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Enchanting Irruptions

Wonder, Noir, and the Environmental Imaginary



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Abstract

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This thesis investigates narratives of re-enchantment and disenchantment in three contemporary U.S. novels, Lydia Millet's *Mermaids in Paradise*, Karen Tei Yamashita's *Tropic of Orange*, and Thomas Pynchon's *Inherent Vice*. Drawing on key concepts from ecocriticism and affect theory, I argue that these novels interrogate narratives and affects associated with questions central to the Anthropocene: climate-related dilemmas, questions of environmental justice, and animal ethics. Situating these texts in relation to environmental discourses, I show how affects of wonder and re-enchantment are produced within them through the insertion of anti-mimetic narrative objects into otherwise representationally realistic fictional worlds. These incursions, and the affective shifts they produce, challenge and interrupt in the novels narratives of ecological dread and disenchantment, which I link to the techniques and affects of noir. In each chapter of this study, I show how the dialogical interplay between disenchantment and re-enchantment disrupts preconceptions and assumptions about aspects of ecological crisis, and engenders or reinforces political commitments to environmentally related issues. Chapter One focuses on interspecies politics and animal rights in *Mermaids in Paradise*, environmental justice is central to the analysis of *Tropic of Orange* in Chapter Two, and the political dynamics of countercultural environmentalism inform my reading of *Inherent Vice* in Chapter Three. Throughout, I explore the potential of re-enchantment to suggest an alternative to disenchanted and apocalyptic narratives concerning the environment, and to articulate a productive politics for contemporary ecofiction.

Keywords: Ecocriticism, ecofiction, re-enchantment, wonder, disenchantment, noir, environmental ethics, climate change, affect, environmental justice, Thomas Pynchon, Lydia Millet, Karen Tei Yamashita

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For Marie Kay

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Introduction

This thesis aims to make sense of the recurrent tropes of disenchantment and re-enchantment in contemporary ecofiction, particularly in relation to noir sensibilities which the three primary novels draw on. More specifically, its goal is to examine the tensions produced between noir-inflected disenchantment and opposed gestures of re-enchantment and wonder in Lydia Millet's *Mermaids in Paradise*, Karen Tei Yamashita's *Tropic of Orange*, and Thomas Pynchon's *Inherent Vice*. These novels are linked by various commonalities in their depiction of the impacts of a nebulous and apocalyptic, anthropogenic climate change. I argue that these novels further make use of a common dialogic between disenchantment and re-enchantment as part of a representational structure in which affective engagement is deployed as a means of mobilizing environmentalist politics and ethics.¹ My claim is that there is an affinity between disenchantment and the environmental imaginary which is developed through discourses such as that of climate change.² In their depiction of disaster narratives, the novels bear out this affinity while also resisting it by identifying the potential of other affects such as wonder and re-enchantment. I explore the ways in which the novels challenge disenchantment on the basis of the threat it poses to an affect-based political and ethical engagement and I present some of the ways in which re-enchantment is proposed as an antidote to environmentalist inertia. While exploring the tension between dis- and re-enchantment that structures the novels, I analyze the particular manner in which each frames its environmental narrative in the context of the historical, political, and economic forces that lend it its present form. Given that the novels are fictional representations of questions central to the Anthropocene, I approach them as part of a much larger environmental imaginary expressed in contemporary fiction.

The rapid increase in the number and scope of publications which can be broadly categorized as ecofiction, as well as growing critical attention to

¹ The term dialogic is used to indicate that instances of disenchantment and re-enchantment form an interrelationship in which one contextualises and re-contextualises the other. Moments of re-enchantment in the novels are to be read in terms of their relation to disenchantment, and vice versa.

² As well as referring to the way environment in its broadest sense is imagined, framed, and processed in fictional works, the term environmental imaginary is used in the geographical sense to denote the ways in which the natural environment and events associated with it shape discourses on it. However, the latter usage will remain secondary, given that the primary discussion revolves around representation rather than the physical systems themselves.

such writing, comes in the wake of the environmental movements of the 1960s. Though these movements have a far longer history than this, their modern manifestation in North America was spurred on by a combination of material and theoretical forces. Environmental catastrophes such as the Santa Barbara oil spill of 1969, the Love Canal disaster in 1978, and the 1979 Three Mile Island nuclear plant meltdown rendered the sometimes abstract issues of pollution, population pressure, and ecosystem degradation increasingly comprehensible and immediate to the non-specialist public. These kinds of disasters showed that anthropogenic risk to both people and ecosystems now exists on a scale previously only applicable to natural disasters. Meanwhile, the widespread impact of these disasters lent weight to the notion of humans as embedded in the local and global ecosystems that were affected. Such iconic disasters informed an increasingly articulated environmental imaginary.

An integrated view of humans and environment is fundamental to fictions that wish to engage with the Anthropocene. In order to address climate change, which is neither tangible nor comprehensively visible, fiction often engages with the notion of the Anthropocene as what Timothy Clark calls a threshold concept. In many respects the concept “evades normal categories of attention,” and so authors make use of sometimes counterintuitive techniques and “profound emotional engagement” to render the epoch comprehensible (Clark x, 176). As authors of ecofiction who draw on affective devices make clear, comprehensibility is one aspect of a larger problem. Clark, in his readings, demonstrates that such a task is not an easy one. He offers an example from Barbara Kingsolver’s *Flight Behavior* to show how readers respond to an assortment of affects offered up through the protagonist, rather than the “strange behaviour” of the novel’s “spectacular insects” (177-78). If readers are more engaged by a protagonist’s emotional states than with signs of ecological distress in other species then non-anthropocentric and non-anthropomorphic representation becomes difficult. The idea that affective engagement is both problematic and necessary in the context of ecofiction is fundamental to my analysis of disenchantment and re-enchantment as doing this very work.

The idea that anthropocentric practices might return the world to a more pristine or pastoral environment is countered by our collective capacity for ecological disaster. The two positions coalesce in ecofiction’s interrogation of anthropogenic feedback loops between humans and environment. I argue that a growing strand in ecofiction develops antagonisms between anthropocentric and biocentric concerns into the specific tropes of disenchantment and re-enchantment as a representational strategy for addressing ecological degradation and for re-shaping an environmental imaginary. I examine some of the ways this interplay between disenchantment and re-enchantment draws on earlier forms of cultural production, particularly ecofiction, as well

as somewhat indirectly making use of the disenchanting world typical of noir fiction.³ I consider how, in the fissures created by these idiosyncratic narrative elements, opportunities may arise for readers to recalibrate their perceptions of the composite and complex nature of climate change with its specific reverberations in the form of rising oceans, species loss, and environmental justice issues.

The novels I focus on often raise their environmental questions obliquely, through a temporary aesthetic shift that momentarily foregrounds the significance of anti-mimetic or fantastic objects, figures, and locations. To refer to such moment, I use the terms “anti-mimetic,” “fantastic,” and “magical” interchangeably. For instance, broad questions about the commodification of non-human animal species are raised in the context of mermaids. These mythological creatures are at a far enough distance from reality to evade some of the conceptual baggage particular to specific examples of charismatic megafauna, while retaining the sense of enchantment that such species conventionally engender. However, these anti-mimetic objects, figures, and places do not offer the escapism of, for instance, fantasy fiction; instead, they raise questions about climate change within the context of a mimetic narrative world. Such figures function as ontological interruptions which, by conforming epistemologically to a mimetic narrative world, suggest a political and/or ethical relevance that transcends the narrative world in which they appear. *Mermaids in Paradise*, then, presents a defense of the rights of non-human animals through the questions it asks about our responsibilities if we were to encounter a cryptid such as a mermaid. The question of how climate change might be linked to labor practices and border policy is posed by Yamashita in *Tropic of Orange* via an enchanted orange. *Inherent Vice* depicts the mythological island of Lemuria as a means of questioning the politics of the Californian counterculture in the context of both real and imaginary environmental threats to the city of Los Angeles.

Each of the novels can be read as a response to widespread concern over sustainability and ecological health in an age when the planet as a whole is in jeopardy. Julie Sze asks of the climate crisis what kinds of discourses of sustainability and resilience have emerged from it, and presents arguments for what the ideological functions of these discourses might be (15).⁴ Sze argues that the desire for sustainability has led to an under-analysis of “feel-good projects” such as Beijing’s Bird’s Nest, built prior to the 2008 Olym-

³ Throughout the thesis I use the term “noir” as a catch-all for mostly Los Angeles based novels (hard-boiled and some other forms of detective fiction), film (film noir and neo noir), as well as the pervasive stance of resistance in the face of disillusionment and fatality that noir thematics and plotting exemplifies.

⁴ I use the term resilience in the standard ecological sense of “the scope for ecological or biogeochemical buffering, the capability to withstand alteration” (O’Riordan 461). In post-apocalyptic novels, resilience is generally a primarily anthropocentric concern centred on the capacity for humans to persist in radically altered or damaged ecosystems.

pics.⁵ The Bird's Nest is one of a number of architectural projects that play on organic structures to stylize their appearance while materially having little to do with sustainability. Rather than directly address issues like Beijing's rampant air pollution, such developments work to counter public perceptions of them (42). Sze demonstrates how such projects have enabled the "greenwashing" of unproductive ideological positions on environment, allowing duplicitous schemes to proliferate. She shows how such projects have gained acceptance as environmentally progressive whether they fulfil this criterion or not (16-19). Sze's analysis underscores the importance of historically and ideologically analyzing discursive figures of environmentalism and sustainability. It also raises important questions about the value and place of positive affects within environmentalist thought. My thesis similarly focuses on the narrative objects that introduce environmental questions within specific affective constellations in the novels as well as their settings. Unlike Sze, however, I argue for the potential usefulness of affectively pleasurable interventions in the environmental imaginary.

In Sze's critique of projects which satisfy "eco-desire"—a "fusion of desire, projection, profit, and fun" that "creates neoliberal subjects"—she uncovers an optimistic, or perhaps disingenuous, impulse to employ capitalist techniques to fix the environmental predicaments that capitalism has, up until this point, predominantly exacerbated (16-17). The questions Sze asks of these large-scale projects are useful at any level of discourse on purportedly environmentalist cultural production. The novels I discuss engage eco-desire in a radically different way from Sze's examples, yoking its positive affectivity to an environmentalist critique steeped in or punctuated by moments of disenchantment that draw on noir's deep discontent with the immanent, material historical conditions in which these works were produced. Each novel consistently resists, rather than enables, the production of neoliberal subjectivity that Sze reveals is a function of developers' co-optation of eco-desire. In *Tropic of Orange*, environmental justice issues are tethered to the eco-desire of re-greening as a means to socio-environmental progress in a way that reveals the truth that structures like Beijing's Bird's Nest aim to hide, namely, that the mechanisms of neoliberalism are at odds with social and environmental sustainability. *Inherent Vice* includes a powerfully critical narrative thread that reiterates the deeply-rooted interconnection between state or commercial interests and environmental devastation, particularly through the fictional neoliberal organization called the Golden Fang and the economic transformation its presence implies. For instance, in the novel

⁵ Though Sze's focus is largely on city planning and eco-architecture as a mirror of eco-desire, her analysis is more broadly applicable because of its predominant tension between real-world environmental problematics and their narrativisation. Her study, though largely taking urban development as its object of interest, is pertinent to my own analysis due to its central concern of how eco-ideologies engender affective commitments, which Sze calls eco-desire.

Wolfmann's "Arrepentimiento" development project can be read as attempting a fulfilment of eco-desire from within the structures of capitalism, while also promising a partial escape from them. However, the project's failure serves instead as a reminder that capitalist techniques of valorization cannot be so easily redirected towards philanthropic and environmentalist ends.

Novels that depict dis- and re-enchantment as a way of making sense of lived environments short-circuit the optimism of neoliberal eco-desire by situating its objects in relation to the material processes they are embedded in. Processes such as rising ocean levels are linked to unattractive impacts like oily coastlines as well as to necessities like housing and trade. Ecological degradation is thus placed in conversation with the re-enchantment that fulfilment of eco-desire promises. I argue that these tensions between the potentially re-enchanting effect of representations of eco-desire and its contextualization within the discouraging reality of ecological decline draw on the sensibilities and affective constellations of noir, particularly the overriding sense of disenchantment linked to the material conditions of the 1930s to 1950s of noir's own development.⁶ In *More than Night*, James Naremore urges us to ask questions about the varied modes of existence of film noir, where it has been used and how it can circulate (11). Naremore's own response details the impressive range of noir's transnational spread and its embedding in numerous mediascapes, from its beginnings into the twenty-first century. I attempt to show how noir has bled through into the somewhat unlikely genre of ecofiction, something beyond the scope of Naremore's own work. Furthermore, John T. Irwin shows how the fatalistic and cynical tone that permeates noir productions emerges from hard-boiled fiction. This form prepared audiences for the iteration of dark themes and affects that eventually found representation in film noir. Apart from what Irwin identifies as central to noir, such as the "pervasive atmosphere of corruption, crime, psychopathology and evil," the use of other noir narrative features can be observed in ecofiction (207). For example, the proclivity of protagonists like Sam Spade and Philip Marlowe to persevere in the face of seemingly predestined failure readily translates to the contemporary politics of climate change—there, the prospect of certain failure can easily become political inertia. Finally, Sean McCann sheds light on how Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal shaped the hard-boiled fiction that became a wealth of source material for film noir (5). McCann creates a bridge between the related but generically distinct forms of detective fiction and film noir, emphasizing commonalities between their sensibilities. Each of the novels I discuss draws on these typical features of noir, from the central figure of the journalist or

⁶ On this point, see Naremore's discussion of some of the political pressures exerted on noir productions during the 1930s-50s (96-135). Furthermore, Vincent Brook's study of how a large number of Jewish directors shaped the development of noir emphasises the importance of political exile as a factor in the style's development.

detective, to revelations that disenchantment with material and political conditions leads to particular forms of resistance. In this way, noir is put to use in ecofiction to make sense of the epic scale of climate change in the context of individual responses to it.

This noir supplement to the positive affectivity of eco-desire creates the tensions central to Yamashita, Pynchon, and Millet's novels. Here, noir's private detectives, journalists, and femmes fatales occupy dense, lower-class urban spaces and commit murder and deception, or pursue sleuthing and vigilantism. These elements of noir are set alongside the disenchanted framing of environmental justice issues and ecological decline, posing a challenge to the blithe view—occasionally entertained or critiqued by Sze, and often parodied in the novels—that the ideologies authorizing environmental degradation are, exclusively, the very same that will foster ecosystemic recovery. Despite their lack of endorsement for green capitalism, the novels also resist the kind of untempered disenchantment that tends to induce political fatigue: if we come to the belief that Earth's systems are too damaged to recover at all, or at best to do so only after a severe and unpredictable mass extinction event, resistance becomes a pointless endeavor. A related concern is that the practices leading to the climate crisis are too deeply embedded to excise and correct, especially given estimates of a relatively short time frame before irreversible consequences set in.⁷ *Inherent Vice* provides the best example of this, since readers have already observed some of the historical consequences of the 1960s and are living in a world shaped by them. While working through the most apocalyptic of foreseeable environmental scenarios—mass extinction and rising oceans, to take two examples—the novels mitigate their own dystopian tendencies through the use of enchanted figures that, far from being sublime, are themselves deprecated by ironic humor. Millet's mermaids have bad teeth, contradicting popular cultural representations of the mermaid as flawlessly beautiful, and thus more valuable. And, as *Inherent Vice*'s protagonist Doc exits for Lemuria, Tiny Tim sings “The Ice Caps Are Melting” on repeat, introducing a planetary agenda to what Doc considered was a personal investigation.

Whereas *Mermaids in Paradise* takes a largely synchronic perspective on the issues surrounding climate change, Timothy Morton's critical work *Hyperobjects* contextualizes the phenomenon by taking stock of a far deeper sense of time and space. From quantum states to the cosmic, Morton's neologism “hyperobject” refers to phenomena that are vastly distributed in space and time. Pollution provides Morton with a good example of a hyperobject for its extensive distribution and the uncanny sense he affords it. The hy-

⁷ See, for instance, predictions that even conservative estimates of sea level rise would dramatically affect the habitability of the Marshall Islands within the century; or the more grave concerns that by the end of this century most of the smaller and low-lying Pacific islands will be simply uninhabitable (Rudiak-Gould 2, 148).

perobject is pervasive and discursively flexible: “I start the engine of my car. Liquefied dinosaur bones burst into flame. I walk up a chalky hill. Billions of ancient pulverized undersea creatures grip my shoes. I breathe. Bacterial pollution from some Archean cataclysm fills my alveoli—we call it *oxygen*” (58). This purple description of mundane experiences is in-step with the discursive inflection of wonder in contemporary environmental writing and its aspiration to enchant. Morton re-enchants the respiratory process and provides a radically different perspective on the by-now quotidian combustion engine, and though his prose defamiliarizes these, his descriptions lack the paranormal eccentricity of the fictional renderings I focus on in the chapters. Morton is concerned with broadening or altering conceptions of environment and its literature discursively or ontologically. In contrast, my focus is on how authors of fiction make use of the imaginative space of the novel to reshape attitudes towards and conceptions of environment. Rather than asking how we can become cognizant of the environment in non-conventional ways, authors of ecofiction tend to interrogate the affective basis of our relation to environment and ask questions about the logic that underlies this relation.

Many early works of fiction with environmental themes bear the marks of an antagonistic relation between nature and civilization. The earliest surviving work of literature, the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, describes the felling of forests and the exploits of their protector, Humbaba, in reference to an actual, proto-Anthropocene, ecological event (Wall 35). However, the culturally internalized notion Donna Haraway calls human exceptionalism has deeper roots (11). The idea of the human as distinct from all other life forms is embedded in the Abrahamic genesis story in which God grants humans dominion over fish, birds, land animals, and “every creeping thing” (Gen 1.26). In the context of the growing awareness of scarcity and depletion in the twentieth century, such carte blanche is blatantly problematic. The argument justifying human supremacy based on Genesis was examined in the early 1970s by historian Lynn White who claimed that the Abrahamic religions, specifically Christianity in the Middle Ages, having established humankind and nature as dichotomous, upheld “that it is God’s will that man exploit nature” (4). This echoes Jane Bennett’s observation that the transition from the enchanted world in which god animates and directs human affairs to the disenchanting one in which we calculate and rationalize strips nature of its autonomy, and recasts it as a source of wealth and commodities. In Bennett’s view, apprehending matter as inert rather than, to borrow her own term, vibrant, also legitimizes this relation. A professor of medieval history, White sparked debate over how and where theological and ecological perspectives overlap and he “prompted many Christians over the next decades to develop an in-

creasingly resonant environmental theology” (McKibben 405).⁸ Though others have called for ecocritical reinterpretations of scripture, these have not gained the same traction as White’s argument, nor do they correspond to fictional narratives of resource exploitation which typically lament the hubris and myopia that led to the apocalyptic event they center on.⁹ White’s essay and its topic is an important one for ecocritics, and it is justly anthologized in collections like Cheryl Glotfelty and Harold Fromm’s *The Ecocriticism Reader*, Bill McKibben’s *American Earth*, and Ken Hiltner’s *Ecocriticism*.

Religious scripture remains a touchstone for archaeologies of environmental discourse that inform fictional narratives of interest to contemporary environmental theory and interpretative practice. Margaret Atwood’s *MadAddam* trilogy develops a religious philosophy that includes, among others, Augustine’s philosophy, Taoism, neo-paganism, as well as elements of the biblical Fall. In the trilogy, Atwood improvises a possible ethical system that might develop in response to a post-apocalyptic scenario. However, while this theological filter tints ecological politics it also systematizes it, giving it a dogmatic structure that is often fatally flawed. As well as Atwood’s *MadAddam* trilogy, John Wyndham’s *The Chrysalids*, Claire Vaye Watkins’ *Gold Fame Citrus*, and Edan Lepucki’s *California* are all examples of this. The dogma embraced by fictitious eco-religions and post-apocalyptic cults is at odds with the more spontaneous and eccentric apparitions of non-real figures in the novels I discuss, in which permanent change is sought through momentary, non-anthropocentric encounters. The diegetic role of religion in novels like Atwood’s *The Year of the Flood* is to organize and interpret the new world rather than re-enchant it, though this can also occur when religious discourse, used in a non socially prescriptive way, lends a mystical aspect to phenomena. Thus, *The Year of the Flood* is punctuated by moments of re-enchantment within a deteriorated world, perhaps most strikingly when Toby first hears and briefly sights the Crakers, a blue-bodied, transgenic species. This moment is significant for the novel as a whole. Here, the moment of re-enchantment simultaneously marks the novel as a narrative of resilience—”the capability to withstand [environmental] alteration” (O’Riordan 461)—when successfully autonomous groups of Crakers demonstrate the intergenerational survival of something akin to humankind. It is a

⁸ See, for instance, Atfield’s semantically-based rejoinder to the discussion in which he argues that the term “dominion” should be read as synonymous with “stewardship” to replace the exploitative inflection White posits.

⁹ See Arthur Walker-Jones’ “Eden for Cyborgs” in which Jones reads the *Book of Genesis* through the prism of Haraway’s binary-destabilising figure of the cyborg. Jones argues that by reading the Edenic serpent as benevolent we can see that human experience is broadened (from merely good to both good and bad). This assists humans in their divinely ordained role as custodians of the land, though it also allows the profane humans to question the sacred god. However, the article itself quietly acknowledges that this re-positioning of the serpent is prescriptive rather than descriptive, rendering the argument of limited use to the analysis of the development of post-1960s ecofiction.

moment similar in nature to the material and metaphorical transference of fire from father to son in Cormac McCarthy's *The Road*. The novels mentioned here frame environmental issues as post-apocalyptic narratives informed by religious discourse. As such they are distinct from the novels I address, since these draw on elements of detective fiction while being only tentatively apocalyptic. Furthermore, *Inherent Vice* critiques the entry of New Age religious discourse into countercultural politics, and *Mermaids in Paradise* lambasts Christian doctrine as hostile to the natural world. While *Tropic of Orange* allegorizes religious experiences through its mystic, Archangel, it does directly not connect these to its environmental narrative.

In my account, the tension between re-enchantment and an empirical perspective remains an important one. At the end of twentieth century E.O. Wilson made a prediction:

The choice between transcendentalism and empiricism will be the coming century's version of the struggle for men's souls. Moral reasoning will either remain centered in idioms of theology and philosophy, where it is now, or it will shift toward science-based material analysis. Where it settles will depend on which world view is proved correct, or at least which is more widely *perceived* to be correct. (262)

Wilson's emphasis on perception agrees with the use of wonder and enchantment as means of producing a shift in affect and perspective. Taken most broadly, Wilson's prediction has its roots in what he calls Ionian Enchantment, which is to say the growing unification of the natural sciences rather than the imaginative work done by authors and artists. However, the term "Enchantment," tellingly capitalized, speaks to the same experience that environmental writers presumably encounter themselves, and seek to provoke in readers. While Wilson's fundamental aim is a rigorous examination of the bases for "consilience" among academic disciplines, he explicitly and implicitly recognizes the importance of enchantment as an affective experience.¹⁰ This, when translated into a literary technique, resonates with environmental writers who use fiction to engender commitments and produce shifts in perception or perspective. In attempting this, ecofiction that self-reflexively includes anti-mimetic narrative elements hedges against both possibilities Wilson raises, thereby spanning the transcendental and the empirical. Such novels take care in testing the often-diaphanous membrane

¹⁰ Wilson's fundamental definition of consilience is "is that all tangible phenomena, from the birth of stars to the workings of social institutions, are based on material processes that are ultimately reducible, however long and tortuous the sequences, to the laws of physics" (291). This claim leads to numerous insights on the limitations of academic specialisation that come at the cost of broader syntheses of knowledge.

separating dislocated fantasy from imaginative figures that do have correspondences with reality, metaphorical or otherwise.

As religion's explanatory power gives way to the empirical principles of scientific observation, the phenomenological world becomes disenchanted, partly by becoming predictable and to some extent controllable. Given that, in Max Weber's account, rationalism permeates European development which is seen as necessarily accompanied by disenchantment, arguably Weber sees a resemblance between Western rationality and the crippling determinism of apocalyptic narrative form (Schluchter 4). If the historical trajectory of rationalism and its attendant affects of disenchantment are inevitable then we find ourselves at a fatalistic impasse similar to the predetermined future of apocalyptic discourse. With the potential to rupture this teleological structure, magic can be considered a type or method of enchantment that intervenes in the disenchanted world and signals alternative possibilities.¹¹

In what follows, I do not make representations of religion central to my inquiry; however, structures of religious belief are used in the novels, often as foils for competing ethical or epistemological interpretative frames. For instance, Millet's satirization of the Christian right-wing stands opposed to anything on a spectrum from liberal humanism to radical animal rights activism. Similarly, Mickey Wolfmann and Riggs Warbling's New Age architecture in *Inherent Vice* is a means for both inter-dimensional travel and partial absolution for environmental crimes. Although fictional accounts of religious experience can include figures or episodes of transcendence and the fantastic, my focus remains on what is created in the frictive matrix of realistic environmental representation and the anti-mimetic interventions that disrupt it. Ecofiction often works from a point of disenchantment towards conclusions that vary from intimations of complete devastation through to tentative suggestions of resilience, and reasonably often to hope. Within this scope of narrative development, and despite the varied endpoints of the novels, re-enchantment is often used as an intermediary technique. Even novels like *Mermaids in Paradise*, which move toward the apocalyptic, make overtures to redemption by way of this trope. These are regularly entangled in tensions between empiricism and disenchantment, scientific practice and regenerative potential, as well as structures of affect and belief, and their relation to the material. In order to make sense of this narrative strategy, I

¹¹ Part of anthropologist Marcel Mauss' definition of magic makes a distinction between magical practices and those from which effect can be immediately observed as following cause. Additionally, Mauss makes the distinction that magical practices are "quite different from their mechanical effectiveness" which opposes magic to the scientific principles of observation and an ability to consistently replicate results (25). Here I affiliate the term in a general sense with the non-real narrative elements I highlight in the novels which resemble magical ones by way of allowing the perception of "occult aspects of nature or to enter into communion with preternatural or supernatural entities" (Bailey 2).

outline how disenchantment has been articulated in modernity and subsequently developed via a concomitant theorization of re-enchantment.

Although early literature that deals with the relation between humans and nature crystallized some of the antagonisms that persist until the present, as we have become more aware of our position in the Anthropocene the power dynamics that shape these stories has changed. The emergence of the modern U.S. environmentalist movement in the 1960s reinvigorated the production of a less confident and more critical strain of ecofiction. Gone was the triumphalism of Humbaba's slaying, or Noah's acquiescence to apocalypse and its portrayal as a primarily redemptive event. In place of these came cautionary, sometimes Malthusian tales, such as Harry Harrison's *Make Room! Make Room!* J.G. Ballard's prescient vision of natural disaster in *The Drowned World*, and the instantaneous technological destruction of life on earth in Kurt Vonnegut's *Cat's Cradle*, share an interest in patterns of human thought and behavior in relation to apocalypse. Such works are as often anthropocentric as they are science-fictional, yet they register the anxieties of modernity with its growing public awareness of environmental degradation. The physical world that had been viewed largely as a silent and homeostatic source of wealth and resources came to be seen not only as (re)active, but also as potentially apocalyptically malicious, something readily observed in Wyndham's *The Day of the Triffids*.

After the 1960s, much environmental fiction took its cue from earlier post-apocalyptic narratives rather than nature writing, and is especially concerned with catalysts such as war (often nuclear) as well as pandemics. War provides the central plot device in Gore Vidal's *Kalki*, in which an eschatological event presents the possibility of cleansing the earth of pollution, corruption, and other agents of deterioration. Philip Wylie's *The End of the Dream* offers a future-retrospective look at the near decimation of humankind by 2001. Set in 2030, Wylie's novel describes a series of mismanaged catastrophes, and shows how attempts to attenuate anthropogenic disasters can worsen them. Alexander Key's *The Incredible Tide* is a science fiction novella in which a young boy survives an apocalyptic war waged with magnetic weapons only to find himself alone on a mostly drowned earth. Another science fiction novella, Roger Zelazny's *Damnation Alley*, depicts a post-apocalyptic world ravaged by powerful and unpredictable storms. A novel that might well be considered something of a blueprint for such narratives is Walter M. Miller Jr.'s *A Canticle for Leibowitz*. Miller's novel questions the relation between scientific knowledge, specifically that pertaining to nuclear weapons, and earthly devastation in a narrative about an order of monks who secretly guard pre-apocalyptic books that survived the cataclysm. Notably, the fate of other animals is also considered in Miller's novel.

Many such apocalyptic novels are deterministic and disenchanting, foreclosing on non-apocalyptic possibilities, at least until their conclusions. The context of the Cold War contributed much to the nuclear imaginings displayed in many of the post-apocalyptic war narratives, whereas plague nov-

els draw on popular fiction like Mary Shelley's *The Last Man*, Richard Matheson's *I am Legend*, and Wyndham's *The Day of the Triffids* in constructing their political allegories. The instantaneousness of nuclear annihilation and the rapid spread of plague are slowed to the Malthusian pace of resource depletion or population pressures in notable films like the desert-set petro-apocalyptic franchise *Mad Max*. *Soylent Green*, a film based on Harry Harrison's *Make Room! Make Room!*, is a dystopian look at urban overpopulation and food shortages. Thomas Dunlap notes that an important problem with a disenchanting environmental imaginary is that it can be "an apocalyptic 'end of nature' thinking that hinders action and draws attention away from pressing issues of environmental justice," neatly articulating what is at stake in questions of environmental re-enchantment, and the apocalyptic form (43). The novels I take up are not premised on, nor do they reach such intense levels of catastrophe as those just mentioned. Rather, they each describe conditions for an apocalyptic event or for other acutely destructive processes. Expanding on Dunlap's argument, by averting an apocalyptic event these novels do away with the determinism of such thinking, and leave space for a transformation in our environmental interactions.

Despite the environmental concerns of these earlier works, these are generally subordinated to anthropocentric concerns. This remains the case for both *Tropic of Orange* and *Inherent Vice*, while *Mermaids in Paradise* explicitly pits anthropocentric concerns against the sovereignty of other species. Apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic novels remain generically prone to focus firmly on human aspects of environmental collapse. This makes sense, since humans are either causative or, almost universally, the primary object of interest in the wake of non-anthropogenic collapse. The post-apocalyptic is something of a misnomer given that life persists beyond it, and these such narratives routinely center on human life or something resembling it. However, anthropocentric and non-anthropocentric need not be thought of as mutually exclusive interests since they are often enmeshed in novels committed to environmental representation.

Novels that negotiate between anthropocentrism and its outside routinely render environmental crisis comprehensible to non-experts by manipulating economies of scale. In order to do so, they often stage undulating connections local and global ecologies. This is the case for *Inherent Vice*'s Golden Fang, which is both a ship and an organization that represents shifting global capital. At the same time it is an abstract evil linked to past and present wars that have destroyed enormous tracts of habitat. *Tropic of Orange* calls attention to the transnational exchange of a crop fruit that is also powerfully symbolic of the novel's Californian locale. Such representational strategies often take stock of the top-down orientation of climate change from the planetary, atmospheric level to its local expression in disaster events or depictions of environmental degradation. Attention to the local is necessary, as it indexes an unequal distribution of effects on specific demographics, regions, and ecosystems. Some of the better known climate-related crises and their feed-

back loops—the erosion of the Bangladeshi coastline, the likely prospect of Kiribati’s flooding, the desertification of China’s Gansu Province, or the demise of Australia’s Great Barrier Reef—provide examples of how climate change entails a dialectic of the local and global in material as well as cultural crisis. If, or when, rising sea levels necessitate an evacuation of Kiribati—or Tuvalu, the Marshall Islands, or other island nations which are similarly vulnerable—the resulting humanitarian crisis for its people would also entail a cultural disaster as ways of life and deep attachments to place are abandoned.¹²

These examples demonstrate the inherent structural interconnection of the local and global in environmentalist terms. Each of the novels I take up makes clear that undulating sense of connection I noted between local and global ecologies. Questions of the relation between the local and global also encompass trade and labor practices, and depictions of cultural responses to environmental degradation. *Inherent Vice*’s drowned island of Lemuria constitutes a parallax view of Los Angeles, and also widens the novel’s local focus to include broader questions about the environmental health of the Pacific. *Tropic of Orange*’s mobile border questions the political demarcations that structure our sense of what is local and what is not. Meanwhile, *Mermaids in Paradise*’s interspecies networks, whether between whales and mermaids, or the assemblage of parrotfish, coral, and sand beaches, are suggestive of the anthropocentric ways in which we conceive of the local.

Climate scholar Mike Hulme provides a useful middle-ground in contrasting global aggregates of human activities with their intimate effects, arguing that, “Climate is an idea which encapsulates the immersion of the physical with the cultural, in which local and global dynamics interweave” (10). Given that the novels I take up in the following chapters are grounded in depictions of the local, this is also my focus in analyzing them. This is not, however, to ignore that in an age of climate crisis, novels that address issues of flooding, coastal erosion, pollution, environmental refugees, species loss, and extinction—all concerns of the novels I discuss—have an ultimate referent of processes of climate change that are inherently global. I take these questions of place into account when considering *Inherent Vice*’s tacit references to the vulnerability of Pacific islands to flooding, *Tropic of Orange*’s transnational trade networks, and *Mermaids in Paradise*’s use of a fictional species that figures as a surrogate for a broader conception of animal rights.

This conversation between global and local is evident to varying extents in each of the novels discussed in the chapters. *Tropic of Orange* in particular makes its cosmopolitan gestures loudly and regularly through the actions of and conversations between Emi and Gabriel. And a sense of the global

¹² Peter Rudiak-Gould discusses some of the impacts on and responses to this development, particularly in Chapter Five of *Climate Change and Tradition in a Small Island State*.

also emerges from the novel's perambulatory treatment of geography and its incredulity toward the logic of national borders and trade policies. Yet, notwithstanding the novel's inclusion of North, Middle, and South America, as well as various parts of East Asia, all roads lead to Los Angeles, and there is no escaping the Californian lens through which all other places are viewed. *Inherent Vice* is likewise tied to the locality and cultural history of California and Los Angeles. Though Pynchon does not attempt the same kind of haphazard traversals that Yamashita does, he presents a powerful sense of California and the United States' historical ties to East Asia and the Pacific. Finally, *Mermaids in Paradise* is a Los Angeles novel too, if only in part. That its environmentalist narrative does not begin until its protagonist has left L.A. is suggestive of the translocation of environmental degradation, particularly as it moves from large, powerful, nations to those less able to moderate its impact. A more persistent connection between local and global is developed through the use of a mythological creature as the novel's at-risk species. Though the minor species-at-risk narrative centering on the parrotfish is specific to tropical and subtropical marine environments, the fictional mermaid could as well be substituted in the reader's mind for a real at-risk animal, or one potentially at risk. In other words, the semiotic slipperiness of the mermaid suggests that its predicament might befall an extant species familiar to the reader, or even become a structural means of comprehending species loss more generally.

Besides highlighting interconnections and differences between local and global environmental imaginaries, the novels ask what constitutes an environment by imagining spaces such as a freeway or downtown Los Angeles as sites of environmental risk. Reading these as such requires some work of defamiliarization in order to expand the concept of environment to include built spaces, as well as wilderness. Expanding the notion of environmentalism in this way, beyond questions of wilderness and non-human animals, is a means of making it as relevant to constructed environments, which are where the majority of readers dwell. In the novels, the irruption of a fantasy element into an otherwise mimetic scene jump-starts defamiliarization, which then extends from categorical questions about what counts as an environment to ethical ones about how animal or environmental rights are legitimized. Do different environmental aesthetics lead to different environmental politics or ethics? What happens when a school of mermaids is sighted in the North Atlantic Ocean or the Caribbean Sea? Are they more significant or important than the comparatively humble parrotfish? Are their rights nullified in the face of anthropocentric concerns? The inter-splicing of anti-realism into otherwise mimetic narratives, as well as the depiction of non-typical environmental sites as ecologically significant, is suggestive of the pervasive nature of climate change, from which no biome or building is exempt.

Assessing the role of disenchantment in ecofiction led me to explore its tropes and figures and to examine how ecofiction functions structurally,

developing over time in response to the shifting concerns and conceptions of environmentalism. In my study of the conceptual issues at stake and how these are framed in the novels, I draw on Buell's account of the rise of toxic discourse by which he identifies environmental narrative features, what he calls, "an interlocked set of topoi." Buell assesses their relation to "the anxieties of late industrial culture," and he examines how various forms of contamination are described and discussed (*Writing for an Endangered World* 30).¹³ He argues that part of the provenance of toxic discourse is a state of disenchantment resulting from the pastoral's depiction of an illusory green world (38). This disenchantment, influenced by the pastoral, expresses at once an implied utopian possibility and a dystopia from which there is no escape, a structure virtually identical to that found in film noir. It also reappears in ecofiction that transforms the hard-boiled genre's apprehensions about socio-political changes that threatened masculinity into socio-environmental anxieties about the culturally widespread loss of agency that Weber characterized as disenchantment. Locating manifestations of toxic discourse in literature involves the identification of environmental risk or damage and evaluating the discursive parameters as well as the literary derivation of the particular trope. Furthermore, Buell argues, readers "must also reckon with the phenomenon of narratorial bias," especially in accounts of toxicity from earlier periods (48). For this reason I examine Pynchon's depiction of the Californian counterculture, as well as the diluvian trope, when reading the toxic discourse of *Inherent Vice*. Similarly, in discussing *Tropic of Orange* I focus on the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) as a pivotal event for interpreting the novel, and I treat the labor history of the Californian citrus industry as an important context for Yamashita's narratological choices.

Complementary to Buell, Ursula Heise also historicizes the ways fiction helps to frame the relations of self-aware beings to nature, showing how modernization and globalization transform these relations ("Hitchhiker's" 504). She describes three of the early and founding tenets of ecocriticism as aiming:

their critique of modernity at its presumption to know the natural world scientifically, to manipulate it technologically and exploit it economically, and thereby ultimately to create a human sphere apart from it in a historical process that is usually labelled "progress." This domination strips nature of any value other than as a material resource and commodity and leads to a gradual destruction that may in the end deprive humanity of its basis for subsistence. Such domination empties human life of the significance it had derived from

¹³ I use the term environmentalism throughout the thesis not in the Foucauldian sense of ecogovernmentality, but rather in the literary sense the term is employed by Buell and others which refers to the textual reproduction of socio-historical environments; an assemblage of subject, text, and surroundings (*Future* 44).

living in and with nature and alienates individuals and communities from their rootedness in place. (507)

Heise's account implicitly recuperates the Weberian notion of disenchantment to specifically fit an environmentalist paradigm. In various configurations and with differing emphases, this is what underpins much ecofiction, and in particular those novels that utilize anti-mimetic figures. However, it also has a longer history which is useful to take into account for a consideration of instrumentality and the challenge that re-enchantment poses to it. I explore this opposition between instrumentality and re-enchantment in Chapter One.

In Weber's seminal account, disenchantment closes in on the Western world as monotheistic religions begin to assert a formalized system of ethics and conduct on what had been diverse and varied cultural practices in everyday life. Once established, the process of disenchantment then shifts away from monotheism, diffusing into secular life—in bureaucratic practices, for example—spurred on by the rationalizing tendency of modern science. In his essay "Science as a Vocation," Weber asserts that "what this intellectualist rationalization, created by science and by scientifically oriented technology, means practically" is that "the world is disenchanted. One need no longer have recourse to magical means in order to master or implore the spirits" (*From Max* 139). In other words, as scientific progress explains phenomena that were previously mechanically opaque and so designated magical, the scientific imperative erodes anything beyond a materialist engagement with reality. The environmental upshot of this transformation, paired with the technologies that helped catalyze it, is the means and grounds for a totalizing instrumentalization of the physical world. On the other hand, magic implies an already enchanted subject-object relation which, in Weber's *Sociology of Religion*, he repeatedly ascribes to those who work in close relation to nature, particularly the peasantry.

Weber is not exceptional in relating magic to nature-oriented practices, nor for thinking of it as both opposed to and continuous with monotheism and science. In *The Golden Bough*, James Frazer demonstrates that magic and magicians sought to enact cause-effect relations with environmental factors (36, 277-88). Marcel Mauss' study of magic situates it as a diverse set of beliefs and rituals or actions that differ from religious ones in large part by seeking pragmatic outcomes that are sometimes related to the natural world (11, 26-30). In addition to Weber's observation that enchantment entails a specific, categorical outlook on the world, practices of enchantment have a long history of involvement with human-environmental relations. It is in this space of exchange between human practice and environmental history that my own interest in re-enchantment lies, following scholars like Bennett. This ecological history aims in part to explain Bennett's materialism as an attempt to subvert disenchantment and re-valorize a kind of open-ended vitalism which ultimately produces a fundamentally environmentalist argu-

ment. Within Bennett's account, Weber's term "magic" intersects with her "enchantment" through its inverse, scientific rationalism, while also acting as an environmental imperative. I return to Bennett's extension and modification of Weber's term below.

To think through the implications of his own argument, Weber turns to literature, particularly to what he sees as a key aspect of Leo Tolstoy's work in the meaninglessness of civilized life, and Charles Baudelaire's *Les Fleurs du Mal* as an example of the purely aesthetic. Weber argues that rationalization begets a kind of ennui wherein thirsts are constantly deferred rather than slaked. He takes this notion to the polemical conclusion that modern life is experienced as provisional "because death is meaningless, civilized life is meaningless" (*From Max* 140). Weber observes a way out of this predicament in "the spheres of the irrational" that confound modernity's ascendant form of disenchantment: scientific logic (143). However, in deploying irrational or non-realist representation as means of re-enchantment, ecofiction registers a shift from scientific to economic rationalism, seeing the latter as a primary cause of disenchantment and facilitator of destruction.¹⁴ A world in which death is meaningless, seen in *Tropic of Orange*'s massacre scene or in its tracing of the unnamed deaths of paperless migrants, is a disenchanted one, and it is here that Weber's account provides a rationale for fictions that seek to re-enchant.

Weber tempers his cynical hyperbole with a return to the practical consideration of the vocation of science and use of politics. He enumerates, with qualifications, some uses of science and theology, emphasizing that non-monumental, intimate art is formative of community (150-51, 154-55). The term monumental is used at times literally by Weber to mean monuments and public art, yet Russell Berman challenges the boundaries Weber seems to set for literature to "retreat from the public sphere" and become autonomous (202). Berman upholds "the literary imagination of the subsequent decades" as having the capacity "to articulate a poetic that might transcend Weber's resigned autonomy in order to achieve a community with a vibrant public culture" (201-02). The novels taken up in the following chapters can be considered an extension of this desire through their efforts toward re-enchantment for their readership via diegetic depictions of it.

The author of enchanted fictions can be considered, in Weberian terms, a sort of magician seeking via the oblique machinery of culture a kind of environmentalist cause-and-effect of re-enchantment. This follows from the affirmative quality of Weber's methodological writings which has been highlighted and elaborated by successive sociologists and critics. Raymond L.M.

¹⁴ Weber links monotheistic religious tradition to capitalism via their mutual propensity for depersonalisation, as well as exploring the historical tensions between the two (332). Here depersonalisation can be read as a form of disenchantment which moves through "religions of salvation" into the practice of science (331).

Lee notes the implied notion of re-enchantment, or a restoration of meaningfulness, through magic and charisma as a sustained theme in Weber's writings. While Lee gives more attention to the question of charisma in Weber's work, he states that Weber's reflections on religion offer "plenty of room for the continuation of magic as the opposing force to the grimness of a world based on disenchanting cultural values" (188). Lee adds that "Weber's implicit reference to re-enchantment in his discussion of magic suggests that mystical opposition in late modernity may become its own source of power" (189). This is consistent with Weber's essay "The Social Psychology of the World Religions" in which he posits the role of the magician as crucial for creating meaning as a form of enchantment in everyday life, for the purpose of community formation and the mitigation of risk by identifying "the factors to be blamed for suffering" (272). The novels in my study each manifest such proclivities either at the level of affect through the enchantment of the reader, or at the level of content in which community is always a crucial narrative component and mitigation of risk a thematic element.

Decades after Weber's pessimistic sociological determinations about modernity, Bennett disputes what has become commonplace in political and social theory: the "image of modernity as disenchanting, that is to say, as a place of death and alienation" (*Enchantment* 3). Bennett is only partly concerned with Weber's account of disenchantment, however, as is evident in her choice of terms that intersect with Weber's attention to magic and rationalization, while also indicating some of the numerous other thinkers through whom she routes her argument. Bennett's twofold concern in this work is to establish that disenchantment precludes ethical life, as well as the corollary to this, that enchantment activates ethics. Bennett underscores the futility of any code of ethics that lacks an accompanying sense of obligation to it. She proposes that this is precisely the central problem of disenchantment; that it results in an affective decoupling from the world that precludes the ethical action that she aims to reinvigorate in her work.

