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Introduction

Climate change stretches the limits of what can be seen, told, and understood. It poses a significant representational challenge because it commits slow violence (Nixon) and functions as a hyperobject (Morton, *Hyperobjects*): its causes are oftentimes invisible and too slow for humans to experience; its effects are temporarily and spatially indistinct. Literature may render climate change—and possible solutions—imaginable through the staging of multiple perspectives. Building on this premise, this thesis examines how a plurality of narrators can mediate the complexity of climate change. Three climate fiction (cli-fi) novels, *Odds Against Tomorrow* by Nathaniel Rich, *New York 2140* by Kim Stanley Robinson, and *The City We Became* by N. K. Jemisin will be analyzed.¹ I am interested in how the narrators in these cli-fi novels negotiate human and nonhuman entanglements. While existing scholarship has examined cli-fi's themes, this thesis contributes a new narratological concept—the democratic narrative voice (DNV)—to analyze how these texts distribute narrative voice and construct ecological relationality. By DNV, I mean a narrative strategy in which voice and agency are dispersed across multiple human and nonhuman perspectives with the goal of utopian and just interdependence. Informed by theories of polyphony (Bakhtin), narratives of community (Zagarell), and communal narration (Lanser), the concept of the democratic narrative voice brings together narrative form, narrative strategy, and implications of ethics and socio-politics to analyze how texts distribute voice, authority, and agency across human and nonhuman narrators. All three novels mobilize such a DNV in distinct ways: The DNV in Rich's *OAT*, albeit only marginally, grants nonhuman perspectives narrative authority. Robinson's *NY2140* shows how multiple of these perspectives find agency against the socio-political ideologies that undermine climate justice in their entanglement. In Jemisin's *TCWB*, the DNV anticipates the tensions within such entanglements and provides a nuanced yet utopian solution. Cli-fi,

¹ For reasons of readability, these novels are abbreviated as *OAT* (*Odds Against Tomorrow*), *NY2140* (*New York 2140*), and *TCWB* (*The City We Became*).

therefore, moves from merely representing the climate crisis to developing responses of both form and content, and beyond.

The three novels under consideration are commonly classified as part of relatively recent literary genre of cli-fi, a term that remains difficult to define. Scholars have understood cli-fi as a genre in its own right (LeMenager), a subgenre (Milner and Burgmann 5), or a literary topic with influences from a variety of genres and conventions, most often science fiction and fantasy (Andersen). I see cli-fi as an ecocentric genre that innovatively represent the climate crisis and whose potential relies on building a distinct reader-community and publicity on the literary market. The terminological ambiguity surrounding cli-fi is both because climate change itself poses significant representational challenges and because cli-fi is shaped by the tension between the novel's traditional anthropocentric limitations and its potential for engagement with climate change. Concepts such as environmental philosopher Timothy Morton's "hyperobject" and environmentalist scholar Rob Nixon's "slow violence" illustrate why the climate crisis exceeds the traditionally anthropocentric narrative scales, simultaneously suggesting strategies for addressing these limits. I treat cli-fi as a distinct yet fluid genre that draws on both environmental literature and science fiction to explore the causes and effects of anthropogenic climate change. Defined in this way, cli-fi fulfills three key functions: it decenters the human, it renders the climate crisis comprehensible, and it connects affectively to its readership. This understanding moves beyond a purely thematic or generic definition and emphasizes cli-fi's power to intervene in how climate change is imagined, narrated, and politically situated.

The spatial and temporal scales of the climate crisis present a significant representational challenge for cli-fi writers. Firstly, climate change is what Morton calls a "hyperobject," a concept so "massively distributed in time and space" that humans have substantial difficulties imagining it ("Introducing"). Amitav Ghosh calls climate change "a crisis of culture, and thus of the imagination" (ch. 1.4). Mahlu Mertens and Stef Craps go so far as to state that "to understand climate change one needs to go beyond normal human

experience” (136). Secondly, and similar to Morton’s concept of the hyperobject, the term “slow violence,” coined by the Nixon, is central in the discussion of representing climate change. Compared to attention-grabbing, dramatic and instantaneous forms of violence, slow violence is “a violence that occurs gradually and out of sight, a violence of delayed destruction that is dispersed across time and space, an attritional violence that is typically not viewed as violence at all” (Nixon 2). Considering the increasingly fast-paced attention economy and the 24-hour news cycle, the slow violence and hyperobjectivity of the causes and effects of climate change pose a significant representational issue, prompting creatives to consider: “how to devise arresting stories, images, and symbols adequate to the pervasive but elusive violence of delayed effects” (Nixon 3). The ecocritic Timothy Clark calls this problem “the tragedy that climate change is not ‘interesting’” (175). Thus, the challenge is to develop narrative strategies that can render these climate-related processes, unfolding beyond immediate perception, visible and even to a certain degree entertaining.

One possible solution lies with innovative narratives and fluid strategies of cli-fi storytelling. For instance, Nixon suggests that “[t]o intervene representationally entails devising iconic symbols that embody amorphous calamities as well as narrative forms that infuse those symbols with dramatic urgency” (10). To this end, formal experimentation and blurring genre boundaries have become increasingly common: as Adam Trexler observes, “the narrative difficulties of the Anthropocene threaten to rupture the defining features of genre” of contemporary climate literature (14). Within this “rupture,” it is crucial to redefine the narrative voice, as traditional techniques such as singular perspective or omniscient narrators are inefficient in representing climate change. Ecocritic Magdalena Mączyńska explains how, in the traditional novel, while the human is foregrounded, nature and habitats are only used as background or symbol (167). In light of this tradition, scholars such as Ghosh and Clark believe that the inherently/fundamentally anthropocentric novel cannot fully or accurately portray the climate crisis in its hyperobjectivity, while others—for instance, Antonia Mehnert, Adam

Trexler, or Astrid Bracke—argue that the contemporary novel must inspire people to reflect and act on climate issues (Mączyńska 167). Considering that the novel’s conventional structures are insufficient for tracing the diffuse scales of the climate crisis, the genre must continue to adapt and experiment formally to engage meaningfully with the pressures of the climate crisis. Cli-fi novels can therefore be deemed as radical in the sense that they inherently break with their anthropocentric tradition in focusing on this dissonance.

Existing scholarship both complicates and supports my genre-based approach to cli-fi. Andrew Milner and J. R. Burgmann firmly position climate fiction within science fiction, arguing that cli-fi constitutes a subgenre of sci-fi because of its long connection to established sci-fi traditions and climate fictions’ inherent reliance on science (1). From their perspective, climate fiction is less a new genre than a continuation of a long tradition that only recently has begun to care about global warming (20). By contrast, Mehnert stresses three core features of climate change fictions. Firstly, climate change is not merely a backdrop for the plot but “significantly alters and is a prevalent issue for characters, plot, *and* setting” (38). Secondly, climate change fiction is concerned with anthropogenic causes of climate change and, thus, engages questions of ethics and responsibility (38). Thirdly, Mehnert highlights the representational challenges that climate change fiction confronts through its hybrid formal character (38). Environmentalist Stephanie LeMenager shifts the discussion away from taxonomic precision towards cultural effect, deliberately stating that she intends “to keep the parameters of the genre open” in order foreground the genre’s sociological function (467). For LeMenager, cli-fi’s significance lies less in formal classification than in its capacity to act as a genre that “calls publics into being” (467), positioning climate fiction as an intervention that mobilizes collective attention and engagement with the climate crisis.

Building on these approaches, I argue that cli-fi must be understood as a genre in its own right to realize its political potential. This potential emerges through three central functions: cli-fi fosters affective engagement between the text and the reader, it represents the

diffuse character of climate change, and it critiques anthropocentric perspectives. This definition foregrounds cli-fi's democratic orientation and its sustained engagement with socio-political questions, rather than reducing it to a thematic label for climate-related content. While consistently situating climate change within structures of power and criticizing anthropocentrism, cli-fi is characterized by a formal and conceptual fluidity that allows it to move across genres. Furthermore, rather than foregrounding a detached representation of climate change, cli-fi forges strong bonds between writers, readers, and their environment in crisis. Cli-fi operates as a cultural practice that invites readers into networks of attention, care, and action. By defining cli-fi as its own genre, its literature gains both the visibility and cultural leverage necessary to engage readers meaningfully with the climate crisis and to foster communities that are oriented toward ecological futures.

Climate fiction matters not only for what it represents but for what it *does*: it mobilizes affective engagement, innovative narrative structures, and deliberately ecocentric ethics to orient readers towards transformative action. Ecocritic Matthew Schneider-Mayerson reports that readers of cli-fi benefit from being able to visualize climate change, overcome its temporal and spatial abstractions, understand not only scientific facts but also the daily impacts of climate change and climate justice, and imagine possible climate futures ("Influence" 482-486). His later study on readers' awareness of climate injustice cautions authors to "make their message more explicit" and "consider their choices carefully," as readers often interpret novels in coherence with their fundamental beliefs, regardless of the lesson in the novel ("Just as in the Book" 354, 357). In this context, Nixon presents the idea of the writer-activist, whose duty it is "to apprehend—to arrest, or at least mitigate—often imperceptible threats [which] requires rendering them apprehensible to the senses through the work of scientific and imaginative testimony" (14). I propose that Jemisin, Rich, and Robinson are such writer-activists. Their work negotiates the interplay of narration, politics, and the reader's imaginative engagement. Thereby, they shed light on the formal innovations through which writers render the climate

crisis perceptible and meaningful. Such analysis matters not only because these works challenge long-standing anthropocentric traditions, but also because narrative choices shape how readers conceptualize possible futures.

Considering that traditional techniques are insufficient in portraying the hyperobjectivity and slow violence of climate change, it is imperative that authors of cli-fi move towards democratic nonhuman and (extra-)planetary narrative voices. Against this backdrop, I examine the three novels' narrative voice(s) with respect to questions of individual versus collective identity, mutual care and collective power. The questions that guide my analysis are: How is the climate crisis presented by different narrative voices in the novel? Which of these voices is the reader encouraged to align with, and which voices does the narrative suppress? In what ways can a democratic narrative voice negotiate collectivity and kinship, reconcile personal agency, and destabilize the notion of the nature-human binary? How do the relationships of the narrators to nonhuman lives contribute to the novels' activist potential? I claim that polyphonic narratives, including those characterized by a democratic narrative voice, can represent the hyperobjectivity and slow violence of climate change, contribute to the reader's intellectual understanding and affective response to climate change, and deconstruct the anthropocentrism inherent in contemporary fiction. These novels expand the reader's climate imagination by making relational, nonhuman forms of existence both thinkable and narratively tangible.

My analysis of the three novels is informed by the theoretical approaches of ecocriticism and narratology. Within this interdisciplinary merger, my concept of the democratic narrative voice is the main lens for analyzing the novels' narrative perspectives. In what follows, "narrative voice" refers to the narratological term of textual organization of perspective and authority within the novels, whereas the DNV functions as an analytical concept for evaluating how such voices are silenced, constrained, or distributed. The DNV conceptualizes narration as an inherently political practice in which equality, shared authority, and attentiveness to

exclusion shape how stories are told and heard across competing perspectives. Cli-fi requires such a framework that can account for how narrative authority is shared across human and nonhuman perspectives. “Democratic” expresses values such as equality, shared decision-making, and social justice, while also remaining attentive to the tensions and exclusions produced by hegemonic power structures. “Narrative” foregrounds the act of telling and listening, emphasizing that narrative authority is never neutral or objective. “Voice,” finally, marks the tension between textual structures of narration, the speaking position of narrators shaped by ideology, and the silencing of marginalized communities. Its central, deliberately utopian premise is that all perspectives either speak or are spoken for, and that these voices must be met by listening and response. Rather than describing a singular voice, the DNV serves as a tool for examining the relations between perspectives: how authority is allocated, how perspectives interact, and which positions are enabled or excluded. While acknowledging that no novel can fully accommodate every voice, the democratic narrative voice functions as an aspirational process. In attempting to render the climate crisis narratively graspable, the DNV is necessarily utopian: it seeks to imagine democratic community under conditions of ecological collapse and gesture towards forms of climate justice that no single narrative can fully realize, yet must nonetheless strive to articulate. As such, the DNV operates primarily as a conceptual tool for analyzing the distribution of voice in cli-fi novels. Because of the genre’s political orientation, the DNV also carries strong implications for narrative strategy and thus reaches from a purely descriptive function into a productive engagement with texts.

Ecocriticism guides my analysis by providing a framework for reading narrative voice as a site where human and nonhuman relations, planetary scales, and questions of environmental justice intersect. From its beginning, ecocriticism has combined literary analysis with insights from other disciplines, evolving over time from a focus on earth-centered literature to the broader planetary and justice-related concerns of environmental humanities. Having gained momentum in the 1990s with the establishment of the Association for the Study of

Literature and Environment (Trexler and Johns-Putra 192), and initially summarized by ecocritic Cheryl Glotfelty as “an earth-centred approach to literary studies” (xix), ecocriticism swiftly turned to focus on more environmentalist topics. Greg Garrard suggests defining ecocriticism as “the study of the relationship of the human and the nonhuman, throughout human cultural history and entailing critical analysis of the term ‘human’ itself” (5). In this context, ecocritics embrace interdisciplinary readings and including scientific fact in their analyses. Garrard advises literary critics “to keep one eye on the ways in which ‘nature’ is always in some ways culturally constructed, and the other on the fact that nature really exists, both the object and, albeit distantly, the origin of our discourse” (10). This dual focus allows me to read the environments of the novels as explicitly narrative constructions. Responding to criticism that the field is too reliant on traditional Romantic concepts of place and nature (see for example Morton, *Ecology*), and in large part shaped by Ursula Heise’s *Sense of Place and Sense of Planet*, the field has in recent years expanded its research towards even broader planetary and global interests and a redefinition of the very concept of “nature.” Such a redefinition of nature as socio-ecological agents and environments affords the field an understanding of climate change as globally interconnected but does not undermine locality as still central to identity, belonging, and kinship. Accordingly, this tension between planetary interconnection and situated experience is also negotiated in cli-fi novels. Another current point of discussion within ecocriticism questions whether ecocritics should take an activist role or remain objective, and if that is even achievable (Johns-Putra 274). Given the ethical and ecological stakes of the climate crisis, claims to a false ‘objectivity’ are untenable and ecocritical scholarship must necessarily be activist in nature. This is the basis of my own critical position: Through the DNV, I evaluate the three novels not just descriptively, but also in terms of their capacity to articulate forms of environmental justice. These issues will further influence my analysis of the three novels, focusing my eye on interdisciplinary and planetary readings as well as on the activist potential of cli-fi.

Narratology guides my analysis by providing the tools to examine how the novels' narrative structures and modes of focalization shape the representation of human and nonhuman relations in cli-fi. While Ecocriticism provides the necessary environmental and political frame, focusing on the novels' conceptualization of the human-nonhuman binary and questions of kinship and collectivity within ecological collapse, narratology clarifies how the novels' form and narrative structures enact these politics. An analysis grounded in central narratological terms, such as narrator and focalizer, point of view, and narrative voice, makes the novels' polyphonic narrative structures legible as deliberate strategies rather than merely formal experimentation. This includes both global narrative structures and small-scale perspective shifts, as well as intrusions of and overlaps between narrators, and fluid changes in focalization. Attending to how narrative authority is distributed or undermined, and which perspectives are rendered reliable or marginalized, reveals the politics stakes behind these formal choices. Crucially, narration is not limited to human voices but also includes nonhuman agents that interrupt or reorient narration, thereby challenging anthropocentric narrative modes. I broaden the scope of narratology to include instances where nonhuman forces apply narrative pressure or seem to speak within the text. Narratology thus provides the analytical tools to discuss how the novels mediate what is otherwise unrepresentable—systemic ecological crisis, distributed agency, and collective experience—and to expose the politics of perspective that structure these representations.

Odds Against Tomorrow, *New York 2140* and *The City We Became* each explore climate disasters in New York City and their effects on the habitats and inhabitants of NYC while offering distinct approaches to representing the climate crisis, arguing for climate justice, and challenging anthropocentric cli-fi narratives. The three novels bear obvious similarities: the setting in a version of NYC which must deal with disasters caused by anthropogenic climate change, the criticism of wealth and power, and explanations of the direct causes of global warming and environmental vulnerability that led to the crisis while also illustrating the

destruction of nature and the outcomes of climate disasters. However, they also correspond in more subtle ways. For instance, all novels intimately show the effects of climate change on a variety of different social groups, individuals and ecosystems. Moreover, as they factor in the fauna and flora, they “extend citizenship beyond the human” (Mączyńska 168). In doing so, the three novels—each in their own, different way—contradict anthropocentric narrative traditions. While Rich frames his protagonist’s story through a satirical single narrator, Robinson and Jemisin both employ multiple narrators, with Jemisin taking one step further with fully interdependent narrators in her story.

Rich’s *Odds Against Tomorrow* is a satirical exploration of disaster capitalism. The single protagonist, Mitchell Zukor, is employed by the consulting firm FutureWorld to calculate the odds of various doomsday scenarios happening. Zukor profits from extreme disasters that happen to other, often poorer people. Yet, as a hurricane hits the city of New York and the whole city falls into chaos, Mitchell becomes increasingly consumed by his apocalyptic thoughts and struggles with personal challenges as well as the uncertainty of climate change. While Zukor is a rather individualistic protagonist, there are glimpses of mutual care, community-based solutions and slight hints towards the nonhuman that warrant analysis. Although the novel contains promising moments of a democratic narrative voice, these are repeatedly undercut by the narrative world’s structural and ideological commitments to misanthropy and by the narrative voice’s ironic distance from the climate crisis.

By contrast, Robinson’s *New York 2140* offers a surprisingly optimistic vision of a future NYC transformed by rising sea levels. Most of the city has been flooded, with its inhabitants living in the upper stories of skyscrapers, travelling by boat, and eating fish bred in aquacultures, while the 1% live in the (still unflooded) Uptown area. By employing eight different narrative voices, a majority of which are inhabitants of the partially flooded Met Life tower in Manhattan, the story provides a polyphonic and democratic perspective on the connections between individuals, their communities, and their ever-changing environment.

While each of the protagonists has their own storyline, in the end the eight strands converge on community action and large-scale financial noncompliance in a utopian attempt to overthrow the hyper-capitalistic city government. *NY2140*'s ensemble narrative opens up alternative models of community, kinship, and resistance within disaster capitalism. Still, one narrator, the "citizen," repeatedly destabilizes the novel's egalitarian impulse through his efforts to assert narrative authority. Yet the text ultimately articulates a democratic narrative voice that imagines a realistic utopian future, made possible through networks of kinship connecting the narrators to their broader urban community.

Whereas Robinson and Rich could be considered cli-fi "canon" (Johns-Putra 272), Jemisin's *The City We Became*, the first in her *Great Cities* series, is certainly the outlier in this selection. This novel does not discuss natural disasters per se; instead, it focuses on social disasters that are hidden as "natural." In this urban fantasy novel, six New Yorkers who inhabit the city's soul narrate their fight against an evil, Lovecraftian "Enemy." By merging elements of fantasy and cli-fi, the novel provides a cutting critique of individualistic and capitalistic practices in NYC while also reminding the readers that the actual power of the city lies with its people. Jemisin's narrative voices oscillate between two competing models of tentacularity: H. P. Lovecraft's logic of contamination and a communal ethics of connection. *TCWB* suggests that hyperobject threats can only be confronted through a deliberate embrace of interdependence and the dismantling of hyper-individualism. Read alongside Donna Haraway, Arturo Escobar, and Audre Lorde, the novel emerges as a sustained effort to undo binaries of subject and object, nature and culture. Instead, it imagines a fully relational ontology in which difference is the precondition for community rather than its contradiction.

Theoretical Framework

Traditional modes of storytelling—especially the novel centered on a singular, often introspective narrator who treats nonhuman nature solely as passive backdrop—prove inadequate for capturing the climate crisis. This theory chapter discusses frameworks that point towards alternatives which more effectively engage with this representational issue. The chapter is structured in three sections that together establish the theoretical and methodological framework for the analysis that follows. The first section presents the central problem that climate change, as an unimaginable crisis, exceeds the analytical capacities of both literary conventions and traditional literary criticism. This problem necessitates an interdisciplinary approach, which I develop by bringing narratology into dialogue with ecocriticism. The second section develops my definition of cli-fi as a distinct genre whose central concern is the decentering of the human, rendering the climate crisis narratively and affectively comprehensible, and foregrounding its democratic and socio-political orientation. Rather than treating cli-fi as a theme or topic, this section emphasizes its formal and conceptual fluidity, its engagement with structures of power and collective responsibility, and its function as a cultural practice that forges relationships between writers, reader, and environments. Understanding these genre-specific features allows me to read the novels' narrative strategies as responses to the demands of climate representation. The third section introduces the democratic narrative voice (DNV) as a methodological framework. This concept provides the analytical vocabulary through which I examine how the novels distribute narrative authority, negotiate competing perspectives, and attempt to articulate more inclusive, relational modes of storytelling. I argue that the novels' narrative form and genre's inherent functions call for an approach that highlights polyphony, narrative community, and the utopian ambitions and limitations of ecocentric storytelling.

In this thesis, I focus on contemporary works of cli-fi that attend to the narrative concern of representing the climate crisis and propose that traditional storytelling techniques are

insufficient in portraying the hyperobject and slow violence of climate change. I address this issue by examining the three novels' narrative voice(s) through an ecocritical and urban political lens. The following questions structure my analysis of the three novels: How do different narrators present the climate crisis? Which of these voices is the reader encouraged to align with, and which voices are disregarded? How do the narrators' relationships to human and nonhuman life contribute to the novel's activist potential? I argue that democratic narrative forms more effectively register the distributed and complex nature of climate change. Such forms foster both intellectual engagement and affective response, and can deconstruct the anthropocentrism inherent in contemporary climate fiction.

Intersections of Narratology and Ecocriticism

The climate crisis confronts contemporary literature with a fundamental representational challenge. As a hyperobject and a form of slow violence, climate change exceeds conventional spatial and temporal scales of human perception and, therefore, also disrupts established narrative structures. This results in what can also be understood as a crisis of imagination and, consequently, a crisis of narration: Traditional literary forms prove insufficient for representing the distributed causality, planetary scale, and delayed effects of the climate crisis. In response, both literary production and critical practice must adapt. Hence, I adopt an interdisciplinary framework that combines narratology and ecocriticism to analyze how narrative form engages with environmental change. As narratology provides the analytical vocabulary for examining formal structures, in particular voice and focalization, ecocriticism situates these structures within broader ideological contexts. Building on these frameworks, I develop my concept of the DNV, which synthesizes these approaches into a model for analyzing distributed, relational, and multi-perspectival narration under the conditions of the climate crisis.

The current climate crisis challenges representation because it exceeds the spatial and temporal scales of conventional human perception. Morton understands climate change as a hyperobject, a phenomenon that is “massively distributed in time and space” that they exceed direct human perception and conventional modes of representation (“Introducing”). Hyperobjects fundamentally challenge how humans understand the world: Hyperobjects are “viscous,” meaning one is always already entangled with them and unable to detach (“Introducing”). They are “nonlocal,” as their “effects are globally distributed through a huge tract of time” (“Introducing”). They are “phased,” meaning no single perspective can grasp climate change in its entirety, as is always encountered partially (“Introducing”). And finally, climate change is “inter-objective,” insofar as it “consists of all kinds of other entities but it isn’t reducible to them,” hinting at the complex relations and multiple systems implicated in the causes and effects of climate change (“Introducing”). Complementing this account of climate change, Rob Nixon’s notion of “Slow Violence” emphasizes how such distributed processes become difficult to recognize as violence at all: the term describes a form of harm “that occurs gradually and out of sight, a violence of delayed destruction that is dispersed across time and space, an attritional violence that is typically not viewed as violence at all” (2). He challenges dominant assumptions about violence as sudden and dramatic events. Instead, slow violence is “incremental and accretive, its calamitous repercussions playing out across a range of temporal scales” (2). In the context of environmental crisis, slow violence points towards the cumulative, imperceptible transformations of climate change and pollution.

Because of its spatial and temporal scale, climate change not only exceeds the cognitive frameworks of humans but also imaginative frameworks and representation in art. Ghosh asserts that “the climate crisis is also a crisis of culture, and thus of the imagination” (ch. 1.4), suggesting that the existing modes of thinking in the Anthropocene are unable to fully grasp its implications. Similarly, Mertens and Craps posit that “[t]o understand climate change one needs to go beyond normal human experience” (136). Timothy Clark considers the “limits of

imaginative engagement” and questions the whether the Anthropocene marks “a threshold at which art and literature touch limits to the human psyche and imagination themselves” (94). This breakdown of imaginative and representational capacity then directly leads to a narrative problem, as the crisis is not only difficult to *think* but also difficult to *tell*.

The reason for this imaginative challenge, as Heise suggests, is because narrative form has the wrong focus: “climate change poses a challenge for narrative and lyrical forms that have conventionally focused above all on individuals, families, or nations, since it requires the articulation of connections between events of vastly different scales” (*Sense* 205). Dominant literary forms, in particular realist fiction, as Ghosh suggests, are unsuited to climate change because realism prioritizes probability, individual experience, everyday events and climate change involves extreme, improbable events such as floods and storms, vast temporal and spatial scales, distributed causality (ch. 1.2-1.3). As Nixon maintains, “[a] major challenge is representational: how to devise arresting stories, images, and symbols adequate to the pervasive but elusive violence of delayed effects” (3). He further emphasizes that, in a culture that “venerate[s] the spectacular” and “immediate need,” the representation of “disasters that are slow moving and long in the making, [...] that are anonymous and that star nobody, [...] that are attritional and of indifferent interest to the sensation-driven technologies of our image-world” becomes the key issue (3). In particular, the question is how such disasters can be rendered in ways that might still “rouse public sentiment and warrant political intervention” (3). The fundamental tension between the real climate crisis and dominant logics is that whereas conventional storytelling privileges immediacy, visibility, and eventfulness, climate change unfolds as a slow, dispersed, and invisible process. Taken together, these perspectives demonstrate that because the climate crisis exceeds human imagination, it is incompatible with established narrative conventions.

Narratology provides my core analytical method for the narrative structures within the novels. Ecocriticism directs this analysis towards environmental concerns and the broader

implications of climate change. As representing the climate crisis requires innovative narrative structures, it also necessitates new critical approaches capable of analyzing these formal innovations. To that end, Deborah Bird Rose and her co-authors propose the “‘unsettling’ of dominant narratives” and introducing “new narratives that are calibrated to the realities of our changing world” (3). This demand is grounded in the recognition that formal structures within texts both shape and are shaped by historical, environmental, and socio-political conditions beyond the text. When these conditions and ideologies change drastically, through the emergence of planetary-scale environmental processes, the decentering of human agency, and the disruption of linear, event-based temporality, the narrative structures within texts must be adapted.

