes the minimal impact of 9/11 and its aftermath on the plot of *OC*, the novel does contain references to the World Trade Center attacks. For instance, in discussing the global outbreak of riots over the exploitation of people and nature by the Happicuppa corporation, Glenn makes reference to the destruction and chaos, saying “There hasn't been anything like it since the first decade of the century. Crake said it was history in the making” (211). Here the reference to the first decade of the century is the first decade of our century, a subtle but brief reference to the chaos and tumult surrounding the history that was unfolding

during the course of the production of this novel. This is reinforced by the earlier revelation that “It was amazing how much dust got stirred up in the course of such events” (210), calling to mind the numerous chilling images of a dust-covered Manhattan that consumed people and property alike. Later, as Snowman travels through a formerly residential area on his journey, he notes that “The buildings that didn’t burn or explode are still standing” (260). Much like this last image, interest is drawn toward the lack of presence that the WTC attacks have in the novel. As one of the most publicized and written about events of the beginning of the twenty-first century (and perhaps especially just two years afterward, at the time of *OC*’s release), Atwood’s restraint in reconceptualizing the novel serves instead to weave the event into the historical backdrop of a civilization where this kind of catastrophe is simply one of many, and her reluctance to transform the trilogy in later volumes to refocus energy on 9/11 would seem to underscore this particular point. What is important about 9/11 in the novels is what is important about 9/11 in our own world, namely the aftermath of the reactionary shift in American global policy and a doubling down on the capitalistic structures and practices that such terroristic acts assault in the first place.

Returning to Atwood’s “Letter”, she critiques the United States on four distinct fronts: the loss of rights through the “gutting [of] the Constitution”, the soaring national debt rates, the shift in American economics away from production of goods toward the production of product networks, and the post-9/11 invasion of Iraq. This last item on the list serves as the frame for the other three, as Atwood writes: “By the time you read this, Baghdad may or may not be a pancake, and many more sheep entrails²¹ will have been examined. Let’s talk, then, not about what you’re doing to other people but about what you’re doing to yourselves” (“Letter”). This

²¹Atwood makes two earlier references in her letter to the divination practices of haruspicy, linking such superstitious rituals to the examination of data cultered from an investigation of America’s own people and procedures through corporate and governmental entities. The implication here is that American culture, and perhaps even the American people themselves, are sacrificed in the aims of capital and political gain.

attention toward reflection is mirrored throughout the trilogy. Aside from the structural design of flashbacks through which we receive most of the action, Atwood investigates the self-destructive nature of American capitalism and its accompanying exceptionalism taken to extremes.

The letter continues, as Atwood attempts to address the invasion of privacy that accompanied the aftermath of 9/11 through surveillance and detention techniques legalized via the passage of the PATRIOT Act:

Already your home can be entered without your knowledge or permission, you can be snatched away and incarcerated without cause, your mail can be spied on, your private records searched. Why isn't this a recipe for widespread business theft, political intimidation and fraud? I know you've been told that all this is for your own safety and protection, but think about it for a minute. Anyway, when did you get so scared? You didn't use to be so easily frightened.

The most obvious allusion would be to the USA PATRIOT Act, whose full title (“Uniting and Strengthening America by Providing Appropriate Tools Required to Intercept and Obstruct Terrorism”) is just as absurd as the abbreviation that misleadingly seeks to merge the ideas of conformity and unity. Introduced “[t]o deter and punish terrorist acts in the United States and around the world, to enhance law enforcement investigatory tools, and for other purposes” (2), the paranoia Atwood mentions in her “Letter” is inherent in the confusion of boundaries that the description of the Act (as well as its implementations) reveals. Of course, the United States attempting to police the global political scene is nothing new, but the means approved by the Patriot Act raise the stakes considerably and have consequences that are disturbing precisely because of their focus inward. In *OC*, the CorpSeCorps officers, her version of a future privatized security force modeled on the proliferation of such privatized militias, play out a worst-case scenario of a future where such intrusions into personal spaces is not only accepted but commonplace. The CorpSeCorps routinely serve as the arm of enforcement in creating the corporatocracy that fills the flashback scenes for the entire trilogy.

The treatment of Jimmy's mother (and her eventual public execution) demonstrates the ways in which such unrestricted access to the private minutiae can send an individual over the edge, breeding exactly the type of extremism such regulations seek to abolish in the first place. As she prepares to leave the compound for good and go on the run, she takes the time first to leave "another note. Not a note – a wordless message. She'd trashed Jimmy's father's home computer, and not only the contents: she'd taken the hammer to it" (*OC* 70). That she employs such destructive tactics to the home computer illustrates the scope of the investigative power of the CorpSeCorps in their "protective" schemes of corporate information through the blurring of the boundary between the personal and the professional. Even when Glenn sets up his Paradise, the haven of the scientific community wherein he engineers the Crakers, a species designed to replace humans on Earth after the destruction of our species, and designs the BlyssPluss pill that virtually wipes out humanity, the threat of interference from such surveillance-based intrusions stands foremost in Paradise's construction: "even the Corpsmen were not allowed inside. Paradise had been his concept, and he'd made a condition when he'd agreed to actualize it: he didn't want a lot of heavy-handed ignoramuses poking into things they couldn't understand" (350). The ability to shield himself from the eyes of corporate authority provides Glenn with the opportunity to react against the corporate structures responsible for his father's death; his successful use of corporate networks and facilities to carry out his plan points toward the destructive potential inherent within capitalist production, essentially calling into question the high stakes in American capitalist beliefs.

In her "Letter," Atwood also addresses the stakes of such tactics in relation to the image of America as a land of freedom and the hypocrisy that such misleading pieces of legislation and the abuse of the political landscape may cause:

Is the world going to consist of a few megarich King Midases, with the rest being serfs, both inside and outside your country? Will the biggest business sector in the United States be the prison system? Let's hope not. If you proceed much further down the slippery slope, people around the world will stop admiring the good things about you. They'll decide that your city upon the hill is a slum and your democracy is a sham, and therefore you have no business trying to impose your sullied vision on them. They'll think you've abandoned the rule of law. They'll think you've fouled your own nest.

Here Atwood addresses the Utopian mirage of American society. By invoking Reagan's famous and frequent political appropriation of John Winthrop's "city on a hill" image, she emphasizes the hypocrisy of Utopian optics in American politics while that supposed Utopian space perpetrates vast offenses against the traditionally American ideals of "freedom" and "individuality" that the United States supposedly embodies. In doing so, she presents the American Utopian vision with its anti-Utopian counterpart, essentially providing a warning against a corporatocracy that assimilates the imagery and language of Utopian schemes into its mythical foundations, though the actions taken in American pursuits are situated more upon the principles of wealth inequality and systemic oppression than the democratic values often hailed in political speeches.

Do not such political speeches illustrate the Utopian impulses upon which the vision of America has been carefully crafted, through which the idea of capitalism as the end of history has perhaps supplanted the Marxist narrative of social progression toward socialist goals? Atwood's letter certainly focuses our attention on these contradictions of the American political landscape not only after 9/11 but also in the pushing of specifically capitalist principles both domestically and abroad. The reactions against these global domination strategies—and the retributive reactions against these reactions—provide the necessary construct in her "Letter" to present a critique of the critique, a space for the negation tactics of American rhetorics of patriotism to themselves be negated via an examination of such contradictions. Similarly, in *OC*,

she imagines a hyper-capitalist, dystopian world where such hypocrisies eventually lead to ultimate destruction through the fulfillment of Glenn's vision of humanity's near-extinction.

The anthropocentric focus on extinction has an additional purpose as well—one that takes a more central focus as the trilogy continues—as it also foregrounds the mass extinctions occurring throughout what scientists have started calling the sixth mass extinction event of the planet, this one caused by human activity related to global capitalism and the reliance of the world on the burning of fossil fuels and the deregulation of the environmental responsibilities of corporate pursuits. As the development of the later novels of the trilogy revolve more and more around the interaction of humans and the non-human world, a brief diversion into a discussion of the emerging field of posthumanism and its relation to the novels is paramount to understanding Atwood's design in addressing the consequences of complicity in a corporate order that seeks to dominate the globe.

C. Posthumanism in the *Maddaddam* Trilogy

Undoubtedly, the field of posthumanism has grown very substantially in the last decade. In the introduction to his 2009 book *What Is Posthumanism?*, Cary Wolfe discusses the relatively small size of the field of posthumanism, using a simple Google search as a cursory metric: “As I write (in summer of 2008), if you Google ‘humanism’ you’ll be rewarded with 3,840,000 hits: ‘posthumanism’ yields a mere 60,200”²² (xi). Additionally, there seems to be little agreement overall about what exactly is meant by the term *posthumanism* itself. As far back as 1977, Ihab Hassan argued that *posthumanism* refers to that which comes after the periodic

²² At the time of this writing, nearing the end of 2018, little more than a decade later, “humanism” nets 47,500,000 Google returns (an expansion of less than 12.5 times Wolfe’s search results), and “posthumanism” returns 2,430,000 results (an expansion of over 40 times Wolfe’s returns). Although the metric of using a Google search to measure such references is inherently flawed, the quick gains that posthumanism seems to have made is nonetheless apparently quite substantial.

philosophical designation of humanism, describing it as “the matrix of contemporary performance” (831) in the face of “five hundred years of humanism [that] may be coming to an end, as humanism transforms itself” (843). Donna Haraway, one of the foremost voices in the field, approaches the subject more in terms of the intersectionality between the human and the non-human: “To hold in regard, to respond, to look back reciprocally, to notice, to pay attention, to have courteous regard for, to esteem: all of that is tied to polite greeting, to constituting the polis, where and when species meet. To knot companion and species together in encounter, in regard and respect, is to enter the world of becoming with, where who and what are is precisely what is at stake” (*When Species Meet* 19). Wolfe’s own views emerge as a synthesis of these perspectives:

[Posthumanism] forces us to rethink our taken-for-granted modes and affective states of *Homo sapiens* itself, by recontextualizing them in terms of the entire sensorium of other living beings and their own autopoietic ways of “bringing forth a world”—ways that are, since we ourselves are human *animals*, part of the evolutionary history and behavioral and psychological repertoire of the human itself. But it also insists that we attend to specificity of the human—its ways of being in the world, its ways of knowing, observing, and describing—by (paradoxically, for humanism) acknowledging that it is fundamentally a prosthetic creature that has coevolved with various forms of technicity and materiality, forms that are radically “not-human” and yet have nevertheless made the human what it is. (xxv)

Likewise, there are two types of posthumanism prominently on display in Atwood’s trilogy. The first concerns the manipulations of the natural order through the corporate-driven experimentations with genetic engineering, which mostly revolve around the creation of life intended for service toward human (and ultimately corporate) interests. The second deals with the aftermath of human destruction and the relationships between humans and non-human entities and the ethical conundrums that spring from antagonistic instead of cooperative approaches to the non-human world. These two posthuman philosophies, one built upon a dominion-based ideology and the other rooted in a collective and shared outlook, form the basis

of the ethical stances Atwood seeks to investigate regarding our interactions with the nonhuman world in the era of late capitalism and beyond. The tension caused by the differences in these philosophies to a large extent forms the basis of the second two novels.