Bennett's argument points to a fundamental problem for environmental and interspecies justice regarding ethical action. Since her main task is not to dismiss disenchantment, but rather to explore its inverse, she writes primarily against the grain of disenchantment. To do so, Bennett identifies sites of material enchantment such as ethnographic accounts of animal communication and "the strange agency of physical systems at far-from-equilibrium states." This latter site of enchantment maps remarkably well onto narratives of "Gaia's revenge" that are based on a vitalist earth or other natural assemblage responding to destructive imbalances in its physical systems (*Enchantment* 4). This is discussed in my third chapter in reference to *Inherent Vice's* character Sortilège who imagines the earth as a living entity with an immune system; it also intersects, albeit more obliquely, with Yamashita's agential orange which I discuss in the second chapter. Enchantment in Bennett's account is also something that can be cultivated by giving "greater expression to the sense of play" or through strategies that "hone receptivity

to the marvelous specificity of things,” both of which are evident in the idiosyncratic stylistic expressions in the novels. Bennett finds that the value of enchantment lies in the “real effects” of its “rhetorical power.” This is suggestive of the possibility of transference from fictional worlds to real life which partly constitutes the politics of ecofiction as a genre. The effect of re-enchantment in Bennett’s account is as simple as it is fundamental: it fosters the ability to care and this encourages us toward “donating some of one’s scarce mortal resources to the service of others” (*Enchantment* 4). The lack of such a contribution renders environmental ethics all but inert.

Disenchantment, outside of social and political theory, is also a central affective constellation for noir texts. Though noir has often been noted as a morally complex style, it has become the subject of growing attention in recent decades in relation to questions of materiality.¹⁵ However, this materiality sits somewhat uneasily beside the concerns of climate change and contemporary environmentalism, in large part because of the anachronism of the coupling. Classical noir is visually defined by hard lines and grey, often concrete, forms lit more often by streetlight than sunlight. With some notable exceptions, environment in film noir is comprehensively urbanized, and interludes in non-built environments tend to be escape sequences. The nature the films show interest in is human, and their moral universe is concerned more with moral duplicity than biodiversity. The visual characteristics of film noir are darkness and shadows, obscurity through silhouetting, smoke, blinds and curtains, corners, as well as asymmetries, and so on. These suggest veiled danger and evoke apprehension, expressing the cynicism fundamental to the social critique underlying the mystery/thriller genre. Signs of street grime are more likely to point to societal degradation than issues of pollution.

Apart from studies of these well-documented tropes and devices there are more complex critiques that draw attention to the ways in which hard-boiled fiction and film noir address prevalent material conditions. These include studies of the boundary work between pulp and literature negotiated by authors like James M. Cain and Raymond Chandler, and the leftist politics underlying the films that would eventually be known as noir.¹⁶ In *Gumshoe America*, McCann historicizes the hard-boiled fiction of authors like Cain, Chandler, and Dashiell Hammett by examining their politics against the backdrop of New Deal liberalism. McCann examines the authors’ conceptions of their own place within the class tensions of the era, subtly reading

¹⁵ See, for instance, Dean MacCannell’s article “Democracy’s Turn: On Homeless Noir” which analyzes the spatial politics of noir’s built environments. Edward Dimendberg’s *Film Noir and the Spaces of Modernity* is a full length study that takes up questions of the concentration and diffusion of urban space in modernity that Dimendberg argues is distinctively noir.

¹⁶ Brook’s study of the Jewish émigré directors who contributed so much to the development of film noir is particularly interesting for its attention to the political anxieties these figures experienced in the U.S.

the ways in which their works intercede in deteriorating social inequities growing out of the structural and economic transformations of the time. Similarly, I take into account the ways in which economic shifts lend momentum to environmental critique in the novels, specifically the projected effects of NAFTA's neoliberalization of social relations in *Tropic of Orange*, and the transition from Fordism to neoliberalism in *Inherent Vice* that Doug Haynes analyzes.

Turning from detective fiction to film noir, Naremore's *More Than Night* devotes a chapter specifically to the ideological function of the 1930 Hollywood Production Code and its influence on film noir. Naremore exposes the flaws in previous assumptions that film noir is merely pessimistic and apolitical, revealing connections between influential directors, screenwriters, and actors with leftist politics. Naremore states, for instance, that John Garfield was an icon of leftist radicalism. *Inherent Vice*'s Doc echoes this observation as he considers the effects of "anti-subversives" on Hollywood cinema, and on Garfield himself. For Doc, watching Garfield's character die in his last film, *He Ran All the Way*, was like watching Garfield himself die "with the whole respectable middle class standing there in the street smugly watching him do it" (254). Later Doc will link Garfield's betrayal by Hollywood to the systematic forms of oppression that became routine for the Los Angeles Police Department. Readings like Naremore's take into account the materiality of the urbanizing environment, coupled with the pre-war and to some extent post-war political and economic climate. This reveals the ways in which hard-boiled fiction and film noir responded both explicitly and unconsciously to these prominent issues. I discuss how such materialist questions re-emerge in more recent narratives when read as ecofiction, and draw links between urbanization, economics, and environmentalist questions.

Ecofiction represents physical surroundings to develop a dialogue showing structural similarities between the material and political. It takes stock of the cynical and realist attention noir gives to shifts within U.S. labor practices, economic conditions, and urbanization, and transfers this to the vastly expanded milieu of a globalized economy and labor market, including environmental modifications which have extreme widespread consequences in terms of time-scales and geographical reach. Noir's motif of the small town's transformation into a city dovetails with ecofiction's treatment of population, commodification, together with industrial and corporate expansion, to evoke a mutual concern with exponential growth. The transition between the impersonal city and the faceless corporation, both as autonomous entities, is particularly seamless. Environmental novels that draw on noir substitute issues of urbanization and their concomitant politics with questions of global environmental threat, though they are likewise concerned with localized expressions of risk and catastrophe. In these novels, environment replaces noir's shadowy or ambiguous unknown as a site of risk, and consistently does so in dialectical relation to human activity. Recall that noir's unknown is the political unconscious intimated by or represented in

street corners, archways and imposing architecture, shadows, asymmetries, and so on. Much ecofiction takes place in common places of habitation like cities. The characteristic architecture of noir and its referent of modernity reappears in Yamashita's Los Angeles' Westside and her preoccupation with sharp, dividing lines. We see it as well in the dramatic, asymmetrical curve and razor-lines of Pynchon's Golden Fang headquarters. These objects of threat are embedded within zones of habitation that are imagined as sites of possible resistance to oppressive political and geographical circumscription. And noir's isolated detective, journalist, or vigilante is supplanted by the non-specialist activist group, the homeless, hippies, or the middle class. Though threat and degradation remain a binary system linking noir and detective ecofiction, the forms threat takes, the parties it affects, and the possibility of its being downgraded are markedly different.

Ecofiction borrows from noir's materiality, conventions, and devices, and generally appropriates noir as the key mode of representation for disenchantment in North America. It draws on noir's ambience, mood, and affects, as well as its political cynicism and self-reliance, reformulating the powerful disillusionment that is emblematic of the style. It does this in specific ways that distinguish it from noir. Whereas noir counterpoints the progressive optimism of what Naremore calls "New Deal populism" with its social and psychological darkness (103), environmental novels develop a dialogic between populist eco-desire in various forms—for instance, genuinely optimistic or at times ironic moments of re-enchantment—using noir cynicism as a framing device for catastrophe, disenchantment, and the apocalyptic. In place of noir's societal and state-based political oppression, ecofiction brings the Anthropocene into focus as the broadest index of corruption. Its material manifestations, whether in the city, desert, ocean, or at the border, become the sites at which risk and threat must be addressed.

Earlier I noted Dunlap's key reason for ecofiction's movement away from purely disenchanted, or thoroughly noir, narratives, the need for avoiding the determinism of "apocalyptic 'end of nature' thinking" (43). Though each of the novels analyzed in the chapters draws to some extent on the apocalyptic, none of them straightforwardly subscribes to the doomsday imaginary prevalent in earlier environmental novels and in recent cli-fi. *Tropic of Orange* flirts with an apocalyptic vision of the north-western Mexico-U.S. borderland, but its consistent return to questions of environmental justice prohibits a more forceful apocalyptic logic. However, the novel's excessive rejection of the apocalyptic results in an improbably optimistic ending which seems to hedge against the very possibility Dunlap identifies. By obviating the kinetic orientation towards widespread destruction in the narrative, Yamashita is able, at the last minute, to reaffirm the enduring significance of the environmental justice struggles that precede the novel's conclusion. The impasse is made even clearer in *Inherent Vice*, in which a belief that the earth will self-correct anthropogenic pollution is intimated as causative of a diluvian inundation. Finally, *Mermaids in Paradise*'s at first diverse

cast of characters coalesces into a binary structure. One group views mermaids as part of a natural order that includes humans, which leads to a re-enchantment of the natural world and concomitant activism. A second group relies on a conceptual dichotomization of humans and other animals in order to commodify the mermaids and treat them as simply another natural resource. This latter group typifies a disenchanting view of nature, and is implicated in a slow apocalypticism in which nature as “meal ticket” is systematically and fatally parasitized by human exploitation (184).

However ubiquitous cynicism and gloom may be in various kinds of environmental narrative, ecofiction succeeds in developing the conceptual ecology of disenchantment into a crucible for an affective re-coupling with the non-human. The possibility of forging affective bonds between readers and the referents of narrative objects is at the crux of critical engagement with re-enchantment. Bennett puts environmental politics in conversation with Weberian disenchantment, showing how this requires a careful reappraisal of disenchantment rather than a wholesale rejection of it. She resists disenchantment by marginalizing it, which is itself a strategy for enhancing the enchantment effect she theorizes. Using the same logic as for enchantment, the narrative of disenchantment obstructs possibilities for change by detaching us from agency in the world. To paraphrase Bennett, the prospect of an alienated existence on a dead planet is far from motivational; if joy can propel ethics, then misery surely mires it. Such a claim is informed by early theories of affect, in particular Baruch Spinoza’s work, which both Bennett and Sara Ahmed, to be discussed below, make explicit (*Vibrant* x, 4). Bennett’s view that ethics requires the positive affects of joy and compassion involves a rejection of the kind of determinism that Dunlap identifies in relation to the impasse of apocalyptic fiction. Fiction that resists a predominantly apocalyptic impulse creates a minimal site of hope for ethics by clearly demonstrating what is fundamental, that the kind of broad-scale improvements sought by Yamashita’s detective/journalists, Pynchon’s counterculture, or Millet’s holidaymakers are at least not impossible.

Bennett’s contention that enchantment makes ethics possible is borne out by the novels’ use of figures of re-enchantment as a way of anchoring a political or ethical subtext. Without the Lemurian subplot, *Inherent Vice* would have less to say about climate change. Exchanging Millet’s mermaids for parrotfish would seriously diminish the sense of wonder that leads to ethical action in the novel. In her reading of Weberian disenchantment, Bennett traces rationalism as a social phenomenon opposed to magical thinking from ancient Hebrew prophets to its “logical conclusion” in Puritanism which, she argues, itself enabled modern capitalism. “Still,” Bennett writes, “it is important to emphasize the ongoing nature of the rationalization process—the enchanted world is always in the process of being superseded by a calculable world” (*Enchantment* 58). Here, calculability involves scientific measurement and thus the ability to predict and control events. Using Bennett’s own methodological strategy of adding nuance through inversion, we might say

the opposite is also true: that immeasurable or uncontrollable experiences and phenomena are enchanting, that the ineffable is not only captivating but also ethics-enabling. Where religion once held sway as enchanter of the natural world, writers have drawn on mythological, pseudo-scientific, and non-real figures to do the same work. This is perhaps most evident in the tension drawn between capitalist instrumentalism and intrinsic value set in motion by the moment of wonder in *Mermaids in Paradise*.

Ecofiction that alternately enchants and disenchants is suggestive of Bennett's view of the uses of enchantment, while also departing from it for the sake of realistically dramatizing pervasive environmental dilemmas. Like Weber, Bennett situates disenchantment within a long history from the cultural transformations of the primitive world through to modern secularization in which the "main culprit" of disenchantment—modern science—"strips meaning from the world by reducing it to pure immanence" (*Enchantment* 60). On the other hand, authors who employ non-real figures transform mundane and unattractive problems into captivating ones with the use of an enchanted orange, mermaids, or other alluring devices. In later chapters I discuss how, in *Vibrant Matter*, Bennett develops a fuller account of "enchanted materialism" (80) to challenge in a more sustained and direct manner the dead, inert world we are left with after the realization of total instrumentalization. Here, her main insistence is that the historical expectation of a telos for scientific practice and the subsequent realization that scientific study is an ongoing synthesis with no clear end point "carries with it a psychology of disappointment and an affect of meaninglessness" which characterizes disenchantment (*Enchantment* 61). In other words, mapping ecological problems within a purely scientific discourse produces an unsatisfying open-endedness. Apocalyptic narratives, which draw so often on the science-fiction genre, disenchant by way of their forgone conclusion of total destruction. On the other hand, a purely scientific approach forms an opposite pole which is defined by an unsatisfying open-endedness in which solving one problem often discloses the possibility or actuality of countless others. This suggests a case for an aesthetic balance between dis- and re-enchantment in which crisis and possibility are both represented, and which is precisely how the novels I discuss in the following chapters proceed. The novels that attempt this equilibrium may still reject narrative closure, as *Inherent Vice* and *Mermaids in Paradise* do in different ways, but they still affirm the importance of agency. *Inherent Vice* ends with Doc waiting by the roadside for something to happen, while *Mermaids in Paradise* closes shortly after mention of an asteroid headed toward Earth which could have been stopped had the relevant bodies acted in time. Nevertheless, the critique of political sloth that I emphasize in my reading of *Inherent Vice*, and the call for activism in *Mermaids in Paradise*, both stand as tacit solutions growing out of an open-ended present. While Pynchon's novel remains uncertain about the efficacy of political resistance, Millet's openly praises it.

For ecofiction to work through environmental crisis without becoming a source of disenchantment it must navigate between scientific and supernatural, or religious, dogma. For Bennett, modern science's odd bedfellow and accomplice in disenchantment is religion, specifically the monotheistic versions Weber refers to, or what she calls the "'ethically' oriented" European and American Christian sects (*Enchantment* 62). The important point to note here is that the structures of control religions use to master social practices are what disenchant. Modern, organized religion and its structures of control contrasts with the enchanted and personal practices of polytheistic belief (*From Max* 148-49). The introduction of mythic elements, from revealing Los Angeles through the lens of film noir to fusions of noir with other styles like magical realism or psychedelia—*Tropic of Orange* and *Inherent Vice* are both examples of this—through to Millet's aquatic hybrid, are all decidedly syncretic. They draw on their own genealogies of representation, thus resisting the disenchantment of the totalizing systems that Bennett, via Weber, is critical of.

In a pithy account of disenchantment that gestures towards an understated ecological politics, Bennett collapses environmental ethics into a dichotomy of an inanimate earth and the human race: "The disenchantment tale figures nonhuman nature as more or less inert 'matter'" (*Enchantment* 7).¹⁷ Her formulation discloses a paradigm of alienation from nature and suggests a complete instrumentalization of it which ties in with ecofictional forms such as travel narratives, as well as critical writing on capitalism. This manner of seeking a nature that is always elsewhere can be seen, for instance, in Deb and Chip's desire to visit the terrestrial and marine environments of the British Virgin Islands, and in Gabriel's attachment to his holiday home's orange grove in *Tropic of Orange*. Bennett's understanding of enchantment resonates with specified codes within environmental thought such as biocentrism, which seeks to displace humankind as the privileged subject within any ecological network. This follows the common story that human societies were once animistic, enchanted with nature, but lost that spiritual perspective and with it the ability to treat with their environment in a non-instrumentalist, non-economic manner. For Bennett, the ecological dimensions of enchantment crystallize in her incisive reading of Henry David Thoreau where she identifies the experience of disruption as crucial to enchantment. Thoreau's vision of nature, in her account, centers on his courtship of "the Wild so that he might experience the charm/disruption that [she calls] enchantment," which itself facilitates the cultivation of "the ethical principles of nonconformity, material simplicity, and ecological living" (*Enchantment* 95). This constellation informs to some extent the ethics presented in

¹⁷ Bennett develops this line of thought explicitly in *Vibrant Matter* where she pursues what she calls "vital materialism," at its heart a synthesis of human and nonhuman matter that seeks to uncover their mutually-bound "vibrancy" (17, xiii).

each of the novels I analyze, but resonates particularly with Pynchon's depiction of the Californian counterculture's oil-soled bare feet and anti-establishment lifestyles.

Ahmed's political theory of wonder likewise assesses the productive capacity of revelation and the destructive/productive dialectic implied by it. Revelation is destructive in the sense of doing away with an extant referential frame, and productive in the sense of reconfiguring its elements into a revised perspective. In *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, Ahmed's main interest is the subject-object relation seen through a range of political layers in order to examine the ethics and effects of the affective states we attach to political discourses. Her emphasis is also on the cultural dimension of these affects and the rhetoric that frames them, particularly in relation to Australia's Stolen Generations, immigration in the U.K., and terrorism. Ahmed is interested in the work of emotion in the public sphere and to this end gives a depersonalized account of affect as political rather than strictly phenomenological or corporeal. In her chapter on feminism, after discussing pain, anger, and counteraction, Ahmed considers the positive affects that exhort what she calls feminist attachments. Where Bennett's account of re-enchantment discusses and prescribes a set of ethical stances an individual may take, Ahmed's political account of wonder situates a comparable logic and process within a sphere of collective action.

Ahmed's insights into affect and attachment provide ecological politics with a basis for the claim that when ecofiction seeks to inculcate environmental conscientiousness, it does so partly through the positive affectivity of wonder. Ahmed's formulation of wonder as politically activating rests partly on an analysis of its inverse: normality. Ordinarity has the power to conceal potential actions and perceptions, approximating the function of disenchantment: it counters the creation of ethical commitments, though the quotidian is less useful critically because of its broadness and its lack of affective freight. Following Wittgenstein, Ahmed argues that "What is ordinary, familiar or usual often resists being perceived by consciousness. It becomes taken for granted, as the background we do not even notice." Her claim illuminates how the environment has been largely ignored by literary criticism until the inception of environmental literary studies that now foreground it as a significant narrative constituent. While the ordinary lurks in the background of consciousness, the extraordinary, such as magical or fantastic figures and tropes, brings subjectivity to the fore. Where disenchantment might inflame and agitate, as film noir demonstrates so powerfully, and in doing so fortify existing affective commitments, and where ordinarity presumes the legitimacy of the existing state of affairs, and worse, presents a threat of apathy and detachment, wonder is different from both. In Ahmed's terms, "wonder expands our field of vision and touch," bringing us into closer contact with the world around us and inspiring affective engagement with it, which in Ahmed's argument is a precondition of political action (179).

Literary critic Stephen Greenblatt's consideration of the role of wonder in history complements Ahmed's account, and is applicable to the novels I discuss. Greenblatt's approach includes the fantastical as a privileged font of wonder. Reading the history of the European colonization of America, he explores the various expressions, meanings, and exchanges of wonder as they pertain to European observation of the cultures and environs they encountered in the region, particularly on the southern continent. "Wonder," Greenblatt argues, "is the central figure in the initial European response to the New World." Prefiguring Ahmed's argument that the cultivation of wonder enables seeing the world anew and a reconfiguring of our perceptions of it, Greenblatt's discussion frames the affect from the perspective of colonialism, depicting the response as a spontaneous reaction to a new world. Though his study centers on colonial relations, the fact that wonder is triggered by environmental as well as human interactions is a useful bridge between Ahmed's focus on feminism and wonder, and my own use of the concept as potentially ecological. Greenblatt compares the experience of wonder in this era to the "'startle reflex' one can observe in infants," revealing the developmental and historical continuum of the quality and function of the reaction from this colonial period right up until Ahmed's examples drawn from feminist theory and praxis (14). Greenblatt's focus on the narrativization of activities that bring about this cognitive state is also suggestive of the potential for enchantment via what he calls "the primal power of storytelling," a crucial part of which is the marvelous and non-real (1). When he considers the "treatment of the marvelous" in the often fantastical travelogue *Mandeville's Travels*, he posits that the "blend of spectacular credulity and genial skepticism" conveyed authority and generated fascination (30). He further argues, via Anselm, that attempts to determine authorship diminish the power of the *Mandeville's Travels* since the "reality-claim is stronger than reality itself" (36). Following this line of thought, ecofiction that integrates, as Mandeville, the fantastical with the actual and asks of its readers to indulge its fantastical elements as significant, can thus rhetorically generate wonder and exude authority. While in the context of colonial relations Greenblatt's insistence on wonder elides the power relations implied in such contact, in ecofiction, this rhetorical combination strikes a balance between mimetic representations of the dystopian reality of ecological decline and re-enchanting an ethical obligation to attenuate it.

Wonder goes hand in hand with re-enchantment, and I suggest their common ethical value is in allowing us to perceive things anew. Re-enchantment is seen to follow from wonder in each of the novels, as an initial period of bewilderment gives way to ethical questions that characters who have been enchanted by their encounter are better equipped to address. Given that a central challenge facing environmental thought is how to shift conventional modes of perception we unconsciously employ to navigate the world around us, both Greenblatt's historical account of wonder and Ahmed's feminist approach are relevant to ecological questions. Describing

Marxism as a “philosophy of wonder” for its historicization of perceptual objects previously taken for granted, Ahmed insists on the historicity of wonder, its tendency to transform the ordinary into something self-expressive of the forces that shaped it (180). This binds wonder to the pedagogical impulse to understand and explain the nature, meaning, and origins of objects and processes. Each of the novels I examine inscribes layers of meaning like palimpsests—historical, political, biological, mythological—into its wondrous objects, imbuing them with dense significance and unpacking these as the object or creature moves through the narrative. This technique or way of seeing draws attention to the malleability of our perceptions of reality. By unveiling the historical formation of our perspective on and assumptions about the object, be it mermaid or environment, it reveals that inevitably our appreciation of it will further change, which in turn discloses possibilities that will shape its future meaning. Ahmed argues that this promise of modification supplies the hope which is a precondition for political action—she and Bennett both stress the role of hope in this respect—while at the same time it necessitates action in order to impact the direction in which the narrative is to proceed.

Ahmed discusses the political potential of being thrown out of our usual perceptual assumptions about the world, and thus discerning a new relation to it or its parts. Following this, I argue that the unexpected appearance of the unfamiliar produces wonder. The novels in this study reveal that political wonder, which is the ability to see the world anew and then forge or alter our affective attachments to it, is vitalized through their creation of what Bennett calls sites of enchantment. Such sites emerge out of disenchanting or noir depictions of often familiar scenarios drawn from reality. Yamashita’s depiction of a Los Angeles where the homeless breathe exhaust fumes in shelters adjacent to the congested Harbor Freeway, the oil-slicked coastline of Pynchon’s fictional Gordita Beach, and the threat to a mythical species, which, I argue, is a proxy for real though non-specific actual species, portrayed in Millet’s British Virgin Islands, are all possible sites of enchantment. *Mermaids in Paradise* is particularly rich in depicting the subjective functioning of enchantment. Most of the novel’s characters experience enchantment at their first encounter with the mermaids, and some go on to forge affective and then political attachments to the creatures, while others quickly form plans to exploit them. Another example comes from the marine biologist Nancy who tries and fails to communicate the enchantment the humble parrotfish excites in her to the other holidaymakers.

So far I have sought to identify a narrative these texts share in as they influence our affective connection to the world around us by modifying key preconceptions. How these may occur is of central concern to environmental literary criticism. I then argued that narratives that channel the fantastic as a means of triggering political wonder have the potential to expedite and motivate perceptual shifts that may manifest behaviorally through discussion and action. If fiction is able to do this, such texts themselves become what Ben-

nett calls sites of enchantment, for which the essential criterion is the production of affective attachment through a subversion of expectation. *Mermaids in Paradise* is, again, the clearest example of this. When Deb and Chip sight mermaids with stained teeth and sickly-white skin, this disappoints their expectation that if such creatures exist at all they should appear glamorously Disney-esque. However, the encounter does not mute their feelings of wonder or almost immediate awareness of a custodial responsibility. Because of the dialectical nature of revelation in the novels I discuss, itself a legacy of the detective form, the critical concept of re-enchantment is better suited to my analysis than simply using enchantment. The process of contrasting hope and despair does not simply enchant by revealing a hidden quality that was always there, lurking in the background; rather, it re-enchants by inflecting a figure or phenomenon with new affects. *Inherent Vice*'s lost continent of Lemuria, for example, is first introduced as a site of enchantment, but later becomes suspect through its apocalyptic affiliation with Los Angeles, only to be re-encharmed as we discover it may in fact represent the specter of Los Angeles' past rather than straightforwardly intimating a possible future legacy for the city if unmitigated ecological degradation continues.

The novels in question capitalize on such kitsch Disney-like figures as a drowned utopian city or the mermaid as a strategy for activating political interest in environmentalism. They seek to re-enchant their readers by breaking the frame of catastrophic environmental discourse and introducing redemptive aesthetic elements to otherwise more-or-less apocalyptic narratives. They do so via re-enchantment by co-opting that ideological Hollywood method that Mike Davis has called "imagineering" (*City* 23). This work of perspective-alteration resonates with the goal of environmental literary criticism I refer to above, that seeks to change the ways in which we conceptualize nature, summarized in Glotfelty's assessment that "current environmental problems are largely of our own making, are, in other words, a by-product of culture" (xxi).

My selection of texts and chapter arrangement take into account the degree to which each novel engages environmental issues directly, and the various ways in which noir figures as a narratological influence. For instance, *Mermaids in Paradise* exhibits nostalgia for the noir hero's rejection of political injustice, while lamenting the implausibility of this kind of approach to large-scale environmental problems. In *Tropic of Orange*, noir provides a toolbox for narrative development through investigative journalist figures and the use of tortuous plotting. *Inherent Vice* is both parody and homage to noir, loosely linking its demise, as a style expressive of leftist politics, to the collapse of the counterculture. The extent to which each novel lends itself to ecocritical readings is inversely related to its engagement with noir. Millet's novel is first and foremost an ecofictional narrative, whereas Pynchon's novel in particular, and Yamashita's to an extent, at first glance seem unlikely to justify an ecocritical approach. Yet they sit comfortably

within the parameters of ecofiction as it has been defined by critics like Lawrence Buell, Patrick D. Murphy, and Diane Ackerman. Buell posits four criteria for identifying environmental texts:

1. *The nonhuman environment is present not merely as a framing device but as a presence that begins to suggest that human history is implicated in natural history ...*
2. *The human interest is not understood to be the only legitimate interest ...*
3. *Human accountability to the environment is part of the text's ethical orientation ...*
4. *Some sense of the environment as a process rather than as a constant or a given is at least implicit in the text. (Environmental Imagination 7-8)*

Tropic of Orange and *Inherent Vice* satisfy these criteria, though they both exhibit largely anthropocentric treatments of environment that repeatedly loop back to human interests. This is particularly so in *Tropic of Orange* where, for instance, a lack of trees means no shade for the local residents, the orange that will not grow in the increasingly warm climate personally disappoints Gabriel; as quickly as environmental distress indicators occur, they are linked to human concerns. *Inherent Vice* phrases its diluvian narrative in much the same way: the loss of Lemuria is a tragedy for the Lemurian refugees, and the novel's development politics are often most potently linked to issues of class and race. However, the reflexivity between humans and their environments does entail a mutual implication, acknowledged through feedback loops, ethics of accountability, and a strong acknowledgement of environments as responsive to human activity rather than simply a static backdrop for this activity. In doing so, they also fulfil Murphy's requirement that nature is a major component of the text (1). Both Yamashita's and Pynchon's novels feature nature as a potentially threatening force, which is offset by mysticism and enchantment, all of which accords with Ackerman's appraisal of ecofiction as moving between the monstrous and a zone of magic and inspiration (3).

If *Tropic of Orange* and *Inherent Vice* largely agree with these and other definitions of ecofiction, they still remain marginal examples for the abiding attention they give to human history, politics, and culture. They are, nonetheless, interesting subjects for ecocritical study because of this marginal status, and they provide strong contrast with the more orthodox ecofiction found in Millet's *Mermaids in Paradise*. Millet's novel displays few of the postmodern tendencies of the other novels, and is more wholly a work of ecofiction that centers on specific ecological dilemmas like species extinction, activism, and apocalypse. Where the first two novels smuggle their environmentalism through heterogeneous metaphors and suggest political and spiritual interrelationships between humans and environment, after a brief and misleading, though fitting, introduction to a romance plot *Mermaids in Paradise* puts its environmental setting, activism, and conflict front and center for the

duration of the plot. Where Yamashita and Pynchon connect more persistently with noir conventions and preoccupations, noir has a smaller role in Millet's novel, less even than in previous works of hers such as *Ghost Lights* and *Magnificence* that play on the detective genre. Despite drawing the least on noir aesthetics, *Mermaids in Paradise* features the most prominent and dramatic dialogic between dis- and re-enchantment of all three novels. Arguably, Millet achieves this because her decoupling from noir allows a more sustained engagement with re-enchantment, until the novel's understated but nevertheless apocalyptic conclusion.

Because of their common literary provenance, particularly noir, narrative devices, and environmental politics, the novels fit well together. Yet their differing textual approaches and environmental problematics set them at enough distance from one another to provide distinct critical outcomes. Their broad common concern with environmental degradation and activism, relayed through a dialogic spanning affects of wonder and disenchantment suggests seeing them as a stage on which issues of environmental justice, the local-global relations indicated by climate change, and questions of extinction are played out. These thematic concerns also mark a formal development from a heavier anthropocentric perspective expressed through post-modernist techniques toward more ecocentric attention to the rights of other species, including the question of inherent versus instrumental value. Taken together, all of these features manifest a more generic ecofictional form.

The simplification of style and content in both Millet and Pynchon, when compared with their earlier works, can be likewise read as a formal concession in the service of engagement with audience and the Anthropocene. However, what Clark concludes is an evasiveness in *Flight Behavior*'s narrative closure, since it is concerned with human justice rather than butterflies or environment, is avoided in all three novels I discuss. Though *Tropic of Orange* feigns narrative closure, even a cursory reflection on the novel's somewhat puzzling end—the optimistically framed reunification of a family—sees that its myriad dilemmas, including climate refugeeism, environmental justice issues like infrastructural racism, and desertification, remain unresolved. *Inherent Vice* and *Mermaids in Paradise* are better examples, as neither novel discloses anything very definitive about what happens next. However, as a novel that is primarily concerned with its human dimensions, *Inherent Vice* is not obliged to meet the same standards as a work primarily concerned with the Anthropocene. In any case, by recurrently emphasizing the situation of their characters within anthropogenic feedback loops of environmental threat, the human drama that motivates much of the reader's affective involvement is unresolved, remaining tensile, even productively unsatisfying.

The negotiation between disenchantment and re-enchantment in the novels involves particular rhetorical strategies. These configurations of language and literary form involving setting, tone, genre, figures, intended audience, and so on, convey specific linguistic effects. My focus is on the way these

effects are used to present nonrealistic figures which interrupt mimetic depictions of degraded or precarious environments. Like most ecofiction, the novels I discuss are both heuristic in the methods they use to promote environmental consciousness and cautionary, however, they differ from many texts in their pivotal use of such non-real figures. These non-real interruptions enable the novels to steer clear of a deterministic apocalyptic trajectory, and they recast the narratives in terms that are more congenial to engendering an environmental custodial responsibility.¹⁸

Jenny Price's insistence that the concrete channel of the L.A. River is not only "nature" but a powerful symbol for future environmentalism is an example of the work of defamiliarization ("Remaking American Environmentalism" 540, 542). It clears the ground for recognizing other fabricated sites of representation, like anti-mimetic figures, as standing in for aspects of the Anthropocene that are difficult to represent. Despite Price's focus on human-built environments, the methodological assumptions of her work align it with re-enchantment, as she attempts to follow Val Plumwood's admonition to "adopt a counter-hegemonic program to restore planetary balance and establish dialogical and carefully negotiated relationships with our planetary partners" (167), though their differing approaches to and materials for analysis modulate the terms of this oppositional technique. The fundamental compromise Price and her Los Angeles Urban Rangers make with their key stratagem of mindfulness in urban environs is that it risks a reification of anthropocentric values, though this is offset by its potential to speak to a larger demographic. On the other hand, Plumwood argues for the effacement of anthropocentric views by dwelling in nature and cultivating interspecies empathy, undertakings that are unavailable or unsuited to many (168, 229-30). In fact, Plumwood's technique of adopting a number of stances, such as intentional recognition, and an attentive, generous, self-critical demeanor (175-76, 182-83), is less straightforward than the instruction in the Los Angeles Urban Rangers' *Field Guide to the American Road Trip* to count the number of lanes on the road, or take pictures of stereotyped landscapes like "cowboy & indian desert" or "enchanted forest" (22, 24). However, both approaches entail a self-reflexive process of re-enchantment which aims at reshaping sedimented ideas and behaviors that underlie human exceptionalism, or forms of anthropocentrism. Authors of ecofiction that continue the postmodernist tradition of flirting with boundaries between literary and genre fiction strike a balance between the popular and perspicacious, as well as human and nonhuman concerns.

The work of defamiliarization—that is to say, wonder—is fundamental to fictions interested in mobilizing readers toward new attitudes or actions.

¹⁸ *Mermaids in Paradise* can be read as an exception to this for its apocalyptic ending. However, the novel proper does not contain a sustained apocalyptic trajectory, rather this device comes only briefly at the novel's end as a sort of *deus ex machina*.

Using various narrative strategies, ecofiction generally invites its readership to follow a certain line of thinking about the environmental problematics it portrays or suggests. However, this standard feature of literary fiction is subject to what in environmental philosophy is called the “directionality problem” that points to the difficulty of specifying change as negative or positive when evaluated on ethical grounds (Sarkar 96). This problem can be ideologically complex, though it can also be visceral and straightforward, as Sarkar’s example illustrates: “An accidental encounter with a dangerous wild animal, such as a venomous snake, can potentially be terrifying. It may even lead to a lack of sympathy for that animal’s conservation” (97). Compared to collaborative writers, novelists are in a privileged position to fashion their narratives to encourage a particular interpretation and thus exert some control over the directionality problem. In this regard they differ from scientists and authors of environmental reports, as well as television and film writers who routinely combine multiple aesthetic and political visions. Though novels are clearly open to multiple and sometimes dramatically varied interpretations, those I discuss provide clear routes of accessibility into their environmental politics. The concern over how climate change links to economics with impacts on the poor is as clearly thematized in *Tropic of Orange* as the tension between the conservation and rights of charismatic megafauna versus less iconic or inherently appealing species is in *Mermaids in Paradise*.

The first chapter takes up Millet’s novel *Mermaids in Paradise*, which is the most representational work of ecofiction according to the criteria I advanced earlier. The novel stages a transition out of California to the British Virgin Islands, the main setting, in order to explore questions of species loss, animal rights, environmental instrumentalization, and so on. I argue that Millet casts the mermaid as a figure of enchantment and wonder, making use of the cryptid’s place in popular culture and its charismatic status to interrogate the place of nature within the capitalist episteme. Furthermore, I analyze how the experience of wonder resulting from sighting the mermaids is, for some characters, enough to trigger the ethical obligation to protect and then free the mermaids, which is an undertaking that dominates the remainder of the narrative. I discuss the challenges to this sense of duty in relation to the alternative of exploitation and I elaborate on the friction between instrumentalist reason and deontological ethics. Finally, I link the novel’s expression of disenchantment to its engagement with film noir and detective fiction.

In the second chapter, I argue that in *Tropic of Orange* Yamashita focuses a number of political issues facing her contemporary Los Angeles through the lens of Davis’ “sunshine and *noir*” dialectic (*City* 23). The novel’s concern with environmental justice is no less central than its consideration of race politics, immigration, and neoliberalism, and though each of these will be discussed in the chapter, I read the novel mainly as ecofiction. The noir aesthetics and the concerns it frames represent the quintessential expression of disenchantment in Los Angeles fiction as well as evincing a meaningful connection to place, while the narrative threads concerning climate change

open the novel up to a broader geography of threat. Though the novel ranges across many issues and topics, from Nicaraguan contras to Mexican wrestling, I focus on the novel's treatment of environmentally-related problematics. Using Davis' history of Los Angeles in *City of Quartz* as a tool for reading Yamashita's novel, I examine *Tropic of Orange's* utilization of noir and hard-boiled fiction through detective-journalist figures and other devices. I also examine her desacralization of the central figure of the orange and its place in the Californian economic landscape, from the sunshine component of the dialectic, visualized via the fruit as a bright, heliacal, orange-colored sphere, to the disenchanting noir status of the dangerous and corrupted. I demonstrate the ways in which the novel fleshes out Davis' contention that Los Angeles functions prognostically for capitalism by staging predictions about impacts of the North American Free Trade Agreement on the lives of those in Los Angeles and Mexico, and the border politics between the U.S. and Mexico.

The third chapter's primary novel, *Inherent Vice*, is set in a fictional Los Angeles some twenty years prior to Yamashita's NAFTA-era L.A. The novel itself is not primarily concerned with environmentalism. Rather, questions of environment are subordinate to transformations in capitalism, the nature and failure of California's counterculture, and the mythologized history of the 1960s. Despite this, I focus on the novel's ecological narrative, particularly in terms of Pynchon's representation of a countercultural environmental politic. I look at how the distorted noir mode vacillates from disenchanting tropes of environmental degradation and political failure through deterministic thinking, to an ironized re-enchantment via the fantastic geography of Lemuria. I argue that Pynchon both presents and subverts a sense of wonder at the fantastic. I use it as a prism through which to contemplate its relation to and effect on responses to climate problematics. Bennett's formulation of disenchantment is instructive here, as it entails a perceived Fall from a prelapsarian once-upon-a-time when "Nature was purposive" and "God was active in the details of human affairs" into an overdetermined state of rationalism that views "nonhuman nature as more or less inert 'matter'" (*Enchantment* 7). The tension between a deterministic transcendent power and human agency is explored in this chapter with reference to the depiction of an earth enchanted by a Gaia-like figure which, I argue, Pynchon encourages readers to question.

The chapters move from a clearly stated though formally undeveloped relation with noir, to a closer generic engagement with the style as a means of suggesting a relation between environmental issues and a disenchantment that is geographically and culturally tied to Los Angeles. Noir, used in the novels to convey a textual mood as well as an intertextual set of referential points, gives way in the third chapter to a less specified representation of disenchantment. Beginning with *Mermaids in Paradise*, I argue that noir appears as a loose framing device and note that the novel briefly cites the style and aligns noir's perceived demise to its formal preoccupations with

the rise of national U.S. fantasies of sovereignty and control. Set mostly outside of the home of noir, I read Millet's novel more in terms of a dialogic between dis- and re-enchantment that corresponds to and is expressive of an instrumentalist ecological politics. In the second chapter, my analysis of *Tropic of Orange* draws on Davis' history of the material struggles that have influenced the development of Los Angeles, partly in terms of texts produced in or about the city. Despite the novel's foregrounded frustrations with the present state and projected future of Los Angeles, it maintains a buoyancy that resists disenchantment. The novel's somewhat unconvincing triumph over its own fatalistically noir trajectory closes with a promise of unity that effaces the societal disintegration it dwells on for much of its plot. The third chapter on *Inherent Vice* attempts to show the ways in which noir is reshaped by the historical context of California in the 1960s, and I argue for the ways in which its aesthetics are distorted and re-imagined in order to question the beliefs and practices of the Californian counterculture. At the center of this analysis are questions about why the revolutionary politics of the 1960s failed and an appraisal of some of the implications of its defeat.

Following Ahmed's theorization, I argue that the novels include elements of wonder that are inherently political because of the subject matter they inscribe, as well as the affective response they represent within the narrative, and which they perhaps also seek to engender extra-diegetically. As such, I argue for the ways in which the novels interrogate the potential for fantastic narrative objects to generate a politics that would be less accessible on a purely mimetic level. If such fictions can simultaneously re-enchant ecological discourse, forge affective environmental and interspecies bonds, and in doing so generate productive perspectives on and attitudes toward ecology, they surely contribute to the transition to sustainable practices that underpin the ecological imperative.

Chapter One

“Goodbye to perfect legs”: Wonder and Instrumentalism in *Mermaids in Paradise*

In the wonderment of this taxonomy, the thing we apprehend in one great leap, the thing that, by means of the fable, is demonstrated as the exotic charm of another system of thought, is the limitation of our own, the stark impossibility of thinking *that*.

—Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things*

In this chapter, I discuss Lydia Millet’s choice of the mermaid as her central mythical figure in a novel mainly concerned with a somewhat unconventional thematic pairing of love and marriage with radical environmental activism. The chapter asks what the significance of the fantastical mermaid might be in a novel that emphasizes real-world problems of short and long-term ecological conservation. I argue that the mermaid breaks the frame of typical conservation narratives, in that it gives credence to the potential of wonder as an affective intervention that activates ecological consciousness. Whereas in Chapter Two I examine the figure of the orange for the significance of its metonymical connection to trade and labor, here I want to understand the mermaid with respect to its popular cultural symbolism, and its presumed status on a sociozoological scale. Central to this analysis is the contention Slavoj Žižek posits, that “instrumental reason as such is capitalist, grounded in capitalist relations” (*Less than Nothing* 257). My claim is that Millet offers a critique of instrumentalism that is anchored in her novel’s narratives of disenchantment, explicitly linking it to noir through Deb’s reflections on the cultural meaning of the style’s decline and transformation. I argue that Millet fleshes out her critique in her narrative of ecological threat by using a fantastical element to question the economic values of instrumental reason, thereby opening up a consideration of the potential value of wonder in environmental politics.

Mermaids in Paradise is typical of Millet’s novelistic style—brief, tightly constructed, with alternating humor and pathos in its treatment of environmental issues. Millet, who has experience working with the U.S. National Resources Defense Council, is knowledgeable about the nature and practice of environmental conservation, as well as the bureaucratic regulations that

apply. This expertise is visible in many of Millet's novels, and is perhaps put to its best use in her most recently published trilogy for an adult audience, *How the Dead Dream*, *Ghost Lights*, and *Magnificence*. Each of these novels deals in differing ways with biodiversity loss. In *Magnificence*, the protagonist's discovery of a human corpse in a comprehensive collection of taxidermy forms a climactic point of the narrative that directs its aesthetic questions about species decline and extinction toward a broader, existential perspective on mass extinction. While the novel is subtler than *Mermaids in Paradise*, its environmental implication is clear: the extinction of other species due to anthropogenic factors foreshadows the eradication of our own. *Mermaids in Paradise* replicates this structurally, with a significant difference in content. The novel is set in Virgin Gorda, the third-largest of the British Virgin Islands, whose population relies heavily on the island's ecosystem for their economic survival. After insinuating that commodification of mermaids would be yet another step in the destruction of the island's precious ecosystem, and so another step towards the implosion of the island's habitability for humans and others, the threat of total destruction comes in the form of an asteroid headed towards planet earth. It is primarily through the plot's closing anticipation of the asteroid impact that the novel moves from local to global environmental concerns, though the latter are also intimated through the figure of the whale and questions about its migration.

Working through Millet's body of work there is an observable trend toward a straightforward presentation of ecological issues. Prior to *Mermaids in Paradise*, Millet published *The Fires Beneath the Sea*. This is the first in a young adult eco-fantasy series, *The Dissenters*, and features a shape-shifting woman that marks a departure from the more realistic narratives of the cycle ending with *Magnificence*. Though written for an adult audience, *Mermaids in Paradise* re-uses this magical realist mode in which obviously unreal narrative elements appear beside mimetic ones. Nevertheless, the novel's setting is a realistic representation of an actual place, its characters have normal attributes and personal histories. By placing the mermaid as the central figure in this otherwise mundane honeymoon story, Millet can explore the relatively neglected question of the role of wonder and the fantastic in catalyzing and enabling active involvement in conservation. Furthermore, by her inclusion as central yet anomalous, the mermaid opens up ethical questions of species categorization as they intersect with the economic instrumentalization of nature, a practice that anchors the novel's sustained engagement with disenchantment.

