Saving the Present: Material Feminist Readings of Canadian and U.S. Post-Apocalyptic Fiction of the Twenty-first Century

by

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ABSTRACT

Saving the Present embarks on a journey through recent Canadian, Métis, and American post-apocalyptic fiction of the twenty-first century to discover the means by which the apocalyptic setting is overcome. This study takes current developments in climate change and the intersection between the human, the animal, and the machine as the backdrop which informs its inquiries with the aim to demonstrate that the post-apocalyptic novel not only takes up contemporary anxieties, but that it also often imagines counter-scenarios that involve a reckoning with humanity's entanglements. In fact, it is humanity's inextricable entanglement with the nonhuman world which "reverses" the apocalyptic scenario and enables a more optimistic future in the post-apocalyptic narratives in my study.

Throughout my chapters, I employ close reading informed by material feminist theory to attend to these entanglements. I therefore examine the lived experiences of "fleshy" bodies, but also their relation to "matter," such as the ways in which the environment and the human body are mutually affected by each other—their "trans-corporeality" (Alaimo). My methodology practises what Donna Haraway has referred to as "situated knowledge;" I close read these novels, thereby rejecting universals in favour of the position of specific bodies. Attending to these entanglements supports Rosi Braidotti's argument that it is "in the ordinary micro-practices of everyday life" that "a humble kind of hope" for a sustainable future can be cultivated, as it is often through ordinary things, such as the passing on of a paperweight in Emily St. John Mandel's *Station Eleven* or the storytelling in Cherie Dimaline's *The Marrow Thieves*, that the apocalypse is reversed.

Each chapter of my project focuses on a particular type of entanglement: The body as a site of inequality; the intra-action—Barad's conceptualization of subject/object relations, which, rather than being pre-existing, result out of the interaction between entities—of the characters and the objects around them; the trans-corporeality of the human body as it is enmeshed in the post-apocalypse world; and the ethics that inform the future communities at the close of the novel. In short, by focusing on the body and its relations to the nonhuman world I demonstrate the vital role that bodily entanglements play for reversing the apocalypse in post-apocalyptic fiction.

PREFACE

The world looks rather different in 2020 than it did in the fall of 2015, when I first set foot into Marie Carrière's graduate seminar on Canadian post-apocalyptic fiction. For all the apocalyptic elements of twenty-first century fiction (see Carrière "Metafeminism," Boxall), I had not expected to come as close to an apocalyptic event in the course of my research as the Coronavirus—or COVID-19—pandemic that began the year of 2020. In many regards, however, the current events strengthened my commitment to my concluding research. My focus on ethical relations and the things that enable them seems more pertinent now than ever, for the pandemic is demonstrating that—when action is taken—pollution and CO2 emissions can be curbed. Across social media a newfound hope—a glimmer of possibility—repeatedly shines through. In his inspiring podcast, Rich Roll refers to the Coronavirus as "A Pandemic of Possibility" and expresses his hopes that "we emerge from this planetary wake up call not as victims, but empowered—armed with greater clarity to reimagine and actualize a better, more sustainable, purposeful, intentional and fulfilling life."[1] It is the imagining of what enables such a life that my project seeks to establish, using the apocalyptic setting of the post-apocalyptic novel as a framework.

DEDICATION

Für meine Eltern, die immer sagen “du schaffst das” und unerschütterlich an mich glauben, egal wie verrückt mein Ziel ist

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My first thanks belongs to Marie Carrière whose tireless support of my work has seen this project to the finish line. Through the million and one drafts, Marie provided me with insightful feedback that held me to my commitments and made me work to stay focused. And if it had not been for her wonderful graduate class on Canadian post-apocalyptic fiction, my research would probably have taken a different turn. Almost as many thanks go to my immediate supervisory committee: my first reader, Mike O’Driscoll, and my second reader, Julie Rak. Despite taking on Vice-Dean duties, Mike always had an open ear for me and managed to always draw out the key ideas despite my struggles to articulate them. Julie provided me with her particularly sharp mind and paid attention to the nitty-gritty details and made sure I paid as much attention to my theoretical sources as I did to my literary ones. Thank you to Natalie Loveless and Sherryl Vint, my arms-length and external examiners, for their time and feedback.

I am grateful for the opportunities to present my research along the way, and the inspiring conversations, thoughtful questions, and additional sources they entailed. Some of the ideas in chapter four were first submitted as a graduate paper in Marie’s post-apocalyptic graduate class and further refined at the 2016 *Maladies of the Soul, Emotion, Affect* conference organized by the Canadian Literature Centres at the University of Alberta and the University of Innsbruck. An excerpt of my early chapter four draft was later published in the anthology *Apocalyptic Chic: Visions of the Apocalypse and Post-apocalypse in Literature and Visual Arts* (2017). Parts of chapter three were presented at the annual Canadian Review of American Studies conference, first in 2016 and then again in 2017, and I am particularly grateful for having been on the ACQL panel with Susie O’Brien and Heike Härting to present some of my findings from chapter one at

the 2019 Congress of the Humanities. Thanks to everyone who participated in those conferences and who shared their thoughts on my research with me.

My research was further supported by several Sarah Nettie Christie Awards and an AGES award, which were made possible through the English and Film Studies Department, as well as a FGSR Graduate Travel award from the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research. In particular, Kim Brown's and Mark Simpson's endless support helped me out when I really needed it. I am also deeply grateful for the many colleagues at the English and Film Studies department who mentored me: Katherine Binhammer, Sarah Krotz, Teresa Zackodnik, and most of all Cecily Devereux deserve special thanks! My thanks also go to the indispensable EFS staff, Mary Marshall Durrell until recently, Annett Gaudig-Rueger, and now Craig Soars among them, as well as the rest of the EFS team.

Lastly, this project was carried by more than my own shoulders. My amazing partner helped me keep my balance and shouldered other loads whenever I needed it—thank you, Kirsty, for everything! Thank you to my parents who never doubted that I could write a dissertation or the many things that a PhD program required to get there. Thank you to my grandparents as well, who taught me to cherish books, and to my sister and her husband for their optimism and go-getter nature. Special thanks are reserved for Tascha Adomeit, who probably had to listen to the many stages of my progress more than most. Without the many friendships that I have formed here, the finishing line would have been much more daunting, and so thank you to Eduardo Rodriguez and Memo Garza, Stephen and Roshani Lane, Holly Christiani and Peter West, Heunjung Lee and Andy Lam, Subhamoy Mahajan and Natasha Ting—as well as Natalia Lifshitz and Edgar Pérez—for the much needed social support.

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INTRODUCTION

> "We know that if we continue on our current path of allowing emissions to rise year after year, climate change will change everything about our world. Major cities will very likely drown, ancient cultures will be swallowed by the seas . . . And we don't have to do anything to bring about this future. All we have to do is nothing."
>
> —Naomi Klein[1]

Defining the Post-Apocalyptic

Saving the Present embarks on a journey through recent Canadian, Métis, and American post-apocalyptic fiction of the twenty-first century to discover the means by which the apocalyptic conditions that govern the life of the survivors at the beginning of each narrative are overcome. Post-apocalyptic fiction presents a setting some time after a large-scale catastrophe has decimated most of the human population, and which has often also resulted in drastically altered living conditions. In the aftermath of this calamity, life is reduced to bare survival and many narratives suggest an amount of hopelessness with regard to the possibility of a future for the human race: Margaret Atwood's *Oryx and Crake* (2003) ends with the narrator being feverish and setting out for a final battle that might kill him, acknowledging, "Zero hour . . . Time to go" (443); Cormac McCarthy's *The Road* (2006) presents the bleak struggle of a man and his son with little indication that this struggle will ever end; and Rick Yancey's *The 5th Wave* (2013) begins with a lone survivor, who believes that she should fight even though she most "probably [is]—doomed" (101). However, most post-apocalyptic narratives do not stop there; instead, they progress to a point that is more hopeful—in the sequels to *Oryx and Crake*, the narrator is joined by other human survivors and the series ends with several births, while Yancey's protagonist succeeds in defeating the threat to the human race in the last book of the trilogy. My analysis is therefore guided by the following question: What enables a future that involves more than survival in novels like Emily St. John Mandel's *Station Eleven* (2014), where the initial fighting and scavenging is overcome and communities and culture re-establish themselves, while narratives like *The Road* remain bleak at the close of the novel? As these narratives imagine scenarios that begin with a doomed future for humanity with imagined threats that often correspond to particular time periods, I read the apocalyptic paradigm as a response to ongoing actual crises, such as climate change or pollution. My examination of these post-apocalyptic narratives is strongly concerned with the relation between embodiment and the means that enable an end of these apocalyptic conditions in favour of a new future: It is through their imaginative speculation that these novels posit embodiment as crucial not merely for ethical relations but for humanity's very survival—and even more specifically, for an existence that consists of more than just survival. This study takes especially current developments in climate change and the intersection between the human, the animal, and the machine as the backdrop that informs its inquiries, and takes seriously the entanglements that take place between humans and nonhumans within post-apocalyptic fiction.

Due to its focus on embodiment and the future of the human, the body is the thread that connects the individual chapters of this dissertation. The body is often central to post-apocalyptic narratives that focus on survival and the immediate aftermath of the catastrophe because caregiving—most often in bodily form through providing medical aid or food—is essential to survival. Yet, through the different narrative developments, the body is also revealed to be much more than a mere tool or a biological husk that needs to be kept alive: It is part of a complex web of relations and the post-apocalyptic framing draws out that embodiment is crucial not just for survival but for ethical relations. The aim of analysing these aspects of post-apocalyptic fiction is not only to demonstrate that the post-apocalyptic novel takes up contemporary anxieties or issues, but that it also often imagines counter-scenarios that involve a reckoning with humanity's entanglements with the nonhuman world. It is the insistence on this inextricability that defines humanity's relationship with the nonhuman world, and that ends the post-apocalyptic scenario and enables a more optimistic future.

In the many novels analyzed in this dissertation, the apocalypse takes place and is overcome. This is also post-apocalyptic fiction's most defining feature: it is set after the event of a large-scale catastrophe.[2] The post-apocalyptic narrative usually begins *in media res* by following one or a group of survivors of this calamity. My own definition largely aligns with that of Heather Hicks, who defines post-apocalyptic fiction as "material that depicts what might be called 'globalized ruin', . . . works that portray catastrophe of at least a national level and, by nature of our globalized political economy, assume dramatic effects elsewhere as well" (7). This definition is also concurrent with that of Alice Curry who "conflate[s] the terms 'post-apocalyptic' and 'post-disaster' since both terms . . . capture the sense of a world recovering from a large-scale breach of cultural normativities" (15). My own use of "post-apocalyptic" likewise conflates these two terms, as all of the novels that I have selected work on the premise that the world as the characters know it has come to an end due to some form of disaster and that the survivors are in some way isolated—as actual fact or merely perceived in that way—from other parts of the world.