To account for the formal complexity and the environmental stakes of contemporary climate change, this thesis adopts an interdisciplinary approach. To this end, I draw on literary critic Erin James’s concept of econarratology. James highlights two related issues: First, the role of narratology in exposing how texts shape and contest ideological positions, and second, the difficulty of rendering the fluid, ongoing threat of the climate crisis in narrative form (326). As she argues, “narrative theory is a powerful tool for unpacking how narratives can both perpetuate and subvert dominant ideologies about nature in this moment of environmental crisis” even as “climate change is influencing the content and texture of modern nature narratives” (James 326). Thus, narratology provides the conceptual vocabulary necessary for this thesis. In particular, terms such as narrator, focalization, and perspective/point of view prove central to the conceptual development of the DNV. The narrator, defined by Uri Margolin as “the inner-textual (textually encoded) speech position from which the current narrative discourse originates” (646) becomes especially significant in texts that employ plurivocal or multi-level narration. Similarly, focalization, coined by Gérard Genette, designates the “selection or restriction of narrative information in relation to the experience and knowledge of the narrator [or] the characters” (Niederhoff, “Focalization” 197). Forms such as variable and

multiple focalization distribute perspective across several characters (G  nette 189-90). Closely related, the terms “perspective” and “point of view” refer to “the way the representation of the story is influenced by the position, personality and values of the narrator [and] the characters” (Niederhoff, “Perspective” 692). Together, these foundational narratological concepts provide the vocabulary to identify and analyze the formal innovations within cli-fi, particularly with regard to narrative voice. Additionally, ecocritical approaches direct attention to the environment and ideological dimensions of these texts. Taken together, this interdisciplinary framework enables an analysis of narrative strategies developed in response to the climate crisis that is both formally precise and attuned to the broader environmental and political implications of climate fiction. It is precisely at the intersection of narratology and ecocriticism that the DNV is situated.

With these precise narratological terms for structural analysis, ecocriticism directs attention to the content of the novels. Ecocriticism, initially “an earth-centred approach to literary studies” (Glotfelty xviii), examines the relationships between human and nonhuman worlds, including questioning the concept of the “human” itself (Garrard 5). As a contribution to the broader environmental humanities, ecocriticism is interdisciplinary and often incorporates scientific perspectives. Scholars like Garrard stress balancing the cultural construction of nature with its material reality (10). Correspondingly, Morton argues that the reliance on Romantic notions of place and nature has hindered “properly ecological forms of culture, philosophy, politics, and art” (*Ecology* 1). Additionally, critics also increasingly need to engage with the changes a global climate crisis brings. Early ecocriticism’s reliance on outdated concepts of nature in combination with climate change fundamentally reshaping how the world is known and understood lead to a planetary focus and a redefinition of nature. Ursula Heise argues that, as opposed to “the recuperation of a sense of place,” which she calls “a visionary dead end” for environmentalism, a “sense of planet,” which is “an understanding of how a wide variety of both natural and cultural places and processes are connected and shape

each other around the world” is best (*Sense* 21). Furthermore, the very concepts of “nature” and “human” have been reimagined: Moore, for instance, has taken to spelling the “abstractions that have been taken as real by empires, modernizing states, and capitalists in order to cheapen human and extra-human natures of every kind” as capitalized “Nature” and “Human” (50). These issues will significantly influence my analysis of the three novels, highlighting interdisciplinary and planetary readings as well as the activist potential of cli-fi.

The following concepts from ecocriticism inform the conceptual development of the DNV and my analysis: Val Plumwood’s critique of dualisms as foundational to anthropocentric ideology; Donna Haraway’s concepts of situated knowledge and the god trick as critiques of disembodied perspective, and her Chthulucene as a relational, multispecies alternative to anthropocentric worldviews. Together, these perspectives build the conceptual basis for challenging hierarchical and human-centered models of knowing. Plumwood argues that the nature-reason dualism, like other dualisms, is highly political. It is a “conceptual framework which structures otherwise different categories of oppression” such as racism, sexism or colonialism, as “an intense, established and developed cultural expression of such a hierarchical relationship, constructing central cultural concepts and identities so as to make equality and mutuality literally unthinkable” (12, 41). In her framework, reason functions as the privileged master, the marker of full subjectivity, agency, and cultural authority, while nature designates the subordinated realm of materiality, embodiment, and passivity (12-3). Dualisms, Plumwood further presents, are constructed through processes of backgrounding the subordinated part, of radical exclusion and hyperseparation between the two parts, of instrumentalizing, objectifying as well as homogenizing the subordinated part (41-5). Bruno Latour mirrors Plumwood’s hyperseparation, polarization and homogenization in *We Have Never Been Modern*, explaining how the modern frame of knowledge is based on the separation of nature and culture into “two entirely distinct ontological zones” by a process he terms “purification”, and by the covert practice of “translation,” that is hiding “hybrids of nature and culture” (10-1). Thus, dualisms

organize reality through rigid oppositions of master and slave. In the context of the environmental crisis, dualisms reinforce the hierarchy between the human and nonhuman worlds, and actively shape modes of perception and representation. For my purposes, Plumwood's and Latour's perspectives provide a critical framework for understanding how these hierarchies are produced by the novels' form and content.

Furthermore, dualisms build the basis for anthropocentric ideologies: forms of oppression such as racism and sexism, so Plumwood, "have drawn their conceptual strength from casting sexual, racial and ethnic difference as closer to the animal and the body construed as a sphere of inferiority, as a lesser form of humanity lacking the full measure of rationality or culture" (13). In this sense, anthropocentrism can be understood as an ecological version of the same logic. Anthropocentrism emerges not as a neutral worldview with the human as the master over nature and nonhumans but as a historically produced ideology that legitimizes human supremacy by naturalizing the dualisms Plumwood and Latour expose as historically constructed and politically produced. Jason Moore similarly argues that the Anthropocene, while certainly an established critique of the superiority of humans over nonhumans, is unjust and reductive in that "it fails to see that the problem is not *Man* and *Nature*, but *certain* men committed to the profitable domination and destruction of most humans and the rest of nature" ("Capitalocene" 53). Furthermore, Moore explains how the construction of the dualism of Society and Nature has facilitated other historic dualisms, for example related to civilization and savagery, and has led to a systematic undervaluing and "cheapening" of women, indigenous peoples, people of color, and, in fact, of all life and work ("Capitalocene" 53). Lawrence Buell summarizes the character of nature's exploitation thusly: "In short, nature has been doubly otherized in modern thought. The natural environment as empirical reality has been made to subserve human interests, and one of these interests has been to make it serve as a symbolic reinforcement of the subservience of disempowered groups: nonwhites, women, and children" (21). Correspondingly, Moore concludes that "these humans were not Human at all. They were

regarded as part of Nature, along with trees and soils and rivers—and treated accordingly” (“Cheap Nature” 79). Within this logic, climate justice is systematically deferred, as those positioned as part of Nature are treated as more expendable than those recognized as fully Human.

Haraway’s work intervenes in this anthropocentric thinking. Her situated knowledges challenge the dualisms that sustain anthropocentric ideologies and propose relational modes of thinking. Haraway uses the term “god trick” to describe the illusion of a neutral, all-seeing perspective that claims to observe the world “from nowhere” while remaining detached and objective (“Knowledges” 581). Such a perspective, she argues, pretends to occupy a space that is believed to be neutral, objective and true, “claim[ing] the power to see and not be seen, to represent while escaping representation” (“Knowledges” 581), a deeply “false vision promising transcendence of all limits and responsibility” (“Knowledges” 582-3). She criticizes this gaze as masking its own partiality, arguing instead for “situated knowledge” that acknowledges its stance and context (“Knowledges” 582-3). Situated knowledge, by contrast, is a form of knowledge that openly acknowledges its position, limitation, and embodied perspective. Haraway foregrounds “politics and epistemologies of location, positioning, and situating, where partiality and not universality is the condition of being heard to make rational knowledge claims” (“Knowledges” 589). Rather than “the view from above, from nowhere, from simplicity,” Haraway proposes “the view from a body, always a complex, contradictory, structuring, and structured body” (“Knowledges” 589). Related ideas appear in the work of Adrienne Rich, whose concept of the “politics of location” similarly insists that identities, and the knowledge that can be gained from them, emerges from specific historical, contextual and political position of the body (32). Rather than claiming universal authority, Adrienne Rich argues that critical understanding must begin by acknowledging the concrete conditions from which one speaks. She sees theory as “[a]bstractions severed from the doings of living people, fed back to people as slogans” (31). For the DNV, Haraway’s perspectives thus provide a crucial

foundation. They enable a shift from singular, authoritative narration toward a multi-voiced, relational mode. As a result, a multi-voiced, relational and distributed narration across human and nonhuman actors becomes imaginable.

Cli-fi as a Genre

The novels under consideration are part of relatively young literary phenomenon, climate fiction (cli-fi). Situating the three novels within the genre of cli-fi, climate fiction, is essential for understanding both their formal strategies and their intervention in broader political discourses. Generally, as Adeline Johns-Putra explains, the term “cli-fi” has not been clearly defined and is understood as either a significant genre of its own right, a subgenre of another genre, or a literary topic with influences in a variety of genres and their conventions, such as science fiction and fantasy (“Climate Change” 267). Building on existing understandings of cli-fi, I propose a definition of cli-fi not as a hybrid label but as its own genre. Cli-fi is shaped by its roots in environmental literature and the conventions of sci-fi yet firmly focused on anthropogenic climate change and its impacts. My definition foregrounds three primary functions: Cli-fi is most critically effective when it, firstly, amplifies affective engagement between text and reader, secondly, renders the slow and distributed nature of environmental harm legible (structural innovation), and thirdly, is committed to subvert anthropocentric perspectives (political commitment). From this discussion of genre emerges a definition of cli-fi that combines democratic notions and socio-political questions, fluidity of structure and content, and a strong connection between its writers, readers and their greater environment. Environmental literature and science fiction add up in cli-fi to make something greater than the sum of its parts. I believe that the novels by Robinson, Rich and Jemisin are exemplary for this notion within cli-fi.

Instead of demarcating the genre of cli-fi solely through literary or theoretical conventions, I approach cli-fi in terms of its function. My understanding is grounded in what

cli-fi does, in its capacity to confront climate change and climate injustice. Given its rising popularity and the increasing academic interest in literature under this term, I choose to define cli-fi as its own genre that fluidly encompasses influences from both environmental literature and science fiction, yet always attends to anthropogenic climate change, its causes and effects. Treating cli-fi as its own genre expands its reach and significance within the literary market, academic discourse, and among readers. As LeMenager argues: “The project of creating a taxonomy for cli fi gets both climate and culture into the newspaper and in doing that, it is a *project that acts*, summoning a national and even international climate change public. Genres intend to call publics into being” (476). Considering the looming climate crisis, this highlights the practical dimension of genre: Bearing in mind that genre is not a fixed category and not strictly exclusive or inclusive, it operates as a means of visibility, circulation, and collective engagement. Defining cli-fi as its own genre increases its impact within the literature market and critical discourse as well as increased visibility to attract more readers and build communities off existing ones. Cli-fi’s status as its own genre is inseparable from its capacity to mobilize readers and to make climate change actionable.

Cli-fi serves three interrelated functions that distinguish it from environmental literature and science fiction as a genre uniquely suited to the challenges of climate change: an affective dimension, structural innovations for capturing the hyperobject of climate change, and a subversion of anthropocentrism. Its affective function relies on eliciting empathy and identification with the text, provoking emotions such as anxiety or dread while simultaneously fostering resilience and hope. Personal identification with characters or scenarios often serves as the basis for collective engagement. This deep emotional engagement with the text allows readers to imagine and participate in planetary futures. Structurally, climate change presents a significant representational challenge for writers because it is a hyperobject (Nixon). To reflect the distributed and interconnected impacts of climate change, cli-fi writers employ fluid, often fragmentary or genre-blending narrative structures to depict environmental disasters, integrate

nonhuman perspectives, such as cyborgs or the environment itself, and co-construct new realities with readers. Responding to these structural innovations, Julia Leyda and her co-authors see cli-fi as a rather loose category that encompasses print media as well as film, TV, theater and other performance art (13). They conclude by saying that while the term cli-fi “acknowledges a debt to the genre of science fiction[, they] would not reduce cli-fi to merely a subgenre of science fiction” (13), implying that by absorbing cli-fi as a subgenre within sci-fi, one restricts its scope and diminishes its future impact. Finally, cli-fi actively subverts anthropocentrism, challenging dualistic and hierarchical conceptions of humans and nature. Cli-fi is not just concerned with representing climate change “in its multiple facets to the reader” (224), per Mehnert’s definition, but also focuses on the hierarchical nature between humans and nonhuman life as well as on creative solutions to inspire action. Together, the three functions, affective engagement, structural innovation to render climate change imaginable, and the decentering of human perspectives, define cli-fi as a literary and political “project that acts” (LeMenager 476).

This definition of cli-fi along its three functions is informed by early texts that engaged with nature. Early environmental literature, also referred to as “ecoliterature” or “Nature Writing,” treated nature as both subject and backdrop, frequently relying on tropes tied to pastoral or wilderness ideals. Nineteenth-century texts such as *Walden* by Henry David Thoreau and *Nature* by Ralph Waldo Emerson reflected on one protagonist’s enlightenment and deep connection with the beautiful divine truth of the natural world (Mehnert 36). These early American environmental texts focused on the emotional effect of one specific environment on one singular man. Even as the novel evolved to include multiple perspectives, it marginalized nature as the mere backdrop and reflected human anxieties for socio-political concerns of the time. Mączyńska explains how the nineteenth-century novel was developed in and in dialogue with its time, as it “documented the abuse of fossil fuel extraction, yet also canonized an anthropocentric ethos that privileged the quotidian concerns and interior lives of the human

individuals, relegating ‘nature’ (constructed as a separate, fixed ontological category) to the role of background or symbol” (167). This literature reflects the status-quo critically yet still does not fully contend with the fact that the destruction is anthropogenic. In the 1960s and 70s, as public awareness for environmental concerns grew, literature addressing environmental destruction, such as Arthur Herzog’s *Heat*, positioned climate change not only as a dystopian or distant setting in sf but as its own theme, “as a social, cultural, and political phenomenon and problem” (Trexler and Johns-Putra 187). Yet, nature remained primarily a setting or trigger for human-centered narratives. Early environmental texts thus provide cli-fi with both inherited limitations and useful strategies: the careful attention to details in nature, the elicitation of affective responses, and the negotiation of socio-political concerns. Cli-fi extends these foundations, turning the focus on details into a deep care for nature and call to action.

While cli-fi is rooted in the traditions of science fiction, it diverges significantly in its emphasis on affective engagement and its structural capacity to capture climate change in its complexity. Cli-fi is most often related to science fiction, a term which has also been strongly contested. Most scholars employ literary theorist Darko Suvin’s definition, who defined the interplay of two concepts, the novum and cognitive estrangement, as constitutive of sci-fi (3-4). Suvin’s novum denotes a new idea or strange element that drives the plot and estranges the reader from their familiar reality while simultaneously provoking criticism of that reality (7-8). In many sci-fi stories, changing climates have been this novum, and the rapid planetary changes function as a sort of estrangement from the Earth. Interestingly, Mehnert sees this fact as proof that cli-fi should be categorized as science/speculative fiction (41). However, reading climate change as a sci-fi novum, in my view, does not necessarily suggest that cli-fi is part of science fiction. In cli-fi, in contrast to science fiction, climate change is not just the novum or otherworldly setting, it is a deciding feature. Cli-fi writers need to treat climate change as a pervasive, structuring condition rather than an isolated plot device. Likewise, when considering cognitive estrangement, cli-fi does not need to be set on a different planet or too far in the future

to be strange, to show planetary effects, to depict dire consequences and induce reflection. Rather, cli-fi's affective dimension works precisely because the immediacy of the climate crisis intensifies reader engagement. As such, sci-fi's ideas of the novum and cognitive estrangement become factually ineffective in cli-fi and even downplay the immediate danger of the climate crisis. Thus, cli-fi reworks sci-fi's conceptual tools to prioritize affective bonds with readership and represent climate change as a totalizing structural condition.

Due to being deeply interwoven with both sci-fi and other experimental environmental literature, and bearing in mind the representational challenge of climate change as a hyperobject, the development of cli-fi as a genre has also brought with it structural innovations. These included fragmented and non-linear narratives as well as multiple perspectives and the inclusion of nonhuman voices. LeMenager, writing about her concept of "genre trouble" in the Anthropocene, sees that "artistic genres are fraying, recombining, or otherwise moving outside of our expectations of what they ought to be because life itself is moving outside of our expectations for what it ought to be" (477). This fluidity of genre within cli-fi is unsurprising in the context of an ever-evolving planet due to climate change, Heise explains: "Like other processes of global systemic transformation, ecological or not, climate change poses a challenge for narrative and lyrical forms that have conventionally focused above all on individuals, families, or nations, since it requires the articulation of connections between events of vastly different scales" (*Sense* 205). Thus, there is a movement away from anthropocentric literature to a broader, more revolutionary ecoliterature that is concerned with anti-anthropocentric politics. This step away from distinctly human forms of collectivity, that is to say a focus on myself, on my family, my nation state, implies that cli-fi, challenged by and developed for the hyperobject of climate change, can introduce a more democratized form of literature. Through its multi-perspectival, decentered, often non-linear narrative forms, cli-fi makes perceptible the scale and complexity of climate change while undermining anthropocentric modes of storytelling.

Over time, common sci-fi tropes—such as apocalypse, utopia, and dystopia—have been reinvented to render them more suitable for climate literature, leading to an increased focus on community, democracy, and the nonhuman. This also shapes the utopian impulses found in the novels analyzed here. Allison Mackey offers such a reinvention and argues that apocalyptic narratives with an interspecies focus and that decenter humanity can inspire change:

Beyond a logic of human exceptionalism, [these narratives] invite us to *feel responsibility for one another and for the land we walk upon*. [...] By recovering and revaluing stories and modes of knowledge that have been ignored or overwritten by dominant narratives, these texts imagine ‘apocalypse’ in the original biblical sense—not merely as the end of the world, but also as a revelation that other worlds are possible. (451; emphasis added)

This possibility for change has already shown tangible effects in the novel-exterior world: Mehnert sketches the evolution of the apocalyptic trope from the publication of Rachel Carson’s *Silent Spring* in 1962 onwards, explaining that Carson’s work was groundbreaking in that it combined fictional and non-fictional modes in “a *democratization* of scientific research” and, crucially, revealed the anthropogenic nature of climate change to a wider public (28; emphasis added). Thus, both Mackey and Mehnert highlight the idea that climate change literature closely relates to the exterior world and display a somewhat democratic, communal belief. In this sense, these reimagined sci-fi tropes within climate literature undermine anthropocentrism by foregrounding interspecies relations. At the same time, the formal and structural innovations, such as the blending of genre and integration of multiple perspectives, support more democratic ideals by redistributing knowledge production. Finally, these tropes help articulate a notion of climate justice that links responsibility and care not only among human communities but also to nonhuman worlds.

Akin to the apocalypse, the utopia has been reimagined as a site of active engagement with crisis that is marked by a commitment to change and action rather than passive contemplation. While “utopian” ideas in daily use detail something unrealistic and unattainable, the utopian trope in literature has several meanings: “a better way of living or of being,” as an alternative system of living, a “social utopia,” futuristic thinking with present-day doing, a

“prefigurative practice [that] attempts to live out in this world the relationships and practices that might characterise an imagined better future” (Levitas 6-7). These readings show “a clearly articulated commitment to revolutionary change” (Milner, “Utopia” 28) and “engage in a ‘poetics of responsibility,’ that is, in a discussion about the responsibility humankind has toward its own actions” (Mehnert 2-3). Ruth Levitas ascribes utopia with a visionary power that allows us a “break from the present at least in imagination” to envision a good future, inherently normative in that it evaluates what this good future entails and holistic and complex yet also concrete in its imagination (7, 3). Furthermore, utopia must involve continual criticism and be a *collective process* rather than focus on one end point (Levitas 9). Like Mackey and Mehnert, Levitas identifies a democratic tendency towards other life and the environment as central for climate change literature: “provisional versions of a better future must be negotiated collectively, raising questions about political organisation and agency” (9). By articulating distinct commitment to climate justice, this utopian trope positions literature as inspiration, as a guiding vision. The three novels examined in this thesis mobilize these reconfigured utopian dynamics in different ways and to varying degrees. This expansion of sci-fi tropes further demonstrates that cli-fi is not just a subgenre further innovates on sci-fi traditions. This active reinvention enables the utopian functions that drive the affective, structural and political ambitions in cli-fi: newly imagined utopian tropes foreground nonhuman communities, decenter human perspectives, and imagine relational networks that challenge anthropocentric assumptions.

Democratic Narrative Voice

To do justice to the narratological complexity of the three novels, I propose the concept of the democratic narrative voice as an analytical tool with a strong political orientation. The DNV combines the form of narrative voice(s) with narrative strategies, incorporates both narratological terminology and sociological implications, and emphasizes the community

between human and nonhuman life. This concept relies on the premise that narration is not neutral but negotiates authority, participation, and responsiveness across competing perspectives. The DNV, as such, provides a framework for analyzing how narrative authority is distributed across perspectives, how different voices are enabled or constrained, and how texts negotiate the presence or absence of marginalized human and nonhuman agents. In this sense, the DNV does not refer to a singular voice, but to a relational configuration of voices and silences. This is particularly relevant in the context of cli-fi, which attempts to comprehend a crisis that exceeds individual experience and thus demands the synthesis of multiple, even conflicting viewpoints. The DNV therefore functions descriptively and evaluatively: it maps how narrative authority is enacted in the text and assesses to what extent a narrative is moving towards a more inclusive, relational, and ecologically attuned form of storytelling.

The term “democratic narrative voice,” in my perspective, evokes a number of related concepts: ecological democracy, visions of polyphonic narration, material ecocriticism, and utopianism. The first element of the democratic narrative voice holds interesting tensions. The term “democracy” appears as both a political system and a normative ideal, both of which are historically contingent, exclusionary, and deeply contested. Associations with democracy as a form of governing, citizens choosing who to follow and let lead, as well as a set of values such as equality and giving a voice to the many come to mind. In practice, democracy applies only to those who are allowed to cast a vote in the current system, or can afford to do so. As Wendy Brown argues, “markets and money are corrupting or degrading democracy, [...] political institutions and outcomes are increasingly dominated by finance and corporate capital, [and] democracy is being replaced by plutocracy” (17). Furthermore, she insists that neoliberalism “is converting the distinctly *political* character, meaning, and operation of democracy’s constituent elements into *economic* ones” (17). If democratic processes are shaped by short-term economic interests, they cannot respond to climate change, which demands solutions such as equality, collective responsibility, and long-term sustainability. In the modern context

democracy is not just conceptually unstable, but also “outdated in our age of the ecological crisis” of the Anthropocene (Lysaker 120). Democracy, at least in its current form, is insufficient for the challenges of climate change and must be rethought as an inclusive and future-oriented process.

Redefining democracy is a necessary response to the conditions of climate change which centers nonhuman agency and the boundaries of democracy in general. In this regard, *ecological democracy* becomes relevant. As Robyn Eckersley explains, ecological democracy seeks to extend the democratic principles of justice and representation to the nonhuman world: From the beginning, ecological democracy was a project that intended “to expose the complicity of ‘actually existing liberal democracy’ in perpetuating the ecological crisis” and “expand the fundamental coordinates of democracy—space, time, community, and agency—to bring them into closer alignment with an ecological imaginary that transcended national boundaries” (214-5). Later, a critical reconfiguration of this framework challenged the anthropocentric limitations of traditional liberal democracy further, and aims “to connect ecology and democracy in everyday life by creating new and more ecologically responsible material practices in collective, embodied, and prefigurative ways” in “a marked shift in focus away from representative democracy ‘from above’ and towards more radical and participatory forms of democracy ‘from below’” (Eckersley 223). Democracy, in this sense, must be rethought beyond its liberal and anthropocentric foundations. The DNV offers a way to analyze these emerging innovations as interconnected forms of agency.

In line with this rethinking of democracy, reader participation becomes crucial. Vanessa Anderson also considers a democratic notion in literature, considering that democratic literature must stem from an interaction between writers and readers: “democratic literature can be defined as a literature that requires the reader’s direct participation in order to succeed. It is a literature that interpellates its readers, challenges them, creates a space for them within the narrative and demands a response” (2). Anderson then reasons that a first-person narrator can

best accomplish this democratic narrative: “the ‘I’ of the text necessarily implies a corresponding ‘you’” (2). The readers certainly are crucial for the democracy of a text, in that they have a privileged position to act on what they learn, and the narrative voice is the link between the content of a novel and the readers’ interpretation of it. Yet, I believe that all forms of narrative voice, be it first or third person, omniscient or selective, can depict nonhuman and democratic voices. Limiting democratic narration to a certain structure risks reducing democracy to a formal feature. It is less the actual form than the interplay of narrative voices and their capacity to engage the reader in processes of interpretation and responsibility that is central to the DNV.

The second element, “narrative,” refers less to the simple presence of a storyteller than to the way narrative authority is distributed across voices. Narrative authority relies on access and mediation: Who is allowed to speak? How is perspective structured through focalization? How strongly do particular voices shape the meaning of a novel? For the democratic narrative voice, it is useful to think of narrative authority not as a fixed idea. It can vary in quantity, meaning how much of the story is mediated by a one voice, as well as in quality, depending on the ideological position of the narrator or if they are a particularly convincing and reliable mediator. Thus, in texts that offer multiple perspectives, narrative authority is also about the question of uneven distribution of narrative power: When multiple voices are present, and they share differing versions of a text’s content, these dimensions continue to shape what is being said and whose version of events carries the most force.

My understanding of “narrative” builds on models of multi-voiced narration, such as Mikhail Bakhtin’s polyphony, as well as on the communal approaches developed by Sandra Zagarell and Susan Lanser. Bakhtin’s polyphony denotes the coexistence of multiple narrative voices and perspectives which are each independent and unique whilst interacting dynamically with others, not subordinated under a single authoritative perspective: “*a plurality of consciousnesses, with equal rights and each with its own world*, combine but are not merged in

the unity of the event” (*Problems* 6). Absent from this definition and most other theories on multiple narration is, however, a notion of community. Challenging the belief “that great literature is about the search for the self,” Zagarell describes the “narrative of community,” which imagines the self “as part of the interdependent network of the community rather than as an individualistic unit” and is typically concerned with the inner workings of a community’s everyday life (499). Lanser, in a similar vein, develops the concept of communal narration:

By communal voice I mean a spectrum of practices that articulate either a collective voice or a collective of voices that share narrative authority. [...] By communal narration I do not mean simply the use of an authorial voice that resorts to an inclusive ‘we’ [...]. I refer, rather, to a practice in which narrative authority is invested in a definable community and textually inscribed either through multiple, mutually authorizing voices or through the voice of a single individual who is manifestly authorized by a community. (21)

The ideas of authorship and voice in communal narration show considerable similarities to a democratic narration. What is lacking from both Zagarell’s and Lanser’s concepts is an explicit concern with marginalized voices. Influenced by these ideas, “narrative” in the DNV offers a deeper understanding of the interplay between the novels’ form of narration and their external function: Narrative is not just about the presence of multiple voices but about how these voices are made to speak with and alongside one another. Narration, ideally, then becomes a shared practice: community and inclusion are both thematic and reflected in the form of the story. Difference, using Audre Lorde’s definition (104-5), between the voices does not make the story inconclusive but enriches it.