Central to both these strategies is the concept of enmeshment, which only further complicates the terminologies already introduced herein. In “Ecology after Capitalism,” Timothy Morton succinctly describes his concept of the mesh as “the coexistence of life forms” (54), which he elsewhere argues is something of a totalizing, grand unifying theory in that it encompasses not only life forms themselves but also those things we consider to be non-living entities in an intricate and entangled web:

Once life ‘begins’ – and thinking this origin is practically impossible – everything else becomes linked with it. This is what most of us mean when we think ecologically: Everything is connected to everything else . . . This implication profoundly implies that there is no environment as such. Your DNA doesn’t stop expressing itself at the ends of your fingers. A beaver’s DNA doesn’t stop at the ends of its whiskers, but at the end of its dam. A spider’s DNA is expressed in its web. From the perspective of the life sciences, the environment is nothing but the phenotypical expression of DNA code. This includes oxygen (anaerobic bacterial excrement). And it includes iron ore (a byproduct of archaic metabolic processes). You drive and fly using crushed liquefied dinosaur bones. You are walking on top of hills and mountains of fossilized animal bits. Most of your house dust is your skin. The environment looks like not a very successful upgrade of the old-fashioned term nature. (“Thinking Ecology” 272)

Morton’s ultimate point is to abolish the way we think about nature as being something Other, something that we can identify with in those moments where we can see ourselves reflected within it; ultimately, he argues that we should learn instead to see everything as existing together and to appreciate those differences for the differences that they actually are. These differences, for Morton, are necessary and necessarily linked together by this concept of the mesh, in which each point “is both the centre and edge of a system of points, so there is no absolute centre or edge” (“Thinking Ecology” 270).

Much of the way this type of thinking is obscured by capitalist production has to do with the status of humans at the top of the food chain. Indeed, the sources of food and its consumption run throughout the background of Atwood's trilogy from its beginning. One of Jimmy's earliest memories in *OC* centers upon the burning of livestock that have been destroyed due to a disease that presumably has been intentionally inflicted by corporate sabotage. The burning of cows represents the death of an older form of food sourcing, and much of the developments in technology that emerge throughout the trilogy deal with the replacement of this livestock-based order of meat consumption with what might on the surface appear to be more ethical approaches to the production of meat for specifically human consumption but which instead subvert the "natural order" of evolutionary processes through genetic manipulation in the aims of corporate supremacy.

The question of food in the trilogy often comes back to a sense of interconnectedness, emphasized at the end of the trilogy when Blackbeard relays the information that the pigeons refuse to eat the Painballers after their deaths: "they will not eat those ones. They do not want those ones to be part of them" (370). The satire of the cliché "You are what you eat" is most prominently seen in the character of Zeb, who we learn through rumor "ate a bear once" (*YF* 109). We get a fuller version of the story in *MA*, wherein Zeb escapes a deadly helicopter crash and, starving, comes across a bear and eats it; ironically, this event occurs as a result of his association with Bearlift, a group whose mission is to provide food to the polar bears that have become endangered due to climate change and the breaking up of the ice at the polar caps. Bearlift itself is characterized as "a scam, or partly a scam" that revolves around the issue of adaptation: "I remember *adapt*' says Toby. 'It was another way of saying *tough luck*. To people you weren't going to help out'" (*MA* 59). The appearance of the mission to save the polar bears

becomes a further source of capitalist exploitation without the intention to change the underlying problems causing the endangerment of the polar bears in the first place, and potentially worsening matters by encouraging the southern migration of the polar bears and their hybridization with grizzlies. After killing and eating one of these such hybrid species, Zeb muses on his own connection with the bear: “Having eaten the heart, could he now speak the language of bears?” (*MA* 81). Ren seems to think so, as she describes “his big Russian-bear voice” (*YF* 64) and recalls that “Sometimes I dreamed about Zeb. He’d be wearing a bear suit, and the fur would unzip down the middle like a pyjama bag, and Zeb would step out” (214). This echoes the story told in *MA*, wherein he attacks a passing bicyclist, “making a growly noise, in his bear-fur coverings” (82). This repeated description of Zeb in ursine details, while humorous on its surface, opens the question of contemporary food sources and the manipulation of our sources of food, particularly meat, in contemporary capitalist society.

The Chickie-Nobs are a particularly interesting example of this. For instance, when Glenn provides Jimmy with a tour of Watson-Crick, the university dedicated to genetic engineering that Glenn attends, they come across the Chickie-Nob, described as “a large bulblike object that seemed to be covered with stippled whitish-yellow skin. Out of it came twenty thick fleshy tubes, and at the end of each tube another bulb was growing” (*OC* 237). Jimmy is initially horrified to learn that this is a modified chicken, developed strictly for its ability to grow meat that can be harvested at regular intervals, relating it to “an animal-protein tuber” (238). The woman who accompanies them on the tour explains that “they’d removed all the brain functions that had nothing to do with digestion, assimilation, and growth” (238). Furthermore, the woman points out: ““You get chicken breasts in two weeks – that’s a three-week improvement on the most efficient, low-light, high-density chicken farming operation so far devised. And the animal-

welfare freaks won't be able to say a word, because this thing feels no pain" (238). As such the Chickie-Nob illustrates the anti-Utopian ideals of postmodern food production: if the illusion of destruction is removed from the equation regarding human food resources, the consumption of meat becomes more palatable. The further removed people are from the sources of their food, the less people consider the ethical question.

Atwood's Chickie-Nob invention throws the development of this creature into ethical relation with current methods of meat production throughout the world. Contemporary chicken farms like Tyson Foods and JBS S.A. have come under fire from organizations seeking a more humane treatment of animals in their food processing facilities in recent years, as chickens and other animals are often housed in such numbers that their movement and participation in a natural environment become restricted to such a degree that their order of life seems to become diminished. In contrast, the elimination of the ability to process pain by the Chickie-Nob is hardly a point of ethical concern in the novel; in fact, this is one of the primary selling points. But such is also the anti-Utopian aspect of not just the Chickie-Nob but of the vast majority of the corporate developments to be found throughout the trilogy. Though the Chickie-Nobs may not experience pain, they are harvested alive. What has been removed from the ethical equation is not the unethical behavior itself but rather the barrier to its perception as unethical.

The undermining of this ethical principle is emphasized by Jimmy's reaction and behavior in *OC*. That Jimmy leaves this part of the Watson-Crick tour disgusted by the thought of eating the Chickie-Nob, his horror does not deter him later in life, during his relationship with Amanda Payne, when he justifies his purchase of a Bucket-o-Nubbins by rationalizing that "the stuff wasn't that bad if you could forget everything you knew about the provenance" (284). Such a rationalization demonstrates the point Atwood makes with this and other genetic manipulations

throughout the novel, namely that even when we know something negative about the sources of the products we consume, ethical considerations often fall to the wayside in light of marketing campaigns, appeals to taste, or competitive pricing schemes, so long as our minds can ignore the negative components to such methods of commodification and production. When we expand the discussion beyond the question of genetic manipulation, factory-farming methods such as those practiced by Tyson and JBS S.A. reveal that the meat-production industry obscures in similar ways the image of their production techniques. Capitalism degrades by degrees.

The pigoons are another particularly interesting example of genetic manipulation within the trilogy. Created by the team Jimmy's father worked with at OrganInc Farms, essentially, the pigoon has its start from the genetic basis of a pig but has human DNA incorporated into its code such that it grows extra organs, primarily hearts and livers, that can be harvested and transplanted into a human recipient, eliminating the need for transplant donors and reducing the risk of organ rejection: "Such a host animal could be reaped of its extra kidneys; then, rather than being destroyed, it could keep on living and grow more organs" (*OC* 26). Once more, these creatures are harvested—this time for organs—while still alive. Unsurprisingly, the OrganInc facility takes little time in the modification of its menu: "it was noticeable how often back bacon and ham sandwiches and pork pies turned up on the staff café menu" (27). But the consumption of the pigoon carries perhaps a different ethical function than that of the consumption of the Chickie-Nob, as mentioned above. As the Chickie-Nob has been developed specifically for the process of consumption, the consumption of the pigoon within the Compound is grounded in the "Pigoon Pie" as a by-product of the availability and ease with procuring them as a food source.

Further complicating matters is the incorporation of human DNA into the pigoon's genetic code, which leaves the consumption of the pigoon in a liminal space regarding

cannibalism. Again, young Jimmy serves as the introductory ethical voice, as “[h]e didn’t want to eat a pigoon, because he thought of the pigoons as creatures much like himself. Neither he nor they had a lot of say in what was going on” (27). Yet when he encounters them in the post-apocalyptic landscape, he is tempted by the thought of eating one of them: “[h]e can almost smell it, that bacon, frying in a pan, with an egg, to be served up with toast and a cup of coffee” (177). While it might seem natural that Jimmy would have such a reaction in the world of chaos after the fall of capitalism and the dearth of food production resources that such a fall creates, his imaginary impulse is not that of simply feasting on a pigoon but of rebuilding a semblance of the larger availability of mass-consumption food commodities in general. This imaginative fantasy skips over the process of killing and preparing the pigoon and jumps directly into consuming it as a finalized product (alongside other commodified food forms no longer available in the apocalyptic aftermath) like what was served to him in his youth at the OrganInc Compound.

Even the surviving members of the God’s Gardeners, who are mostly various shades of vegetarian or vegan, have similar fantasies in the subsequent novels. Toby fantasizes about killing and eating a pigoon while she is trapped in the AnooYoo spa, and the Maddaddamites discuss—and occasionally enjoy—the possibilities of pigoon bacon with full knowledge of and even a little debate over the ethical quandary of consuming an animal with human DNA. But Atwood’s trilogy pulls no punches here, as even the Maddaddamites eat the pigoons with a great deal of satisfaction until the later stages of *MA*. Even then, it takes a political willpower among the Maddaddamites—along with hours of debate—to go along with the scheme, and even then they only consent to the truce the pigoons offer because they see no other viable options to confront the Painballers, who by this point have become the new evil force of the trilogy after the fall of capitalism, limited in numbers though the remaining Painballers are.

Perhaps the most outright ethically dubious source of food to be found within the trilogy is the fast-food corporation SecretBurgers. Introduced through Toby's narrative in *YF*, SecretBurgers is built on a corporate strategy of actively obscuring the source of the meat found within the burger, as exemplified by their slogan, "SecretBurgers! Because everyone loves a secret!" (33). As such, the sources of the meat are often of the most dubious nature and inherently draw attention to the connections between meat-eating and cannibalism. Cannibalism through meat consumption is also represented here as a class struggle, as it is marketed to the lower-class pleeblands, assisted by the CorpSeCorps, who "also ran corpse disposals, harvesting organs for transplants, then running the gutted carcasses through the SecretBurgers grinders. So went the rumours. During the glory days of SecretBurgers, there were very few bodies found in vacant lots" (33). The love of secrets in the company slogan is a coded message, hinting but also obscuring the possibility that the "secret" of the meat source is perhaps even a loved one who has disappeared.

That SecretBurgers is so easily connected to cannibalism also makes it the perfect place for the introduction of Blanco into the trilogy. As Toby's first boss, he eventually becomes interested in her and forces her into a physically and sexually abusive relationship, preying on her vulnerability as an employee in a reality where jobs are scarce. This predatory relationship and its connection to the fast-food chain reveals what for Atwood is essentially an argument for viewing in terms of cannibalism the men in positions of power who take advantage of the women around them. Like the consumption of pigeons and the creation of the Chickie-Nob, sexual predation is viewed as an order of dominion wherein the relationship to the consumed—in this case the victims of such behaviors—is obscured by a process of dehumanization.

But even after Toby escapes Blanco's control with the help of the God's Gardeners, Blanco remains the primary source of antagonism through *YF*. He emerges again in the narrative, after having been released from Painball—an entertainment-based substitute for prison wherein prisoners set out to kill one another for their freedom—to find her among the Gardeners and seek his vengeance for embarrassing him in front of the SecretBurgers chain during her escape. He even manages to survive the apocalyptic event brought about by Glenn and is part of a group of escaped Painballers who harass the surviving Gardeners, assuming the narrative function of the antagonist in the absence of the capitalist structures of Atwood's anti-Utopian middle-world. His prior association with SecretBurgers establishes him as antagonistic to the posthuman sentiments Atwood conveys through the God's Gardeners, but it is his personal association with Toby that elevates him to villainous status and connects the remaining Painballers to their antagonistic role in *MA*.