The apocalyptic event itself has a multitude of different origins in post-apocalyptic narratives—which contributes to the problem of clearly classifying post-apocalyptic fiction as a distinct genre, which I will address further below. In many narratives, the end of the world is unrelated to human action. This is the case in Mike Mullin's *Ashfall* (2011), in which the volcano under the Yellowstone National Park erupts, or in Susan Beth Pfeffer's *Life as We Knew It* series (2006-2013), in which an asteroid alters the moon's orbit. However, choosing "a non-anthropocentric cause for the disaster also takes away a lot of the books' critical potential" (Weik von Mossner 161). My study is specifically interested in the critical potential of post-apocalyptic fiction—that is, its break with the all-encompassing destruction of the apocalypse, which reduces life to bare survival, and its progression toward a more sustainable future. For that reason, it is only occupied with texts that firmly place the responsibility for the apocalypse in humanity's hands. This responsibility is far from equally distributed and instead in the hands of specific groups of people, as the responsibility for the apocalypse is not shared among all humans in the same way because it is determined by class, gender, geography—as I will unpack in more detail shortly. A common fictional apocalypse is that of a nuclear fallout. While Keith M. Booker observes that science fiction in the 1950s was obsessed with the fear of a nuclear holocaust (4), contemporary examples like Veronica Roth's *Divergent* (2011), Julianna Baggott's *Pure* (2012), or Nancy Lee's *The Age* (2014) show that this nuclear fear is not restricted to that time period. Pandemics are another apocalypse of the contemporary imaginary that seems all too plausible in the age of the Coronavirus COVID-19,[3] whether the diseases are intentionally released, as in Atwood's *Oryx and Crake*, or they unintentionally lead to humanity's annihilation, as in Percy's *The Dead Lands* (2015).

Furthermore, some of these apocalyptic events are more realistically possible than others. The Georgia Flu, the fictional pandemic of St. John Mandel's *Station Eleven*, seems a much more likely end of the world scenario than the improbable alien attack that precipitates the plot in Yancey's *The 5th Wave*. Even texts, such as Lissa Price's *Starters* (2013), which envision the more possible scenario of a pandemic caused by biochemical warfare as the root for humanity's annihilation, might diverge into more of a science fiction narrative with technology that far surpasses contemporary means. The different facets of post-apocalyptic fiction—such as the plausible or implausible apocalyptic event, the use of recognizable technology in contrast to the invention of devices beyond current research developments, as well as a focus on everyday practices of survival rather than totalitarian living conditions—illustrate why there is little agreement in scholarship on the genre to which this kind of fiction belongs. It is due to these many different characteristics that post-apocalyptic fiction often blurs the borders between or borrows from various genres such as science fiction, speculative fiction, dystopian fiction, and young adult fiction. Depending on the definition of these genres, post-apocalyptic fiction is often grouped in with one of them in scholarship, lists of recommendations or new releases, as well as in bookstores.

Ursula Heise declares several of the aforementioned post-apocalyptic novels dystopian,[4] and argues that they belong to "a literary genre by and large developed in the 20th century, in the shadow of world wars, totalitarianisms, genocides, and looming threats of nuclear war and environmental crisis" ("What's the Matter with Dystopia"). Dystopias are, in broad terms, "a fictional portrayal of a society in which evil, or negative social and political developments, have the upper hand" (Claeys 107). Post-apocalyptic fiction therefore often shares—or makes use of—dystopian conventions because if "society" can consist of as little as a handful of survivors, then most post-apocalyptic narratives are indeed dystopian at the onset, as "evil, or negative . . . developments" have led to almost total annihilation and often continue to govern the life of the survivors. For example, both Collins's *The Hunger Games* and McCarthy's *The Road* employ an apocalyptic event as a catalyst for the plot—and would therefore be examples of post-apocalyptic fiction—and both texts are also dystopian.[5] YA narratives often employ an apocalyptic event to explain the dystopian changes incurred by the fictional society. Such is the case in Collins's *The Hunger Games* trilogy, which bases its fictional society Panem on a series of natural disasters of apocalyptic proportions that precipitated the plot (Collins, *The Hunger Games* 18), and the new society that has established itself suffers under an oppressive totalitarian regime. McCarthy's *The Road* is also apocalyptic in that it has been read as "a story about the end of the world in which the world ends" (Clute), but it focuses directly on the dystopian aftermath of the apocalyptic event.

While I want to highlight the traits that post-apocalyptic narratives share with the dystopia and science fiction, I will also briefly elaborate on the discussions surrounding these genres and which make them far from stable categories. The definition of dystopia, for example, is not entirely fixed. Gregory Claeys argues that only "feasible" scenarios belong in dystopian fiction, whereas narratives, like H. G. Well's *The War of the Worlds*, are part of science fiction instead (109). Suerbaum et al., in contrast, argue in their genre study of science fiction that "no foundational distinction can be made between anti-utopia [classic dystopia] and science fiction," and further point out that classic dystopias, such as Orwell's *1984* (1949), have been printed and sold by science fiction publishers (4, translation my own). What these critics highlight is that the distinction between the "feasible" and the fantastic is an ongoing debate throughout the genre history of science fiction—and technological advances further shift what can be considered "feasible." For example, the space program makes narratives about interstellar exploration—which might have been considered purely fantastic prior to the moon landing—seem more probable. Post-apocalyptic fiction likewise exists on a scale that spans from the feasible to the fantastic: nuclear Armageddon or superflus are more plausible scenarios than alterations to the Earth's orbit or alien invasions. This tension between the plausible and the extraordinary not only exists within the dystopia and science fiction, but also appears in post-apocalyptic fiction. Post-apocalyptic fiction also shares further conventions with these two, such as the tendency "to be extrapolative as they imagine the impact of social or technological changes on the near or distant future" (Bellamy 59). What I want to emphasize by recounting these debates within and across science fiction and dystopian fiction is that genre discussions are always malleable and debatable. My project is not a genre study and I am therefore not attempting to establish distinct boundaries between the dystopia, science fiction, and post-apocalyptic fiction; my aim is rather to note the shared conventions on which post-apocalyptic narratives operate and to what effect. Furthermore, to draw particular attention to post-apocalyptic fiction's ability to not only extrapolate but also to comment on social or technological changes, I will associate it with a form of speculative fiction, a label that arose out of certain developments in the sci-fi genre.[6]

In the 1960s, "speculative fiction" became a new genre label to distinguish a new kind of nonrealist fiction for which "science fiction" "now seemed too narrow to describe the field of imaginative literature" (Vint, *Science Fiction* 75). As Sherryl Vint comments on one of J. G. Ballard's stories written during this New Wave, these stories use "science not to extrapolate its future but to comment ethically on current trends" (80). She further defines speculative fiction as a genre that "emphasizes social and cultural change as much—if not mores [sic] than—technological change." For that reason, it "encourages examination of irrational and affective dimensions of experience as well as logical extrapolation" (90). Marek Oziewicz offers another meaning for speculative fiction, not as a distinct genre but a blanket term "for contemporary works within the fantastic field [and across different media], most of which blend genres to such a degree that they can no longer be adequately described with old tools and categorizations" ("Speculative Fiction").[7] Writers like Atwood employ speculative fiction as an intentional opposition to science fiction.[8] Drawing a distinction between speculative fiction and science fiction in *Moving Targets*, Atwood proclaims that *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985) and *Oryx and Crake* cannot be science fiction because in that genre things happen that are not possible today (330). Whereas for her, speculative fiction is about "things that really could happen but just hadn't completely happened when the authors wrote the books" (*In Other Worlds* 6). Most of the texts that will be discussed in this study would fall into the category of what Atwood terms speculative fiction: alternate futures that are within the realm of our current technological development and that are "plausible," involving neither extra-terrestrial life forms or locations nor fantastical creatures or devices. However, one might note that Atwood's distinction turns speculative fiction into a moving marker rather than a fixed ascription, as what is "plausible" in 2020 might have seemed rather implausible in earlier times.[9] Or, as Vint puts it in *Science Fiction: A Guide for the Perplexed*: "What we call 'science fiction' in 1940 looks rather different from what we call 'science fiction' in 2014" (7). It bears pointing out again that genres function as marketing categories, in addition to representing a shared set of characteristics. Highlighting the relationship between categorization and marketing is a reminder that genre is always in flux and defined by processes involving the authors, publishers, as well as the audience.

Karen Barad offers a methodological concept that I find particularly well-suited to my reading of post-apocalyptic fiction: that of diffraction. In *Meeting the Universe Halfway* (2007), Barad develops Donna Haraway's conceptualization of diffraction as a counter-approach to reflection,[10] and argues that attending to the entanglements involved in one's object of study leads to a more nuanced understanding, as such a methodology does not attempt to universalize or dichotomize (Barad 29-30). Diffraction refers to the physics paradox that light can behave both as a particle and a wave. The crux of this paradox is that one is not more correct than the other: depending on the experimental conditions, light does behave like a particle—which is incompatible with the behaviour of a wave—but under different conditions, it does behave like a wave—which is in turn incompatible with the behaviour of a particle; yet, the behaviour is correct within either experimental setup. Using a diffraction grating, light is filtered through a slit and then creates a pattern of light and dark patches on the other side. Post-apocalyptic fiction represents a similar phenomenon in that the apocalyptic event functions as the funnel for the light; what comes out on the other side can take different and speculative—sometimes contradicting—most often dystopian forms. Each narrative presents its own thought experiment—some more feasible, some more fantastic—but they are all equally valid explorations of a future after an apocalyptic event within the particular setting of their fictional worlds.

These thought experiments are instructive for my purpose of reading post-apocalyptic fiction as an engagement with contemporary crises and I therefore want to return to the usefulness of thinking of these texts as speculative fiction. Speculative fiction is “not merely a fiction about the difference between the fictional world and our own, but one in which the ontology of ‘reality’ itself is unstable” (Vint, *Science Fiction* 90). Through my text selection, I am providing a specific temporal and cultural context within post-apocalyptic fiction and as such the texts collected here are also concurrent with speculative fiction in that these narratives represent speculative encounters with our contemporary crises that lead to an end of almost all life. They are theoretical experiments on how the world might end and what would enable humanity to survive and are, therefore, in conversation with the other theorists that I include on matters of embodiment, entanglement, and ethics. Rather than being purely imaginative about what causes the apocalypse, the narratives that I have selected are—as my individual chapters will unpack—anchored in contemporary developments and thereby think through strategies that steer the future of the survivors away from the apocalypse and toward more sustainable, if speculative, futures. These strategies are intimately tied up with the individual settings, but even more so with the relations between the human characters and the more-than-human world.