The last element, “voice,” creates another tension between the textual structure, the voice of the teller, and the voice—or lack thereof—of a silenced community. To the narratological term of voice as a set of formal structures, I add the political term of voice as “the causes, ideologies, or social implications of particular narrative practices,” adhering to Lanser’s exploration in her introduction to *Fictions of Authority* (4). From this perspective, narrative voice is never neutral: it determines who is allowed to tell a story, who is heard, and which forms of expression are deemed as legitimate or even important. Some voices are

amplified; others remain marginal or completely unheard. Again, these frictions are deliberate, because they make visible the inherent paradox of storytelling, as even in texts that aim for completeness or inclusivity, not all experiences can be articulated or recognized. If we consider, from a human perspective, speaking and writing as having a voice, then many will be effectively voiceless.

In the context of nonhuman nature, this question of voice becomes a question of representation: Who can speak for ecosystems, animals, or environments, how can texts mediate nonhuman nature's voices as legible for humans, and when does advocacy become appropriation? Various theoretical approaches in ecocriticism complicate these questions further and challenge the idea that voice must be tied to human language. Jane Bennett, for instance, argues that nonhuman bodies and materials possess their own vitality, a "thing-power," "the curious ability of inanimate things to animate, to act, to produce effects dramatic and subtle" (6). In a similar vein, material ecocriticism, as developed by Serenella Iovino and Serpil Oppermann, suggests that matter itself can be expressive, in that bodies, landscapes, and ecological processes leave traces that can be read as forms of narrative: "Matter, in all its forms, in this regard, becomes a site of narrativity, a storied matter, embodying its own narratives in the minds of human agents and in the very structure of its own self-constructive forces. Interpreted in this material-ecocritical light, matter itself becomes a text" (83). Voice, in this context, becomes relational and is developed through interactions: "Material ecocriticism invites us into a polyphonic story of the world that includes the vital materiality of life, experiences of nonhuman entities, and our bodily intra-actions with all forms of material agency as effective actors" (Iovino and Oppermann 88). Through the lens of material ecocriticism, processes such as environmental destruction and species extinction become an erasure of nonhuman voices. Within the framework of the DNV, voice therefore does not simply mean adding more speakers but rethinking what counts as voice altogether. The form of narration itself must begin to accommodate a broader, more relational, and potentially more equitable

distribution of expression. By attending to nonhuman voices, more democratic engagement is made possible, and ecosystems, nonhuman species, and materials are represented alongside human interests. This links my understanding of voice back to the task of democratic narration.

The challenge of representing nonhuman voices is inherently paradoxical as humans must speak for what cannot similarly speak for itself, yet it is ethically and narratively necessary. This paradox makes cli-fi distinctly utopian: it aims for something impossible yet necessary. A utopia that acknowledges its own limitations while pursuing a more relational world is what Lisa Garforth and Miranda Iossifidis call “a thoroughly weirded utopianism” (1). They expand on the idea of utopia and argue that the Anthropocene has necessitated a rejection of comfortably happy ending in favor of a disruptive and uncanny utopia that “refuses the comfort of unreflexively inhabiting our world as it is and instead offers the prospect of finding a new way to feel at home in a transfigured society” (2). In climate change narratives, this weird utopia can “push us past binaries of nature and society, object and subject, towards a recognition of networked and hybrid entities and selves” (Garforth and Iossifidis 12). As such, Garforth and Iossifidis move beyond the idea of community into a more complex form of entanglement. Democratic narrative voice mirrors this process: It functions to distribute attention and agency across human and nonhuman worlds. It recognizes that no single novel can encompass every perspective but models justice, relationality and empathy. Furthermore, attempting to “humanize” the scale of hyperobjects such as the climate crisis is inherently utopian, but necessary. Cli-fi is particularly well suited for these goals, as it is structurally equipped to represent complex networks of actors on multiple temporal and spatial scales. This utopian direction is mirrored in the representation of matter, ecosystems, and nonhuman species, which—even if mediated imperfectly—is necessary. Democratic narrative voice can be seen as a utopian process that aims for climate justice for all yet acknowledges that no novel can hold space for every voice.

Doomed Nonhuman Voices in Nathaniel Rich's *Odds Against Tomorrow*

Nathaniel Rich's *OAT* follows Mitchell Zukor, a risk analyst obsessed with calculating disaster probabilities in New York City, as he navigates a catastrophic hurricane and its aftermath. The democratic narrative voice emerges in *OAT* both in its global narrative structure and in glimpses within the distinct narrative perspectives. While the novel is structured through three focalizers, the initially unknown first chapter focalizer, Mitchell, and his love-interest and co-worker Jane, there is only one overarching narrator. This structure disperses narrative authority across multiple viewpoints, occasionally even suggesting nonhuman perspectives. Thus, it creates what can be described as seedlings of a DNV: consideration of community and interconnectedness even with the reader, fleeting scenes of empathy, glimpses of nonhuman voices, the deconstruction of the nature-culture dualism and even an attempt at Haraway's Chthulucene. At the same time, the narrator repeatedly undermines these seedlings by relying on anthropocentric, capitalist, and at times misanthropic logics: Nature is frequently aestheticized and subordinated to human perception, Mitchell exhibits a growing misanthropy towards who he does not deem "human enough," and Jane's perspective reproduces a wilderness fantasy that mirrors capitalist and anthropocentric ideology. Ultimately, these choices weaken the novel's democratic narrative voice, and, consequently, its potential for advocating for revolutionary planetary justice. The identity of the overarching narrator is only revealed at the end of the novel, and retroactively effects the imagined community between the narrator, focalizers, and reader. Because of this breach of trust, *OAT*'s satirical critique of anthropocentrism and the isolated moments of democratic narrative voice are ineffective.

Seedlings of Democratic Narrative Voice

While there is only one narrator—who, thus, is the dominating narrative instance—there are three focalizers who allow for seedlings of the DNV. In its first chapter, the initially unknown first person narrator-focalizer presents memories of his college years. The narrator's

use of “I” and “we” constructs an affective proximity that invites reader participation, assuming they are part of *OAT*’s storyworld and disaster experience. Characteristic of the democratic narrative voice, this sense of affinity persuades the reader to emotionally invest in the story. After this introduction, the majority of the novel is then focalized through Mitchell’s perspective in the third person. This shift from first to third person narration transforms the novel’s initially intimate perspective into a more distant yet still internally focalized one. The final chapter is presented through Jane Eppler’s eyes in the third person and, in tandem with the first chapter, frames Mitchell’s journey narratively. Mitchell Zukor is the main protagonist of the novel, a mathematical savant who is deeply invested (literally and metaphorically) in the chances of disasters occurring in the city. Jane is Mitchell’s coworker turned love-interest and by his side for most of their journey fleeing New York City. As focalizer, Mitchell is torn between listening to his intuitive connection to nature, which relates closely to Haraway’s concept of situated knowledges, and the capitalist reason and universalist logics that he has internalized. In several scenes, Mitchell’s thoughts build upon a deep attunement of his environment and even let glimpses of nonhuman perspectives intrude in his narration. His journey seemingly leads him to embracing his natural instincts and inner voice. Mitchell’s attunement to nature is related to his fear of death, a deeply ingrained and instinctual anxiety of mortality. These traces of democratic narrative voice are noticeable in Mitchell’s connection to nature throughout and are particularly potent in a crucial moment of possibility towards a less anthropocentric narrative at the end of his journey, when he seemingly enters the Chthulucene. In this scene, Mitchell views a rotting log filled with insects and critters, drawing conclusions about the multispecies entanglement and his own situatedness as a relational being. At last, Jane’s focalization signals an attempt at democratic narrative voice whose potential is not realized fully and, in fact, undermines Mitchell’s character journey and the text’s democratic narrative affordances as a whole. The multiple focalizers in *OAT* depict a diversity of perspectives and, in that, mirror the heterogeneity, active participation and meaning making within democracy. However, the

changing distance, possibly unreliable narrator, and satire ultimately constrain these seedlings of DNV.

The majority of the narrative is focalized through Mitchell's third person accounting of his own journey. An anti-social man, Mitchell is a financial analyst who trades in disaster insurance for a company called FutureWorld. He simultaneously profits from natural disasters and is plagued by his constant worry of death. When a hurricane strikes New York City and Mitchell's fears come true, he attempts to leave the city with his coworker Jane. While this disaster reveals his attunement to nonhuman nature, grounded in his situated knowledges, it also exposes his continued attachment to universalist reason. This tension between nature and logic underlies most of Mitchell's inner conflict and becomes particularly evident in the context of decay and disaster. Haraway's situated knowledges offer a deeper understanding of Mitchell's natural attunement: Haraway suggests we rethink the ideal of epistemic objectivity, traditionally construed as the point of view or opinions of the "unmarked category" of a body that is "Man and White" with "the power to see and not be seen, to represent while escaping representation," what she calls the "god trick" ("Knowledges" 581, 589). This category, which Haraway identifies as "the master, the Man, the One God whose Eye produces, appropriates, and orders all difference" ("Knowledges" 587), is within the normative confines of Western knowledge production understood to be a neutral, apparent, and true voice. Critically, this thinking creates a false universality, erases social, cultural and political dynamics of power and ignores the fact that all knowledge is produced from a specific and partial position in the world. In contrast, Haraway proposes situated knowledges as an acknowledgement of a localized and contextual "practice of objectivity that privileges contestations, deconstruction, passionate construction, webbed connections, and hope for transformation of systems of knowledge and ways of seeing" that can "sustain[...] the possibility of webs of connection" ("Knowledges" 584-5). Such possibilities are identifiable in Mitchell's focalization.

Through Mitchell's embodied and situated attunement to his environment, the novel presents examples for such networks of connection. Mitchell's shift towards situated knowledge marks a relinquishing of narrative authority, as his focalization does not impose a singular, universalizing frame on the world. One such example is a scene in which Mitchell, amidst other New Yorkers anticipating the disaster and evacuating the city, is entranced by the colors of the sky. He perceives the dramatic, almost apocalyptic imagery as "brick-dust red speckled with curling yellows and oranges" (*OAT* 142). This visceral intensity triggers a childhood memory of a winter vacation on Vancouver Island. Back then, he first experiences this awe-inspiring fascination with nature in tandem with the fragility of life in the spawning of salmon, whose skin appeared in "the same unusually strong pink hue, almost bloody" (*OAT* 142). Mitchell remembers the scene in brutal but precise detail, the fish not "quite dead yet," their decomposing bodies still moving, their "skeletons started to show; a fin detached; an eyeball hung loose from its socket" (*OAT* 142). Relating the dying fish back to himself, Mitchell asks his mother: "Why, even as they died, did they still face upstream, fighting against the current?" (*OAT* 142). This suggests that, despite his anxieties and self-centered tendencies, Mitchell possesses the capacity for attunement to the material and nonhuman world. He experienced the salmon not abstractly, but from a position that was both sensory and personal, one that anchored him corporeally in the environment he observed. His memory of the salmon is situated spatially and transcends time, as he observes the sky from a transformed urban landscape and compares it to the natural environment on Vancouver Island. In the convergence of past and present, Mitchell demonstrates a tentative relational awareness, linking his own death to the death of animals, relating the New Yorkers' powerlessness against the coming flood with the fish's dying scene. Most importantly, Mitchell's present knowledge is contingent on his subjective experience and memory, as both moments confront him with mortality and decay. Within this emotionally charged memory, Mitchell briefly abandons the illusion of a single narrative authority. Because

he acknowledges his own position, he takes a small but significant step toward the more democratic, inclusive narrative vision of the text.

Mitchell's natural intuition, grounded in this situated knowledge, is a lingering underpinning of his focalization, and in itself a glimpse of democratic narrative voice. This becomes most evident in the "cockroaches," a metaphor for his pervasive sense of impending doom: "he imagined thousands of them, tiny hairy-legged critters climbing the walls of his stomach. Their food was fear, and they ate ravenously, lip-smackingly" (*OAT* 20). Though unsettling, these cockroaches signal his natural intuition, his embodied awareness and his potential to inhabit a more situated, intuitive mode of being. In one scene, Mitchell listens to his "cockroaches" and tries to become more connected to his environment: after a long heatwave and then heavy, "obliterative" (*OAT* 125) rainfall, the cockroaches stir Mitchell from feeling "completely disengaged, zombified" (*OAT* 125) to action, and he decides to research the city's waterlines. Mitchell rediscovers how Manhattan was once covered with streams, ponds, and forests, many of which were buried during urban development but still exist underground, with water continuing to flow beneath the city (*OAT* 125-6). His findings frame the urban environment as precarious: "The underground city was a water balloon filled to bursting. It just needed one sharp poke" (*OAT* 125-6). This moment marks a shift from Mitchell's detached calculations at FutureWorld to situated awareness: he learns about the history and the changes settlers made to the environment, how British settlers destroyed a "red maple swamp" and a "hickory forest populated by hawks and ravens" to create Times Square and St. Mark's Place (*OAT* 125). He relates what he knows about the modern New York to its past, attempting to situate himself in place rather than his present moment in time. Only this research into the history of his environment helps him understand the highly emotional stakes, the fact that the city of New York is in grave danger and flooding imminent, and leads him to engage more deeply with the possibility of an upcoming disaster. Had he opened up his understanding of history to indigenous wisdom, he would also have learnt that the destruction

of the island of Mannahatta is deliberately hidden and justified with claims of white superiority, cultural advancement and how Humans are cultured, educated, and worthy of their power over nonhumans. In short, Mitchell begins questioning the nature-culture dualism and attempts to situate himself in his environment's history. Though he still relies on Western forms of information.

Although Mitchell relies on this situated knowledge of the cockroaches, he feels deeply uncomfortable with his natural intuition. His naming of this power as "cockroaches," evoking images of filth and infestation, suggests his deep discomfort. In an early scene, Mitchell is tasked with calculating the cost of an employee's life to his company. Struggling with this morbid assignment, he "feel[s] his old pursuers, the cockroaches," "thousands of [...] tiny hairy-legged critters climbing the walls of his stomach" and consuming him from within (*OAT* 20). Mitchell's recurring fear, as embodied by the cockroaches, represents not merely anxiety but a form of intuition that calls him toward awareness and action. Yet, he suppresses it by immersing himself in "objective" reasoning grounded in western rationalism. He insists that "there was nothing to do but keep working. He was getting close. The numbers were beginning to tell a story" (*OAT* 20). Later, when Mitchell is struggling with the same feelings of anxiety, he repeats this strategy: "Work, his old savior, would clear his brain, or at least distract him. It had been the same thing his whole life. When the hot panics came, he turned to math for relief" (*OAT* 128). The more Mitchell suppresses this intuition with reason, the more insistent it becomes: a force urging him to acknowledge what lies beyond the reach of his reason. His fear thus does not stem from the cockroaches themselves, but from his refusal to listen. The cockroaches can be read as an expression of the novel's democratic narrative voice, calling on Mitchell to become more situated, more attuned to his environment and to others. They appear as an intuitive force seeking to guide him toward a more relational mode of being, one capable of coping with his fear of disaster and death. Yet, Mitchell continues to dismiss these impulses.

His fear of death—in and of itself an instinctual and embodied feeling—is consistently suppressed by reliance on reason.

Throughout the novel, nature—both in its grand forces, such as the wind and the rain related to the flood, and in its smallest realization, as rodents and critters—is relayed through Mitchell's eyes. These glimpses of nature hint towards a potential democratic narrative voice. In this first example, Mitchell as the focalizer is mediating the sky's experience as the storm rolls into the city: "The sky had begun to darken. It looked enraged, a livid sky, full of eggplant colors, purple yielding to cast-iron black. There was something thrillingly exotic about the angry blackness of it, tense with intermittent electricity. The clouds were scowling" (*OAT* 145). Mitchell interprets the sky's colors as it expressing human emotions, rendering it "livid," "angry" and, even approximating a human facial expression, as "scowling," giving emotional space and narrative power to the sky, and raising its position to one of a human narrator. A similar emotional nuance is inscribed in the storm's wind a few pages later-on. In this second example, the narrator even relays the wind's screams directly to the reader. "The wind sobbed. *Whaaah! Whaaah! Aaaah!* The wind screamed murder" (*OAT* 155). This could be read as an exercise in empathy, as an attempt to connect with nature and engage with its point of view. It could also be that Mitchell sees his own emotions reflected in nature: fearing for his life during this storm, angry about not having calculated it, thrilled at its sheer power. Crucially, though, the wind's voice is reported, not Mitchell's emotional reaction, indicating that the wind truly gets to speak in this short quote. The storm narratively suspends human dominance temporarily, allowing nature to speak more freely. Another glimpse of nonhuman voice emerges, when Mitchell and his companion Jane flee the city by rowing a canoe through its flooded streets: "The birds had returned, at least some of them. [...] In the absence of traffic and human voices, their calls filled the air" (*OAT* 167). Mitchell describes the birds as inherently stupid and disoriented, saying that "imbecilic brains ha[d] lost all sense of orientation" (*OAT* 167). However, he also sees them as sources of hope. The birds' "confused squawking" serves as a

sign of possible life “beyond the fog;” Mitchell says it is “Noah’s big idea: release a dove” (*OAT* 167). This depiction of the birds signifies how Mitchell both looks for hope in nature and views the scene from his anthropocentric lens. He listens closely, tries to emotionally interpret the birds’ melodies, and relates what he hears back to his own experience as a human. Interestingly, the biblical story Mitchell references in this scene is one of human hubris and disaster. As he begins to re-think the hierarchy humans built up, he abandons his position of authority and builds a community with nature. In these scenes, the novel’s democratic narrative voice is clear: a plurality of voices sharing the floor, embracing the breaking of boundaries and building a network of voices that is not reliant on Western modes of reason. In these moments, the narration briefly relinquishes its authority and lets nonhuman voices occupy space.

What emerges towards the last section of the novel are several moments in which the democratic narrative voice is of particular importance. Mitchell’s natural instincts lead him throughout his journey, from his escape from New York City to Camp Ticonderoga and several relief shelters, until he decides to head back to the city. Though he does not return to his apartment, he falls upon the Flatlands as if by coincidence. There, Mitchell takes over an old bank building, the Canarsie Bank Trust Company, and—again, driven by his innate natural intuition and his penchant for reason—decides to work the land. He immediately concedes, however, that “he wouldn’t unearth Eden, or even some agrarian ideal” and “wouldn’t amount to very much at all” because Mitchell “knew nothing, after all, about farming, fertilization, engineering, construction (*OAT* 286). He even calls himself “comically unprepared” for when “the fields might go fallow or flood” (*OAT* 286). Still, Mitchell continues: “The only thing stronger than his desire to stay in the Flatlands was his aversion to returning to his old life. [...] In the Canarsie Bank Trust Company building he would create his own self-contained universe” (*OAT* 286-7). Mitchell reaches a breaking point and is met with a choice: returning to his former life and his former values—money, power, attention and popularity, even Jane’s love and affection—or staying and starting over. This breaking point could, reminiscent of the trope of

rebuilding after the apocalypse, indicate an opportunity to start anew and create a fresh system of values. Narratively, this choice is depicted as an emotional one, not a logical one. He knows he will struggle, that he is ill-prepared for living in and tending for nature. It seems that he is trying to convince himself that this is a good idea, that his persistence will overcome any obstacles. The use of “would,” “might,” “could” as hedges reveals that Mitchell sees these things as a mere possibility, not as fact. He assumes that he, driven by his determination, will be successful nonetheless, and feels deeply that his old, capitalistic life is not right anymore. Crucially, although Mitchell clearly sees the danger in this choice, his fear of death does not stop him from doing what he strongly desires. In this moment of transformation, Mitchell resolves his struggle between reason and intuition in favor of the latter. His narrative trajectory thus culminates in this long-anticipated choice for this new, attuned and situated mode of being.

Layered onto Mitchell’s rejection of his former values in this chapter are patterns of the Chthulucene as Haraway defines it, a lens through which the nature-culture dualism can be reframed as a web of interconnected elements. Chthulucene is Haraway’s proposed answer to and dismissal of the Anthropocene and the Capitalocene, a “sympoietic,” or collaborative, co-constructed, interdependent and entangled, system that “is made up of ongoing multispecies stories and practices of becoming-with in times that remain at stake, in precarious times, in which the world is not finished and the sky has not fallen—yet” (*Staying* 55). Furthermore, Haraway describes the Chthulucene as “a kind of timeplace for learning to stay with the trouble of living and dying in response-ability on a damaged earth” (*Staying* 2). Haraway’s concept is particularly resonant for the following passage from the last chapter that is focalized through Mitchell. His intuition reminds him, firstly, that he is not separate from nature but entangled within it, he is a sympoietic being and not independent, and secondly, that he—in this timeplace—is responsible for the consequences of his actions and their effects on the nonhuman world. Being attuned to nature is a process, an ongoing practice of care to commit to, and not a fleeting emotion. This is what Mitchell realizes in this scene, by this point having finally

decided to take up residence in the Canarsie Bank building, as he forages wood in the Flatlands marshes and discovers a rotting tree trunk:

He raised his ax, aiming the blade. But he couldn't follow through. Something was moving in the tree. He bent over to examine it more closely, and then he was on the ground beside it, and then his head was nearly inside the tree. The first thing he noticed were the mushrooms, orange with caps the size of buttons, projecting from the walls of the crevasse. Their fleshy undersides were lined with gills that ruffled like lace. These gills secreted a toothpasty substance that branched into a plexus of lines that descended deep into the trunk's core. But that was just the beginning. (*OAT* 291)

Almost against his will, Mitchell's body brings him physically closer to the trunk, letting him discover the plants and insects that dwell in the rotting tree and making him notice what he could have destroyed. Through the eyes of Mitchell as focalizer nature is put under magnifying glass, calling deliberate attention to itself. Mitchell's situated attunement to nature is at the forefront here, as—in very colorful, sensual, and attentive language—what Mączyńska calls a “radical decentering of the human” (174) and Western capitalist values takes place. As the scene goes on, Mitchell views nature self-reflexively, using it to describe itself, for instance in the imagery of “spiders with bodies the same exact hue as the tree itself.” His experience blurs the boundary between human and nonhuman through metaphors such as “a flesh-colored worm as long as his arm.” By likening the log's organic forms to elements of the modern, human realm, for example as “a fiery procession of red mites snaking between piles of school-bus-yellow spores” and “a downy pink fungus like a speck of cotton candy,” the narration builds an aesthetic of connection between nature and culture. In his situated experience, he weaves a sympoietic system of connection, compares human and nonhuman elements without moral or qualitative judgement and, thus, breaks up his former capitalist convictions. Ultimately, Mitchell's attentive perception transforms his first impression of the log as “no more than a dead log” to a “grotesque insectopolis.” By using the suffix *-polis* (=city), Mitchell is relating what he knows best, for instance, living in a city with other people, to describe what nature has accomplished. The rotting tree then triggers Mitchell's fear of mortality, as he is, first, reminded of his friend Elsa's death, “where her body now lay, in what state of decomposition” (*OAT* 291-

2), and second, also his own, “his corpse would have already merged, like the rotting oak, into the marshy soil” (*OAT* 292). Mitchell realizes that in death all power cedes to exist and that he comes from nature, making humans and nonhumans one and the same. As opposed to the beginning chapters of the book, Mitchell now fully experiences nature and argues for the importance of feeling and embodiment as communication within a network of life. His sympoietic and embodied experiencing of the rotting log, the sensual translation of this experience onto the page and the focus on starting anew indicate that Mitchell is finally realizing his potential within a democratic narrative voice.

The same sense of embodiment and attunement with the nonhuman world can be seen in the last scene through Mitchell’s focalization, which is also the endpoint of his character development. Mitchell, again compelled by his attunement to the nonhuman world in context with disaster, finally realizes that his coping mechanism of relying on Western knowledge and reason does not bring him true peace. Instead, he now relies on detaching himself from his former life and fully entangling in the Chthulucene. In his last scene, Mitchell enters a staring contest with a “stubborn” and “odd cloud,” which is “fixed in the highest part of the sky” (*OAT* 292). Mitchell directly talks to the cloud in dialogue, anthropomorphizing the cloud and, thus, collapsing the distance between human and nonhuman world. Mitchell’s attitude towards the nonhuman world—and, by extension, the democratic narrative drive of the novel—is expressed by his willingness to step into dialogue with the cloud. He experiences the scene as temporarily indeterminable, relating “what seemed like ten, fifteen minutes” to “eternity” (*OAT* 292). His focus on what seems to be (“[the cloud] didn’t seem to be drifting” [*OAT* 292]) hints towards Mitchell’s disengaging with concrete time and connecting with a timeplace that subverts capitalist notions of time as linear and productivity-driven. As Mitchell tries to detach from his former life and values, he lets go of his fear of death—the one thing that has driven his character development up to this point. Interestingly, Mitchell feels threatened by the cloud: his interpretation moves from the cloud “looking down at him” to it “really [...] watching him” to,

finally, “staring at him” (*OAT* 292-3). It seems that Mitchell has refigured nature as his equal, as something he must compete with. Mitchell projects traits he deeply values—stubbornness, great strength of will, competitiveness—onto the cloud. Then, after coming to terms with his mortality (“if he wanted to lie there for eternity, nobody could stop him” [*OAT* 293]), Mitchell wins the staring competition, and the cloud dissipates: “But then something very peculiar happened. Almost imperceptibly, the cloud, cowed by his will, began to drift away” (*OAT* 293). Just as Mitchell lets go of his fear of mortality, the cloud moves on. Finally, Mitchell faces his fear of mortality rather than suppressing his feelings with reason and logic. Almost as a reward, the—literal black—cloud over his head, symbolic of his focus on death and his anxiety around living a free life, dissipates. This scene shows Mitchell’s potential as a focalizer: Once he fully commits to his nonhuman attunement, he manages his fear of death and the cockroaches that plagued him throughout the novel. In his last scene, he also upholds nature as equal to himself, as a competitor and a teacher.

Seedlings of the democratic narrative voice in the other sections of the novel further add to the seedlings in Mitchell’s narration. First, *OAT*’s global narrative structure—one narrator organizing three focalizers—produces heterogenous perspectives and distributes the narrative authority across multiple positions. This heterogeneity is a seedling of the democratic narrative voice because it disperses the narrative power amongst several perspectives rather than consolidating it within one single consciousness. Second, the novel’s polyphonic structure invites the reader to actively participate in meaning making. Because the story is told as an interplay of partial, situated perspectives, the reader must negotiate between these voices and actively consider each viewpoint. This, again, shifts power away from the narrator. Third, the opening chapter explicitly invites the reader to join an imagined narrative community. By positioning the reader as such, the novel further decentralizes narrative authority, balances the power of narration further, and refigures narration as a collaborative practice rather than a hierarchical product.

Instead of relying on just Mitchell's main perspective, the novel distributes its narrative authority across multiple perspectives. Together, the narrator and the three focalizers establish the foundation for a collective mode of storytelling. The novel's global narrative structure itself functions as a seedling of democratic narrative voice. *OAT* is organized around a single narrating voice which moves across three distinct focal positions: in the opening chapter, the narrator *is* the focalizer, Mitchell's former classmate; then, the narration shifts to Mitchell's focalization and, for the last chapter, Jane's perspective. Within this structure, the story emerges as the cumulation of three different, situated and partial viewpoints. At the same time, the narrator continues to function as a coordinating instance—mediating between the three perspectives, judging what is told and how. Thus, the narrator ultimately complicates the novel's democratic ethos since he organizes and controls the distribution of voice and focalization. This underscores that narration remains a form of power, even within a seemingly polyphonic structure. Similarly, Mitchell's perspective remains structurally and hierarchically privileged, as the majority of the novel is focalized through his point of view. Therefore, *OAT*'s global narrative structure is merely a seedling of the DNV, not because it abolishes narrative authority entirely but because it relocates some of the power from a single narrator to the relational network of perspectives between narrator, focalizers and reader.