Though Millet's novel may not strive to develop a cutting-edge environmental politics or transform a traditional rights-based argument for interspecies ethics, the novel is nonetheless noteworthy for the way these issues are presented. Millet foregrounds her knowledge of environmental issues in *Mermaids in Paradise*, writing in a more comical and wry mode than in her previous cycle of novels. Her ability to talk about serious problems without seeming to take the discussion too seriously, aligns the novel with some

other recent U.S. ecofiction such as Kingsolver's *The Poisonwood Bible* or Carl Hiaasen's *Skinny Dip* which mollifies dysphoric-affective commitments with the use of humor. Katherine Chandler notes that "shrillness" in environmental discourse, which occurs when problems are either overstated or treated with excessive solemnity, can derail environmentalist agendas. Chandler challenges critics of Kingsolver's tendency to foreground environmental didactics in her novels, arguing that her overt use of allegory is tempered by the rhetorical use of humor. Where more serious strands of ecofiction may suffer from a textual heaviness conveyed by the weight of realistic ecological problems framed in a fictional narrative, and a way of thinking through these problems that is mired in their reality rather than uplifted by imaginative thought, Millet eases tense moments and fraught issues through humor and wonder. This novel is also set apart from Kingsolver and Hiaasen's by its centering on an imaginary creature as the basis for its animal ethics discourse. By situating its readers in an alternative though thoroughly recognizable world, Millet ruptures received ways of thinking about survival and extinction, in particular the economic rationalism that dominates the novel's discussions of how the mermaids should be treated, and builds sympathy for these issues through humor and the fantastic.

In her analysis of the use of humor in environmental writing, Chandler draws on a theory of rhetorical persuasion to show how Kingsolver's use of it in *The Poisonwood Bible* negotiates "the uncomfortable territory of social injustices and demonstrates how they are inseparable from the land" and, through the foregrounding of incongruities between form and content, actually creates a sense of unity (329-30). *Mermaids in Paradise* likewise uses humor to highlight the ways in which injustice is inseparable from the land or ocean, and to promote collective resistance as a legitimate response to the instrumentalization of the natural world. Thus, when marine biologist Nancy instructs a group of divers who have just sighted and filmed mermaids for the first time that they should "have a well-defined, clear strategy for handling this," to protect the mermaids from exploitation, the response of one diver is, "Sell the video!" (109). This exchange is typical of the way the novel undercuts the tension that results when the ocean, and its life, is seen as abstract capital, which thus serves as a rationalization for the unjust treatment of the mermaids. Use of irony demonstrates the way Millet deflates dogmatic claims about what *has* to be done.

As well as the frequent use of humor, the novel organizes its associations between characters or events and the affects that frame them in a manner that supports the narrative's environmentalist commitments. Environmentalist action entails positive affects such as the excitement, enthusiasm, and alertness accompanying resistance, whereas dysphoria rules the seeming futility of an operation's logistical improbability, as it does the concluding sensibility of failure in those who tried to save the mermaids, even though they were rescued. Millet seems to endorse, then, the commonsensical view that you catch more flies with honey than vinegar, and puts the idea to work in con-

structing an easily accessible and thus practical—albeit perhaps simplistic—presentation of the detrimental effects that capitalist extraction has on ecosystems.

Millet makes use of a strategy of re-enchantment that I argue also occurs in Yamashita and Pynchon, by inserting a conspicuously fantastic figure into an otherwise mimetic representation. In her novel, a more straightforward narrative trajectory, temporality and characterization all befit the more accessible politics the story centers on. In these aspects, the novel runs counter to trends in ecocriticism that call for greater theoretical complexity, instead endorsing a pragmatic approach to environmental issues. The tone of *Mermaids in Paradise* likewise marks a departure from the bulk of modern self-consciously environmentalist writing which usually dates back to Rachel Carson's sometimes allusive and lyrical *Silent Spring*, first published in 1962. In the *Literature and the Environment* collection edited by George Hart and Scott Slovic, the fiction following Carson's formally integrated work of fact and imagination is varied in terms of style, genre, and so on. Nevertheless, from Ursula Le Guin's science-fictional *Earthsea* cycle, to Leslie Marmon Silko's *Ceremony*, most of this literature finds a common thread of tonal sincerity about its environmentalist agenda. Millet's use of humor and deprecation in conveying an orthodox politics of conservation strikes a marked contrast with these earlier works.

Mermaids in Paradise eases its reader into its conservationist narrative by way of a more conventional story concerned with the rituals and significance of marriage. John Weld describes Elizabethan comedy as “the festive celebration of true love and merry hearts in a love story, presented sympathetically but with amusement, leading to a happy ending” (1). This sense of comedy is central to the generic context of the “Newlyweds” section of the novel in which Deb and Chip's marriage precedes rather than concludes the bulk of the narrative, motivating their departure from urban west Los Angeles to the “green world” setting of Virgin Gorda. Following this, a more contemporary sense of comedy ensues, one that is rife with irony and satire. Ecological concerns do dominate the latter half of the novel, but even here environmentalism is problematized in terms of its aims, methods, and efficacy often being undercut by comedic moments. This differs from the approach of post-apocalyptic ecofiction, such as those mentioned in the Introduction, as well as eschewing the pathos of Wayne Johnson's *The Snake Game* which traces the coupled degradation of a reservation and the community that lives in it. By adding humor and the mythological mermaid to its objectively bleak plot concerning abduction, murder, exploitation, and extinction, Millet's novel approaches ecological politics in a stylistically casual way when compared with many of its antecedents in environmental literature.

In *Mermaids in Paradise*, Millett displaces the primary action from Los Angeles to Virgin Gorda, a small island whose tourism-based economy sees more than two hundred times its own population in annual visitors. In this

Millet implies some of the problems of scale dilation and the principles of eco-cosmopolitanism Heise raises in *Sense of Place and Sense of Planet*. The suggestion is that the “teeming hordes” of “my people” (260)—Deb’s compatriots—who she imagines invading the island to destroy the mermaids, are not altogether different from Deb and her partner, who have themselves staged a more deliberate and self-conscious arrival on the island in order to get away from it all and “jiggle inertly,” as Deb puts it (60). Eventually, through this process of self-reflection, re-enchantment, and disenchantment, Deb comes to a better understanding of how local economic and environmental systems are implicated in the global biosphere, being affected by transnational flows of capital. This recalls Heise’s reading of Le Guin’s story “Vaster Than Empires and More Slow” a story which Heise notes depicts “the encounter of a group of humans with an ecosystem that cannot be understood as encompassing anything less than an entire planet,” and emphasizes the communications network that pervades the planetary ecosystem (*Sense* 17). As in Heise’s reading of Le Guin’s science-fiction story, Deb’s burgeoning eco-cosmopolitanism “comes at the price of [her] individual identity” (20), a shift Millet registers, tongue-in-cheek, as Deb says goodbye to perfect legs.

Mermaids in Paradise opens during the lead up to Deb and Chip’s wedding. Deb goes through the rituals of planning a bachelorette party, and the wedding itself, buffered with a good measure of irony and an almost anthropological emotional distance from what she sees as the quaint follies of the ceremony. After Chip suggests numerous adventure-honeymoon package options the couple settle on a conventional getaway to the British Virgin Islands. The idyllic setting is, for Deb, degraded by various other guests who speak with her while she urinates, or proposition her for “toe-genital intimacy” (79). Deb is aware, however, that Chip’s amiable personality will enlist her in some involvement with the other guests, and this forms the crucible for the activism of the main characters. An extra-marital community forms in the wake of the mermaid sighting and this transitions the novel from what has begun to feel like a romantic comedy to a story about capitalism, activism, and interspecies ethics. Here, Millet seems to want to put both the ritualistic and quotidian in conversation with environmentalism. After dining with several other holidaymakers on their first night, on the following day Deb and Chip see one of their new acquaintances running along the beach towards them. The marine biologist, Nancy, rushes Deb and Chip onto a boat she has chartered for snorkeling, claiming she has sighted mermaids. The trio then organize a diving excursion with Rick, a filmmaker, and various others who have been told they will see a remarkable grouper. After cameras are prepared and members of the party have signed contracts that Nancy has drawn up for the protection of the mermaids, they head out to the reef where they find and film the novelty of human/fish hybrids.

After a night of celebrations, Deb and Chip are informed by the resort’s staff that Nancy has been found dead in her bathtub. They later learn that the

mermaid video is also missing. A mixture of surveillance and bribes reveals that the corporation that owns the resort is planning to capture the mermaids in nets and convert the resort into a mermaid zoo called the Venture of Marvels. Outraged at the corporation's scheme, Deb, Chip and some of the original party consider how to resist this commercialization of the mermaid reef. Others who sighted the mermaids on Nancy's dive opt to work for the corporation instead of honoring the contracts they signed with Nancy. The activists settle on a mixed strategy of media disclosure and direct action. They begin to sabotage the corporation's plans by internationally broadcasting a message about the situation while secretly gathering information about the project. Meanwhile, they make efforts to discover the truth about Nancy's death. After initiating plans to damage the fishing nets and recover the mermaid video, Nancy turns up alive and explains that she was abducted by the resort's management. The central drama of the novel has already been set up at this point, and the remainder of the narrative will explore tensions among the characters with the story developing increased suspense over the fate of the mermaids.

A divide opens up between those willing to work in secret for the corporation and those who wish to help the mermaids. As attempts are made to capture the mermaids, Deb becomes aware of the pending arrival of another threat, "my people, those teeming hordes ... brandishing their stupidity" (260). There are also religious zealots who arrive after media coverage of the mermaid sighting who consider the creatures to be abominations and want to destroy them. Amidst growing confusion, Deb's group is approached by two sympathetic government bureaucrats who ferry them out to a corporate armada gathered near the maritime boundary to discuss the legal status of the Venture of Marvels. The denouement takes place when a pod of blue whales appear and dive over the mermaid-nets. The whales then rescue the mermaids on their backs, and disappear over the horizon. As Deb and the others recover from this experience, what seems to be a neat ending to a story about saving mermaids while on holiday is transformed into an apocalyptic narrative that throws the preceding events into question.

The novel seems to have reached a happy ending. Mermaids have been rescued from captivity or death, Nancy's apparent murder was just an abduction, and the Venture of Marvels is successfully halted. However, the novel ends with Deb foreseeing "a future of decay and dereliction, a future where the ships floated on the vast waters with nowhere to sail to anymore," and reflecting that "in the end we'd failed the whales, much as we'd failed the mermaids" (279, 289). The idea of a decrepit future world flooded beyond recognition characterizes the increasingly sober tone in the final part of the novel, notwithstanding that the threat posed by the Venture of Marvels has been disarmed, or at least deferred. This complicates a possible ecocentric reading of the novel as privileging other animals' rights over human economic prerogatives since it presages a possible future that, however aesthetically displeasing to common sensibility, would ostensibly make for a perfect

mermaid habitat. In other words, by imagining a flooded world unfit for human habitation though probably all the better for mermaids, Millet's novel ultimately rejects the idea of another world as epistemologically viable. Millet's use of the fantastic not only acts as an agent of wonder, but also somewhat paradoxically makes use of the mythical in order to refer back to reality. (Pynchon's use of a similar trope will be discussed in Chapter Three with reference to Lemuria.) The apocalyptic prognostication the novel ends on also reinforces what the novel is ultimately putting at stake in its consideration of species loss, namely a set of cumulative effects resulting in mass extinction resulting in a planet that is inhospitable for humans.

Though the first two sections of the novel, "Newlyweds" and "Honeymoon," deal with love, work, and marriage, the facade of normality and stability that Millet later punctures acts as a foil to the danger and uncertainty that characterizes the environmental narrative. Though the novel will shift focus dramatically, these opening sections are crucial to the wonder—the moment of shock and re-enchantment—that readers are supposed to feel along with the diving group who witness the mermaids. Notwithstanding an extreme marathon event that Chip enters, the opening sections of the novel are marked by a blissful indolence that Deb characterizes as "jiggling inertly" (60). Jiggling inertly, Deb reflects, is what she and Chip do as they are conveyed across the holiday resort's grounds in a golf cart, an image more generally associated with class wealth. Thinking of that material prerequisite for jiggling—body fat—Deb considers the way fast food in the U.S. has inverted the historical balance of obesity from the wealthy to the poor, and concludes that the working poor do not jiggle inertly, but overtly. Inertia, then, is related to leisure and privilege, and Millet's novel presents an alternative to precisely the kind of inertia of mainstream Americans like Chip and Deb on ecological issues. This concern with a generalized and diverse sort of sloth will form the central concern of my reading of Pynchon's novel in the third chapter. Millet shows that Deb's sense of guilt and privilege over having leisure time leads her to reflect on others, particularly those "Middle Americans" who haunt the narrative, which clears the ground for the novel's primary juxtaposition of haves and have nots, as well as another, interspecies association between the island's occupants and those "inconceivable amphibious maidens," the mermaids (Foucault xvii). Using the prosaic handholding of betrothal, as well as marriage and honeymoon, Millet is laying the ground for readers to ask questions about the nature of categorization.

In his discussion of Jorge Luis Borges' alternative taxonomy titled the "Celestial Emporium of Benevolent Knowledge," Michel Foucault argues that this speculative system exposes the illegitimacy of the models of categorization prevalent in the human sciences. It is not the list's fabulous items that perturb Foucault, rather it is the proximity of the fanciful to the authentic. The categorical separation of the worldly from the fantastic exorcises, Foucault argues, the "possibility of dangerous mixes" (xvii). Foucault is concerned with the ways in which such practices interact with structures of

knowledge, whereas Millet concretizes the perceived danger of the mixing of categories as an issue of interspecies ethics, depicting “Middle American” firebrands who first encounter the newly discovered mermaid habitat intending to “Get rid of them. Our mission is *annihilation*. What if they interbreed with humans? What then?” (258-59). Millet here comically transposes the racist logic of miscegenation onto an animal rights issue and suggests the ethical confusion that stems from the problematic task of categorization which the mermaid, as a hybrid creature, both elicits and confounds. The mermaid *as* mermaid is shown to be not the site or source of animosity for those who wish to destroy them, rather what is provocative is the “narrowness of the distance separating them from (and juxtaposing them to)” humans (Foucault xvii). In addition to drawing the ire of the pastor and his parishioners who visit the island with the intention of slaughtering the mermaids, “the disconcerting effect of the proximity of extremes, or, quite simply, with the sudden vicinity of things that have no relation to each other” engenders a need to reassert the integrity of the human-as-species by violently excluding these from-the-torso-up humanoid bodies (*Order* xvii). The countervailing view to this fear of things out of place is represented in Deb’s group’s assumption of basic rights for mermaids because of how human they appear: “The mermaids don’t belong to you,” said Chip. “They’re not a fish stock. They’re half-human! They don’t belong to anyone!” (200). In stating that the mermaids are neither fish nor stock, Chip defines the mermaid-subject as more or less human, at least in terms of their right to autonomy. As well as raising questions about the valuation of non-charismatic species, Chip’s contrasting of fish stocks that can be owned and humans who cannot brings the ethics of categorization into conversation with questions of economic rationalism.

This concern is an enduring one for Millet and it is not limited to *Mermaids in Paradise*. In an article focusing on Millet’s earlier novel *How the Dead Dream*, Ella Soper notes Millet’s own characterization of her novels as having an “agenda of empathy” (Millet qtd. in Soper). In an analysis which skirts the interpretation of re-enchantment that I take up, Soper argues that this statement “[promotes] a politics of affect” which “mobilizes the agentic potential of empathic realization.” This empathy, Soper argues, is “elicited by the plights of identifiable individuals to a far greater extent than it is moved by those of countless and unknown others.” It would seem, then, that Millet’s shift in focus from actual charismatic megafauna like rhinoceros and elephants in *How the Dead Dream*, to the hybrid form of the mermaid takes one step further in her bid to build empathy for other animals by making them more familiar to us. In this sense, Millet attempts to smuggle empathy for aquatic creatures, particularly fish, via our established empathy for our own species. This is not, however, entirely straightforward. Rather than a wholesale acceptance of mermaids as partly human and thus worthy of our empathy, a set of characters reject them wholly by categorizing them as fish, thus making them valid targets for exploitation. This is a necessary tension

that bridges the familiar and unfamiliar, though with varying degrees of success.

Along with the potential for fear and abjection through the confusion of subject-object categorizations, classifying mermaids as human/fish/hybrid bears on issues of instrumentalization authorizing specific ways of treating other species. Chip's use of the term "fish stocks" evokes a sense in which the act of classifying the mermaids eschews proper consideration of their biological form in order to view the creatures as abstractions of capital. Opinions about what should be done with the mermaids polarize the characters into those who generally support the exploitation of mermaids for profit and those who assume the inherent value of the creatures and defend their right to self-determination. The profiteers reduce mermaids to being part of the natural environment and thus an exploitable resource, assimilating them to the reef and its other marine life.

Two distinct threats can be discerned when mermaids are grouped together with other reef-life. Economic exploitation poses the immediate threat of captivity in the service of the Venture of Marvels project. Apart from this, and as the spear-fisher points out, the threat of global warming and acidifying oceans will also harm mermaids. Rick reminds Chip, there is a "likelihood that the mermaids also depend on the reefs" (185). In the novel, the threat of captivity finds common ground with the themes of work, mobility, and freedom, while the global threat of ecological disaster from collapsing ecosystems becomes linked to the threat of an asteroid impact. In other words, the threats detailed for the mermaids become equally applicable to human life. The empathic view of the mermaids relies on a humanization of the creatures. This is no easy task given that these mermaids are never given a voice and are more notable for their absence than their visibility in the narrative. Instead, doubt is cast over the dichotomized view of humans as distinct from other animals, which makes exploitation of the mermaids a human rights issue. It is this symbolic identification with mermaids that will ultimately decide if they are exploited or protected. The mermaids' hybridity allows Millet to connect the ecological problematics of classification with animal rights that apply to real, rather than mythological, creatures. In developing their hybridity in this manner, Millet makes use of, without endorsing, a positive relation between anthropomorphization and recognition of rights.

Millet deploys anthropomorphism here in interesting ways. It is often viewed as a presumptuous error in thinking, a reinforcement of human-animal dualism, or imperialistic. These charges are especially true of the Disney tradition, wherein the difference between human and other animal species is so often reduced to morphology. But if anthropomorphism has delimited a rational understanding of other animals, Millet's portrayal of mermaids reinforces the useful aspects of it as an empathetic gesture towards others. While Millet is careful not to make assumptions about the inner life of the mermaids (Deb's only conjecture is that a mermaid's facial expression

is a “look of surprise” [104]), the humanoid physiognomy of the mermaids supports a dichotomy between a self-interested position interested in their economic potential, and a defense of their animal welfare rights. On one hand, the innate differences between the mermaids as “fish stock” and humans in need of a “meal ticket” legitimizes the commercial exploitation of the aquatic other (200, 184). On the other, an experience very like Emmanuel Levinas’ face-to-face encounter is at work wherein it is the “not mythically beautiful, not mythically homely” face of the mermaid that catalyzes Deb’s wonder and completes the self-critical questioning sparked by Chip’s sighting of the mermaid (104). Whether or not the characters adopt an ethical stance relies on a recognition of equivalency, which Foucault, when discussing classification and hierarchy in nature, posits as fundamental to the linkage between humanistic knowledge and ethics (358).

I mentioned Disney animations as particularly good examples of anthropomorphic blinkering. Though this point has been well made by other critics, sound objections have also been raised.¹ Millet’s choice of the mermaid from among numerous other hybrid mythical creatures like gorgons, centaurs, and harpies, puts to use what Walter Benjamin identifies as the subversive potential of the anthropomorphized animals of early Disney animations, such as Mickey Mouse and Donald Duck. Miriam Hansen argues by way of Benjamin that “Mickey Mouse not only unfetters the human sensorium from its imaginary confinement to the human shape, but also projects the demise of the human species in an anthropomorphic, anthropocentric sense.” Or, as Benjamin puts it, the artificial, anthropomorphized subject “ruptures the hierarchy of creatures predicated on the human being” (Benjamin qtd. in Hansen). *Mermaids in Paradise* conveys via its mermaids the deep anxieties aroused by a disruption of the anthropocentric hierarchy of the so-called natural order before stepping back from these matters to concretize a threat to humanity in the form of an asteroid headed for planet earth.

Following the novel’s sustained attention to how the hybrid animal troubles fundamental assumptions about humanity’s sense of its exceptional ecological status, the introduction of an asteroid narrative figures almost as an afterthought. The difference in weight that the two distinct threats to human integrity and survival are afforded is counterintuitive: why is fighting to save an obscure species of animal portrayed as more significant than averting planetary crisis? That the group’s encounter with mermaids is as serendipitous as their political mobilization is spontaneous, denotes both the power of wonder, as well as registering the accessibility of micropolitics, particularly through the specific and localized environmental settings. Organizing to defend the mermaids against capture is portrayed as possible and worth-

¹ Margaret King’s “The Audience in the Wilderness” is a good introduction to Disney’s commercialisation of nature which includes an interesting exploration of the animated films’ politics of anthropomorphisation and their situation within popular culture.

while, despite the participants' lack of experience with any similar undertaking. Although Deb is devastated when she realizes that the ad hoc measures the group takes to extricate the mermaids have foundered, there is a deontological sense in which the failure that humiliates Deb is offset by her having been "willing to fight" for their release (261).

In sharp contrast to the opportunity to take action to protect the mermaids is the problem of the asteroid headed for Earth. As with climate change, the hazard is too large to be managed with ad hoc, micropolitical organization. Averting the extinction event the asteroid's collision will entail requires multilateral consideration and collaboration; the proposal to knock the object off course using rockets is not a plan that just anyone can take part in. This much larger and graver threat is relegated to the depths of Deb's memory—"I'd almost forgotten," she reflects (288)—which reinforces the deontological ethical lens through which the group's failed effort retains its importance. Writing off the extinction event in a mere few lines in the novel's final pages, while having focused instead on the astounding array of affects and agendas that emerge in response to the mermaids, Millet leads readers to consider the significance of the cultural and economic values that exert pressure on environmental issues. The mermaids could have been protected were it not for the deadlock resulting from the competing ideologies of capitalism and chauvinism that lay claim to the creatures' lives. Similarly, the asteroid impact would have been avoidable, had those in a position to address the problem done so promptly. By weighting the plot in this way Millet flags the issue that scientific expertise, whether Nancy's knowledge of conservation practices or the rocket science that would allow for diversion of the asteroid, are of little value if political commitments are lacking.

This is most evident in the fears of "teeming hordes" of "Middle American" religious zealots that the corporeal hybridity of the mermaid upsets systems of categorization thereby threatening hierarchy (260). Regardless of the spuriousness of this logic and the arbitrariness of attaching morality to classification systems like Linnaean taxonomy, those who wish to destroy the mermaids have a louder collective voice than professional marine biologists like Nancy. As with the vexed and vicious attacks on Charles Darwin's hypothesis that all species have common ancestors, the notion that mermaids could be thought partly human is received as an iconoclastic attack on the integrity of the species necessitating considerable adjustments to human self-perception. To the "angry, slightly sweaty" zealots, the mermaids have Anti-christ-like significance, their presence acting as a harbinger for other fallen, mythical, hybrid forms poised to further confuse the perceived natural order: "these things are not the work of the Lord. These things are filth and abomination" and, "man's face with lion's teeth, the wings of locusts and the tail of a scorpion" (258-59). Millet's anthropomorphic figures redouble the sense of anticipation of the demise of the human species by casting humans as both notionally cordoned off from surrounding species and life forms, and also as potentially facing their own extinction.

The motivation for protection or destruction of mermaids depends on problems of categorization arising from the mermaid's liminal position between human and amphibian-other. These also problematize the reader's sense of the imaginary yet consequential boundary that paints humans as separate from other species based on cognitive ability. Considering mermaids as human almost certainly places them in the mammalian family in common with the blue whales that eventually rescue them. The *deus ex machina* of the whale rescue suggests some kind of understanding and communication between the two species, forging a connection between the mermaid and the whale that might suggest a human-whale association by virtue of our links to mermaids. This slippery slope logic focuses questions of animal rights through the lens of human rights, and by granting mermaids basic substantive rights such as the right to life, freedom from torture and slavery, and freedom of movement, the novel raises the issue of why other species, like Nancy's parrotfish, should not be granted the same. In depicting the agency of whales and mermaids and implying communication between the species, Millet networks "earth others" through what Val Plumwood calls the "intentional recognition stance." Plumwood argues that adopting this stance is a "counter-hegemonic" resistance to the exploitation of non-human animals since it challenges the reductive stance that refuses acknowledgement of the agency and communicative ability of other animals. The intentional recognition stance, Plumwood's argument suggests, is a ground of re-enchantment, inasmuch as it entails a radical perceptual shift, which recalibrates our ecological consciousness by reminding us of "the butterfly wing-dust of wonder that modernity stole from us and replaced with the drive for power" (177). The role of wonder in engendering an affective engagement that allows the extending of ethics to non-human creatures is presented in the novel when the group resisting the Venture of Marvels asks of Miyoko, a television personality in Japan, whether her Japanese audience will sympathize with, and thus care about, the plight of the mermaids:

"You think people will care about the mermaids, in Japan?" asked Chip.

Rick chimed in.

"Your, uh, Japan's a whaling country, pretending to kill whales for scientific purposes, then eating them?" he asked. "Not exactly eco-freaks. Plus they do those dolphin slaughters on the beach."

Miyoko didn't take offense.

"The mermaids are very special," was all she said. "My viewers will love them." (162)

By suggesting the mammalian link between whales, dolphins, and humans, the novel assumes a common ethical structure that can be transferred via biological correspondences. Whereas Rick follows the same logic, he imagines this chain of association working the opposite way and becomes concerned that a lack of regard for whales and dolphins could extend backwards to mermaids. Either way, discussions that implicitly address the logic of a

duty of care towards the mermaids resolve the tension between an anthropocentric ethics based on categorical proximity and questions of inherent value through the function of wonder. The question of whether or not Miyoko's viewers will transpose possible valuations of dolphins and whales onto mermaids is trumped by the sense of wonder evoked by the "very special" mermaids (162). The "departure from ordinary experience" (Ahmed 179-80) that the encounter with mermaids entails becomes the basis for empathy and political motility.

This is not to discount the importance of similitude in the ethical frameworks that the novel questions. None of the guests on *Virgin Gorda* have a comparable experience with the other marine life they encounter though it is, no doubt, new to some. Together with the universal newness of mermaids, their anthropoid physicality lends itself more readily to empathetic responses than does the "silly-looking parrotfish" (284). Though according to myth, mermaids are not quite human, on a sociozoological scale they would rank highly: They appear human from the torso up and commonly, with a few caveats, are capable of speaking with humans. The possibility to either identify with mermaids as hybridized humans or reject them because of this, which underlies the desire to destroy them, is one of the key ways Millet frames questions of moral epistemology, or in other words, the connection between knowing and caring. Though acknowledging this as a powerful basis for a duty of care, Millet also resists portraying it as a mono-causative or even necessary factor. By instilling a deep ambiguity about how human the mermaids are, Millet pivots off the contemporary ascendant image of the mermaid typified by Disney's Ariel from *The Little Mermaid*, a point of reference acknowledged more than once as the novel gestures towards non-anthropocentric considerations.

Writing against Disney's anthropocentric mermaid tale not only interrogates the ways in which such a portrayal delimits the environmental imaginary, it also creates space for a re-enchantment of the figure by forcing the reader to reconsider their assumptions about it, as Deb and Chip do. Before sighting the mermaids, Deb's notion of them is defined by Disney's characterization of sub-aquatic humans engaged in the leisure activities of sunning on rocks or gazing at their reflections in mother-of-pearl framed mirrors, "their father someone like Neptune, bearded, big-chested, trident-holding" (94). However, when Deb and Chip do sight the mermaids, Millet deflates Disney's glamorous image through various deprecations that assign a new set of conceptual coordinates for our understanding of the creatures. Chip does away with the fantasy of a Californian ideal of physical attractiveness, describing one with "bad teeth ... Like an Englishman" (98). Deb undermines the heteronormativity of Disney's love story when she suggests that another is perhaps a butch mermaid, and lays her cards on the table when she reflects that "if there were really mermaids, I hoped they didn't look like Ariel. Honestly, if they turned out to be Disney-style mermaids, I wouldn't like them one little bit" (99). Disneyfied mermaids again surface as a point

of contention when the proposed mermaid park is unfavorably compared with Disneyland. By beginning the novel as a love-story alike to Ariel's and then refocusing on the questions of freedom that the fairy tale elicits, and that its Disney version downplays, Millet converts the mermaid from an escapist device to one that raises questions about interspecies justice, animal rights, and survival. Placing the aesthetically perfect mermaid in question, the novel demands a re-evaluation of the bases on which its mermaids are valued.

Millet's rejection of the Ariel archetype allows her to sidestep some general problematics of charismatic megafauna, particularly the Bambi effect, named after another Disney animated film, which refers to the sentimental privileging of cute or endearing creatures over those we find unattractive or unpleasant (Bruckner 188). The mermaid's hybrid body encourages an anthropocentric connection to the humanoid creatures—"They're half-human!" Chip reminds us (200)—as well as a rejection of valuation based solely on their similarities with humans. The ugly mermaid is a figure that readers can identify as human, yet one that remains a part of a natural, rather than civilized or developed, order. This combination is useful for Millet's linkage of this isolated and unlikely conservation narrative to a broader ecological view that embeds the mermaids in an ecosystem and promotes them as having rights beyond those that reflect their instrumental value to humans. It is also a depiction inflected by a feminist perspective that challenges the objectification of the mermaid we see in Disney's *The Little Mermaid* by rejecting the narrative of a feckless woman being rescued by her more capable beau, and offers instead alternatives such as the dynamic between Chip and Deb, and between mermaids and humans.

Disney's retelling of the story draws heavily on its source text, Hans Christian Andersen's "The Little Mermaid," though with crucial differences in the nature and role of the sea witch and in the conclusion of the tale. Near the film's end, Disney's Ariel clings helplessly to a rock as Prince Eric overcomes the evil sea witch, thus rescuing Ariel and obtaining the blessing of her father for their marriage. By way of contrast, Andersen's Little Mermaid sacrifices her voice, accepts a lifetime of podiatric pain, and gambles her life on a chance to woo and marry her prince. When the king arranges a marriage for the prince, the upshot for the Little Mermaid is a death sentence, unless she kills the prince with an enchanted dagger before he weds. Unable to do so, at dawn on the day of the prince's marriage the Little Mermaid throws herself into the waves and ostensibly to her doom. An alternative reading of the contested ending of the story holds that the Little Mermaid, rather than dissolving into the sea-foam as mermaids are reputed to do, is transformed

into an ethereal being with a chance, through further sacrifice and good deeds, to obtain an immortal soul.²

Millet adds a political nuance to Andersen's recurring theme of love triumphing over reason (Anderson 36), by dramatizing challenges to instrumentalist reason. One such challenge entails a compassion that relies on a series of leaps of faith in the mermaids' authenticity, presence, and nature. Compassion for the mermaids is displayed by most of the resistance group's members; while Chip defends their humanity, Miyoko proclaims them to be "very special" (162). Deb makes a conscious decision to accept that the mermaids are not a hoax based on her intuition that even if the mermaids existed in their most fabulous, and for her disappointing, form, that knowing about them would still be worthwhile: "if there were mermaids who rode, when the occasion warranted, in giant clamshells pulled by a team of giant seahorses—so much the better for us all" (95). Deb's conscious decision to care about the mermaids before she is even sure they exist is conspicuously based on non-practical, or non-instrumental, reasoning. Even more so than Andersen, Millet puts pressure on the distinguishing features between humans and non-humans and, while putting it to some use, finally undermines the validity of biological resemblance as a comprehensive basis for ethical assumptions.

As with Andersen's mermaids, Millet's are neither rewarded nor completely destroyed, instead they are relegated to an unknown space. There is, however, a key difference in this process of estrangement from the world. While Andersen's occupy a purgatorial realm in which they can earn an immortal soul, Millet's are exiled from their habitat only to remain in a finite marine environment in which they may be once again found and exploited. Moreover, given the novel's attention to the fragility of coral reefs, and the domino effect that can result from the destruction or loss of one species, and since the mermaids presumably have no way to allay the anthropogenic degradation of their habitat, their long-term prospects of survival are decidedly uncertain. This lack of redemptive possibility is compounded by the revelation of the coming extinction event which, as we have seen, is itself morally coded by the very likely fact that the asteroid impact could have been averted by redirecting or deflecting it, if action had been taken earlier (*Mermaids* 288).

As in Andersen's tale and Disney's *The Little Mermaid*, in the novel the rift between realistic and mythic worlds is spatially dichotomized into the terrestrial, cultural realm of the island, and the underwater marine environment as the site of nature (Whitley 40). The collapse of these two domains into the purely economic reasserts, though in an ironic and unsatisfying way,

² Harold Bloom's comments are representative of a suspicion regarding the supposedly redemptive ending of Andersen's tale, writing that "The story should end when the mermaid leaps from ship to sea and feels her body dissolve into foam" (xii).

the longing David Whitley identifies in Disney's *The Little Mermaid* for "some form of resolution to the nature-culture divide." In the Disney film, the maritime axis reinforces an instrumentalist view of the natural world by positioning it as a site of latent resources that transform into items for consumption if or when they breach the subaquatic world. As Whitley points out, there are a line of running jokes through the film that refer to the marine life "as food items once they have ventured into the human world on land" (41), not unlike the "meal ticket" Millet's mermaids could become for some of Virgin Gorda's residents (184).

Mermaids in Paradise reiterates this comment on the human use and domination of the natural world, though the continuum between fish and food as items for human consumption entails an additional stage of mediation in the case of the mermaids. Since "The reefs are done, dude. Done like a dinner" because of "Global-ass warming" and "Acid oceans" (184), the fishers whose livelihood is threatened are aware that more capital can be extracted by displaying the mermaids rather than butchering them. The fishers and other supporters of the Venture of Marvels ignore issues of intrinsic value in their assumption that abstracting aquatic life into capital is not only legitimate, but also shrewd. This is evident in the dialogues with the spearfisher, who repeatedly refers to the resource potentiality of the mermaids, speaking of them in terms of whom they belong to:

"So what's your angle, man? Still trying to keep the mermaids for yourselves?" ...

"It's too bad, but the reefs are over. This is the next big thing, my dudes. Without the coral reefs, out here, we don't have *shit*. Sand, water, you can get that boring crap in *Florida*. Hell, even in Jersey. This is the next big meal ticket. Man, this is *it*." (183-84)

In this way, instrumentalist logic grants an easy solution to the nature-culture divide by enlisting mermaids into the cultural realm based on their potential to generate capital. Though Deb's group also subsume mermaids into culture in order to justify protecting them, they challenge the basis for the Venture of Marvels' claim by extending the same intrinsic valuation of human life to mermaids. In creating this tension between two anthropocentric modes of argument, Millet implicitly acknowledges the weight of this view in environmental philosophy. Yet there are also attempts to see the mermaids biocentrically, that ask ecological questions about how the mermaids must constitute an interdependent part of the region's biota. This parallels Nancy's early descriptions of the value of parrotfish both within anthropocentric discourse and outside it.

The unsolicited lesson Nancy gives on the ecological function of parrotfish becomes the implied grounds for a non-anthropocentric valuation of the mermaids. Early in the novel, Nancy explains the important ecological niche parrotfish fill as bioeroders and notes that they are major contributors to the

picturesque white sand of the island's beaches. Like the mermaids, the parrotfish, and by extension the island's reefs and marine ecosystems, are under threat. For the parrotfish, however, the threat is not as straightforward as that which the Venture of Marvels presents to the mermaids. Warming oceans with rising levels of acidity put the reefs and parrotfish at risk, Nancy explains, but tellingly her warning fails to raise the ire of her dining companions, some of whom will later be active in their efforts to protect the mermaids. Through her contrasting of the charismatic mermaid and the "silly-looking parrotfish with their bulging lips" (284), Millet registers the value and appeal of anthropomorphic representation and charismatic megafauna, and yet also places this impulse within an ecological context that acknowledges the crucial importance of the parrotfish, despite its allegedly less-attractive appearance.³ After having confirmed that parrotfish are both ecologically important and unlovely to look at, Millet transposes their ugliness onto the mermaids, suggesting, but never confirming, that they might also have merits beyond the possibility of generating human spectatorship. When the mermaids are favored over the parrotfish as worthy of protection despite their less obvious ecological function, Millet raises questions about the reasons certain species are prioritized in terms of conservation. She indicates the difficulties involved in justifying the value of a species without abstracting its members as latent capital. The ambiguity Millet generates here throws totalizing systems of valuation, whether biocentric or instrumentalist, into doubt, which the novel resists resolving.

Parrotfish do not only lack the majesty of mermaids, they also lack their similarity of form, which puts them at a disadvantage in respect to rights. If there is a truth to the Levinasian ethics of the face, the obligation it elicits does not extend immediately to other animals in the naturalized, non-reflective way that would aid the novel's characters in their ethical choices.⁴ Casting mermaids as the imperiled animals of the novel has an important affective function for readers who have been taught to subconsciously divide sentient life into a mutually exclusive categorization of human and animal. Mermaids trouble this false dichotomy by being both human and other-animal, which is precisely what incenses the novel's "middle Americans" who deplore the mermaids as abominations, incarnations of Lucifer, a caste

³ I use the term "charismatic" in the sociozoological sense to refer to creatures which appeal to humans on the basis of presumed shared characteristics, cuteness or majesty, and alike attributes.

⁴ For a discussion of how Levinas' ethics might relate to non-human animals see Diane Perpich's chapter "Scarce Resources? Levinas, Animals, and the Environment" in her *The Ethics of Emmanuel Levinas*. Perpich notes a concern with anthropocentrism and humanism in Levinas' philosophy, and notes the ambiguity over whether "animals have a face" or not (151). Her argument is that for Levinas' ethics to have significance for other animals it must be read in a political, rather than environmentalist or ethical frame, which leads her to the conclusion that Levinas sees our "highest worth in the possibility of subordinating instrumental imperatives to something categorical" (175).

punished by god, or the progeny of bestial coupling (224). The fervent Christian fundamentalists Millet depicts serve as a foil to empathic views that presuppose sentience, capacity for suffering, and therefore the right to life of the humanoid mermaids. Both views hinge on the physical and cultural similarity of mermaids to humans. The mermaids have human heads, hair, and torsos, and their mythology has established their ability to engage with humans socially, even to become human. In confounding the familiar system of classification that separates humans from other animals, mermaids raise the question of what kind of animal they are. Classifying the mermaids as fish-stock, as the Venture of Marvels apparently does, legitimizes their commodification and use as a resource that will be used to Disneyfy the island and increase wealth through a reinvigorated tourism industry.

For the resistance group, things are more complicated. Most of the characters in this group have generic responses to the Venture of Marvels' aim to capture and display the mermaids for the sake of tourism. In calling the mermaids half-human, Deb evokes the logic of proximity or similarity as a basis for ethical consideration. She imagines the mermaids "struggling in those nets like dolphins, asphyxiating, possibly." She then "[sees] their half-human blood dispersing cloudlike in the sea" and reflects that "It would be our fault: we would have brought those hooks to them. Not on purpose, but still" (161). Chip is likewise inclined to take responsibility for the mermaids they inadvertently exposed, as well as to uncover the suspicious circumstances around Nancy's purported death. But, as we have seen, Chip is primarily motivated by a deontological ethical frame of reference that compels him to protest the corporation's attempt to commodify the mermaids, claiming, "The mermaids don't belong to you ... They're not a fish stock" (200). Other members of the group such as ex-Navy SEAL Thompson, TV personality Miyoko, filmmaker Rick, and interior designer Ronnie, are also driven to action by obligation to Nancy coupled with their own desire to protect the mermaids. The strategy they decide on includes a mixture of surveillance and reconnaissance around the resort and reefs. They publicize the plight of the mermaids, directing action against the corporation's efforts to capture the mermaids and launch its Venture of Marvels. I have argued that re-enchantment and wonder ought to be considered in assessing the influence of stylistic factors on readers' environmental awareness, yet the novel also depicts this process at the level of characterization. In what follows I use value-belief-norm (VBN) theory to trace Millet's linking of different characters to different modes of resistance or support for the commercialization of the mermaid reef.

VBN theory is a conceptual framework used in sustainable development-related studies to assess the significance of environmentalist actions and identify the factors motivating such behavior. The theory asserts that "Individuals who accept a movement's basic values, believe that valued objects are threatened, and believe that their actions can help restore those values experience an obligation (personal norm) for pro-movement action that cre-

ates a predisposition to provide support.” The authors specify that the type of support offered “is dependent on the individual’s capabilities and constraints.” In the case of environmentalism, Stern and his collaborators argue that public support is one of the most important resources available “to overcome cultural inertia and the interests of powerful actors” (81). The authors develop a theory of public support based on a survey of 420 U.S. respondents with the aim of filling a gap in the literature on social movements. Both the study and its sample originate from the U.S. and so they speak to an environmentalist context close to Millet’s own. Her novel fleshes out the aspects of VBN theory that deal with political motivation and the ethics of environmental responsibility. Given that the study deals specifically with non-specialist environmental activists, as Millet’s novel does, the theory is a good fit with *Mermaids in Paradise* which likewise takes up environmentalist questions about public support, and the problem neophytes or outsiders face in overcoming the interests of powerful actors.

While committed activists and dedicated organizations are at the core of social movements such as environmentalism, public and non-specialist support is crucial. Millet’s novel conveys the point that such support can come from anywhere. The crew that faces the decision of whether or not to sacrifice their honeymoon or holiday and risk their wellbeing in order to protect another species is made up of people who work in independent film, home furnishings, and other non-environmentally based vocations. Perhaps surprisingly, for the central characters Deb and Chip—two affluent white-collar workers—the decision to abandon their honeymoon and engage in a dangerous struggle against corporate capital’s exploitative project is hardly a difficult one. As the novel shifts from its comical treatment of marriage and its attendant rituals into the more suspenseful mode that frames murder, abduction, and environmental exploitation, its protagonists also shift seamlessly from carefree newlyweds into the roles of impromptu investigators, journalists, and direct action activists that will occupy them for the remainder of the narrative.

Stern and his co-authors propose that the success of social movements depends on the “activating or reshaping of personal norms to create feelings of obligation” that translate to action according to three factors: “acceptance of particular personal values, beliefs that things important to those values are under threat, and beliefs that actions initiated by the individual can help alleviate the threat and restore the values” (83). Chip’s valuation of other worlds is established by his love of fantasy sports and video games. In his case, the natural world is an example of an other-worldly space that he accesses through his structured “wilderness” experience during the mud-marathon he runs near the beginning of the novel as well as the multiplayer online video games he plays before leaving for Virgin Gorda. Deb’s internal monologue reveals her underlying environmentalist commitment in her off-hand noticing of littering, a snarky comment she makes about the sun obliterating the planet, and repeated reflections on the beauty of her natural surroundings.

Yet what we learn of Deb and Chip in these ways, general and unremarkable though it is, foreshadows their response to the mermaids, though it is not until the mermaids come under threat by the Venture of Marvels that VBN's second and third factors come into play. The threat posed to the mermaids is made clear in Chip's response when he learns of the Venture: "'No,' said Chip. 'No. No. No. No. No!' ... 'They can't do this,' he said, shaking his head. 'It's just like Nancy said! They're going to wreck everything!'" (156). Chip's immediate questions to Deb do not express the ontological or even epistemological doubts one might expect after sighting a mythical creature, rather they are ethical: "'Deb,' he said, 'you're the strategist. What can we do?'" (156). This, along with Deb's improvised plan of action, reveals the third factor identified by Stern and collaborators: Deb and Chip's belief that their actions can alleviate the threat. On a structural level, Millet's narrative strategy of displacing the central environmental tension between conservation and exploitation onto a much-loved mythological creature, rather than an actual one, gestures towards activating conventional environmentalist norms, which include voluntary environmental protection and more committed undertakings such as activism and direct action. In terms of VBN theory, this can be seen as occurring via the transposing of values established elsewhere in popular culture, most prominently in Disney's *The Little Mermaid*, onto a purportedly real, though of course actually fictive, at-risk species. However, Millet is careful to filter what is transferred from one text to the other. For instance, *Mermaids in Paradise* shuns the glamorous mermaid convention by describing its own, in contrast to Ariel, as aesthetically flawed creatures with brownish-yellowish "bad teeth," offering by way of explanation that there are "No dentists in the sea" (98).⁵ By resisting an idealized representation of mermaids, the novel also questions the high status of charismatic megafauna as a means of propagating biophilia.