In fact, it is precisely the entanglements, both formal and also ontological, within post-apocalyptic fiction that my project seeks to understand. I use the term entanglements less for any specific definition and more for the image that it entails: a messy reaching into each other of various, potentially or at least seemingly independent strands, that might or might not be able to be fully separated from each other. These entanglements can take many different shapes in post-apocalyptic fiction: there are those that relate to how the apocalypse came about— for example the relations that exist between a virus sample and the character who released it—but there are also entanglements that connect the remaining survivors—such as through family or kinship bonds. As my readings will show, entanglements exist as connections between the human characters and the more-than-human world—these might be created through objects that change hands or through a visible enmeshment of the two, such as mutations caused in the human population by the radioactive material in the environment.

In my selection of post-apocalyptic works in the form of the novel—rather than poetic encounters with the apocalyptic—these entanglements stand out more clearly. The fact that there is a narrator not only means that there is a guide who leads through the events, but also a voice that contextualizes and gives shape to relationships and connections between different characters and other entities and that provides insight into the individual lived experiences of the characters.[11] The narrative frame of the post-apocalyptic novel furthermore presents an arch from a point after the apocalyptic event to a point in the future that often looks less apocalyptic and more hopeful, thereby allowing a contextualization of these entanglements within these two positions. In other words, the temporal structure of the narrative and the clear situatedness of the characters within it more readily support my purpose of identifying a shift from apocalypse to a new future and of examining the means that promote such a development.[12]

Reading Post-apocalyptic Fiction

My primary method for engaging with these narratives is close reading. This method finds its roots in the New Criticism and the works of John Crowe Ransom and Cleanth Brooks, among others. Brooks' *A Well-Wrought Urn*, for example, contains a detailed analysis of John Donne's poem "The Canonization," paying close attention to the metaphors, themes, and tones of the individual lines and their relation to the poem as a whole. Close reading, within the conceptualization of New Criticism, focuses on the relationship between structure and meaning and considers the work of art in itself, while disregarding external or historical factors (DuBois 5). My own close reading is indebted to New Criticism for its attention to detail—or, as Brooks refers to it throughout his reading of Keats, an interpretative condition based on "if one attends closely" ("Keats's Sylvan Historian" 585)—and a focus on the relations between the different elements contained within the narratives of my selection. However, mine is a close reading that is also interested in the context—the time of the text's writing, its cultural background, its relationship with potential readers—and in that sense more Burkean because "an idealistic criticism that disallows any external knowledge is unable to account for the true human work a poem [or other work of art] does" (DuBois 9).[13] While my close reading disregards the author's intention or biography, similarly to William K. Wimsatt's and Monroe Beardsley's call in "The

Intentional Fallacy," it does not aim to be the sole or authoritative reading; rather, I consider it a close reading that is enabled through a particular situatedness within and across the selected texts, and which I will explain in more detail below in my discussion of Barad's conceptualization of an apparatus and a phenomenon.

Close reading lends itself to a detailed examination of both the larger narrative frame, as well as specific scenes within it. I privilege close reading as it enables me to become entangled in these narratives: in my reading, I sometimes dwell on small details, such as a paperweight; I follow the affective potential of a character's emotions; or I situate myself within the conflicting evidence regarding humanity's worthiness to survive. To some extent, this is a form of the theory of entanglement in practice. The post-apocalyptic narratives I have collected in this study suggest that it is the entanglements that arise out of the characters' everyday interactions with the nonhuman world that have ethical potential. These interactions are mostly ordinary, involving regular objects or parts of the natural world that are often taken for granted. In being mindful of these encounters and paying attention to the consequences of these minutiae of everyday life in these novels, my methodology aims to entangle itself in these interactions to determine their effect. In other words, a close reading is also necessitated by the entanglements presented within these narratives. Donna Haraway makes a similar point, claiming that situated knowledge can only be gained through "the view from a body, always a complex, contradictory, structuring, and structured body, versus the view from above, from nowhere, from simplicity" ("Situated" 598). By carefully examining the particular situation presented by the encounters that I close read, I model such a situated—or embodied—perspective. In order to make sense of these entanglements one needs to be close. Furthermore, as Barad's example of diffraction suggests, the phenomenon is specific to the conditions in which it occurs, which in my case are determined by the individual novels and their particular constituencies.

In several post-apocalyptic narratives, these details are mundane—as Heise points out in turn. Yet, it is precisely the ordinariness of these entanglements that carries their ethical potential. Arguing for necessary changes in society to further sustain life on this planet, Rosi Braidotti claims that it is "in the ordinary micro-practices of everyday life" that "a humble kind of hope" is generated, through "simple strategies to hold, sustain, and map out thresholds of sustainable transformation" (*Transpositions* 278). The narratives I have collected put this idea into practice and present—each in their own way—a thought experiment on what exactly these strategies might entail. My selection of texts suggests that these strategies range from a more embodied form of culture to a kinship model of relations between humans as well as humans and nonhuman others. In that sense, post-apocalyptic fiction reveals how the doom of the human race caused by an apocalyptic calamity is overcome by chronicling how the group of survivors at the centre of the narrative arrives at a more optimistic future and by what means.

Revealing something is indeed a concept intimately connected to apocalypse, as its Greek root indicates the meaning "to reveal." While the argument has been made that post-apocalyptic fiction of the twentieth century is devoid of any "revelation" of a new world (Heffernan 5),[14] it appears that the twenty-first century post-apocalyptic novel contradicts this argument by presenting a "faint and faintly utopian outline of a new kind of futurity" (Boxall 14). Peter Boxall notes a kind of hopeful tendency in the twenty-first century novel in general, arguing that it is "where the deathliness of a late historical condition is stated most plainly . . . that the texture of a contemporary utopianism finds its clearest expression" (221). The post-apocalyptic novel certainly takes "the deathliness of a late historical condition" seriously by following it to its logical conclusion: the annihilation of almost all life on the planet. Within this setting, however, a progression takes place that does suggest a more optimistic future at the close of the novels.

Indeed, in some of these novels, amidst the destruction and death, a glimmer of "a new kind of futurity" prevails because it forces readers to face the inevitable fate of humanity and the planet—if things continue as they currently do—but it also imagines new futures, and often more sustainable ones. "I wanted to write a love letter to the modern world," says St. John Mandel in an interview about her novel *Station Eleven* (Alter). Echoing Donna Bennett's statement that "hopeful . . . visions" characterize the explorations of the apocalypse of many Canadian authors (818), St. John Mandel confirms that *Station Eleven* is not dystopian but hopeful (Simon).[15] Atwood's *MaddAddam* trilogy (2003-2013), to which *Oryx and Crake* belongs, has likewise been read as constituting "an alternative sense of apocalypse, that of revelation, an imaginative exploration of possibilities," which is ultimately "pointing imaginatively to permanent possibility and hope" (Northover 81). While not all novels are equally optimistic—as I have stated, *The Road*, in particular, presents a glum story about the end of the world—my attention to entanglements in these narratives reveals that a more situated form of knowledge, relational ethics, and a bodily engagement with the nonhuman world are necessary for humanity's survival. Practicing these ways of being in the world leads humanity away from the apocalypse and toward a more optimistic future, which is precisely their relevance as speculative engagements with crises for the present moment.[16]

Within the fictional worlds examined in my chapters, these entanglements therefore lead to ethical relations with the nonhuman world and enable a more holistic future to take the place of the apocalyptic conditions at the beginning. These findings support a main argument in the field of material feminisms, namely the importance of bodily specificity and situatedness for ethical relations instead of transcendence and universalisms. Referring to a not quite unified body of theory, material feminists, as I will consider further at length, promote embodied practices and thereby pay attention to lived experiences, to “fleshy” bodies, but also to “matter” in its various shapes and the ways in which humans are always enmeshed in it. For example, Stacy Alaimo conceptualizes human corporeality as “trans-corporeality” to attend to the many ways in which the environment and the human body are mutually affected by each other (*Bodily Natures* 2). What Alaimo—but other scholars, such as Vint and Braidotti as well—emphasizes is the need to understand the body as always entangled in an intricate web of relations.

Such an entangled understanding would necessitate a change in how we define ethics—or who can be a subject within an ethical framework—which would then have further impact on nonhuman actors when it comes to policy-making; in other words, a more interconnected understanding might lead to much needed ethical action, for example with regard to climate change. What the post-apocalyptic narratives of my selection demonstrate is that a more relational understanding of the human can indeed lead to a break with the doomed fate of humanity within the fictional world—this common ground is noteworthy given the often vastly different settings: Atwood’s *Oryx and Crake* chronicles the apocalypse as well as the aftermath, while St. John Mandel’s *Station Eleven* takes place twenty years after the fatal pandemic; Julianna Baggott’s *Pure* is set in a world of advanced technology that includes the possibilities of genetic enhancements, while McCarthy’s *The Road* takes place in an ashen wasteland that shows remnants of late capitalist consumer culture—to name just a few of the differences within the novels that I examine.

The post-apocalyptic setting itself is key for my examination of entanglements. Again, while it is possible to analyze entanglements in other forms of fiction, the ways in which these affect the plot would most likely be different. Barad offers another useful conceptualization for this relationship between the object of study and its possible outcomes: rather than referring to the research process as a subject that examines an object—for example a scholar who examines a novel—she contemplates the concept of an apparatus and a phenomenon. An apparatus far extends beyond a single person and even includes nonhuman factors—it is more a rhizome than a bordered entity—and it largely predetermines the phenomena that can be observed (146-148). As such, I am employing post-apocalyptic fiction as part of my apparatus to examine the phenomenon of human relations to the world and how they affect crises. Post-apocalyptic narratives are always in conversation with the time of their publication and are therefore closely related to the developments—and crises—of that temporal moment, rather than to that of an unrelated, imagined future. The optimistic future at the end of these novels is therefore also about ideas of how to avoid an apocalypse in response to the conditions at the time of their writing. In my choosing of post-apocalyptic fiction, I to some extent predetermine the experimental conditions: Most of humanity is dead, life has been drastically altered by a massive catastrophe, survivors are either struggling to survive or have re-established some kind of normalcy. What this means for the entanglements that I observe is that they are always already implicated in the apocalyptic changes set forth in the individual texts. For my purpose, this predetermination is useful because it allows for the examination of the role of these entanglements in various permutations of the same conditions—i.e., the consequences of an apocalyptic event. And this framing supports my primary motivation for looking at these narratives out of an interest in stories of overcoming global destruction in a time, indeed our time, when the end of the world does not seem entirely out of the realm of science fiction.