The text resists the authority of one main voice and instead constructs a more polyphonic narrative structure in Bakhtin's sense, which invites the reader to consider each one of the perspectives and contend with the limitations and overlaps in meaning. Polyphony, which Bakhtin defines as the "plurality of independent and unmerged voices and consciousnesses [...] with equal rights and each with its own world" (6), emphasizes the coexistence of voices and distributes interpretive power, as is the goal of the democratic narrative voice. In *OAT*, the three focalizers allow the story to unfold through their diverse and sometimes conflicting gazes, offering a more comprehensive account of the disastrous flood. Jane's closing chapter is particularly revealing in this regard: By having the last word, Jane retroactively influences the

reader's interpretation of Mitchell's version of events. For example, while Mitchell states that "[t]here's really no reason for Jane to worry" as he is "self-sufficient" (*OAT* 285) when he lives off the land in the Flatlands, Jane brings him rather unnecessary supplies such as "floor wax, the new pack of filtration cartridges" and even "fresh vegetables" (*OAT* 295). Thus, Jane's chapter complicates and enriches the reader's understanding of both characters as the reader is invited to synthesize their accounts and negotiate gaps and contradictions. The reader, thus, must actively participate in constructing shared meaning with the novel. This co-construction of the novel through an active, dialogic negotiation of meaning is central to its democratic narrative voice, as it enables reader agency and decentralizes narrative authority. The multiple focalizers in *OAT* depict a diversity of perspectives and, in that, mirror the heterogeneity, active participation and meaning making within democracy.

The novel's democratic narrative impulse does not only reveal itself in its global narrative structure but already within its first pages. In the first chapter, the narrator introduces the reader to the characters and plot by explicitly building a close narrative community through assuming common knowledge and referring to extra-textual, real-world events. This "imagined community," to use Benedict Anderson's term, relates to the democratic narrative voice in that it collapses the distance between reader and narrator and refigures narration as a collaborative practice. Anderson uses the "imagined community" to explain and analyze nationalism, stating that a nation is defined as an "imagined political community" which "regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail [...] is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship" (6, 7). In this first chapter of *OAT*, the relationship between the reader and the narrator-focalizer can be described as an imagined reading community. Just as a nation exists because a group of people conceive of themselves as part of a shared collective, *OAT*'s narrative community exists because the narrator addresses an implied collective reader and invites them to participate in a narrative world. This first person narrator-focalizer in the first chapter is an initially unidentified former classmate of the protagonist, Mitchell Zukor. The narrator

reminisces about their college days, remembering a scene where their classmate was having a medical emergency when an earthquake struck Seattle. The first narrator is aware that Mitchell is well-known in the storyworld of the novel and, thus, does not introduce him. By treating him as already known, the narrator positions the reader as a participant in the narrative community rather than as an external observer. This immerses the reader effectively in Mitchell's narrative trajectory, his psychological developments, and the events of New York's flood crisis. In assuming familiarity with Zukor, the narrative voice also implies that the reader is part of the same universe, creating a feeling of interconnection and encourages affective and emotional investment with Mitchell's experiences. The narrator uses his memories of the day to bond with the reader: "I hardly need to rehearse for you the emotion of that day, the confusion and terror, but certain images I will never forget" (*OAT* 7). This turn of phrase, in its assumption of common memory and emotion, makes the reader part of the narrator's, of the "we." By including the reader in this imagined community with this phrasing, the narrator opens the possibility for sharing the narrative authority democratically. The narrative voice also addresses the reader directly, imploring them to "[t]ry to imagine the great man as a college student" (*OAT* 5). This choice of words immediately elevates Mitchell as the protagonist and creates a sense of anticipation/foreshadowing his eventual significance, which, again, encourages the reader to invest in Mitchell's character development from the outset. The narrator selects what counts as relevant knowledge, distributes access to consciousness, establishes norms of interpretation. This implication lingers as the first chapter comes to a close, successfully having lured in the reader by assuming common knowledge and memories and keeping the reader hooked to the narrative voice by proposing a spot within the in-group. The imagined narrative community between narrator-focalizer and reader exists because it is continually spoken into being. In keeping with the novel's democratic narrative voice, the reader being invited to participate is an act of decentralizing the authority of the narrator and, in doing so, exposes narration as a form of power.

Eroding Climate Justice

These marginal sprouts of democratic narrative voice—Mitchell’s intuitive attunement to nature, the heterogenous and polyphonic narrative system, the glimpses of community and nonhuman networks of connection—are heavily undermined by the narrator’s and focalizers’ Romanticized and aestheticized treatment of nature and their anthropocentric and exclusionary definitions of the nature-human dualism. The narration relies on dualisms that are common in Western thought (nature/culture, human/nonhuman etc.) and presented as neutral, yet heavily politicized and exclusionary in that they are the basis of a variety of forms of oppression, such as racism, sexism, colonialism. As Plumwood demonstrates, such dualisms are actively produced through processes of separation and domination (41). Latour’s concept of nature-culture hybrids further exposes how these dualisms are hidden within cultural practices. *OAT*’s reliance on familiar tropes, such as the wilderness and the frontier, civilization and savagery, reproduces these harmful processes and limits the novel’s engagement in climate justice, even though seedlings of the DNV destabilize and disrupt the structure of dualisms in narration through nonhuman agency and collective perspectives. Nonetheless, the narrative centers Mitchell, marginalizes other human and nonhuman experiences of the catastrophe and reduces nature to an aestheticized backdrop and commodified metaphor. It reaffirms repeatedly that nature is subordinated to human concerns. Mitchell himself both recognizes and benefits from the nature-human dualism, sliding into cruel anthropocentrism and even misanthropy that excludes those who do not conform to his vision of a Human. Mitchell’s trajectory ends in the Flatlands, where he fully embraces his individualism. Jane, romanticizing the idea of living in tandem with nature, wants to join Mitchell. Yet she, as Mitchell does, cannot escape dualist thinking which is deeply embedded in capitalist and colonialist notions of land and ownership. Ultimately, *OAT* is a novel that structurally privileges anthropocentric and misanthropic

narration, embraces capitalist ideals and colonial ideology, and as such clearly and repeatedly opposes the democratic narrative values of planetary climate justice.

Mitchell's narration in *OAT* heavily relies on common dualisms within Western thoughts, such as nature/culture, human/nonhuman, reason/emotion, nature/man, object/subject, and presents these as given and objectively true. Mitchell's reliance on these familiar Western dualisms limits the plurality of voices and how these voices can articulate themselves in the novel, therefore preventing participation and endangering the previously identified democratic narrative seedlings. Plumwood conceptualizes dualisms as fundamentally political practices that rely on rigid oppositions and processes of "backgrounding," "radical exclusion/hyperseparation and polarization," and "instrumentalizing/objectifying" (41-5). This is similar to Latour's "purification" and "translation" of "hybrids of nature and culture" (10-1). The DNV aims to disrupt this hierarchical model at the narrative level. Instead of replicating the privileged master position, instead of purifying and translating, instead of enacting the hyperseparation/purification of the realms of nature/human, nature/reason, nature/culture, the DNV distributes agency, perspective and authority, constructing meaning collectively. Furthermore, *OAT*, more often than not, presents nature as opposition to culture, logic and reason. It also, most often in Mitchell's section, reproduces harmful anthropocentric notions such as the wilderness trope, plays with themes of dehumanization, civilization and savagery. In that, *OAT* presents some humans, often the poor and racialized, as belonging to a sub-category of humans, as being closer to the subordinated Nature than the Humans. Forms of oppression such as racism and sexism, Plumwood demonstrates, rely on associating marginalized groups with nature, the body, and irrationality, and position them as inferior (13). Anthropocentrism works along the same structure by framing human dominance over the nonhuman world as natural and justified. However, this supposedly neutral perspective is, as Plumwood and Latour expose, historically produced ideology and grounded in hierarchical dualisms. In a similar vein, Moore challenges this anthropocentric narrative by refusing its

universalizing framing of humanity as a whole. Instead, he exposes how specific systems of power drive the ecological crisis and benefit specific groups disproportionately (“Capitalocene” 53). Moreover, Moore shows how separating society from nature systematically devalues both human and nonhuman life (“Capitalocene” 53). In this framework, those associated with nature become more readily expendable, and, consequently, climate justice is deferred. The following analysis examines how these logics, the dualism of nature/reason and Nature/Culture as well as the Capitalocene are narratively articulated in *OAT*.

Despite the novel’s structurally diverse narration, with a single narrator and a range of focalizers, *OAT* remains structurally centered on Mitchell as its primary lens. The novel’s DNV is undermined by persistently aligning with Mitchell’s perspective, which positions him as a Human located in the center, rather than following a perspective in the social and ecological margins produced by the climate disaster. Even the other focalizers, such as the first-chapter narrator, are more concerned with Mitchell than with the life-destroying flood. The first chapter arouses interest and builds connection. It does not, however, mention climate change, climate disaster or natural disasters at all. While this first chapter might be successful in drawing the reader in via an interesting first person narration, even using community to this end, it remains focused on one man who remains largely unaffected by the disaster around him. Instead, when confronted with the Seattle earthquake’s destruction, the narrator laughs and revels in a feeling of connection with Mitchell: “I felt that I had entered Mitchell Zukor’s head. Sitting in that hall as the smoke plumed on the screen, I felt as if I were eavesdropping on one of Mitchell’s nightmares. I felt very close to him then” (*OAT* 8). This prioritization of Mitchell remains active over the remainder of the novel. Clashing with the values of a democratic narrative voice, the narrator does not mention climate change or even discusses the flood victims, human or otherwise, at length. In a mention of triaging the rebuilding efforts after the flood, the narrator frames a group of refugees in Zone 5, last on the list of priorities for the officials, as negligible, “it wasn’t anything to get concerned about now” (*OAT* 285). This deferral of care and urgency

is made worse by the fact that Mitchell is aware of the kind of people to be found in the government's refugee centers: "It was clear what they weren't: Manhattanites. Many were first-generation immigrants. They didn't have friends with guesthouses in other parts of the country; they couldn't afford hotels or airfare" (*OAT* 241). Lacking financial and social resources, these refugees should be privileged in the rebuilding efforts; a fact that Mitchell—although he seems aware of the inequality—does not criticize. From the beginning, the disaster is framed in a way that makes one man seem like a genius, instead of the destruction of thousands of homes as a warning for the ongoing climate crisis or even a starting point for rebuilding in a more ecological fashion. The introductory chapter is just a small preview of the novel: *OAT* is about what Mitchell has done with his life, what his impact was, and decidedly *not* the collective experience of a social disaster.

In a similar fashion, Mitchell as a focalizer reveals how—even though he clearly has a deep and innate connection with nature and nonhumans, and it seems as if he is taking the first step towards deconstructing the nature-culture dualism in his mind—Mitchell is still deeply entrenched in anthropocentric, capitalist, colonialist and misanthropist mindset. Mitchell relies on traditionally Romantic notions of Nature as an aesthetic tool, which simultaneously background Nature and instrumentalize it, to use Plumwood's terminology. Mączyńska also draws this connection between Rich's modern cli-fi and Romanticism, criticizing that the novel actually strengthens traditional notions of anthropocentrism: "Urban climate fiction's borrowing of Romantic categories makes visible larger-than-human forces at work within the city, but it simultaneously reinforces received modes of thought that contemporary ecocriticism works to dismantle," such as "the privileging of the aesthetic as the primary category through which humans relate to their environments" (176). When revisiting the natural voices within Mitchell's narration, the wind and the sky, under these considerations, Mitchell's empathy reads as empty. The wind and sky do not have a voice in these passages but are exploited for a stylistic choice that is fully driven by aesthetics and Romantic traditions. The narrative voice only tries

to approximate what the disaster sounds like his human ears, and nature is only used to convey a feeling to the reader, independent of the wind's or sky's agency. Mitchell might not even consider about what the wind is feeling, he could simply be interpreting, from his human mind, what nature could communicate. It is quite telling that he only interprets nature as having emotions rather than saying something of consequence—or something Mitchell considers to be of consequence. Most of Mitchell's relations to nature thusly reveal themselves as aesthetic and are solely described for the reader's understanding or imaginative enjoyment of the disaster story. When nature is reduced to an object of beauty or spectacle, as it is here, nonhuman interests are subordinated to human feelings and interpretation. Aestheticizing nature as Nature is inherently anthropocentric because it limits the value of natural worlds to only what it can offer human observers—visual or affective pleasure. As Buell argues, an “environmentally oriented text” presents nature not as a backdrop but as an active presence that reveals the entanglement of human and natural histories and decenters “human interest” (7). By contrast, aestheticized representations frame nature as timeless and harmonious, and solely available for human appreciation. Within Mitchell's narrative voice, this anthropocentric aesthetic ultimately undermines the democratic narrative voice because it is fundamentally based on a hierarchical view of the Nature-Culture binary. *OAT*'s narrative use of Nature is colonialist and capitalist because it imagines Nature and place as always ripe for the taking, always waiting to be claimed, as a resource to be extracted, turning nature into a passive object outside of history and disconnected from former inhabitants rather than a living, contested, politically invented space.

This exploitative streak in Mitchell's narration intensifies in the novel's framing of his capitalist coworkers as animals. While the narrative voice in the following quotes might seem innovative in mapping modern, wealthy men onto natural objects and animals, the narrative voice relies on the same system of discourse as the Romantic tradition in that the nonhuman signifier is used “merely as a framing device” to further “the only legitimate interest” (Buell 7),

that being the human's. The narrative focus remains on Mitchell and his coworkers; nature merely serves as the backdrop for the narrator's linguistic creativity. During a board meeting, Mitchell, then just a junior associate, describes the company's executives as "hover[ing] like seagulls over a spread of bagels, lox, and sturgeon" which "seethed a salty, humid aroma, indistinguishable from the smell of dirty dollar bills" (*OAT* 13-14). This short section animalizes the executives as seagulls, thus imagining them as opportunistic scavengers and reinforcing capitalistic excess. Nature is narratively instrumentalized and merely serves to critique human greed instead of being painted as an entity with its own agency. The fish, which typically only smell outside their natural habitats, are "indistinguishable" from the reek of dirty money. They are already commodified and important only as a resource to be extracted from nature. The smell of the fish converging with the "smell of dirty dollar bills" only reinforces this notion of nature as means for economic profit. Mitchell uses natural imagery and the deep-rooted cultural connotations to frame what is, in fact, capitalist and culturally constructed. This pattern continues when Mitchell first meets his future boss, Alex Charnoble: "He appeared to be a snake, this guy. But he wasn't quite guileful enough. The real reptiles never look like reptiles—they're too skilled at camouflage" (*OAT* 25). Paradoxically, Mitchell paints Charnoble as the "real reptile," reinforcing nature's lower position in hierarchy with humans. Again, the narration draws on familiar animal imagery to signal human traits, and nature is not represented as agent but is reduced to its symbolic function, to a collection of traits such as deception and instinct. Then, when describing his company's chairman, Sandy Sherman, Mitchell compares humans to animals: "Men of Sherman's stature are often compared to bulldogs, but he reminded Mitchell more of a jaguar—albeit one in captivity, fussed over and overfed. He had that animal's dangerous, false languor in his eyes, a stare that lulled its objects into quiescence before, all of a sudden, it attacked" (*OAT* 40). This quote compares Sherman to a jaguar, usually connoted as strong and fast, but here ironically related to captivity. Again, the animal is reduced to a metaphorical tool, reinforcing a hierarchy in which nonhumans only exist to illuminate human

behavior. Nature's power is recognized only in the way it can be framed relative to human observation and narrative purpose. Reading these scenes in tandem with Plumwood reveals how deeply the nature-human dualism runs in *OAT*: The narrator backgrounds nature in that it is both relied upon aesthetically and simultaneously denies its importance (Plumwood 41). The narrator instrumentalizes and objectifies nature, as "those on the lower side of the dualisms are obliged to put aside their own interests for those of the master or centre, that they are conceived of as his instruments, as means to his end" (Plumwood 45). Furthermore, these quotes reveal that Mitchell subconsciously clearly differentiates between nature and culture, partaking in what Plumwood calls hyperseparation (42). In these passages, the narrative voice thus repeatedly reaffirms the nature-human dualism and its contingent hierarchies, as it continues to relegate nature to a subordinate role as either background or narrative tool.

Mitchell's treatment of nonhumans further reveals how his jokes simultaneously gestures toward a critique of the nature-human dualism while reinforcing his own position at the top of that hierarchy. Mitchell's sections already presuppose a critical awareness of the nature-human dualism: by imagining comedic hybrids of humans and nonhumans, he exposes the absurdity of anthropocentric exclusion and, thus, demonstrates that he has, at least in part, uncovered the process of translation that Latour describes. He knows that the dualism is politically produced. Nevertheless, Mitchell's comedy does not function as biting satire but rather punches down, ultimately reinforcing the nature-human dualism. This treatment of nonhumans is most revealing in the following moments, where he frames animal behavior as a source of humor rather than as an example of ecological disruption. It becomes particularly visible in his description of urban wildlife suffering under climate change: "New York rats had a reputation for haughtiness—they knew they were going to outlast you, it was just a matter of time, so could you please stop getting in their way?—but recently their confidence seemed shaken" (*OAT* 97). Mitchell repeatedly uses animals as narrative devices, anthropomorphizing them as "native New Yorkers" (*OAT* 97). He describes the rats as arrogant, their "haughtiness"

and territoriality like that of native New Yorkers; he assigns human-like attributes and traits to the animals. When he continues, he extends this anthropomorphism into imposing distinctly human categories of mental illness onto the animals: “The rats were traumatized; the pigeons neurotic, their dirty beaks nodding incessantly, like meth addicts; the roaches were downright hysterical, running suicides across the sidewalk” (*OAT* 97). This language, the “traumatized” rats, the “neurotic” birds, the “hysterical” roaches, both trivializes animal suffering and human mental illness. The narrator frames the animal’s distress through exaggerated and mocking terms while also reducing human trauma and addiction to a comedic punchline. In particular the comparison of pigeons to “meth addicts” punches down by using an illness that often results from cruel marginalization as funny imagery. Mitchell further states that “animals were always the first to know” about “the warming world” (*OAT* 97). This ironic misattribution of agency is then mirrored in his description of a “polar bear experimenting with anorexia” (*OAT* 97). Mitchell constructs the polar bear as an active subject, which obscures the fact that its hunger is involuntary and imposed by climate change. Starvation and anorexia are neither a choice nor a temporary phase; they are lethal conditions. Similarly, “the marmot cutting shorts its hibernation” presents the animal as an active agent with free will, even though its behavior is a response to environmental destruction. Mitchell paints similar illusion of autonomy in describing an “American grizzly emigrating to Canada” (*OAT* 97). While emigration suggests active intention and even opportunity, the bear’s actual movement is driven by the pressure of survival and his loss of habitat. The animals’ erratic behavior signals environmental collapse, yet the narration filters it through irony and exaggeration, which distances the reader from the severity of the crisis. This linguistic strategy softens the perceived severity of ecological damage while simultaneously revealing how language can obscure structural violence against nonhuman life. The comedy in this section stems from the knowledge that humans and nonhumans are not actually on the same playing field. If these descriptions were taken seriously, even within the internal logic of a fictional novel, they would cease to be funny. As Mączyńska

observes, “Rich’s choice of species points back to the Anthropos, since rats, pigeons, cockroaches, and bedbugs are among the nonhuman animals that impinge most obviously on the lives of human New Yorkers. The narrowness of this selection (and its grouping under the sign of ‘vermin’) prevents more imaginative and nuanced fictional engagements with urban fauna” (173). The novel therefore seems to be stuck at the level of deconstruction: it makes the “purification,” in Latour’s sense, visible, but does not take the next step to critique it. The scene treats an anorexic polar bear as a victimless joke, trivializing the cruel language and attitude the novel presents these nonhumans with. Mitchell essentially “purifies” the two categories by assuming their combination is ironic or paradoxical enough to count as satire. At the same time, Mitchell washes his hands clean of his complicity in anthropogenic climate change. He frames climate change as inevitable, as a fact of life. Ultimately, however, his satire leaves the hierarchy intact and even profitable. Mitchell continues to occupy the position of the Human who benefits from this dualism and therefore has little narrative interest in dismantling it. Through this lens, Mitchell continues reinscribing the nature-human dualism he appears to expose.

The narrative voice’s anthropocentrism reaches such an extent that Mitchell starts hating people, other humans, as well as nature. His growing misanthropy, which might initially appear as a critique of human dominance over nature, is actually an embrace of intense anthropocentrism. Mitchell’s disdain for humans mirrors his treatment of nonhumans. This shift becomes clearest when Jane and Mitchell arrive at Camp Ticonderoga, a previously idyllic and self-sufficient farmers’ commune, and find its fields destroyed, its buildings burning. He describes the camp as “madness” and “pandemonium,” and the people within the camp as animalistic, “shirtless,” “like foxes” “hunting” and “moving in packs” (*OAT* 224). The refugees he describes as “fidgety, huddling low to the ground” with “their faces covered with mud and leaves” have forgone all semblance of privacy and decency, as exemplified by “a young girl defecating in the middle of the road” (*OAT* 224, 229). Mitchell equates what he deems as uncivilized humans with animals. His feeling of superiority towards Nature as a Human is

revealed to only include particular humans, namely those who have enough money and resources to stay ‘civilized’ after a devastating flood. In his depictions of disaster victims, Mitchell’s misanthropic conception of Humanity becomes especially visible. It becomes clear that Mitchell up until this point romanticized Camp Ticonderoga as the place where Elsa would “cure him of Fear” and then “offer herself to him [... r]ight there in the middle of the softball field, surrounded by heirloom tomatoes and zucchini and whatever the hell else they planted there” (*OAT* 219). This sexual fantasy now destroyed, Mitchell views his fellow humans as animalistic to establish his superiority over them. Schneider-Mayerson also picks up on this notion and finds that Mitchell’s narration only “describes the condition and perspective of a small and exceptionally lucky fraction of our species,” which “shapes [Jane and Mitchell’s] outlook throughout the novel” (“Whose Odds” 7). Mitchell’s anthropocentrism has developed into misanthropy: at this point in the novel, he only values certain humans as Human.

Not even at the climax of the novel, when Mitchell is supposedly at his most enlightened, does he care for other humans. His breaking point at the Flatlands is more so his final decision to stop trying, he gives up and fully gives in to his misanthropic nature. Although his breakdown opens the possibility for true change, Mitchell regresses to what he knows: individualism, capitalism, resource hoarding and capitalist scarcity mindset. Notwithstanding the fact that there are people who are knowledgeable in “farming, fertilization, engineering, construction” (*OAT* 286), Mitchell wants to work alone. Rather than asking somebody for help, somebody who might be more in tune with what nature in the Flatlands needs to be tended and cared for, or rather than becoming more in tune with nature and trying to live in kinship with it instead of as nature’s master, he pretends that with enough willpower—which, in his case, paradoxically involves Jane getting him food and resources from the city—he can do anything he sets his mind to in “his own self-contained universe” (*OAT* 287). He deeply feels that his old life is not right anymore, not realizing that in doing exactly that he continues on a path that is egoistic, power-hungry and solitary. During this last part of the novel, Mitchell is confronted

with the possibility of other people living in the Flatlands as he does. When confronted with this possibility, he decides to “keep his distance” (*OAT* 288), arguing that “the purest intellectual pursuits were always solitary, weren't they? You had to be uncompromising and self-disciplined” (*OAT* 288). The question tag here signals Mitchell's insecurity around his own argument for individualism early-on. Mitchell doubts what he is saying, while also attempting to get the reader to agree, presenting this opinion as inscrutable fact. Immediately after arguing for individualism, Mitchell refutes it himself:

No great mathematical problem was ever solved by a team of mathematicians (there was the Appel-Haken solution to the four-color theorem, but really their supercomputer deserved the credit); no brilliant machine was ever conceived in tandem (the Wright brothers were good engineers, but they honed technology developed by others); and no literary masterpiece was ever written by a group of collaborators (the Bible notwithstanding). (*OAT* 288)

He argues for a point that he himself does not believe and cannot stop refuting himself, makes an argument and then cannot stop himself from telling the readers the exceptions to his made-up rules. Mitchell presents his belief in solitary pursuits by stating how none of them were ever conceived of by a team. He presents this argument as a list of claims, as common-sense and self-evident. Yet, Mitchell himself pre-emptively contradicts his own arguments. These rebuttals could be read as exceptions to Mitchell's rule; however, they more so point out Mitchell's unreasonable denial of community, his cognitive dissonance around his own power as a one single man. Similar to Appel-Haken, the Wright Brothers and the Bible, Mitchell continues by misunderstanding Elsa's dream of a community farm as something led solely, almost dictatorially by her, her ideas, her plan, with no input from other community members: “Elsa had understood this. There were others working with her on the farm, working for her, but it was her plan, and she was uncompromising in its execution” (*OAT* 288-9). Instead of seeing the collective labor on a supercomputer, the funding for research, the collaborative nature of human development, Mitchell focus is solely on individualism and autonomy. Furthermore, he presents this idea as the only correct and “pure” way forward, reinforcing the capitalist fallacy that individualism, hard work and strength of mind will head him to succeed over others.

Mitchell simply does not want to share what he has claimed as his: “And what Mitchell was after—an impregnable, self-contained, self-sustaining fortress—would require the same level of dedication. No place would be reserved for anyone else” (*OAT* 289). He puts his individual self over the community of others, over considering the nature around himself as something of value. Furthermore, he chooses a deeply capitalistic way of acting on his natural instinct. Even though Mitchell has, as the text implies, deconstructed the nature-culture dualism, his values are still bound by the power that the binaries hold. Mitchell presents nature as something in the background, as a passive resource just waiting to be claimed. Constructing nature in this inert, passive role justifies the dualism of nature/human and justifies relations of domination. Such a framing also conflicts with the idea of the democratic narrative voice, as it reinforces a narrative structure which only grants significance to Mitchell’s individualistic, misanthropic, anthropocentric perspective. Consequently, it only grants agency and participatory rights to capital-H Humans.