D. Terrorism and Resistance

In contrast to the corporate-driven structures of food production in this world are the God's Gardeners themselves. Cleverly disguised as a fringe group of religious fanatics, the Gardeners are as much a force of resistance to the dominion-based ideologies of late capitalism as anything. The core principle of the Gardener ideology resides in the notion of human cooperation with the non-human life remaining in the world. To this end, the Gardeners celebrate a variety of holidays and saints that emphasize the works of responsible posthumanism within our contemporary world and acknowledge the vast swathes of the eradication of life in the human-caused sixth mass extinction event occurring all around us. One such notable Gardener holiday is Predator Day, which discusses directly the position of humans in the food chain. The

sermon from Adam One that marks the beginning of the “Predator Day” section of the novel directly addresses the concerns over the positioning of humans within a food chain free of capitalist interference:

Which is more blessed, to eat or to be eaten? To flee or to chase? To give or to receive? For these are at heart the same question. Such a question may soon cease to be theoretical: we do not know what Alpha Predators may lurk without.

Let us pray that if we must sacrifice our own protein so it may circulate among our fellow Species, we will recognize the sacred nature of the transaction. We would not be Human if we did not prefer to be the devourers rather than the devoured, but either is a blessing. Should your life be required of you, rest assured that it is required by Life. (*YF* 347)

Much of the Gardener ideology operates in this same way, reducing the effects of perceived separation between humans and what is seen as a naturalistic Other that has been brought on by centuries of discourse that seek to remove human existence from the “natural” world. But behind the sermons and the lessons designed “towards an Earth restored to balance” (275) lies a coordinated and concerted effort to dismantle the networks of capitalism that keep the populace at large from reconciling with a fuller interaction with the nonhuman world free of the trappings of consumerism.

Our first real introduction to the Gardener group comes through the character of Bernice, Jimmy’s roommate while in attendance at the Martha Graham Academy. But from Jimmy’s perspective, Bernice is marginalized through the extreme reactions she has to his complicity in the capitalist system and the materialism that accompanies it. The most memorable part of Jimmy’s narration regarding Bernice is when she burns his clothes in retaliation for his obsession with eating meat: “Bernice let him know how much she disapproved of his carnivorous ways by kidnapping his leather sandals and incinerating them on the lawn. When he protested that they hadn’t been real leather, she said they’d been posing at it, and as such deserved their fate” (221).

After she takes a similar destructive path with his underwear because of his sexual activity, he leverages her reactionism to lobby for a single room, effectively removing her from his narrative.

The Gardeners, however, often appear in the background of this first novel; the “bioform resistance” they practice, whereby they create organisms designed to destroy capitalist structures and networks of production and distribution like “time bombs” (*YF* 333), populate the news broadcasts that Jimmy and Glenn often watch together. It is even during one of these sessions that Jimmy witnesses his own mother’s execution alongside several protestors during the Happicuppa Riots. But whereas the Gardeners are marginalized in *OC*, the remainder of the trilogy focuses quite heavily on the group of Gardeners who survive Glenn’s plan, subsequently marginalizing Jimmy and his role within the larger, expanded frame of the narrative. The difference in the presentation of this group in these last two novels furthers the ethical questioning central to the trilogy and speculates on the role of resistance to capitalist structures and the relationship of this resistance to movements of organized terrorism.

Since the events of 9/11, America has been obsessed with the idea of terrorism. The threat of terrorism within the United States is one normally perceived to be a danger of the outside world, but Atwood’s trilogy turns this speculation inward, examining the relationship between terror and resistance. At what point does resistance against an unfair authoritarian order breach the line and move into the realm of terror? Domestically, the concept seems to be one which resists such labels, as attacks on American institutions and figures in the early twenty-first century are often given other labels with less stigma. The difference in treatment of those resisting the forces of global capitalism through violence domestically and abroad becomes a focal point for the last two novels of the trilogy, though its shaky foundation is presented largely in *OC*.

Much of the perspectival approach to capitalist resistance can be seen in the character of Jimmy's mother Sharon, who becomes increasingly disillusioned after the family's move into the HelthWyzer Compound. Jimmy's mother is displeased with the move: "the guards were ruder, they were suspicious of everyone, they liked to strip search people, women especially" (60). We also learn of a recent attack on the Compound, wherein a woman smuggled in a biological weapon and killed a guard by spraying him in the face, an act that results in his death. The woman is killed instantly, "spraygunned at once and neutralized in a vat of bleach" (60). The extreme divisiveness of the terrorist act and the subsequent lack of due process in her inhumane extermination highlight the extent to which these private security forces disregard oppositional forces and take extreme measures to eradicate dissent. The reasons behind the attack are never mentioned; as such Atwood insinuates that the reasons behind such oppositions are irrelevant to the Compounds. The wealthier Compound also keeps a stricter leash on its residents, as pairs of intelligence officers disguised as housekeepers make regular visits to every household in an attempt to quash potential subversion. The result is increased paranoia in Jimmy's mother, whose outsider status is constantly questioned, which eventually leads her to leave for a life of environmental activism, the very thing the Compound's security forces are—at least superficially—attempting to prevent.

When Jimmy's mother finally leaves the HelthWyzer Compound, she takes it upon herself to do her best to destroy Jimmy's father's computer (as well as her own). In an elaborate scheme, she fakes nerve pain in her tooth to be able to see a dentist outside the compound. The note she leaves behind for Jimmy attempts to explain her actions, but Jimmy's disinterested teenage mind only remembers fragments of the note: "Blah blah blah, suffered with conscience long enough, blah blah, no longer participate in a lifestyle that is not only meaningless in itself

but blah blah” (69). Though the general sentiment remains, the trauma Jimmy experiences at his mother’s departure blocks out the more socially significant portion of her goodbye. Instead, he focuses on the more personal sense of betrayal in her liberation of his pet rakunk, which she takes with her in order to set free. Here we have two opposing senses of self-centeredness: Jimmy’s indignation at her taking a living creature he has claimed ownership and dominion over—the intimate bond between them gets lost in this sudden abandonment—and his mother’s insistence that she knows what will be best for the animal.

The treatment of Jimmy’s mother (and her eventual public execution) demonstrates the ways in which such unrestricted access to the private minutiae can send an individual over the edge, breeding exactly the type of extremism such regulations seek to abolish in the first place. As she prepares to leave the compound for good and go on the run, she takes the time first to leave “another note. Not a note – a wordless message. She’d trashed Jimmy’s father’s home computer, and not only the contents: she’d taken the hammer to it” (*OC* 70). That she employs such destructive tactics to the home computer illustrates the scope of the investigative power of the Corpsmen in their “protective” schemes of corporate information through the blurring of the boundary between the personal and the professional.

However, when we encounter her again in *YF*, Sharon seems much less heroic. Although she has received the codename Hammerhead for her destruction of the computers with a hammer, and though she brings the group “genome codes” (*YF* 247), Toby looks down on her from the beginning: “In reality she hadn’t told them anything they didn’t already know—it was that old human-to-pig neocortex transplant material—but it would have been less than kind to say so” (248). This contrast between her presentation in *OC* and *YF* illustrates the limitations of thinking and acting outside of capitalist constructs once one has become embedded in its

ideology. Even though Sharon attempts to do great damage to a system that she sees as unethical and destructive, her efforts in the eyes of those who have lived mostly outside those constructs are miniscule in their relevance and impact. Like Jimmy, she is compromised by her previous complicity in the contributions to the development of destructive order.

Atwood interrogates this notion of complicity throughout the series. For instance, when we are first introduced to Amanda Payne in *OC*, her work as a conceptual artist involves what she calls Vulture Sculptures: “The idea was to take a truckload of large dead-animal parts to vacant fields or the parking lots of abandoned factories and arrange them in the shapes of words, wait until the vultures had descended and were tearing them apart, then photograph the whole scene from a helicopter” (287). This artistic endeavor, as we learn through Ren’s narrative in *YF*, has its roots in her days as a pleebat, one of the lower-class inhabitants of the non-Compound world. In the alley behind Scales and Tails—the adult entertainment club that serves as a site of resistance for the Maddaddamites—Amanda shows Ren the early form of this artwork: “She’d written her name in syrup on the slab, and a stream of ants was feeding on the letters, so that each letter had an edging of black ants” (*YF* 76). But the art itself is potentially compromised by the nature of its funding and its resources, as “Amanda always got the money to do her art capers” through the “rich circles” including “a deal with a top CorpSeCorps guy – he’d get her up in the helicopter, to take the videos” (*YF* 56). The two most prominent words used in Amanda’s art are “love” and “pain”, though both are manifestations of Amanda’s own personal history, the former being the project she takes on after breaking up with Jimmy and the latter being a version of her own name. Atwood refrains from passing direct judgment on Amanda’s art, but the potential seems blunted by her own personal preoccupation and consumption by the elitist circles that most deserve social criticism, indicating that whatever political potential her art may have

goes completely unnoticed by the very segment of society she presumably criticizes because of her inability to see beyond her own situation. Though Amanda gains personal notoriety through her work, the messaging itself remains ultimately impotent.

Failed resistances such as these make up much of the trilogy's background noise, where love and pain seem further connected through the televised executions during riots and political demonstrations, wherein more central characters witness the demise of those they have known personally. More terrifying, however, is the success of Glenn's Paradise Project, which results in the destruction of nearly all humankind. In *OC*, the central ethical question of the novel, and perhaps the series as a whole, is posed to Jimmy by Glenn during Jimmy's early days with Paradise: "“Would you kill someone you loved to spare them pain?”" (375). Jimmy, due to his affair with Oryx behind Glenn's back, misinterprets the question, as he is unable to see beyond the limits of his own circumstances. With the slight fear that Glenn knows of the affair, he sidesteps the answer, instead seeking to confuse the point. His first attempt to avoid the question is to draw a comparison to putting down a pet, which Glenn shrugs off and demands an actual answer. But Jimmy is unprepared for such strict black-and-white answers, so he seeks further context: "“What kind of love, what kind of pain?”" (375). In so doing, he forces Glenn into a corner, at which point Glenn drops the point altogether. Still, the question lingers throughout the background of not just *OC*, but the remainder of the novels as well.

The central question, in fact, does have a double edge of sorts, and Jimmy's response is appropriate within the context of the novel. We don't know exactly what Glenn means by this question, and even after the novel is finished, we have no clearer view of what this question means within its placement in the novel. About whom is Glenn speaking here? Possibly he means Oryx, as he does slit her throat after the deaths from the Blyss-Pluss pill begin. Her

participation in the distribution of the pill is perhaps the pain he seeks to spare her from, given what seems to be her more compassionate nature. But Glenn's affections for Oryx also seem superficial, as she appears to have been brought onto the project as much for Jimmy's sake as anything. Perhaps Glenn means himself, planting the seed in Jimmy's head that Jimmy's duty is to kill Glenn after his murder of Oryx.

But that reading requires an emotional investment that Glenn seems totally detached from, unless the pain he seeks to avoid is the aftermath of his own methods of destruction and the difficulties that are bound to result from the overthrow of the capitalist system. Perhaps Glenn most likely means Jimmy, and he is in the stages of devising a clearer role for Jimmy in the post-apocalyptic future, wondering if Jimmy is indeed up to the task of survival. After all, it is within this same conversation that Glenn tells Jimmy to take over with the Crakers, asserting that Jimmy is the better choice to deal directly with them than the other scientists—all of whom are scientists involved with the God's Gardeners—in the case of Glenn's absence: ““They wouldn't have the empathy to deal with the Paradise models, they wouldn't be any good at it, they'd get impatient. Even I couldn't do it. I couldn't begin to get onto their wavelength. But you're more of a generalist”” (376). Although this explanation seems to be quite self-deprecating for Glenn, he further explains that Jimmy has ““a great ability to sit around not doing much of anything. Just like them”” (376). It is because of this final explanation that the last of these suggestions would seem the most fitting: Glenn's plan is already in full motion, and the idea of Jimmy's ability to handle boredom and nothingness makes him most suited for post-apocalyptic survival, in Glenn's mind. Because Jimmy has no purpose in the STEM-driven world in which they live and prosper, he will have little trouble adjusting to the lack of purpose that comes with the wiping away of capitalist civilization in its current form. Nothing will remain of the constant

consumerism that drives the distractions of the world, and Jimmy's lack of production in the corporate-scientific order leaves him the most qualified to deal with the dull necessities of the inevitable ennui that Glenn imagines the post-apocalyptic world, one without any such distractions, contains. It is likely then that the empathy of Jimmy worries Glenn most; in asking this question about love, death, and pain, Glenn is subtly testing Jimmy's preparedness for the ultimate destruction that awaits human civilization. Jimmy's answer, a diversion into relativism, assures Glenn that he has made the correct choice—although Glenn may have already rationalized any response Jimmy could possibly give to confirm the superiority of his own plan.