The Lived Realities of the Apocalypse

In the present moment, the Coronavirus pandemic largely overshadows people's lives in ways that at times appear apocalyptic because of its global threat, imposed isolation, and breakdown of economical and, in some instances, even government structures, while the empty supermarkets recall popular culture images of the apocalypse. However, apocalyptic-like conditions have existed far earlier than 2020. Global warming, pollution, depleted soils, acidifying oceans—the list of things contributing to pushing life on the planet to the brink of extinction is long. And this is not even including the apocalyptic genocides experienced by Indigenous people as a result of colonization and to which I will come back in a moment. The environmental processes that I just listed have led to the proposition of a new geological era, that of the Anthropocene. The reason for assigning a new geological era is based on the impact of human activity, which has drastically altered Earth's history (Trexler 1). In 2015, an international team of researchers warned that humanity had already crossed four of the nine environmental boundaries that guarantee a safe existence for humankind (Steffen et al., "Planetary Boundaries"). Paul Crutzen offers several events that might be considered the origin of the Anthropocene, such as the advent of the steam engine in the late eighteenth century, or the impact of agriculture, as well as the slow overpopulation of the planet (23), but most accepted is the mid-twentieth century as the Anthropocene's origins because it "groups together all of the obvious horrors of the twentieth century, from the atomic bomb, to petrochemicals, to overconsumption and waste" (Davis and Todd 765).

However, the term Anthropocene and the proposed origin in the mid-twentieth century glosses over several discrepancies. For one, it universalizes humanity as a cause for these anthropogenic changes, when in reality only some populations—notably those of petrocapitalist and colonial cultures—contribute or have contributed to them. As far back as 2009, the then Bolivian ambassador to the World Trade Organization told Canadian author and social activist Naomi Klein: "Millions of people . . . in small islands, least-developed countries, landlocked countries as well as vulnerable communities in Brazil, India, and China, and all around the world—are suffering from the effects of a problem to which they did not contribute" (qtd. in Klein 5). Steffen at al.'s findings support this argument, concluding that "most of the human imprint on the Earth System is coming from the OECD world" ("The Trajectory" 89). Referring to the *Human Impact Report* by the Global Humanitarian Forum, Ian Angus provides further proof that "the victims [of climate change] are poor and disadvantaged" in that "99 percent of weather disaster casualties are in developing countries, and 75 percent of them are women" (177).

As Heather Davis and Zoe Todd (Métis/otipemisiw) point out, the idea of the Anthropocene tends to be an eurocentric discourse. It is presented from a universal or global perspective and fails to account for the power relations that govern anthropogenic causes (763). To counter such a universal, disembodied narrative, they propose 1610—the onset of the colonial era—as the Anthropocene's origin. This start date not only highlights that the environmental crisis is a result of colonial practices, such as the tendency to model the invaded territories on the colonizers' homeland (769), but also that the disproportional impact suffered by the global poor is not an accidental side-effect of the Anthropocene but "a *deliberate extension of colonial logic*" (771, emphasis in the original).

Why is it important to make these links between environmental crisis and colonialism visible? And, furthermore, what is the relevance of such a framing for a study of post-apocalyptic fiction? Throughout Davis's and Todd's article, they reference the "narrative" (763,

765) or “story” (763, 772, 775) that is told about the ecological crisis and the Anthropocene. The word choice implies that the Anthropocene—like colonialism—is a storied project that depends on the perspective of the teller. However, referring to the Anthropocene as a story also points to an important aspect of storytelling: not only does it frame humanity’s place within the story, it also influences the audience’s understanding of the world, and thereby their future actions (see Davis and Todd 763). Post-apocalyptic fiction also tells a story: That of overcoming an apocalypse. In much the same way, it presents a particular understanding of the world and entails consequences that affect the human and nonhuman bodies as well as the land of these fictional worlds, thereby influencing the relations between the human characters and their nonhuman kin. In addition, if the Anthropocene is based on settler colonialism, then it implies that the ecological crisis is part of an ongoing process of severing relations: as Davis and Todd show, acts of (colonial) dispossession and integration necessitate a previous severing of existing relations, which means that not only humans but the local flora and fauna, as well, are victims of the genocide in the Americas (770-71). The fictional apocalypse likewise affects “all manner of kin” (771) and demonstrates the importance of kinship by emphasizing the interconnectedness of human and nonhuman beings.

Lastly, understanding colonialism as the root of the Anthropocene emphasizes that the apocalyptic dimensions that it entails have been the lived reality of Indigenous populations across the globes for hundreds of years. Similarly, post-apocalyptic fiction often illustrates that apocalyptic events do not affect all populations in the same way. Yet, Indigenous people are not just victims of the colonial apocalypse—they are living survivors and they “continue to work to foster and tend to strong relationships to humans, other-than-humans, and land today” (Davis and Todd 773). In telling the story of the survivors, post-apocalyptic narratives, indeed, like

Catherine Knutsson's *Shadows Cast by Stars* (2012) and Cherie Dimaline's *The Marrow Thieves* (2017), focus on the methods that support their survival. My examination of post-apocalyptic fiction is therefore implicitly guided by the questions: who survives—and how? Recognizing the colonial logic of the Anthropocene might lead to addressing questions about "the need to acknowledge our embedded and embodied relations with our other-than-human kin and the land itself" (Davis and Todd 776). Post-apocalyptic fiction thinks through imaginary worst-case scenarios that, as my project seeks to demonstrate, grapple with exactly these kinds of questions.

Embodiment and relationality are central concepts of my project. Several post-apocalyptic novels imagine a future that involves some form of bodily modifications. Genetic alterations in *Pure*, technological and surgical enhancements in Scott Westerfeld's *Pretties* trilogy (2005-2007), bioengineering in Atwood's *MaddAddam* series: all of these narratives envision a future that feature cyborgean humans who transgress the boundaries between the human, the machine, or the animal. While cyborgs or technological modifications are not new to post-apocalyptic fiction or the dystopia, in which technology is often presented as an evil force (Mohr 30, Flanagan 2), of interest is the interaction between these enhancements and how a character's interiority allows for the interrogation of subjectivity, self-perception, and bodily borders—as well as the ways in which these alterations affect the character's relations to the nonhuman world.

These genetic enhancements and bioengineering in contemporary post-apocalyptic narratives allow for radically new fictional human forms. By examining these forms of the human, the chapters that follow seek to think through conceptions of transcendence and embodiment and their meaning for constructions of the self, thereby also contributing to conversations about posthumanism. Posthumanism explores the definitions of the human in the context of developments in cybernetics, biomedical engineering, but also animal transplants—in short, research that in some form implicates the human body. Due to this intersection of the human body and scientific research, posthumanism is largely conceived in two different ways that are mutually exclusive. On the one side—and the more commonly used definition—is the posthuman as a state of transcendence, in which our bodies become increasingly irrelevant.[17] On the other side, material feminists, in particular, argue for an embodied posthumanism, so as not to perpetuate humanism's "tendency toward false universalism, abstraction from body, and distanced relation to nature" (Vint, *Bodies of Tomorrow* 11).[18]

My chapters attend to both kinds of posthumanism, though my use of the term aligns with a material feminist understanding. As post-apocalyptic fiction often contextualizes that not all bodies are equally at risk in the event of an apocalypse, my close reading is again informed by questions of embodiment. The *Thesaurus* offers "to manifest" or "to personify" as synonyms for "to embody," which is defined as "to represent" or "materialize" ("Embody"). Embodiment speaks to a characteristic or quality that finds its expression through someone's body: "He was the embodiment of the English gentleman" ("Embodiment"). A focus on embodiment is, in other words, a focus on the body, on something that can "materialize." The relationship between the body and matter is a central aspect of my examination of the apocalyptic in post-apocalyptic fiction. *The Posthuman Glossary* entry for "material feminism" posits that the current challenge is to not just "think merely 'about' matter" but to "attempt to think with it, in ways that articulate specific ontological, epistemological and ethical commitments" (Neimanis). Using the post-apocalyptic novel, I seek to address the challenge of thinking "with" matter and to articulate the ethical consequences of doing so.

I think "with" matter through the post-apocalyptic framework, as it allows me to demonstrate that a transcendental body creates a false universalism in that such a state of transcendence is not available to all. At the same time, I build a portfolio—or a case-file—of the different forms of entanglements presented in post-apocalyptic fiction to show that a character's bodily engagement with the world around them—at times to the point of being completely enmeshed with the nonhuman world, as in the case of Baggott's *Pure*—can stay the all-encompassing destructiveness of the apocalyptic events. Grounding my reading in materiality, again as understood by material feminists such as Alaimo and Braidotti, serves as a reminder that there are no absolute truths and instead promotes what Haraway calls "partial, locatable, critical knowledges sustaining the possibility of webs of connection" ("Situated" 584).

Situating *Saving the Present*

My text selection situates my research in a particular space and time—that of Canada and the United States in the twenty-first century; however, it also tends to "the possibility of webs of connection" that Haraway identifies. I am an Americanist by training and connected to Canadian literature by my choice of studying literature at a Canadian university while living in Alberta.[19] My project initially arose out of this specific position; at the time of writing, the lived reality of the Coronavirus pandemic of 2020 has reaffirmed for me that the narratives one can tell are always dependent on one's situatedness. I am from Germany and while my family connects me to that country, I feel culturally removed. While my family in Germany and I share a certain overlap in our experiences with the pandemic, mine are drawn from Edmonton, Alberta and thereby not always identical with those of my relatives because they are specific to this place.[20] At the same time, the stories that are exchanged between my family in Germany and me in

Canada connect us and our situations; the stories they tell help to contextualize and situate their experiences and thereby foster a sense of kinship as I relate them to my own experiences. The differences in our stories further become instructive: what did the people in Germany do in the face of the pandemic and with what results? What might yet be to come here based on what has already happened there? These stories might also invite reflections; hearing the narrative of someone's loved one becoming infected might affect my own behaviour around the people I care about—or perhaps even around people I do not even know, but who might constitute important people in someone else's life.

In the context of post-apocalyptic fiction, the nation-states of Germany and Canada would no longer be distinct entities. In general, post-apocalyptic stories challenge the significance of borders and the nation-state by pointing to their lack of meaning for the new, post-apocalyptic world. The father in McCarthy's *The Road*, for example, tries to explain what state roads are, but without the existence of states, they are merely roads, and even those might vanish at some point (43). Similarly, Pressia's grandfather in Baggott's *Pure* wants her to know that they are outside of Washington D.C., but to her neither "Washington" nor "D.C." or even "east coast" hold any meaning (8). Yet, these narratives often highlight how unconsciously globalized life in the twenty-first century is. For example, the loss of global communication and news due to the demise of the electric grid in post-apocalyptic fiction leads to the end of feeling like a part of a global community—a thought that also came to the author of *Station Eleven*, St. John Mandel, who realized "how incredibly local your world would become" in such a case (Simon).