Sara Ahmed's argument regarding the political import of wonder complements the quantitative methods of VBN theory in assessing Millet's representational strategies with regard to political mobilization. Ahmed argues that political—in her case, feminist—attachments are formed through wonder, since this affective state involves seeing the world "as if for the first time" without necessitating the erasure of history (179-80). Wonder, Ahmed argues, "is about learning to see the world as something that does not have to be, and as something that came to be, over time, and with work" (180). Ahmed's argument involves the progression from wonder to learning, which itself results in the "world making" that ecocritics such as Lawrence Buell

⁵ Sarah Rothschild argues convincingly that the feminist overtones of Disney's *The Little Mermaid*—independence, rebelliousness—are superficial, and that the beauty standards, male dominance, lack of positive mother figures, and vindictive female figures "undermine the notion of feminism" (147). By way of contrast, *Mermaids in Paradise* does not gender qualities like vindictiveness, and it highlights the different, and complementary, varieties of power held by various characters, unlike *The Little Mermaid*'s patriarchal power structure.

have identified as challenging classical mimetics in the service of novel ways of representing the natural world (38-41). Drawing on Luce Irigaray, Ahmed claims that wonder motivates political mobilization by disrupting our relation to the ordinary world. Her theoretical mapping of the concept illuminates what happens to Chip and Deb on sighting the mermaids: “‘Jesus!’ cried Chip, spluttering ... and without waiting for me to answer, down he dove,” his “purple-red face” and wide eyes evincing astonishment (90). From this moment on, Chip becomes committed to protecting the mermaids, his sense of wonder delineating a significantly different response to that which occurred when learning of Nancy’s parrotfish. Others who sight the mermaids have a similar response, “emitting noises of astonishment” and crowding around a small monitor to watch the footage they had just witnessed live (106). In both instances, it is precisely the newness of the mermaids that re-enchants the natural world for the visitors, shifting their perception of Virgin Gorda from a backdrop for their leisure time to a living, and vulnerable, ecology of which they are part.

As well as breaking the frame of everyday reality, Millet’s use of mermaids is a more interesting choice than, say, polar bears since mermaids have a cultural, rather than natural, history that provides a set of common points of reference for those who witness them. Mermaids are not only seemingly defenseless creatures who require protection from exploitation or habitat loss as their reef is encircled by nets, they are also part of a long and varied mythology that provides context for their meaning in the novel. The European mermaid emerged from fifteenth century maritime culture, placing the figure at the crossroads of the middle ages and the European colonial period, as well as on the cusp of the Enlightenment. This context is productive of the associations between the mermaid and the extensive oceanic expansion that took place in the name of trade, discovery, and expansion. There are obvious parallels between this and the novel’s presentation of mermaids as imperiled by the financial enterprise the Venture of Marvels. It is run by a corporation which, though unnamed, wields comparable power to those involved in colonial enterprise. Like the Golden Fang in *Inherent Vice* and NAFTA in *Tropic of Orange*, exploitation is authorized by a faceless entity whose central organizing principle involves flows and accumulation of capital. Millet grapples with the problems of representing ecological crisis and its corollaries by using a mythical figure with its own a set of cultural meanings, while at the same time inviting a reflection on the role of wonder in political activation.

As a maritime creature, the mermaid is also associated with a broad array of ecological relationships in a messily interconnected world. This is most prominently displayed at the novel’s end when a pod of blue whales arrive, apparently intent on rescuing the mermaids. This species of whale is not typical for the area, nor does it typically travel in large numbers near the surface of the water as in the novel. Whales themselves are also of interest for the long-distance migration some make, which sets the way these ani-

mals inhabit the earth at odds with the Venture of Marvels' plan to measure out and cordon off the area of ocean they believe the mermaids to inhabit. No less significant is the blue whale's association with ecological vulnerability. Having been hunted with brutal techniques and equipment, such as grenade-tipped harpoons, almost to the point of extinction during the 20th century, the blue whale was eventually protected, leading to modest but significant population increases. At present it is classed as endangered but no longer critically so (Haas 28). The rationale for the massive hunting of blue and other whales mirrors that of the Venture of Marvels; by abstracting the mermaids into projections of the profit they can generate in captivity they become fair game for exploitation. Though the upshot for whale or mermaid hunting may be the same, Millet is also aware of shifts in late capitalism that reverberated through the maritime world transforming it from a space primarily defined by the pursuit of commerce and notions of freedom to a place for recreation (Mentz 998). Millet dramatizes this alternative use-value of the maritime environment by portraying the beach and ocean as at once a place of recreation for Deb, Chip, and others, an object of study for Nancy, and a source of income for the fishers.

Millet's use of mermaids is perhaps also due to the prevalent view that a response to global ecological degradation must include powerful acts of re-imagination. As discussed above, the challenge to protect the mermaids does not stem from a lack of scientific acumen, it is rather an issue of conflicting modes of perception and their respective ethical commitments. Reading mythology puts us in a world that seems like some distant past, though in fact it never existed. Millet makes use of this quality in a narrative that includes a compelling fantastical element, though it is delimited in a way that does not detract from the novel's more somber undertones. By the novel's end, all that remains of the mermaids are a few scant pictures taken on a mobile phone, thus restoring the creatures to the ontological status of the myths that described them. If we consider the mermaids as a real species under threat, as the novel does, then their disappearance into the foamy waves—which in Andersen's tale signifies the mermaid's death—is symbolically suggestive of their extinction. This association is reinforced when the mermaids are rescued by another endangered species, the blue whale. The troubling association of capitalism with extinction is what lends the novel's conclusion its ominous tone, when more objectively—the mermaids escape, no one is badly injured, activist aims are fulfilled, the honeymoon ends well—it should be a gleeful one. And yet Deb is at her most despondent after the mermaids escape the clutches of the Venture. This suggests that Millet's narrative has an ecological import that does more than comment on charismatic megafauna. Arguably, given the preferential treatment of the mermaid over, say, the parrotfish Nancy studies, the novel is also an acknowledgement of the importance of pragmatic, if troubling, aspects of environmental politics.

Contemporary North American writers who address large political issues in their work are faced with the generalized problematic that Western nation

states have exhausted much of their public's trust. With the exception of the two government bureaucrats who eventually confront the corporation, the novel depicts the state as impotent, untrustworthy, and indeed virtually invisible. Deb reflects that "Law was a tale and government was more a wish than a reality. A smart dresser, maybe, but simply not effective. For the first time I understood its quaintness. Government! Once we'd believed in it" (254-55). The most pressing issues concerning the survival of human and other species require a level of highly specialized knowledge which means that even experts in one facet of a problem like climate change are generally not experts in all the fields requisite to comprehend the whole in the necessary detail. Such experts, including writers addressing these issues, must rely on a consensus founded on an acceptance of the validity of the scientific method itself dependent on the reliability of its institutional practices. However, while precise estimations about the impact of climate change are unavoidably inexact, earth scientists and other relevant professionals have offered numerous evaluations which are too rarely and too slowly translated into policy.

Millet's novel displays an awareness that it is not primarily a lack of technical understanding that precludes a legitimate level of action on climate change. Its concern, accordingly, is with the structures of affect and economic interests that hold disproportionate sway over scientific consensus. It portrays the state as undependable and the novel's scientific authority, Nancy, as pragmatically ineffectual in the face of corporate capital, her contracts and considered opinions about how to treat the mermaids are dismissed or ignored. Showing the state to be largely irrelevant in solving environmental problematics, and scientific opinion to be easily drowned out, Millet presents grass-roots collective action as a valid response, yet then only as a strategy of deferral; Deb is aware that freeing the mermaids does not guarantee their continued wellbeing. Moreover, helping the mermaids is eventually trumped by the report of an impending asteroid impact on earth. What is significant about the group's sabotaging of the Venture of Marvels is not its instrumentality—after all, whales and not humans end up saving the mermaids—but its deontological ethical position. This is a stance that does not value the mermaids in the same way as the parrotfish, which are valued by Nancy for their ecological significance which is however, as illustrated by white sand that draws tourists to the island, translated as a function of capital. Rather, Deb's valuing of the mermaids is premised on a humanization of the creatures. It thus rejects a model of use-value as a determinant of action. Humanizing the mermaids facilitates empathy for them as well as including them in the same ethical framework as humans. The importance of this is again illuminated by VBN theory's suggestion that structures of belief, phrased as personal norms, can be transferred between "values," which helps explain how empathy for other humans can be more readily transposed onto a humanoid creature than, say, a fern or parrotfish.

In fact, Deb's group roundly rejects instrumentalization of the natural world. Despite working for a faceless corporation, holding an MBA, and snidely commenting that Chip "couldn't perform a basic cost-benefit analysis on a supercomputer named Deep Blue," Deb herself eschews putting her own expertise to work. She could, for example, perform a cost-benefit analysis of harm to the environment, forgone opportunities, and environmental trade-offs, but instead learns to use a social media application to disseminate information about the Venture of Marvels and mermaids. By omitting the use of her professional skills to determine an economic model of the mermaid venture, Deb rejects instrumentalist logic in favor of a principles-based perspective. In depicting the limitations of both the state and the scientific community—this community of one in the novel, Nancy, being literally silenced as she is drugged and abducted—in mitigating environmental disaster, Millet privileges collective, spontaneous community resistance as a strategy for environmental activism.

This can be read as a critique of an exclusively scientific approach to ecological problems. In mounting such a critique, Millet joins in a long conversation on Enlightenment hubris that, particularly over the twentieth century which saw mass death from new technologies, cast the ethics of scientific knowledge under suspicion. As Enlightenment values percolate through the critical lenses of modernity, the conflation of empiricism with ideals of progress becomes deeply suspect. This is attested to by Fredric Jameson in his polemical response to Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno's *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, "in which the scientific ethos of the philosophes is dramatized as a misguided will to power and domination over nature, and their desacralizing program as the first stage in the development of a sheerly instrumentalizing worldview which will lead straight to Auschwitz" (*Post-modernism* 58). More recently Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri have made a similar point when they state that "so many claims to progress have led to disaster and ruin. Some point to the way Nazi administrative rationality led to genocide and gas chambers, others to the way scientific 'advances' led to environmental devastation and nuclear destruction" (378). Though perhaps overly vehement in their condemnation, and glib in their points of comparison, the relation these commentators posit between instrumentalist rationality and a callous disregard for life holds true. Millet's cryptozoological imagination can be read as resisting a purely instrumentalized environmental politics and reintroducing wonder as a way of framing the natural world which is, at least in ecofiction, often defined by a mutual relation of threat. Though Millet does not deny this relation, she mitigates it with the sense of fascination for and attraction to the mermaids.

Earlier I delineated how ecological problems are given nuance by Millet through the figure of the mermaid, while the use of the fantastic is balanced in the novel by the more sober crime narrative. In what follows I examine some of the ways in which *Mermaids in Paradise* engages theories of capitalism and environment, noting its brief but significant engagement with

noir. My claim is that the novel's critique of these issues is underpinned by questions of preservation and survival. By collating Millet's rendering of crime fiction with some aspects of film noir I flesh out the link the novel implies between collective action and ecological thought. A genre that can be defined by its descriptions of empirical investigation, when combined with magical realism, results in an unorthodox environmental plot which uses its magical element of mermaids to counterpoint the noir dimension of its cast of characters.

The transition from nomadic and animistic practices to settler and agricultural ones arguably marks our entry to the geological epoch now known as the Anthropocene. Among the dynamics arising from these shifting societal formations is the nascent basis for the economic practices that will come to establish a pattern of domination and exploitation of the non-human world. Whereas films noirs often trace the re-emergence of personal past and modern historical forces as they stage their narrative present, *Mermaids in Paradise* takes a much longer scope in connecting historical practices with present dilemmas; what remains constant between the two is the inescapability of the past, whether recent or ancient. In both, the past returns in the form of circuits of retribution centering on anthropogenic rather than transcendent causes. This historical relation is presented in a more or less straightforward manner in *Mermaids in Paradise*. It suggests at once an anachronistic continuation of subsistence logic within an economy with virtually infinite capacity for the storage of capital into which natural objects are abstracted, while also insisting on the ecological imperative to consider the natural world divorced from its abstraction as latent capital. What the novel puts at stake because of this anachronism is the possibility of extinction.

In his 1932 essay "The Idea of Natural History," Adorno puts survival at the center of his notion of history, observing that natural and human history are intertwined in a way that determines the continuation of the species. In the essay, Adorno seeks to unveil an historical sense of natural objects, and vice versa, which leads him into a discussion of the place of historical relativism in German philosophical thought. Within this essay are also incipient traces of ideas that will be developed by Adorno and Horkheimer in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, in which it is argued that under capitalism the natural world is either manipulated or exploited for an excess of resources, or mystified in a way that negates it (Cook 16). Or, as they phrase it, Adorno and Horkheimer investigate the aporia of "the self-destruction of enlightenment" (xvi). In this view the natural world is intertwined with second-nature, or the socio-historical world, the preponderance of which Adorno makes use of as a critical concept to shed light on the damaging effect of history on nature (Adorno 18). Adorno and Horkheimer argue this point by examining the tensions between pre- and post-Enlightenment thought, exposing the relation of power and its tendency toward exploitation entailed in Enlightenment reason: "With the spread of the bourgeois commodity economy the dark horizon of myth is illuminated by the sun of calculating reason, beneath

whose icy rays the seeds of the new barbarism are germinating” (25). *Mermaids in Paradise* dramatizes the friction between, and ramifications of, a novel meeting and interweaving of first and second nature. It questions the features that delineate the two via the mermaid’s hybridity in a way that allows the figure to broach both worlds. The mermaid is not only physically part fish and part human, but in those two halves carries the conceptual freight of the nature/culture divide. In articulating these in a narrative that pivots on questions of extinction, Millet encourages a rethinking of the largely obsolete for affluent Westerners instinct for survival and accumulation. In the novel, as in Adorno and Horkheimer’s estimation, the entwining of first and second nature is productive of the primary antagonism through which nature becomes subjugated.

Viewing natural objects as variable measures of exchange value defines a perspective that is associated with the Anthropocene, a period which is sometimes dated to the onset of the industrial revolution some short centuries ago.⁶ The relation of domination which intensifies at this point allowed the development of subsistence into surplus economies, the ramifications of this development being of particular interest to Millet in this novel which reflects on distributive elements of leisure and luxury. The nameless corporation that we only know through its subsidiary, the Venture of Marvels, together with a perspective on the planet within a timescale that extends back through millennia via the conceptual apparatus of ecological relations, both evince the noir trope of “inadequately understood forces that threaten their protagonists” (Flory 175). However, a precise definition of these forces is not the focus of the narrative; rather, the novel asks what the appropriate ethical response to atrocity is, and how to establish a moral order in the face of exploitation.

As discussed above, having recently arrived at the resort, Deb rolls the phrase “jiggling inertly” around in her head, considering the ethical implications of a luxury holiday. Repeating a variation of the phrase a number of times, Deb ruminates on servility, the working class, religious hysterics, and other themes that signal her awareness of her own position among systemic pressures that make it possible for her to “[pay] out to be human cargo” (61). The instrumental relation between the served and the servile in the novel is indicative of that between nature and history, which is consonant with Adorno’s argument: “history also leaves its mark on nature when we treat natural things instrumentally and reduce them to their exchange value in the capitalist marketplace” (Cook 2). In attempting to mediate the “usual antithesis of nature and history” (Adorno 111), Adorno unearths the mutually detrimental impacts on the human and non-human of instincts for survival run amok

⁶ The epoch may also be defined by the shift to sedentary living, monocropping, irrigation, and other practices that mark the Neolithic Revolution, which begins a new phase of human alteration to the natural environment persisting to the present day.

(Adorno 2). Millet's novel invigorates its ecological-activist theme through the dramatization of survival and corollary instincts that pit questions of affluence or excess against a sense of ethical responsibility to the natural world.

Adorno and Horkheimer emphasize the way that after the Enlightenment, or under its model of rationality, self-preservation paradoxically entails self-destruction, writing that "self-preservation destroys the very thing which is to be preserved" (43). It is argued that self-destruction is set in motion "at the moment human beings cut themselves off from the consciousness of themselves as nature," an act that entails the "enthronement of the means as the end" (42-43). This is at its heart an ecological view cautioning against the Enlightenment exceptionalism that separates the human subject from nature via mastery over it. The notion that an ideological separation of humankind from nature in a capitalist economy "tends toward the extermination of humanity" (43) is characterized by a fear of nature at odds with the ecological understanding that biodiversity loss is a cumulative process, and that life cannot persist in isolation from other life. *Mermaids in Paradise* reproduces this dilemma by aligning the exploitation of the mermaids with the destruction of the natural world as we now know it:

The whales were gone, and so were the mermaids; the coral reefs were on their way out. I felt like I saw the future of these ships, from the private yachts to the workhorses of the fishing industry, and it seemed to me that future was a sad one, in some respects—a future of decay and dereliction, a future where the ships floated on the vast waters with nowhere to sail to anymore. (278-79)

This process is facilitated by mercenary characters such as videographer Riley who profits from the mermaid footage, knowing that it could lead to their possible destruction, as well as the "Fox News spearfisher" who encourages Riley to break his contract with Nancy and sell the mermaid video (110). In this scenario, perceived economic self-preservation entails the exploitation and possible destruction of the other, and the spear-fisher justifies his decision to work for the corporation and to capture the mermaids on this basis: "Without the coral reefs, out here, we don't have *shit*" (184). The ecological implication of this is that the destruction of one species or group catalyzes the termination of others, so that while trying to satisfy his material needs through the commodification of the natural world, the fisher unknowingly participates in the degradation of the very basis of his livelihood. By the novel's end, the possibility of mermaid extinction encompasses the anticipation of larger extinction events; the watery mass grave of a flooded earth, the asteroid on course to impact the planet, or the totter and fall of civilization.

These examples of cascading destruction emphasize the importance of thinking collectively in a socio-ecological sense. Part of the novel's presen-

tation of what Timothy Morton calls the ecological thought involves a departure from the rebellious individualism of noir protagonists like Sam Spade or Phillip Marlowe in favor of the cooperative action of non-specialists. Though Deb regrets the transition away from the noir detective who works alone to solve a crime, this seems to link her to the broader conditions underlying narratives that fulfil a perceived need in the television-viewing public to witness “governmental institutions working perfectly” (151). After suggestions of non-violent protest and verbal approaches to resort management are laughed off, the group recognize that any one of them acting as an individual would be an inadequate address to the situation. They realize the need to form a team with their different skills; Miyoko’s media savvy, Thompson’s knowledge of munitions, Rick’s experience in operating cameras, and so on. Nostalgia for noir signals a desire for the compartmentalized, if tangled, problems noir detectives faced when investigating murder or larceny, and the comparative simplicity of damage inflicted upon individuals or property. In sketching this collective formation as a revision of the terms on which resistance to injustice can take place, the novel acknowledges and transcends its hard-boiled antecedents with their lone-wolf protagonists and individualistic acts of opposition to a corrupt and degraded world. Millet recycles noir critiques of capitalism, shifting some of their terms and rendering their underlying message more explicit. The gangster story that allegorically examines the exploitation of workers (Rabinowitz 20) becomes an exposé of the corporation’s exploitation of the non-human world, as capitalistic development, plainly represented by the Venture of Marvels, and opposition to it forms the main narrative thread of the novel.

More generally, the novel has in common with films noirs the portrayal of physical violence, theft, and even the use of explosives in sabotage, as legitimate if unlawful actions that are validated by characters’ sense of personal culpability. Though portrayals of violence, theft, and so on obviously occur outside of noir and other crime fictions, the use of these techniques by activists apprised of their own implication in an eco-political scenario recalls Morton’s claim about the noir form of ecological politics: “We start by thinking that we can ‘save’ something called ‘the world’ ‘over there,’ but end up realizing that we ourselves are implicated. This is the solution to beautiful soul syndrome: reframing our field of activity as one for which we ourselves are formally responsible, even guilty” (*Ecology* 187). Morton’s use of the first person plural makes his statement a performative one: by including the reader in the use of “we,” Morton takes into account the inclusivity of the noir subject-position. Noir activates the ecological plot of the novel by licensing, even obliging, those who oppose the Venture to act outside the law in the name of justice. In other words, the novel’s engagement with noir has more to do with the subject-position of being already implicated in and responsible for the environmental issues it describes than it does with the concretized narrative elements commonly put to use in noir.

Unlawful action, though, is not the group's first option. With mounting suspicion over Nancy's apparent death, the budding vigilantes first consider hiring a detective before moving on to other plans, a decision that reveals a nostalgia for the morality and physical energy of noir alongside an acknowledgement that the form's civilian fantasies of justice cannot be completely recovered. Chip asks Deb, "Please, honey. Can't we call someone and give them a bunch of money to solve this? Aren't there police you can just hire? Who figure out the crime and catch the bad guys? And make sure justice is done?" Deb replies that "They call them private detectives," and Chip responds that he was not aware that they still existed, and casts doubt on the contemporary relevance of the lone detective by adding, "maybe they went out with black-and-white movies, or maybe when Columbo died." This aligns the noir detective figure with the mermaid as a mythologized cultural icon that exerts influence over perceptions of reality without itself being actual. Deb silently agrees with Chip, wondering why "the hard-boiled sleuth of the 1940s and '50s had morphed into crime procedurals." She considers that "People didn't believe in a lone sleuth these days," or that "they didn't believe one man could solve a crime. Or one woman, either. Miss Marple was a joke, same with the *Murder, She Wrote* lady" (150). While considering the shifting contours of crime fiction as a response to and attenuation of cultural anxieties, Millet anticipates the illegal acts of sabotage the group will soon commit. This serves to legitimize their vigilante actions by reference to the well-established place of such behavior in U.S. cultural history that crystallized through its repeated representation in various crime fictions, and iconically in film noir. By vindicating the use of illegal tactics to disrupt the environmentally exploitative corporation, Millet creates an "aura of subversion" (Wager 3) that reinforces the novel's connection with film noir.

The demise of the self-determined detective is also linked to the anaesthetizing effect the culture industry has on the very notion of a democratization of justice. We see this in Gina's theory that the U.S. public wants television to depict "governmental institutions functioning perfectly." Without knowing it, she disparages Deb and the amateur activists when she muses that the TV-watching public cannot take seriously "a lone man armed with nothing but a snarky wit and a lame analog peashooter." The suggestion here is that fictional representations of detective figures and other crime-fighters serve the purpose of reassuring the public that justice is prevailing and is best left to the professionals. Unfortunately this dynamic between popular culture and national psychology is not explored further. Rather, Millet seems to use the disappearance of the illusory hard-boiled protagonist to counterpoint another fantasy of responsible government that is conveyed by the "highly efficient teams of police officers with integrity, brilliant forensics specialists, earnest lawyers, and superefficient computers" of crime procedural television. "It doesn't matter to the TV-watching public that in real life America has basically none of the above," she notes (151). Supplanting first the lone detec-

tive, then the slick professionalism of contemporary crime fiction, the novel presents a makeshift group of mostly non-professionals engaging in impromptu and messy grass-roots resistance. Presenting a style of decentralized, amateurish political resistance serves as a comment on the obsolescence of an atomized view of socio-ecological problematics and this shows the danger of reliance on illusory authority.

The setting of the novel outside of U.S. territories provokes consideration of questions of mobility, environmental justice issues that are associated with the use of marginal space, and the indifference of ecosystems to national borders. Edward Dimendberg contends that, from 1949 on, film noir fantasies about escaping centripetal space were already spurred on by the development of interstate highway systems and the “interlinking of radio and television” (210). As networks of connectivity, whether of communications or spatial, became more ubiquitous, more natural settings were sought for these films. *Mermaids in Paradise* dramatizes the tension between connectivity—most prominently displayed in the mobile phone pictures mentioned throughout the narrative, and the impact of broadcasting information about the mermaids—and isolation. The abduction, and the novel’s island setting, itself well outside of U.S. borders, all convey a sense of remoteness, despite the novel’s almost exclusively U.S.-American cast of characters. Noir fantasies of escape meet with the ecological reality of an enclosed biosphere, the centripetal site of Virgin Gorda being repeatedly shown to be, though isolated, thoroughly connected with the U.S., and the rest of the world. Attention to the novel’s local island setting and its more general planetary one, which is illustrated by the discussion of blue whale migratory habits or the report regarding an asteroid collision that is translated into more than a thousand languages, also troubles the notion of the mermaids’ escape. Deb reflects that she wished “there were some perfect retreat for those whales and those mermaids ... a safe haven for them, locked deep in the endless blue,” followed by a sad smile which suggests that there probably is not (289).

The novel’s conclusion also draws on the structure of much film noir. When the mermaids finally escape the Venture of Marvels’ nets, it is not due to human efforts but is rather a fatalistic turn revealing that humans were never in charge of their environment. Rather, their best efforts would likely have been in vain had the *deus ex machina* of the blue whales not appeared. Interestingly, while any significant sense of agency for solving the ecological dilemma is absent, the work the group does is not dismissed. Millet maintains a degree of ambiguity over whether the group’s actions were detrimental in drawing masses of people to the island to witness the mermaids, or productive in forestalling the Venture of Marvels until the mermaids were rescued. Yet the forces that seem to conspire against the group’s efforts persist throughout the novel, supporting the ambiguity over whether the group’s actions had any measurable positive impact at all.

In some respects the novel approximates the subgenre of film noir, film gris, with its “critical references to American materialism and the ideology

of the American dream, the inequalities and injuries of class, and an association between corruption and corporate capitalism” (Neve 177). With examples including Abraham Polonsky’s *Force of Evil* and John Huston’s *The Asphalt Jungle*, the style is noted for its “corrosive critique of corporate capitalism and [its appeal] to a broad public” (Spicer 7). *Mermaids in Paradise* picks up on noir’s disenchanting criticism of the American dream and American materialism “by portraying characters whose defeat or death seems fated ... raising a skeptical eyebrow at the midcentury faith in psychoanalysis and the therapeutic ethos that supports it” (Osteen 2). That critique of therapy is depicted in the novel through the denigrating treatment of Steve the psychoanalyst who wears a “cruel Speedo,” flaps his arms like a pelican, and works “Freudian/yoga magic,” and whose absurdly neurotic partner Janeane has been treated for PTSD, at one point fearing being raped by a flower (148, 149, 144, 138). However, it is the lapse of faith in the individual that marks the novel’s most significant departure from film noir and gris where individual struggle is meaningful, even when in vain. In the novel, the responsibility for such a struggle is shifted onto a loose collective whose actions are presented as walking an ambiguous line between utility and futility. What is retained from film noir is the sense of their failure as fated, conveyed by a series of obstacles such as abduction, intimidation, and the massive pressure from public action groups and corporate clout.

Near the novel’s end, Deb is observing the blue whale pod from a boat that suddenly capsizes. As she struggles for breath, her legs drag along the sharp barnacles plastered over the hull before the boat is righted. She then spends the journey back to shore watching the “deep lines scored into my thigh and calf” drool blood (274). Gone, reflects Deb, “were the days of perfect legs” (269). Though Deb has aesthetics in mind, embedded in her lament is also a challenge to pure instrumentality. Her immediate acceptance of the injury resonates with Andersen’s *Little Mermaid*, whose interspecies attachment justifies, in her own mind, her suffering permanent physical damage to her tail/legs. In aligning Deb with the mermaids by way of her loss of perfect legs, Millet brings the novel’s treatment of the ethics of classification full circle. Deterritorialized on the open ocean in a small, unstable vessel, the bleeding, exposed Deb becomes more animal. From this subject position she can contemplate the hubris of hierarchical classifications in light of our delimited understanding of other species and of ecological niches other than our own most immediate ones. That Deb’s life comes under threat precisely as the mermaids escape reverses the dynamics of vulnerability that have held up until this point. This reversal underscores the possibility of a dramatic reconfiguration of interspecies relations in a post-mass extinction world, and signals the mutual implication of human and non-human worlds in ecological collapse.

In the following chapter, I again examine how mythical or supernatural narrative objects naturalized into historically grounded settings are used to draw out ecological concerns. Specifically, I examine how the central figure

of a magical orange works to connect *Tropic of Orange*'s critique of labor relations in contemporary Los Angeles to the city's agricultural history, and how it connects both of these with environment and justice issues.

Chapter Two

Citrus Noir: Environmental Justice in *Tropic of Orange*

Los Angeles may be *planned* or *designed* in a very fragmentary sense (primarily at the level of its infrastructure) but it is infinitely *envisioned* ... within the master dialectic of sunshine and *noir*.

—Mike Davis, *City of Quartz*

In this chapter, I examine how structural tensions between dis- and re-enchantment in *Tropic of Orange* shape its dramatization of events and the expression of its politics, particularly as they relate to economic and environmental concerns.¹ As will become clear, the novel is distinct from *Mermaids in Paradise* in terms of its presentation of dis- and re-enchantment. Where the latter pivots sharply and neatly between the two, primarily anchoring them by way of the dyadic groups of characters, *Tropic of Orange* takes up disenchantment as a pervasive, noir societal context. This disenchantment is, however, repeatedly punctuated by possibilities for re-enchantment until the close when the novel's interruptions of its noir script become dominant as Karen Tei Yamashita imagines the dissolution of national borders. In order to trace the ways in which the novel draws on and challenges noir disenchantment, I focus on the central figure of the magical orange and the various transformations it precipitates in terms of topography and climate, commodities and economies, and attachments to place. In its narrative function as an agent of defamiliarization and disruption, I read the orange as an object of re-enchantment that shapes the novel's interest in questions of transnational flows, race, labor, and environmental justice. In the first part of this chapter, I focus on Yamashita's strategy for presenting the politics surrounding the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), and later shift focus to the novel's presentation of environmental justice issues. Yamashita navigates the historical and cultural status of the city using disenchantment as an ethical compass. This lets her acknowledge the significance of noir as an analytical tool for disentangling narratives

¹ This chapter was published in an earlier form in *Studia Neophilologica*, and *The Ongoing End: On the Limits of Apocalyptic Narrative*, edited by Michael Titlestad and David Watson.

about the city, while also exceeding noir's narrative conventions in order to directly present political concerns.

The fruit Joan Didion once described as "talismanic" (13) of the Golden State is employed by Yamashita as a kind of hub from which various concerns about the social and environmental implications of neoliberal policy radiate. The impacts of this economic structure include issues of climate change, homelessness and displacement, racism and segregation. Such concerns are framed in the novel by a climate change event that results from the novel's eponymous orange. As the "Tropic orange" is transported north from Mexico to the U.S. it drags an imagined yet material manifestation of the Tropic of Cancer rapidly northward with it. When shifting this circle of latitude the orange also drags other non-physical lines with it, most notably national borders, until the final moment in the novel when the orange is cloven and, in an optimistic gesture of re-enchantment, these borders are likewise opened up. This ending is a crucial moment in the novel as it marks a shift from a largely disenchanting view of U.S. domestic and foreign policy that dominates the novel until this final moment of hope. This hints at the possibility of a radical change in the direction in which globalization was heading at the time of the novel's publication. As such, this central figure is both an enchanted object and an object of re-enchantment, and is deployed with the purpose of fusing a disenchanting narrative of Los Angeles' history to a re-enchanted vision for its future.

The novel's ending discloses this future, as the seven narratives of the characters affected by the relocated Tropic of Cancer have finally come together. To emphasize the dissolution of thematic and other borders, Yamashita disintegrates the formal, structural borders which are arranged by chapter, juxtaposing episodes like alternating cinematic cross-cuts that are tabulated on a page titled "Hypercontexts" which precedes the first chapter. This way of structuring the narrative stages an ironic border construction that, as the characters' lives intertwine, becomes untenable, gesturing towards the novel's critique of national borders.

The Hypercontexts table designates the location and focalization of each short chapter, each of which addresses one of the initially markedly separate seven narrative threads that become increasingly interwoven as the plot develops. These are the stories of: (a) Bobby Ngu who is ethnically Chinese with a Vietnamese name, Yamashita points out, has lived in Singapore prior to the U.S., who works as a cleaner and has a child named Sol together with (b) Rafaela Cortez, a Mexican woman who works as a housekeeper in the northern Mexican holiday home of Gabriel Balboa. (c) Gabriel is a politically engaged newspaper reporter, would-be detective, and film noir enthusiast who models himself on Raymond Chandler's famous detective figure, Philip Marlowe. He is in a relationship with (d) Emi, an intentionally provocative, Japanese-American television news station employee who assists Gabriel while coordinating her own televised programs. Emi turns out to be the granddaughter of (e) Manzanar Murakami, named after the U.S. concentra-

tion camp for Japanese-Americans where he was born, who stands on freeway overpasses in Los Angeles conducting an imagined orchestration of the traffic below. (f) Buzzworm is an African-American Vietnam War veteran who provides various free social services to the community, emphasizing to his neighbors the importance of being aware of their surrounding environment. Finally, (g) Arcangel is a messianic figure, laborer, and performance artist based on Guillermo Gomez-Peña and Pablo Neruda, who also figures as an avatar of the Zapatista movement.

The novel outlines several different migratory flows of people and commodities, contrasting the two in order to highlight the ethical contradictions inherent in neoliberal policy, specifically the manipulation of trade restrictions and, more generally, economic deregulation. Oranges, particularly the eponymous figure of the novel, the orange that shifts the Tropic of Cancer, are the principal commodity examined in terms of their “migration” from Central and South America to the U.S. Taking place during the implementation of NAFTA, though the novel was published three years after NAFTA came into effect, the orange’s shifting of the Tropic of Cancer becomes a physical catalyst for some of the environmental and migratory effects of the Agreement which had already become apparent by the time of the novel’s publication. The orange’s movement enables and intensifies mass northward migration, initiates strange climatic effects, and causes twin freeway accidents that create a temporary anarchic zone, the creation and destruction of which forms the novel’s first climax. *Tropic of Orange* differentiates the ease of transnational commodity flows from the difficulty some characters have in crossing even a single national border. It lambasts the ease with which commodities pass over national borders post-NAFTA, and the disingenuous business practices undertaken to achieve the same, pre-NAFTA. This is illustrated in one case by the satirical tracing of the convoluted movements of a pre-NAFTA orange shipment designed to avoid trade quotas:

“Oranges from Brazil via Honduras. Is that the normal route?” [Gabriel] queried.

“Well, say Brazil’s quota for oranges is exhausted, then Brazil exports to Honduras. Honduras to Guatemala, Guatemala to Mexico, and Mexico to the U.S. Then it’s cool even though everyone know the orange harvest is dead in Mexico in June. Keeps everyone in business.” (244)

Sherryl Vint points out that this series of transitions is part of the orange’s embodiment of the “multiple connotations of the complexities and absurdities of the imaginary geography of globalization” (406). A further ironic suggestion in the above passage is that the unnecessarily serpentine passage of the orange is due to be streamlined by NAFTA, the ostensible purpose of which is to improve the practicability and profitability of trade. This contrasts amusingly with Bobby Ngu’s genealogical musings:

Dude speaks Spanish. Comprende? So you figure [Bobby's] one of those Japanese from Peru. Or maybe Korean from Brazil. Or Chinamex. Turns out Bobby's from Singapore. You say, okay, Indonesian. Malaysian. Wrong again. You say, look at his name. That's gotta be Vietnam. Ngu. Bobby Ngu. They all got Ngu names. Hey, it's not his real name. Real name's Li Kwan Yu. But don't tell nobody. Go figure. Bobby's Chinese. Chinese from Singapore with a Vietnam name speaking like a Mexican living in Koreatown. That's it. (15)²

For Bobby to arrive in the U.S. he needed to leave his family as a child and travel with falsified documents, a trauma that comes close to being repeated with Bobby's own son towards the end of the novel. The lineage Bobby traces is suggestive of the avoidance behavior he must adopt to circumvent suspicion in the U.S.³ It mocks the passage travelled by the orange while comparing it to economic migration and North American trade and labor practices. The comparison evokes both the racist history of citrus farming in California, and the reproduction of this discrimination in the context of Mexican-U.S. labor relations sanctioned by NAFTA. This articulation dovetails as a critique of the race politics that are reified under the specter of a neoliberal policy aiming to extract profit from one of the most exploited socio-economic groups in the bloc—the Mexican working class. This policy fortifies the Mexico-U.S. border against migration while it simultaneously weakens its regulation of trade. Revealing NAFTA's goal of strengthening borders against Mexicans while deregulating restrictions on commodity border-crossings forms part of the novel's critique of the Agreement's supposed benefits for the entire North American bloc. The rhetoric of the trade deal promises, as Yamashita puts it in the novel, "a piece of the action" (257) that is at odds with the actual mechanisms of the Agreement.⁴

Yamashita's choice of the orange is deliberate. Although a seemingly innocuous fruit, in the context of the novel it should be read as a product of its history in California's citrus industry and cultural imaginary. On the latter point, what Mike Davis' in *City of Quartz* calls the "master dialectic of sunshine and *noir*" is instructive (23). Davis uses this phrase to describe the

² It is worth noting here Yamashita's appropriation of early hard-boiled style for Bobby's voice. In particular the sparse, staccato sentence structure emulates the voice typical of novels by James M. Cain.

³ Bobby's ethnic identity often metamorphoses, adapting to the cultural stereotype that will best facilitate his ability to work without arousing suspicion (159).

⁴ History has since shown that NAFTA, aimed at "[fixing] the problem" of undocumented migration from Mexico to the U.S. has lived up to its neoliberal agenda by outsourcing factory labour from the U.S. to Mexico where already poor conditions for workers have worsened, but failed in its mission to reinforce borders against Mexicans (Hing 9, 14). What NAFTA did achieve, confirming the economic anxieties present in *Tropic of Orange*, was an increase in the profitability of multinational corporations and a correlated decrease in occupational conditions and opportunities for the workers actually producing export commodities (21).

tension between two stakeholders with opposed discourses about Los Angeles. These are the boosterists who promote the city as a place of economic possibilities, who are opposed by those, such as authors of hard-boiled fiction and noir filmmakers, who see the city as a site of disenchantment, injustice, and crime. The sunshine of the dialectic refers superficially to Los Angeles' sunny climate, and more meaningfully its historical reputation as a place of opportunity and prosperity; noir refers to the "anti-myth" or unveiling of Los Angeles as a place of disenchantment, corruption, and seemingly endless urban sprawl.

While the key orange of *Tropic of Orange* is primarily a commodity, it also presents allusions to the sun and sunshine through its heliacal appearance and its effect on climate. As historical objects, and as toxic and deadly fruits, the numerous other citruses of the novel fall clearly on the noir side of Davis' dialectic. In her typical playful style, Yamashita revels in the slippage between the wholesomeness of material oranges and the often dark history of their production in California. As Douglas Cazaux Sackman demonstrates in *Orange Empire*, the economic benefits of orange farming historically obscured the implication of the fruit in environmental degradation, xenophobia, and labor exploitation. In *Ecology of Fear*, Davis remarks in a similar fashion on the citrus industry as one marred by "paternalistic exploitation, social segregation, and labor violence" (60). *Tropic of Orange* disenchant a boosterist history of orange farming in California by weaving the journey of the Tropic-orange—that which infuses in its flesh, and then shifts, the Tropic of Cancer—together with that of the Mexican laborers who move northward in its wake. Their journey recalls the underpaid migrant labor that fueled the industry in California and which incited a movement "seeking what would today be called environmental justice" (Sackman 263).

Citrus has long been part of the Californian physical and cultural landscape. With somewhere in the vicinity of 170,000 acres of orange orchards established between the 1930s and 2010s in California, the industry has remained a significant one despite its somewhat turbulent history (Sackman 7).⁵ Demand for the commodity drew labor from Central and South America, as well as from beyond the continent, to facilitate its mass production (Garcia 35). The challenges of providing the material conditions necessary for the production of oranges while minimizing environmental harm, at least to the extent of damage that would be detrimental to the industry, together with the race-divisions imposed on the labor force, were concealed by the marketing strategies of the ostentatiously labelled Orange Empire. Under this banner, citrus fruits were advertised as the "fruits of Eden, unmediated by culture" and "often presented to the consumer in the hands of a country maiden or earth goddess," masking "the hand of the worker ... whose position at the bottom of California's social scale was reinforced by images placing its

⁵ Additional figures are taken from USDA's National Agricultural Statistics Service.

members in the kingdom of nature, like the plants and animals under Adam's command" (*Orange* 8). Recalling Davis' dialectic, the exploitative and discriminatory labor practices used to produce oranges were hidden behind boosterist promotions of their natural and wholesome status.

Since the arrival of the exotic fruit in California, its labor market was fraught with racism. Prominent horticulturist and citrus farmer Luther Burbank once defined his work as being "for the definite purpose of producing new forms of plant life, for the better nourishment, housing, and clothing of the race," by which he meant whites (qtd. in Sackman 5). The example is typical of the double-standard in the race relations of California's orange production, Burbank being both an employer of Chinese laborers on his farms and supporter the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 (9). The Act prohibited all immigration of Chinese laborers and was not repealed until 1943. Erika Lee argues that it has been a significant force in U.S. immigration policy in general, helping to establish the cultural value and ethical legitimacy of the gatekeeping that NAFTA draws on to legitimate its own terms (245-46). Indeed, the division in types of labor north and south of the border, mostly into knowledge work or manual labor respectively, in *Tropic of Orange* underscores the racial tension that emerges from this structural inequality. This is fueled by the north's desire for racial segregation, euphemistically called border security, and its reliance on valorized commodities arriving from a cheaper market to maintain and expand capital in the region.⁶

In the citrus orchards specifically, the racial division of labor saw whites acting as overseers and regulators, skimming surplus value from the manual labor performed by "racial others [perceived as] biologically suited to stoop labor, labor in the heat, any labor that white workers could not or would not stand for" (Sackman 9). This organizational principle persists and is indeed exacerbated, while being rendered less visible, by NAFTA's outsourcing of labor to Mexico (*Orange* 9). In *Tropic of Orange*, NAFTA essentially recreates the racialized division of labor whereby the mostly white elites of the north create and enforce labor conditions that relocate production to Mexico. This has the explicit aim of reducing South-North immigration and yielding the capital benefits of under-regulated working conditions. In the 1990s this is facilitated by increased border security and vast improvements in the network of transportation technologies such as freeways and road trains that *Tropic of Orange* builds a large part of its narrative around.

The fact that the oranges in the novel are not Californian raises questions about transnational forms of production and circulation. These economic icons, imbued with the boosterist promise of wealth, mimic the South-North

⁶ In the wake of NAFTA, by the turn of the millennium roughly two thousand *maquiladoras* employed "over 5000 Mexicans at wages roughly one-half of those prevailing in the rest of Mexico, and one-tenth of those prevailing in the United States ... They are mostly foreign-owned and export over 90 percent of their finished products to the US" (Orenstein 609).

flow of commodities and capital that NAFTA expedited since they are imported from Central and South America to the U.S. Indeed the only citrus we witness growing is the Tropic-orange that blossoms on Gabriel's Mexican property. As Rafaela wanders through the orchard of this house, she observes a surfeit of mangoes and papaya decaying in ditches. The rotting excess fruit is suggestive not only of the fertility of the land, but also the faulty logic through which it is decided that Mexicans would benefit materially from tying their economy to the North which, through the metaphor of the "northern trees," cannot or will not produce its own sustenance. This metaphor is disclosed through a deliberate fault in biological coherence. Though oranges, papaya, and mangoes share similar requirements for growth and fruiting, the impressive variety of "exotic northern trees," which excludes the papaya and mango trees, and includes most prominently the orange that Gabriel had "insisted on planting" bear no fruit except, of course, the one that becomes central to the plot (10-11).⁷ From Rafaela's perspective, the supposedly northern plants, particularly the desiccated orange trees, which do not bring fruit to her garden, become a metaphor for NAFTA. Under that Agreement, production is relocated to Mexico and undertaken by its cheaper, less regulated labor force which does not enjoy the economic benefits of increased production, an effect that can be observed as impacting Rafaela who, though thrifty and hardworking, remains poor. Rafaela's dream of preparing a pot of home-made marmalade is disappointed since the northern trees yield no fruits, literal or otherwise, for those undertaking the labor. Mexico, this metaphor suggests, will get the infrastructure, plant, and other constituents necessary for production, but not the products and material benefits resulting from it. This is consistent with production practices after NAFTA that see 90% of commodities produced in Mexican *maquiladoras* exported to the U.S. (Orenstein 609).⁸ In this scenario the excess fruit of the neighboring papaya trees, a plant that is probably native to southern Mexico, stands as a reminder that the land is inherently capable of providing for its people.

As well as speaking to the economic politics of the novel, the orange tree also introduces questions of climate change. When Gabriel reflects on having planted the navel orange, he considers that the importation of a tree from the north, specifically Riverside, California, to Mazatlán is "a significant act

⁷ None of these are actually northern trees. Oranges and mangoes are thought to be native to South or South-East Asia, and the papaya originates from somewhere in Middle America. The orange becomes designated northern by Rafaela who picks up on the connection between California and oranges.