Still, even the horror of Glenn's plan is, in a world void of empathy, at least rational. As discussed elsewhere in this chapter, the corporate order of the novel's world is the cause of a great many problems, leading the entire earth down a path of destruction through unsustainability, giving no thought whatsoever to the future, concentrated on the immediacy of the present world alone. The design of the Paradise Project itself reveals that what empathy Glenn has is fixated upon the post-human world, as he sees little evidence of humankind's ability to break out of its current destructive patterns. In a strange way, Glenn is attempting to save the post-human world from the ravages of human enterprise and its consequent destructive tendencies. But his judgment is totalizing, intended to envelop everyone except Jimmy.

Contrast this with the actions of Zeb in *MA*, as these two characters are the only agents in the trilogy to employ the virus contained in the Blyss-Pluss pill. Zeb's use of the pill is aimed not at humanity as a whole but at a very specific—and very personal—target: his supposed father. The Rev—as he is referred to throughout Zeb's backstory—is a preacher for The Church of PetrOleum, sermonizing that the current “Age of Oil” (112) is a blessing from the divine and a duty of the human race to burn more and more of it: “we didn't pray for forgiveness or even for

rain, though God knows we could have used some of each. We prayed for oil. Oh, and natural gas too—the Rev included that in his list of divine gifts for the chosen” (113). What is interesting in this portion of the narrative—for much of Zeb’s backstory leads up to his murder of the Rev by giving him the pills that would eventually become the destructive substance of Blyss-Pluss—lies in the method of Zeb’s framing. His action to kill the Rev is one that is more understandable, especially as the Rev’s character becomes more fleshed out through the revelation of Adam’s mother’s murder at the Rev’s hands and the fear of relentless pursuit that Zeb feels in his attempts to escape the Rev’s immense power and influence. The very personal nature of Zeb’s motivations provides his actions with a more sympathetic frame, even though his implementation of the pill has the potential for unforeseeable consequences that threaten all of human existence (luckily for Zeb, death ends with the Rev alone without further casualty).

Furthermore, Atwood goes to great length in *MA* to draw more tangible connections between Zeb and Glenn. Though they seem to recognize one another in the brief scene where the two are seen together in *YF*, Zeb’s backstory in *MA* illustrates the extent of their connection, imploring the reader to interrogate their relationship to one another. Zeb first encounters Glenn when he goes into hiding at the HelthWyzer West Compound where Glenn grows up. As Glenn’s parents pay him little attention, Zeb teaches him the computer coding skills that eventually allow Glenn’s plan for human annihilation to go undetected by the CorpSeCorps and HelthWyzer. That several of the flashback scenes in *OC* revolve around Glenn’s attempts to show Jimmy the teachings of Zeb only complicate matters more, as these attempts fall short of producing within Jimmy an adequate level of cognitive dissonance: Jimmy, squarely caught in the trappings of this advanced capitalist society, fails to see the importance of these revelations and continues, against

his own best interests, within the paradigms of a corporate order that continually devalues his existence.

Yet the differences between Zeb and Glenn could hardly be more pronounced. We sympathize with Zeb as he recalls his past; Glenn has no such connected voice in any of the novels, and the distance caused by the lack of his own narrative perspective mirrors the void he sees between humanity and a sustainable future through the corporate order of the world. Without such an empathizing perspective, we are left to view Glenn's actions through the lens of terrorism: his use of the virus is as totalizing as his abuse of power within the Paradise Project. Whereas Zeb often seeks out ways to work with others—if not as equals, then at least through cooperation—Glenn instead seeks to dominate others. He kidnaps individuals from the Maddaddam group and forces them to work on his Paradise Project; resistance to his scheme means death by assassination. That Glenn's means are more effective than those of Zeb or the Gardener group in general leaves an ambiguity to the trilogy in relation to the ethical positioning of terrorism, an ambiguity that is, to say the least, difficult to reconcile with preconceived notions of good and evil.

The pairing of Zeb and Glenn inevitably leads to questions of Glenn and Adam, as Zeb refers to his relationship to both as being brother-like, and in many ways he seems to serve as the middle ground between the two figures. While Glenn's apocalyptic vision is one of totalizing destruction, Adam's methodologies are quite different. Utilizing the tools of evangelism, Adam concentrates on creating a resistance space within the borders of the corporate world, hidden away by the oversight of the corporatocracy. The Edencliff Rooftop Garden, then, serves as something of a parallel to Glenn's Paradise Project. Even within each of these there are levels of hierarchy created by knowledge: for the Paradise Project, Glenn decides on his own whom to

include in his more devastating plans; Adams and Eves are initiated into the development of ideology, while additionally some of the more aggressive members of the group become participants in the “ecoterrorist” attacks they perpetrate on the operational networks of capitalism. Both use science and technology in the form of genetic manipulation to achieve their goals.

But the differences open a vast chasm between them. Though both wish to dismantle the effects of capitalism on the world, Glenn’s path leaves no room for any choice but his own. Glenn decides who knows what; Glenn decides who lives and dies. Adam’s path incorporates others into as much of the decision-making process as they demonstrate their trustworthiness. The attacks they perpetrate are against the structures of capitalism, not its participants. The group leaves room for members to come and go, and several do so without the fear of death that serves as a deterrent for those who may wish to leave the Paradise Project. Thus the Paradise Project is through this juxtaposition related more to the capitalist structures it wishes to overcome, drawing its totalizing aspects into even clearer focus.

And perhaps this ethical ambiguity is the point: perhaps it is the capitalist order itself that stretches our understandings of the world into contortions that belie the fundamental principles that we assume to be at the heart of human civilization, namely those of empathy and collaborative living. A system that leaves us with little recourse as it consumes and destroys the world is hardly a good thing. The lack of relevant escape routes, Atwood seems to insinuate, breeds extremism in return: totality begets totality, dominion begets dominion. Glenn isn’t necessarily wrong—at least not in his reasoning—but he isn’t right, either. If the only way to escape the destructive and unsustainable path of capitalism is to use its totalizing effects against itself, then perhaps there is no way out. The only solution would seem to be a re-emphasis on the

ethical questions behind our way of life; the snuffing out of such questions in American adherence to capitalism leads to stagnation and complicity as the distribution of both wealth and power become ever more striated.

Of course, Atwood moves on from this ethical conundrum in the final book of the trilogy. Once corporate order has been wiped away, the Painballers become the remnants of that order that must be cleared away in the final novel. But short of being as totalizing as the implementation of the BlyssPluss virus, the final battle of the trilogy, absurd as it is, depends upon interspecies cooperation wherein the surviving Gardeners collaborate with the pigeons to eliminate the Painballers and the problems they cause to both groups.

The pigeons are initially treated as antagonistic within the trilogy, which separates us from thinking of them in terms of their DNA. They trap Jimmy in *OC*; they keep Toby from leaving her position at the AnooYoo spa when her supplies are running low in *YF*; they serve as an impediment against larger movement of the group of humans and periodically destroy the crop gardens built by the surviving Gardeners in *MA*. This approach and their near-constant threat invite thoughts of consumption from the reader, especially when potential food sources in the postapocalyptic landscape are sparse. With this, the obscuring of thoughts about the origins of food sources further underscores the contemporary divisions between people and the sources of our foods. Is eating a pigeon tantamount to cannibalism, given their human DNA splices? The question remains mostly unresolved at the end of the trilogy, though the practice of eating pigeons—at least by the Maddaddamites—disappears after the institution of a truce between the pigeons and the humans, brokered by the Crakers.

The pigeons recognize the Painballers as a greater threat to their existence than the Gardener group, which by this point has also incorporated the Crakers. They also realize that

these Painballers are a threat to the Gardeners as well, and as such they communicate with the humans, through the aid of the Crakers, in order to execute their plan to kill the Painballers. Interestingly enough, this turn in the narrative contains several inversions of human expectations. As the pigeons were initially created to serve as organ donors for humans, they essentially were designed as a tool to extend human longevity; ironically, when the pigeons approach the humans, they ask for their help precisely because, as the Craker Blackbeard explains, ““They want you to help them with the sticks you have. They know how you kill, by making holes. And then blood comes out. They want you to make such holes in the three bad men. With blood”” (*MA* 270). So it is not so much the need for humans themselves but instead their ability to use guns. The pigeons, initially intended to be tools of a sort for humanity, instead use humans as tools for their ability to use other human-created tools. Outside of this ability, the humans are of little use to the pigeons, and by extension the posthuman world. As such, this inversion of expectations is something of a re-enmeshment of human existence into the larger framework of interspecies dependence, a reversal of the effects of capitalism in its attempts to disconnect humanity from conceptions of Morton’s concept of the mesh.

All of this adds up to a decentering of the human experience in relation to our nonhuman surroundings. Such is the effect of thinking in terms of the mesh, not just in terms of humanity. This process of decentering, however, pales in comparison to the larger decentering that occurs at the very end of the trilogy, wherein the Crakers, particularly the character of Blackbeard, take over the narrative of the trilogy itself, and humanity fades into the background as the Anthropocene draws to a close.

E. Language, Ritual, Religion

Each novel of the trilogy contains a discussion of religion and the development of ritual through the reinforcement of language. In *OC* this discussion revolves around the mythology that Jimmy creates for the Crakers, through which he designs a set of unsustainable rituals for the Crakers so that they will serve him as he tells them of their own existence and backstory; *YF* contains numerous sermons and hymns through the voice of Adam One that are designed to provide a path for the God's Gardeners in their preparations for a world free of capitalist existence; *MA* presents religious organizations more antagonistically, as Zeb's backstory reveals his father's role in the Church of PetrOleum, a religion revolving around the consumption of oil as ordained by God.

In *OC*, The Crakers are at the center of Jimmy's employment with HelthWyzer through Glenn and the successful development of the new species is the signal to Glenn that he is ready to eliminate the human race so that the Crakers can usher in what Glenn sees as a better future free of humankind's destructive impulses. The Crakers tend to have a more collective society as opposed to the isolation and social stratification caused by the corporate compounds of the novel's past that seem to transcend national boundaries and insulate themselves from the Pleeblands where the lower working classes live in disharmony and crippling poverty. As such, they are simultaneously an acknowledgement of the inescapable divisions within human society under late capitalism and the only way Glenn can see forward—a fresh start after a total break from the narrative of human development. For Glenn, global capitalism is the end of the human narrative, a vision he forces upon the world in near totality, using the pharmaceutical networks of late capitalism against the structure as a whole.

Central to the development of the Crakers is the introduction of language, which Glenn deems a critical component for the rebuilding of society. Glenn pressures his company to hire Jimmy—despite his lackluster resumé—superficially to work with the marketing department but secretly to work with the Crakers, though from a distance. Jimmy’s facility with words—the very thing that alienated him in the production-based, scientific results-driven mindset of the corporate and STEM-based spaces in his past—has also developed in him a sense of empathy that Glenn himself cannot access. This is not to say that Glenn lacks a facility with language; on the contrary, in Jimmy’s early memories Glenn often gets the best of Jimmy even in words; what Glenn lacks is a sense of connection that comes from relating to—instead of just understanding—others through language. It is because of this relationship with empathetic potential that Glenn designs a role for Jimmy after the virus has wiped out the population: supervising the Crakers and harnessing their genetic predisposition for empathy.