Despite their borderless state—and, in fact, the blurring of borders by some of the authors themselves, for example Atwood, who situates her novel *Oryx and Crake* on the eastern seaboard somewhere in New England in the United States—[21] post-apocalyptic narratives from Canada and the United States have mostly been examined separately. Marlene Goldman found the post-apocalyptic position of the ones left behind to be quintessentially Canadian when she explored Canadian fiction of the Cold War period, while Richard Kyle stated as late as 2012 that "apocalyptic thinking . . . is most at home in America" (345). This separation led to a contrasting understanding: while Goldman argues that "Canadian exploration more often invoked apocalyptic visions of hell rather than of paradise" (3), Kyle emphasizes the United States' self-identification "as a millennial nation, meaning that God has a special mission for America" (346). Stephen Clarkson reiterates the existence of distinct national identities, by concluding that Canada, America, and Mexico are far from identifying themselves as "members of a continental community" (45). However, Grubisic et al. contrast Clarkson's finding precisely with Collins's Panem in *The Hunger Games*, in which everybody identifies with being a citizen of Panem even though it spans across North America (13). Panem exemplifies that some of the narratives do imagine a North American community that identifies as a coherent cultural space.

Summarizing this body of pre-existing research on post-apocalyptic fiction, it can be surmised that the post-apocalyptic narrative can do both: it can support distinct national identities that invite comparison, and it can imagine communities that question the meaning of borders and offer new geographic alliances that are based on identity-markers other than passports.[22] What does this mean for my own study of post-apocalyptic fiction? I am following Winfried Siemerling's call of "reading across borders" as a way of bringing "national cultures in relational view where otherwise they may not be seen or heard" (2). As such, my chapters are not grouped according to the nationality of the author but by the type of entanglements that the narratives feature most prominently. Rather than drawing out national differences, my chapters chart the different apocalyptic settings of the individual narratives and unpack the similarities of the strategies that enable a more optimistic future. However, through my close reading, I also attend to the discrepancies presented across these narratives—some of which need to be situated in their national context—and I highlight commonalities; these often draw on a shared cultural background of capitalist consumer culture, settler colonialism, English-speaking "mainstream" culture, and Enlightenment definitions of the human.

In summary, *Saving the Present* draws out what enables the move from the apocalypse at the onset of the novels to a future that consists of more than merely staying alive. As my readings seek to demonstrate, by thinking "with" matter and through a body as I attend to the entanglements of the human characters and the world around them reveals a counter-apocalyptic narrative that indicates a more hopeful future beyond the close of the text in some post-apocalyptic narratives. The structure of this study has mostly been determined by the corpus of texts under analysis itself. As I came to these narratives, recognizable similarities cropped up only to often lead to striking divergences. One has to keep in mind the versatility of the post-apocalyptic setting: in some stories, place is central to the narrative; yet, in others, it remains vague and irrelevant (Skult 1). Some chronicle the immediate aftermath, while others "barely seem[] apocalyptic at all" and feel "more like life today and . . . all the more haunting for it" (Bellamy iv); one might find a flood of left-behind items in these narratives, or the objects that are left behind warrant nary a glance. For that reason, the similarities structured the groupings of texts, while my search for the traces of hopeful futures determined the focus of each chapter.

I start by establishing the role of survival in these narratives in chapter I with particular focus on whose bodies are at risk. I then examine the purpose of material objects, their affective force, as well as their entanglements in Chapter II. Chapter III explores bodily modification in the form of technological enhancements as well as mutation, tying back both to questions of lived inequality that have been raised in chapter I and to the ethical potential of entanglements which has been established in chapter II. In Chapter IV, the focus shifts toward the new future that often emerges at the close of the post-apocalyptic narrative and the ethics that inform it.

More specifically, chapter I unpacks the drive to survive that governs the actions of the characters by teasing out that—while there is a concrete need for physical survival—the narratives develop into a quest for more than mere survival as they progress. Using the apocalyptic framework of colonial Indigenous experience in which a certain way of life and particular physical features become threatening markers for the people embodying them, I use Kate Boorman's *Winterkill* (2014), Cherie Dimaline's *The Marrow Thieves*, and Catherine Knutsson's *Shadows Cast by Stars* to examine the impact of cultural heritage, situated knowledge, and embodiment on survival. Anticipating my analysis of the concepts that allow for a break with the apocalyptic paradigm, chapter I provides the groundwork which establishes that post-apocalyptic fiction oftentimes displays an urge to transform the apocalyptic origin into a new beginning. It also offers a first exploration of the role that the body plays beyond the scope of physically surviving, indicating that embodiment is often enmeshed in the strategies employed to create a post-apocalyptic future.

Chapter II demonstrates that the deluge of objects that often litter the post-apocalyptic world functions as more than a return to a nostalgic pre-capitalist era of necessities; objects often are mediators between humans and the more-than-human world, enabling identity formation, creating attachments, and often possessing their own form of agency. This chapter also renders the post-apocalyptic time within the frame of survival. While McCarthy's *The Road* is set in the immediate aftermath of the apocalyptic event, St. John Mandel's *Station Eleven* takes place almost twenty years after the apocalypse. The temporal divergence emphasizes that, as long as physical survival is the preoccupation, there is no space to create bonds with nonhuman entities whether manmade or not. However, once the basic needs are met, the characters' bodily engagement with the world around them creates investments into places, people, and objects and thereby establishes moments that carry the potential for ethical actions. The interactions with the objects that the characters encounter also demonstrate another thing: subjectivity is embodied. My examination of the body's function in these encounters provides a background for the discussion of the role that embodiment plays in defining the human as well as in ethics, which the following chapters will take up.

Building on the previous two chapters, chapter III offers a more thorough analysis of the body by using technological progress in the field of bioengineering as its context. Cyborgean humans or technology that allows a transcendence of the mind which enacts an actual separation from the body is a common feature of futuristic post-apocalyptic stories. While the technology is sometimes more out of the realm of science fiction, as in Yancey's *The Fifth Wave* or Price's *Starters*, others—for example, Baggott's *Pure* series or Percy's *The Dead Lands*—take existing technology, such as nuclear weapons, as a point of departure to dwell on the mutated body. These bodily alterations put into crisis the definition of the human as well as blur the boundaries between the body and the external world. I use this boundary to focus on what Alaimo has termed "trans-corporeality" (*Bodily Natures*, 2), or the extent to which the human is always intermeshed with the more-than-human world, to demonstrate the vital function of bodily specificity and situatedness for understandings of the human, particular with regard to current technological developments that often frame the body as excess baggage or the weak link that prevents immortality.

Chapter IV demonstrates that some post-apocalyptic narratives focus on the apocalypse and its relationship to women by using the Book of Revelation as their intertext (*New King James Version*). These narratives align their female characters with the victimized women in Revelation, such as the Whore of Babylon and Jezebel, and situate them in a larger framework, for example those of medical discourse or global commodification. I attend to this larger web of entanglements—including the intertextual ones—to examine apocalypse's exclusionary nature; that is to say, the apocalypse always contains two groups: those who are being saved and those at whose expense this happens. I focus on Lee's *The Age* and Atwood's *MaddAddam* trilogy to show that the more optimistic future created in these two narratives is based on a reclaiming of the female body and that the future communities at the close of the novel are based on feminist care ethics.

I conclude with returning to the post-apocalyptic novel in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic of 2020 and discuss in more detail what the "more optimistic future" indicated by the end of these novels might entail. Some scholars claim that the post-apocalyptic novel offers a framework of reduced complexity—as governments, societal structures, and global processes (from policy-making to the economy) have ceased to exist, which might curb its power of "making sense of the world" (Bellamy 27). In my conclusion, I address this reduction and contrast it with post-apocalyptic fiction's ability to highlight both the reason for the apocalypse and the features of the post-apocalyptic living conditions, as well as the strategies that lead to a break with the behaviours that led to them.

In a time when the apocalypse seems an all too possible event in the not so distant future, stories function as a medium to engage ideas on how to intervene in the apocalypse. The storytellers of these post-apocalyptic tales—though some admittedly more bravely than others—

dare to imagine a future that breaks with the violence of apocalypse. I believe it is this daring to imagine that fuelled my commitment to keep reading, and so it now becomes the starting point of this study.

> "When people are encouraged to imagine broadly, to approach the world expansively, their hearts and actions are more expansive, as well."
>
> —Daniel Heath Justice[1]

CHAPTER 1: Ethical Relationships and the Body

The human body and its relevance for survival has often been explored in post-apocalyptic fiction, and narratives that interrogate the relationship between the body and technology have grown in number in the course of the last few decades. Both Larissa Lai's *Salt Fish Girl* (2002) and *The Stone Gods* (2007) by Jeanette Winterson grapple with "anxiety over technology," which is not only represented as "an integral part of humans lives, but used by those in power to discipline the other, variously identified as nature, women, animals, and machines" (Villegas-Lopez 27). Yet, it is not only with regard to technology that post-apocalyptic fiction offers critical explorations

of the material body. While the juxtaposition or merging of the body and technology allows for the interrogation of identity construction, subjectivity, and the connection between self and body, post-apocalyptic fiction more generally enables an examination of the body's role in survival—both physical and cultural. Material feminist practices can largely be grouped into two fields: that of historical materialist feminism and that of feminist new materialisms (Wingrove 455). Historical materialist feminism can be traced to feminism's early engagement with Marx and Marxism, and "to speak of materiality [according to historical materialist feminism] is to speak of structural logics and constitutive contradictions, systematic relationality, and social totalities" (455-56). Feminist new materialisms, on the other hand, draw "variously from the insights and provocations of science and technology studies, Deleuzian philosophies of immanence, feminist technoscience, object-oriented ontology, and systems theory" (455), and consider materiality to be synonymous with “contingencies, web-like meshes and multidirectional flows that suggest fluctuating connections and a rich ‘messiness’ whose complexity and indeterminacy preclude the notion of a totality” (456). Matter, in a feminist new materialisms’ understanding, is then less of a bordered or singular entity and instead something more dynamic or agentic.[2] Materiality as networked thus shifts the analytic focus from explaining chains of cause and effect—for example of oppression and the materialities that reproduce it—to envisioning “the untapped potential for living otherwise in a universe sustained by ‘intra-action’” (468).[3]

One reason for the formation of the field of feminist new materialism can be found in Haraway’s critique of Marxism, in which she argues for the “insufficiency of Marx’s materiality to address the ‘breached boundaries’ between the biological and the technological and the human and the animal as an incitement to pursue a new materialist imaginary” (Wingrove 467).[4] The “new materialist imaginary” of feminist new materialisms “orients feminist analysis to corporeality as a site not only of political and cultural imposition or transformation, but also of political possibility tied to the agential capacity of bodily matter” (464). Feminist new materialisms, which “think through the co-constitutive materiality of human corporeality and nonhuman natures” (Alaimo and Hekman 9), inform my reading of post-apocalyptic fiction due to their definition of materiality as something “web-like” and “multidirectional,” as well as its understanding of corporeality as a site of “political possibility.” Focusing my analysis on materiality understood in these terms enables me to demonstrate that, in these post-apocalyptic narratives, the body fosters an engagement with the world that goes beyond survival.