⁸ *Maquiladoras* are factories that import products for assembly and re-export on a duty-free basis. Though framed by NAFTA advocates as of benefit to the Mexican people, Ralph Nader has warned against mistaking the *maquiladora* system as "benefitting the Mexican people; they have to live in the polluted areas and accept the low wages and dangerous work" (qtd. in Ann Kingsolver 20).

of some sort” and positions it to mark the Tropic of Cancer (11). The significance of this act may be that Gabriel, of Incan ancestry but at home in the U.S., despite his work on social justice issues, is also implicated in the economic exploitation and mechanisms of valorization that extract capital from the South and deposit it in the North. Or perhaps it is an act of undefined significance in which the placement of the tree to mark the Tropic of Cancer, being unexplained, imbues it with the ability to bridge climate change and commodity politics. The yellowing plant is the sole bearer of a citrus fruit that Rafaela describes as “an orange that should not have been” because the conditions oranges need to thrive are at odds with the prevailing climate:

It was much too early. Everyone said the weather was changing. The rains came sooner this year. “What do they call it?” mused Doña Maria. “Global warming. Yes, that’s it.” Rafaela had seen it herself. The tree had been fooled, and little pimples of budding flowers began to burst through its branches. And then came a sudden period of dry weather, the flowers withered away, except for this one. (11)

The orange tree is revealed here as an indicator of global warming, as its flowering hints that something is off with the weather, and the fruit a direct product of climate change. This anticipates the moment in the narrative when the orange drops from its tree and along with the Tropic of Cancer also drags the Mazatlán climate north towards Los Angeles. In connecting citrus to climate change, Yamashita presents a dialectical process wherein history is used to prognosticate, in this case about socio-economic and environmental deterioration. Though climate change had not yet been identified as an ecological threat during the growth of the citrus industry in California, Sackman points out that farmers were keenly aware of the environmental damage wreaked by their rapid expansion of the industry, chiefly in the form of soil depletion and erosion. Sackman examines the photographs of Dorothea Lange, Norman Z. McLeod’s *It’s a Gift*, and studies such as economist Paul Taylor and Dorothea Lange’s *An American Exodus: A Record of Human Erosion* in order to trace how agronomic erosion was linked to social disintegration (225-41). *Tropic of Orange* picks up on this relation and transposes it onto the contemporary scenario facilitated by NAFTA.

The orange is repeatedly double-coded as a cypher for environmental and race issues. Following the above excerpt, questions about migrant labor are signaled through Rafaela who reflects that perhaps the “aberrant orange” is the product of “the industriousness of African bees” (11). Rafaela’s linking of the orange to the novel’s ironic presentation of foreign and migrant labor as assiduous, cheap or free, temporary, and usually unseen, is not so far-fetched. Sackman finds evidence of the desire for a “cheap and nonwhite labor force” that would eventually be eradicated once adequately profitable measures were instituted which could pay white wages (27). The zoomorphic rendering of labor practices and their link to marginalization is one of

several in the novel, and the comparison to bees here is indicative of the dehumanizing nature of exploitative labor practices that the novel will later expose as exacerbated by NAFTA.

A distinction between two methods of wealth extraction via migrant labor is portrayed in the novel. This first is the above-mentioned outsourcing of labor to Mexico, and subsequent importation of the material products of this labor. The second, which I largely omit from this discussion due to its grounding in issues of non-environmentally related social justice, is that which is emblemized by Bobby Ngu, through whom questions about undocumented labor are probed by Yamashita.⁹ Briefly, although we are told that Bobby is “legal” this declaration is undermined by the various devices he offers to prove his legal status, such as official security clearances for his cleaning job, his concealment of his nationality after his arrival in the U.S., but most clearly by his choice of a Vietnamese name before getting “sorted” with “American passports” while trespassing in a refugee camp in Singapore (16). Recurrently defined as a low-waged hard worker and constantly preoccupied with keeping his head down, Bobby represents the illegal labor force that “[pays] more in taxes than they consume in social services,” and that also vastly reduces labor costs for U.S. businesses, “characteristically [filling] low prestige or undesirable jobs that the typical American worker is able to shun” (Orenstein 602, 610).

This labor dichotomy underscores one of the notable absences in the text in the form of an exploration of the social ramifications of the type of labor outsourcing that NAFTA advanced.¹⁰ In her earlier novel *Through the Arc of the Rain Forest*, Yamashita inverts the South-North movement of labor while retaining that same direction for the flow of capital. The novel charts the effects on the lives of Brazilian characters when U.S. capital descends on a mass of waste matter in the Amazon rainforest and monopolizes the highly ductile material for construction projects, causing environmental chaos and social disintegration. In *Tropic of Orange*, Yamashita explores the same fundamental effects of labor and environmental exploitation from the perspective of North Americans, though in this later novel less narrative space is given to the Mexican workers whose livelihoods are fundamentally affected by the newly imposed economic regime. Indeed, focusing on the effects of NAFTA on Mexican workers would be difficult in *Tropic of Orange*. Whereas in *Through the Arc of the Rain Forest*, the action takes place in

⁹ Although Yamashita does draw connections between flows of commodities and flows of labour, linking Bobby to the Tropic-orange by way of neoliberal valourisation, there are a distinct set of concerns around Bobby’s narrative which are at best tangential to environmental issues.

¹⁰ Catherine Orenstein’s analysis of illegal transnational labour touches on some of the social consequences of NAFTA such as the disruption of traditional cultural roles and patterns, uprooting of young workers from their homes to industrial cities, and displacement of men in the workforce (609-10).

retrospect, after the North's extraction and the rainforest's subsequent metabolization of the waste matter, *Tropic of Orange's* narrative occurs before, or on the cusp of, the event of NAFTA. The effects of the Agreement are set to commence only at the close of the novel, after SUPERNAFTA's wrestling bout. Instead of registering the societal effects NAFTA has on labor demographics or changes related to environment in Mexico, *Tropic of Orange* broaches the Agreement's impact through a collection of individual narratives that reflect on the kind of crises that neoliberal economics are frequently responsible for.¹¹

In contrast to the enchanted commodity in *Tropic of Orange*, *Through the Arc of the Rain Forest* depicts an anthropomorphized enchanted object, one made up of waste matter, no less. Molly Wallace comments on exactly this feature of the narrative, suggesting via Gay Hawkins that *Through the Arc of the Rain Forest* illustrates a shift in environmental affect that elicits both a warm response to plastics, and an acknowledgement of their environmentally problematic status. Wallace argues that plastics in the novel are at once unavoidable and environmentally damaging, but also cast as part of an ecological niche. Wallace points out that since plastics are globally ubiquitous as well as causative of local impacts on the Matacão and its denizens, the novel undermines the individualism of the plastic narrator's anthropomorphism and implies a dyadic relation between global capitalism's resource exploitation and the delimited region the novel focuses on (140-47).

While it is clear that both novels use anti-mimetic devices that draw on the magical realist tradition—the floating, spherical narrator that orbits the protagonist's head in *Through the Arc of the Rain Forest*, and the orange in *Tropic of Orange*—both do so in order to address the historical trajectories and contemporaneous material conditions of their settings. In an article titled “Belonging to the Network,” Robin Blyn makes this point and argues for the importance of immanent and material political struggles in *Tropic of Orange*. Perhaps this is a reason for Yamashita's choice of enchanted material objects over ephemeral ones, though it is worth noting that such objects appear in both novels in association with less concretized processes like climate change and decolonization. However, as well as the novel's attention to the historical conditions that give rise to the narrative present, the re-

¹¹ By deregulating and outsourcing production to nations with lax environmental protections and inadequate funding to enforce them, together with the strengthening of multinationals which can easily afford fines set at rates well within their means for breaches of regulation and/or environmental damages, nations that see an upturn in production due to neoliberal economics are prone to environmental disaster. The case examples of this are to many to enumerate. One common example is the Exxon Valdez oil spill which occurred in 1989 and thought to have been caused by BP's cost-cutting in the face of already hazardous standards. BP was fined a mere 500 million U.S. dollars (reduced from an initial punitive fine of 5 billion USD). Since NAFTA, the Gulf of Mexico oil spill tells a comparable, though even grimmer, tale. *Maquiladoras* emblemise this increase of risk in *Tropic of Orange*.

enchantment plot in *Tropic of Orange* also looks to a projected future. This future is both hopeful in its rhetoric of decolonization and bleak for its lack of resolution to its ecological script.

The projection of a possible future at the novel's conclusion, as Bobby "gropes forward" (268), speaks not only to the dissolution of national borders but also to climate problematics; an appropriate formal choice given that many of the problems associated with climate change must be predicted well in advance of their materialization if they are to be mitigated.¹² The environmental, as well as economic, ramifications of agreements such as NAFTA can be predicted before their implementation, but only observed with significant lag. A relatively early study from 2002—*Greening the Americas: NAFTA's Lessons for Hemispheric Trade*—scripted a largely optimistic narrative to present the supposedly positive effects of NAFTA, though many of the environmental gains outlined in the volume are projections, rather than assessments.¹³ A later report from 2009 finds numerous detrimental effects of the neoliberal agreement on the Mexican environment. Gallagher, Wise, and Peters summarize that "NAFTA has had harsh socio-economic and environmental impacts in Mexico" including the "rising food dependency" that I argued *Tropic of Orange* predicts in its comparison of "northern" to "southern" plants (6-7). The measures suggested by the authors include the removal of "full liberalization" from food crops so that some measure of control is maintained in the "free" market, which is an indication of the dissonance between neoliberal policy and food security (7). Furthermore, the authors state that the "environmental damage from expanding trade in North America is large" and is a problem of both provisions and regulation (8). Other studies that have assessed empirical impacts of NAFTA have found that the Agreement's already scant environmental provisions have failed to control negative environmental effects, and that its trade practices have caused significant deforestation, pollution, and so on (Weaver et al. 20; Sanchez).

Such environmental effects have a social dimension and affect the poor most profoundly for two main reasons, a high risk of hazard and lesser ac-

¹² This is true for various reasons such as thermal inertia in oceans, or the cumulative warming properties of biogenic emissions. A common illustrative example of the long duration of environmental change is the empirical possibility that the emissions from a 1911 Ford Model T still pollute the atmosphere today (Boykoff 354).

¹³ For instance, Blanca Torres' argument is based on the notion that NAFTA is positive in that it has caused "a greater concern for the environment," but she does not substantiate the connection between concern and effect, nor does she produce convincing evidence for the skeptical reader. In one dissenting chapter Laura Carlsen and Hilda Salazar applaud the fact that environmental concerns eventually made their way into the pre-NAFTA discussions, but are otherwise largely in agreement with assessments published elsewhere that found that the organisations NAFTA spawned (NACEC and NADBank, for example) "were left with such minimal mandates and meagre funding that they barely meet their original expectations" (Hufbauer et al. 62).

cess to health care. According to Robert Bullard the strongest predictor of health in the U.S. is area code. As he and his co-authors Glenn Johnson and Angel Torres put it: “Environmental degradation, poverty, and vulnerability are interrelated. Poverty impacts health because it determines how many resources poor people have and defines the amount of environmental risks they will be exposed to in their immediate environment” (15). The practice of locating high-risk or high-polluting industries in areas inhabited by underprivileged socio-economic groups is the remit of environmental justice which also encompasses issues of immigration and border control, including the growing phenomenon of climate refugees. In *Tropic of Orange*, Yamashita alludes to matters such as these in her treatment of the northward movement of Mexicans, literally in the wake of a rapidly changing climate, and in the emergence of a contingent of disadvantaged and homeless people on the Los Angeles freeway system.

Rather than directly addressing such environmental issues, however, *Tropic of Orange* develops a subtext about environmental justice through depictions of social-environmental connections, often with an eye to processes of gentrification and globalization. Hsuan L. Hsu has argued that so-called “first-wave” ecocriticism “tended to privilege rural scenarios featuring apparently unaltered ‘nature’.” Distinct from this, Hsu notes that “environmental-justice activism has drawn attention to urban settings where descriptions of nature cannot be isolated from uneven and contested patterns of housing, zoning, and transportation.” This activism focuses on the resulting communities that are “cut off from public services, displaced, and denigrated as urban ‘blight’” (147). The phytopathological term “blight” invoked here, sometimes associated with the poor during gentrification projects, is instructive in that it sutures the social to the environmental and brings this synthesis to bear on issues in the urban environment. An illustrative example can be found in the social ramifications Buzzworm identifies through trees. The general lack of trees in Buzzworm’s lower income neighborhood results in an oppressive lack of shade and is a pejorative visual designation of a self-reinforcing class system. The few trees that have been planted in his neighborhood are palms; however, the tropical beauty these gesture towards for Buzzworm is at a disconnect with his lack of access to the actual tropical beauty of the beach. He finally re-imagines the palm trees as “standing up giving everyone the finger” (84). As a means of resisting the gentrification that reinforces racial segregation and pushes the lower classes into less desirable areas, Buzzworm introduces his project of “gente-fication” which involves social and environmental measures designed to empower the people in poor neighborhoods to become their own gentry with “a self-made set of standards and respectability” (83). Taking Fredric Jameson’s analysis of late capitalism into account, this concern with curbing the inequitable processes of gentrification in a Los Angeles suburb resonates with the broader regional apprehensions Yamashita presents about NAFTA via the “now-global scale” of gentrification facilitated by, among other things, “the new international

division of labor,” “transportation systems such as containerization,” and “the flight of production to advanced Third World areas” (*Postmodernism* xix). Such global concerns are reduced in scale in *Tropic of Orange*, which allows for an analysis of their effects at the local level between southern California and northern Mexico.

For Buzzworm, the local effects of globalizing capitalism partly revolve around environmental issues. As noted, the palm tree is symbolically important to Buzzworm’s vision of urban environmentalism. His environmentalism is closely linked to economic concerns and social mobility, issues that are elucidated by local environmental characteristics. It thus shares with conventional environmentalism the dream of escape that conservation work and preservation of wilderness entails. Buzzworm recalls that as a youth he was unable to recognize the trees in his neighborhood because the trees he drew in school were “two brown strokes for a trunk and that green amorphous do on top, sometimes with red dots they called apples.” In the “city desert” of Los Angeles no such productive trees were visible, but Buzzworm eventually notices much taller trees—palms—and thinks “if you could get to the top of them, you could see everything. See beyond the street, the houses, the neighborhood. See over the freeway” (32).

As noted above, trees for Buzzworm are socio-economic barometers. They also act as unmediated sources for information about the immediate environment: “Palm tree’s smart, knows the time for everything. Knows to put out flowers and fruit when the time’s right, even though out here don’t seem like there’s any seasons to speak of. Suppose we could all learn something from a palm tree that knows the seasons better than us” (31). This links back to the orange tree that is both a climatic and socio-economic indicator. Palm trees, like citruses, are shown to directly confer knowledge about place, and thus they counter the mediated prescriptions that define how the Los Angeles landscape—both physical and social—is understood. By drawing attention to the way palm trees disclose connections between class, environment, and racism, Yamashita transfers the re-enchantment effect of Buzzworm’s revelation about the trees’ communicative capacity onto the politics they imply.

Buzzworm recalls other children at his school discussing: “What you drawin’ them ugly palm trees for? If anybody had some sense, they’d hack these poles down and plant some real trees with real shade.” The children tell Buzzworm that “Poor people don’t get to have no shade. That’s what porches are for.” The internalized acceptance of environmental injustice is made explicit in this passage. As the dialogue continues, the children state that even the palm trees were a mistake because “it turned out they giants” and, as such, had been slated to have their tops severed (32). Returning to Buzzworm’s association of their height with both visibility and social mobility, topping the palms functions as a symbolic act that negates his vision for improving the neighborhood and for upward social mobility. Given that cut-

ting the top off a palm results in the tree's death, rather than simply making it shorter, there is a further implication about the violent suppression of those who, like the freeway commune, attempt to rise above their social class.

The visual metaphor of the topped palm trees reinforces the theme of segregation by removing the only things tall enough to allow visibility of the impoverished neighborhood from other parts of the city and, conversely, for those in the neighborhood to climb the trees and view parts of the city beyond. The shortened trees mean "You never had to see [Buzzworm's part of town] ever" (33). Yet this rumination on partitioning is immediately challenged by Yamashita's formal strategy of cross-cutting to another part of the freeway and a disparate character, Manzanar, whose fate will eventually join Buzzworm's. Elisabeth Mermann-Jozwiak has noted that "*Tropic of Orange* is a postmodern, multiple-voiced, fragmented, and hybrid text whose hyperbolic plot defies order, stability, and homogeneity" (2). Yet the initially shambolic form of the novel, like Manzanar's ostensibly discordant freeway orchestrations, becomes orderly by way of the cross-cuts set out in the Hypercontext page that gradually weave different narrative threads together until each separate character becomes a part of the others' lives.

Yamashita manipulates the temporal and topographical progression of the narrative in order to harmonize narrative structure, content, and politics. This is done partly through the Hypercontext arrangement of plot lines that has them switching abruptly between subjects and locations, in a similar manner to the cinematic cross-cut, as a "stylistic vehicle of temporal manipulation" (Bordwell 84). This allows narration to develop the seven distinct but interconnected plot threads occurring in differing locations simultaneously. It also constitutes a formal allegory of NAFTA and globalization that links disparate individuals and communities. Initially making firm demarcations between stories before allowing them gradually to coalesce, by the time of the story's culmination in a wrestling match, the separate plots have become largely unified in time and space. Yamashita pairs form with content, tightening the threads of narrative into a closer mesh as Gabriel extends his use of the internet to conduct his investigation.¹⁴ This weaving together of lives in the narrative arc reflects the subtextual interdependency of economic, environmental, migration, and race politics that we see expressed through each character. Anchoring the events of each chapter to specific locations, as the fabula gravitates toward the Mexico-U.S. border, to borrow Edward Soja's satirical take on the Los Angeles Times slogan, "it all comes together" on the Harbor Freeway, primarily through the impromptu housing project set up there (191).

¹⁴ Gabriel's musing that "Maybe the net was the ultimate noir" links the novel's structure to noir form, in which it is typical for narrative threads to transition at the climax from isolated to interconnected (246).

Yamashita uses this homeless commune to break down the distinction between private property in the form of cars, and public space, the freeway, while also invoking the ethics of national borders that allow the passage of U.S. citizens like Gabriel and Bobby to Mexico, but not vice versa. In the novel, NAFTA is presented as an actual character, or caricature, one whose opponent is “El Gran Mojado” or the “Big *Wetback*” (257-58). These terms highlight the racist discrimination inherent in a policy that allows for “free” trade of commodities across borders, while leaving intact restrictions on the cross-border flows of workers who produce those commodities. That another imaginary line—the Tropic of Cancer—together with the orange that grows around it, is used to illustrate these issues points to their grounding in ecological politics. The absurdity and hypocrisy implied by the orange that travels from Brazil via Honduras, Guatemala, and Mexico to finally arrive, legally, to be sold in the U.S., is contrasted with the difficulty faced by those who wish simply to cross one state line in order to join another economic community (244). Perhaps the most grotesque illustration of the effects of border restrictions on bodies is detailed in Bobby Ngu’s narrative. In it he shows the cost as well as the difficulty and danger he faced when smuggling his young relative across the border from Mexico to avoid her being sold into the illegal sex trade or perhaps even carved up for her organs—a fate he later fears has befallen his son (100).¹⁵

By situating the politics of migration within the economic injunctions that govern its conditions of operation, Yamashita highlights the lived experience of environmental precarity—for example, vulnerability to polluted air or contaminated water, in which economic deregulation plays a significant role—which, already evident in the Los Angeles of the early 1990s, was set to be exacerbated by NAFTA.¹⁶ The metonymic implications Yamashita constructs for the orange that link it to issues of climate, migration, the division between labor and capital, and so on, are a means of developing and interconnecting the socio-environmental critique of NAFTA and neoliberalism more generally. Although, according to Kenneth Burke, metonymy is one of the four master tropes of literature and is found in numerous styles or

¹⁵ Bobby and Rafaela’s son Sol becomes associated with the infant organ trade ring Gabriel seeks to expose, as well as climate change, firstly through his name, Sol, and later through his transporting of the Tropic-orange towards the border. This threat of Sol being literally and brutally commodified for his saleable organs, together with his unwitting role in environmental catastrophe, is perhaps a polemical attempt to suggest the appropriateness of a response of horror about environmentally damaging commodification of natural resources by attaching it to the naturalised affect of horror at the prospect of the illegal organ trade.

¹⁶ Robert D. Bullard has published extensively on environmental racism and identified instances of this failure to address problems regarding environmental conditions for communities of colour. In *Ethical Borders* Bill Hing describes how NAFTA amplifies economic inequalities and the human rights issues these imply, causing an increase in the undocumented migration the agreement avowedly sought to suppress.

genres of fiction, William Marling makes the case for its particular use in noir.

In *The American Roman Noir*, Marling undertakes a detailed discussion of the importance of metonymy for the genre. Marling argues that the manifestation of modernity's discourse of progress in technology, economy, and design was an important factor in shaping the social conditions that noir sought to identify and criticize. Developments in design and technology redefined the nature of work, Fordism representing the most influential and emblematic of these changes, and reinforced a dogma of progress equated with improvement, which was not borne out in the material conditions of the majority of those who experienced these changes firsthand. It is in this disjuncture between discourse and experience that noir grounds its critique of the impetuous optimism of upholders of the status quo.

Yet as Marling and others show, the noir form is inseparable from the social conditions in which it arose. The "Janus-like nature" of Los Angeles as a city of opportunity though with a history of restrictionism and dispossession would become part of the noir imaginary of the city, if often limited to the genre's unconscious (Marling 41).¹⁷ This can also be read as a variation on Davis' "master dialectic" (23). Film studio censorship and its effects on film noir have been well documented (see, for instance, James Naremore's chapter on this in *More than Night*). Yet as noir has evolved and censorship has diminished appreciably, remaining primarily only in coercive pressure, Yamashita's novel demonstrates the continued relevance and potential of noir for narratives of disenchantment. As occurs in noir, Yamashita builds or questions metonymic associations between the orange motif and California and she also unsettles the discourse of progress that legitimates the status quo.

"In the economic boom of the 1920s," Marling writes, "metonymic qualities became allied to 'progress' and to narratives about it. This is because metonymy shares qualities with momentum" (40). *Tropic of Orange* makes extensive use of metonymy in constructing its political ecology. Yet it also parodies the inflection of progress that Marling claims metonymy implies for noir, in which "momentum" is understood as teleological, by attaching the failed economic promises of modernity to the neoliberal revisitation of them in NAFTA. By recycling and altering noir devices and thematics into her late 1990s novel, Yamashita highlights the repetition of economic history in Los Angeles, that "crystal ball of capitalism's future," and demonstrates the city's failure to break free from its own mythology of prosperity and equality (Davis, *City* 48). *Tropic of Orange* connects the 1920s white, middle-class U.S.-American prerogative "to become rich without work" (Galbraith qtd. in Marling 54) to the supposed benefits of NAFTA, parodying its rhetorical

¹⁷ Julian Murphet elucidates the process of submergence or repression in the context of race in film noir.

commitment to improving the situation for the economically underprivileged while actually eroding their rights.¹⁸ Before the novel's final, farcical fixed-match, luchador SUPERNAFTA proclaims: "what's the future? Well, isn't it what everyone really wants? It's a piece of the action! And that's what progress is all about. A piece of the action. How about twelve percent? ... That's multimillions." SUPERNAFTA goes on: "And you don't have to do nothing to get it" (257).

Metonymy has the potential to succinctly implicate multiple factors by collapsing large and untidy formations into a neatly formed object. This feature particularly is taken up in *Tropic of Orange* as a means of connecting various concerns of the novel that might at first glance appear separate.¹⁹ Consider Yamashita's presentation of the image of the toilet bowl trade. Rather than buying Mexican toilet bowls for his home in Mexico, since buying them there would be "too expensive," Gabriel chooses to export them from the U.S. into Mexico (23). This inverts the South-North flow of commodities that sees items built cheaply in the economically deracinated environment of the South being then exported to the wealthy North where they are sold at inflated prices, with the majority of profits kept out of the poorer region of production. Toilet bowls here become a metonym for waste and pollution, and Gabriel takes advantage of the exploitative terms of neoliberalized trade by saving money as he transports this commodity, now a symbol of waste, back to the South. This suggestion that environmental degradation caused by mass production is being exported to the South for the purpose of cheaper commodities in the North is reinforced by the re-introduction of the toilet bowl to Mexico. This in turn gestures toward the way that so-called free trade transforms the South into a waste receptacle for the North.

This transference of capital and waste occurs via the freeway on which a good deal of the novel's action takes place. The freeway presents a spatial configuration that resembles the structure of metonymy, as well as globalization, because of its physical and symbolic connective function, and its facilitation of the momentum Marling associates with metonymy. In *Tropic of Orange*, the freeway is not only the site of an impromptu environmental

¹⁸ Ratifying NAFTA was the apotheosis of Carlos Salinas de Gortan's presidential career which was defined by mass privatisation and slashing of public spending. Shortly after NAFTA came into effect, Zapatistas staged "the largest post-revolutionary rebellion" of the century in Mexico (Gutierrez 144). Andy Gutierrez describes how the nature of this rebellion reinforces the inseparability of environmental issues from human rights ones, an observation that is merely commonsensical to the Zapatistas who recognise their livelihood as directly connected to the land (145). In this article Gutierrez shows how the ratification of NAFTA was received as a genocidal act by those whose land and livelihoods were directly threatened by the agreement with its inherent bias (not least through massive subsidies) toward U.S. producers.

¹⁹ It should be noted that although *Tropic of Orange* makes use of metonymy as an indexing device, the reverse of this can also be true when metonymy is unpacked to reveal its fragmented constituents.

justice challenge, but also provides the means to oscillate between Mexico and the U.S., urban and desert zones, black and white neighborhoods. It acts as a site of contiguity between the social and environmental and it is a symbol of mobility for the car-owning middle classes, mobility that, for the state, is unacceptably interrupted by the spontaneous formation of a community in the midst of a traffic pile-up. Yamashita withholds the possibility that this community could be a harbinger for an improved, future Los Angeles by returning to the citrus narrative and the socio-environmental disruption it entails.

Drawing on a noir sense of disenchantment associated with densely interconnected corruption, oranges become linked to large and fraught questions about the American illicit drug trade when they are used as clandestine vessels for the smuggling of a “very pure form” of cocaine from South America to the United States:

“It all goes north to the gringos. If they want it so much, why don’t they plant it in their own backyards? Make it in their own factories?” He stood up suddenly with anger. “How many people run along this road. Every hand is greased.” ... “[My son] used to brag to me, ‘Drugs,’ he said, ‘have come to kill our poverty and marry our politics.’” (146)

Rodriguez is referring specifically to “the war over an innocent indigenous plant,” *Erythroxylum coca*, the use and regulation of which, particularly in its refined form, has led to countless deaths and fueled state corruption in the U.S. In Middle and South American countries, the consequences of the “war” have been far more devastating (146). The smuggling of cocaine using oranges as vessels links the production of a legitimate commodity to an illicit one. This suggests a substitution wherein both commodities are appraised in terms of their positive effects on the U.S. economy, and their detrimental effects on the workers who produce and transport them. Sayaka Fukumi has argued that NAFTA intrinsically benefits the trans-American drug trade because of the increased density of South-North border crossings (99). That the first casualty of the cocaine-filled oranges is a young African American alludes to the politics of crack and ghettoization, while it reinforces the notion that this is a politically inflected economic venture.

It also links back to other articulations of racist exploitation and trade in the novel, and calls for a consideration of the ways in which the detrimental societal effects of cocaine in the U.S. are unevenly distributed along lines of race. Howard Abadinsky documents the racist history associated with cocaine and notes that as early as the turn of the twentieth century in the southern U.S. cocaine use was already associated with the myth that the drug caused African Americans to become violent and to rape white women (54). Given this racist fabrication that denigrated African Americans as morally bankrupt, it is ironic that by the end of the same century investigative journalist Gary Webb would uncover the role of the CIA in propagating the use

of the drug in black communities within Los Angeles.²⁰ In *Tropic of Orange*, the lethal oranges are swiftly gathered and sent to landfill, a response that puzzles Buzzworm since it is at odds with the long-running failure of governmental institutions' professed aim of removing crack cocaine from urban ghettos: "Buzzworm scratched his head. Looked like you could take out an entire industry in just twenty-two minutes flat. Nothing to it. Why should he be surprised? Put the crack industry in in 'bout the same amount of time" (141). Not only suspicious of the efficient removal of the oranges, Buzzworm also alludes to the CIA's role in deploying crack in metropolitan African American communities. Webb has shown that the CIA's drug-dealing was also connected to the funding of right-wing guerrilla Contras in Nicaragua, which emphasizes the interlinkage of the state, cocaine, and political violence between Central and North America. In the novel, Emi discloses the bounds of her disenchantment when she callously states that the "CIA/Contra arms-for-crack scheme is passé" when compared with ongoing crime and corruption, especially in connection with the infant organ trade ring that Gabriel attempts to disentangle (248). *Tropic of Orange's* critique is aimed at this historical context that discloses the betrayal of pan-American citizens by U.S. national and corporate interests for the same economic benefits that underlie NAFTA and its attendant racism.

As well as being implicated in issues of race and social cohesion, oranges function as a bridge between economic and environmental dilemmas in the coupling of NAFTA with climate change. The effects of the orange shifting the Tropic of Cancer, an occurrence associated in the novel with the economic agreement, are environmentally cataclysmic. The movement of the Tropic of Cancer warps the Californian terrain and carries an arid climate into the usually Mediterranean conditions of the Los Angeles Basin. In real-world Los Angeles, despite some minor decreases in greenhouse gas emissions (GHG), during the decades NAFTA has been operational its net environmental impact has been of significant detriment in terms of GHGs, deforestation, and energy efficiency (Schott et al.), confirming the anxieties around environmental degradation that are presented in the novel.

However, the most immediate problem for the physical environment resulting from citrus farming in Los Angeles is the issue of water use; the Owens Valley "water wars" providing inspiration for another citrus noir: *Chinatown*. In terms of environmental justice, citrus presents problems of distribution of the commodity, of resource use, particularly water in the drought-prone climate of California, and waste creation. Despite California's reputa-

²⁰ In a series of articles published in the *San Jose Mercury News*, later developed into the book *Dark Alliance*, Webb describes the CIA's involvement in the so-called crack epidemic beginning in South Central Los Angeles. Webb demonstrates the connections between the CIA's cocaine-related activities and the funding of Contras who were active in Nicaragua from the late 1970s until the early 1990s.

tion for orange farming, the oranges in *Tropic of Orange* come from south of the U.S., an indication of a concern over NAFTA's outsourcing of production to other regions, to places where regulations protecting workers and environment are less rigorous, where living situations are generally more precarious, and where medical care is less accessible despite that under-regulated labor practices often create a greater need for it. Labor under NAFTA was primarily outsourced to Mexico, the same location in which Gabriel's citrus trees fail to produce the fruit they should, due to a lack of water. This development in the novel and the fact that the single fruit that does grow on the orange tree leads to dire environmental effects tethers economic anxieties to those about climate change.

Yamashita considers the interconnection of climate change and community disorder, writing that:

climatic change in L.A. was different from other places. It had perhaps less to do with weather and more to do with disaster. For example, when the city rioted or when the city was on fire or when the city shook, [Manzanar's] program was particularly apt, controversial, hair-raising, horrific, intense—apocalyptic, if you will. (36)²¹

This conflation of climate change and disaster scenarios is linked back to the question of borders, since it is the shifting of two borders—the Tropic of Cancer and the national border of Mexico that it drags with it—that tampers with climate and causes the highway disaster. Climatic change in *Tropic of Orange* is not only an environmental phenomenon but a societal one—the shocks of riots are felt as earthquakes. The landscape, typically viewed as relatively static, comes alive as the Tropic-orange physically distorts the Northern Mexican and Southern Californian landscape; as it forces the Mexican border and Tropic of Cancer northward it also drives the plot forward into confusion and destruction.

As described above, this orange begins as the unexpected fruit of one of the citrus trees that Gabriel plants at the home he plans eventually to move into in Mexico. Contrary to what Rafaela perceives as unlikely in the savannah climate of Mazatlán, the tree bears a single orange which grows around a materialization of the line that not only marks the Tropic of Cancer, but also regulates the meteorological effects associated with it. After the orange that has ensnared the section of the Tropic of Cancer falls to the ground it then, in various characters' hands, begins a journey northward. As it does so, it transforms the landscape, redefines borders and mobilizes weather patterns. It also distorts space, as if the physical environment were a field being skewed out of shape by a magnetic force. Through this rapid and cataclysmic

²¹ In the novel the intensification of Manzanar's performance denotes a foreshadowing of disaster, most notably in its escalation prior to the freeway massacre.

transformation of weather patterns and environs the sun-like orange becomes a visual metaphor for accelerated climate change.

As the orange travels along the Harbor Freeway in Los Angeles it deforms the symmetrical lines of the road. Manzanar's orchestral performance begins to call "for more expansive gestures, a greater elasticity" as he conducts traffic (36). This elasticizing of the road is a result of the orange distorting parallels of latitude as it travels north which anticipates the freeway disaster. The following day another orange, one of those infused not with the Tropic of Cancer but with cocaine, causes an accident on the same Freeway. A driver unwittingly eats a segment of the toxic orange, passes out, veers across lanes of traffic, and crashes into a semi-trailer shipping propane—"Kaboom!" (90). A few minutes after this accident, "about a mile back of the first," the orange attached to the Tropic of Cancer causes the spatial distortion that results in a petrol tanker jackknifing and then exploding like another "giant Molotov cocktail" (112). The reference to an object associated with revolutionary uprisings provides an important, if somewhat ironic, context for what happens next when the homeless community camped in the roadside flora move onto the freeway and take up residence in the vehicles trapped among the wreckage.

Through this group of background characters, Yamashita introduces questions of environmental justice and community self-determination, and focuses environmental issues through the lenses of race and class. Members of this community thrive in their provisional homes, growing their own food and cleaning or otherwise improving the cars they temporarily inhabit. This looks something like a car-obsessed but relatively utopian commune when focalized through Buzzworm, but the "politicos" that come to view the event see something that looks "like a big border town," a clear threat to the integrity of the U.S. border that NAFTA aimed to bolster. The inhabitants initiate "urban gardening" in a move towards food security and they practice recycling (217), suggesting that autonomous communities are themselves able to address some problems of environmental justice that are routinely ignored by the state.

Kate Klein and Manuel Riemer argue that homelessness is a challenge to environmental justice for two reasons. Firstly, homelessness can be experienced by those who lose their homes due to natural disaster, or due to increasing rental and energy costs resulting from the depletion of resources, including land-space. *Tropic of Orange* adds to this the issue of economic migration—something that NAFTA tried, but failed, to reduce—and the implied problem of housing and income. Secondly, while experiencing homelessness people are more exposed and vulnerable to environmental hazards. Yamashita identifies the Los Angeles freeway system as a living space for those experiencing homelessness, "a great root system, an organic living entity," and yet part of its ecology is that it is hyper-exposed in terms of air, as well as sound and light, pollution (37). The orchestral performance that Manzanar conducts from various overpasses ironically signals the chaot-

ic grind of automobile noise and movement as a phenomenon that, once structured, becomes for him the ultimate aesthetic experience. Yamashita draws out questions of environmental justice by juxtaposing the City of Los Angeles' affinity for car culture and its reverence for the highway system with its neglect of socio-environmental issues such as homelessness. Not only is Yamashita prescient in drawing out connections between homelessness and environmental justice, she also suggests one of the most crucial points of vulnerability for this group. By situating the fictional homeless alongside the freeway, Yamashita's narrative is suggestive of the precise nature of homeless environmental vulnerability which is not, at least in Los Angeles, exposure, but conditions arising from poor quality of air, like asthma and pulmonary disease.

Tropic of Orange presents an interpretation of environmental justice as the right for communities to exist and interact in an "environment [that] is safe, nurturing, and productive" while also demonstrating a responsibility to maintain it (Adamson et al. 4). In an article on *Tropic of Orange* and Japanese internment, Chiyo Crawford notes that self-determination is a central principle of environmental justice. Crawford emphasizes the "important role the environment plays in upholding the autonomy of a cultural community," and critiques the role of military operations in displacing "targeted communities" (88). It is in this context that the orange complicates simplistic clichés about self-determination and bootstrapping when it draws attention to the sweep of historically and geographically dispersed factors that shape the social configuration of the novel's contemporary Los Angeles. In depicting a plausible version of the city before introducing surprising and unpredictable forces at play, Yamashita attempts a re-enchantment of narratives about Los Angeles without relying on boosterists reverence for the restorative potential of capitalism. Rather, Yamashita depicts a spontaneous and self-reliant community:

Politicos came to the edges to take a look. Take a look into something looking like a big border town. ...

Along the way, folks came up to put in their two cents. Brother in a '78 Pontiac said, "Mayor, sir, I consider my occupation of this vehicle to be a short-term one. I'm just borrowing it. But I want the man or woman who owns it to know I've made considerable home improvements. Washed it good. Waxed it. Spiffed up the insides. There's not a speck of dirt. Made it downright homey inside." Sure enough: photos sat on the dash on either side of an arrangement of California poppies and the Bible; stuffed bear in the back window, decorative hanky over the steering wheel.

Next-door neighbor showed them how he got a tomato plant growing in the dirt coming up through the concrete. "You see here, these blossoms? And here's baby tomatoes. Call it urban gardening. We gonna be feeding ourselves, don't you worry." (217)

Plant life here transitions from having the symbolic value attributed to it by Buzzworm and Gabriel into being a basis for food security and social cohesion. The nurturing of plants is a central indicator of community in the novel, and plant life links the U.S.-based narrative thread to the Mexican one. In the context of industry, the orange is a suspect object and agent of disenchantment, however, growing food plants on a local scale and for use, rather than profit, gestures towards their potential to become objects that facilitate affective and societal re-enchantment. Through these associations, *Tropic of Orange* develops a tension between different use-values of plants and fruits, and between their use as objects of dis- or re-enchantment. At the crux of their differentiation are questions of alienation, as Gabriel explains to Emi:

“Gabe, this back to nature thing of yours? It’s a nice vacation, but how about golf?”

“I don’t know how to explain it. I get a kick out of planting a fruit tree everytime I go. It’s not like this news business. I plant; I get fruits. I get to make something I can actually touch and eat for a change. Seriously, I sometimes think to hell with all this.” Gabriel’s eyes wearily surveyed all this. (23)

This exchange engages the idea of production for consumption discussed earlier in the context of Californian citrus farming and economic depression. It exposes the alienation Gabriel experiences in the knowledge-work he does on the North side of the border. It also undermines his re-enchanting vision of primary production by implicating the fruit he grows in environmental disaster and inequitable border policy.

The scene also obliquely addresses the privatization and securitization of public space through its roadside encampment of homeless, this image of an invisible but precarious community contributing to debates surrounding the use and restriction of public space in Los Angeles. Margaret Crawford contests the loss of public space observed by Jürgen Habermas and Michael Sorkin, arguing that the loss is primarily a perceptual one (4). Crawford’s rejection of the idea of shrinking public space relies on a redefinition of what counts as public, and thus an adjustment in what we conceive of as public space. Unfortunately, her examples of unions, lodges, and spontaneously created public space through demonstrations only serve to reinforce the loss of larger and more permanent public spaces such as parks, roadways, squares, beaches, and so on, and emphasize the restrictions placed on their use for the already vulnerable homeless (4, 6). She also fails to speak to a more democratic conceptualization of public space defined by the Zapatistas that Yamashita evokes.

The novel gestures satirically toward this right to occupy the urban environment and the ironic lack of access to homes in a city that has been so reliant on property development. Rendering the cast of homeless characters visible while they retain their marginal and minority status accentuates the noir tension, discussed elsewhere in terms of race, between the invisible and

the ubiquitous. It also links problems of race segregation to homelessness by presenting both African American neighborhoods and the roadside homeless as invisible to the rest of the city. Appropriating the early noir form of a “through-the-glass-darkly” narrative sees the novel “puncturing the bloated image of Southern California as the golden land of opportunity and the fresh start” (Fine qtd. in Davis 37-8). In fleshing out such a vision, the novel stages a jarring disenchantment of its earlier utopian presentation of the homeless community.

In the novel, public space becomes a site for staging environmental justice issues affecting those who attempt to inhabit it. Spaces that should be open for access and use by all members of society, much like protected wilderness areas, have increasingly become zones of exclusion for the underprivileged (Amster 44). The disjunction between the concept of public space and the reality of who has fair access to it is, in the context of Los Angeles, a problem of urban ecology. In the novel Buzzworm’s neighborhood is impacted by such inequities of public space, as are the homeless. As a challenge to this, *Tropic of Orange* creates a site of enchantment as it briefly imagines the temporarily autonomous freeway zone wherein community spontaneously arises and becomes immediately self-reliant. This utopian project is conceived of as temporary by those involved, and yet is attacked suddenly and violently and destroyed only days after its inception:

The coordinated might of the Army, Navy, Air Force, Marines, the Coast and National Guards, federal, state, and local police forces of the most militaristic of nations looked down as it had in the past on tiny islands and puny countries the size of San Bernardino and descended in a single storm. (239)

Thus, a style of state-violence that had been a strategy of oppression overseas becomes a domestic procedure, a polemical indicator of the brand of globalization facilitated by NAFTA.²² The massacre closely follows the vaguely pastoral scene resembling a community garden which, as a site of enchantment, requires a perceptual shift regarding the freeway and its purpose, thereby condensing what Yamashita projects as the slow-violence of NAFTA into an immediate catastrophe. The jarring shift that occurs between paragraphs disenchant the utopian scenario and swings the affective mode of the novel back toward the noir.

²² Transnational women’s human rights group MADRE has voiced their concerns over the “raw violence of economic exploitation” experienced by the “world’s majority” under globalisation (Rupert 89). This violence is legitimated by agreements like NAFTA which affirms that “the global arena lacks any countervailing structures through which to oppose [multinational corporations]” (89). For an assessment of the violences, particularly of poverty, hunger, and exclusion, associated with neoliberal economic policy in Mexico see Weaver et al., especially their concluding chapter: “Structural Adjustment, Structural Violence.”

Yamashita indicates that at least some of those who were slaughtered on the freeway were black, drawing attention to the topographical segregation of comparatively homogenous groupings of race in Los Angeles. Buzzworm's neighborhood is predominantly African-American and the Westside mostly white. NAFTA attempts an additional separation of Mexicans by limiting the influx of migrants from the south. In *Tropic of Orange*, neighborhood is a synecdoche for the state in the sense that both are economically, and so racially, insulated areas that are defined by who is kept out as much as by who is let in. Yamashita briefly acknowledges her debt to Davis' *City of Quartz* in this critique by placing a map torn from its pages in Buzzworm's hands. The map displays the disputed territory of rival gangs, Crips and Bloods, and suggests the brief relevance and instability of non-geological borders due to their historical contingency, and shows these political divisions to be powerful and deadly (80). This scene draws attention to the deterritorializing outcomes of segregation and gentrification.

In contrast to the foregrounding of race, which helps to establish the status of the main characters in the novel while challenging stereotypes about them, the homeless who take up the freeway wreckage as a living space are described in barely any detail at all. Here, Yamashita highlights the significance of the disappearance of interior spaces in classical era film noir that Dean MacCannell establishes in his analysis: "the torn window shade, the single bare lightbulb hanging from a twisted wire, the iron bedstead" (281). She links this with the disappearance of actual working or lower-middle class spaces which has caused homelessness and at the same time rendered it invisible by pushing the poor to the margins of cities and neighborhoods, and also of capitalist society. This is what lies behind Buzzworm's challenge of "gente-fication" by which he means a democratic restoration of marginalized neighborhoods (83). MacCannell argues that the disappearance of "the abject interior spaces of film noir ... disarms the left when it comes to critical examination of contemporary urban problems, especially homelessness" (280-82). The lack of detail given about the homeless in *Tropic of Orange*, their living spaces hidden in bushes and under overpasses, responds to this problem of visibility in the context of what MacCannell describes as exclusionary democracy.