Although the Crakers have relatively little action in *OC*, their contrast to Jimmy emphasizes the destructive influence of late capitalism on the individual in such a disjointed society while at the same time providing a parallel to early organized human civilization. While Jimmy is supposed to be protector of the Crakers, the protection they need is quite limited, and through his role as protector, they in fact turn out to protect him from such dangers as hunger by bringing him a fish every week, creating a perimeter around their shared area with their predator-detering urine, and now and then healing his injuries with their special humming. What he provides them is a series of explanations for the mystery of their own existence and surroundings, built on half-truths. This sense of mystery echoes the description of the development of the early Egyptian temples as described in Norman Cohn’s *Cosmos, Chaos, and the World to Come*: “what, above all, gave the deity the strength to sustain the ordered world

were the offerings supplied by the public: each day he or she was more than adequately fed. That the food was finally removed, untouched, from the temple building and divided amongst the priests in payment for their services made no difference, the deity was strengthened just the same” (24). The power he has over them comes precisely through his facility with storytelling, and the rituals he builds around his role with them are, in the early days of the BlyssPluss aftermath, the only things that keep him alive, though he remains fundamentally broken in his separation from humanity.

This communication with the Crakers to explain to them the creation myths of their world forces Jimmy to internalize the post-apocalyptic setting of the world after BlyssPluss. Through the need to explain the realities the Crakers experience when in the world for the first time, Jimmy develops his own vast but vapid network of associations with the world he once knew, now the world of the dead, turning both the figures of Oryx, one of Jimmy’s lovers, and Crake into the mythological creators of the Crakers and their world. Of particular interest here is the story he gives the Crakers of Oryx's role in the creation process:

The children of Oryx hatched out of an egg, a giant egg laid by Oryx herself. Actually she laid two eggs: one full of animals and birds and fish, and the other one full of words. But the egg full of words hatched first, and the Children of Crake had already been created by then, and they'd eaten up all the words because they were hungry, and so there were no words left over when the second egg hatched out. And that's why the animals can't talk. (110)

In providing the Crakers with an absurd relation of how speech ability came into existence, Jimmy attempts through these creation myths to take his experiences and rebuild some sort of civilization in the face of the destructive force of Crake's apocalypse, and while these stories may end up holding cultural value for the Crakers, his own identity is lost in the process, as he sees through the falsities of language to the nothingness behind his own words. He cannot explain to them the true horror of the world around them, and as such he is forced to contain those truths

and to hide them from the Crakers for what Jimmy sees as their own good. In turn, Jimmy has no way to communicate his own horror at the apocalyptic reality around him, and instead he must push that horror down further and further beneath the surface. Jimmy as Snowman becomes only another part of the Craker myth, as he overhears their negotiations of his own position in this new world. His refusal to participate in these conversations denies him relief from his isolation:

Snowman was once a bird but he's forgotten how to fly and the rest of his feathers fell out, and so he is cold and he needs a second skin, and he has to wrap himself up. No: he's cold because he eats fish, and fish are cold. No: he wraps himself up because he's missing his man thing, and he doesn't want us to see. That's why he won't go swimming. Snowman has wrinkles because he once lived underwater and it wrinkled up his skin. Snowman is sad because the others like him flew away over the sea, and now he is all alone. (9)

Even the Crakers are aware of Snowman's difference and his loneliness. In these stories he overhears, his own origin is as much a mystery to them as anything else; however, his inability, or his unwillingness, to communicate the origin of his Snowman identity causes the persona of Snowman to become only one more part of a system of meaningless lies, perhaps emphasizing the importance of communication and social collectivity in a world where language seems to be corrupted for profit or power on a fairly regular basis.

Aside from Jimmy's insistence that the Crakers must bring him a fish to eat for him to be able to tell them the stories of their existence, he also incorporates other symbols into the Craker mythology, most prominently his "only talisman" (*OC* 3), a broken watch, and his "authentic-replica" (4) Boston Red Sox cap. Neither of these items has much relation to the BlyssPluss wasteland—the broken watch no longer tells time, and the Boston Red Sox, like most everything else, were obviously wiped away by the widespread virus. The broken watch marks the "absence of official time" (3), and the contradiction in the term "authentic-replica" further underscores the absence of meaning behind his usage of these items as necessary for his role as story-teller, thus

signifying the lack of substance behind the stories he presents to the Crakers, who consequently buy into the mythology without question. All of this reinforces the power behind the creation of such rituals through the blending together of language and action, which Atwood further explores through her portrayal of the God's Gardeners.

The Gardener ideology presented in *YF* primarily revolves around creating a system of living designed to exist outside the structure of capitalism toward the goals of environmental awareness. As each chapter of *YF* begins with both a sermon on a particular environmental subject or saint and a corresponding hymn, the novel's structure places the actions and backstories of Toby's and Ren's narrations into a contextual organization relating to Gardener ideology as developed by Adam One. As a result, the environmental religion of the Gardeners is more than just a connection between the two characters but also serves as a dominating framework that impacts the narrations and actions taken by the two characters and has lasting consequences, the most devastating of which is the reluctance of Toby to kill the Painballers during the Feast of Saint Julian at the end of the novel.

Both Toby and Ren resist the Gardener ideology at various points within the novel. Ren's relationship with the Gardeners contains an initial struggle with acceptance to the ideology of the group. She is forced into participation through the circumstances of her mother Lucerne, who took Ren with her while fleeing the Compounds to continue her affair with Zeb: "When Lucerne and Zeb first took me away from the Exfernal World to live among the Gardeners, I didn't like it at all. They smiled a lot, but they scared me: they were so interested in doom, and enemies, and God. And they talked so much about Death" (59). Ren feels like an outsider through much of her early time with the Gardeners, and she has trouble adjusting to her new life, often contrasting this different way of living with the life she had known previously: "I couldn't remember ever being

hungry at the HelthWyzer Compound. I really wanted to go back there. I wanted my real father, who must still love me: if he'd known where I was, he'd surely have come to take me back. I wanted my real house, with my own room and the bed with pink bed curtains and the closet full of different clothes in it" (65). Eventually, her friendship with Amanda makes living with the Gardeners more palatable, and she eventually begins to feel a sense of belonging within the larger group as a result. As such, when Lucerne and Zeb finally break up and Lucerne takes Ren back to the Compound, all of Ren's initial desires for her former life ring hollow: "I was reunited with my father, just as I used to wish long ago. But nothing felt right" (209). Her father "approached me as if I might bite, and put his arms awkwardly around me" (210). Even the material desires are disappointing: "the four-poster bed and the pink curtains looked shrunken" (209), the clothes Lucerne buys for her "felt like a disguise" (214), and the stuffed animals she returns to "I'd once loved so much, but their glass eyes looked dead" (209). Furthermore, her time with the Gardeners has literally stained her body, as she notes that "my skin was blue: it was dye from the Gardener clothes" and is surprised at "how hairy I'd become, and that was more of a shock than my blue skin. I rubbed and rubbed at the blue: it wouldn't come off" (209). The lingering effects of the dye are for Ren much like the Gardener ideology itself; the return to Compound life after her long indoctrination distances her from the status quo of Compound living.

Lucerne has a much easier transition in returning. Ren states that "she'd wasted no time" (210) in returning to the materialistic comforts of fashion and beauty products. Lucerne fabricates a story in which the two of them were abducted by Zeb and used as sex slaves, keeping Ren from providing an alternative narrative through threats: "Before our psychiatry sessions, she'd squeeze my shoulder and say, 'Amanda's back there. Keep that in mind.'"

Meaning that if I told anyone she'd been lying her hair off she'd suddenly remember where she'd been imprisoned, and the CorpSeCorps would go in there with their sprayguns and who knew what might happen?" (211-2).

Atwood uses these scenes to demonstrate the ways in which children in particular are initiated and indoctrinated into ideological rituals, mostly due to the practices set forth by their parents. Ren's unease in settling with the Gardeners is strikingly similar to her problems in readjusting to the corporate Compound world after her time away from it. In both cases, the adjustment is made more possible not by the actions of Lucerne but because of connections made with others her own age: with the Gardeners, she does not feel as though she belongs until she meets Amanda; back in Compound life, it is her friendship with Wakulla Price (coupled with the fear for Amanda's safety should she not comply) that eases the transition. In both cases, her resistance is strikingly similar, and constitutes more than just childhood rebellion. Instead, the difficulty arises more from radical change and the unfamiliarity with the practices of the ritual behaviors themselves. However, that Ren struggles to ultimately identify with Compound living should not be taken as an endorsement of the Gardener ideology; Atwood's design juxtaposes the two systems of living precisely to draw parallels between the lies we tell ourselves—and the lies we tell each other—that keep us firmly entrenched in capitalist rituals. The Gardener ideology is built upon similar foundations of duplicity, as Adam One is revealed to often bend or break the rules from his speeches to the Gardeners to build a sense of conformity within the group much in the same vein as conformity is imposed upon the subjects living within the Compounds through the manipulation of information.

In an early scene in *YF*, Ren recalls the group's participation in the Tree of Life, an exchange that works much like a farmer's market, wherein several eco-conscious groups gather

to sell their goods to consumers, most of whom are “upmarket trendies”, “affluents”, and “even people from the Compounds, coming out for a safe pleebland adventure” (141). This excursion into capitalism itself is somewhat disdainful to Adam One, as he remarks of other groups’ participation, “their trading products were morally contaminated, though they didn’t radiate synthetic slave-labour evil the way the flashy items in the mallway did” (141), yet the Gardeners’ participation in the market itself is on the surface antithetical to the group’s anti-capitalist messaging. However, as we learn later in *MA*, these excursions into the market fund the true purpose behind the group in their active attempts to undermine the corporate orders of operations.

Much of the duplicity we see through the figure of Adam One in *YF* comes through the perspective of Toby. While Toby is grateful for the opportunity the Gardeners provide to escape the abuses of her boss Blanco at SecretBurger, she—like Ren—initially struggles to fit in with the group and its duties. Even after the arrest of Burt for an illegal weed-growing operation and the imminent death of Pilar by cancer, when Adam One invites her into the inner circle as an Eve, Toby resists the promotion, citing her lack of full belief in Gardener ideology. As she tells Adam One, “‘I’m not sure I believe in all of it.’ An understatement: she believed in very little” (168). Adam One, however, finds this to be of little problem: “‘We should not expect too much from faith,’ he said. ‘Human understanding is fallible, and we see through a glass, darkly. Any religion is a shadow of God. But the shadows of God are not God’” (168). Here Adam acknowledges the small role that actual belief has in the operations of religious organization. Furthermore, while he seems to be offering her a choice in the matter, he ultimately makes the decision for her, as he needs her to fill the role left behind after Pilar’s death: “So the two of

them had trapped her. What could she say? She found herself stepping into ritual as if into a pair of stone shoes” (182).

As she moves further within the inner circle of the group, Toby also learns that they have a computer, a strict violation of Gardener ideology:

[T]he Adams and Eves had a laptop. Toby had been shocked to discover this—wasn't such a device in direct contravention of Gardener principles?—but Adam One had reassured her: they never went online with it except with extreme precaution, they used it mostly for the storage of crucial data pertaining to the Exfernal World, and they took care to conceal such a dangerous object from the Gardener membership at large—especially the children. Nevertheless, they had one. (188-9)

The duplicity behind this computer ownership is revealed in *MA* to have a direct connection to the Extinct-a-thon game through which the more radical members of the group stage various resistances to the corporate order, yet a further level of duplicity in Adam One's justification of the ownership to Toby. While there is undoubtedly a protective aspect to the banning of electronic devices such as the laptop—a careless phone call or internet search could result in the CorpSeCorps identifying their location and exterminating the entire group—the larger purpose of the Gardener leadership in its active resistance to capitalist structures is obscured by the ideology carefully crafted by Adam One. His further lie to Toby is simply another level of obfuscation until he is sure Toby can be trusted with the full purpose of the group.