Post-apocalyptic fiction presents narratives that are set in the aftermath of a large-scale calamity that caused the annihilation of most of the world’s population. Through this setting, it often highlights humanity's dependence on the body for physically surviving in a hostile environment, but also for more than that. As Curry has observed with regard to post-apocalyptic YA narratives, "the body—and particularly the female body and the posthuman body—becomes a locus of control and a site of potential resistance" against forces that devalue life in some of these texts (16).[5] Katniss's body in *The Hunger Games* trilogy is an example of such a site. In her article "(Im)Mutable Natures: Animal, Human and Hybrid Horror," Sharon D. King offers a reading of several human bodies in Suzanne Collins's trilogy and the way in which their connection to animals destabilizes the definition of the human. Not only do several characters possess animal names, they often also mimic character traits or habits of their nonhuman counterparts (109). King reminds us that it is likewise not merely animals that are hunted, for example by Katniss and her friend Gale to feed their families, but the human tributes in the arena of Panem are prey as well (111). These plays between the species open up questions about what defines the human—and the ways in which the animal has been used to devalue groups of people, such as Indigenous populations, by ranking them as more animal than human. The novels that will be closely examined later here open with this history of the Indigenous body as a marker for oppression, but by embedding Indigenous knowledge at the centre of their narratives, the body becomes a vehicle of resistance and even a locus of power that shifts the dynamic between the Indigenous populations and their oppressors in these texts. In fact, it is incorporating Indigenous knowledge into the everyday lives of the characters and embodying their cultural traditions that enable the characters and their communities to move from mere survival to life beyond it.

In post-apocalyptic fiction, the body offers a form of resistance in a variety of ways. In *The Hunger Games,* Katniss's body comes to represent the Resistance through her actions but even more so through the use of fashion. It is through her televised and public appearances for which she has been styled by Cinna that she is able to change the audience's opinion of the human sacrifices used for the games, and to establish the rebellion (Montz 142), and it is "entirely through Cinna's styling" that "Katniss is transformed into the physical embodiment of the Resistance" (144). While one might argue that fashion rather than the female body is the site of resistance in *The Hunger Games*, Joanne Entwistle argues in her monograph *The Fashioned Body* that "dress, the body, and the self—are not perceived separately but simultaneously, as a totality" (10, qtd. in Montz 144). What this argument draws attention to is that the body is often part of a wider apparatus—to draw again on Barad—that is not necessarily contained by skin as the boundary. In the novels collected in this chapter, the body becomes the locus for cultural identity and knowledge. The body's engagement with the land and its role for more-than-survival—or what Anishinaabe scholar Gerald Vizenor calls "survivance"—presents the body as a vehicle for ethical ways of being in the world and ethical encounters between both human beings as well as human and nonhuman beings.

1.1. The Body and the Land

The body as a tool for resistance is particularly central to reversing the apocalyptic state of the world in recent popular publications by several authors, such as Kate A. Boorman, Cherie Dimaline, and Catherine Knutsson. These authors "challenge the process of globalization implicated in earth-dislocation by promoting localized interactions between humans and the lands," a gesture that has been noted across various YA narratives in the genre (Curry 16). It is particularly appropriate to examine the apocalyptic reversal in the novels discussed here, as the apocalypse—or what is often associated with it: a loss of place, a loss of normative societal structures and expected behaviour, and a loss of reference frame due to the replacement of the pre-existing way of life with bare survival conditions—is a living reality for Indigenous populations across the globe. In the process of "the colonizing apocalypse" (Justice 5), Indigenous peoples were removed from their own territories or hunted to extinction and both Knutsson's and Dimaline's novels not only feature an apocalypse in which the Indigenous body is in mortal danger, but in which this danger forces them to leave their home—often in the search for ancestral lands or places where the spirits are strong. While these novels tell the stories of apocalypses brought on by colonialism, the events are anchored in particular characters whose experiences are not identical—they come from different backgrounds, have different stories of how they came to the group or why they are staying, and their reactions to situations is likewise different. By situating my close reading in the contexts and relationships of the characters, I attend to these specificities within the larger narrative of apocalypse.

Displacement is only one form of apocalypse experienced by Indigenous people; environmental pollution is another, and it affects some populations more strongly than others (Hartmann 96). Suffering from environmental conditions is a recurring scenario in post-apocalyptic fiction, in which certain groups are forced to live in unhealthy or outright lethal conditions while other populations are protected by their privileges. Even more specific when it comes to the effect of industry practices on Indigenous people is Thomas King's post-apocalyptic *The Back of the Turtle* (2014), where a chemical spill caused by a major corporation results in the displacement—and death—of almost an entire Indigenous community in British Columbia. Robert D. Bullard emphasizes the extent to which certain groups are more strongly affected by environmental toxins in his article "Anatomy of Environmental Racism," in which he argues that reservations have become prime sites for waste disposal, turning them into "environmental sacrifice zones" (26; cf. Hartmann 97). Post-apocalyptic fiction can draw attention to the uneven effects of life-endangering practices or natural disasters, which affect poor or ethnic populations in apocalyptic ways, by revisiting these lived realities—for example Dimaline's novel *The Marrow Thieves*, in which a new type of residential schools appears.

As Isabel Altamirano-Jiménez and Leanna Parker further highlight, Indigenous relationships to the lands can challenge Western understandings of land and resources as something limited to their use-value (102). Indigenous knowledge—or what Kyle Powys Whyte (Potawatomi) refers to as traditional ecological knowledge—is based on relationships not only with the land or with other people but nonhuman beings, such as natural elements or spirits. Indigenous knowledge is "part knowledge system, part system of practice, and part belief system" that is furthermore shared across generations (Powys, "Hunting" 15). This interrelated understanding of nature explains why translating Indigenous terms for "knowledge" into English often results in expressions such as "ways of living" or "ways of being," so that Indigenous notions of nature more closely correspond to "ways of living in nature" (Aikenhead and Michell 65).

However, colonial domination has substituted Indigenous worldviews with "conceptions of property and the nuclear family, based on hierarchical and patriarchal assumptions" (Altamirano-Jiménez and Parker 95).[6] Women's intimate knowledge of the land, in particular that of plants, was relegated to the private sphere as a result and therefore became silenced and undervalued (Kermoal 109; Horn-Miller 34). As Nathalie Kermoal, Isabel Altamirano-Jiménez and Leanna Parker demonstrate in their reading of land claims and court settlements with regard to Métis rights in various places in Canada and the Awas Tingni in Nicaragua, respectively, the silence surrounding women's knowledge of the land can be legally used against them.[7]

Regardless of gender, traditional ecological knowledge is often disregarded by resource managers and policy makers (Powys, "Hunting" 16). The work that the novels examined in this chapter do is even more fundamentally important in the present as they reclaim Indigenous and Métis women's knowledge by creating a network of relationships between the body, the natural environment, and the community. Promoting traditional ecological knowledge—or Indigenous knowledge—is further relevant as it is a "collaborative concept" that "invites [non-Indigenous] participation in a long-term process of mutually respectful learning" (Powys, "On the Role" 10).

The promotion of "localized interactions between humans and the lands" (Curry 16) has appeared in earlier publications as well, such as Jean Hegland's *Into the Forest* (1996), which similarly emphasizes the connection between humans and their surroundings, but with a different focus. *Into the Forest*, published in the mid-1990s, tells the story of two sisters who live far outside of town in a small house in the Californian redwood forest. As electricity fails and the towns become more and more violent, the sisters first learn to farm, but in the end familiarize themselves with the plants of the forest around them and surrender the imposed organization of nature by farming in exchange for a life in and with the forest.

What Hegland's novel throws into stark relief is the time-consuming effort of farming, the bodily exhaustion that comes from toiling and harvesting from sunup to sundown, and the fragility of human existence when a single rainy month means that an entire supply of food dies. Even when their father is still alive to help, preserving the harvest from the garden is an arduous labour that started

> at dawn each day, and all morning [Nell and her sister] picked and washed and skinned and sliced and packed and processed, until the creases and whorls in [their] fingers were permanently stained by the juices of tomatoes, beets, and plums, and [their] faces and

> arms were reddened and swollen from the kettles of boiling water it seemed [they] were constantly bending over.
>
> (Hegland 88)

Working the garden by themselves demonstrates the demanding physical work that producing food entails when Nell writes, “I hurt so much it hurts to hold this pen. My hands are throbbing with blisters and scratches, stiff with the soil it seems that no amount of scrubbing can wash completely clean. My arms and legs and back ache as though I had the flu” (154). However, the apocalypse leaves them no choice but to farm their own food. Nell is painfully aware that their own survival is dependent on their work in the garden: “Each sip, each bite, each scrap is agony, a needle-prick tattooing my awareness with an indelible image of loss and need . . . The arithmetic, the simple multiplication and subtraction that will show how much we eat in a day, how many days’ food we have left, is an equation I can’t face” (135).

Into the Forest’s focus on humans’ dependence on nature and the hard labour involved in producing food highlights the work and care required to grow something from seed to harvest, which is mostly rendered invisible by modern forms of consumerism enabled by supermarkets and convenience stores. Nell’s reflection on the work they now have to do reveals something else, too. As the juices of the fruits permeate her skin, and as the soil from the garden covers her body, the border between Nell’s body and that of the natural world becomes blurred. Through physical labour, the natural world becomes a part of her, a process that is extended later on, when she tries to understand and recognize the different plants that grow native around their house. Trying “to attach names to the plants” makes Nell realize that it is as if she was “trying to learn a new language without the help of tapes and books, a language for which there are no longer any native speakers” (Hegland 173). Understanding the forest is also rewarding for less practical matters than collecting edible plants as well; Nell reflects, “Gradually the forest I walk through is becoming mine, not because I own it, but because I’m coming to know it. I see it differently now” (176).