Despite the lack of subjectivity granted to the novel's homeless, their inclusion in the novel calls attention to environmental racism since they are marginalized in a white-minority part of the city near Buzzworm's African-American neighborhood, an area known for environmental justice initiatives.²³ The primarily homeless victims of the massacre have been established throughout the narrative as numerous and yet somehow invisible. This

²³ Bullard et al. note instances of this, such as Los Angeles' March 2008 Clean Truck Program aimed at ameliorating the impact of harbour area pollution on the adjacent community of colour (131).

situates the violence done to them within the anxieties of noir when it sought to address a cultural violence that also seemed ubiquitous and yet is often out of frame and unseen. Noir violence is characteristically fraught with ambiguity which has been interpreted as contributing to the disenchanting mood, suggestive of corruption, that permeates the style. A particular criticism of classical and post-classical film noir has been aimed at the lack of non-white characters and plotlines, and especially its failure to depict the racial anxieties felt by whites about blacks, anxieties that were prevalent in the Los Angeles of the mid-twentieth century.²⁴

Perhaps drawing on the 1992 Los Angeles riots for her articulation of race, poverty, and invisibility, Yamashita is nonetheless prescient in depicting them in relation to ecological and environmental justice. Eric Ishiwata's essay in *The Neoliberal Deluge* makes the same connections with reference to the response to Hurricane Katrina. Ishiwata finds that after the hurricane, a previously invisible "Other America" comprised of "racial minorities in particular, the socioeconomically disenfranchised in general" came into national relief (33)—at least it was previously invisible to major news outlets such as Newsweek and the Federal Emergency Management Agency. In the same volume, Nicole Trujillo-Pagán points out that in the rebuilding efforts post-Katrina, Latino evacuees were joined by other Latino workers, all of whom were then labelled "imported labor." Vilified as "illegal aliens" by media outlets and politicians, their right to work was questioned (327). Meanwhile, construction companies made hay by recruiting undocumented workers and subsequently refusing to pay their wages, despite President George W. Bush's suspension of worker documentation requirements. Trujillo-Pagán notes that, following Katrina, a neoliberal deregulation of the reconstruction project included the abeyance of the Davis-Bacon Act which protects minimum wages on federal projects, and the diminished function of the Occupational Health and Safety Administration. She argues that, together with this, a key factor enabling exploitation of laborers was the limitation of visibility of these workers—a strategy with parallels in NAFTA's outsourcing of labor to less regulated regions and factories (328).

The concern in the novel over NAFTA's impacts on non-affluent groups dovetails with one of the most important historical conditions for the emergence of film noir: economic depression. David Reid and Jayne L. Walker argue that the "essential continuity between roman noir and film noir" is that "the imagination of disaster in both was Depression-bred" (58). The continuum into hybrid noir styles such as we see in *Tropic of Orange* upholds this anxiety in anticipation of a growing gap between the rich and the poor that

²⁴ As Murphet shows, noir violence generally excluded the visualisation of "black/white race relations" that are evoked by the history of race relations in the U.S. by any reference to "blackness" (22).

neoliberal economic policy facilitates.²⁵ The Depression-bred imagination was obsessed with depletion and the violence that accompanies the transition from excess to frugality—psychologically and socially—as well as with distribution, that central problem for environmental justice. The economic conditions governing film production are readily visible in the so-called Poverty Row films noirs. Those directed by Edgar G. Ulmer would revel, much like *Tropic of Orange*, in “blending the sophisticated with the tawdry” which worked to highlight these differences (Naremore 144). Moreover, the anxieties generated by the economic depression and the significant restructuring of the labor force during the Second World War, as well as government rationing, influenced the agenda of many hard-boiled novels and films noirs.

Tropic of Orange's narration of Los Angeles' political realities draws on noir disenchantment with the city, but also offers an opposed view of the city's latent, cosmopolitan potential as an alternative to neoliberal globalization. Certainly film noir's palette of negative affects is well suited to the imagination of disaster, and its gloomy mood found resonance with a wide audience already primed by news media with apprehensions of economic collapse and social disintegration. The type of loss dramatized in film noir “is a sense of loss of something that was never possessed, something that never was” (MacCannell 280). In *Tropic of Orange*, this sense of loss is anchored to a Los Angeles that never was, defined by the “sunshine” of equal opportunity and prosperity of Davis' master dialectic. The novel is not itself a thoroughgoing exploration of the negative affects associated with film noir—fear, paranoia, anger, disgust, to name a few—and this is part of Yamashita's effort to reveal noir as one voice among many that compete for representational authority over the Los Angeles.

Though the novel self-consciously moves between different generic or stylistic conventions, noir remains an important influence on it. Its journalist figure, Gabriel, sees himself as a Philip Marlowe-esque figure. Gabriel mimics Marlowe in trivial ways such as donning an overcoat, but more significantly, his investigative method attempts to find links between seemingly

²⁵ A particularly relevant set of essays can be found in *The Neoliberal Deluge: Hurricane Katrina, Late Capitalism, and the Remaking of New Orleans*. In the Introduction, Cedric Johnson shows how the scapegoating of bureaucratic ineptitude as chiefly responsible for the crisis following Hurricane Katrina paved the way for deregulation and neoliberal governance. Johnson succinctly targets the central problem of equitable distribution for neoliberal economics, writing that “neoliberal reforms” have led to “massive transfers of public wealth into private hands [which has] simultaneously created unprecedented inequality, mass immiseration, and vulnerability for the multitude around the world” (xxi).

The essays which follow show that although “Forces of nature were instrumental” in the devastation in New Orleans, “policy choices ... were more decisive” (xx). This political analysis leads Johnson to claim a much broader relevance for the essays relating to Katrina. He argues that “The social and environmental crises facing New Orleans portend the challenges and states of vulnerability confronting millions in the United States and beyond” (xx).

disparate crimes and issues. He connects an orange-related death to international cartels, the freeway massacre to political corruption, and apprehensions about Rafaela's son Sol to an infant-organ smuggling ring. By the end of *Tropic Of Orange*, it has become clear that the unsolved crimes in the narrative are part of a larger pattern that does not end when the novel does: "Leftover homeless with their eyes on Worthington Ford's used-car deals. Congress woman Waters saying we gotta get to the bottom of this orange conspiracy. . . . Vigilante groups disbandin' to Bel Air. Attorney General arrestin' and investigatin'" (265). By withholding any neat conclusions, Yamashita emphasizes the ongoing, dialectical nature of the narrativization of Los Angeles via a suspenseful process of synthesizing dis- and re-enchanting figures and events.

The Big Sleep and *Tropic of Orange* both deploy confusion at the level of language and plot structure as a technique of ambiguity that makes the crimes as un(re)solvable for the characters as they are for the reader or viewer. By the end of *Tropic of Orange*, Gabriel, seeking to position himself in relation to his investigation, realizes that: "I no longer looked for a resolution to the loose threads hanging off my storylines. If I had begun to understand anything, I now knew they were simply the warp and woof of a fraying net of conspiracies in an expanding universe" (248-49). This recognition resonates with Marlowe's final rumination that he is "part of the nastiness now," as he imagines himself contaminated by the disenchantment that tints the noir universe and transcends his personal experience (146). Both characters recognize a culture of degradation that permeates and exceeds the limits of the individual, implying a predicament that must be approached collectively, structurally.

The chapter following Gabriel's realization is titled "The Big Sleep," it describes the shooting and death of his partner Emi. This event takes place at the peak of confusion between and within narrative threads. Just when readers expect to find resolution, mirroring *The Big Sleep*, they are instead confronted by indeterminacy. Even Chandler himself was at a loss to explain the novel's plot, and he was unable to identify its murderer or, obversely, confirm the death as a suicide. The story illustrating this difficulty in comprehending Chandler's plot as a whole is retold by Jameson: On the set of *The Big Sleep*, lead actor Humphrey Bogart and director Howard Hawks debate the Lido pier murder, or suicide, late into the night, eventually calling, literally, on Chandler's authority to resolve the dispute. Chandler, also awake and drinking at the late hour, admits he cannot remember ("Synoptic Chandler" 33). This tale exerts an influence on *Tropic of Orange*, in the last words of Emi as she dies from her bullet wounds: "Just cuz you get to the end doesn't mean you know what happened" (252). This is one of many foreshadowings of the loose threads left at the conclusion of *Tropic of Orange*, but also an indication that the novel is speaking to a broader universe than its own diegetic world.

However, Yamashita also emphasizes dissimilarities between the actual city of Los Angeles and her narrativization of it. Following a conversation with Gabriel, Emi leaves the restaurant they have eaten at, then appears at its window, fists clenched, and screams: “‘It’s raining!’ Her lips formed the ridiculous words. In fact, the terrace and street beyond were awash, water pouring as if from a thousand chrome-plated faucets, pouring out of the gray L.A. skies” (25). The words, ridiculous in the context of Los Angeles’ dry climate, signal that something beyond just weather has gone awry. The rain ironically interpolates Yamashita’s own awareness of entering into the Los Angeles cultural imaginary on the same terms noir texts do. With the down-pour, which mimics the classical film noir’s often drizzling city-street set, the narrative content begins to turn noir: mysteries proliferate, false leads are followed, violence erupts, and not all of the key characters will make it out alive. To do so, narrated events both draw upon and enter into the history of texts that have shaped the city’s image, informed by the disenchanting cynicism of noir as one of its key archives.

Early post-classical film noir often diminished the frequency and intensity of on-screen violence, a decision that was due in part to the Hollywood Production Code and meant that films repressed and diffused the anxieties they sought to reflect. *Tropic of Orange* partly mimics this self-repression in its treatment of violence against the homeless. Although the same explicit restrictions of the Production Code have not been imposed on Yamashita’s writing, she nonetheless reduces the visibility of violence in the novel. On the other hand, class, ethnicity, and other indicators of privilege are often foregrounded to an extent that parodies the sincerity of their presentation, and yet at other times these too are not described at all.

One such conspicuous absence is in those descriptions of the freeway community, especially when contrasted with the ironic fetishization of the model and contents of the automobiles:

Even [Manzanar], who knew the dense hidden community living on the no-man’s-land of public property, was surprised by the numbers of people who descended the slopes. Men, women, and children, their dogs and even cats, bedding, and caches of cans and bottles in great green garbage sacks and shopping carts moved into public view, sidling along the lines of abandoned cars, gawking into windows and kicking tires, remarking on the models, ages, and colors, as if at a great used car dealership...

The vans and camper trailers went first; then the gas guzzlers—oversized Cadillacs with their spacious pink and red vinyl interiors, and blue Buicks. A sleek white limousine with black interior was in particular favor. (121)

The insect-like appearance of human forms seen from the distant vantage point of Manzanar’s overpass shows the homeless emerging from a dusty hill, threatened by fire as they clamber into the crevices of abandoned cars. Compared with the itemized brands, colors, and models of cars, the homeless are a nondescript group of “Men, women and children” defined primari-

ly by the threat they might present to the abandoned private property (120-21).

Davis' index of Los Angeles fiction reveals a slew of novels bearing strong, albeit conspicuously reconfigured, resemblances to Yamashita's depiction of disaster. The above scene of homeless on the move particularly recalls Whitman Chambers' *Invasion!*. The novel is concerned with the division between labor and capital, though in this novel these anxieties are dramatized in a racist narrative about a Japanese invasion of California. Chambers' Japanese invaders are described as insects or apes, and the narrative culminates in the execution of several Japanese prisoners by order of the novel's odious hero, Happy McGonigle. Davis argues that the fact of the Japanese soldiers eating oranges when captured was intended by Chambers to be obscene, presumably because the iconic produce of an Edenic California was being consumed by those perceived to be an economic and racial threat to the region (*Ecology* 299-300).²⁶ However, whereas the massacre in *Invasion!* takes place on war-torn Los Angeles streets piled with rubble and pitted with bomb craters, amongst spilt oil and miscellaneous detritus, in *Tropic of Orange* the massacre actually creates this sort of devastated landscape out of a scene previously resembling a low-key community event. This time it is the homeless and Mexicans who are the abject targets of violence, a change that once again hints at a cyclical repetition of history in Los Angeles. Manzanar reflects on "the utterly violent assumption underlying everything [in Los Angeles]: that the homeless were expendable, that citizens had a right to protect their property with firearms," the very same rationale that legitimizes the massacre (123).

Los Angeles and its history is not the only point of reference for this event. The apparition of a dense yet hidden community on the ironically labelled "no-man's-land of public property" also evokes and draws on the history of the modern Zapatista movement. Emerging, seemingly out of nowhere, in the southern Mexican state of Chiapas on the day that NAFTA came into effect (1 January 1994), the Zapatistas moved into town centers to announce their resistance to national policies that marginalized poor and indigenous peoples in Mexico. Made up primarily of farmers and workers, they were opposed to the aims, principles, and predicted effects of NAFTA. This was an insurgency aimed at "opening a democratic space and challenging the hegemonic position of the PRI" (Mentinis 9).²⁷ The ultimately pacifist goals of the Zapatistas are echoed in *Tropic of Orange* by the freeway community's call for their collective right to the land, autonomy to produce food, and fair treatment by the state, goals that resonate with Buzzworm's

²⁶ This is ironic, given that in reality Japanese workers may well have produced some of the fruits they are seen to be unrightfully consuming.

²⁷ The *Partido Revolucionario Institucional* or Institutional Revolutionary Party had held power in Mexico for several decades before the inception of NAFTA.

aim of assisting Los Angeles' homeless "to get jobs, housing, health care, rehab, and mental services" (111). Moreover, the perpetrators of the state-ordered massacre who put an end to the freeway community cites the Mexican government's grotesquely violent response to the Zapatistas: after a cursory glance at the resistance and their demands, the state became responsible for several hundred rebel and civilian deaths, all in under two weeks. In *Tropic of Orange*, this process is remembered when "politicos" take a brief and apprehensive look at the marginalized community before ordering its destruction (217). References to the earlier Mexican resistance is suggested via various political parallels and other devices—such as the iconic Zapatista balaclava—in an attempt to re-enchant the narrative of Los Angeles, given that a central aim of that revolutionary movement was to provoke shifts in consciousness that would allow the hegemonic worldview of governing elites to be contested, and basic rights secured for those in most need of them. The Zapatistas call was for "a world where many worlds fit" (Mentinis 35) which, though radically different in tone, finds as much expression in Emi's disaffected cosmopolitanism as in the actions of the Freeway's homeless who try to find shelter and produce food for themselves.

In the main square of Mexico City, Yamashita weaves together some of the different threads concerning environmental justice that are hinted at, rather than fully explored, in the novel. In this location, Gabriel notes "250,000, maybe more, people in México's version of Tiananmen Square or, say, the Washington Monument" gathered with wooden rifles and balaclavas for a *Todos somos Marcos* (we are all Marcos) demonstration (192).²⁸ The comparison to Tiananmen Square invokes the 1989 Beijing protests and implies commonalities between Chinese and Mexican rights movements. Both were pro-democracy uprisings against economic deregulation and inequitable distribution, and both events led to the mass killing of demonstrators by the state. The transnational connection exposes a pattern of violence as an upshot of resistance to neoliberalism, and is also linked to the U.S. and therefore, in this context, NAFTA by way of the nationalist symbol, the Washington Monument.²⁹ The reason for Gabriel's visit is to pursue links between the cocaine-infused oranges, drug traffickers, and the Mexican-U.S. border city of Juárez. This city, in which *maquiladoras* multiplied in the wake of NAFTA, is known for its cartel-driven violence as well as issues of environmental justice. Sara Grineski and Timothy Collins note the relation-

²⁸ The number exaggerating that of the historical event, which was nonetheless large enough to contribute to the Mexican government's calling for a halt to their killing, appoint the Minister of Foreign Affairs (Manuel Camacho) as commissioner for peace and reconciliation in Chiapas, and assent, for a time, to the Zapatistas' intent of a political resolution (Mentinis 9).

²⁹ David Harvey discusses the Tiananmen Square massacre in the context of China's neoliberalisation, writing that "Deng's violent crackdown ... clearly indicated that neoliberalization in the economy was not to be accompanied by any progress in the fields of human, civil, or democratic rights" (123).

ship between mainly U.S. transnational corporate investment in the *maquiladoras* of Juárez and increasingly hazardous conditions—also facilitated by the Mexican government, for instance in their stifling of unions—adjacent to these industrial areas (248, 260-61).³⁰ They posit the same relationship for Juárez between poverty and environmental risk that has been analyzed more widely in the U.S., and link this to the higher risk of hazard from *maquiladoras* for the underprivileged (266).

Meanwhile, in the novel, Mexico City reveals its own environmental justice problems to Gabriel as he waits for his news source, a person he hopes can make sense of his investigation. Gabriel passes in turn a family planning clinic, an adoption agency, an orphanage, and finally “a miserable shantytown of abandoned children on the edges of a vast dump” (193-94). In this sequence Yamashita again draws attention to segregative border politics and the geography of poverty, and reinforces their interconnection with environmental risk. Soon, Gabriel is found by his source who passes him a database containing details of the massacre of a village as well as the known perpetrators, details that will be censored by media outlets and only find publication on obscure online newsgroups.

The figuration of the Zapatista movement that is visually evoked by people wearing balaclavas is given a longer history through Arcangel, himself a laborer who has participated in grassroots resistance, and who, like the Zapatistas, can trace the source of his oppression to the arrival of Christopher Columbus to America (49, 142-44). This allegorical structure forms another of the novel’s strategies for making visible the connections between economy, environment, as well as civil and political rights that the Zapatistas themselves sought to elucidate to the Mexican government. Arcangel’s poetry often refers to the long history of American colonization, from the frontier up until the “steel structures, barbed wire, infrared binoculars, / INS detention centers, border patrols” of the present, as well as the attendant “*rape, / robbery, death,*” which registers some of the various forms of exploitation and oppression colonization involved (198). As he stands awaiting questioning at the Mexico-U.S. “Great Border,” Arcangel contemplates the “*unnatural angle of Nuevo México*” and the “*Río Colorado,*” which straddles Mexico and the U.S., before confounding the standard immigration questions of the border guards, emphasizing his ecological citizenship, which is based on the land and its physical boundaries, rather than the fabricated borders authorized by the state (197-99). The concept of ecological citizenship contains within it a criticism of the arrogance of displacing centuries of economic and

³⁰ Interestingly, because in Juárez and many other Latin American cities elites live close to the high-social status area of the plaza which is also the best infrastructurally connected part of the city, *maquiladoras* were often built within a short range of this necessary infrastructure and thus more socially powerful groups. It should be noted, however, that this has not led to an inversion of the typical relationship between economic status and environmental risk (Grineski and Collins 262).

cultural practices adapted to geological features and borders, only to replace them with comparatively arbitrary and self-serving ones. Ecological citizenship, or the kind of belonging that emerges when societies are closely tied to the land, probes the ways in which community, landscape, and natural resources are interconnected. It poses a challenge to the predominant form of citizenship that is authorized and enforced by the nation state, and as such it aptly captures what is at stake here in the conflict between state policy and the material struggles of the Zapatistas. Lauren Berlant points out that, particularly in U.S. culture, citizenship crystallizes as a binary of insiders and outsiders wherein the inclusion or exclusion of immigrants is “tied up with desire to control the conditions under which certain populations would be ‘free’ to perform labor in the United States without access to many of the privileges of ‘free white persons’” (37, 39). Berlant’s account of citizenship recalls both Trujillo-Pagán’s analysis of the labor conditions for Latinos post-Katrina and Sackman’s history of citrus, and is suggestive of the way that this same logic authorized the disenfranchisement of *campesinos* (tenant farmers), leading to the Zapatistas’ rallying against increases to capitalism’s sovereignty over their lives given their knowledge that they have nothing to gain from it.

Curiously, considering the protracted attention to atrocity and exploitation in the novel, its conclusion stages a crucial moment of re-enchantment. Following Arcangel’s journey north during which much of his colonization poetry appears, he transforms into the luchador, or wrestler, “El Gran Mojado” and wages a wrestling match with symbolic significance against “SUPERNAFTA” that ends in their mutual demise. The Zapatistas, who organized and participated in the most powerful demonstration of resistance to NAFTA, did not win their confrontation with the Mexican government, which reneged on the promises made in negotiations with the Zapatistas. Rather, they returned to their homes and continued their revolution in a way more closely approximated by the freeway community than by Arcangel’s (as El Gran Mojado) spectacular final battle. After both wrestlers die, Bobby is holding the Tropic-orange which is then sliced in half. Bobby, unaware of what is happening, finds himself holding the two ends of the now-severed Tropic of Cancer, one in each hand. “What are these goddamn lines anyway? What do they connect? What do they divide? What’s he holding on to?” (268). At this point, Bobby has an undisclosed epiphany which causes him to let go of the lines. This final act concludes the novel with a rather implausible narrative development. For one thing, the materialized Tropic of Cancer becomes suddenly metaphorically confused with national borders, the disintegration of which suggests an outcome that is at odds with the novel’s treatment of NAFTA and national boundaries. Nevertheless, as a moment of re-enchantment it succeeds in making us see anew by conveying the possibility of a world structured by principles other than national sovereignty. Ameliorating the dire socio-economic reality depicted throughout its pages, Bobby’s inadvertent dissolution of national borders concludes the novel

optimistically, with a note of ambitious hope. What is crucial in reading this hope as re-enchantment is that it defamiliarizes the heavily bordered entity of the nation state. Thus, though the orange is an enchanted object, the narrative of re-enchantment ultimately centers on actual questions of sovereignty, citizenship, family, and social justice.

Tropic of Orange imagines, in the words of the Zapatistas, “a world capable of holding many worlds” (Knasnabish 107). The novel attempts a post-modernist re-enchantment of the noir vision of Los Angeles by denaturalizing California’s talismanic symbol of the orange to expose the intertwined issues of race, labor, and environment that it implies. As intimated in the first of the novel’s three epigraphs, *Tropic of Orange* renegotiates a narrative about Los Angeles that strikes somewhere between its extremes of desert and ocean, North and South, sunshine and noir.³¹ While doing so, it realizes the contradictions between rhetoric and reality, and the interdependence of the social and physical environments. The novel reveals, moreover, the causal connections between race, poverty, and environmental degradation, and their determination within the economic framework of free market capitalism. Steven Shaviro has argued that “the meaning of noir” is “everybody is connected” (152), but not only connected to one another, also connected to corporate interests, hierarchical structures, technologies, and so on. Gabriel comes to a similar conclusion as he familiarizes himself with the quasi-techno-utopian “borderless soup” of the internet, connecting to various newsgroups and uncovering further conspiracies: “Maybe the net was the ultimate noir,” he reflects (246). The internet here becomes an analogue for a disenchanted globalization, with noir matter as the means of connecting, though not resolving, the various political valences activated by a world increasingly determined by neoliberal economics.

In this and the previous chapter, I looked at how the two novels in question present largely disenchanted narratives that are counterpoised by figures of enchantment that allow for a re-imagining of environmental politics in various ways. Both of these novels naturalize mythical or supernatural narrative objects into historically grounded settings and draw out ecological concerns through these fantastical devices. In the first chapter I sought to elucidate the significance of the mermaid figure for a re-enchantment of envi-

³¹ The epigraph reads: “A city named after sacred but imaginary beings, in a state named after a paradise that was the figment of a woman’s dream; a city that came to fame by filming such figments; a city existing now on sufferance from the ever-hotter desert and the ever-rising sea, and that feels every day, to so many of us, like a mirage as it waits for its great quake. Its suffering is real enough, God knows. But its beauty is the beauty of letting things go; letting go of where you came from; letting go of old lessons; letting go of what you want for what you are; letting go of what you are for what you want; letting go of so much-and that is a hard beauty to love.” An excerpt from Michael Ventura’s *Letters at 3am*, this epigraph ties together the themes of environmental crisis, the constructed nature of Los Angeles’ image, and the possibility for redemption in the face of precarity that Yamashita’s novel is preoccupied with.

ronmental politics. In the next, I argue for the ways in which *Inherent Vice*'s presentation of the mythical lost continent of Lemuria functions as a cypher for issues around climate change and environmental degradation.

Chapter Three

“A Way to Lose More Slowly”: Climate Change and Counterculture in *Inherent Vice*

Is there some sort of natural selection which determines the survival of some ideas and the extinction or death of others?

—Gregory Bateson, *Steps to an Ecology of Mind*

Hereditary sloth instructs me.

—William Shakespeare, *The Tempest*

In 1993 Thomas Pynchon published an article as part of a series on the seven deadly sins. Perhaps out of personal interest, or a mischievous sense of humor, the writer who, after an almost twenty year wait following his masterpiece *Gravity's Rainbow*, had then published his novel *Vineland*, which featured television-addicted couch potatoes called Thanatoids, decided to publish a piece on sloth. Given Pynchon's reputation for subversive prose in which even the most minor detail can be rife with meaning and in which everything seems relentlessly connected, it is likely that the author chose sloth specifically and deliberately. In “Nearer, My Couch, to Thee,” Pynchon asserts that the meaning of sloth in the twentieth century is “primarily political, a failure of public will allowing the introduction of evil policies and the rise of evil regimes, the worldwide fascist ascendancy of the 1920s and '30s being perhaps Sloth's finest hour, though the Vietnam era and the Reagan-Bush years are not far behind.”

More than two decades pass while Pynchon publishes two very different and dense works of historical fiction, *Mason & Dixon* and *Against the Day*, before following up his California novels, *Vineland* and the novella *The Crying of Lot 49*, with a third work focused on the 1960s California counterculture, a noir surf and stoner novel titled *Inherent Vice*. As a novel about the late 1960s, written after the turn of the millennium, *Inherent Vice* makes use of its deterministic future-anterior temporality to reflect on the legacy of countercultural sloth then for the environmental predicament we find ourselves in today. In fact, the closing remarks of Pynchon's essay on sloth could well have been recycled into the blurb of his 2009 novel, given that it is “full of leisurely but lethal misadventures with the ruthless villains of the Acedia Squad.” Or, it almost is. The novel's tireless detective protagonist,

Doc, stands in relief to his torpid community. His neighbor, Denis, has thirty take-away meals delivered once a month. His lawyer, Sauncho Smilax, would rather speculate on the couch about whether Donald Duck is being oppressed by Daisy into shaving his facial hair, than drive downtown to bail Doc out. But despite his near-constant dope-smoking, Doc is no idle gumshoe. Unlike many of the novel's loafers living on Gordita Beach, from the outset Doc actively and energetically tries to disentangle the case he is presented with, albeit often from behind the haze of that countercultural token of temporal deceleration, marijuana. Through Doc's haphazard and unlikely investigative success, Pynchon considers the failure of the California counterculture as resulting from the coalescence of mythopoeic thought, political sloth, and the dynamics of capitalism. In depicting the implosion of the Californian counterculture and the re-ascendency of capitalism, the novel registers the disenchanting state of "the Movement" at the end of the sixties, and turns a sardonic eye on gestures of re-enchantment and wonder that ultimately fail.

In *To Recapture the Dream*, published the year before that in which *Inherent Vice* is set, Julius Lester registers the same torpor that Pynchon explores in the novel. Lester writes positively of the movement that grew out of the late fifties and persisted into the late sixties:

Things happened in the Sixties. We didn't make them happen as much as one action produced ten other actions (but the progression was geometric) and we were swept along with it. By the mid-Sixties, it was practically impossible for an organization to adequately control and guide actions which it initiated. And to tell the truth, we were so excited seeing so much happen, that few tried to control or direct what was happening. We were not concerned with being conscious of the implications of what we were doing. We were merely conscious of doing. (530)

At the time of writing, Lester sees the movement as having lost political focus, observing that as the "power structure moves against" organizations, their efforts become focused on self-preservation rather than revolutionary action (532). In *Inherent Vice* we witness a counterculture that has traded political action for preservation of lifestyle, and an exploration of the ideologies that underlie this.

Contrary to the novels addressed in Chapters One and Two, *Inherent Vice* suggests, obversely, an environmentalist value in Weberian disenchantment for its potential to rationalize politically impotent mystical understandings of the material world. In the novel, dis- and re-enchantment do not form an unambiguous binary as they do in the previous novels discussed. They are in fluid and complex relation to environmental mobilization and lethargy. Rather than straightforwardly making use of mythical or supernatural figures to re-enchant, Pynchon thinks beyond the transformative moment of re-enchantment to questions about the political content such moments animate. As always, Pynchon's treatment of re-enchantment is ambivalent. While the

wonder intrinsic to the mythical and mystical island of Lemuria is compelling, and indeed introduces questions of environmental degradation, in the context of the narrative-whole, Lemuria, as a site of re-enchantment, fails to produce a durable or effective environmentalist politic.

Though climate politics are not the obvious core of the sustained critique of capitalism in *Inherent Vice*, my reading of it is as a work of Anthropocene fiction. As such, close attention is paid to how sites like Gordita Beach, Lemuria, and Los Angeles function as grounds for a consideration of environmental issue. The constellation between facets of the counterculture and questions of environment and place are intimated early on. In the novel's second paragraph, the pounding surf that will resonate throughout the novel is first established. The trope of surf will link to the beach setting itself and its cultural significance, as well as to contemplations on surf-rock as metonymic for countercultural music in general and its revolutionary potential. As well as this, surf will come to express a metaphorical linkage between "surfing" ARPANET—the precursor to today's internet—and surfing waves. Centrally, for my reading, surf will come to represent the diluvial threat that overshadows Los Angeles. Ecological questions also loom behind the figures of the Golden Fang. For its attention to anthropogenic, geological, and ecosystemic transformations such as the drowned continent, the environmental effects of urbanization, oil production and spillage, and the ever-growing threat of inundation, the novel readily lends itself to ecocritical analysis

The noir frame of the story allows Pynchon to play with loose interpretations of some of the genre's master tropes such as the detective protagonist Doc, femme fatale Shasta, and the moral ambiguity of, among many other things, sloth itself. The novel also positions the reader within a history of environmental degradation by way of its noir form which, as Timothy Morton has argued, generally shifts from a detached investigative mode to a realization of complicity and implication (*Ecology* 187). This condition of implication is crucial to moments of re-enchantment and disenchantment, since it narrows the gap between subject and object. In other words, Morton's contention about the process of reader implication in noir form places the subject in a position of immanence, and negates the possibility of detached observation. As we read comical lines of 1960s nostalgia such as the lyrics of Tiny Tim's "The Other Side," we realize the then-seemingly deranged proclamation that the ice caps are melting and causing the planet to flood, has actually begun to come true. For Doc, the singer's flippancy and performative wonder while quavering "nowhere left to go!" is already disturbing. That the lines are "fiendishly programmed to repeat indefinitely" makes it all the more so, even though Doc cannot be aware of the song's environmental significance (108). For readers in the twenty-first century, however, the song takes on a decidedly menacing tone, and demands a recognition that we live on a planet that functions more or less as a closed system, with no viable outside for humankind. If we take the song's lyrics seriously, they point to such grave dilemmas as sea level rise and eroding coastlines, the

disappearance of islands, the destruction of ecosystems, and millions of climate refugees. The episode demonstrates Morton's claim about noir form, as both Doc and the reader switch subject-position from outside observer, to ecologically implicated.

Morton refers to this predicament when he describes the noir detective "caught in a story that has crept up on him or her from behind his or her back" (*Ecology* 187). Similarly, Pynchon's novel highlights the ways in which climate change has a noir form, entering surreptitiously into characters' lives, and shaping the lifestyles and culture of Gordita Beach. A noir conception of environment exists in the novel as a presence that threatens not only ways of life, but the very lives themselves. Environmental awareness manifests in the novel as the threat of a coming inundation via the rumored tsunami that characters like Flip—short, possibly, for flippant—wish to surf; the degradation of the beach as a result of a local oil refinery; and in the shoddy property development projects that scourge the landscape

However quietly environmental degradation may have crept up on *Inherent Vice*'s characters, by the 1970s widespread interest in events like Earth Day demonstrates how pervasive the notion had become. A key context for interpreting Pynchon's interrogation of the degrees of traction that ideas like environmentalism gain, and the tensions between the ability to radical socio-environmental transformation and the pragmatic work of achieving such, can be found in the influential report compiled by a team at MIT, and published in 1972, titled *The Limits to Growth*. In it, the authors draw on systems theory to detail how the unbounded exploitation of global resources, authorised, or even demanded, under capitalism, on a planet with finite natural materials, will lead to an outcome of crisis and collapse. In an interview for the 2013 documentary *Last Call*, one of the researchers involved with *Limits to Growth*, William Behrens III, reflects on the optimism shared by its authors at the time of its publication. They believed that their identification and analysis of the global plight would naturally lead a widespread drive to amend our self-destructive practices, a course for doing which was laid out in the report. However, soon unsettled by the lack of collective action following the publication of the report, Behrens retreated to the country to attempt to live in self-sufficient isolation. In doing so, Behrens becomes a real-life example of a segment of the back-to-the-land counterculture that *Inherent Vice* does not explore. Another of the authors, Dennis Meadows, claims that through our inertia in the decades following the report, we have passed the point where restoring ecological balance is practicable. Meadows states that a revision of the report written contemporaneously would need to shift its counsel from a focus on a restoration of balance to building resilience. This means refocusing attention from questions of how to avert ecological disaster in order to address how to fortify against its possible consequences. This transition from questions of sustainability to questions of resilience is one of the ecological problems the novel explores. Taking into account the recurrent theme of a gap between analytical and transformative power in

histories of the countercultural era, Pynchon's novel undertakes the work of making sense of why some crucial endeavors of the counterculture were doomed to wither. His reflections on sloth are instructive.

In this reading of the novel, the missing persons case that initiates Doc's investigation is taken as a diversion from the more significant depiction of the threat of environmental disaster. Seeking an understanding of how the novel's environmental themes are disclosed through attention to the nuances and antagonisms between disenchantment and re-enchantment, I look at how the novel relates to Pynchon's earlier work and to one of its key influences, the neo-noir film *Chinatown*. Noting that ecological politics are largely absent from previous analyses of the novel, and largely absent from analyses of Pynchon's work in general, I show how a number of themes and figures in the novel coalesce to form a critique of the politics of climate change. Such questions encompass the demise of the 1960s Californian counterculture; the disappearance/missing persons plot; the location of Los Angeles and its parallax Lemuria; the continuum between deterministic thinking, taking distortions of the Gaia hypothesis as a model for this, and inaction as an example of a more pervasive sloth; and the role of sloth in creating a disconnect between political ideology and political action. In leaving these matters unresolved, the novel is subtler than *Tropic of Orange*, with its implied possibility of overcoming capitalism, colonialism, and the nation state through gestures towards family and cosmopolitanism. It is also problematizes the narrative in *Mermaids in Paradise* that depicts seamless transitions from office workers, filmmakers, and media personalities to eco-activists. In contrast to these novels, Pynchon's also differs in eschewing their use of wonder and re-enchantment as a means of straightforwardly engaging and sustaining environmental politics. Rather, it depicts the limits of re-enchantment in this context. While *Inherent Vice* does depict re-enchantment as a moment of affective transition through an anti-mimetic figure, unlike the previous novels it also provides a narrative undercurrent that cautions against re-enchantment as a totalizing logic for environmentalism.

Pynchon's novels prior to *Inherent Vice* have garnered some ecocritical attention. In "The Environmental Pynchon" Thomas Schaub outlines the environmental politics of *Gravity's Rainbow*, which Schaub argues relies on a version of Luddism that creates an opposition between technology and environmentalism. This view becomes complicated in *Inherent Vice*'s metaphorical conflation of the burgeoning internet, as ARPANET, and the traditional (longboard) surf culture that, for many, defines Gordita Beach. The novel ambivalently depicts the instantaneous satiation of curiosity the internet promises to deliver: "Someday" Doc's Aunt Reet prophesies, "there will be computers for all this, all you'll have to do's type in what you're looking for ... and it'll be right back at you with more information than you'd ever want to know" (6-7). Yet the minimal physical effort required to access this information—especially compared with Doc's perambulatory method of investigation—resonates with the implied sloth of surfers in Wavos restau-

rant who talk incessantly about the surf, but rarely seem to get out: “I think they just go out and drink beer and fall asleep and come back when it gets dark,” opines Zigzag Twong (100). Surfing, both metaphorically, on the net, and literally, seem to be connected in the novel to the same pervasive inertia that has overtaken California’s counterculture in the novel’s diegetic present. And yet both also, tentatively, proffer opportunities to resist the structures of control and domination that are linked to environmental damage.

Other ecocritical approaches to Pynchon include Chris Coughran’s “Green Scripts in *Gravity’s Rainbow*: Pynchon, Pastoral Ideology and the Performance of Ecological Self.” Coughran looks at the construction of subjectivity in *Gravity’s Rainbow* from the perspective of the novel’s context in the history of U.S.-American thought, and argues that a thread runs through *Gravity’s Rainbow* that seeks to recycle the North American pastoral *locus amoenus*. In an article that reads the novel from a postcolonial and environmental perspective, Lee Rozelle shows that the “geodetic oddities” that abound in *Mason & Dixon* “perturb the linearity of colonial history.” Ursula Heise has made use of Pynchon’s works in her theorizing of the relationship between risk and narrative. She locates an ethics of care—for human bodies rather than specifically for environment—as being at the center of a New Age counterculture troubled by an ambivalence between the liberation of thought, as emblemized by Timothy Leary, and subjugation of mind through addiction, that are both associated with the heavy use of psychoactive substances (*Sense* 161). As noted above, the drug of choice in *Inherent Vice* is marijuana, which is not known for its clinically addictive properties but better for its reputation as a relaxant, or a soporific. This links the use of the substance to a different type of subjugation, not through addiction but through the passivity it can promote, which in *Inherent Vice* allows the “deadly sin of greed” and that of sloth to combine and expedite processes of environmental degeneration like sea-level rise, but also desertification, of which the “tapped dry, and crippled” Los Angeles river is emblematic (166).

While not focused on environmental questions, Samuel Thomas and Joanna Freer have published monographs on the 1960s and its counterculture in Pynchon’s work. In Thomas’ monograph, *Pynchon and the Political*, Thomas claims that the 1960s “function as the most significant juncture in Pynchon’s political universe” (128). A similar point is made by David Cowart who argues that Pynchon’s works “revolve in planetary orbits around the sunlike moral intensity of the 1960s” (85). Freer, in *Thomas Pynchon and American Counterculture*, builds on the argument that the 1960s are crucial to understanding Pynchon’s work and the politics contained within. Freer argues that an exploration of the “mechanisms and motivators of oppression” are profound concerns of Pynchon, as are “oppositional groups ... and the alternatives they offer to current socio-economic systems” (1-2), an interest which is clear and present in *Inherent Vice*, with a limitation on alternatives that rely on the other-worldly.

Where such works address the politics of Pynchon's counterculture, I position his portrayal of it in relation to questions of environment. While the trope of psychoactive substances in Pynchon's work has often been commented on, until now the question of whether and how Pynchon engages with the looming problematics around climate has gone unanswered—indeed largely unasked—despite environmental literary criticism's abiding interest in contemporary fiction, and the fact that climate change is the principal focus of environmental debate today. I argue throughout this chapter that climate change is broached in the novel through a politically charged understanding of the deadly sin of sloth. Furthermore, I seek to establish that what sloth is deadly for, is the lost revolutionary potential of the counterculture.

The historical setting of *Inherent Vice* is its first means of highlighting the sixties as the era in which public awareness of an ongoing and accelerating ecological crisis reached a critical mass that resulted in large-scale public actions like Earth Day. This is the same period in which Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* popularized the idea of anthropogenic environmental degradation, and underscored the dangers of ignoring telltale signs of such. Along with *Silent Spring*, Paul Erlich's *The Population Bomb* was a rejoinder to questions of the socio-environmental impacts of population growth under contemporaneous systems of food production and environmental management. In a similar vein, Frances Moore Lappé's *Diet for a Small Planet* called on the U.S. to abate the wastefulness of a meat-heavy diet. Though Lappé's book was published one year after *Inherent Vice*'s setting, it nevertheless captures something of the countercultural zeitgeist. Rather than focusing on the mechanics of a specific problem like food security, sea level rise, or drought and desertification, the novel presents the counterculture as a group hostile to generalised ecological degradation, and maps the forms their resistance takes and the ideologies it incorporates.

As in *Vineland*, Pynchon questions how and why the counterculture failed in its political goals, and how it had, by the end of the sixties, become largely disillusioned. *Vineland* unravels a tangled web of infighting, deception, duplicity, and informing as central character Frenesi Gates' story unfolds. Yet for all the internal failings of the movement that the novel describes, *Vineland*'s 1970s northern California is readily distinguishable from *Inherent Vice*'s southern California for, among other things, the former's highly energized radical activism. Clearly a product of the Nixon/Reagan era, its primary counter-revolutionary force is an increasingly militarized state, to which corporate capitalism takes a back seat. *Vineland* is more assertive in its political claims and more descriptive of political activism than *Inherent Vice*, and it provides more detail, even if ambiguously, about the personal and political agendas that shape the characters' lives. In *Inherent Vice* the immense, opaque, and ubiquitous systems, whether state-based, corporate, or even climatological, that exert seen and unseen pressures on societal formations are so extensively dispersed that opposing them seems doomed in

advance to failure, if any of the novel's characters could figure out how to mount a resistance. In *Vineland*, we note a progression from when "the outlines of the Nixonian Repression were clear enough even for the most gaga of hippie optimists to see," until the "personnel changed" and "the Repression went on, growing wider, deeper, and less visible" (71-72). *Inherent Vice* fixates on the latter development. The dissimilarity between *Vineland*'s femme fatale, Frenesi, and *Inherent Vice*'s, Shasta, reveals another key difference between the novels. Where Frenesi is a radical activist turned government informer, as active in one role as in the other, Shasta enters the story having already exchanged her Country Joe and the Fish t-shirt for the "flatland gear" that positions her as an establishment figure (1). However, Shasta's conveyance to the establishment is not marked by political betrayal, but is rather, simply, a quiet retirement from her alternative lifestyle. If *Vineland* is broadly a novel of reckless participation, at least in its flashback passages, *Inherent Vice* is mostly one, with some notable exceptions, of passive acquiescence. However, though the impact of institutional corruption and governmental influence over grassroots activism is just as potent in *Inherent Vice* as in *Vineland*, it is more concealed, coming to the reader primarily secondhand through characters like Coy, and sometimes firsthand through Doc's speculations:

Was it possible, that ... those dark crews had been busy all along reclaiming the music, the resistance to power, the sexual desire from epic to everyday, all they could sweep up, for the ancient forces of greed and fear?
"Gee," he said to himself out loud, "I dunno..." (130)

Though both novels describe a clandestine takeover of the political resistance, in *Inherent Vice* the internal weaknesses of the Movement are brought into focus as faults of political lethargy rather than treachery, a more apt fit for the ecological problems the novel engages with. In thinking through those vulnerabilities of the counterculture that were able to be exploited, Pynchon makes deceptive use of the superficially appealing aspects of the Californian counterculture milieu of the late sixties, while suggesting its underlying inadequacies.

Critics and historians of the counterculture (Braunstein, Gair, Kirk) have demonstrated in their work that the term itself is ill-defined, even internally contradictory. It encompasses a vast, and often disconnected, geography, spans perhaps four decades, and is made up of numerous groups and individuals with differing political and apolitical agendas, methods, and conceptions of resistance. In what follows, I examine the counterculture as it relates to the ecological questions raised in *Inherent Vice* through its presentation of a loose-knit group of surfers, hippies, followers of New Age spirituality, musicians, and drug enthusiasts.

Because of the nostalgia, sardonic though it may be, attached to *Inherent Vice*'s descriptions of late sixties music, hippie regalia, surfer lifestyle, and

psychedelia, it is tempting to read the novel as pining for an era, now past, in which revolutionary political change seemed a real possibility. This is especially so given *Inherent Vice*'s publication in 2009, at a time when the term "change" resonated more readily with hollow political promises and dangerous shifts in earth systems, than with actual political reformation. As Bernard Duyfhuizen notes in his review of the novel, the "hippie culture of sex, drugs, and rock 'n' roll believed a chance had arrived for a new way of organizing American politics and society" (1). Implicit in Duyfhuizen's observation is the knowledge that those potential new ways of organizing politics and society failed.

For such reasons, readings of *Inherent Vice* may find the novel to be merely nostalgic. To refer back to *Vineland* once again, this novel that followed Pynchon's masterpiece *Gravity's Rainbow* was met with not a few sneering criticisms that took the era of its setting as proof of a nostalgic betrayal of "great art."¹ *Inherent Vice* shares its time and place of setting with that of *Vineland*'s flashback storyline, as well as many of its themes and tropes. However, it deploys nostalgia in a similar manner to that outlined by James Berger, who writes of *Vineland* that the sixties is not "a site of original wholeness and plenitude, but ... a site of catastrophe, betrayal, and cultural trauma. Moreover, the past in *Vineland* is not simply a place to which a nostalgic text may return. Rather, it is the traumatic past that persistently leaps forward into the present." Berger's incisive observations on *Vineland* are as relevant for *Inherent Vice*, a novel in which a sense of longing exists not so much for the past as for the future. Understanding *Inherent Vice* as a primarily future-orientated novel is crucial to an understanding of its ecological content.