Even in the novel’s climactic log scene, Mitchell’s perspective reduces the nonhuman world to an object of observation and possession. His previous deconstructions of the nature-culture binary seemingly forgotten, Mitchell remains the narrative voice in power. With relation to Plumwood and Latour, Mitchell’s misanthropy becomes drastically clear. “He raised his ax, aiming the blade. But he couldn’t follow through. [...] The first thing he noticed were the mushrooms, orange with caps the size of buttons, projecting from the walls of the crevasse” (*OAT* 291). While Mitchell does not “obliterate this festering micro-universe” (*OAT* 292), it is still his choice to leave the log be, he is the one to make the decision whether to break apart the teeming with life log or to let it persist. He contemplates violence and plays with his extreme control over life and death: “Did he really want to obliterate this festering micro-universe? Or might it be nicer simply to join it?” (*OAT* 292). He’s omnipotent, he’s the narrator of the log’s story. Nature is framed as his, as Humanity’s domain. The narrator continues to focus solely on Mitchell’s perspective here. The vitality or agency of the swamp, the mushrooms and insects,

is never acknowledged and only described as elements interacting with Mitchell's story. Mitchell is simultaneously repulsed and interested in becoming one with the insects, which points towards his arrogance and towards the idea that while he is superior in every way, nature will let him "join" no matter what. This passage thus reinforces the nature-human dualism as Mitchell embodies the "master" perspective, while nature is depicted as object of domination, existing only in relation to this master. The insectopolis would not even have the option or the intellect for agency. Mitchell could join, if "all the creeping things mistook him for a second log to explore and infest" (*OAT* 292). Furthermore, he is still thinking about other humans ("how long would it take for anyone to notice? Who would discover his absence?" [*OAT* 292]). Indeed, while no person, no human would find his body for a long time, that does not mean nobody would notice. Mitchell's anthropocentric thinking culminates at the end of the passage:

Even as the swamp flies, or whatever they were, started flapping around his eyes, as the bark beetles scaled his bare arms and the grass scratched at his neck, he would stay there. This was his land now. If he wanted to lie on it all night long, or even for weeks, until he wasted away and his flesh sloughed free from his bones— well, if he wanted to lie there for eternity, nobody could stop him (*OAT* 293)

Repeatedly, Mitchell enforces his right as a Human to occupy this land, to define this land and all life upon it as his possession even after his death. He presents the flies, beetles and even the grass as his subordinates; nature and its value only exist in relation to Mitchell's presence and choice. The natural world, fungi, plants, insects, depend on the carcasses of dead animals in nature. Mitchell, no longer his conscious self, would enter a new relationship with nature and the nonhuman world. While Mitchell's willingness to become one with nature after death suggests a fleeting possibility of connection with his land, the narration frames this entirely through Mitchell's own agency and endurance, not as submission to nature. Forgetting what happens to bodies in nature, Mitchell thinks he could "lie there for eternity, nobody could stop him." Mitchell's energy is not gone, neither is his body—not fully. In his anthropocentric thinking, he falsely believes that everything stops once his consciousness stops because there is no human left to observe. Ultimately, this scene maintains a strong nature-human dualism.

Nature is richly described only through Mitchell's perceptual and interpretive frame. There, it serves as the background setting and as a measure of his choices and endurance. Even in moments of apparent ecological intimacy, the nonhuman world is not granted independence. Narratively, it only functions as the relational counterpart to the Human master.

Lastly, *OAT*'s narration gestures towards ideologies that are historically linked to colonial frontier thinking, particularly in Jane's final focalization. Her perception of the Flatlands as a "wilderness" to be subjugated is reminiscent of an ideology which, as the historian William Cronon argues, is culturally constructed and deeply entangled with individualism, mastery, and the fantasy of empty land (9). When Jane visits Mitchell in the Flatlands, she is captivated by this imagined space of escape: "For a passing moment, as Jane took one final look at the high entryway of the grand old bank building surmounted by its silly granite eagle, she felt that she would like to live in the Flatlands herself one day. She felt that she wanted to live in the Flatlands rather desperately" (*OAT* 306). Jane's fantasy is inspired by a stone eagle, a human approximation of an animal and all its connotations with power, nationalism and capitalist grandeur. She now thinks of the eagle as "silly," its previous meaning as a capitalist monument hollowed out, the grandiose bank building now relegated to a survival shelter. In this fleeting, "passing moment," Jane considers the decline of the capitalist urban system, and is attracted by the fantasy of the Flatlands as the site of reinvention. However, precisely because her desire is only fleeting, it is insufficiently interrogated. She does not reflect on how deeply she herself is embedded in the capitalist system, which leads her to imagine the Flatlands as empty space. She imagines the Flatlands as available, as something one can simply choose to inhabit, as a property and resource to be claimed. It is also a deeply individualistic thought: Jane does not think to consider community or any existing inhabitants, but only wishes for a personal escape, imagines the Flatlands as a pure and hopeful alternative way of life. Her perspective aligns with what Cronon identifies as the wilderness myth, a cultural invention by humans that combines the idea of "a refuge we must somehow recover if we hope to save the

planet” with connotations such as individualism, masculinity, hostility towards modernity/urbanization and the claiming of uninhabited “virgin” land (1, 9). In fact, the concept of wilderness “quietly expresses and reproduces the very values its devotees seek to reject” (Cronon 11). Jane’s fantasy of wilderness reproduces the colonial imagery of empty space. This is reinforced by the novel’s omission of its actual demographic and social composition, which Schneider-Mayerson notes includes predominantly African-American, Caribbean, Latinx and Asian-American middle-class communities with around 60.000 inhabitants (“Whose Odds” 9). The absence of these inhabitants in Jane’s perception and the larger narrative framing reveals how deeply embedded capitalist and colonial frameworks remain in *OAT*’s narration. This fleeting moment thus expresses a contradiction: even as the symbols of capitalism, the bank and the eagle, are rendered “silly” and obsolete, the underlying ideologies persist. In this sense, Jane does not imagine an alternative to capitalism but extends its logic into a different form, into claiming a wilderness which paints nature as empty and subjugated space. Thus, while the ending of the novel may be intended as inspirational and as a passing of the baton to the reader to live more in tune with nature, notions of capitalistic individualism and its continuation as romanticized wilderness logic shine through.

OAT’s seedlings of democratic narrative voice are ultimately stifled not only by the narrative’s reliance on entrenched dualisms but by Mitchell’s own persistent inability to think beyond the ideological constraints of capitalism and misanthropy. Plumwood demonstrates how such dualisms (nature/culture, human/nonhuman) are the products of manufactured domination and exclusion. Latour’s notion of hybrid entanglements exposes the instability of this dualist system. Both scholars underscore how the persistence of these dualisms forecloses more relational, justice-oriented responses to climate crisis. What initially appears as potential for a more entangled way of life, Mitchell’s instinctual attunement to the nonhuman, the polyphonic arrangement of perspectives, and the fleeting gestures towards collectivity and nonhuman entanglement, is crushed by the narrator’s and focalizers’ refusal to relinquish their hierarchical

worldview. Mitchell's anthropocentrism, far from being disrupted by the catastrophe, has hardened into an intense misanthropy. Rather than undergoing any transformation, Mitchell remains fundamentally unchanged, he increasingly withdraws from and feels hostility towards humanity. In his logic, planetary justice is unthinkable. Even at Mitchell's apparent breaking point in the Flatlands, where the possibility for relationality and embodiment opens up, Mitchell retreats into his misanthropy. The text's failure to meaningfully counterbalance or challenge Mitchell's perspective ensures that the reader remains aligned with, and even sympathetic to, his limited viewpoint. Thus, despite the *OAT*'s initial gestures towards a more democratic narrative voice, it does not sufficiently destabilize but rather reinforce Mitchell's internalized individualistic and anthropocentric perspective. The novel thus falls short of offering a planetary vision more conducive to future- and justice-oriented, nonhuman modes of storytelling.

Dubious Satirical Ethos

Not only are the sprouts of democratic narrative voice undermined by the narrator's anthropocentrism, misanthropy and colonial ideology, but they are further compromised by revealing the unreliable implied author's identity at the 300-page-mark. The first-person narrator-focalizer from *OAT*'s first chapter reveals himself as the overarching narrator of the whole novel. This rattles the subversion of anthropocentrism in Mitchell's focalization that a cli-fi satire must necessarily include. Satire, as a literary mode, depends on trust and interpretive alignment between implied author and reader, as well as on a shared set of norms that allows the reader to recognize critique rather than mere reproduction. As Wayne Booth argues: "The whole thing cannot work at all unless both parties to the exchange have confidence that they are moving together in identified patterns" (13). Irony, and by extension satire, depends on a tacit agreement on shared norms. If the reader is deliberately misled, the ironic potential for criticism collapses. Linda Hutcheon sees irony as a relational process that requires a community

of understanding to share ideological ground: “irony isn’t irony until it is interpreted as such—at least by the intending ironist, if not the intended receiver” (6). Accordingly, the delayed revelation of the implied author as an in-world journalist positions him hierarchically above the reader and undermines trust. The resulting rupture dissolves the shared norms required for satire and replaces them with mistrust. The novel’s narrator, rather than destabilizing anthropocentric and capitalist logics through irony, instead reproduces and consolidates them. Consequently, the novel’s democratic narrative voice is sabotaged.

OAT’s narration initially presents as a first-person voice, the journalist and Mitchell’s former classmate, who builds an imagined community with the readership. This apparent alignment, however, is revealed to be strategic rather than genuine. Around page 300, it becomes clear that the narrator’s primary motivation is financial gain. If satire is understood as a mode that depends on trust and a set of shared norms between the implied author and the reader, as Booth and Hutcheon suggest, this revelation causes a clear rupture. Once the community of understanding and shared ideology collapses, satire fails to criticize and instead endorses its target. When Jane visits Mitchell in the Flatlands, she mentions that “the guy from *The Wall Street Journal* keeps calling” and has now, after having written an article on Mitchell Zukor, secured of “a book deal. A kind of biography. It begins with his memories of you in college. The day of Seattle and all that” (*OAT* 301). The narrator has ostensibly manipulated the reader into reading a story under false pretenses. The reveal exposes the imagined community as asymmetrical and, thus, dismantles the shared ground on which ironic critique depends. Moreover, the narrator’s limited personal connection to Mitchell further undermines his credibility: The two were never particularly close friends, and the journalist even claims he would be “forced”, would Mitchell not comply and “sit for an interview, or several,” to “imagine things from your perspective so that he can put the reader inside your head” (*OAT* 5, 301). The journalist’s narrative voice does not disappear but masks itself in Mitchell’s focalization, imagining what Mitchell could be thinking or feeling, could have experienced or

said. His admission further erodes trust and retroactively renders the narrative—and with it the climate catastrophe it depicts—suspect, as if it were pure fiction. When he re-enters the narrative at the end of the novel, he reveals himself as the dominant narrative authority, positioned not only above Mitchell and Jane but also above the reader. This reinforces a hierarchy and individualism that undermines the democratic narrative voice.

Once the shared ground between implied author and reader collapses, satire loses its critical force. In addition to the journalist's narrative betrayal, moments of ecocentric potential are reabsorbed into hierarchical, human-centered logic. Satire in climate fiction can be critically effective and truly revolutionary: Joshua DiCaglio suggests that “irony disrupts the logic that remains within spatialized language and pushes us toward the more intimate, more personal implications of ecology,” leading to the “decentering of the idea of a center itself” (459). This promise of satire in climate change narratives can be fulfilled, so long as they find the middle-ground “between fact and fiction and between earnest argument and jest” (Kalviknes Bore and Reid 463). However, the narrative voice in *OAT* does not use satire or comedy to criticize anthropocentrism. Instead, it reproduces and stabilizes anthropocentric logic. Particularly the ending scene, where Mitchell is in conversation with a cloud, stands out in this respect:

It just sat, motionless, looking down at him. Mitchell lay there for what seemed like ten, even fifteen minutes, but the cloud refused to move. How was this possible? It didn't expand or contract, just stayed fixed in the highest part of the sky. And it really was watching him, wasn't it? Just staring at him, waiting for him to move.

“You first,” said Mitchell without sound.

“Nope,” said the cloud.

“I got nowhere to be.”

“That's two of us.”

“Fine,” said Mitchell. “Suit yourself.” [...]

Almost imperceptibly, the cloud, cowed by his will, began to drift away. (*OAT* 292-3)

What previously appeared as a moment of interspecies attunement is reframed through a satirical lens that reasserts human dominance, as the cloud is rendered subordinate to Mitchell's will. This scene implies that the cloud should feel humbled by Mitchell's human power. Rather than destabilizing anthropocentrism, the scene re-centers it. It demonstrates how the implied author's satire does not challenge but instead consolidate hierarchical and exclusionary modes

of thought. Thus, *OAT*'s satire fails to criticize the narrative voices' anthropocentric, capitalistic and misanthropist ideologies. Instead, it is a mode of storytelling that emotionally manipulates the reader in a destabilization of trust. *OAT* experiments with its narrative voices, revealing seedlings of a democratic narrative attitude that, however faintly, gesture toward nonhuman perspectives that challenge anthropocentrism. Yet, these moments are often shaped just as strongly, if not more so, by a misanthropic undercurrent. A blend of anthropocentrism, capitalist and colonial ideologies, and the dubious satirical voice ultimately dull the power of these democratic moments. Rather than cultivating a democratic narrative voice that invites solidarity or planetary justice, *OAT* is deeply entangled with the very systems it pretends to criticize.

Narrative Community in Kim Stanley Robinson's *New York 2140*

Eight narrative voices relate the story of Robinson's *New York 2140*. Accordingly, my core interest for analysis is how *NY2140*'s vision of democracy is shaped by this plurality of narrators. In the year 2140, the climate crisis has deeply affected how people inhabit the city. The most significant environmental change are the so-called "Pulses," periods of rapidly rising sea levels that have increased by a total of 50 feet. As the tides regularly submerge Manhattan, people use skybridges and ferries to commute, and innovative urban gardening and farming practices have been introduced. Socio-democratic and communist collectives have appeared all over "the intertidal," the littoral parts of the city. While some of these adaptive measures may sound productive from an ecological standpoint, thousands have lost their housing and documents and are now considered refugees who must often squat in destroyed and unsafe buildings. Yet, all these people still feel a sense of belonging to the city, as do the narrators in *NY2140*. The novel is arranged into six parts with eight chapters each, one for each of the focalizing narrators: There are Mutt and Jeff, a pair of coding savants who are kidnapped after they attempt to overthrow the capitalist system; Inspector Gen, a police officer investigating the kidnappings; Franklin, a conceited financial analyst working for a hedge fund; Vlade, the Met Life tower's superintendent fighting against somebody tampering with the building; Amelia, social media "cloud star" traveling in an airship caring for animals; Charlotte, a lawyer working for the Householders' Union and the Met Life tower's board of members; Stefan and Roberto, two unhoused boys with neither parents nor papers; and, finally, the citizen, an extra-diegetic, disembodied voice belonging to a historian who comments on the plot. Owing to the variety of narrators, the novel's story focuses on several plotlines that, at the climax of the novel, converge when the narrators attempt to overthrow the city's capitalist system after a devastating hurricane. Thus, the eight narrators construct a vision of a future that remains grounded and realistic but is also joyful and utopian. They demonstrate how community functions as a central mechanism for imagining democratic urban life.

The novel's message, a story of developing kinship and budding utopia in the face of systemic capitalism, is challenged by its form: while *NY2140*'s ensemble narrative structure enables an exploration of alternative forms of community, kinship, and resistance under disaster capitalism, the narrative authority of one narrator, "the citizen," also persistently complicates the novel's egalitarian ethos. Several theoretical frameworks foreground the politics of relation, community and collective joy and provide a basis for analyzing the narrators' community in *NY2140*. Firstly, Donna Haraway's concepts again yield insights in this context. Her term "god trick" describes the illusion of a neutral, all-seeing perspective that claims to observe the world "from nowhere" while "claim[ing] the power to see and not be seen," a "false vision promising transcendence of all limits and responsibility" ("Knowledges" 581, 582-3). Against this, Haraway advocates "situated knowledge," a "view from a body" grounded in "politics and epistemologies of location, positioning, and situating" and focusing on "partiality and not universality" ("Knowledges" 589). A similar insistence of positionality appears in Adrienne Rich's "politics of location," which locates knowledge in "the doings of living people" rather than in abstractions detached from lived experience (31). The citizen narrator enacts this "god trick," performing precisely the kind of disembodied and seemingly universal perspective that Haraway and Rich critique. The ensemble cast, by contrast, express deeply personal situated, contextual, and lived knowledge to find kinship and community.

Haraway's later work frames these notions of kinship as a deliberate practice: In introducing the term "oddkin," she argues for accountability and care for others and the environment beyond the traditional boundaries of family and species (*Staying* 4). "Oddkin" are the non-traditional, the "unexpected collaborations and combinations" (*Staying* 4) that emphasize the differences between kin that allow for survival on an increasingly strange and destroyed planet. This expanded understanding of kinship resonates strongly with the social networks depicted in *NY2140*, where solidarity emerges not through traditional Western family structures but through improvised alliances among neighbors, activists, and urban communities.

Similar relational forms of solidarity also underpin the concept of “joyful militancy” articulated by carla bergman and Nick Montgomery. They describe joy not as simple happiness but as a transformative force: “Joy rarely feels comfortable or easy, because it transforms and reorients people and relationships. Rather than the desire to exploit, control, and direct others, it is resonant with emergent and collective capacities to do things, make things, undo painful habits, and nurture enabling ways of being together” (bergman and Montgomery 13). Similarly, adrienne maree brown’s “emergent strategy” offers further insight into the novel’s revolutionary practices. As an activist, brown understands social transformation as a process that develops organically through small-scale interactions, adaptive relationships, and decentralized networks rather than top-down control (12). “Emergent strategy” emphasizes experimentation, responsiveness, and collaboration, “ways for humans to practice being in right relationship to our home and each other, to practice complexity, and grow a compelling future together through relatively simple interactions” (a. brown 13). Emergent strategy draws on models from the natural world, such as mycelium networks and ant colonies, to illustrate how change emerges from the cumulative effects of many interconnected actions rather than the vision of a single guiding figure (a. brown 20-1). Crucially, this form of change requires immersion rather than distance: As bergman and Montgomery argue, “[t]he way to participate in joyful transformation is through immersion in it, which is impossible if one is always standing back, evaluating, or attempting to control things” (bergman and Montgomery 29). Their emphasis on relational intimacy directly challenges the detached perspective of the citizen narrator. If joyful militancy depends on participation and relational entanglement, the citizen’s god trick is diametrically opposed to community and collective joy. Furthermore, bergman and Montgomery argue that resistance against the Empire emerges from dense social relations, which the Empire seeks to break through “relentless violence, division, competition, management, and incitement to see ourselves as isolated individuals or nuclear family units” (37). Its “undoing,” therefore, lies in ““[r]ecovering and sustaining deeper forms of friendship and kinship” (58). bergman and

Montgomery's emphasis on relationality resonates with Haraway's call for oddkin while foregrounding the political potential of shared struggle and collective joy. Taken together, these concepts illuminate the tension at the heart of *NY2140*. While the citizen narrator does not directly influence the plot and remains a structurally minor influence, his chapters nevertheless undermine the potency of *NY2140*'s sense of community. Ultimately, however, the novel's use of a democratic narrative voice provides a plurality of different viewpoints on a realistic utopian future which only becomes possible through a network of joyful and utopian kinship between the narrators and their community.

Kinship, Care, and Collective Action

NY2140 is a story of solidarity and revolution: out of daily acts of cohabitation and care emerge kinship networks that transform into collective action against the dominant capitalist force in New York. At the start of the novel, most of the characters are mere acquaintances connected by the fact that they live in the same building, the Met Life tower. The building is both a home and a workplace for the main characters, with its upper floors serving as living quarters in a self-contained community governed by a board of members, and its lower floors flooded or repurposed for boat access and storage. The MetLife inhabitants share resources, common spaces and sometimes emotional labor. Most often, they cross paths in the dining hall, which Amelia describes as "jammed, hundreds of people in the serving lines and crowded side by side at long tables, talking and eating" (*NY2140* 43). Amelia eats besides these "hundreds of people" who she does not know well, still feeling safe in the fact that she can get dinner without getting mobbed by her many fans: "Quite a few of them waved hello to her and then left her alone, which was just how she liked it" (*NY2140* 43). She relates this community to "tadpoles in a pond," creating an image of crowded and fast-moving network that does not occupy her free time (*NY2140* 43). The tadpole metaphor conveys a dense, teeming mass of small bodies packed into a confined space, almost undifferentiated and indistinct from each other. At the

same time, it evokes an early stage of development, suggesting a collective that is defined by its shared potential for growth and transformation. Similarly, Franklin and Charlotte describe the dining hall as “[h]undreds of voices, hundreds of lives; it was exactly like being alone together, but louder” (*NY2140* 426). The repetition emphasizes that crowds are a part of their daily lives. In this sense, the dining hall scenes can be read as instances of what bergman and Montgomery describe as a form of joy grounded in immersion rather than control (29): Amelia, Frankling and Charlotte do not distance themselves from the other inhabitants but actively participate in the dining hall’s messy collective. The dining hall is an example of the forms of collective intimacy that bergman and Montgomery describe, in which participation in shared, everyday practices fosters relationships that enable “emergent and collective capacities” and constitute a mode of resistance (13). Thus, the Met Life community foregrounds collective life over individualism, operates through participatory structures, and depends on each member’s contribution to ensure that vulnerable residents are supported. Ultimately, the characters’ connection with others do not even need to be particularly positive to have an impact on their building of kinship; most of these encounters are purely utilitarian.

The tower’s kinship networks extend beyond the building through informal ties: friendships, coworkers, and past relationships are mobilized. Often, characters refer to a friend, a cousin, even an ex-husband, as they work to find solutions. The protagonists also often refer to their friends as family, thus blurring the boundaries of traditionally Western familial bonds. Vlade, for example, remembers his time working as a diver fondly: “All that work had been done in teams, and there was enough danger involved to make the teams like family for the time they were working together; and that feeling persisted long after the work was done” (*NY2140* 312). Vlade’s memory reframes family as something that is produced through shared risk. The intense trust within diving teams creates a true affective bond. In this way, this section suggests that family-like relations can emerge from cooperation and mutual dependence rather than solely through blood ties. In bergman and Montgomery’s terms, Vlade’s found family can be

read as the basis for transformation, as a “new and resurgent form[...] of intimacy through which people come to depend on each other, defend each other, and become dangerous together” (37). As such, Vlade reaching out to his old friends for help activates a network of trust and solidarity that can become collective action. Amelia, in a similarly oddkin-sustaining moment, mentions “her ursine brothers and sisters” when referring to the polar bears she is responsible for (*NY2140* 351). By describing the animals explicitly as her closest family, Amelia incorporates them into a broader kinship network that exceeds the human. This language also reframes ecological care from a matter of simple land stewardship to a meaningful familial obligation. These examples are significant of an extension of the concept of family, of a network of human and nonhuman actors that is not defined by biological or genealogical ideals.

The networks of kinship in *NY2140* extend from the private and small scale into larger, systematic and democratic developments after the floods. The intertidal, where “[h]egemony had drowned” (*NY2140* 209), offers a radical alternative to the dominant capitalist urban hierarchy in Upper Manhattan: “a proliferation of cooperatives, neighborhood associations, communes, squats, barter, alternative currencies, gift economies, solar usufruct, fishing village cultures, mondragons, unions, Dav’s locker freemasonries, anarchist blather, and submarine technoculture, including aeration and aquafarming” have developed since the Pulse (*NY2140* 209). The word choices here explicitly link two disasters, climate change and capitalism, with the rise of collaborative projects through metaphor and neologisms: “mondragons” is a reference to Mondragon, a worker cooperative in the Basque region in Spain, and “Dav’s locker freemasonries” possibly alludes to the depths of the sea via Davy Jones’ locker and the belief of brotherhood in Freemasonry. Likewise, Charlotte’s scenes with the Householders’ Union and as a board member of the Met Life tower’s council are examples of this shift towards communal self-governance. Similarly, Vlade and other superintendents “formed a kind of club, all enmeshed with the mutual aid associations and cooperative groups that knitted together to make intertidal life its own society” (*NY2140* 27). Vlade meets up with them regularly to discuss

issues and distributes electrical power through the local plant. Such practices can be understood, with bergman and Montgomery, as the emergence of “common notions,” that is, shared values of trust and responsibility that arise from concrete, situated forms of cooperation (61). As bergman and Montgomery suggest, such values are “not enshrined in law and formal agreements, but emerge instead through a sense of feeling invited to participate in the world, care for others and be cared for, support and be supported” (61). This dynamic is reflected in the intertidal’s networks of mutual aid and collective problem-solving. Both Vlade and Charlotte work to protect their communal resources from predatory attacks through dialogue and shared decision-making. The novel thus suggests that a broader democratic agency emerges through lived, cooperative practices.

The characters’ everyday practices of cohabitation in the Met Life tower develops into forms of mutual care. Through repeated acts of cooperation and responsibility, relationships extend beyond merely living in proximity and instead produce a shared social network of trust. This dynamic is most visible in the treatment of Stefan and Roberto, the “water rats” (*NY2140* 30). Despite lacking a guardian, the boys are informally cared for by the community, most consistently by Vlade. He habitually leaves food where they can find it, so that “the sight of a little hand reaching up over the edge of the dock to snag some of the stale break he left out there did not surprise him” (*NY2140* 29). His nickname, “water rats,” is not a derogatory label but a term of endearment that frames the boys as wild and vulnerable beings needing protection. The comparison to vulnerable animals persists even after the boys begin to spend more time in the building: “they dashed into the Met’s kitchen and snatched a loaf of bread fresh out of the oven, Vlade looking the other way, as he did all the time now” (*NY2140* 193). This suggests that Vlade’s help has become routine. His quiet sharing of resources, he “did the same thing for the bacino’s cats” (*NY2140* 193), thus constitutes an ongoing practice rather than an exceptional act of charity. As bergman and Montgomery suggest, joyful kinship can emerge through repetitive and everyday practices of mutual responsibility and trust (20). The boys’ response

further demonstrates this dynamic: their casual “Thanks mister!” (*NY2140* 30) acknowledges Vlade’s help without positioning them in a subordinate position, as dependent. Because Vlade frames his help through humor as something normal, casual, the boys can accept his assistance without feeling that they are relinquishing agency or control. Vlade’s behavior neither mocks their poverty nor establishes a hierarchical relationship; instead, it normalizes support as part of the building’s everyday life. Vlade’s instinct to help reads as almost factual, as if he helps just to help, without ulterior motives. This signals that mutual responsibility and trust are simply the expected modes of social interaction within the Met Life community.

The full integration of Stefan and Roberto into the Met Life community exemplifies how the novel moves beyond the Western nuclear family model toward an extended, improvised form of “oddkin” care. Often, characters compare the two to animals: Roberto is described as “looking like an otter with a human face,” both boys as “raccoons peering out of a dumpster” (*NY2140* 422). These comparisons underscore the adults’ feelings of fondness for the boys, and their unspoken agreement to care for them in the future. Such comparisons may also undermine their agency as individuals and reduce the boys to wild and impulsive creatures, but the fact that the boys have their own narrative voices refutes this concern. Within the social structure of the Met Life tower, the boys’ lack of a traditional family structure does not imply the absence of care or social regulation. The other characters assume parental responsibility and feel protective of them: the residents collectively monitor and correct the boys’ behavior and educate them to become responsible members of society. One example is the relationship between Franklin, the indifferent hedge fund trader, and the boys: At first, the boys strongarm Franklin into towing them back to the Met Life building after he nearly runs them over in his speedboat (*NY2140* 62), yet Franklin quickly warms to the boys and, aloof as ever, calls them “our guys” (*NY2140* 198). Although he only reluctantly agrees, Franklin then rescues the boys several times: “Why break my streak with these guys?” (*NY2140* 477). The financial analyst comes to

care for Stefan and Roberto, although it would be out of character for him to say so directly.