Her “different” perspective shines through when she muses that they never had to buy the flowers “in plastic containers from the Buy-n-Save parking lot” that needed to be “watered, fertilized, fenced, and sprayed, and that still finished the summer ragged from slugs and snails and grasshoppers” in the first place because they “were surrounded by flowers all the time” (Hegland 176)—the ones native to the forest where their house stands. It is her newfound familiarity with the forest that allows the sisters in the end to abandon their house, which is in danger of falling down, in favour of living in the forest—mimicking the story of the Indigenous woman that Nell recounts earlier in the story. The woman, Sally Bell, was “the last of the Sinkyone” (178), a Californian Indigenous tribe. When white people came and killed her family, she hid in the forest and lived there for a long time “with a few other people who had got away” (179). The salvation of Nell and her sister—and her new-born baby—so the novel suggests at the end, will likewise be found in living with nature.

What is the relation between the environment and human survival? Conversations around climate change often highlight the environment as a resource or as the backdrop necessary for survival, i.e., rising sea levels will lead to drowned coastal areas which pose a threat to the humans living there. Yet, what if we want to do more than just survive? Some scholars argue that “we will have to find a way to relate to nature on another than a scientific or purely instrumental basis” (Claviez 436). We can add to this position Louise Westling’s reading of John Dewey, in which she traces his rejection of traditional dualisms to his belief that “the long biological history that humans share with all other life means that we continue to be fully interrelated and immersed within that living community" (33). Such an interrelation means that humankind can indeed not be separated from its relations to the animal world, and I would extend this to the natural world in general. Material feminists have extensively argued for the inextricability of the web connecting nature and culture: Barad emphasizes the intrinsic entanglement of nature and culture in her monograph *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning,* while Donna Haraway coined the term "naturecultures" in *The Companion Species Manifesto* (2003) to likewise draw attention to the inseparability of the two concepts, and Alaimo performs a similar gesture by using the term "trans-corporeality" for human corporeality in *Bodily Natures* (2010). It therefore follows that if "culture is understood to be embedded in nature and [if] nature is always culturally inscribed, [then] culture can no longer deem itself superior to nature. It must instead respect the implications and consequences of its embeddedness" (Grewe -Volpp 81).

While the biological body comes into focus in tales of survivals by having to overcome injuries, forage, or farm, such as in Hegland's novel, the texts examined in this chapter suggest that it is not only our physical survival that is dependent on our bodies but our cultural one as well. In Kate A. Boorman's *Winterkill*, Dimaline's *The Marrow Thieves*, and Knutsson's *Shadows Cast by Stars*, the body becomes the tool for preserving cultural traditions and for learning more generally. Traditional education systems are often lost or unavailable to the protagonists in the post-apocalypse-world of these novels, meaning that verbal and written skills of the post-apocalypse generations are affected by this loss. The role of language in dystopian fiction as a site of oppression as well as for resistance has been well documented,[8] and several scholars writing about post-apocalyptic fiction have likewise noted its centrality. One example is

Heffernan, who argues that post-apocalyptic narratives of the twentieth century present a fading away of language and culture (5).

Several narratives do indeed seem to suggest such a future: Snowman, the narrator in Margaret Atwood's *Oryx and Crake*, is trying to hold on to vocabulary but loses more and more as time goes on. Moira Young's *Blood Red Road* (2011) is set a few generations after the apocalypse and the spelling throughout the novel reflects the lack of written culture presented in the narrative, mimicking the oral tradition of the characters by spelling words the way they are pronounced: "I ain't never bin so glad to be anywhere in my life . . . every streamlet along the way's eether bin dry or a deathwater . . . We couldn't of gone on much longer" (59). The novels under study here, however, demonstrate that learning—and with it knowledge—is not necessarily dependent on books or writing skills.

1.2. The Body as Teacher: Kate A. Boorman's *Winterkill*

In *Winterkill*, survival is dependent on the body and physical labour, but the focus is not on the body's function as a tool for farming; rather, it becomes a mediator for knowledge in a world where literacy and written information has been replaced by oral traditions that serve those in power to oppress the remaining survivors. By making the body—both through language in the form of metaphors and similes as well as through sensory experiences—a communicator with the natural world, the focus shifts from the mind as a seat of knowledge and power to an emphasis on the body's entanglement with the environment, thereby promoting situated knowledges and an active engagement with the natural world.

Often, reading and writing skills—or lack thereof—not only indicate the deterioration of language but of more traditional types of learning as well. The lack of writing and reading skills might therefore give rise to a different type of knowledge. The lack of books and literate people in *Winterkill* bestow a sense of the forbidden on the protagonist whenever she comes across reading material; a feeling that becomes validated when she finds a letter containing the well-guarded secret of her family's past (181-84). The knowledge in *Winterkill* is carefully guarded by those in power to enforce a particular narrative that supports their current way of life—and the strict regulations imposed on the community—by circulating and maintaining a particular version of the apocalyptic event that preceded the novel according to which evil spirits or monsters devoured everyone who had tried to leave the settlement and killed everyone living beyond the immediate area. This narrative is in part protected by the lack of reading and writing skills in the community; Emmeline, the protagonist, "can't read, not many people can," but confessing that she would like to know how to makes her feel like admitting a secret (144).

Emmeline is being trained as a healer and is made familiar with the plants and wildlife around the settlement. Her profession also allows her to leave the tightly guarded settlement to gather herbs and roots. While she is not able to learn from books, learning to understand the plants around her eventually leads to a form of communication with the trees around her that ultimately allows Emmeline to discover the truth about the apocalypse and her own family. Knowledge in the form of truth that allows the settlement to liberate itself from the oppressive regime that was imposed on them—supposedly for their own protection—comes from understanding the land, from leaving the settlement, and being in the surrounding forest.

Such knowledge is a "situated [form of] knowledge," where "to know" is part of "to experience" (Curry 4). It is a knowledge born from bodily experiences—from interacting with the world—rather than the type of learning that comes from books or an educational system sanctioned by the authorities.[9] In other words, knowledge is no longer preserved through writing and curating; instead, novels like *Winterkill* offer a type of learning that comes from connecting with nature and that ultimately proves to be more accurate and liberating than the knowledge that was passed down by the authorities of the community. In *Winterkill*, the legend goes that the First Peoples, the settlers from the Old World, and the "melange," those with mixed blood like Emmeline, all stopped on their westward movement "in the woods just shy of the foothills, before the wall of Great Rock" where then all traces are lost; according to the stories, they have been taken by the "malmaci" (Boorman 30). The malmaci are either a monstrous hybrid creature or an evil spirit and Emmeline's settlement lives in constant fear of "takings," where the malmaci kidnap townsfolk who have wandered too far beyond the settlement or who have broken the rules created to prevent malmaci attacks and which are enforced by the councilmen. However, Emmeline believes the First People are still around and refers to them as the Lost People, who speak to her through the forest around the settlement.

Whenever Emmeline leaves the settlement to gather herbs and roots for her teacher, Soeur Manon, she listens to "[e]verything. The river, the wind, the birds . . . [and] sometimes it seems the woods are talking to [her]" (Boorman 164). She believes "the Lost people [are] hanging off the boughs and watching over [her]" while she is out there (8)—but they do more than watch. They "drift through the branches, whispering to [her], calling to [her]" to go in a specific direction (28). As in *Shadows Cast by Stars*, which will be examined later, the protagonist's teacher—the healer—understands that the natural world can communicate with us, telling Emmeline to ask the woods for the meaning of her strange dreams about the Lost People (116). Following the directions given to her by the forest, she discovers a secret path that is used by hooded, secretive characters, one of which is later identified as Brother Stockham, "the most respected member of [the] settlement" and head of the councilmen (9). Despite the respected position of the council, Emmeline's body has always reacted with fear to its members, causing her to "swallow a spike of fear" (44), her blood to freeze (13), and a cold stone to form in her stomach (3). A justified response, as it turns out, when she finds several skeletons and ultimately learns of the council's involvement. In the beginning, it is merely a foreshadowing dream that warns her of the identity of the skeletons: "The trees around me shift and lose their leaves, become gleaming white bones, reaching for the twilight sky. A rush of breath whistles through their skeleton fingers" (209). But then the merging of the forest and the Lost People is again mirrored in the waking world; it turns out the skeletons she found were indeed members of the Lost People.

At the same time that the Lost People are an external source leading Emmeline, she is also guided by her "secret heart," which—according to the old song her mother used to sing—"you should follow by setting "your feet to the same path and follow" (Boorman 27). Her heart, we later find out, is also a part of her natural surroundings in that her body merges at times with the forest around her, such as when she notices the peace that being in the forest affords her, where her "feet feel solid, rooted into the forest floor like [she's] part of this grove, these woods" (34). She is quite often in synch with the natural world, so that she is "trembling along with the prairie grass" when she climbs the cliff outside of the settlement and surveys "the plains sweeping to the horizon in every direction" (45). Just as she merges with the forest, and the forest merges with the Lost People, the Lost People and Emmeline become one—while Emmeline was dreaming of the Lost People, so was Matisa—a girl of the First People. Matisa dreamt she would find Emmeline, whom she likewise refers to as someone from the Lost People, the term Matisa's people use for the remaining group of settler-survivors in the area.

Listening to the forest and the responses of her own body leads Emmeline not only to discover that the Lost People still exist, but also the truth about the council and their oppressive rule. The malmaci do not exist; instead, the councilmen have used them as cautionary tales to justify their authority because "fearful people are easily led" (264). In truth, the First People left after receiving a premonition that violence in the form of new settlers was coming. When they finally sent scouts to make contact with the newcomers, the then leading councilman "drugged them with bittersweet and imprisoned them," leaving them to die (272). Ever since, the council staged takings, thereby inciting fear, whenever they felt the need to bring order. In a similar circular structure to that of Emmeline—the forest—and the Lost People, finding Matisa and her people leads to an end of the post-apocalyptic state in which the settlement lives in fear of vengeful creatures and to a more hopeful future in which Emmeline and the rest of the settlement can "[d]o more than just survive" (Boorman 248). The earth-related knowledge to which Emmeline opens herself up prevents "earth-dislocation" (Curry's term)—which ultimately makes people less connected to the earth and therefore also less active about respecting its resources and ecosystems—because it fosters a mutual relationship between the land and humankind. In *Winterkill*, it is only through Emmeline's communication with the forest that her settlement can be saved.