Inherent Vice's use of nostalgia is rhetorical and strategic. It consistently undercuts its own idealisms and seeks out the fault-lines of countercultural utopianism, while identifying the oppressive presence of the state and transnational capital as dominant of both its era, and ours. The state and capitalism are two expressions of the ubiquitous capital T "They"—the totalitarian Other—that links the power dynamics explored in *Inherent Vice* to the sabotage of political resistance in *Vineland*. Both plots also have resonances with the deterministic meanderings of *Gravity's Rainbow*, in which characters unknowingly participate in or attempt to uncover a veiled political apparatus that appears to govern their lives. While these forces appear, indeed are more readily apparent, in *Vineland* and *Inherent Vice*, Pynchon gives close attention to the internal failings of the counterculture that rendered it impotent to resist these outside forces, inclusions that ultimately defy nostalgic readings of either novel. Rather than being anchored in sentimentality about a bygone

¹ See James Berger's excellent article "Cultural Trauma and the 'Timeless Burst'" on the uses of nostalgia, particularly his third footnote in which he summarises the arguments by critics of nostalgia in *Vineland*.

era, *Inherent Vice* both reflects and comedically subverts the unhinged fear, confusion, and paranoia coursing through the social consciousness of California in 1970. These states are presented as engendered by the iconic Manson Family murders of 1969, noted in the novel as a turning point for California's counterculture, and framed as an event that distracts from environmental questions (38, 179, 107).

Inherent Vice's treatment of Charles Manson's activities as a pivotal moment for the counterculture attunes the mood of the novel with noir paranoia, though this is tempered by a lighthearted tone that abates the "fatalistic and despairing" voice of postwar film noir that had by 1970—the year in which *Inherent Vice* is set—begun to produce work "which reflected the growing nihilism of the end of the 1960s dream" (Dixon 1, 97). Though *Inherent Vice* perhaps depicts an expansion of nihilistic political tendencies, its more immediate and emphatic concern remains with political apathy, or sloth. This is made clear by Doc who, rather than resigning in the face of seemingly insurmountable adversity, repeatedly finds himself asking "what happened" (23, 148, 195). Like a typical noir protagonist he persists, even beyond the point of hope. In piecing together clues to make sense of his missing persons case, his investigation more broadly reflects the interrogative mode of the novel itself in which Pynchon asks what happened to the potential of the sixties.

Kathryn Hume argues that this focus on the material world of the 1960s is a departure from Pynchon's typical building of multiple realities. Hume reads the novel as Pynchon's exploration of "a worst-case scenario," one in which no other worlds exist, leaving us in a position where "we are stuck with what we have" (2). In the context of the environmental issues the novel broaches, the inescapability of a deteriorating planet is particularly troubling. Hume does note the exception to the singular world of *Inherent Vice*—Lemuria—but she argues that it does not represent the same kind of multiple realities of Pynchon's other novels since it is only accessible by taking the hallucinogen LSD. In agreement with Hume, I argue below that Lemuria does not offer escape from this world, but rather points back to it, and specifically to its future. In this respect, it is in the dialogical return to disenchantment, or mundane reality, that Pynchon locates the state of contemporary environmental politics, as well those of the era in which *Inherent Vice* is set.

Following Hume's argument, the ontological reality *Inherent Vice* presents has less to do with the parallel realities suggested by the fantastical geography of *V.*, or the subterranean world of *Against the Day*'s hollow earth, than with transposing the novel's obviously factitious elements onto actual problematics. In other words, although *Inherent Vice* does fictionalize an historical narrative, it does not do the same work Fredric Jameson attributes to the postmodern historical novel, which "with all its false chronologies and made-up chronicles and genealogies, constitutes a referential use of fiction to free ourselves from the 'facts' of the history manuals and to institute a simultaneity of multiple worlds" (182-83). In fact it does rather the

opposite. In fictionalizing a chronicle about a segment of the counterculture, the novel highlights how the movement has been mythologized in post-sixties U.S. culture, and uses this a springboard for reflecting on the reasons for, and implications of, its real-world failure.

The preoccupation with an uncertain future is also linked to the novel's use of noir via paranoia. Hume defines two types of paranoia in Pynchon's work. Firstly, what could be called conspiracy paranoia in which a hitherto unsuspected system is revealed to exist. Secondly, what could be termed corruption paranoia, which assumes the "linkage of corrupt elements to form controlling systems" (3). I would add a third type of paranoia linked to noir: a generalized mood of precognition based on "doubt and fear and uncertainty," which is ingrained in *Inherent Vice*, as well as in postwar film noir, in which it "served as the most authentic version of the inherent corruption and complacency of postwar life" (Dixon 1). *Inherent Vice* draws on this postwar complacency, as well as the "violence and revenge" that characterizes the postwar noir. These features dovetail in an "unremitting fear of the future," or, more accurately, a fear *for* the future (*Film Noir* 99). Both these are linked to the avatar of capitalism in the novel, the Golden Fang: "I am the Golden Fang ... I am the unthinkable vengeance they turn to ... when all other sanctions have failed" (318). In turn, the Golden Fang becomes associated with environmental degradation through imagery such as Gordita's oil refinery or the "napalmed, polluted, defoliated" wartime Vietnam (104). Its ability to regenerate when seemingly destroyed both stands in contrast to the failure of the counterculture, adds to the sense of paranoia for the future. In this way, Pynchon ties together capitalism and environmental harm via noir form and intertextuality.

The Manson Family murders likewise attune the reader to a sense of paranoia. They speak to the end of an era, and the transformation of the California counterculture in the public eye from innocuous to deadly. They also bridge the novel with the influential neo-noir *Chinatown*. This is done directly since Sharon Tate, the wife of the film's director, Roman Polanski, was a victim of the cult's murders. In a more complex manner, the novel also echoes the pervasive and hidden evil driving the California Water Wars that *Chinatown* grapples with. *Inherent Vice* displays resonances with the themes of capitalism, development, and greed, through what has been phrased by James Naremore as *Chinatown*'s underlying "universal guilt" (207). This universal guilt stemming from greed and irresponsible development is expressed via *Inherent Vice*'s Wolfmann, whose property development Arrepentimiento—"Spanish for 'sorry about that'"—is an attempt to reconcile his past social and environmental wrongs (348). Naremore argues that *Chinatown* decouples itself from its antecedents because of its persistent pessimism (209), something *Inherent Vice* ultimately frees itself from via its tentative hope for the future, while agreeing that the Cielo Drive murders marked the "End of a certain kind of innocence" (38).

While the environmentalist theme of water retains its place as an engine driving *Chinatown*'s plot forward, it is ultimately relegated to a framing device for the film's primary concerns of literal and metaphorical violation and rape. Brian Johnson argues that sexual abuse lies at the heart of *Chinatown*, but also notes that the original screenplay by Robert Towne was inspired by the environmental degradation he observed perpetrated by those in Los Angeles who "make [their] bundle and get out regardless of the collateral damage that's done" (17). *Inherent Vice* broaches both of these, driving its plot forward by the investigation of disappearances, while developing them as metaphorical allusions to a foreshadowing of the disappearance of Los Angeles itself, through the analogical figure of Lemuria and a disastrous ecological event. While *Chinatown*'s drought-stricken Los Angeles threatens to reach cataclysmic levels, such a scenario is answered by a tension in *Inherent Vice*. On the one hand, there is the anticipation of the city becoming a watery grave, as the novel develops the fate of Lemuria in tandem with that of Los Angeles. On the other, the hints of drought conveyed by the Los Angeles River's dried up bed associate the city with a Las Vegas that "should not, according to theory, even exist" (232). It is a place which, despite being "all dry desert," still reminds Doc of "a rising flood" (241).²

Such environmental imagery speaks to the polar extremes climate change produces in both drought and flooding. The novel's environmental imagery suggests both slow process and imminent crisis. The former occurs in the form of the repetitive, pounding surf that permeates Gordita Beach homes, or the slow accumulation of oil on Gordita Beach; the latter via "sailor-take-warning skies," and "apocalyptic peals of thunder," and all of which suggest that Los Angeles is on the brink of environmental disaster (1, 98, 165). *Inherent Vice* thus sees a more foregrounded treatment of environmental thematics than *Chinatown*. Water in *Chinatown* functions largely in its human drama, as both "the motive for Mulwray's murder and the means of it" (Maxfield 96). And it is ultimately deployed as a proxy to indict corrupt capitalism, and tap questions about greed. Whereas *Chinatown*'s motif of water is a means of historically contextualizing some of its other themes, *Inherent Vice*'s deployment of natural imagery embodies in itself an environmental threat.

To make sense of the balance between plot and theme in both *Chinatown* and *Inherent Vice*, the noir convention of disclosure may be instructive. Noir narratives typically taint the process of detection with a kind of toxicity; with each seeming revelation comes danger. This may come in the form of false or misleading knowledge, the unveiling of evil where good was supposed to be, or a discovery that alters the terms of investigation. In *Chinatown*, this is

² While the baffled Marxist economist in this quote is specifically referring to how Las Vegas' economy should preclude its existence, since it does not produce anything, the material conditions of the city (its desert geography) is the reason it does not produce anything.

established early on in reference to Jake Gittes' past vocation as police officer in Chinatown, Los Angeles. He acknowledges that, even as a detective, he cannot "always tell what's going on" and that his attempts to produce one kind of result could very well create the opposite." Gittes' response to this predicament, that "you could never figure out what was happening," reifies this aporetic undergirding of noir form. When Gittes' protective actions end in the injury of the very person he was trying to protect, Evelyn Mulwray, the unnamed woman in Chinatown, and when seemingly irrelevant details of his investigation become its central leads (Maxfield 94), a pattern of evasion wherein the margins become the center begins to emerge. As this pattern develops, evil is discovered where good was supposed to be, which is echoed in the nearly invisible co-optation of countercultural events by forces of evil in *Inherent Vice* (130).

Consonant with the false leads that structure noir plots, *Inherent Vice* stages the entire missing persons case it is premised on as a smokescreen for the disappearance or destruction of the city it is set in. In this way, and through the disappearance of characters who never return, *Inherent Vice* extends questions of disappearance into insinuations of extinction that mirror the Lemurian exodus story. Among the unresolved threads of narrative, including all the characters whose fates remain unknown, it is the dual fate of Los Angeles and Lemuria that should bother us most. Pynchon underscores that this is a novel of departure and not return: Shasta does not return to Doc, nor does Wolfmann return to Shasta. Neither does the promise of Lemuria's return eventuate. In fact even the Golden Fang seems to disappear along with the gold standard, a development that is satirized in the novel when the Nixon dollars are discovered at the site the Golden Fang disappeared from. Like the Gaian concept of a planet that, unlike the human species inhabiting it, would, while radically transformed, likely survive anthropogenic environmental degradation (Pepper 37), when certain characters and figures do return they are so changed as to be unrecognizable. Surf saxophonist Coy Harlingen gets back with his old band after his faked death, but none of them recognize that it is he. The schooner *Preserved* reappears fundamentally altered, as the *Golden Fang*, and then finally returns as a hybrid of the two. Details aside, as in *Vineland* the swan song is, most broadly, for the sixties themselves and the political future they seemed to promise.

Chinatown's ecological threat is premised on a Los Angeles drought being exacerbated by corrupt officials, the undercurrent of greed and perversity suggesting a view of culpability that transcends the individual. *Inherent Vice* works along similar lines, as it presents the threat of diluvial flooding without clearly identifying who is to blame. Although it is insinuated at several points that property moguls are responsible for their part in the unsustainable development of the city, Pynchon's ultimate target is something less tangible, something connected with "the ancient forces of greed and fear" (130), from which sloth seems to facilitate an easy, if ineffectual and temporary, escape. In both *Inherent Vice* and *Chinatown*, the context of the Vietnam

War menacingly implicates greed and fear with ecological damage. Naremore posits that the context of the Vietnam War, as well as the Watergate scandal, is the reason that, at *Chinatown*'s close, Gittes "remains locked in a world of irrational greed and sickness, and his consciousness of that world has left him so numb he can barely move" (209). *Inherent Vice*'s Doc ends up in a similarly disenchanted and indeterminate position, though the conclusion of the novel is less pessimistic than gently hopeful, for "something else this time, somehow, to be there instead" (369).

Alongside the context of the Vietnam War for *Inherent Vice* is the modern environmental movement, a theme developed through characters like Spike, and Farley Branch, who develop a respect for nature after seeing so much of it destroyed during their time in Vietnam. The Vietnam War and its connection to paranoia about the spread of communism expands the Los Angeles scope of the novel into a larger, Pacific and East Asian geopolitic. In doing so, the novel acknowledges its twinned geographies of environmental concern that are found in both land and ocean. Indeed, its attention to U.S. involvement in international events reminds us that the novel is set in the wake of the 1968 Earthrise photograph, an image of earth taken from space during the Apollo 8 mission, and the first major visual representation of what would come to be known decades later as globalization. The image diminishes humankind's place on the planet, and alerts us to the fact that the Earth's surface is nearly three-quarters ocean. *Inherent Vice*'s ocean motif is initially displayed on the first edition's cover which depicts a sunset over the ocean, as well as on the promotional poster for Paul Thomas Anderson's film adaptation, which displays a broad oceanic vista. The novel opens to the sound of surf which "Some nights, when the wind was right, you could hear ... all over town," and the sea's aurality surfaces recurrently throughout the narrative (1). In one of Doc and his parents' favorite films, *The Postman Always Rings Twice*, the ocean is used to depict a barrier between Frank and Cora, and represents the limit of a "westward expansion fantasy of progress" which is, for Cora, literally a dead end (Clute and Edwards 123). In this context the ocean is a visual delineation of the terminus of the American Dream, as much as *Inherent Vice* is an exploration of the end of the countercultural dream, and indeed suggests the possible end of Los Angeles itself.

Los Angeles' well-known pollution problems are registered in the novel through the figure of the ocean, which lends isolated and localized instances of smog a sense of expansiveness and connectedness. Through its association with the ocean, smog becomes a symptom of larger, more protracted and persistent climatic processes for which the narrator has no vocabulary, and describes simply as "weirdness" in lieu of a better term:

Santa Anas had been blowing all the smog out of downtown L.A., funneling between the Hollywood and Puente Hills on westward through Gordita Beach and out to sea, and this had been going on for what seemed like weeks now. Offshore winds had been too strong to be doing the surf much good, but surf-

ers found themselves getting up anyway to watch the dawn weirdness, which seemed like a visible counterpart to the feeling in everybody's skin of desert winds and heat and relentlessness, with the exhaust from millions of motor vehicles mixing with microfine Mojave sand to refract the light toward the bloody end of the spectrum, everything dim, lurid and biblical, sailor-take-warning skies. (98)

The image of smog being swept out to sea, no doubt full of the greenhouse gas carbon dioxide, together with the offshore winds so strong they destroy rather than improve the surf, combine in a biblical premonition and anticipatory restlessness that brings into focus the ecologically dangerous trajectory of the city.

Such descriptions of pollution and degradation are given nuance by the legal construct referred to in the novel's title. In maritime law, "inherent vice" refers to the principle by which cargo will from time to time inevitably suffer damage or loss not because of outside conditions like storm or water leakage, but because of a hidden defect with the cargo itself (Güner-Özbek 73-74). This suggests an atrophic process at the material level of cargo that can be transposed onto the general trajectory of the novel's narrative as it charts the environmental degradation of Los Angeles. Through its attention to oil, both explicitly in its imagery and implicitly via the transformation of capitalism, the novel foregrounds the view that climate change is an inexorable consequence of the use of advanced technologies. The legal definition of the title clarifies the novel's critique of such a deterministic perspective on climate change that would see environmental toxification as a sort of inherent vice of industrial civilization.

It should be noted that the ocean in *Inherent Vice* functions as more than a carbon-sink repository; it networks places and concepts in the narrative. It connects the local and transnational by extending California into the Pacific region, the profane Gordita Beach to the sacred Lemuria, and the East Asian cartel the Golden Fang to their North American quarters. The ocean and ARPANET even dovetail as interlocked tropes in the novel, the features of one elucidating those of the other. More straightforwardly, the ocean defines the lifestyle of the Gordita residents. In the novel's thematic context it enables an imaginary of threat, such as that described by Mike Davis in *Ecology of Fear*: Los Angeles is cast as a Pacific city at risk of being overcome by environmental cataclysm, capitalist extraction, or even as a result of the implosion of the competing ideologies outlined in the novel. The friction between these has been assessed by Christopher Gair, who suggests that consumer capitalism counterintuitively facilitated transgression and resistance against institutional forces (23). Fred Turner has an alternative take on this, demonstrating how the devotion to individualism in the New Communalist wing of the counterculture, its prioritizing of a "struggle to reclaim their consciousnesses" over class struggle or political action, "opened new doors to mainstream," that is, capitalist, "culture" (36-38).

Pynchon's abiding interest in closed systems surfaces as these geographical extensions open the novel up to readings that are more global than its immediate setting might at first suggest. Haynes has argued that "The important question hinted at here in *Gravity's Rainbow* is whether there can be an 'outside,' 'beyond,' or end to the system, a question that recurs in *Inherent Vice*, touching as it does on theories of crisis and collapse" (3). Climate change resembles this structure in having no "outside," occurring as it does in a closed system that, in this context, means a system in which energy can enter and leave but material (mass) cannot. Overcoming its own expansiveness, *Gravity's Rainbow* also develops some sense of closed-system claustrophobia, somewhat paradoxically, by way of the relentlessly ambiguous connections it seems to make that culminate in the event of its devastating final scene. Its general trajectory towards destruction is, however, punctuated by moments of re-enchantment. The most ecological of these is Lyle Bland's realization that "it's hard to get over the wonder of finding that Earth is a living critter, after all these years of thinking about a big dumb rock." Bland's sense of wonder is triggered by his revelation that the geological strata of the earth constitute a kind of history, that earth contains a palimpsest of historical record in its stratigraphic physicality. Bland reflects on his being "in love with his sense of wonder," which makes him feel "like a child again" (600). This matches Bland's experience to Ahmed's theorization of wonder as an irruptive affect that affords the possibility of seeing familiar things anew. Moreover, the reverence for the earth as a living entity that follows Bland's wonder resonates with Jane Bennett's assertion that the "figure of an intrinsically inanimate matter may be one of the impediments to the emergence of more ecological and more materially sustainable modes of production and consumption" (*Vibrant Matter* ix). In other words, ecological consciousness is awoken by realizations of the vitality of things. The same sentiment is echoed by *Inherent Vice*'s Sortilège, whose veneration of the earth is tied to the idea that the planet is "like any living creature" (105).

The rudiments of this kind of environmental thinking in *Gravity's Rainbow* have had almost four decades to develop before the publication of *Inherent Vice*, and indeed in that time Pynchon seems to have begun to engage in a more sustained and critical manner with environmental politics. Having made military-industrial connections salient in *Gravity's Rainbow*, before linking them to environmental destruction, Pynchon turns in *Inherent Vice* to the relation between syncretic philosophies that surface in countercultural environmentalism (Braunstein and Doyle 8), the influence of a transforming system of capitalism, and the failures of the modern environmental movement.

The novel's articulation of environmental and anti-capitalist politics is first suggested in its epigraph, "Under the paving stones, the beach!" The famous graffito from the Paris 1968 demonstrations refers, literally, to the procedure of unearthing cobblestones to throw at police as an act of resistance, but was also to be understood as a symbolic attack on what was

perceived as a broken political system. The statement was not originally received as environmentalist, but rather as related to politically charged convictions about the use of public and private space by the social collective; the full statement being “defend the collective imagination. Under the paving stones, the beach!” (*Do or Die* 1). Nonetheless, the declaration is a gesture of re-enchantment inasmuch as it is an admonishment to see the city street as something other than what it is commonly perceived to be. The complete slogan is a challenge to the capitalist-instrumentalism of the city. It suggests that the act of removing stones symbolically, if somewhat oxymoronic, attacks the notion of private property by exchanging the regulated city street for the space of recreation and play that beaches represent. Bill Millard argues that “the pristinely natural, Rousseauvian, capital-B beach of the Situationist slogan” is satirized in Gordita’s “grungy” California beach town. However, some aspects of Gordita’s psychogeography that complicate this reading of satire. For example, there exists a non-satirical parallel between the hedonistic aspect of the Situationist International movement and the surfers hanging out at Wavos; as well as between Vehi’s quest for authentic consciousness, and The Boards’ apolitical, self-indulgent lifestyle.

The beach crystallizes as a site of idleness and recreation through these descriptions of its numerous inhabitants and their preoccupations. But no matter how ironic its portrayal in relation to the epigraph, that the beach is also a political space, if a failed one, is difficult to ignore. The utopian site that lies just under the paving stones of revolutionary action never eventuated in Gordita, which is further evidence against glib interpretations of the novel that would decry it as straightforwardly nostalgic. Rather than the individualistic acts of rebellion against mainstream society enacted by Gordita residents, and their affirmation of pleasure and love, amounting to the systemic changes envisioned by the Situationists, Gordita’s counterculture has “ceased to contradict the status quo” (Pepper 203). Given this context, it is difficult to ignore the connotation of chubbiness that *Gordita* has in Spanish.

David Pepper notes that the “apparent nihilism” of the counterculture at this point caused Herbert Marcuse to comment that some such movements had actually come to reinforce the existing state of affairs (203). Though I argue that *Inherent Vice*’s counterculture is not quite nihilistic, it is worth noting that Marcuse is one of the few theorists mentioned by name in *Inherent Vice*. He appears in reference to Harlingen’s reprogramming, and experience that causes the saxophonist to infiltrate the left in the service of various inimical bodies (301). Doc comes to realize this betrayal when prompted by Shasta:

“Both [you and Coy Harlingen], cops who never wanted to be cops. Rather be surfing or smoking or fucking or anything but what you’re doing. You guys must’ve thought you’d be chasing criminals, and instead here you’re both working for them.”

“Ouch, man.” Could that be true? All this time Doc assumed he’d been out busting his balls for folks who if they paid him anything it’d be half a lid

or a small favor down the line or maybe only just a quick smile, long as it was real. He began to run through the cash customers he could remember, starting with Crocker Fenway and going on through studio executives, stock-market heroes of the go-go years, remittance men from far away who needed new pussy or dope connections, rich old guys with cute young wives and vice versa. ... It sure was a piss-poor record, not too different after all, he guessed, from the interests Coy had been working for. (313-14)

The “interests” Coy had been working for being the FBI, among unnamed others. Though Doc and Coy’s working for the other side is phrased as immediate and literal here, the theme of the subtle palimpsest of decades of countercultural contributions to what historian Thomas Frank has called “accelerated capitalism” underlies it (33).

Whereas the beach becomes a theatre for the conflicting strategies of resistance, in the wider context of Los Angeles the novel evokes the politics of land development documented so incisively by Davis in *City of Quartz*. Davis shows how land development struggles led to “the militarization of city life” resulting in “a proliferation of new repressions in space and movement” in “post-liberal” Los Angeles (223). The foundations for these “new repressions” can be detected in *Inherent Vice*’s sharply segregated physical and cultural geography. The violent, rampant development that Davis charts in the city’s history culminates in a discussion of Fontana in Los Angeles, which Davis terms a “junkyard of dreams,” itself not a bad slogan for *Inherent Vice* (374-76).

Inherent Vice’s Wolfmann serves as an avatar of the developers in Davis’ history, at least up until the point of his drug-induced political transformation. As a character who is absent from the narrative and whom we only know through rumors and conversation, the correspondences between Wolfmann’s projects and Davis’ overdeveloped Los Angeles are illustrated chiefly in terms of a housing project and “latest assault on the environment” known as the Channel View Estates (8). This “chipboard horror” recapitulates colonial history by excising an entire neighborhood and community, leaving its only traces in the memories of former inhabitants (17). When Wolfmann’s housing project destroys Tariq Khalil’s black, working class neighborhood, it is replaced by “unincorporated wastes ... trash of industrial ventures” with not “a shade tree in sight,” and smog (19-20). This ecology echoes the pollution issues and failure of environmental justice that were discussed in the previous chapter, and the lack of shade trees recalls Buzzworm’s Los Angeles neighborhood in *Tropic of Orange*. The novel calls attention to the “violent instability in local landscape and culture” that this type of development brings about (Davis, *City* 376), and presages environmental collapse, while it sharpens the sense of class tensions through Golden Fang associate and “heavy-duty South Bay money” Crocker Fenway (171).

Fenway, who once hired Doc to find his daughter Japonica, nears farcical levels of elitism. After Doc’s recollection of returning Japonica to him, Fen-

way re-enters the novel near its end to organize an exchange for the heroin Bigfoot plants in Doc's car. Since Fenway lives in a gated enclave of an already gated community closed to non-residents, Doc suggests meeting at the same place they did some years ago, but Fenway registers Los Angeles' rampant development in his reply that it has "probably been replaced with something else by now" (342). When they instead meet at Fenway's club, Doc enters and gazes at a Doheny-McAdoo era mural, with its oily and underhanded connotations, of the Portolá expedition: the original Californian land-grab. When Fenway designates Doc an "art-lover" for appreciating the piece, it is unclear if he is referring to the aesthetics of the piece itself, or the history of colonial development it symbolizes. As the two discuss terms of exchange for the heroin, Fenway reveals himself as what Haynes calls the "arch-money-capitalist" to Wolfmann's "productive capital" (10):

"You've been out to have a look at Channel View Estates? Some of us moved heaven and earth, mostly earth, to keep that promise of urban blight from happening—one more episode in a struggle that's been going on for years now—residential owners like me against developers like Brother Wolfmann. People with a decent respect for preserving the environment against high-density tenement scum without the first idea of how to clean up after themselves." (347)

Pynchon's cities and geographical spaces, then, are not merely topographical models but historically contingent spaces which produce meaning at a shifting intersection of politics, economics, the social, and the ecological. Where *Inherent Vice* expresses anxieties about property development in Los Angeles, it balances these against a deep unease about the class stagnation Fenway thrives on.

When Doc protests Fenway's justifications for class inequality, stating "Bullshit, Crocker, it's about your property values" (347), Fenway goes on to link the accumulation capitalism that Haynes demonstrates is in crisis in the sixties and seventies to the extraction of resources responsible, in part, for the polluting of Gordita Beach:

"It's about *being in place*. We—" gesturing around the Visitors' Bar and its withdrawal into seemingly unbounded shadow, "we're in place. We've been in place forever. Look around. Real estate, water rights, oil, cheap labor—all of that's ours, it's always been ours. And you, at the end of the day what are you? one more unit in this swarm of transients who come and go without pause here in the sunny Southland, eager to be bought off with a car of a certain make, model, and year, a blonde in a bikini, thirty seconds on some excuse for a wave—a chili dog, for Christ's sake." (347)

Fenway imagines water, oil, and real estate as inexhaustible, just as his class position is indestructible, and in the same breath summarizes the easy power capitalism wields to subvert the counterculture through commodification.

His discussions with Doc align his power to with a disenchanted, instrumentalist commitment to capitalism. Yet the tension between apocalyptic deluge and drought that looms over Gordita throws Fenway's confidence into doubt. Though Fenway's siege mentality can justify his dismissal of the class tensions that threaten to bubble over, Doc's comparison of Los Angeles to an ark with reference to Lemuria's diluvial annihilation extends the frame of crisis beyond class war or countercultural revolution into questions of climate change and its effects.

Inherent Vice's other property developer, Wolfmann, registers the negative impact of his past developments in his project Arrepentimiento. His previous development, before his transformation, is the Channel View Estates, the environmental disaster that erases a primarily black neighborhood that settled there in the wake of WWII Japanese internment, a displacement described by Tariq Khalil as "More white man's revenge [for Watts]." Doc notes that this is typical of the "Long, sad history of L.A. land use," and recounts a truncated history of dispossession in the area (17). However, whenever looking back in *Inherent Vice*, Pynchon is always Janus-faced, and the combination of the irrational, though historical, Mansonoid context of race-war combined with the feasible though unhistorical Lemurian threat of apocalyptic flooding seems to suggest that Fenway's smug self-assurance of perpetually being "in place" is less than guaranteed. When Doc ventures out to the Channel View Estates, the "soft smell of the fog component of smog, and of desert beneath the pavement" that he registers reasserts the epigraph's articulation of politics and physical environment, suggesting the continued, if suppressed, existence of atavistic—and potentially revolutionary—layer of earth beneath the housing estate.

The Channel View Estates also attract the attention of Farley Branch, the Vietnam War veteran and environmental activist who collects "dozens of reels' worth of Stateside environmental abuse, especially Channel View Estates" (104). That the housing development is an environmental disaster is unambiguous, but Fenway and Khalil's differing explanations for its eradication lend it figurative significance in relation to the political movements of the sixties, asking of these the same fundamental question: What comes next? While the project's name—Channel View—is suggestive of an idle and apathetic Thanatoid community, Branch's documentary activism sheds light on the conspiratorial plot of the novel, revealing a competing possibility for "something else this time" to amount (369). More concretely, the Estates interlock with the cautionary thread about unchecked development and its concomitant ecological degradation, all of which reach a crisis point that is suggested by Lemuria.

The alternative history of Lemuria is the closest representation in the novel to anything other-worldly. The mythical island articulates past and future by rendering Lemuria a parallax of Los Angeles, transforming its imaginary history into a prognosticator for the city. If Los Angeles is the "crystal ball of capitalism's future" (Davis, *City* 48), then Lemuria is the image, revealed

in the oracle, that warns of a looming environmental implosion. The utopian history of Lemuria is called into question by Vehi's belief that, along with Atlantis, it "had sunk into the sea because Earth couldn't accept the levels of toxicity they'd reached." We are prompted to suspect that the "levels of toxicity" around Gordita Beach are reaching Lemurian proportions, meaning that the fate of the island, while imaginary, prognosticates Los Angeles' future. Vehi, Sortilège, and possibly also Spike, each hope that the Earth, personified as a female with an immune system, will begin rejecting "agents of disease like the oil industry" before Los Angeles suffers the same fate as the lost continent (105). The idea of a sentient earth re-enchants a prevalent, instrumentalist view of nature by swapping an inert, physical entity for a dynamic and responsive one. Yet the possibility of diegetic environmental re-enchantment through Lemuria is stymied, and the island instead leads to political sloth for the characters. When Lemuria is first mentioned, re-enchantment is externalized and treated as a property of the earth itself, rather than a moment of transformative affective engagement with it. This is conveyed partly via Flaco's flat, unemotional reaction to a discussion about the topic, "'Lemuria again,' muttered Flaco," as well as Sortilège's sober response: "Not so strange really, there's always been predictions that someday Lemuria would reemerge" (101-2). This is not a moment of re-enchantment for either of them, and by stripping the island of its potential to create wonder, Pynchon hints at the limits of re-enchantment as a basis for environmental politics.

Myths of Lemuria have associated the island's demise with its people's development of advanced technologies (Ramaswamy 80-81). The novel suggests a similar trajectory for Gordita's beach, which is degraded by the nearby oil refinery plants, unhindered by the passive if reluctant acceptance of them by local residents. Though the narrator concedes that "Gordita was still like living on a houseboat anchored in a tar pit," Spike is able to proclaim his love for the place, express his hatred of the pollution, and go back to working on his motorbike. Spike's mutual stance of affective concern and functional disregard is suggestive of the fixation in the novel on the vice inherent to the counterculture—political sloth. This disjuncture signals the disenchantment that had already arisen at the end of the sixties, partly as a result of the failure of material conditions to change in tow of the shifting of consciousness that informed an influential strand of counterculture dogma.³

³ The emphasis on consciousness was encouraged in part by selective interpretations of commentators like Herbert Marcuse and more direct exhortations by figures like Timothy Leary, and Ken Kesey. It is possible to read Marcuse's "An Essay on Liberation" as encouraging subversive art and manipulation of consciousness, and to play into other countercultural habits and interests; though to take this at face value the undercurrent of analysis on how such symbolic shifts affect lived reality must be ignored. Kesey and some of his milieu proposed as a solution to destructive politics that politicians themselves should take LSD to change their worldview (Gair 135). This is the counterculture that, in the late sixties and early seventies

The global consequences of pollution in the form of climate change and its threat of environmental collapse coalesce on Gordita's soiled shoreline, as the transnational oil trade leaves its unavoidable traces in the form of rubbery oil-soles that form on beach-goers' feet after walking in spilled crude. Where Spike scrapes the oleo-veneer from his foot soles with a pocket knife, Denis "liked to let it just accumulate till it was thick as huarache soles, thereby saving him the price of a pair of sandals" (104). Denis, who buys thirty takeaway meals each month and when not accompanying Doc seems to be in front of a fridge, is able to change his thinking so that he can make lemonade of spilled oil. As a representative of the political sloth of the counterculture, Denis' passive resilience would seem to naturally segue into, in Sortilège's euphemistic cosmology, levels of toxicity that force the earth to "reject its agents of disease" (105).

This sort of environmental thought highlights some uncomfortable resonances with deep ecology. Although the term deep ecology was not coined until 1972—two years after that of *Inherent Vice's* setting—Alan Drengson argues that Arne Naess was actually describing, rather than proposing, an environmental movement (xxi). Furthermore, Bill Devall and George Sessions claim that a similar position to Naess' was developed independently during the 1960s by environmentalist and poet Gary Snyder (83). This suggests that the ideas Pynchon explores in *Inherent Vice* were incipient in part of the sixties' counterculture, even if the nomenclature had not been settled. Whatever the case, clearly some principles of deep ecology, as they would be later defined, were nascent in countercultural ideals of harmony and unity.⁴ Pepper identifies the following as basic to deep ecology: (1) an emphasis on oneness, (2) Barry Commoner's principle of "nature knows best" and the auxiliary ideal of living with, rather than against, nature, and (3) non-confrontational radical activism (17-20). These present clear parallels with the ideology of *Inherent Vice's* mostly white counterculture which is less interested in civil rights struggles than expediting a fundamental shift into a "simpler, unalienated, nature-loving, decentralized culture" (M. Zimmerman 58), whether in phasing the world out as Spike does while working on his motorbike, or by making the best of spilled oil by passively utilizing it as footwear like Denis. Such stances towards environmentalism contrast with the direct, indeed violent, action that is referenced in the novel's epigraph.

Of the eight points Naess and Sessions provide as a framework for theoretical and activist deep ecology, the first reads: "The well-being and flourishing of human and non-human Life on Earth have value in themselves (synonyms: intrinsic value, inherent value)." The inherent value of flourish-

"turned away from political action and toward technology and the transformation of consciousness as the primary sources of social change" (Turner 4).

⁴ Michael Zimmerman dates these countercultural preoccupations to 1957 with the publication of Alan Watts' *Nature, Man, and Woman*.

ing life is reversed in Pynchon's title, which refers instead to a condition of degradation or even, as Doc puts it, "original sin" (351). This is suggestive of the disconnect between mystical deep-ecological principles and their historical efficacy. The novel conceptually shows the "inherent vice" in capitalist modes of production and instrumentalization that are opposed to deep ecological values of inherent or non-instrumental worth. However, it is precisely this ruthless instrumentalism, of which Fenway as "fixer" is an example, that allows capitalism to reinvent itself from Fordism to neoliberalism, as Haynes argues, incorporating along the way the counterculture's passive resistance "as part of its healthy diet" (Marcuse, *One* 16).

In particular, Marcuse was referring to readily commodifiable parts of counterculture ideology and praxis, particularly linguistic aspects, but also lifestyle ones. Both are satirized in the Channel View Estates commercial in which LAPD officer Bjornsen appears in hippie-drag, dripping with mass produced regalia like beads and an afro wig, all for the purpose of selling tenement housing to the lower classes. Likewise in Richard Nixon's Orwellian admission that "if it's Fascism for Freedom? *I...can...dig it!*" (9, 120). But by including eastern systems like Zen Buddhism, Marcuse is also targeting the belief, prevalent in parts of the counterculture, that changing one's consciousness would change the world in its wake. This is perhaps also satirized in the "Chinese. Maybe Japanese" logogram on the "expressly designed" LSD blotter Vehi gives Doc to open his mind to new possibilities about his case (108). Deep ecological analyses of intrinsic versus instrumental value can illuminate such relations by showing how the counterculture's belief in inherent value allows advanced capitalism to easily identify, reify, and strategically redeploy the symbolic value of things in the ideological service of the status quo, not to mention profiting meanwhile. In seeking "a freer, more authentic, more self-expressive life, which [did] not depend on dominating anyone or anything," California's counterculture created a vacuum that the mechanisms of late capitalism were quick to fill (M. Zimmerman 62).

These ideas were associated with individual resistance, and they extended into environmental politics. Countercultural techniques of the self tied to drug use and Eastern religious thought bled into the movement's ideas about nature. Anthropocentrism began to be broken down into a deep ecological notion that valued life generally, rather than selectively. Entangled in this countercultural environmentalism were New Age beliefs that sometimes agreed with deep ecological principles, but remained distinct for their inclusion of mystical entities and rituals (M. Zimmerman 69). In the Californian counterculture Pynchon describes, such ideas play out as metaphysical musings on a sentient, even agentic, Earth that repairs anthropogenic damage to its systems with the aim of restoring itself to a state of equilibrium.

The best-known name for this type of belief is Gaianism, based on the Gaia hypothesis that James Lovelock helped found.⁵ Lovelock describes Gaia as a self-correcting entity that adjusts itself in order to achieve its “goal” of optimizing the conditions for life.⁶ This has led to the hypothesis being taken up, often to Lovelock’s chagrin, as the kind of “New Age mysticism” (*Gaia in Turmoil* 22) dramatized in *Inherent Vice*. Michael Ruse explains that the Gaia theory was so well “loved” by the New Age movement that it was consecrated and distorted into Gaianism (42). Gaia, for Lovelock and Lynn Margulis, was a hypothesis meant to encourage scientific exploration of global systems ecology, but in the hands of the New Age movement it became “the ideological basis of a new and sometimes counter-scientific vision, a new ethic, and a new spirituality for a dynamic social movement” (Hay 138). What is important in *Inherent Vice* is not whether the environmentalist ideology it presents is scientific or not, but rather whether it is effective and durable, and how it relates to political action or political sloth.

Both Pynchon and the Californian counterculture must have been primed for such deep ecological notions of interconnectivity and agency by works like Buckminster Fuller’s *Operating Manual for Spaceship Earth*, which envisions the Earth as a self-enclosed life-support system. Understanding the scientific nuances of the self-correcting properties of an Earth modelled in this manner was less important to some countercultural environmentalism than were its mystical aspects. Some emphasis was given to aligning homeostasis with teleology, with speculation that the balance entailed in homeostasis was moral as well as physical. What we learn of Sortilège and Vehi’s idea of a homeostatic and sentient earth is in tune with Gaianism, which Marcel Wissenburg describes as “a modern variant of philosophical determinism” in which everything being dependent on everything else “leads to one of three courses of action: quietism, totalitarianism, or ‘anything goes.’” Sortilège’s own version of this philosophy lies somewhere between the quietism displayed by her boyfriend Spike, and the anything goes attitude that results from believing that “If Gaia can take care of herself and does not need man’s help or co-operation, no action whatsoever is prescribed” (“The Idea of Nature” 9). Such a position recalls Thomas Dunlap’s observations

⁵ James Lovelock argues that living matter and non-living planetary systems form a single organism that self-regulates the environmental conditions required for the propagation and survival of living matter. Gaianism draws on the Gaia hypothesis, though not exactly as it was proposed by Lovelock in articles such as “Gaia as seen through the atmosphere,” nor as subsequently developed by himself and biologist Lynn Margulis.

⁶ Earth’s physical systems are described in Lovelock’s early work as if sentient in their planetary role, for instance in Lovelock’s description of the biosphere’s “control” of the Earth’s temperature. That such systems are described as constituents of a larger, sentient organism is not due to the grammatical convenience of being able to speak of cause and effect in agentic terms, it is crucial to the Gaia hypothesis. See, for instance, pages 45-6 of Lovelock’s *Gaia: A New Look at Life on Earth*, in which he suggests the idea of the Gaian earth as a cybernetic system.

about apocalyptic determinism. Meanwhile, Vehi illustrates the ease with which such distortions of environmental theory can enter into belief systems. In his case, homeostasis acts as a master metaphor that purportedly accounts for connections between events that are likely to be unrelated:

“Man, did you miss a big story,” he greeted Doc.

“You too, man.”

“I’m talkin about sets of fifty-foot waves that wouldn’t quit.”

“‘Fifty,’ huh. I’m talkin about Charlie Manson gettin popped.”

They looked at each other.

“On the face of it,” Vehi said finally, “two separate worlds, each unaware of the other. But they always connect someplace.” (107)

Sortilège does not go so far. When Vehi claims he’d be “very surprised if they weren’t connected,” she retorts, “that’s because you think everything is connected” (108).

The interpretation of Gaia as a teleological hypothesis is one that has persisted despite the pains Lovelock took to resist it by stressing stimulus-response models over goal-directed ones (Hay 137). This implies something about the politics of Gaianism. To build on Wissenburg’s argument, if Gaia can “take care of herself,” then distributive justice can be seen as irrelevant to Gaianism, along with any other global environmental issues. Either way, whether Gaia is taken up as a scientific model or teleological philosophy, it has little to say about collective decision-making, policy, or governance. Drawing on Wissenburg’s assessment, Karen Litfin observes the political futility that the logic of Gaianism implies: “quietism and ‘anything goes’ are only options if we are not concerned with the future of our species ... Gaian totalitarianism, which would subject all human interests to the nonhuman interest of Gaia, is not so real once we recall that Gaia per se is not at risk” (211). Sortilège illustrates this ineffectuality when she claims that the earth will self-correct for the increasing toxicity of Gordita Beach; her faith in the earth’s “immune system” leading her into complacency about the degradation of her immediate environs (105).

During Doc’s visit to the lost continent, the myth of Lemurian exodus is recounted as “Lemurian holy men” transport “the sacred stone of Mu” from the drowning island to California, where it forms the basis of their culture (109). During centuries of invasions, the stone is moved from place to place for preservation, until dropping from sight after the French invasion of Indochina. This account differs significantly from the historical claim that Mu is another lost continent itself strongly resembling Pynchon’s Lemuria. James Churchwood, who expanded and popularized the myth based on Charles Étienne Brasseur de Bourbourg’s initial conception of Mu as a submerged land and Augustus Le Plongeon’s subsequent equation of Mu with Atlantis, fabricated the hoax that Mu was equivalent to the biblical Garden of Eden (169). Churchwood claimed that the first two offshore settlements from this site of human origin were in southwestern North America and eastern Asia,

the same locations given in *Inherent Vice* for the dueling lineages leading up to the Indochina wars. For his part, Pynchon sets up a counter-narrative to the natural disaster responsible for Mu/Lemuria's destruction. He links the U.S. and East Asia through the warfare contemporaneous to the novel, and he also relates the environmental destruction wrought by warfare to that made legitimate through the logic of capitalism. With the substitution of Lemuria for Mu, and California for Lemuria, *Inherent Vice* replaces the overdetermined and ineluctable process of large-scale natural disaster with the, at least potentially, resolvable problems of warfare and pollution. In doing so, Pynchon highlights the crucial aspect of agency and the opportunity to take action which the counterculture had access to, but Lemuria's mythical autochthonous humans, when taken by surprise by the collapse of subterranean gas chambers that supported their island, did not.

By associating Southeastern Asia with the U.S. under the dual threats of destruction posed by war and eroding coastlines, of more concern to Southeast Asia than North America, *Inherent Vice* expands its circumscribed setting within California and becomes relevant to much of the Pacific Rim, and the planet as a whole. Alongside its depiction of readily discernible and localized cases of environmental degradation, more extensive impacts of flooding and desertification are illustrated through the binary system of Lemuria, as a surrogate Los Angeles, and Nevada's Arrepentimiento; Nevada being a primary site of ancient civilization according to Churchward's fabricated archaeology (172).⁷ Where Lemuria and Los Angeles are at risk of a "terrible inundation," the skeletal failure of Arrepentimiento—which promised to repopulate the forbidding terrain of the Nevada desert—stands half-built and probably soon to be destroyed by bombing, locked into an ancient "karmic loop" of violence (109). While highlighting present-day environmental issues, the fantastical Lemuria and the dimensional-gateways of Arrepentimiento also hold an implicit critique of the mythopoeic thinking that infused certain strands of countercultural environmentalism. In this way Pynchon complicates the assumption of ethical productivity that underlies Bennett's formulation of enchantment and Ahmed's of wonder. While Bennett is correct to point out the importance of affect in motivating political action, Pynchon highlights the malleability that is possible within the structure of enchantment to show how the sublime moment of wonder needs anchoring in political, and rational, reality. Although re-enchantment can break the frame of mundane perception, and create space for new affective attachments to the world, Pynchon renders the process an ambivalent one that en-

⁷ Though rising ocean levels and flooding are well established as global issues since they are exacerbated by climate change (for instance due to melting polar caps). Processes of desertification (or dryland degradation) have more recently also been determined to result more significantly from climate change than local land use practices (cf. Behnke and Mortimore).

tails the possibility for a mystification that, in fact, impedes action and leads to political sloth.