MA complicates the religious structures introduced in the previous novels in various ways. As the storytelling duties of Jimmy expand to Toby during the former's incapacitation, she struggles to incorporate the rituals that Jimmy has previously constructed and must rely on the narrative that the Crakers themselves already know:

She must make a show of eating the fish they've brought, charred on the outside and wrapped in leaves. She must put on Jimmy's ratty red baseball cap and his faceless watch and raise the watch to her ear. She must begin at the beginning, she must preside over the creation, she must make it rain. She must clear away the chaos, she must lead them out of the Egg and shepherd them down to the seashore. . . .

They prompt, they interrupt, they fill in the parts she's missed. What they want from her is a seamless performance, as well as more information than she either knows or can invent. She's a poor substitute for Snowman-the-Jimmy, but they're doing what they can to polish her up. (45)

The ritualistic nature of these storytelling episodes emphasizes the need for order that, despite Crake's best efforts to suppress in his desire to free them of the human constructs of religion, still pervades their sense of community. Toby's unfamiliarity with the constructs that Jimmy has created causes additional problems throughout *MA* and further complicates the Craker mythology. In most cases, Toby manages to distract them from the stories about their own development by incorporating narratives about Zeb, through which we learn much of his backstory. The chapters that contain this backstory have a strikingly similar structure to the chapter divisions in *YF*: each begins with the version of the story Toby tells to the Crakers, followed by the flashbacks of Zeb that comprise a large part of the novel itself.

The most notable of these stories is the story of "Zeb and the Bear." Immediately after Toby's story of the event to the Crakers, she muses to herself about the nature of narrative: "There's the story, then there's the real story, then there's the story of how the story came to be told. Then there's what you leave out of the story. Which is part of the story, too" (56). In this preface to the "real story," we see the multiple layers that complicate the development and dissemination of narrative itself. But in the insistence that omission is itself a part of narrative, along with Toby's admission that she has omitted the presence of "the dead man" named Chuck from her Craker story, Atwood invites readers to interrogate this omission as a vital function to the process of narrative creation.

It would seem on the surface that the omission, in its complication of Zeb as a character, exists to protect the idea of Zeb from scrutiny by the Crakers. After all, we learn through Zeb's account that after a helicopter crash, Zeb slices off and later eats Chuck's ass cheeks. Such a

cannibalistic act would be sure to draw an inquisitive response from the Crakers, who have basic questions over such simplistic concepts as marriage, death, and the practice of wishing someone a good night. But in the end such omissions are less to protect the Crakers as Toby herself, as the constant explanatory processes over human behaviors and patterns of speech become cumbersome. Just as Jimmy before her, she often finds it easier to provide a simplistic explanation with little to no bearing on reality instead of trying to derive an explanation that makes sense even to her. For instance, after Jimmy awakens from his infection-induced slumber, his utterance of “Oh, fuck” causes at first a sense of confusion until the expletive is transformed into “an invisible entity called Fuck. A helper of Crake’s in time of need” (163). This inclusion of the character of Fuck into the Craker narrative is ritualized first by the human characters, as they utter the expletive without much consideration of Craker presence, but this action is later fully incorporated into their own actions by the time of the final confrontation with the Painballers when Blackbeard explains to Toby that he has already called upon him: ““Oryx will be helping me, and Fuck. I have already called Fuck, he is flying to here, right now. You will see”” (343).

The final few chapters of the novel further problematize the narrative trilogy as a whole. The narrative first moves toward the writings of Blackbeard, as he begins to chronicle the actions of the group during and after the Painballer encounter. That these narratives come through Blackbeard’s voice instead of Toby’s signals her loss of hope in keeping track of the events they encounter, a rejection of the future via her resignation in the face of a bleak present after the deaths of Jimmy and Adam. In the paralysis of her grief, she abandons action, a human condition often preyed upon by the capitalist system that creates small personal disasters to ward off

revolutionary potential. In addition, this motif emphasizes the limitations of long-term thinking in the face of perceived loss.

Blackbeard's continuation of ritualized behaviors associated with storytelling further emphasizes the divorce of the formalities associated with the dissemination of narrative from their initial purposes. Blackbeard has no real need for the Red Sox cap that he wears, as his skin is designed to already protect him from the harsh environmental conditions; perhaps more significantly, his eating of the fish causes him anguish: "I will try to do this hard thing of eating the smelly bone fish. It is cooked. It is very small. Perhaps it will be enough for Crake if I put it into my mouth and take it out again" (357). He further notes that he has made "the noises of a sick person" and that he "will chew many leaves to get rid of that taste" (357-8). But perhaps most importantly in this evolution of storytelling is the fact that Blackbeard no longer has to rely on memory or imaginative power to tell the stories, as he recounts the tales of the Craker and human history through the very stories he and Toby have written down: "And she showed me, Blackbeard, how to make such words, on a page, with a pen, when I was little. And she showed me how to turn the marks back into a voice, so that when I look at the page and read the words, it is Toby's voice that I hear. And when I speak these words out loud, you too are hearing Toby's voice" (385). Furthermore, Toby tells Blackbeard that "another Book should be made, with the same writing as the first one. And each time a person came into the knowledge of the writing, and the paper, and the pen, and the ink, and the reading, that one also was to make the same Book, with the same writing in it. So it would always be there for us to read" (386). This codification of the mythology and history of the Craker people echoes the development of human history through the reliance of ideology built out of supposedly sacred texts; as such, Atwood indicates that the very characteristics of human evolution that have proved ultimately destructive

for the development of a better world have been passed down to the Crakers, indicating that they may be on a similar destructive path as the humans who precede them.

F. Chapter Three Conclusion

Something resembling a dialectic emerges from Atwood's trilogy. *OC* on its own initially appears to be a satirical dystopia embedded within a post-apocalyptic framework. The "Letter to America" juxtaposes the dystopian world that Jimmy remembers against contemporary American culture under late capitalism, specifically in relation to the growing power of corporate entities and the corresponding diminution of the rights of individuals. Scattered throughout this critical dystopia are several anti-Utopian elements, namely the warnings through news broadcasts that resistance to capitalism and its most powerful forces is futile and a good way to get oneself killed. Safer to go with the flow, it seems to say.

But here the satirical portrayal of Atwood's hyper-capitalist model comes into play, with the ridiculous corporate entities bearing through their comical names the contrast between their seemingly benign superficial functions and the devastation that occurs in the advancement of a primarily corporate agenda.²³ As a result, the arts, language, and even a knowledge of history have been deprived of any deeper meaning, and the subjects within this system—most notably through the character of Jimmy—lose their sense of function and purpose within this corporate framework. Jimmy's words bring him neither notoriety nor independence, and his energies are consumed by the corporate world of marketing. Even his subversive game, wherein he makes up

²³ A good example of this aspect of American capitalism is the marketing campaign of OxyContin by Purdue Pharma, through which they offered potential patients "a free seven to 30-day supply of the drug" while appealing to health care professionals through the distribution of "OxyContin-branded swag including fishing hats and plush toys" (Kelvey). The seemingly innocuous gifts to doctors and patients alike contributed greatly to the Opioid Crisis that continues to affect much of the United States and obscured the dangers and risks associated with over-prescription and overuse.

words to see if they will slip past supervisory oversight, becomes taken up by his supervisors, and all his potentially rebellious instincts are snuffed out by the superficiality of the advertising industry. Likewise, Amanda's art never gets beyond herself, and her reliance on the CorpSeCorps helicopter to take the pictures of her work—pictures that cater to wealthy patrons without revolutionary affect—reveals a cynicism toward the power of the arts to manifest significant change in a world where such work is relevant as a commodity more than as a statement.

Glenn's release of the BlyssPluss virus stands in stark contrast to these artistic and linguistic failures. Totalizing in their destructive force, his actions do succeed where the humanities fall short. By employing a STEM-driven solution, Atwood draws such a contrast to demonstrate the dangers of ignoring the revolutionary potential of the humanities while at the same time highlighting the need for organized and large movements toward change. As Glenn successfully executes his plan to destroy capitalism through the very corporate structures and mechanisms of capitalism itself—primarily the use of the HelthWyzer lab for the development of his Paradise Project and, of course, the virus in the BlyssPluss pill created the HelthWyzer itself—there may be something to be said for the networks developed and exploited by capitalism being turned against it. In this way, Glenn does to capitalism what capitalism does to the humanities. But the totalizing and demoralizing destruction of Glenn's plan, not to mention the treatment of his totalizing vision in the subsequent novels, also reminds us of the limits of totalizing thought.

The post-apocalyptic landscape of the opening novel also contains its anti-Utopian concerns. In the aftermath of capitalism, the lack of tools humans have grown accustomed to limits their ability to remain at the top of the food chain, a common trope in post-apocalyptic

novels in general. The regression that accompanies this movement away from presupposed natural superiority would seem on the surface to carry warnings against disrupting the anthropocentric lifestyles that capitalism through commodity development facilitates. At the same time, however, we must remember that the capitalism on display in the *Maddaddam* series is itself fraught with difficulties and dangers, just different ones from the more primitive fears portrayed in the post-catastrophic world. In the juxtaposition of these different perspectives toward danger, we are reminded of the tools we have access to and fail to use against oppressive forces.

Additionally, the presence of the Crakers carries with it the constant reminder of our presumption of genetic superiority and the fallacious logic of such thinking. While the Crakers are designed to take the place of humanity by providing them with useful genetic abilities while relieving them of what Glenn sees as drawbacks in the human genetic code, their best quality is the way in which they act in concert with their surroundings. Their greatest danger is what is left over from humanity—primarily the biohazardous waste and the remaining humans themselves.

In contrast, *YF* opens into an antithetical space when compared with *OC*. Not only does the narrative split itself into two voices to contrast with the monologic presentation of *OC*, but the development of the God's Gardeners as an alternative or outside society also directly confronts the realities of the privileged Compound world given to us through the backstory of Jimmy. Toby's narrative draws us toward considerations of the organizational structure of resistant spaces as she moves through the ranks of the Gardeners, while the overlapping elements of Ren's narrative at times directly confront the narrative as experienced through Jimmy's backstory. The effect of this is to create multiple versions of reality that ultimately challenge

readers to question the sources of information and presupposed ideas in both our personal lives and within society at large.

This strategy is also borne out by the focus on the God's Gardeners themselves as the unifying bond between *YF*'s two narrative perspectives. The Gardeners, as we know from *OC*, are seen by this privileged world as a fringe group that causes trouble for the comforts of capitalism, but by thrusting the group into the forefront of the series—and keeping them there throughout the remainder of the trilogy—Atwood attempts to open our minds to the possibilities of overcoming the anti-Utopian energies of *OC* toward perhaps a different future, one that emphasizes more personal, social, and environmental responsibility. The Gardeners then are a unifying force that runs counter to the fragmentations that occur throughout the Compound backstory of Jimmy's narrative.