When he finds the boys in danger once again, Franklin gets angry with them:

“Come on,” I snapped, “get your ass out of there. I’m going to tell your mom on you.”

“Don’t got a mom.”

“I know that. I’m going to tell Vlade.”

“So what.”

“I’m going to tell Charlotte.”

That got their attention. (*NY2140* 422)

Once the other Met Life residents understand that the boys are orphans, they follow Vlade’s example. By the end of the novel, the boys become wards of the Met Life tower, fully integrated into the community and well cared for. Different characters occupy complementary roles within the boys’ kinship network: Charlotte functions as a form of affective guardian whose authority the boys respect; Vlade acts as a consistent provider of practical care such as food, perhaps refraining from more emotional labor as he is reserved after losing his own child; old Mr. Hexter assumes an educational role, sharing stories and historical knowledge in a grandfatherly manner; Franklin appears as the reluctant yet protective uncle. Together, these roles illustrate a shift away from the nuclear family model toward a form of found family or oddkin, in which responsibility for care is collectively shared rather than inherited through blood ties.

Significantly, the Met Life community’s small acts of mutual care and collective joy become materially and politically productive, as the gold recovered by Stefan and Roberto funds their collective plan to overthrow the capitalist financial system in New York. Ultimately, the incorporation of Stefan and Roberto into the Met Life community not only redefines kinship as a shared, communal responsibility but also ties affective bonds to broader cooperative and anti-capitalist practices. As adrienne maree brown’s emergent strategy proposes, the ensemble cast’s small and “relatively simple interactions” lead to “ways for humans to practice being in right relationship to our home and each other, to practice complexity, and grow a compelling future together through relatively simple interactions” (13). The ensemble cast has a transformative power particularly because they work together: Franklin saves Stefan and Roberto, Vlade and Idelba’s crew dig up the gold, they rescue Mutt and Jeff who Inspector Gen

has been looking for, and, finally, decide on the best course of action with their newly acquired wealth. This group effort, ultimately, saves the building and—with Amelia’s public persona and Mutt and Jeff’s knowledge—jumpstarts the financial revolution. The ensemble cast enacts a coordinated and explicitly disruptive intervention into the financial system. Simply put, all types of networks and community come together to finally fight the oppressive capitalistic force in Upper Manhattan. Or, in Jeff’s words: “Self-reliance my ass. We’re fucking monkeys. It’s always about teamwork” (*NY2140* 541).

As the ensemble cast expands their small but mighty Met Life community to the whole of the intertidal and beyond, they finally break Upper Manhattan’s grasp on the city’s financial resources. Their mundane, everyday acts of mutual care and kinship are the foundation for resisting the capitalist system in New York, and they usher in the beginning of a utopian spirit. This scaling of community is exemplified when Amelia, with Charlotte’s and Franklin’s “arguing among themselves like little mice in her left ear” (*NY2140* 527), improvises a speech that she broadcasts live to her millions of viewers. Charlotte and Franklin, at once collaborating and fighting through their differing opinions, channel their collective knowledge: “Charlotte and Franklin in rapid counterpoint, having a little real-time editing war over what she should say” (*NY2140* 528). Amelia, who knows her millions of listeners and how to best mediate this information, listens, edits, speaks for them both: “Amelia just repeated whatever sounded good to her in what she managed to catch of their discourse. Kind of a *mélange* of the two of them, but so what” (*NY2140* 528). The speech is unplanned, unfiltered, transparent, and based on their deep familiarity with each other. This signals the urgency of the moment and their shared investment in systemic change; they are aware of their personal stakes as well as the greater implications. Their collaborative effort based on their deep trust and familiarity with each other stems from their emotional involvement in the topic to present the best possible argument for change and revolution. The community that has formed around the Met Life tower is not by blood or law; it was formed through shared struggle and the ongoing commitment of people to

care for others. In this sense, the novel suggests that networks of kinship, articulated narratively as forms of oddkin, community, and collective joy, become the basis for transformation and the possibility of a utopian future.

The Citizen Narrator's God Trick

NY2140 is arranged into six parts with eight chapters each, one for each of the focalizing narrators whose perspectives are linked through the shared setting in the Met life building. All narrating characters work in different occupational fields and contribute different sets of skills and knowledge. Simply through their differences, these eight narrative voices realize democratic intent to paint the story in finer strokes: through their multiple perspectives, *NY2140* shows events, characters, and environments from varied viewpoints and creates a layered depiction of urban life. This distribution of narrative authority is democratic because it gives equal weight to diverse experience and avoids concentrating perspective in a single voice. The citizen narrator, however, poses a conundrum for the democratic narrative voice. He, a single and disembodied voice, holds a special narrative authority, the power of seeing and speaking for the ensemble cast.

In doing so, the citizen is a manifestation of what Haraway calls the “the god-trick of seeing everything from nowhere” (“Knowledges” 581). The framework of the “god trick” offers insights into the citizen’s absence of contextual and identity factors, such as age, gender, and race, and, as such, the narrator’s “leap out of the marked body and into a conquering gaze from nowhere” (“Knowledges” 581). When applied as an analytical lens to the narrators in *NY2140*, the “god trick” problematizes the citizen narrator’s chapters and the knowledge he shares. Unlike the other narrators, whose perspectives are grounded in their day-to-day life directly through what they experience in a given moment, the citizen speaks from outside the plot. Furthermore, he addresses the reader directly, “[i]f you’re ok pondering the big picture, the ground truth, read on” (*NY2140* 32), and offers decontextualized exposition, for example on the

Pulses (*NY2140* 139-145) and on the Met Life tower and Madison Square (*NY2140* 77-81). This disembodied stance produces authority and feigns objectivity but, as Haraway argues, results in a form of knowledge that is “truly fantastic, distorted, and irrational,” as “[t]he only position from which objectivity could not possibly be practiced and honored is the standpoint of the master, the Man, the One God, whose Eye produces, appropriates, and orders all difference” (“Knowledges” 587). Hence, the citizen’s position outside the ensemble cast, outside of place and time without context and situational embodiment, reduces his power of relating information to the reader. The contrast between the situated narration of community, the citizen narrator’s detached overview weakens *NY2140*’s democratic ethos.

Although claiming to be, the citizen is technically neither part of the ensemble cast nor of the community of New Yorkers he claims to represent. He instead lures above them, occupying a privileged position. He declares himself as “a citizen,” later morphs into “the citizen” and “the city smartass” and by the end becomes “the city” (*NY2140* 32, 139, 495, 531). By nature of this self-imposed label, the citizen is visibly marked not only as belonging to the group but as *being* the group he speaks on. The evolution of this label, from the indefinite “a” to the definite “the,” signals the citizen’s privilege: his authority as the voice of one ordinary New Yorker gradually expands to speaking for all of New York and then into an assertion of *being* the city. He transforms into an emblematic figure whose perspective is positioned as representative of the urban collective, so that one person among many becomes the figure through which the city is articulated and the ultimate example of New York-ness. This transformation elevates him above the ensemble cast, as he elevates himself above the collective he claims to represent. The citizen does not merely speak as a New Yorker but as New York itself. His identity is based on the city and the collective of New Yorkers, yet he also mocks it, making snide comments such as: “So it isn't all that special, this NOO YAWK of ours. And yet. And yet and yet and yet. Maybe there's something to it” (*NY2140* 35). Furthermore, while claiming this deep relation, he regularly undermines his co-narrators. The citizen’s relation to

the other narrative voices is positioned as superior, omniscient and omnipresent. The other narrators show no awareness of his existence. This asymmetry in knowledge and perspective compromises the novel's democratic ethos.

This tension between the citizen narrator and the ensemble cast's voices is most obviously reflected in his historical knowledge, which is broad where the others narrative voices' is personal, retrospective where the others' is contextual, and ideological where the others' is practical. The citizen shows his extensive knowledge of history, explaining the connections between the formation of New York's coastline during the Ice Age, Henry Hudson's voyages and the diegetic modern history of the Two Pulses. Calling the citizen a "future historian" (533), Spencer Adams asserts that the citizen's purpose is to "inject the sense of history that makes the particular moment we are witnessing in the novel into a momentous event within the much larger trajectory of the city, and of climate change and humanity's social and political responses more broadly" (527-8). While this may be true, the citizen stays very general and refrains from talking about personal histories, specific victims of disasters and precise dates or events. Instead, he largely engages in monologues grounded in common sense and broadly shared in-world public knowledge. This abstraction creates distance from the city and the other narrators, yet it simultaneously endows the citizen with a particular form of privilege: His function is informative, he is positioned to frame the history that the other characters have experienced first-hand. The citizen's authority is not derived from direct participation in the plot; rather, he occupies an intermediate narrative position between the plot and the reader. The citizen's privileged positions correspondingly manifest in his tone, belittling the other cast members and all other New Yorkers: "People keep living here, bad as it is, and more than that, people keep coming here, despite the suicidal stupidity of that, the way it is in effect volunteering for hell. People are like lemmings, they are mammals with herd instincts very much like the instincts of cows. In short, morons" (*NY2140* 35). From his observing perspective, the citizen remains detached from the danger of the crises in New York. Simultaneously, he

judges the other narrative voices and insists on representing the city and its inhabitants to an external audience. Although the citizen repeatedly suggests his proximity and immersion within the city, he remains detached from the dangers of the climate crisis he describes. His claim of being “here” functions less as evidence of living in New York and more as a rhetorical strategy that allows the narrator to (falsely) claim membership in the urban collective while maintaining a privileged observational stance. This asymmetry of power appears fundamentally undemocratic and, as a consequence, the authority derived from his historical knowledge is undermined. The citizen’s claim to represent New York therefore conflicts with the distance from which he speaks.

The citizen also exerts his power over the other cast members in the communication with the reader. By breaking the fourth wall, he is positioned as both a commentator and a “future historian.” Thus, the citizen’s condescending tone further exposes his deeply privileged position. Because he informs the reader of the intradiegetic history, he occupies an intermediate narrative position as commentator between the plot and the reader. When retelling the history of the Pulses, he draws conclusions on the readers’ intellect and divides them into two groups, “those of you anxious to get back to the narrating of the antics of individual humans [who] can skip to the next chapter, and know that any more expository rants, any more info *dumps* (on your carpet) from this New Yorker will be printed in red ink to warn you to skip them (not)” and the “broader-minded more intellectually flexible readers” (NY2140 141). This distinction implicitly ranks the audience according to intellectual capacity, suggesting that readers who are more interested in the characters’ “antics” are less capable of grasping the larger historical or systematic context. The citizen assumes a position of intellectual superiority; his dismissive attitude toward the novel’s characters is revealed in the phrasing of “antics,” which carries a playful and trivializing connotation. He reduces the protagonists’ everyday actions and struggles to amusing performance. Their behavior is painted as entertainment, as something to observe from a distance. The citizen’s parenthetical asides and witty tone reinforce this sense

of detachment. To the citizen, the disasters are not immediate threats or sources of fear but historical developments that can be analyzed. In this way, the citizen places himself as outside of the “human” drama of the novel.

Furthermore, the citizen instructs certain readers to skip sections, joking about “info dumps (on your carpet)” and deciding when exposition interrupts the storyline. The citizen asserts control over the pace of the story and its interpretation. He thus determines not just the interpretation of history but also the narrative structure itself. This control allows the citizen to mock both the audience and the other narrators: he enjoys instructing and teasing the reader while simultaneously diminishing the significance of the other characters’ perspectives. Thus, in his impersonal and condescending style, the citizen again insists on the god trick, projecting his objective historical truth over the actual story of the novel and even the reality of the readers. This tension between the citizen narrator and the other perspectives is also revealed in the fact that the citizen focuses on abstract political critique and ideological questions while the ensemble cast is actively experimenting with practical solutions to their daily problems. Heise sees the citizen as a voice that is the manifestation of “institutional contexts and political forces” and the “voice of the municipality itself” (33). The citizen, being this untouchable, disembodied figure, has the privilege to focus on ideology and theory without being emotionally connected to them. He, for instance, comments on the devastating Pulses with: “But hey. An end is a beginning! Creative destruction, right?” (*NY2140* 144). His upbeat phrasing contrasts with the catastrophe of the Pulses; he positions himself as detached and distant to the other narrators’ drama. He is somebody who may interpret rather than must experience the climate crisis. The citizen’s flippant tone and ideological commentary flatten and normalize climate disaster and their victims’ suffering.

Democracy, broken down to its simplest parts, is about the choice of who gets to speak for the many. And, paradoxically, one voice—even one chosen directly by all other—will never be truly able to depict a story fully and in its entirety. However, the citizen is not a democratic

speaker, as he is neither chosen by nor accountable to the collective he claims to represent. He asserts to be a true, resilient New Yorker while also not being affected by the flood or even partaking in the plot other than functioning as an informative vehicle. He has the capacity to talk about abstract historical concepts while the other characters struggle with hunger and homelessness. Because the citizen neither communicates with the other narrators nor is involved in the actual plot, and because he is caught in his abstract and elitist thinking, he cannot truly effect any change. Enacting the god trick, the citizen is omniscient but practically unhelpful to the larger cause. Ultimately, the citizen's god trick diminishes the novels' DNV: his power of viewing the story from the outside and seeing impersonal history as objective truth to be revered fails to facilitate practical changes. The ensemble cast, on the other hand, is truly democratic in that they build upon deeply emotional and contextual experiences and, in those situated knowledges, finds solutions for greater problems. By elevating a supposedly objective viewpoint above lived experience, the narrator distances himself from the Met Life tower's community and undermines their collective processes of care and joy.

Plurality of Truths and Situated Knowledges

The ensemble narrative cast of *NY2140* is compiled of characters of various ages, genders, races and socio-economic status, each embodying different social roles within the city. These narrators, shaped by their lived experience, professional roles, and personal histories, register New York's transformation differently and offer deeply personal reactions to it. Vlade's perspective, for instance, is marked by the traumatic loss of his child. The author also includes nonfictional quotes from real scientists, philosophers, journalists, social activists, and famous New Yorkers, as interludes between the ensemble's chapters. These paratexts frame the plot, guide reader expectations, and extend the fictional future world into the extradiegetic present. Through Haraway's lens of situated knowledge, the novel's pluralistic form of storytelling mirrors the messy, embodied plurality of life in community grounded in social relations,

kinship, and locality. This emphasis on position resonates with Adrienne Rich's "politics of location," which insists that knowledge emerges from specific and embodied positions and gains meaning through relations of responsibility and care (31-2). Especially evident in this context are the ways in which the narrators are inseparable from biography, affect, and material circumstance.

In contrast to the citizen narrator, the remaining voices cannot speak and see from a safe vantagepoint. Instead, they experience the hurricane through their bodies and their place in the city: their perspectives are shaped by their view of the world, by their lived experience, their jobs. Read through the lenses of Haraway's situated knowledge and Rich's politics of location, these perspectives appear as embodied and relational forms of knowing that are grounded in specific histories and oriented towards others. For example, Vlade often relates his care for Roberto and Stefan back to his own experiences of grief of losing his child in a drowning accident: one such scene, when Roberto nearly drowns, Vlade describes as "a real-world version of a nightmare he had suffered all too many times in the last fifteen years" (*NY2140* 197), signaling how his deeply personal their well-being is to him. The boundary between his present and his past trauma shifts; his grief informs his understanding of the present. He feels "sick with fear" while "his throat closed up" (*NY2140* 197, 200). Vlade's visceral reactions show how his body is a site of knowledge: his fear is deeply situated and material, so embodied he is unable to speak. Haraway argues that this embodiment is how truly objective knowledge is created: "We need to learn in our bodies, endowed with primate color and stereoscopic vision, [...] in order to name where we are and are not, in dimensions of mental and physical space we hardly know how to name" ("Knowledge" 582). Vlade's partiality does not diminish his authority or the truth. Because it is grounded in lived experience, Vlade's perspective makes him, and by extension the reader, responsive to the lives of others. During the hurricane, Vlade is, again, deeply worried for the boys' safety: "The building would be fine. But some of his people weren't there" (*NY2140* 460). He later gets to work, taking out his ex-wife Idelba's boat

to save stranded New Yorkers. Instead of isolating him, this grief becomes the basis for sustained forms of care and connection. This is an example of bergman and Montgomery's joyful militancy: Vlade is haunted by his loss, yet his relationships endure and are even deepened through shared vulnerability and mutual support. It is precisely his positioning that enables forms of perception and care that the distant citizen narrator cannot access.

NY2140 engages with history as an accumulation of multiple perspectives, reflecting the diverse interpretations of the narrative voices coming together in one web of storytelling. Whenever one of the ensemble cast's characters mentions historical information, they filter it through their personal interests and desires. For example, Mr. Hexter, Roberto and Stefan's elderly friend, relates his experience during the previous floodings back to their current moment: "Start of the Second Pulse. Breach of Bjarke's Wall. I was about your age. You can't imagine I was ever that young, can you" (*NY2140* 161). Here, Mr. Hexter's recalling of these disasters corresponds closely with Haraway's epistemology of location and positioning: "objectivity turns out to be about particular and specific embodiment," where "only partial perspective promises objective vision" ("Knowledges" 582-3). Mr. Hexter's—and the rest of the ensemble cast's—knowledge is embodied, relies on lived experience and is grounded in emotional memories. Their many partial and embodied perspectives present a counterpoint to the citizen's panoramic and abstract historical summaries. This becomes clearer when Mr. Hexter gives the boys "a moldy book copy of *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, by a Mark Twain" (*NY2140* 191), which they identify strongly with: "They too had been hungry and stolen food, they too had been threatened and once or twice trapped and abused by adults" (*NY2140* 191-2). The boys discuss the novel, comparing their lives to the story: "Wild times on the Mississippi. Similar in many ways to life on the Hudson" (*NY2140* 192). Similarly, they instantly relate to Herman Melville, who Mr. Hexter tells them also "was a water rat" because he "had to scrape to get by" (*NY2140* 386). History, through these passages, appears as recurring, experiential, and relational rather than abstract. They contrast the citizen's view of

history as objective in that they identify with and learn from this shared past. The boys feel like they are part of something bigger than themselves; they can situate themselves in greater history and are anchored in a lineage of stories. Conveyed through this shared humanity and deep empathy, Stefan and Roberto show how Haraway's situated knowledges can resemble deep empathy and humanity across time and reality. The ensemble cast's partial perspectives, their situated knowledge and embodied memories collectively weave a meaningful narrative web.

In the pattern of weaving narratives, the devastation of the floods and the hurricane becomes fully knowable. Moreover, the ensemble cast reveals how situated perspectives enable a critique of capitalism that is at the heart of the disasters. The citizen's attempt at historical objectivity is unfounded in this case: the characters experience the same hurricane differently and all their experiences are valid and true. In fact, these different experiences do not weaken but constitute historical truth. As opposed to the citizen narrator, the ensemble cast members never aspire to be objective or neutral. They acknowledge their positionality:

"Capital," Jeff clarified. "It will always win. It will eat your brain."

"Not my brain," Charlotte declared.

"You say that now, but you're not a billionaire. Not yet."

"I hate that shit," Charlotte said. "I'd like to crash it."

"Me too," Amelia interjected. "I want it for the animals."

"I want it for this building," Charlotte said grimly. (*NY2140* 339)

Jeff reminds of the fact that capitalism is not just powerful in the material sense but also in the ideological sense. Capitalism's power lies in its all-encompassing cultural logic, on the fact that it promises individual success while it relies on the work and subjugation of the masses. Even though these capitalist structures have been in place for a long time and have adapted to be even more insidious in the transformed world of *NY2140*, there are ways around capitalist structures. The novel, in this scene, hints towards these solutions: Firstly, Charlotte affirms that she is not immune to the power of capitalism. Secondly, the characters' do not yearn for personal gain but for others, for animals or the Met Life community. Their embodied, messy, local, contextual experience of crisis is precisely why the ensemble cast members can allow themselves to think outside of capitalism's power and refuse a grand and objective narrative.

These examples prove that history must not always be told in the way that the citizen does, in sweeping statements and generalizations, solely focusing on individuals who are deemed worthy of having done something special by the hegemonial powers. In fact, history is an amalgamation of small, personal, repeated stories, and is made more available and more productive to the current times through context and embodiment. Haraway argues, and convincingly so, that these histories are crucial for change, for building networks of kinship with other beings:

The details matter. The details link actual beings to actual response-abilities. [...] Each time a story helps me remember what I thought I knew, or introduces me to new knowledge, a muscle critical for caring about flourishing gets some aerobic exercise. Such exercise enhances collective thinking and movement in complexity. [...] We are all responsible to and for shaping conditions for multispecies flourishing in the face of terrible histories, and sometimes joyful histories too, but we are not all response-able in the same ways. The differences matter—in ecologies, economies, species, lives. (*Staying* 29)

Opposing cold, hard facts with embodied, emotional histories can enable a new, less anthropocentric thinking that more in relational networks and webs of connection, a posthuman form of knowledge that values position and embodiment over neutrality and objectivity.

Joyful Community

Considering the revolutionary spirit in the last part of the novel, *NY2140*'s vision of the future is no typical utopia. Robinson does not fall into the trap of considering climate change a solely natural disaster. Instead, he depicts his transformed city as changed by climate and late-stage capitalism, implying that all climate disasters are social disasters. As Raphael Kabo maintains, "climate change is only a significant actor in *New York 2140* to the extent of its uneven distribution along intersectional lines, particularly those of species, class, and ethnicity" (257). This logic, a continual development throughout, is most clearly enacted in the novel's final chapters: Utopian possibility emerges from embodied and situated forms of community, alongside and against the abstract systematic commentary of the citizen. The utopian thought at the heart of *NY2140*, Kabo argues, is the characters "forg[ing] radical, accessible, and

sustainable communities of mutual support, care, and joy that may never be utopian enough, but which will always, necessarily, continue becoming more utopian” (269-70). This process of “always [...] becoming” is concretely staged in moments of collective interaction, most notably in the jazz club scene, where improvisation and responsiveness to each other replace hierarchical narrative authority. Kabo’s reading of *NY2140* as a “disaster utopia” is reinforced by Adams, who claims the novel presents a “quiet utopianism” that “maintains an investment in the way people attempt to carve out contingent enclaves, imbued with radical possibility for social reorganization, in often harsh and unfamiliar terrain” (522). The novel’s utopian ending is an example of joyful militancy, as it depicts practices of shared attention and collective energy. In this sense, *NY2140*’s happy end lies in situated, improvised practices of kin-making that take shape even within conditions of the ongoing flood crisis.

These concepts of a realistic utopian drive are best exemplified in the last scene of the novel, in which Amelia, Jeff and Mutt go dancing in a jazz club. It appears that true futuristic joy neither comes from the citizen’s authority over the ensemble cast nor from empty platitudes addressed to strangers, but from embodied and complicated community. The characters find such a community in the jazz club, where two contrasting guitars, “one clean and sharp, the other fuzzy,” weave “complicated lines” with a bass, while a trumpet and a trombone play interweaving harmonies (*NY2140* 611). Alternating vocals mix “very complicated shouting” with “long howling melodies” until a young saxophonist joins (*NY2140* 611-2). His energetic playing lifts the whole band. This moment illustrates both situated knowledges and kinship networks as Haraway defines them. The scene’s impermanent utopia, hinted at by the spontaneous set up of “folding chairs against the far wall” (*NY2140* 611), can be read as “both momentary and lasting: momentary because it must be regenerated anew every night, which keeps its transformative potential firmly anchored on a utopian horizon always just out of reach; and lasting because this constant process of improvisational regeneration prevents it from being enclosed and subsumed by capitalism” (Kabo 268). The act is unplanned, imperfect but still

powerful. Like jazz improvisation, where musicians respond to each other in real time, the participants in this scene build community through spontaneous, responsive interaction. The resulting network of relationships resembles Haraway's oddkin, emerging not from predetermined institutions and structures but from an ongoing process of mutual attentiveness and collective creation. Many small acts of choice and care for another merge in community: "The vocalists are grinning and shouting duets in harmony" (*NY2140* 612). Furthermore, the narrative voice's lexical choices relating to electricity, "zooming around in the tune," "like they've all just plugged into an electrical jack," "screeches across the supersonic" (*NY2140* 612) convey the infectious nature of the music, not only making the friends dance but also inviting them into the circle, the community of jazz players and listeners. The unknown instruments, music styles, even languages do not hinder but add to the friends' enjoyment of the evening. Finally, after having gone through much trauma and disaster, Amelia, Mutt and Jeff get swept up in the music, forget their worries and experience a moment of true, embodied and communal joy.

Likewise, the scene strongly suggests the rise of different kinship networks within the jazz bar and throughout New York as a whole: "Heck, there's probably fifty bands like them playing tonight in this city. Dances like that going on right now, all over town" (*NY2140* 613). The individual instruments and players, even some that might seem contradicting, come together in something more than the sum of their parts. Difference becomes productive rather than divisive. The band finds harmony in their "complicated lines," "trade off on the vocals," and through "crossing each other" (*NY2140* 611). Even the saxophone player, who joins late and is the "star of the band," does not control the dynamic and overshadows the other musicians but inspires the others to "instantly get better," become "more precise and intricate" (*NY2140* 612). As opposed to the citizen narrator, who shamelessly claims the identity of a New Yorker and power of speaking over the other narrative voices, the saxophone player adds something productive and worthwhile to the group, playing *with* them instead *over* them. The musicians'

difference is their strength, echoing Lorde's argument that difference should not be seen as a source of division but as a generative and "dynamic human force" that "is enriching rather than threatening to the defined self, when there are shared goals" (35). Lorde sees "human difference as a springboard for creative change" (108). Ultimately, this scene is a microcosm of the utopian instinct in *NY2140* that is based in situated knowledges and odd/kinship networks and decidedly resists the god trick of the citizen narrator. The future in *NY2140* is not utopian but a "change [...] already in the making" (bergman and Montgomery 12). It "stays with the trouble," as Haraway calls it, working to be better and, as such, makes future worlds possible through kinship and mutual dependence. *NY2140* ultimately invites readers to reconsider narrative as odd/kin-making: a mode of imagining futures shaped not by traditional relations, individualism or power, but by interdependence, care, and critique. The ensemble cast's situated knowledges from the past and their community and kinship in the present are in service of a realistic and even joyful utopian future for all inhabitants of New York.