Pynchon's characters reflect the contradictions and tensions that were rife in the counterculture and its politics at the end of the 1960s (Gair 209). Assessments of its traits and politics vary, from Andrew G. Kirk's strong emphasis on the environmentalist pragmatism that guided Brand's *Whole Earth Catalog*, to Nadya Zimmerman's contention that a large segment of the counterculture was politically apathetic (3). Keeping such varied accounts in mind, *Inherent Vice*'s counterculture shares a reasonably specific set of traits, habits, and beliefs that are closer to Wissenburg's "anything goes" ethic (9), than to the ideals of commune-based separatists, or the largely civil rights-based advocacy of groups like the SNCC (Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee). While Kirk does convincingly argue for the importance of pragmatism, do-it-yourself culture, and a back-to-the-land ethic for some segments of the counterculture, these philosophies, mostly practiced in isolation from wider society, are neither represented nor critiqued in the novel. The focus is instead on a specific set of pressures that emerge in a metropolitan area of a nation undergoing pronounced structural, societal and economic shifts. The counterculture Pynchon presents us with strikes between a recreationally-focused counterculture of surfers and musicians, and a burgeoning New Age, mystical movement more interested in hallucinations and occult rituals than physical tools; a movement anchored in California's metropolis rather than a rural idyll.

While Gair is correct to note the tensions between diverse anti-Establishment groups of the era, *Inherent Vice*'s counterculture is split into a few clear segments. Spiritual coach and building contractor Riggs Warbling, and to some extent Wolfmann—whose status oscillates between anti-capitalist, establishment thug, and "acid-head philanthropist" (252)—represent, somewhat uncomfortably, the pragmatic counterculture for which Fuller and Brand now serve as avatars. Brand believed in the mutability of systems, from technological society to capitalism, and worked from the perspective that the counterculture and capitalism could "come together and legitimate one another's projects" (Turner 8). When Doc meets him, Warbling has, on Wolfmann's dollar, been working on Arrepentimiento, a project Wolfmann undertakes apparently following a transformative LSD experience. Warbling designs and builds zones or "zona-hedral domes" (62). Zones are an architectural design based on the Buckminsterfullerene molecule, named after Fuller who popularized the geodesic domes favored by counterculture communards (*From Counterculture* 5). As suggested by its name, Arrepentimiento is a project of repentance by Wolfmann "for having once charged money for human shelter" (249). Like Lemuria, the project illustrates the dovetailing of mystical beliefs and environmental philosophy. Here, anyone would be allowed to live for free. When Wolfmann is re-enlisted into faceless capitalism—attested to in the exchange: "'They did something to him.' 'Who?' 'Whoever.'" (252)—Arrepentimiento is aban-

done by all except Warbling, who, in an apparent psychosis, awaits a bomb to be dropped by fighter jets which will destroy the project and any record of it, himself included (252-53). In this episode, the last we see of Warbling, Pynchon intimates the fate of an articulated capitalism and countercultural hope, with the latter destroyed in a series of precise and decisive strikes from above (232).

It is significant that the destruction countercultural hope entails the eradication of a physical space that represents a potential “elsewhere” from capitalism. Mythical lands are well-trod in Pynchon’s works, sometimes commanding significant presence in the narrative. His first novel, *V.*, alludes to Vheissu, a remote and inaccessible city of kaleidoscopic colors; *Gravity’s Rainbow* treats a fantasy about Gondwanaland in much the same way, as an unreachable but idyllic land populated by an enlightened people. Both recall the hidden city of Shambhala in *Against the Day*. *Inherent Vice* problematizes the trope of a utopian elsewhere in a different way to these novels by rendering Lemuria as a parallax view of Los Angeles, and by interweaving their histories and fates into an exodus narrative that draws on the myth of Lemurian resettlement in Mount Shasta, California (Ramaswamy 73). Though the intrinsic appeal of unreachable idylls is precisely in their inaccessibility, *Inherent Vice* refocuses our attention on actual and, to many, familiar geographies. Whereas in *Gravity’s Rainbow*, when Squalidozzi and others dream of Gondwanaland, part of its appeal is that they do not need to leave the U-boat to find or build the utopia, since it remains a comforting fantasy in the midst of the horrors of war. In *Inherent Vice*, the fantasy of Lemuria, plays a similar role in that it does not necessitate any action, it will either appear of its own accord or it will not. However, by portraying Los Angeles as a refraction of Lemuria, Pynchon is critical of the way utopias can appeal to a sense of sloth through their inherent inaccessibility. By suspending Los Angeles between the utopia and destruction that Lemuria signifies, *Inherent Vice* reinforces the mutability of the city’s future. In the case of Arrepentimiento, which figures as a brief portrayal of a more pragmatic attempt at countercultural resistance, the attempt to build a utopian community, rather than await one, meets with a violent end.

Descriptions of such places and communities in Pynchon’s work are usually scant and allusive. Yet they also hold a gravitational weight in the novels, pointing to larger schema. For instance, though Vheissu is mentioned few times in the course of *V.*, Brian McHale argues that this topos allows the book to be positioned as a late-modernist rather than a science-fictional postmodern novel since it converts an ontological projection—the lost world—into an epistemological puzzle that asks, Who knows about Vheissu? What do they know, and how (68)? The discussion of Lemuria likewise does more work than it might at first appear. It reinforces the future-orientation of *Inherent Vice*, countering the sense of its being a nostalgic novel. It also structures an examination of internal countercultural differ-

ences and allegorizes imminent environmental catastrophe in contemporary Los Angeles.

According to surfer Flaco the Bad, the mythical sunken continent is “the Atlantis of the Pacific” (99). Like Atlantis, Lemuria is said to have been populated by a spiritually and technological advanced people, some of whom, according to myth, escaped the cataclysmic incident that sunk their island and took up residence under Mount Shasta, California (Ramaswamy 75-6). Yet, in the narrative *Inherent Vice* constructs, Lemuria ends up with more negative connotations than utopian ones. Mount Shasta is the namesake of Doc’s old flame who herself apparently resides on Lemuria while missing from Los Angeles. However, the underground city aspect of the myth has broader historical resonance with another fantasy of the era, traceable to the Manson Family. Manson’s sect planned to wait out Helter Skelter—Manson’s conspiracy theory, based on his interpretation of Beatles lyrics, as predicting an imminent race war—in a putative lair called the “bottomless pit” in Death Valley, California. Gair argues that Manson’s ideology and the resulting murders seem to have marked “the implosion of the counterculture” (167). His claim is consonant with the disenchantment in *Inherent Vice* that led to the “post-Mansonical nerves that currently ruled the area,” causing “straight world” Angelenos to avoid eye contact with people like Doc (179, 209).

There is also the suggestion of an ideological, and perhaps ancestral, connection between the California Lemurians and Gordita Beach hippies. Doc’s hallucinatory alter ego Xqq suggests this by way of his density being different from Doc’s which, according to Aurelia Louise Jones, a New Age writer on Lemuria, distinguishes regular, three dimensional folks from Lemurians (30). Vehi acts as “travel agent” for the next trip when Doc visits a place “that was, and also wasn’t Greater L.A.” and in which “Doc and all his neighbors, were and were not refugees from the disaster which had submerged Lemuria thousands of years ago” (108). This creates an uncanny sense that perhaps Los Angeles *is* Lemuria, or could be.

On a structural level, by creating an opposition between Gordita Beach residents and the “flatland” establishment figures, Pynchon destabilizes the vision of a benign, spiritual people living in harmony with the planet. Instead, he compares their vision with that of Manson’s by highlighting the strange common thread between Vietnam War-protesting pacifists and the ultra-paranoid worldview of Manson and his acolytes. At the crux of this interconnection is a willingness to embrace the non-rational and shape it into a dark, fatalistic, telos. Finally, the exodus of Lemurians to California, suggestive of an imagined historical continuity between the island and the Californian coast, is spelled out during Doc’s hallucinatory visit to Lemuria, in which he imagines himself “going back, back to the previous world, before the U.S., or French Indochina, before the Catholic Church, before the Buddha, before written history, to the moment when three Lemurian holy men landed on those shores, fleeing the terrible inundation which had taken their

homeland.” That the Lemurians settle in a California which by 1970 is heavily polluted, suggests that the “karmic loop” described in relation to Lemuria is now playing out on the United States’ west coast, and that spiritual advancement does not go hand in hand with a utopian society (109).⁸ The atavistic desire to return to an earlier time recalls a type of utopian hope based on a romanticization of the past, as well as registering the impossibility of return, and by doing so re-asserts the importance of the material present.

The slippage between the 1970s of the novel and its publication nearly four decades later fits with this conception of noir form. It allows Pynchon to stress the fact that the process of climate change, popularized in the 1990s, were already pressing in 1970. This, in turn, creates a sense of urgency; climate change has crept up on us and we are compelled to decode a world that has revealed itself as conflicting with our collective understanding of it. *Inherent Vice* puts us in this same reflexive position, reading a work of fiction ostensibly about the past which in fact is a commentary on our present.

Daniel Grausam has argued for the long history that Pynchon draws on, even in his most present-focused work. Grausam posits that Pynchon makes use of the historical space between the novels’ settings and their time of publication, meaning that his novels both extend far into the historical past, as well as looking towards the future (43-44). Although *Inherent Vice* is explicitly focused on the transitional period of the long 1960s, its critique of power relations extends into a deep past in which the forces that will come to drive contemporaneous capitalism exist only rudimentarily, in human desires and affects. As Grausam points out, the anachronistic slippage between time of setting and publication date that Pynchon makes use of, can result in teleological readings that can triangulate a potential future, partly by exploring this gap (44). By creating a bi-directional historical sense that extends into both past and future, Pynchon is able to explore lost potentialities and reveal unrealized, latent possibilities. Yet in its gestures towards possible futures, *Inherent Vice* is not teleological but open-ended. Rather than settling on a lamentation for paths not taken, the narrative leads the reader to the precipice of change. Whether that change will entail Lemuria’s return, planet earth’s apocalyptic immune response to pollution or, vaguely, “something else this time,” is left an open question. Nevertheless, an unavoidable implication of choosing simply to wait is that we are left with the same world we already have (369).

Despite its magical allure and enchanted mythology, Lemuria is also one of the key figures of disenchantment in the novel. It facilitates a noir reading of the novel’s countercultural figures who, imagining themselves as separate

⁸ Though it should be noted that the primary focus of this passage is geopolitics, rather than ecological degradation specifically, the two are linked in the novel via descriptions of landscapes, as noted earlier in the chapter.

from the ecological degradation they observe being inflicted by the geopolitical conflicts waged in service of capitalism, are actually involved in these processes at a systemic level. Sortilège believes, with her guru Vehi, that the submergence of Lemuria was the function of a planetary immune system that enveloped and destroyed the environmentally toxic island, just as the human body would a pathogen:

Even when the wind cooperated, Gordita was still like living on a houseboat anchored in a tar pit. Everything smelled like crude. Oil spilled from tankers washed up on beach, black, thick, gooey. Anybody who walked on the beach got it on the bottoms of their feet. [. . .]

“I love it here in Gordita, mostly ‘cause it’s your hometown and you love it, but now and then there’s just some . . . little . . . fucking detail . . .”

“They’re destroying the planet,” she agreed. “The good news is that like any living creature, Earth has an immune system too, and sooner or later she’s going to start rejecting agents of disease like the oil industry. And hopefully before we end up like Atlantis and Lemuria.”

It was the belief of her teacher Vehi Fairfield that both empires had sunk into the sea because Earth couldn’t accept the levels of toxicity they’d reached. (104-5)

Here, the presentation of environmental politics resonates with other themes of the novel, most prominently the torsion between the individual and collective, and in its motif of ominous portent. The deterministic reference to Earth’s immune system and its ability and proclivity to self-correct anthropogenic environmental damage, as well as the mystical tenor of the passage, with its casual references to mythical places, has resonances with Gaianism and New Age thought. The claim that the Earth “couldn’t accept the levels of toxicity” that the supposedly sunken continent produced constitutes a parochial interpretation of Lovelock’s argument that self-regulatory mechanisms are responsible for adjusting ocean salinity and that processes such as methylation are probably “a means of removing toxic substances from the local environment” (*A New Look* 97).

The environmental philosophy represented in *Inherent Vice* centers on the idea that humans have caused an environmental crisis, a response to which “requires us to be humble, not arrogant, towards the Earth” (Pepper 15). This humility, *Inherent Vice* suggests, did not lead to its intended goal of the earth returning itself to a state of environmental equilibrium. Quite the opposite; while the wheels of industry continued to turn, pollution continued to be produced, unopposed by countercultural true-believers who trusted a sentient Earth to correct humanity’s folly. Such beliefs in a vengeful feedback loop have persisted to the present day. In a column titled “Rumsfeld and the Bees” Slavoj Žižek, discussing colony collapse disorder, reiterates the question, “What if Mother Earth is punishing us?” The humility of characters like Vehi and Sortilège seems to translate too easily into passivity, even sloth. Indeed, Pynchon asks in his piece on sloth, “who is more guilty of Sloth, a

person who collaborates with the root of all evil, accepting things-as-they-are in return for a paycheck and a hassle-free life, or one who does nothing, finally, but persist in sorrow?" He responds with the suggestion that the former is the guiltier party, and though Vehi and Sortilège are not getting any payment for their beliefs, they certainly contribute to their ability to lead a "hassle-free life."

In exploring this relation, Pynchon productively shifts the emphasis of discussion from the question of environmentalism as a form of spirituality in its own right, to an examination of the resonances between certain spiritual precepts with ecological thought. What *Inherent Vice* insinuates about the failure of this counterculture's environmentalism resonates with the argument outlined by Lynn Margulis in her Foreword to Reg Morrison's *The Spirit in the Gene*. Margulis praises Morrison's thesis for linking religiosity to habitat destruction, proposing that delusions of invincibility validated by religious doctrine were felt to justify environmental destruction. From here it is a small step to Pynchon's counterculture that imagines the planet as a self-regenerating organism that vindicates their own lack of concrete action. In this movement, based on insurmountable and utopian ideals that radically re-envision the structure and texture of society, convenient fantasies gloss over concrete problems. Although the characters do not actively engage in environmental destruction, they likewise fail to take up its protection or rehabilitation.

Lemuria's status as a lost world reflects the passing of a more pristine environment and dovetails with "modernity's preoccupation with loss" (Ramaswamy 6-7). Pynchon forms a thematic continuity through loss to link the myth of Lemuria and its disappearance with a projection about the future of Los Angeles. This is done through the demise of the Lemurian civilization, the disappearance of characters such as Shasta or Wolfmann, and even the places that vanish, such as Tariq Khalil's old haunt, Artesia Boulevard. Lemuria is revealed as an allegory for Los Angeles during Doc's hallucination, in which he encounters it as "an ancient city that was, and also wasn't everyday Greater L.A." When Doc enters the hallucination, presumably at Vehi's residence, the stereo is "somehow fiendishly programmed to repeat indefinitely" Tiny Tim's "The Ice Caps are Melting," at which point we are told that "Vehi had either left the area or become invisible" (108). The implication of Vehi being precluded from hearing the tune is clear: while the ice caps melt indefinitely he is deaf to the crisis, continuing to teach his disciples that the Earth will eventually self-correct environmental imbalances (105).

Later in the hallucination Doc receives a postcard from the missing Shasta who is alive and well on "some island he had never heard of out in the Pacific Ocean, with a lot of vowels in its name" (163). Doc later notes that this particular island is one "whose name he couldn't pronounce" (167). Taken together, these share with the Pacific island nation Kiribati a name composed half of vowels and a non-phonetic pronunciation. Kiribati has become

known as a site of climate precarity due to its vulnerability to flooding that is expected to take place in the coming decades as a result of climate change. This will necessitate either a creative and pragmatic solution to flooding, or a mass migration from the island, a prospect anticipated by the fictional exodus from Lemuria. Either way, Kiribati has come to be emblematic of the problems global society will face because of shifting climatic conditions. Whether the novel alludes to this island nation or another, both Lemuria and Kiribati highlight, even forecast, ecological precarity beyond their own borders. In this way, Pynchon again extends the scope of the novel from its locale of Los Angeles into a global field of reference.

The postcard from Shasta signals climate change as a thematic in a more concrete way. It reminds Doc of the occasion when he and Shasta use a Ouija board to “find some dope” and end up at the future Golden Fang headquarters amidst the novel’s only storm (164). It is a dramatic downpour with “apocalyptic peals of thunder” and rain so heavy that it sweeps away bushes, trees, even cars (165). The rain has a “peculiar effect” on Sortilège, who associates it with “Lemuria and its tragic final days” (167-8). Although this may be an isolated incident of weather unconnected to Lemuria’s cataclysmic past and the possible future of Los Angeles, it is more likely to be another of the anachronisms that structure subtextual elements of the narrative. If so, it means that the characters experience the consequences of the anthropogenic climate change, which was well underway but had not yet been named as such in the early 1970s. A large-scale climate event, rather than simply bad weather, seems to be implied as Doc waits out the storm in a car, imagining the water level rising and flooding the streets, and “all this karmic waterscape connecting together, as the rain went on falling and the land vanished, into a sizeable inland sea that would presently become an extension of the Pacific” (166). Although this exaggerates the impact of rising ocean levels for Los Angeles specifically, it is true that significant sections of the city could flood within decades.⁹

A similar sense of anticipation in connection with water recurs in The Boards’ mansion, a space ruled by extravagance and sloth. Doc notices the “huge 3-D reproduction in fiberglass of Hokusai’s famous *Great Wave off Kanagawa*, arching wall to ceiling to opposite wall, creating a foam-shadowed hideaway beneath the eternally suspended monster” (237-38). The static rogue-wave that looms over the idle band-members and friends creates a perpetual sense of impending disaster, and the artwork is indeed intended to “freak a visitor into declining his hit whenever a joint came around” (126). As an ekphrastic piece, the wave reinforces the potential for large-scale destruction that the ocean holds over any coastal region, evoking once again the motif of submergence which connects the novel to concerns about

⁹ An assessment of sea level rise vulnerability has been made in a report by the University of Southern California titled “Sea Level Rise Vulnerability Study for the City of Los Angeles.”

the kinds of extreme weather events brought about by climate change. The monstrous but static fiberglass wave that looms over the Boards' "dope-smoking room" becomes yet another menacing emblem of a coming flood that threatens *Inherent Vice's* Los Angeles, a harbinger that is met with a dope-dazed indifference (125).

As he makes his way around the residence, Doc realizes that "every single one of these Boards was a zombie" (250). The zombification of The Boards is partly political, and it connects them to the Thanatoids of *Vineland*. Thanatoid means "like death, only different," Ortho Bob, himself a Thanatoid, points out (170). As we learn, this means that Thanatoids spend much of their lives in front of a television. Low on "dedication and community spirit," Thanatoids are *Vineland's* apolitical specters, content to maintain their existence as karmically imbalanced entities (218). The Boards, with their karmic imbalance and sloth, can be read as a reprise of the Thanatoids who also, through music, mirror a trajectory from collective experience to a state of "solitude, confinement, and mutual silence" (176). That the Boards are at once an iconic band for the novel's counterculture, and also completely apolitical ties them to the segment of the musical counterculture who were "not determined to bring about changes to the system," and indeed not "counter to anything" (N. Zimmerman 3). This constellation of the apocalyptic in Hokusai's *Great Wave*, and the zombification of the Boards, reinforces the connection between the novel's ecological politics and its critique of countercultural sloth.

Though sloth may take a back seat to the massive power of greed that undergirds capitalism, *Inherent Vice* offers it as the most fitting deadly sin afflicting those who would oppose aspects of capitalist practice. Sloth is what invites us collectively to "stay still enough and [hope that] the blade of the scythe, somehow, will pass by" (Pynchon "Deadly"). Although on this count Doc is more closely aligned with can-do characters like Fritz Drybeam or Aunt Reet, in the end idleness gets the best of him too. In the novel's final scene the otherwise tireless detective imagines himself, despite driving on a half-full tank, running out of fuel and sitting beside a Los Angeles highway waiting for something to happen, waiting "For the fog to burn away, and for something else this time" (369). In a novel of one world, where there will be no historical "something else," seeming to end on a note of anticipation, if not optimism, is the novel's final dark joke. After all, as he idly waits, Doc is unaware that the coming decade is to bring five more years of the Vietnam War, escalating industrial pollution and resource extraction, and what Haynes has called "the abyss of the 1970s" (2). Yet embedded in this final scene is an ecological dimension that relies on the disjointed temporality Pynchon sets up in the novel: although Doc's car is half-full of fuel he nonetheless imagines himself running dry, and accepting the setback as an opportunity for change. Petrol here joins metonymically with the larger discourse on oil, and Doc's tentative optimism after foreseeing the expiration of this

resource points to the resilient undercurrent of the novel, even as it casts an eye toward possible future resource scarcity.

Counterpointing the novel's treatment of scarcity and fragility is the robust and expeditious capitalism of which the ship *Preserved/Golden Fang* becomes emblematic. Despite the internal contradictions and shortcomings of a waning counterculture, its failure to achieve the kind of revolutionary change it sought is fundamentally linked to the vast power of capitalism to subsume opposition, and to transform and regenerate. The reincarnation of the *Golden Fang* schooner as *Preserved* at the historical moment of the countercultural demise, exhibits the buoyancy of capitalism as it repels antagonistic ideological systems. Haynes identifies that a key issue at stake in *Inherent Vice* is its examination of the crisis of capitalism that necessitated a violent destruction of capital in order to transition into a more stable economic state. This state, based on credit and debt, and marking the transition from Fordism to neoliberalism, is registered in the transformation of the more sinister *Golden Fang*, with its reference to the gold standard, into the ironically affirmative designation of *Preserved*. The schooner, originally built as a fishing vessel, is "of keen interest to the countersubversive community" and is transformed for use in covert "anti-Communist projects in Guatemala, West Africa, Indonesia, and other places whose names were blanked out" (95). After the conversion/co-option of the schooner, it becomes capable of supernatural mobility, changing position "as if by occult forces" (93). The ship is implicated in the transnational history of capitalist hegemony and is shown to have been particularly useful in clandestine schemes to resist or suppress non-capitalist methods of governance and activities considered subversive by the ruling classes. Thus, the dovetailing of the career of the ship with U.S. foreign policy is an example of how the novel makes use of fantastical devices in order to chart, rather than avoid history.

Haynes notes the ways in which the wave motif of *Inherent Vice* evokes a visual metaphor for a cycle of capitalism that was coming to an end in the late 1960s. At the same time, the "quaint zoology" that Haynes sees resulting from the initial defamiliarizing perspective on Gordita Beach is also open to a level of interpretation that understands the surf, waves, and water as material (4). Though Pynchon seizes on the tensions between the literal and figurative uses of the term "surf," the repeated intrusion of the actual ocean into the sensorial registers of the characters, as well as the deadly threat it poses, renders its use more than just metaphorical. Indeed, the ocean is the primary site at which the material and ideological worlds of the novel intersect. In a novel that looks at the processes through which ideas are developed, contested, and either persist or fall by the wayside, the material ocean is nevertheless an apocalyptic presence that ultimately decides whether anything survives at all.

The first epigraph for this chapter asks whether there is a natural selection that decides the survival of some ideas and death of others. As the collection

of Bateson's essays attests, there are many factors affecting the survival of ideas, one set of which is economic. Though Bateson uses the term "natural selection" partly in a figurative manner, for my purposes biological and cultural selection can be articulated through principles of economy. Just as the organism that expends the least energy fitting its niche has an advantage over the creature that spends the most, economies of somatic effort influence which ideas are developed and how likely they are to become embedded in a particular discourse on a broad scale. Minimizing somatic effort is as basic a survival strategy as it is common. When applied self-reflexively in the context of Pynchon's novel, and coded morally, we might call this strategy sloth. Though other factors in *Inherent Vice*, particularly those relevant to the durability of capitalism, are evidently at work in the selection of which ideas from this counterculture persist and which are lost, Pynchon points to the ways in which the late counterculture's disaffected indolence expedites the death of the countercultural idea that a different way of organizing society was possible. Doc observes that even sites of cultural expression and collectivity that were developed within and by the counterculture—concerts, peace-rallies, love-ins, be-ins, and freak-ins—were already being co-opted by the forces of capitalism. Pynchon also depicts the movement as being undermined from within, not least through his satire of activist groups that he christens with comically non-threatening names like "the Bong Users' Revolutionary Brigades" (302). Yet Pynchon's attention to the life and death of ideas, especially those that do not in the novel translate into action, chimes with Bateson's repeated admonition that individual errors in thinking easily aggregate into mistaken values. This is perhaps most clearly illustrated in the mistaken belief in a sentient earth, a view that crystallizes into an ethic of "hands off" environmentalism. Writing on ecological degradation, Bateson contends that wrongheaded values are one of the three root causes of threat to humankind's survival. In *Inherent Vice* we witness the triumph or selection of one set of values, those of neoliberal capitalism, over those of countercultural revolution.

In light of this, it would be difficult for the novel to end convincingly on a straightforwardly positive note such as we see in the final paragraphs of *Tropic of Orange*. Yet, despite the failure of the counterculture's political ideals, neither does the novel submit to the same kind of apocalyptic conclusion that I discuss in relation to *Mermaids in Paradise* in the first chapter. Together with Hume's observation that *Inherent Vice* departs from earlier Pynchon novels in that it does little to "destabilize our ontology," and her contention that this is a strategy for encouraging reflection on the material reality and singular nature of the planet, the ambivalence and anticipation on which the novel ends appears to be purposively inconclusive. If we read Lemuria as no more than myth and hallucination, then it stands that in the diegetic world, "Nothing substantive exists beyond what we see" (2). And what we see is hardly encouraging. As Doc cruises along the Santa Monica Freeway, he imagines the different possibilities of getting lost in a fog so

thick it erases borders and identities. The only thing that remains clear is that no matter what does happen, the fact that life goes on beyond this moment of crisis and failure, ultimately suggests the novel as a narrative of resilience. Though its ending is equivocal, the novel's rejection of the kind of *deus ex machina* we observe in *Mermaids in Paradise*, any intervention whereby a spiritual or supernatural force magically appears in order to resolve the problems of environmental degradation, resilience is probably the best that can be hoped for.

I titled this chapter "A Way to Lose More Slowly," using a quote from Jacques Tourneur's *Out of the Past*. The film is widely acknowledged as one of the finest films noirs, and features Robert Mitchum in his first lead as Jeff Bailey (a role first offered to Doc's favorite noir actor, John Garfield). In some ways an unlikely point of reference, *Out of the Past* shares with *Inherent Vice* a pivotal interplay between present and past that gradually reveals the impossibility of evading the history we create. Doc suffers some of the same adversities as Bailey, such as being framed for murder, double-crossed, and having to withstand attempts on his life. However, for Doc, as well as for the novel as a whole, much more is at stake than for Bailey: the failure of various social revolutions, a consolidation of capitalism's stranglehold on global economics and, not least, the changing environmental conditions that threaten to finish it all. Despite these differences, in the face of overwhelming odds, what seems like a predetermined fate, and no clear way to "win," rather than concede outright, both texts see a lapse into slowness as a survival strategy. Doc could well be channeling Bailey's last resort in his choice to lose slowly, if he cannot win. Doc's eventual inertia, tied to the use of fossil fuels at the close of the narrative, speaks more to the climate-crisis aims of slowing rates of carbon emissions and hence temperature rise, than to the sin of sloth embodied by his countercultural milieu.

Conclusion

The novels discussed in the preceding chapters represent a fraction of the diverse approaches and strategies that authors have taken up when composing environmental fiction in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. My focus has been on novels that put re-enchantment to use to make sense of environmental degradation. The novels make clear that re-enchantment as an environmental affect is complex and conflicted. Whereas *Mermaids in Paradise* depicts the potential for re-enchantment to mobilize direct action and encourage affective engagement with environmental issues, *Inherent Vice* reveals it to be a contextually bound and potentially dangerous fulcrum for environmental politics. *Tropic of Orange*, in contrast, takes up re-enchantment as a means of producing a politics of hope with regard to social and environmental justice issues. Common to these novels is an interest in the affective scope of climate change and environmental degradation. They interrogate some of the cause-and-effect circuitry that is definitive of the Anthropocene, asking what kinds of outcomes we might expect of the energy we have fed—figuratively and literally—into our ecosystems, and how we might confront the resulting dilemmas.

These writers, along with many others, increasingly trade the experimental breadth of modernism and its lineage for a novelistic form driven in large part by the U.S. turn towards affect. Rachel Greenwald Smith uses the language of economics to posit that the affective hypothesis—that literature is most meaningful when it enables empathetic connections—has been shaped by the rise of neoliberalism (1). Greenwald Smith argues that personal feelings, or privatized feelings as she also calls them, have an effect that “reinforces neoliberal subjective norms,” and urges her readers to pay attention to “impersonal feelings” which are formal gestures rather than cognitive ones (11, 18-19). In other words, Greenwald Smith is more interested in how “works of art envision, enact, and transmit their specific effects” than in “investigating how the brain and body respond to works of art” (19). However, while Greenwald Smith and I share an interest in an affective turn in ecofiction, I attempt to show how affect is marshalled within ecofiction in service of environmental politics, rather than focusing on its relation to the neoliberal economy.

Underlying my discussions of the affective freight of dis- and re-enchantment in the chapters is the notion that despite the clear proliferation of apocalyptic narratives in ecofiction, particularly cli-fi, works that identify affects of re-enchantment resist an apocalyptic environmental imaginary. While Millet’s and Yamashita’s novels bear out a positive relation between

affects of re-enchantment and environmental politics, Thomas Pynchon's demonstrates the limits of their potential. In these narratives, the knowledge of how rapidly we have changed the course of deep-historical processes, along with estimates of how long before often vaguely defined catastrophes result from this, and what we need to do to avert or diminish these, is articulated with an understanding that the Anthropocene presents a more collective issue or risk than any that have come before it. As two seemingly governing principles of Western society, affect and risk have been paired in these narratives as dialogical narrative strategies that are framed by techniques and devices common to popular culture.

In what follows, I discuss some other contemporary works of ecofiction that make use of similar tensions between gestures of re-enchantment and disenchantment, and draw attention to their use of affective wonder. In doing so, I hope to demonstrate some of the breadth of recent environmental writing, ecofiction, or cli-fi that addresses the Anthropocene and its representational challenges in affect-laden or affect-evoking narratives about risk. While not all my examples belong to the genre, I also intend to show that the dialogic of dis- and re-enchantment appears in post-apocalyptic novels, and other narratives of environmental crisis that register a shift away from the nuclear-age device of a singular apocalyptic event. Instead, these novels deal with a cataclysmic process of environmental degradation that serves as a point of departure for examining scenarios of resilience.

Tom Cooper's *The Marauders* typifies the one-world positionality ecofiction frequently takes up, here within the minute geographical parameters of Louisiana's Barataria, with brief excursions to neighboring cities. Yet the catastrophe on which the novel is premised is an event of global significance. *The Marauders* fictionalizes a version of British Petroleum's Deepwater Horizon oil spill, a disaster that devastated a large portion of the Gulf of Mexico in 2010. As a result of this disaster, 176,000 square kilometers were directly impacted by oil, and no reliable estimates of spilled hydrocarbons are available (Norse and Amos 11065). The novel charts, in the wake of a massive oil spill, the attrition of the local ecosystem and the community centered around the town of Jeanette whose livelihoods rely on it. As shrimp populations dwindle and individual crustaceans are stunted and mutated, shrimpers like Gus Lindquist come to realize that after many generations their profession has reached an anthropogenic tipping point. While the dust, or rather oil, is still settling after the spill, a representative from the company responsible for the destruction and former resident of Jeanette bamboozles locals into settlements as a measure against a class action lawsuit. While some relocate and transition into different careers, Lindquist refocuses his time and energy on his lifelong interest in treasure hunting. A darkly humorous metaphor for BP's oil drilling, the disheveled Lindquist pilots his pirogue (a small, flat-bottomed boat) around the Barataria Bay searching for the hidden treasure of pirate Jean Lafitte.

Though Lindquist is one of several focalizers whose perspective is demarcated by chapter divisions, he is the novel's protagonist as well as its agent of re-enchantment, a role handed off at the novel's end to the younger Wes Trench as a gesture towards the intergenerational resilience that contemporary post-apocalyptic novels are so often premised upon.¹ It becomes undeniable to Lindquist that, for economic and pragmatic reasons, shrimping no longer represents a viable career, and so he transforms the degraded bayou into a site of hope and opportunity through a willful act of wonder that allows his longstanding interest in hidden pirate treasure to seem a legitimate venture. Lindquist is deracinated by the spoiling of the bayou and as he gradually becomes aware of the marsh as a site of disenchantment it becomes clear that its degradation equates to his own. He combats this disenchantment through his fantasy of locating "hundreds, maybe thousands" of doubloons in the Barataria (164). This culminates in Cooper gesturing towards redemption via Lindquist's tenacious desire to re-enchant the bayou, partly through the fantasy of wealth. Yet the ecological context makes it almost impossible to believe that Lindquist will ever succeed, and he never does. When read as a work of ecofiction that makes use of re-enchantment as a narrative strategy, Cooper's debut is an interesting example. In the circumstances of a disintegrating community, an ecosystem in a state of ruin, and extensive corruption, re-enchantment is deployed as momentary hope in an atmosphere of despair. As with hope in noir, it always entails an awareness of the enormous odds against it, and Lindquist's ambitions ultimately fail as they seem environmentally fated to do.

Whereas Cooper's *The Marauders* builds tensions between disenchantment and hope through Lindquist's tacit desire to re-enchant the Barataria, Ann Patchett's *State of Wonder* lacks such a sense of disenchantment. Rather, and as its title suggests, it repeatedly compels the reader to develop a sense of wonder for an exotic and mysterious conceptualization of nature. This is not a novel of ecological collapse or disaster, though it does depict and comment on deforestation, species loss, and other conservation issues. Patchett explores ideas of fertility and disappearance, including the possibility of the disappearance of a medically fascinating, and eminently marketable, tree. It makes use of wonder as a means of manipulating perspectives on, among other things, the natural world. In the novel, a tribe called the Lakashi who reside in the Amazon Rainforest in the vicinity of Manaus city make use of a strange plant. The women chew the bark of the tree which averts menopause and imbues them with permanent fertility. The tension

¹ The depiction of a new generation is a trope of post-apocalyptic fiction, and is often either a central concern or forms the culmination of such narratives. This can be observed in novels like Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* and *MaddAddam* trilogy, McCarthy's *The Road*, Lepucki's *California*. The idea of intergenerational legacy and human resilience post-apocalypse is discussed in Heather Hicks' *The Post-Apocalyptic Novel in the Twenty-First Century*, particularly its Introduction, and first and third chapters.

drawn between the possibility of unlimited fertility for women, and the threat that the unique and singular tree as an object of commercial research would quickly become extinct, provokes some of the same questions Millet overtly explores about the ascription of value to the natural world and the reasons underlying this value. However, *State of Wonder* is more a social drama than an environmental novel. It privileges a mapping of the “psychological and cognitive structures that constitute” what Timothy Clark observes is “‘interesting’ ... for most human beings” in relation to Anthropocene fictions (176).

Another novel that touches on environmental issues as part of its social drama is Edan Lepucki’s post-apocalyptic *California* in which—as in Margaret Atwood’s *MaddAddam* trilogy—North American life is partitioned into fully neoliberalized gated communities and anarchic wastelands outside the (once) urban centers. The novel’s representations of environmental issues are noteworthy for the use Lepucki makes of dis- and re-enchantment in framing them. Descriptions of encounters with the natural world routinely seek a defamiliarizing effect. For instance, Frida, who has fled Los Angeles with her husband Cal, invokes a metaphysical demarcation of life in the woods by calling her new home “the afterlife” (3). After bathing in a stream, Frida feels she has been “spit out as if from a *Wizard of Oz* tornado” (14). She describes the heightened sensory experience of being in the woods, and reflects that “The green world filled her head and cleared it,” contrasting with the disenchanted state of barely noticing the world around her that will later set in (19). Lepucki describes Frida as attuned to the natural world in her states of re-enchantment, and farcically disconnected from it at other times (19-20). However, in terms of the novelistic whole, such moments of engagement with environment are subordinated to Frida’s interactions with Cal, Micah, and members of the community she moves into. Truncated considerations of climate change, alongside some of the other usual thematics of overpopulation, wealth disparity, and systemic oppression, are largely subsumed into the psychological meanderings of the novel. Aside from a rather confused treatment of the uses and abuses of political violence, *California* falls prey to Clark’s observation about Anthropocene fiction by relying primarily on human drama rather than the environmental factors implicated in, and following from, climate-related collapse (176-77).

For a properly environmental post-apocalyptic novel, we can look to Claire Vaye Watkins’ *Gold Fame Citrus* which taps into the greedy promise of California that Raymond Chandler captured so deftly in the “private sunshine” of Terry Lennox’s \$5000 banknote, and re-situates it within the citrus fiction genre of Davis’ *Ecology of Fear* (85). In relation to Karen Tei Yamashita’s *Tropic of Orange*, Vaye Watkins’ novel reads as an aftermath in which gold and citrus (and, of course, the eponymous fame) have coalesced in an apocalyptic trajectory, the climate change that Yamashita toys with having set in and desertified Los Angeles completely. Once the harsh climate has expelled prospectors—Davis’ boosterists—to a more temperate

east, many of those who remain in the area are a hybrid of back-to-the-land counterculturalists, religious fanatics, and survivalists. Rather than head east for a better chance at survival despite the almost certainty of being drafted into labor camps, Luz and Ray seek out a town run by a water-dowsing prophet. The couple are in part motivated by their encounter with a child they decide to care for, which signals the novel's concern with intergenerational resilience. Unlike Lepucki's *California, Gold Fame Citrus* resists giving itself over completely to considerations of the impact of familial and societal pressures on its main character. In fact, the novel fits well with what Patrick D. Murphy calls "nature oriented literature" (1), given that the desert is a major component of the text and arguably has more agency than its protagonist Luz.

Punctuating the development of Luz' story, and those of the mirage-chasers who populate California, are rich descriptions of a transformed landscape at varying scales. The narrativization of Los Angeles that David Fine describes as thoroughly fixated on "the betrayal of hope and the collapse of dreams" is, in *Gold Fame Citrus*, inherited by the larger state of California (236). Out of this characteristic disenchantment, however, the efflorescent landscape becomes a site of representational density that takes two main forms. The first is a future-anterior archaeology of burials. "Quartz country. Talc country. Arrowhead country. Petroglyph country. Rain shadow country. Ephemeral lake country. Creosote forest country. Joshua tree country. Alfalfa field country. Solar array country. Air Force base country. UFO country" (173). The intermingling of geological and environmental features, agricultural, technological, and cultural sites, points to some of the differing histories and uses that desertification brought to an end. It invokes the radical invariance of earth's deep past, and as such involves a temporal loop or return that so often underlies post-apocalyptic form and its mythologizations of place. The second form of this troping of elegy is directed at the novel's present time as the loss of biodiversity and vital landscapes are registered in overwrought language that strives towards, and falls short of, re-enchanting the sandy uniformity: "Mountains not mountains. Not rock, or no longer. Once rock. Dead rock. The sloughed-off skin of the Sierra, the Rockies, so on. Sand dunes. Dunes upon dunes" (171). Yet, though the desert is at first depicted as bleak and dead, Vaye Watkins soon animates it with new and striking forms of life.

Before Luz reaches the desert colony, the landscape becomes imbued with a Pynchonian wonder augmented by Vaye Watkins' own propensity for densely digressive narration and shambolic inclusion. The Amargosa desert has "ascribed to it a curious energy," evoking a feeling that is "incredibly calm, like heaven" (186-87). Various new species of animal are placed in ecological relation, like the "Vampire Grackle" that uses its "sharp, proboscis-like beak ... to extract the blood" from mammals such as the "Dumbo Jackrabbit," a leporid with "enormous ears" evolved to cool its body (290, 281). Even an ambulatory variety of Joshua Tree is described in a bestiary

Luz feels to be so “secret, sacred” that she needs to keep it close to her (292-3). The plants and animals that have evolved in response to their changed environment and new ecological niches are given descriptions that serve as a conduit for a re-enchantment of the decimated region. The likelihood that they are fabrications of cult-leader Levi’s imagination reinforces a dynamic between re-colonization and re-enchantment that recalls the history of Los Angeles boosterism more than any resilient environmental ethic. Nonetheless, within the context of the novel, these efforts to re-enchant have their desired effect, as Luz is seduced into staying with Levi to worship the sand dunes. On one of her walks out into the desert, when Luz sees a piece of tarpaulin taken by the wind, she recognizes the expansiveness of the place and the varied forms of life it supports. “The tarp could be going anywhere,” she reflects. “It could settle upon a tomb dug by a devious ant. It could be a queer surface rolled over by a forever snake. It could shade a parliament of miniature owls,” she continues, before realizing: “Suddenly this was a land of *could*. Flamboyant, vibrant, polychrome and iridescent ... so many inspired ways to eat and be eaten. And what was vibrancy but being very, very alive” (202). Such descriptive passages that work to re-enchant the desert are common in the novel.

In step with the serial instances of wonder that mark Luz’s induction into the post-apocalyptic landscape is an oscillation back to California’s counter-cultural past. Mentions of Earthships, geodesic domes, the paranoid charlatan Levi, and the conflation of science and magic, all refer back to the same site of environmental consciousness Pynchon plumbs in *Inherent Vice*. Inverting that novel’s potential diluvial catastrophe into an actual scorched future, *Gold Fame Citrus* displays a fascination with elusive and unmappable geographies and uses them as a trope for the uncanny ambiguity of a place that is both familiar and defamiliarized. This oscillation is also one of dis- and re-enchantment that, as is typical of Los Angeles fiction, proffers hope and betrayal first sequentially, then concurrently. Within this historical scope, re-enchantment is no longer deployed as an ambiguous or ironic effect of charisma and rhetoric, but rather as a way of pre-mourning what might already be forfeit. The inventories of loss often begin simply and increase in descriptive vibrancy, maintaining a tension between the aesthetic pleasure of a description and the knowledge that its object is unreachable. For example, Luz envisions “[taking] Ig walking in the rainforest, barefoot,” to “show her velvet moss and steady evergreens and the modest gibbous of glacier on Mount Rainier,” to “encourage her to stroke gently the fins on the underside of orange mushrooms,” and “pry open rotting logs and watch grubs and slugs and earthworms at their enrichment business,” to “let her take some of the sweet colloidal humus into her mouth,” and “come upon a moose, his antlers splayed like great hands raised to God, his ancient beard swaying as he saunters silently through the forest” (86). These damp-fantasies of fungus, slugs, and the like, when read with the awareness that they are impossible in the sun-desiccated California, resonate with Jane

Bennett's criterion of sensuousness about nature and her model for the mood of enchantment, "or that strange combination of delight and disturbance" (xi). Unlike the suspect moments of re-enchantment for Luz, encouraged by con man Levi, these descriptions of the diegetic past, or real-world present, make a genuine attempt to participate in what Bennett argues is the practical usefulness of the enchantment effect as part of "a complex set of relays between moral contents, aesthetic-affective styles, and public moods" (xii).

Clark draws on William Flesch's arguments on behavioral economics in order to argue that readers are more powerfully engaged by the "trajectory of one, individual fictional life" than by any number of non-human lives (177-78). Flesch's observations reveal that literary interest is piqued by narratives that illustrate scenarios in which we witness the meting of justice, which necessarily draw on our capacity for and interest in affect (66, 121). Fundamental to such affective investments are practices of cooperation (119), which are depicted as pragmatically necessary in *Mermaids in Paradise*, internally successful though stymied by state violence in *Tropic of Orange*, and lamented for their absence in *Inherent Vice*.

My principal focus in analyzing the kinds of fictional biographies Clark draws attention to has been on the affects of disenchantment and re-enchantment that develop them. This necessitates an at least partly anthropocentric approach to environmental questions, and thus comes at the cost of closer attention to the "largely invisible ecological" dynamics that Clark argues present problems for Anthropocene fictions (178). Although the novels I discuss in the chapters engage readers through their charting of individuals lives, they also highlight our affective commitments to the environment and draw attention to the ecological interconnections that combine to form our sense of place. The re-enchantment these novels elicit activates an emotional response and a sense of environmental ethical or political engagement. They attempt to balance these with that basic unit of literary value, narrative interest, while tying this narrative interest to questions that extend beyond a purely anthropocentric frame. In this way, affect exceeds the bounds of what Greenwald Smith calls "privatized" feelings that are "personally controlled," insofar as these narratives forge affective constellations between the individual, others, particularly other animals, and environments. The external orientation of affective investments in other animals or in ecosystems serves to "challenge the principles of subjectivity that underpin ... our economic, political, and social convictions" (2). This rhetorical strategy is counterbalanced by the disenchanted mode of environmental dystopias, the apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic novel, and related narrative modes. Such novels function as an attempt to conceptually and affectively elude the difficulties of representation that the Anthropocene presents, and enable the expression of ethical and political energies.

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