The strict veganism of the God's Gardeners—strict for everyone except Zeb, apparently—presents an oppositional stance to the meat-obsessed culture presented in *OC*, made even more apparent with the development of the SecretBurger plotline of *YF*. The community that is built up around a common sense of environmentalism and cooperative labor runs counter to the isolation and the individualism presented in Jimmy's *OC* narrative, where he is mostly incompetent in his return to nature. The anti-Utopian elements of *OC* are drawn into a negative relationship, one wherein the presence and activism of the resistance provided by the God's Gardeners neutralize the perspective that such resistance is futile. The removal of the ethical question from the STEM-driven world that creates the Chickie-Nob is contrasted with the sermons of Adam, where the ethical ideology of the Gardeners is reinforced and adapted, as necessary. Although there is also a cynical twist to presenting such a site of resistance through the workings of evangelism, it is precisely this function of religion in general that Atwood's

work poses: namely that of the reincorporation of the ethical question into the anti-Utopian elements of our own world. If we are ever to overcome the anti-Utopian barriers that keep individuals from enacting substantive change, we must reinsert the ethical questions into arguments that appear to have been depleted of their revolutionary potential.

But where we might expect to find in a Hegelian dialectic some positive synthesis from the outgrowth of *MA* from these previous two novels, all we find is aftermath. Atwood's design in this third novel is not so much to provide us with answers as to offer us challenges. As we move forward with the combination of the plot lines from the previous two novels, the narrative becomes complicated and increasingly less focused on human existence, promoting the status of such groups as the Crakers and the pigoons. This strategy serves to decenter the human experience and emphasize the importance of the world we continue to shape in terms of posthuman responsibility, furthering the criticism of anthropocentric thinking in postmodern society. But instead of offering easy solutions, the remnants of humanity continue to wreak havoc—though perhaps on a lesser scale—in the development of other species.

Atwood in the end shows the rise of the Crakers into literacy and their subsequent evolution into the symbolic order—complete with all its advantages and faults—through the development of what would appear to be a sacred text that blends history and superstition. This comes amidst the decline of humanity in the face of a world wherein humans have no distinct advantage; those who survive pit themselves against each other, essentially forming teams: those committed to a more eco-conscious and cooperative lifestyle, and those who are so intent on fighting everything that they also feel compelled to identify and destroy otherness of any sort. The mistakes being made by the Crakers in their conflation of myth and history play out in the divisions that develop at the end of humanity, as humanity itself looks fated to disappear (at least

as human, or perhaps human as we genetically know it, given the number of Craker-human hybrid babies anticipated at the trilogy's end).

But this juxtaposition between groups of people throws into light the importance of individual and group choices. The choices that Jimmy and Toby make alter the development of the Crakers through the institution of ideology; likewise, the evolution of the Craker text is contingent upon the choices of words themselves—and, as much of the trilogy emphasizes through its various wordplays, words are important. As this text is codified through the reinscription of the writings with each Craker child who passes into literacy, the choices affect not just individuals but generations. It is also a choice when the remaining Maddaddamites vote to put the last two Painballers to death. Such a departure from their normally pacifist ideology reveals that ideologies in and of themselves rarely provide consistent and convenient answers. The choices themselves shape the future, a reminder that our own decisions have lasting impact in the world.

V. Conclusion

We know things are bad—worse than bad. They're crazy. It's like everything everywhere is going crazy, so we don't go out anymore. We sit in the house, and slowly the world we are living in is getting smaller, and all we say is, "Please, at least leave us alone in our living rooms. Let me have my toaster and my TV and my steel-belted radials and I won't say anything. Just leave us alone.

Well, I'm not going to leave you alone. I want you to get MAD! I don't want you to protest. I don't want you to riot. I don't want you to write your congressman, because I wouldn't know what to tell you to write. I don't know what to do about the depression and the inflation and the Russians and the crime in the street. All I know is that first you've got to get mad. You've got to say, "I'm a human being, goddammit! My life has value!

--Howard Beale, *Network*

If we are to take the notion seriously that apocalypse signifies change—both in the sense that the emergence of apocalyptic rhetoric and imaginations indicate a rupture in greater society and in that the transition between historical epochs contains a reformation of social and political order—then the proliferation of apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic texts in the last few decades would seem to indicate a turbulent world in the face of globalization and the geopolitical dominance of American capitalism in the wake of the Cold War. But even this sense of change has transitioned over time: the post-apocalyptic paradigm prevalent in the Cold War era texts still has resonance today, but the attitudes toward what comes after apocalypse are radically different. The texts presented in the body of this dissertation project speak less toward a reordering of society that leads to a more unified and collective future and more toward a disintegration of human organization and cooperation.

At the heart of this distinction, historically speaking, is the downfall of the Soviet Union and the emergence of the United States as an unopposed global superpower, wielding its will through the development of international treaties that ever more lock the principles of capitalism

into place throughout the world. No longer is apocalypse a manifestation of a powerful external threat but the manifestation of inner ills. These investigations into the internal markers of catastrophe, more than just reflecting anxieties over social divisions, illustrate repeatedly the ineptitude of the revolutionary imagination, subdued as it is by the totality of entrenched capitalism's assimilation of resistant urges.

A. McDonald's in Moscow

When McDonald's opened its first franchise restaurant in Pushkin Square on January 31, 1990, the line of customers spread around the block. The restaurant served 30,000 customers on its opening day, a record at the time²⁴, and the images of the opening of the Soviet Union to one of the largest corporate powers of American capitalism were broadcast throughout the Western world as an omen of the Soviet Union's true end. The Berlin Wall had come down less than a year before, and the encroachment of a post-Cold War reality seemed absolutely inevitable.

Although Pepsi had previously entered the Soviet marketplace some years before McDonald's arrived²⁵, the arrival of McDonald's seemed to signal a new era in global political and economic power. Where diplomacy had often been met with hesitation, capitalism appeared to have found some measure of success. The encroachment of multinational capitalism into a Soviet Union historically predicated upon a resistance to the West pointed toward the eventual Soviet collapse and a more involved interaction with international institutions of capitalism. The global expansion that followed in the ensuing decades, combined with the end of the most

²⁴ This feat was eventually outdone by the opening of the first McDonald's in Beijing only two years later, wherein the restaurant served 40,000 customers on its first day.

²⁵ Pepsi had been trading with the Soviet Union since 1974, exchanging its soft drink syrup for Stolichnaya vodka and selling the vodka in the United States through a third party. Shortly after the successful opening of the Pushkin Square McDonald's Pepsi sweetened this deal by expanding in the Soviet Union, an agreement for which they received "at least ten tankers and freighters, ranging in size from 28,600 tons to 65,000 tons, with a total value of over \$300 million" (Ramirez).

powerful politically resistant state force, left little opposition to the proliferation of international deals that further entwined geopolitical treaties with economic trade agreements. Capitalism, in essence, rose to the level of an international peacekeeper.

This shift in political reality left its mark on the literature dealing with apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic thought. Such novels of the long 1950s were grounded in nuclear fear, the outgrowth of anxiety over what seemed an inevitable clash of global political superpowers. During this time, the post-apocalyptic paradigm reigned supreme, in which imaginative futures of catastrophe thrust time forward to look back on the past, often containing some level of judgment on the direction of society itself. This judgment typically was juxtaposed against the development of an enclave society, in which survivors of the destructive event would group together in a Utopian-like framework which emphasized social collectivity and interpersonal responsibility, as in texts such as *The Day of the Triffids* and *Earth Abides*. Even libertarian fantasy texts like *Alas, Babylon* carried such sentiments, wiping away the structure of the United States government to clear the way for a new and improved, albeit smaller and flawed, return to community production. To think the end of capitalism at such a time presupposed the simultaneous geopolitical ascendancy of its apparent opposite in communism.

Times change. Toward the end of the twentieth century, no longer was the danger of communism such a threat to capitalist dominance. With the disappearance of this looming fear, the post-apocalyptic paradigm simultaneously gave way to the apocalyptic itself. No longer do texts need to project themselves beyond cataclysm; novels such as *In the Country of Last Things (ICL)* and *White Noise*, both published in the 1980s and envisioning a world where capitalism has no restrictions, investigate capitalism as an end to itself.

In this shedding of the post-apocalyptic, apocalyptic fictions offer little in the way of collective hope: imaginations of community resistance fail repeatedly. Anna Blume finds partnerships to be unstable and often self-destructive, as her alliance with Isabella falls apart in the wake of Ferdinand's death, and even the semi-Utopian collective at the Woburn House disintegrates after a betrayal by a former patient who has been ejected back into the hyper-capitalist nightmare that is the urban space presented in the novel. The Gladney household in *White Noise* also presents the failure of the family as Utopian unit, where members talk over instead of to one another and where the television is as much an antagonistic force of division as anything. Even the university community, with its potential for an academic Utopia, becomes a site for competition, as when Jack interrupts Murray's lecture on Elvis with a comparison to Hitler's upbringing. The failure of post-apocalyptic time to develop snuffs out Utopian possibility, as only the force of capitalism seems able to propagate itself into the future, primarily by reflecting market ideologies in which enough is never enough through the behaviors of the characters who inhabit these societies.

An interesting contradiction opens into such space. For *ICL*, the apocalyptic energy that pervades the novel is much like that of Mary Shelley's *The Last Man*, wherein the former order of empire fades against a world that no longer has need for national borders. While the city in *ICL* does seem to have borders, they are ill-defined and constantly in flux due to overall instability; trade with external parts of the world collapses, as the unnamed city-state lacks any significant resources. Apocalypse, in these cases, would seem then to be a manifestation of the failure of the dominant political-economic modes contemporary to each timeframe: empire for Shelley, multi-national capitalism for Auster. DeLillo's novel offers the opposite approach, as the apocalyptic disintegration of American culture and unity under consumerist ideology is a

distinct feature of capitalism's success. The consumer fascism that develops under the hyper-saturated suburban world of *White Noise* is the failure of the political ideal of democracy to sustain itself amidst a world where image takes precedence over substance.

But unlike Shelley's novel, which wipes away the geopolitical barriers through which the British Empire defined itself, *ICL* does little to clear the world of the effects of capitalism. And while Lionel Verney can potentially be read as the last expansionist, particularly with his journey to Rome and his striking out from there to explore the remainder of the world, Anna Blume's journey ends with an attempt at escape from the city that has consumed everything and everyone within it. The only thing left for Verney to escape is boredom. By the time we reach Verney, preparing to sail the seas with his limited library, the human narrative seems to be exhausted; his search for adventure is one of privilege even after the context of that privilege has been washed away by death. All he can do is passively reflect on the best humanity has had to offer, knowing that his own contributions to the world will be minimal at best. The text thus has a somewhat regressive ending, in contrast to Anna's story, where the search remains for an enclave space within which to rebuild. In *White Noise*, by contrast, the search for an enclave space is virtually nonexistent. Governmental agencies are inept, living more in the immediate past rather than planning for the future.

This is, of course, the postmodern condition itself. As Jameson would seem to indicate, the lack of definitive endings in such texts illustrates our inability to see anything that can overcome the kinetic force of a capitalism that stretches nearly everywhere.

B. Urbanity and Other Developments

Changes are not just occurring in the geopolitical arena. The world's cities are becoming ever more populated as rural areas are depleted of the resources of labor and wealth. As the forms of urban development take on new characteristics in late capitalism, these texts open a space within which to discuss the development of urban and rural areas. Late in *The Production of Space*, Lefebvre discusses the relationship between them:

the town—urban space—has a symbiotic relationship with that rural space over which (if often with much difficulty) it holds sway. Peasants are prone to restlessness, and as for herders, nomadic or seminomadic, the towns have always found it hard to contain them—they are, in fact, ever potential conquerors of the town.

The city state thus establishes a fixed centre by coming to constitute a hub, a privileged focal point, surrounded by peripheral areas which bear its stamp. From this moment on, the vastness of pre-existing space appears to come under the thrall of a divine order. (234-5)

Overwhelmingly, the relationship between these spaces is strained in contemporary apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic fiction. *ICL* develops urban space itself as the site of apocalypse, as Anna Blume travels around the city that has lost the ability to sustain itself and offer opportunity and shelter to its citizens. Consumption coupled with a lack of internal production—the presumable outsourcing of such over an extended period of time—has rendered the city (which also operates as a state) powerless as it becomes more and more urbanized after having consumed all its non-urban surroundings. There is nowhere within the borders of the state to go, as everything is simply more of the same.