Entanglements of Horror and Hope in N. K. Jemisin's *The City We Became*

In N. K. Jemisin's *The City We Became*, the narrative voices meander between two competing visions of tentacularity: on the one hand, H. P. Lovecraft's fear of contamination, and on the other, a communal ethics of connection. Lovecraft's fictions, in particular *The Call of Cthulhu* and "The Shadow over Innsmouth," imagine monstrous tentacles as something which contaminates the individual and dissolves them into cosmic insignificance. By contrast, I read Donna Haraway, Arturo Escobar and Audre Lorde as conceptualizing these tentacle-like, communal webs as lifelines which foster interdependence through difference. Jemisin's *TCWB* reimagines these different tentacular visions as embodied adversaries: Lovecraft's influence takes shape in the novel's Enemy, an otherworldly monster that embodies colonial and imperialist ideologies and is a metaphor for the violences of gentrification, the erasure of indigenous cultures, and climate change. The communal tentacles, conversely, are embodied in the six protagonist avatars, who are entangled in a network of connection both with each other and with their city by embracing their sense of belonging through cultural modes of connection to place. Through this, *TCWB* reframes culture as a practice of belonging, rejecting Lovecraft's colonial exclusions and embracing the difficulties that arise from being part of a community. This is mirrored at the narrative level in the way the multiple perspectives distribute the narration but also sometimes overlap and argue with each other. This shared authority highlights a central challenge of democracy itself: the tension between individual self-interest and collective well-being. The novel suggests that this tension be approached by imagining more relational, tentacular forms of democratic life. In short, *TCWB* argues that hyperobject problems, such as the Enemy or climate change, can only be met with the conscious choice for tentacular interdependence and rejection of hyper-individualism. *TCWB* replaces dualisms (subject/object, nature/culture) with relational connection. Jemisin reimagines what Lovecraft casts as terrifying as liberatory and reparative. She echoes the cosmic scale and entanglement associated with Lovecraftian thought but undoes the discriminatory and marginalizing

assumptions in his work. The novel instead figures the universe as a pluriverse of entanglement, where difference is the very basis for relation.

Cosmic Fear and Co-constitutive Worlds

Imaginariness of cosmic entanglement, as in *TCWB*, frequently encode assumptions about humanity, difference, and the nonhuman. In the works of Lovecraft, often credited as the father of cosmic horror and repeatedly and justifiably criticized, these assumptions take a particularly exclusionary form. *The Call of Cthulhu* and “The Shadow over Innsmouth,” which serve here as representative for his large oeuvre, are especially insightful for reading *TCWB*. In his texts, Lovecraft often excludes marginalized groups from the category of the human and conceptualizes nonhuman nature as an evil, all-consuming and unstoppable force. In *The Call of Cthulhu*, for instance, he introduces the idea that humanity is entangled in an ancient fight against monsters which lie dormant in the ancient city of R’lyeh. The monsters’ immense size and power render humanity utterly insignificant and unaware of the ancient battle. Humanity can only glimpse this knowledge through collective nightmares “of great Cyclopean cities of Titan blocks and sky-flung monoliths, all dripping with green ooze and sinister with latent horror” (*Call* 9). The story depicts the ancient monsters exerting a corrupting influence on humanity, with the weakest of character and least ‘civilized’ of humans being the first to fall prey to the monsters’ control. For instance, a “voodoo orgy” in the swamps of New Orleans is described as “an indescribable horde of human abnormality” consisting of “hybrid spawn [...] braying, bellowing, and writhing about a monstrous ring-shaped bonfire” (*Call* 20). Similarly, “The Shadow over Innsmouth” centers on monstrous sea creatures that interbreed with humans, producing ‘unnatural’ hybrids. Again, these hybrids and the titular town’s insular community carry strong racialized undertones: They are described as having “queer narrow heads with flat noses and bulgy, starry eyes that never seem to shut” with “the sides of the necks [...] all shriveled or creased up” (“Shadow” 4). Lovecraft’s tendency to equate the source of horror with

the racialized or nonhuman other is particularly vivid in “The Shadow over Innsmouth”. Genetic mixing is equated with degeneration, reflecting Lovecraft’s anxieties about racial purity and otherness.

Lovecraft’s fiction frequently imagines connections with the unknown as dangerous, the tentacles corrupting and contaminating humanity often implying a loss of purity and selfhood. As such, Lovecraft’s contamination draws on a broader ideology of purity in which difference is interpreted as a threat: the impure Other is imagined as a deviation from the norm, as contaminated, disabled, queer or strange. Similar to how racism relies on the ideal of pure bloodlines and uncontaminated culture, religious purity constructs hierarchies between the innocent and the sinful, the clean and the tainted. Such systems are continually produced through dualist practices constructed through hyperseparation/purification, objectification, and translation, as Plumwood (41-5) and Latour (10-1) show. This aspect of Lovecraft’s work has been heavily criticized, for instance by Edward Guimont who argues that Lovecraft’s fiction reproduces structures and narratives drawn from colonial ideology (167). Guimont highlights the influences of settler colonialism on Lovecraft’s oeuvre, particularly underscoring his mirroring of “the core [colonial] justifications used by Europeans in Africa” (167). Guimont suggests that even when Imperialism is not explicitly depicted, Lovecraft’s writing is partially shaped by the “lost [white] race trope” that attributes ancient ruins outside of Europe to previous “explorers or settlers” rather than indigenous peoples (169). Lee Herrmann similarly criticizes Lovecraft’s fiction as fundamentally structured by colonialism and racism (303). Herrmann further argues that dysgenia, the “degradation” of genetic material through racial “mixing,” drives the horror and “possibly global doom” in Lovecraft’s works (305). Thus, purity in Lovecraft’s horror equates difference with contamination and reproduces colonial and racist hierarchies.

By contrast, Haraway’s, Escobar’s and Lorde’s work on community and difference illuminate how the individual does not disappear in the group but emerges within a web of

interdependent relations. Alongside Haraway's Chthulucene, the most pertinent amongst her theories for this chapter is the concept of "tentacular thinking with string figures." Simultaneously working with and distancing herself from Lovecraftian ideas, Haraway is deeply critical of the tension between community and individual needs. She suggests that there is no binary of community and individuality, instead proposing a world made up of companions of all kind who are "always partnered all the way down, with no starting and subsequently interacting 'units,'" whose "contact zones are ubiquitous and continuously spin out loopy tendrils" and which are "wound with abyssal and dreadful graspings, frayings, and weavings, passing relays again and again, in the generative recursions that make up living and dying" (*Staying* 33). In that, Haraway illustrates how both the self and the community are co-constitutive and offer relationality without erasure of the individual self. Haraway leans on M. Beth Dempster's terms "sympoiesis" as "collectively-producing systems that do not have self-defined spatial or temporal boundaries" with "the potential for surprising change," and "autopoiesis" as "self-producing" systems with "with self defined spatial or temporal boundaries" (Dempster 27-32 cited in Haraway *Staying* 33). This relational model can be read as a model for DNV, where the interdependence of multiple perspectives through their overlapping and contradictory accounts produces a text.

Haraway's tentacular thinking further resonates with Escobar's concept of the pluriverse, which imagines "a world where many worlds fit" as a reality comprised of multiple coexisting and interdependent but distinct ontologies (26). Escobar explains how Western modes of science and knowledge render the world in two categories, objects and subjects, and that systems such as patriarchy, capitalism, and imperialism are based "on this dualist ontology" (3). He continues by elaborating how these "objectivizing" mechanisms make questioning of changing this belief difficult "because we grow up and live with them; we bring them to life with our actions" (3). Escobar argues that the subject, in its "objectivizing stance," is not independent from the world it gazes upon but, in fact, other realities do exist, and their

ontologies are possible and real (3-4). Adjusting one's imagination from subject who gazes upon the world to object among many others adds a new dimension to Haraway's tentacular thinking. Haraway underscores that all beings are co-constituted through their relationships with each other and the world. They engage in a continuous process of *becoming-with* and *making-with*, are simultaneously made by and make the world (*Staying* 3-5). Thinking of the world as this sympoietic Chthulucene destabilizes hegemony and all binaries of power. For Haraway, tentacular thinking is a way of imagining interconnection, not isolation and focus on the self (*Staying* 35). Haraway's Chthulucene and Escobar's radical relationality mirror each other in that they demonstrate that all entities are entangled in co-constitutive networks and that no being or world exists independently.

At the heart of this idea lies what Lorde describes as "the creative function of difference" (104): Lorde presents difference as the power that resolves the threatening contradiction between the self and the group. Moreover, difference is the creative force that enables futuristic thinking and being in collaboration with each other (Lorde 104). She frames difference as not a liability or as "human deviance" but as a generative force: "Difference must be not merely tolerated, but seen as a fund of necessary polarities between which our creativity can spark like a dialectic" (Lorde 104). She frames interdependence as "the way to a freedom which allows the *I* to *be*, not in order to be used, but in order to be creative" (Lorde 104). Thus, rather than threatening the individual, difference is what makes collaboration possible and is a precondition for meaningful change and collective empowerment: "Within the interdependence of mutual (non-dominant) differences lies that security which enables us to descend into the chaos of knowledge and return with true visions of our future, along with the concomitant power to effect those changes which can bring that future into being" (Lorde 104). This resonates with Haraway's tentacular thinking, where beings are co-constituted through relational networks; likewise, Escobar's concept of radical relationality shows that all life is deeply interconnected. Lorde adds a distinctly ethical and political dimension: While Haraway and Escobar center

relationality and interconnection, Lorde highlights the necessity of honoring and engaging with differences as the foundation for both security and visionary action. Together, Haraway, Escobar and Lorde conceptualize tentacular networks as lifelines that sustain both difference and interdependence without erasure of the self.

Haraway draws on Lovecraft's writings while remaining attentive to its critiques. Both Lovecraft and Haraway identify tentacular forces and monsters as destabilizing to the idea of human superiority. Yet, they disagree on whether this is cause for dread or hope. The authors' positionalities shape their interpretations: Lovecraft's writing, from the eye of a white, early twentieth-century American writer, emphasizes the insignificance and vulnerability of humanity against vast, incomprehensible forces with the goal of eliciting fear and a feeling of powerlessness. By contrast, Haraway, writing from a feminist, posthumanist perspective, advocates for the category of the human to be disintegrated in order to reject the hierarchy between culture and nature, human and nonhuman. She emphasizes sympoiesis, arguing for entangled, co-constitutive relationships between humans and nonhumans. In that, reading Haraway, Escobar and Lorde in synthesis presents nature and the cosmos as not threatening by default, but as participants in the pluriverse, while Lovecraft's vision of a dangerous and indifferent natural force is in fact what produces cosmic horror. Implied in Lovecraftian cosmic horror is the fact that the concepts of knowledge and truth have become meaningless. From a Latin American decolonial perspective, Escobar shows how indigenous ontologies blur the human/nonhuman divide. Lorde, from her position as a Black feminist and activist, foregrounds difference as a creative and transformative force that grounds interdependence. This multi-positional framework reflects the democratic narrative voice of the novel, where multiple perspectives and situated knowledges converge, emphasizing collaboration, the remembrance of indigenous wisdoms, and the co-creation of solutions to contemporary crises.

Cultural Lifelines Against the Enemy

Set in contemporary New York City, *TCWB* imagines the city as a living entity whose boroughs manifest as human avatars. New York undergoes its metaphysical “birth,” a simultaneously formidable and vulnerable process. When this process is endangered by an otherworldly Enemy, a human avatar emerges for each borough: Manhattan, Brooklyn, Queens, the Bronx, and Staten Island each embody the history and culture of their part of the city. These five avatars must work together to find the primary avatar, the “heart” (*TCWB* 67) of the city. Their opponent, the interdimensional Enemy, attempts to colonize and eradicate cities as they come into being. It infiltrates the city through manifestations of Lovecraftian horror: tentacled presences, spreading contamination and uncanny agents, who seek to undermine the city from within. The Enemy attacks by spreading fear, isolation, and homogenization, preventing the avatars from forming the connections that allow the city to survive. Jemisin borrows the loaded imagery of Lovecraft’s cosmic horror and subverts it in a Harawayan relational pluriverse: *TCWB* stages a conflict between an Enemy who presents domination as inevitable, and avatars who rely on culturally embedded connection to place. Its distinctly democratic narrative voice is distributed across multiple perspectives and refuses to compromise between the individual self and coexistence.

Jemisin employs Lovecraftian imagery to describe the Enemy, whose goal it is to stop New York City from being born and becoming a powerful entity in the multiverse. It is portrayed as alien, as monstrosly bulging and vibrating, dislocating bodies: In the prologue, for example, the narrator “see[s] something roll onto the sidewalk on at least eight legs, using three or four arms to push itself off a building” (*TCWB* 14). Its appearances shift constantly, so at times the Enemy is portrayed as the “Woman in White” (*TCWB* 67), inhabiting a New Yorker’s body and appearing as a white, ‘racially sanitized’ version of their self that amplifies their discriminatory views. The Enemy’s monstrous incarnations are described as a “skyscraper-long tentacle”, as “feathery” and resembling “an anemone’s fronds” (*TCWB* 18, 38). One

manifestation resembles a Starbucks “covered in white tendrils and stiffer projections” that is compared to an animal, its “overlapping, moving layers of white tendrils have given it a kind of brindle-furred appearance, blurring the building’s overall boxy shape” (*TCWB* 381). Another of the Enemy’s incarnations is “a gnarled treelike thing with yawning distorted faces in lieu of boles, which has webbed up the little park between two financial services’ corporate headquarters” (*TCWB* 417). These tendrils are all part of the Enemy: “There are dozens of her, they see at last; many bodies, infinite shapes, one entity, all of her working together and wholly dedicated to the war she was built to fight” (*TCWB* 428). The Enemy’s true form is incomprehensible in its vastness; its mere existence alters reality and destabilizes perception. The Enemy is unfathomable not just in space and time, but also in language: it is variously named the “Enemy,” the “Woman in White,” and “R’lyeh” after Lovecraft’s ancient city in *The Call of Cthulhu*. The grotesque Enemy mirrors Lovecraft’s version of horror further, as they describe monsters as bodily and as impure. Yet, where Lovecraft’s horror stems from this deviance, Jemisin reworks this aesthetic so that the horror no longer marks the deviant Other but signals the violence in the purity itself: The Enemy, this Woman in White, as James Peacock interprets her, “symbolizes homogenization, the whitewashing of difference, and a discourse of inscrutable purity and normativity, [...] the gentrification of mind and landscape hypostasized in eldritch, explicitly racialized form, a monstrous product of the Trumpian nexus of real estate and political power” (190). As such, the Enemy inhabits a form of purity and whiteness that operates as a normative, homogenizing aesthetic.

Similar to her critique of purity, Jemisin repurposes Lovecraft’s horror of insignificance, incomprehensibility, and inevitability to critique anthropocentrism. In direct conversation with Lovecraft’s writing, Jemisin evokes images of oceanic dwelling and a dreamlike, forgotten memory: The primary avatar feels how the Enemy readies itself to continue their battle in another realm: “*Dreaming*, dead dreaming, of a dark place beneath heavy cold waves where something stirs with a slithery sound and uncoils and turns toward the mouth of the Hudson,

where it empties into the sea. Toward *me*. And I am too weak, too helpless, too immobilized by fear, to do anything but twitch beneath its predatory gaze” (*TCWB* 10). This scene is a powerful example of cosmic horror: the existence of such a reality-altering force destabilizes knowledge and power structures on earth. The omnipotent Enemy makes humanity seem utterly powerless and cosmically insignificant by comparison. Its animalistic and monstrous nature also precludes any reasoning or bargaining with it; once the monster’s instinct to feast takes over, humanity is doomed. And, in true Lovecraftian fashion, humanity is doomed to fail again and again, as this “ancient fight” is more ritual than battle, further destabilizing the idea of human superiority (*TCWB* 10). Jemisin depicts her monster, as Lovecraft did, as pure and invasive, as terrifyingly destabilizing to reality, as a force that cannot be reasoned with. However, she further appropriates these ideas. By presenting the Enemy as a relentless, shapeshifting presence, she exposes the limits of anthropocentric thinking. Jemisin’s Enemy emphasizes how human-centered systems are powerless in the face of forces that do not acknowledge them. The Enemy erases all difference and peoples’ consciousness, takes over their bodies and fully compromises their agency and autonomy. The Enemy challenges not only individual survival but the collective human-centered assumptions of logic and order. In doing so, Jemisin depicts the downfall of humanity through its own hubris. She retains Lovecraft’s cosmic horror and transforms it into a critique of anthropocentrism.

The Enemy establishes itself in the avatars’ universe through naturalization in both biological and sociological terms, meaning the Enemy treats its presence as natural, inevitable, and unquestionable. In this, the Enemy mirrors the continuous reproduction of racist and colonial views. The Enemy, just like any invasive species, initially finds a foothold in the new environment because there are no existing natural predators or competitors. Additionally, New York City’s social and economic environment has been destabilized: The Bronx’s avatar understands that the Enemy has laid “[l]ittle corporate traps in every city, in case it comes to life. Infusions of cash here and there to weaken cities before they’re born” (*TCWB* 361). The

Enemy has purposefully implemented gentrification, recession, infrastructural and administrative issues to weaken the city's social ecosystem: "this thing has been planning preemptive strikes everywhere" (*TCWB* 361). As these conditions are naturalized as unavoidable, the avatars emerge as counterforces, as natural competitors. Interestingly, only the city's avatars can perceive the Enemy and its tentacles, while other New Yorkers only register a faint irregular presence. While riding in a cab on FDR Drive, Manhattan's avatar encounters a traffic jam caused by the Enemy's tendrils. Although the other drivers cannot detect the Enemy's tendrils, they nonetheless appear to experience its effects: "Although most people can't see the flare of tendrils, they're still somehow reacting to its presence" and intuitively move around them (*TCWB* 41). Not visible or directly perceivable, the Enemy exerts a subtle but pervasive influence that shapes New Yorkers' behavior. This scene gestures towards how systems of oppression, including structural racism and climate denial, operate through diffuse, often imperceptible regulation. Stuart Hall writes about this when discussing Gramsci's understanding of "common sense," which he explains as "the practical, everyday consciousness or popular thought of the masses" which "is the already-formed and "taken-for-granted" terrain on which more coherent ideologies and philosophies must contend for mastery" (317). Thus, ideology appears natural and self-evident, invisible to those inhabiting it. As systems of oppression are internalized, one can act within them without conscious awareness. For instance, only some New Yorkers being able to directly see the Enemy mirrors how structural racism often remains unseen by those not directly attuned to its effects, even as it continues to structure behavior and systems. Although only the avatars can fully perceive the Enemy, its disruptive presence is collectively registered and acted upon. In Lovecraftian fashion, the Enemy is too vast and complex to be comprehended fully, and ordinary humans are only partially aware of the larger forces at work. The Enemy's ideological power, thus, lies less in overt domination and brute force. Instead, its capacity to naturalize itself, to become so deeply embedded within social, economic, and material structures that they appear natural. At the same time, Jemisin's

avatars show that systemic ideology is never uncontested, but that it needs to be recognized to become visible and disrupted.

Jemisin portrays the Enemy with Lovecraftian imagery to highlight that what appears natural is neither neutral nor safe. The Enemy's insidious occupation is represented as inevitable, pure, and normal. In this vein, it closely mirrors the way colonialism, gentrification and climate change operate as slow and difficult to perceive processes: they fundamentally restructure environments and communities, and, as such, even the notions of truth and reality. Colonialism portrays the domination of one people over another as natural and logical by constructing the colonized as inferior and less civilized, therefore less able to govern themselves and in need of "help". Naturalization provides the moral justification for a choice that is actually driven by political and economic profit. Capitalism presents competition and the myth that hard work leads to success as natural, while obscuring that economic hierarchies depend on law, politics, and social structures. It frames systemic inequality as individual failure and normalizes exploitation as incentive to work harder in the hopes of eventually becoming the exploiter. Climate change denial functions in a similar manner: it treats extreme weather events as normal while ignoring the social and political dimensions of climate disasters. Accountability and the possibility for change are dismissed. In each case, naturalization stabilizes hierarchies: colonialism reinforces racial and cultural dominance, capitalism reproduces economic inequality, and climate denial sustains human detachment from ecological responsibility. Each hierarchy obscures the power relations and choices behind them, making intervention or resistance appear futile. Moreover, naturalization profoundly shapes notions of truth and reality. Truth becomes framed as something that is given, not as something that can be shaped and debated. Reality, in turn, is framed as fixed and self-evident. This makes ecological, social and economic crises appear natural and obscures the possibility for alternative approaches.

Against the Enemy, the avatars' power lies in their embodied, culturally and locally grounded connection to the city which is articulated in memory, intuition and street smarts.

Culture, here, operates as the medium through which social relations are lived and made meaningful. Thus, culture is the lifeline that links New York to its inhabitants. This idea is in line with geographer Doreen Massey's conceptualization of place. She understands places as relational, "as articulated moments in networks of social relations and understandings" which extend far beyond the local (154). Correspondingly, the avatars are introduced through recognizable, at times stereotypical, associations with their boroughs: Manhattan's avatar, for instance, describes Brooklyn as "look[ing] like either a CEO on her way to an incredibly stylish meeting, or a queen who just happens to be missing her court," while the latter clocks the former as "smart, charming, well dressed, and cold enough to strangle you in an alley" (*TCWB* 73, 79). Bronca, the Bronx's avatar, is a lesbian Lenape woman in her sixties who runs the Bronx Art Center; Padmini, Queen's avatar, is a 25-year-old Tamil immigrant graduate student; and Aislyn, the personification of Staten Island, is a 30-year-old Irish American woman who lives with her parents. These characterizations draw on familiar cultural tropes associated with each borough, but rather than simply reproducing them, Jemisin uses them as starting points: they establish immediate recognizability while grounding each avatar in specific cultural practices, histories, and communities. The apparent stereotypical framing becomes the basis for a more complex relation to the city. Recalling Massey's understanding of place as an ongoing product of social and cultural relations (154), the avatars' identities emerge over the course of the novel as dynamic expressions of exactly those cultural networks that bind people to place.

These social and cultural relations are the avatars' main source of power. Central for them is their cultural memory and local-historical knowledge, which connects them to their boroughs' histories and provides the means to resist the Enemy's influence. Bronca is the group's elder and, thus, holder of the city's memory and history. After her first encounter with the Enemy, "a hundred thousand years or so of knowledge falls into her mind" as "the city has decided that she is the one best prepared to bear the burden of knowledge" (*TCWB* 126-7). Bronca receives this indescribable amount of information as inherited and continuous

knowledge rather than detached events observed from the outside. She does not learn history; she is *living history* and carries this knowledge as something that is far from over and resistant to the Enemy's attempt to flatten and erase the city. The past is not behind her but "falls into her mind," is bestowed upon her by the city. The city appears as an archive which situates knowledge within place. Bronca's knowledge also gives her authority over history, which adds to her strong connection to her borough and her identity as a Lenape woman. Her being indigenous situates her knowledge within Indigenous epistemologies. Rather than simply accumulating factual data, Bronca embodies a relational form of memory which is tied to her community and the land, and, thus, not easy to overwrite. Bronca's memory persists through lived experience, relational ties to her ancestry and identity, and personal accountability. Bronca's historical and cultural memory is not a passive inheritance but an active and sustaining force that anchors the avatars, and Bronca especially, in the city.

In contrast, the Enemy relies on a form of knowledge that denies the situated, relational nature of knowledge and instead imposes an abstract, universalizing perspective. Aislyn's internalization of her father's racist prejudices and her embodiment of Staten Island's insularity express this logic: by adopting an ideology that presents itself as natural and unmarked while excluding other perspectives, Aislyn becomes an instrument of the Enemy. Aislyn's perspective is imbued with stereotyping and generalizations. When the Woman in White appears, she thinks of her as a "crazyperson" but harmless because a "well dressed and clean" white woman can never be unsafe (*TCWB* 101). She reads the Woman as "clearly Not From Around Here," a "legal, of course" immigrant from Canada (*TCWB* 101). Her phrasing shows how this thinking is common sense for her. She then briefly thinks of the Woman as a terrorist: "*Terrorist!* her mind cries...and rejects. Terrorists are bearded Arab men who mutter in guttural languages and want to rape virgins" (*TCWB* 103). Aislyn returns to her initial assessment of the Woman in White as safe but foreign. She associates being white with being harmless, revealing how whiteness and respectability function as unmarked norms of safety. Her quick addition of "legal,

of course” (*TCWB* 101) shows that foreignness is only acceptable when it aligns with her norms. Because the Woman in White does not fit Aislyn’s idea of somebody dangerous, a “bearded Arab” (*TCWB* 103), she decides to not recognize her as dangerous. In doing so, she adopts an ideology that presents itself as natural and self-evident while systematically excluding other perspectives. Not only does she parrot her father’s discriminatory and racist views, but she also discriminates against herself, having deeply internalized his sexism and making herself smaller in language: Aislyn describes herself as a “thirty-year-old white girl” (*TCWB* 94), simultaneously framing herself as white, thus, safe and respectable, and as a child, infantilizing herself to the point of avoiding any accountability. Aislyn’s self-description further demonstrates how she has absorbed an ideology that normalized hierarchy while obscuring its own constructedness. What Aislyn frames as common sense is uncovered by Hall’s explanation of ideology as “deeply a product of history” (317), as something ideological that has become normalized to the point of unrecognition. Aislyn’s trajectory over the course of the book demonstrates that not all avatars express collective resistance. In Aislyn, Jemisin shows how ideology becomes naturalized through perception and self-description, producing subjects who replicate the Enemy’s logic. The Enemy relies on a form of neutrality that is false insofar as it denies the situated, relational nature of knowledge and instead imposes an abstract, universalizing perspective.

Besides Bronca, the other avatars possess valuable knowledge that is less academic and resembles street smarts, a kind of urban and local intuition that is deeply connected to their boroughs’ culture. Manny, for example, intuits that the best way to fight the enemy is using the anger of other New Yorkers who are stuck in traffic (*TCWB* 33-5). Manny’s “gut” intuition reflects place-based knowledge. Although he has only just arrived in the city, his power as an avatar lets him intuitively realize the shared cultural patterns in New York. Importantly, this power also comes from the New Yorkers’ anger, the collective emotional response of people in the city to an intruder. At Inwood Hill Park, Manny intuitively knows that to fight the Enemy

he needs the power of money, as he stands at the Shorakkopoch spot where Manhattan was stolen by settlers. There, he understands that “[l]and has value” and that “[i]t’s just a concept, land ownership; we don’t have to live like this. But this city, in its current form, is built on that concept” (*TCWB* 70). Drawing on this local history, Manny channels this power to fight the Woman in White. He recognizes that economic value and land ownership are concepts that have been constructed within specific historical and cultural frameworks. Because he recognizes that these ideas are not inherent to land or natural and universal law, Manny can reimagine the relationship between people and the land they live on beyond these power relations. His understanding that control over land is culturally produced and can, therefore, be contested, is how he can fight the Enemy. Both Manny and Bronca, and in less obvious ways the other avatars too, build their power on their knowledge of cultural and local patterns. In doing so, they actively fight the Enemy’s naturalization because they demonstrate that the Enemy’s power lies in ideologies that are not universal but the products of historical processes and unjust at their core. In this way, the avatars’ deep connection to the land and people of New York functions as the lifeline, the weapon against the Enemy.