Anna's consistent need to move, coupled with a repeated loss of resources, also serves as an apt illustration of the plight of the contemporary wage worker, often having to relocate due to the spread of gentrification and the rapid increase in the cost of housing in urban areas. While the extremity of such migrations in *ICL* are dangerous in themselves, in *The Road*, urban spaces are depicted as loci of concentrated terror, where the man feels the need to keep “the pistol to hand

on the folded tarp on top of the cart” (12) for easy access. Another refrain opens onto these passages: “No sign of life” (12, 21). In this world that has been ravaged by an unspecified catastrophe, urban areas offer no hope of life or resources, as they have all been thoroughly pillaged already. In both cases, urbanity is closely associated with depletion and death.

An additional element springs into the discussion at this point, that being movement itself. The migration element in both of these novels places them into something of a stark contrast with most of the other novels examined in this project. As when the man and the boy finally reach the coast, the end of the road in late capitalist development often turns out to not be the end of anything, simply more of the same. The homogenization of commercial landscapes in American culture in this way mirrors the monotony of day-to-day life. Destination means nothing. Furthermore, as urban spaces themselves become more homogenized, profitable, and accordingly expensive, poorer populations are pushed outward from the centers of cities and into concentrated pockets where destitution is ubiquitous and resources are scarce; the result of this migration is the creation of a labor force with an increasingly large burden in commuting to work. In the wake of this labor exodus, urban properties are snatched up by those with the resources to afford them, concentrating economic resources even further. Novels such as *ICL* and *The Road* can be read thus as an allegory of a future projection of this circular process taken to the extreme.

Alternatively, novels such as *White Noise* and *The Dog Stars* in particular afford their protagonists seemingly controlled spaces from which they operate in the form of suburban areas. But even here we find that urban development implies danger. *White Noise* reveals Iron City to be desolate and seedy, with “the abandoned car district, the uncollected garbage district, the sniper-fire district, the districts of smoldering sofas and broken glass” (303). It is here that Jack

allows himself to perform what is nearly a murder, among other crimes. The danger seems to imply an inner change, though ultimately Jack is the victim of his own obsession with culture, as he mostly emulates how he has seen murder represented on-screen. In *The Dog Stars*, Hig briefly discusses his former life in Denver, only to have his and Melissa's dream of flying west destroyed because "there was the hospital, we went to the hospital. To one of the buildings they took over. Filling with the dead" (13). When he goes back for his poetry collections, he notes "Fires burning west and south, some punctuating gunshots. Waiting in the plane with the AR-15 between my legs waiting to see if anyone was left to bother the Beast for the half hour I'd be gone" (29). Contrasted with the suburban comfort zones presented in these two texts, urbanity carries with it a heightened sense of distrust that resonates with the visions of urbanity in *ICL* and *The Road*.

The suburban spaces themselves turn out to be no less dangerous in the long run, with the Airborne Toxic Event that exposes Jack to Nyodene D. and the constant band of marauders who attempt to overrun the small neighborhood developed adjacent the airport hangar where Hig and Bangley live. They are perceived as safer spaces by their characters precisely because of their relationship to the more urbanized areas close by. Jack's sense of comfort in the town of Blacksmith is simply the reinforcement he receives from participating in the consumption of media and goods through the community ritual of shopping. His satisfaction is as hollow as his later diagnosis. Both novels open onto a consideration of the disintegration of the family unit, with Jack and Babette's arguments somewhat resonating in the arguments between Hig and Bangley. Hig's sense of security at the hangar is undermined by the fact that he and Bangley can't get along well for long. Instead Hig finds the most solace and comfort in the isolation of nature. His diversion to the farm where Pops and Cima live is a rural vision of a near-Utopia, one

where the labor is directly tied to the land, one where he ultimately is granted a place, albeit temporary. In this sense, *The Dog Stars* stands as perhaps the best example from these texts in examining aspects of the rural²⁶ in relation to late capitalist apocalypse, though ultimately this turns out to demonstrate the impact of corporate development on rural spaces, as the farm cannot sustain itself due to a depletion of natural resources.

Hig's ability to cover long distances through flying contradicts expectations of the post-apocalyptic genre of which *The Dog Stars* is a part. The mechanical knowledge of planes and of fuel treatments provides him with a specialty skill that facilitates his almost magical journey that takes up much of the last half of the novel. As such, he is able to access the enclave space to find Pops and Cima. But even this unexpected technological holdover has its limits, as Hig periodically reminds the reader that within the near future, the fuel treatments will stop working, and he will at that point be just as grounded as everyone else.

In novels such as *Feed* and *Oryx and Crake (OC)*, the concept of suburban separation has taken on a more advanced form. Where the most privileged spaces in our own time are relegated to the highly developed and uber-capitalized spaces of, for instance, Manhattan or the Bay Area, the privileged spaces in both these works, from the protected ecobubbles of *Feed* to the Compounds of the *Maddaddam* trilogy, are distinctly separated from the surrounding world, and it is from these protective spaces that the participants of such novels must move to connect with other privileged areas, all distinctly cut off from the more urbanized spaces that take up everything outside these privileged borders. The fictional representations of the underprivileged urban spaces in these novels paints such spaces as dirty and dangerous, much like the other novels discussed here. In *Feed* these urban areas become more and more covered by an

²⁶ The relatively poor representations of rural spaces are not limited to apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic fiction but are indicative of a larger dearth of representations of rurality in contemporary mainstream American fiction.

unidentified black substance, whereas the Pleeblands in the *Maddaddam* trilogy are potentially dangerous for both Compounders and God's Gardeners alike. The development of privileged spaces in these works is defined not by political boundaries, such as the city, but around corporate structures instead. Such signifies the shift in the role of government away from protecting people toward the prioritization of private profit and enterprise. At the same time, large movement is often restricted to the privileged corporate class, where individuals like Titus and Glenn can move about nearly unrestricted, while everyone else must endure the struggles associated with their more immediate space and the conditions with which those spaces are saddled.

But the movement of people presented in these novels also brings to mind the movement of resources in relation to this urban/rural division. Large cities accumulate the vast majority of monies and material wealth available to a population, and within these distributions, the unevenness in the development of these types of wealth separates areas even within urban space.

C. The End of History, the Ends of Endings

We have lost History. Or, perhaps, we have lost *to* history, depending upon which way one looks at it. For the stasis that would appear to have taken over the world, in the loss of our Historical Imagination, wherein we look at the development of society as having reached some arbitrary apex point, beyond which nothing can or will ever progress, is nothing more than a façade. The world changes around us at a blistering pace. It is, perhaps, this very pace that in ways divorces us from our historical context, distracting us from such changes through the combinatory approach of keeping those with plentiful resources constantly consuming while keeping those with minimal or no resources constantly mindful of the ubiquitous deadlines of

payments due or accounts overdrawn. In each scenario, what such demands on our attention do, in addition to the disconnection we experience from History itself, is further separate and distance ourselves from one another. And what chance do we have of breaking free from the monotony of the everyday, if we cannot even connect with other people who are experiencing the same time, but perhaps in a radically different way?

But these types of distractions in the lives of the masses are merely the methods of historical change, as they are nothing new to the development of civilization. Some have always struggled, and some have always prospered, and the separation of the two can be traced back to the earliest days of civilization itself²⁷. What is different about these changes today is the rapid pace at which they upend our prior notions of the world itself, its foundations in various principles and methods and the ways in which spaces are being manipulated to facilitate these changes, while at the same time we are lulled into a contradictory frame of mind that reinforces the idea of safety in a homogenized daily existence. Apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic fictions of the last few decades invite us to investigate the nature of the changes taking place around us in light of a shifting perspective on the development of capitalism, drawing into focus the concentration of resources and the methods by which we are encouraged to ignore such accumulations. Additionally, these texts remind us of the limits of human potential in the absence of the very technology that allows us to accommodate to worse conditions within the world.

Intellectually, we know that capitalism in its current form is unsustainable. Take, for instance, our reliance on fossil fuels, the ever-increasing amount of waste we produce (both

²⁷ See Cohn's *Cosmos, Chaos, and the World to Come*.

industrial and residential), the environmental degradations that threaten the existence of our planet's ecosystems. At some point, something has to give.

And here we must return to a consideration of genre, for apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic texts somewhat differ in their approaches to Utopian development. All these novels seem to indicate concerns over the sustainability of resource consumption in late capitalism. Apocalyptic texts such as *ICL* and *White Noise*, however, demonstrate the failure of such Utopian designs to persist, as with the failure of the Woburn House in the former and the rampant individualism found in the latter. Post-apocalyptic texts conversely offer some reprieve (occasionally, at least) in the form of smaller groups that band together with a shared sense of responsibility and cooperative labor, though this capacity is limited by the devastation caused by capitalism itself. This, given their framing of a world that has been subject to vast destruction, situates them at least partially within what Tom Moylan terms the "critical dystopia," which he describes as works that "give voice and space to such dispossessed and denied subjects" although they struggle and sometimes fail in the Utopian projects that

go on to explore ways to change the present system so that such culturally and economically marginalized peoples not only survive but also try to move toward creating a social reality that is shaped by an impulse to human self-determination and ecological health rather than one constricted by the narrow and destructive logic of a system intent only on enhancing competition in order to gain more profit for a select few. (189)

But what may at first appear to be failure should be remembered as a product of design: these novels work under a slightly different logic.

Here we may do well to return to Jameson's rather lengthy discussion of the anti-Utopian in *Archaeologies of the Future*. Jameson locates the anti-Utopian within a group of texts that "are informed by a central passion to denounce and to warn against Utopian programs in the political realm" (199). As such, they serve as narrative barriers to the ideological implementation of social

programs that move toward Utopian ends. However, as Moylan reminds us, the capitalist drive that historically has fueled much of the anti-Utopian political landscape since the 1980s has itself been built on the premise of Utopian concepts of Reagan's declaration of the "city on the hill" and George H. W. Bush's millenarian approach to post-Cold War global society:

[Y]et in the years between the two presidential gestures, neither humanity nor the environment benefited from their apparently utopian promises. Indeed, the situation became increasingly dystopian as the celebration of Utopia became a mark of triumph for Anti-Utopia. Massive upward redistribution of income became the norm; working people steadily lost the measures of social wealth and rights that they had won through years of struggle; homelessness and the deprivations of un- and underemployment became the common lot of increasing numbers of people; violent attacks on those with little or no social power multiplied and intensified (with harassment, battering, and rape of women and similar psychological and physical assaults on people of color, gays, and lesbians); and quality medical care, universal education, and safe and supportive work and living spaces were sacrificed to the draconian policies of neoconservative and neoliberal "reformers." As well, the environment itself was pushed to the edge of irreversible disaster: Damage ranged from the depletion of the ozone layer and the spread of acid rain, to the destruction of rainforests and the poisoning of land and water through racially opportunistic toxic emissions and dumping, and to the endangering of hundreds of species with whom humanity shares the earth. (183-4)

Given the Utopian messaging of such policies in the name of capitalism, it is perhaps best to read apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic texts in recent years, ultimately, through the ways in which they attempt to counteract the false Utopia of the American political machine under late capitalism. As such, it is initially tempting to read these novels as anti-Utopian in themselves, were a reversal not already underway in the political messaging itself. The anti-Utopian effects of these false political prophecies thus brings us to yet another negative turn, one which invites us instead to read them as a form of the anti-anti-Utopian that Jameson calls for at the end of his introduction to *Archaeologies*. Through the imaginations of the end of capitalism, often thrusting the human species back into ecologies that no longer privilege the species, apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic texts challenge the notion of our inability to ultimately think outside the capitalist paradigm and instead emphasize the need to collectively approach a different ending.

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