At first glance, the avatar’s connection to their boroughs may appear reductive, as it seems to condense the complexity of the diverse populations in each of the boroughs into singular figures, into literal stereotypes, shaped by generalized associations with the city. Peacock sees this aspect of belonging to New York City in the novel particularly critically. Referring to concepts of authenticity and the conscious choice of being part of New York, Peacock claims that the avatars “employ the same language of hierarchy and foreignness they decry in the enemy” (192). The distinction between the gentrifying “tourist, exploiting and gawking and giving nothing but money back” and Manny, who “isn’t an interloper” (*TCWB* 47), is, Peacock states, only a performative, affective act based in consumerism and, ultimately, functions to uphold the city’s capitalist and gentrifying structures (192-3). While Peacock’s critique highlights tensions around authentic belonging and gentrification, it ultimately

overlooks the ways in which the avatars' connections to their boroughs operate. The avatars' connection to their boroughs is inclusive and based on recognizable expressions of borough identity rather than biological or generational belonging. Neither Padmini (Queens) nor Manny are native to the city; in fact, Manny becomes Manhattan's avatar only moments after having arrived in the city. When Bronca, the Bronx's avatar, surmises the others' personalities, she presents the boroughs as "her kin" (*TCWB* 311), a kind of kinship that is not grounded in a traditional Western understanding of family, but in a spatial and affective bond. The boroughs appear "joined and overlapping in a way that somehow does not create paradox or cause pain" (*TCWB* 311), which indicates that the avatars' coexist in their distinct identities. Each borough is characterized through recognizable traits: Manhattan as "[b]right," "tall and shining," Queens as "[j]ittery, jagged," and Brooklyn as "old, family-solid" (*TCWB* 311-2). These descriptions seem deliberately open for interpretation. They function as condensed versions of identities that leave room for self-expression. Furthermore, the boroughs are described as open to newcomers: Queens, for instance, is "pan-amorous in her welcome to all" (*TCWB* 312), emphasizing her radical openness and inclusivity, and presenting the borough as a space that actively receives anybody regardless of origin. The boroughs' expressions of identity are, moreover, based on spatial and material imagery of the city itself: Manhattan's "daggerlike skyscrapers," Queens' "determination to put down roots," Brooklyn as "a deep-rooted thing of brown stone and marble halls and crumbling tenements" all situate identity in built environment, history, and lived community (*TCWB* 312). Thus, the boroughs are described as deliberately open stereotypes that leave room for self-expression.

By actively deciding to engage with the histories, cultures and communities of their boroughs, the avatars transform their emotional belonging into resistance against the Enemy's exclusionary force. Their commitment is not passive but requires deliberate action and accountability. While what Peacock criticizes as a performance of authenticity might not mark them as "true" New Yorkers, their practice of solidarity and building a web of connection to the

land does (Haraway, “Knowledges” 584). The avatars’ relational belonging depends on the city’s inhabitants and infrastructure as active collaborators: At the beginning of the novel, the primary avatar “hip-check[s the Enemy] with the BQE, backhand[s] it with Inwood Hill Park, drop[s] the South Bronx on it like an elbow,” he “curb stomp[s] it with the full might of Queens,” and “shower[s] the Enemy with a one-two punch of Long Island radiation and Gowanus toxic waste” (*TCWB* 18-9). Here, the city’s constructed environment becomes a weapon and an active agent against the Enemy. The roads and parks and sections of the city are not passive settings for the fight but become bases of collective, lived experience: “To drive this lesson home, [he] cut[s] the bitch with LIRR traffic, long vicious honking lines” (*TCWB* 19). The protagonist draws on shared, everyday situations in New York City—traffic jams, construction, public transport, pollution—, which suggests that lived engagement with the city is what makes it powerful. Even negative and harmful aspects of living in the city work as tools of resisting the Enemy: “The Enemy tries some kind of fucked-up wiggly shit-it's all tentacles-and I snarl and bite into it 'cause New Yorkers eat damn near as much sushi as Tokyo, mercury and all” (*TCWB* 18). Even toxicity and risk are absorbed into the city’s defense, framing diversity and cultural exchange as strength. Ultimately, the fight is not carried out by an individual alone but through the city’s infrastructure and shared experience: The primary avatar faces the Enemy with glee and enthusiasm: “The beast of the deeps shrieks and I laugh, giddy with postpartum endorphins. *Bring it*” (*TCWB* 18). The Enemy’s tentacles, still unknowable, enormous, and without center, have no chance against the city because it fights back with all its might. These connections to the city’s material, cultural and affective landscape function as Harawayan tentacles. They are relational extensions that bind together human and nonhuman elements and, thereby, build a network of interdependence. These examples reframe Lovecraft’s cosmic horror as something that can be confronted through a collective vitality. The avatar’s emotional connection to the city, the situated memories and feelings associated with specific places are powerful to oppose the reality-bending monster.

The Enemy's diffuse, barely perceptible presence reflects the ways in which the climate crisis operates: it is normalized, rendered inescapable, and thus difficult to confront directly. Common Lovecraftian tropes—the cosmic insignificance of mankind and the looming demise of humanity, the brittle nature of the self and one's memories as well as the fear of the unknowable Other—have in recent years frequently been read to mirror such crises. Daniel Doncel, for instance, argues that the Cthulhu mythos can be read as paralleling the crisis of capitalist society, the failure of reason and knowledge when confronted with overwhelming, paradigm-shattering forces (132). Ian Feters reads Lovecraft's "The Colour Out of Space" as an allegory for the dangers of radioactivity and nuclear waste, showing how contamination penetrates bodies and environments beyond human control (119). Discussing the climate crisis, Morton directly connects Cthulhu to the hyperobject nature of climate change: "By understanding hyperobjects, human thinking has summoned Cthulhu-like entities into social, psychic, and philosophical space. The contemporary philosophical obsession with the monstrous provides a refreshing exit from human-scale thoughts" (*Hyperobjects* 64). The Lovecraftian monsters' looming threat is depicted as a disaster, something that humanity must work together to fight against, but that has also taken over the inner workings and thoughts of mankind. Humanity has been thrown from its throne of superiority over animals and nature, has been stripped of the naïve idea that they are the only conscious and enlightened being in the universe. The false belief of anthropocentric dominance over nature is uncovered as wrong, an irreversible shift that has permanently altered both reality and human criteria for truth. It deeply transforms the idea of the self and the individual, as not even one's thoughts are safe from the ancient monsters' influence and/or the present climate crisis.

Jemisin's novel rejects this Lovecraftian logic by proposing that relational entanglement is the solution for New York's survival. The avatars' powers emerge from chosen, situated, and relational belonging, from forms of attachment that are not exclusionary or innate but cultivated through cultural memory, local knowledge, and everyday practice. Their interdependence as

boroughs does not erase their differences, as the Enemy's homogenizing force would. Instead, the novel imagines survival as contingent on tentacular entanglement in Haraway's sense—as networks that link human and nonhuman actors, infrastructures, histories, and emotions without collapsing them into one. Confronting the Enemy, and by extension the climate crisis, requires more than individual awareness or isolated resistance. It demands sustained engagement with one's environment, an openness to learning from inherited knowledge and listening to elders, while remaining receptive to newcomers.

Hybrid Identity and Personal Sacrifice

One major theme in *TCWB* is the negotiation of identity within a group. Jemisin's version of collectivism allows for individuality to persist and flourish within the whole. In contrast to the Lovecraftian Enemy's obliterating horror, which understands all difference as "deviance" (Lorde 108) to be erased, the avatars enact the Chthulucene's string figures: practices of tentacular entanglement which sustains difference within relation. Still, Jemisin's model of community, though depicted as largely positive, is not without cost. The avatars relinquish parts of their identities, their ties to families, and personal freedoms. They also choose to partially relinquish their autonomy to sustain the collective. Yet, in contrast to Lovecraft, who paints the loss of subjectivity as complete annihilation, Jemisin reframes the avatars' sacrifice as a generative act that enables survival.

The character of Manhattan is ripe for analysis here, as he realizes he has forgotten his identity once he arrives at Penn Station; only his personal belongings and "Generic all-American boy (nonwhite version)" (*TCWB* 31) exterior hint at his past. Over the course of the novel a criminal background is revealed, yet Manny never tries to look for more information. He actively blocks out his past because he is chosen for something greater: Talking about his new name, Manny thinks, "[b]ut even in modified form, this word—this *identity*—feels more true than anything else he's ever claimed in his life. It is what he has been, without realizing. It

is who he is. It is everything he's ever needed to be" (*TCWB* 30). This realization strikes Manny as soon as he arrives in New York City and affects his self-identity not only in the present and future but also the past. Manny sees these lost parts of himself as "unnecessary" (*TCWB* 49), as the city and his role as Manhattan's avatar now redefine his identity. He abandons his previous identity for a cause that feels worthy and necessary. The vision of identity Manny ultimately claims is that of the city itself as a source of energy and affirmation: He feels "wheels clacking steadily over track segments that thrum in time with his pulse" and how "*the city* is keeping him functioning, feeding him strength," finally realizing that "somehow, everything on this road and under it and around it *is* him" (*TCWB* 42-3). Manny's body synchronizes with the city, the boundaries between Manny's identity and the city's sense of place dissolve as he fully identifies with New York's infrastructure and its material surroundings. The city becomes a source of strength for him: The pent-up anger of the "drivers in the nearby cars" drive him forward, and "total strangers are his allies" (*TCWB* 43). New York City shares its power with him; it becomes an active and sustaining force against the Enemy. Manny's identity contrasts with Lovecraft's hybridity, as depicted in "The Shadow Over Innsmouth" as a contamination: as being subsumed within a group in Lovecraft implies the loss of self. Manny, however, through his connection with the city, feels that his previous life and identity, and even former links to family or friends are unimportant. His power stems from relinquishing his past and focusing on the present allyship with the city.

When read through Haraway's hybridity and Escobar's pluriverse, Manny's loss of identity becomes a form of humanity that is not biologically determined nor defined by status, but co-created in relationships. He draws a connective thread between his pulse with the noise of the subway, "the idling of the traffic-stuck cars" and his pent-up energy, the blockage on the street and the Enemy (*TCWB* 42-3). In Haraway's terms, Manny enacts string figure thinking. Rather than thinking of Manny and the city as separate units, Haraway's theory inspires a system that is "always partnered all the way down," "wound with abyssal and dreadful

graspings, frayings, and weavings, passing relays again and again, in the generative recursions that make up living and dying” and whose “contact zones are ubiquitous and continuously spin out loopy tendrils” (*Staying* 33). This frames Manny’s connection to the city as limitless with fraying boundaries, as deeply emotional and powerful. His sense of self stems from his entanglement with other New Yorkers, with the mechanical structures, the traffic arteries, the ebbs and flows of the city. Unencumbered by status, money, power, and his previous life, he lives in symbiosis with the city, and the city gives him energy in return. Again, the avatars’ power lies in their hybridity; Manny’s power in particular lies in relinquishing his past to devote himself fully to the fight against R’lyeh.

The Enemy, in contrast to the avatar’s entangled connections, embodies the Lovecraftian trope of consumption and homogenization: its forces, such as white spiders in Brooklyn’s backyard, “feel of the same prickling, jangling *antithesis of presence* that everything else associated with the Enemy seems to radiate. As if they erase some tiny part of New York with every iota of its space they occupy” (*TCWB* 219). Aislyn, in a rare moment of clarity, compares the Woman in White to “a fungus that grew inside ants as a kind of webwork throughout their bodies, eating them as it grew, and controlling their behavior” (*TCWB* 332). Both figure the Enemy as a parasite that consumes and destroys individuality. The Woman in White ensures not to present as somebody who might embody Otherness or any kind of identity, instead changing the New Yorkers’ appearances who she takes over to look whiter, “purer.” Aislyn, in her conservative thinking, finds the “well dressed and clean” Woman in White “comforting to look at” (*TCWB* 101, 91), revealing how the Enemy exploits her normative desires. Using Lorde’s words, the Enemy casts difference as “human deviance” from the “*mythical norm*” of the “white, thin, male, young, heterosexual, christian, and financially secure” (109) New Yorker. Instead of presenting as a powerful male persona, the Enemy most often presents as The Woman in White, feigning harmlessness and respectability. Aislyn in particular finds the Woman in White non-threatening as “everything in her life has programmed her to associate evil with

specific, easily definable things. Dark skin. Ugly people with scars or eye patches or wheelchairs. Men” (*TCWB* 333). The Woman in White can be read as a deliberate adaptation of what Lorde calls the “mythical norm” (109), in that she maintains the core structures of power, whiteness, class, respectability, while incorporating gender as a form of harmless difference for Aislyn. This suggests that the Enemy’s belonging to the mythical norm does not hinge upon identity alone, but is mostly about alignment with the norm’s ideology, about how this ideology can be used. Importantly, the Woman in White’s presentation and Aislyn’s reaction also reflect how white women are complicit in systems of racial, financial and sexual exclusion. The Enemy is the epitome of a Lovecraftian hybrid that absorbs all individuality and casts difference as monstrous abnormalities, thus playing into racist stereotypes and discriminatory anxieties.

The other avatars treat their worries about hybridity differently. Similar to Manny, they also give up parts of their individuality to become their respective borough’s avatar. Most of them struggle with full commitment to the city because they want to remain closely tied to their previous lives. Bronca, for instance, is deeply embedded in her neighborhood, dedicating a lot of time and effort to see its local art scene thrive. She resists her role as the Bronx’s avatar: “She doesn’t want this. She doesn’t *need* it. She has responsibilities. A grandchild to nurture and spoil! She’s been fighting all her life, goddamn it” (*TCWB* 127). In this moment, Bronca’s individuality takes precedence. Although she understands that joining the others in the fight against the Enemy is the only way she can save what she has worked so hard for, she resents further demands and even expresses bitterness toward the other boroughs: “The Bronx has always been on its own; let them learn what that felt like” (*TCWB* 127). This statement reveals that Bronca has felt abandoned and isolated, and that reparations or even punishment would be warranted. Brooklyn faces a similar conflict: She has a daughter and an elderly father who she is the primary caregiver for and explicitly states that she does not “want five other people in [her] head” (*TCWB* 200). When the avatars are called to fully commit themselves to the cause,

to be consumed by the primary avatar, Brooklyn reflects: “Not sure I love New York enough to die for it. Definitely don’t love it enough to sacrifice my family for it” (*TCWB* 201). Padmini, the avatar for Queens, similarly struggles, as her identity is intertwined with the friendships she has built in her apartment complex. Even the primary avatar has doubts and contemplates his sacrifice: “But I’m still hungry and tired all the time, scared all the time, never safe. What good does it do to be valuable, if nobody values you?” (*TCWB* 9). The attempts to distance themselves sharply undermine the avatars’ emphasis on interdependence and mutual support. These examples show that the avatars’ identity is not simply a matter of assuming a role and wielding the city’s energy but is complicated by their already existing—or lack of, in Aislyn’s case—kinship networks. At this point in the novel, the avatars are still trying to find the balance between selfhood and relational entanglement that Lorde argues for. Eventually, the avatars’ self-sacrifice becomes necessary, even at the expense of the characters’ former lives, priorities and relationships. Here, Jemisin’s depiction of the avatars’ collective consciousness exposes the limits of string figures, tentacular thinking, and co-constitutive relations. The avatars fear their identities to be flattened of any meaningful difference, their entanglement with the world could become too universal, and could, as a consequence, overlook more situated and specific articulations of difference. In Escobar’s terms, the avatars struggle against becoming objects within the pluriverse and even objects within their city. They begin the process of shifting their understanding of themselves as center subjects to part of a broader network of objects.

Ultimately, the avatars’ objectivist turn is their greatest power against the enemy. The novel presents this self-sacrifice as inherently positive, even when the characters’ prior lives and attachment to other humans are compromised. This conflict is never fully resolved, just put on hold: By the third act, the avatars are deeply mentally linked and use their collective power, wielded by Bronca as their guide, to locate their primary avatar. This passage illustrates their shared consciousness:

The thought comes: *I will do anything for him*, which is not Bronca's thought—Manhattan, whose conviction is part knight-errant discovering the quest to which he needs to devote his life, and part raw lust. Still, Bronca feels it with all the conviction of her own heart. *Ours*, is what she does think, which surprises her because she's never been the possessive type. Someone else in their gathering reacts to this, but there is pleasure in the reaction. *Yes*, flows the thought, echoed this time by all of them. It doesn't really matter anymore who it comes from. *Ours*.

He is

ours, and we are his, of course, but

wait, this isn't good, how are you in my head

Focus, Bronca pushes through their growing anxiety. Too many strong egos all tangled up together. (TCWB 314)

The avatars' connection is depicted as natural, instinctual, even honorable and deeply emotional. Echoing Lovecraft's version of collective dreams, the avatars' consciousnesses are intruded upon by the others' thoughts marked by italicized font. Interestingly, these intrusions always aid the protagonists, giving them cultural advice or guidance on how to defeat the Enemy. As the narrative unfolds, they are not "consumed" (TCWB 328) by the primary avatar but rather exist in a co-constructive, mutually sustaining relationship. Within this conflict, the novel reverses the Lovecraftian horror trope of losing the self for the greater good. Jemisin diverges by presenting the avatars' connection as a relation where individuality can endure, if only partially. TCWB demonstrates that, within this universe, it is indeed possible to become truly entwined with others and still retain a distinct sense of self. In this context, the novel also portrays the avatars' sacrifices as virtuous and heroic deeds, the avatars give up parts of their old lives for the group. At the same time, this emphasis on self-sacrifice complicates the novel's positive portrayal of entanglement and altruism. The primary avatar's joyful "feeling [of] something more intrinsic to my being reverberate in concert with five other souls" (TCWB 430), while not fully dishonest, seems incongruent with the avatars' former struggles. The tension between the group and the individual is, furthermore, remains unsolved as the fight with the Enemy takes precedence. The novel presents self-sacrifice as an inherently positive decision, even when the characters' prior lives and attachment to other humans are compromised and this conflict is never fully resolved. This embrace of self-sacrifice and shift towards an idealized

kind of connection subtly weakens its previously nuanced exploration of the tensions within kinship relations.

TCWB reworks Lovecraft's cosmic horror by translating its fear of the contaminating Other into contemporary systematic threats. Lovecraft's cosmic horror is based on the fear of the unknown and monstrous Other which contaminates a supposedly "pure" humanity, changing reality and leading to the complete destruction of the self within the collective. This logic echoes in *TCWB* through gentrification, settler colonial erasure, and climate change. In response, Jemisin's avatars form a pluralistic, relational community as a response to systemic threats. Jemisin's heroes understand that "[w]e're not supposed to do this alone" (*TCWB* 305) and enact humanity through chosen belonging and mutual defense. This relationality is reinforced formally through the novel's democratic narrative voice, which distributes perspective across multiple avatars and resists a singular authoritative viewpoint. Aislyn is the notable exception: she aligns with the Enemy's logic as the Woman in White exploits her normative and discriminatory ideologies. The avatar community is co-constitutive from the start and, thus destabilizes hierarchical systems. Reading *TCWB* through Haraway further clarifies how Jemisin's narrative network fights the Enemy with the deliberate commitment for "becoming-with" (*Staying* 55) each other. Escobar and Lorde enrich this perspective. The former highlights the importance of looking outward, adjusting one's lens to other ontologies and beliefs in a pluriverse that is "a shared project based on a multiplicity of worlds and ways of worlding life" (Escobar 26). The latter focuses on looking inward towards recognizing difference as the "creative function" against a "mythical norm" (Lorde 104, 109). Even though Jemisin's version of string figures is not without contradictions—particularly regarding the concepts of belonging to place and tropes of heroic sacrifice—the novel ultimately presents a pluriversal world in which community, chosen belonging and difference can coexist, and argues for collaborative solutions to global crises.

Conclusion

The climate crisis is, undeniably, transforming material environments and fundamentally reshaping how we conceive of the world. As such, climate change constitutes not only a scientific and political crisis but also a crisis of imagination: it demands forms of thinking that are capable of grasping complex, distributed, and often imperceptible violences, as well as a reconfiguration of living in community under such conditions. Cli-fi provides a crucial site for this imaginative work because it renders climate change narratively tangible and connects affectively with its readers. This capacity of cli-fi is grounded in its necessary decentering of the Human. In this context, the novels by Jemisin, Rich, and Robinson paint a spectrum of climate imaginaries, from exclusionary and fragmented worlds to more collective and relational modes of coexisting in crisis. In doing so, the novels delineate the stakes of life under climate crisis: between isolation, egoism, and inequality on the one hand, and accountability, interdependence, and the difficult work of living together on the other. These texts matter because they intervene in the conditions under which futures are imagined; thus, they shape whether climate change is conceived as a site of withdrawal and division or as a demand for collective transformation. At its core, this thesis has demonstrated how the concept of the DNV in the novels by Jemisin, Robinson, and Rich grants multiple entangled, even nonhuman, perspectives authority and agency against the socio-political ideologies that undermine climate justice. Thus, the DNV enables cli-fi to elucidate the tensions of living in entanglement and offer utopian solutions.

Across the three novels, a shared concern with negotiating human and nonhuman relations becomes apparent, even as they diverge in how they mobilize narrative voice, multiple perspectives, and readerly engagement. Rich's *Odds Against Tomorrow* reveals how misanthropy, capitalist logic, and ironic detachment from crisis can undermine cli-fi's activist potential despite moments of ecocentric narration and a partial decentering of the human. Robinson's *New York 2140*, by contrast, privileges collective life and kinship as utopia, yet does

so through a traditional multiple narrator mode, in which one “citizen” narrator at times limits the affective immediacy of the depicted crisis. Jemisin’s *The City We Became* demonstrates structural innovations, such as the revision of Lovecraftian tropes and intersections between narrative voices. These innovations can render climate change graspable as both intimate and monstrous, even as they maintain a strong focus on human instead of nonhuman experience. In my analysis, the DNV has functioned to bring into view the varied and sometimes contradictory ways in which cli-fi novels engage the climate crisis. What may be taken from this thesis, then, is not only a set of readings of individual texts, but an understanding of the cultural and political role of fiction in a crisis that is otherwise abstract, unevenly experienced, and difficult to narrate.

Several potentially fruitful lines of inquiry could only be addressed incidentally given the scope of this study. Further research might expand my small selection of primary texts to include more recent works of climate fiction, particularly those novels that experiment with explicitly collective or democratic narrative modes. At the same time, the present study remains heavily oriented in a Western, US-American context, and in New York City in particular. This focus, while analytically useful, limits engagement with perspectives where democracy, environmental crisis, and nonhuman agency might be thought differently. An expanded corpus could offer more insights into the depiction of uneven global distributions of climate vulnerability. Furthermore, while the texts analyzed here already gesture toward formal experimentation, they remain embedded within novelistic conventions. Other genres, particularly poetry, short fiction, and hybrid or mixed-media works, may be better equipped to register the instabilities and nonhuman perspectives in cli-fi and may open angles for future research that remain underexplored here.

What follows from this study is a tentative reorientation of current climate discourse: once the climate crisis becomes thinkable and feelable again, it may become actionable. In its development of the democratic narrative voice, this thesis has, at least in part, sought to clarify why sustained attention and collective responses to climate change continue to falter, why

warnings remain ignored, why attachments to human exceptionalism persist, and why adequate modes of representation remain insufficient. At the same time, my analysis of the three novels suggests a way from debilitating crisis and climate pessimism into active justice across human and nonhuman worlds. Narrative does not produce the future, but it helps determine the limits and possibilities of what can be imagined as one. It is crucial to reconfigure which stories can be envisioned collectively so that futures become imaginable again.

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Appendix

Abstract in English

The dilated and indistinct characteristics of climate change problematize how literature imagines and represents the climate crisis. This thesis examines how three climate fiction (cli-fi) novels—*Odds Against Tomorrow* by Nathaniel Rich, *New York 2140* by Kim Stanley Robinson, and *The City We Became* by N. K. Jemisin—negotiate this complexity through a plurality of narrative voices. To this end, the concept of the democratic narrative voice (DNV) is developed as an integration of narrative structure, narrative strategy, and posthuman ethics. Building on both narratological terms and ecocritical approaches, the DNV is grounded in the assumption that narration mediates authority, participation, and responsiveness of narrative perspectives. As such, the DNV both describes how narrative authority operates in the texts and evaluates the extent to which the texts move towards a more inclusive, relational, and ecologically attuned narration. I argue that narratives that employ a DNV can convey the climate crisis, support affective reader engagement, and challenge anthropocentric assumptions in contemporary fiction. Drawing on the DNV, each novel's distinct negotiation of human-nonhuman relations is analyzed: While Rich's *Odds Against Tomorrow* exhibits hopeful seedlings of a democratic ethos, they are ultimately undermined by the narrator's anthropocentrism and misanthropy. Furthermore, the close imagined narrative community between reader and narrator—and, thus, the potential for transformation outside the storyworld—is significantly compromised by a satirical betrayal from the narrator. By contrast, the narrative collective in Robinson's *New York 2140* demonstrates how kinship and collective struggle can facilitate the imagination of a joyful and even utopian future. In Jemisin's *The City We Became*, innovations of traditionally racist and anthropocentric tropes articulate a version of disasters that is narratively graspable and imaginable. As the DNV illuminates how cli-fi novels respond in varied and ambiguous ways to the climate crisis, it also clarifies the function of fiction in addressing this crisis narratively.

Abstract in German

Die weitreichenden und schwer fassbaren Eigenschaften des Klimawandels erschweren es der Literatur, die Klimakrise zu erfassen und darzustellen. Diese Arbeit untersucht, wie drei Romane der Klimafiktion (Cli-Fi)—*Odds Against Tomorrow* von Nathaniel Rich, *New York 2140* von Kim Stanley Robinson, und *The City We Became* von N. K. Jemisin—diese Komplexität durch ihre Vielzahl von Erzählperspektiven aufarbeiten. Zu diesem Zweck wird das Konzept der Democratic Narrative Voice (DNV) als Zusammenspiel von Erzählstruktur, Erzählperspektive und posthumaner Ethik entwickelt. Aufbauend auf narratologischen Begriffen und ökokritischen Ansätzen basiert die DNV auf der Annahme, dass die Position des Erzählers Autorität, Partizipation und Verantwortung innehat. Die DNV beschreibt sowohl, wie eine solche Autorität in den Texten wirkt, als auch, inwiefern sich die Texte in Richtung einer inklusiveren, relationaleren und ökologisch sensibleren Erzählung bewegen. Ich argumentiere, dass Romane, die eine DNV einsetzen, die Klimakrise vermitteln, eine affektive Beziehung zur Leserschaft fördern, und anthropozentrische Annahmen in der Gegenwartsliteratur hinterfragen können. Auf der Grundlage der DNV wird die spezifische Auseinandersetzung jedes Romans mit den Beziehungen zwischen Mensch und Nicht-Mensch analysiert: Während Richs *Odds Against Tomorrow* hoffnungsvolle Keimlinge eines demokratischen Ethos aufweist, werden diese letztlich durch die anthropozentrische und misanthropische Haltung des Erzählers untergraben. Darüber hinaus wird die eng vorangestellte Gemeinschaft zwischen Leserin und Erzähler—und damit das Potenzial für Veränderung außerhalb der Erzählwelt—durch einen satirischen Verrat seitens des Erzählers erheblich beeinträchtigt. Im Gegensatz dazu zeigt das Erzählkollektiv in Robinsons *New York 2140*, wie Verbundenheit und gemeinsamer Kampf die Vorstellung einer freudvollen und sogar utopischen Zukunft ermöglichen können. Jemisins *The City We Became* artikuliert Neuinterpretationen von traditionell rassistischen und anthropozentrischen Mustern als eine neue Version von Katastrophen, wodurch sie narrativ greifbar und vorstellbar werden. So wie die DNV beleuchtet, dass Cli-Fi-Romane auf vielfältige und vieldeutige Weise auf die Klimakrise reagieren, so klärt sie auch die Bedeutung von Literatur in der Auseinandersetzung mit dieser Krise.