In comparison, Dimaline's and Knutsson's novels examined in this chapter likewise demonstrate the importance of learning from the land and respecting it for the knowledge it offers, but they also go further than that. Dimaline's *The Marrow Thieves* explores the necessity of cultural traditions for more than mere survival and emphasizes the body's vital function as repository for cultural expressions, while Catherine Knutsson's *Shadows Cast by Stars* promotes relationality and interdependence between the human and nonhuman world. Learning that the nonhuman world is not any less alive than humans requires the protagonist to practise a more respectful way of interacting with nonhuman Others—such as rocks, tress, or spirits—and which opens up possibilities for a new kind of relationality between those that would previously equate the nonhuman world with resources and said nonhuman world.

1.3. The Porosity of the Border between the Human and Nonhuman World: Catherine Knutsson's *Shadows Cast by Stars*

Catherine Knutsson's *Shadows Cast by Stars* is a novel in which a specific location becomes a sanctuary for those who are hunted as "Others" (Knutsson 1), that is to say for those of Indigenous descent. Vancouver Island is the sanctuary that provides protection for those of Indigenous blood, such as Cassandra Mercredi, her brother, and their father. However, here, too, it is not the location itself that is safe, as "the Band" which governs the sanctuary is a group of guerrilla warriors who rule the island and not everyone in the community is interested in the welfare of the newly arrived family. Instead, it is Cassandra's training as healer and seer that allows her to learn about the island, about the interdependence between humans and nature, and about the fragile balance between the spirit and the waking world.

While her work as a healer emphasizes both the fragility and the resilience of the human body, her training demonstrates how very dependent one's existence is on maintaining a respectful relationship with one's environment. In addition, Cassandra's skill as a seer opens up old discourses about external souls and the precarious connection between body and mind for whenever a spirit takes over her body, Cassandra experiences an epileptic fit and loses all control—often endangering herself in life-threatening ways. In *Shadows Cast by Stars*, the mind and the body can only be separated at a price and both are intricately connected to everything else: nature, humanity, and spirits are all held in balance and mutually dependent.

In the novel, the ways in which humankind is embedded in the nonhuman world are demonstrated by the interactions between the protagonist and the creatures on the Island. The animals that she encounters on the Island are supernatural; they are creatures of myth that affect the natural environment as well as the human community. While in communication with or in the possession of one of these spirits, Cassandra unleashes an earthquake that causes fatalities (Knutsson 317), and most of the time the actions of the supernaturals change or guide the events happening in the novel. Far from being generally acknowledged by everyone and despite the fact that only very few people on the Island can actually see the supernaturals, the everyday life of the humans is shaped by the natural world around them.

Cassandra's experiences with the supernaturals illustrate that there are no two distinct realms of nature and culture. In Western thought, nature is usually in opposition to culture. As Raymond Williams has shown in his tracing of the word "nature," the term combines several meanings which have also been in flux over time. Particularly noteworthy is that the term often implies "the primitive condition before human society" ("Nature" 222), and more generally "what man has not made" (223).[10] Feminist theory has been critical of this distinction and has "trac[ed] environmentally destructive behaviours to patriarchal norms of entitlement and ownership, and to fantasies of mastery both over nature and each other" (Clark 4). The ways in which nature is treated as something that can be or should be controlled by culture can be found illustrated, for example, by the exploitation of natural resources within capitalist practices, or the modelling of landscapes in the course of establishing colonial settlements (Davis and Todd 769).[11] In the colonial practices I referred to above, nature becomes something that can—or should—be controlled. Yet, such a relationship of supposed superiority of mankind over nature is not the only possible one. John Elder and Hertha D. Wong describe this relationship in the foreword to their collection of Indigenous stories from around the world, stating that Indigenous representations of nature often offer a more “integrated vision” that is “more respectful in their dealings” with it (3). They use the stories of the Pueblo as an example for the ways in which human consciousness remains embedded in the natural world in these narratives, which is in contrast to the concept of a landscape that a writer or painter objectifies (4). In a broad sense, the editors agree that Indigenous representations of nature tend to “view nature as a powerful force to be respected and honored, a life-giving Mother to be cherished, and themselves as part of the intricate web of the natural world” (7). Cassandra’s relationship with the supernaturals, as I will explore further below, is also not based on mastery but rather on respect and interconnectedness. However, this is not to say that nature is always a good or benevolent force in Indigenous stories. As Daniel Heath Justice (Cherokee) stresses, “arguing for other-than-human personhood is not arguing for a naïve or romantic conceptualization of the natural world” (96). Relationality means that “much of the energy that goes into maintaining these relationships is to prevent offending the other-than-human peoples, whose anger is profound and dangerous when they’re treated with disrespect” (97)—as Cassandra’s relationship with the spirits illustrates.[12]

In *Shadows Cast by Stars*, the old stories come alive in the form of totem animals—or guardian spirits—and the supernatural creatures that at times choose to appear to humans. As the healer, Madda, who trains Cassandra, tells her, “These stories are living things, as alive as you and me. Just in a different way, that’s all” (Knutsson 279). While Cassandra is not the only one able to interact with the nonhuman, i.e., spirit, world—other women in the village have seen the Dzoonokwa, the wild woman of the forest, as well—it is through her that the reader experiences the constant interchange between the two worlds and the ways in which they mutually affect each other. It is a careful balance in the novel in which neither Cassandra nor the spirits are superior to the other. At times, she can control the spirits that want to possess her body. When she goes to speak before the Elders at the old gathering house, she "can feel the songs in the air, the words that bring old stories alive, turning myth into reality" (224). She feels the spirits, too, saying, "The supernaturals press at me, wanting to take root in my body, wanting me to dance them back into this world, but I don't let them. This isn't the time or the place, and little by little, they back away, awaiting their turn to be called forth" (224). Yet, she also becomes a tool for the supernaturals, such as when she is marked by Sisiutl, a gigantic water snake, which drags her down to the bottom of the lake behind her house, almost resulting in killing her.

The fact that it is impossible for Cassandra to become a master of the spirit world is noteworthy, as the dualism of culture and nature is based on the assumed superiority of the former over the latter. In the novel, however, the nonhuman world cannot be controlled; it is about protecting the human being from becoming a helpless pawn of the supernatural forces, which in turn are also dependent on humanity.[13] The nature/culture binary is an example of Derrida's term "violent hierarchies, [in which] [o]ne of the two terms governs the other (axiologically, logically, etc.), or has the upper hand" (*Positions* 41). In order to reach a "peaceful coexistence of a *vis-à-vis*" (41), Claviez argues that the otherness separating the two terms needs to be acknowledged in that reciprocity cannot be the basis for an ethics that includes the nonhuman world, as nature has "no ethical concepts" (439). For that reason, an ethics that would overcome these "violent hierarchies" (Derrida) needs to "extend . . . toward a realm where the values and norms that inform such an ethics are non-existent" (Claviez 439), and cannot, therefore, be based on reciprocity or sameness (443).

He finds a suggestion in Emmanuel Levinas's ethics of the face-to-face, as Levinas rejects the notion that ethics is founded on sameness, that there needs to be a shared quality or mutuality between the self and the Other (194). According to Levinas, reducing the Other to my understanding of them is a violent act against them (38-40). If I reduce the Other to what I believe we share, "I reduce him or her to an economy of reciprocity, compatibility, and mutuality, and in the process am destroying what is unique, incommensurable and exceptional about the Other" (Claviez 441). One problem with Levinas's concept of the face-to-face has been articulated by Marie Carrière in that his definition of the self is still based on a totalizing tendency according to which the self always seeks to unify or assimilate, and the Other is necessary to interrupt this process (*Writing in the Feminine* 32-33). [14]

Furthermore, the binary in which "[t]he world increasingly becomes a commodity to be purchased, consumed, and flushed away . . ." in opposition to humanity's "unchallenged superiority . . . is deeply entrenched in settler colonial cultures that are themselves embedded in culturally specific understandings of what it is to be human" (Justice 39, 40). In contrast, for many Indigenous cultures, "the status of 'human' is intimately embedded in kinship relations" (41), and, as Justice emphasises, these can include the nonhuman world (77). Most importantly, kinship relations are likewise not predicated on sameness; in fact, "to find common ground and ensure a world where suffering is minimized," he argues, "we must do so with our differences intact" (101).

As Cassandra's relationship—or kinship—with the spirits illustrates, such relations are not always without conflict, and Justice confirms that "relationality isn't only positive and affirming; sometimes the most transformative relationships we have are the difficult or even the painful ones" (90). Kinship arises from the intra-action—Barad's term to denote that distinct agencies do not precede, but rather emerge through, their encounter" (33)—"when bodies and imaginations come together in relationship, when boundaries are breached and something else comes into being;" it is an "embodied practice" that takes shape in daily interactions (104), as Cassandra's apprenticeship, on which I focus further below, demonstrates.

As I previously stated, the old myths come to life in Knutsson's novel and are enmeshed with the everyday life of the people on the Island. They can therefore not be "reduced . . . to a primitive strategy of overcoming terror" (Claviez 450). While Cassandra's encounter with the three Dzoonokwas at the border where garden meets forest is marked by fear in that her "heart flutters in [her] chest" and she wonders, "Which heartbeat will be its last?" (Knutsson 371), it also ends with the reminder "that Dzoonokwa's not bad. She just is what she is. She takes the life of some people; she gives others beautiful things" (378), which brings us back to encountering nature as kin, without trying to reduce difference.[15]

Examining the porous nature of the barrier between the human world and that of mythology can even be particularly central to the argument for the dissolution of the nature/culture dualism. In his work *Spirit Animals: The Wisdom of Nature*, Wayne Arthurson (Métis-Cree) reminds us that the relationship of Indigenous people and animals was different because "[u]nlike the Europeans and other peoples who saw animals as separate and lesser entities, Native people saw animals and humans as part of the whole world, and each living being was not better or worse than the other" (7). The characteristics, therefore, that spirit animals are imbued with in Indigenous folklore and myth come from thousands of years of observing these animals and that "from these insights . . . they developed the folklore, the spirituality and attitudes toward these animals and their spirits"—in other words, "[f]rom nature and environment comes culture" (9). *Shadows Cast by Stars* demonstrates this, as the following paragraph articulates, with the help of a barrier that keeps the Island safe from the hunting parties on the mainland, as people without Indigenous blood cannot permeate it.

It is this barrier that has allowed the human community—culture—to thrive on the Island and that brings a steady trickle of Indigenous refugees from the mainland. As the reader learns toward the close of the novel, however, the barrier goes back to an old story whose events turn out to have actually taken place. As the healer tells the story, "some of the medicine women back then, they knew that the earth was tired and unhappy; . . . they got together and made a big magic" by creating a pile of spirit stones and dancing around it (Knutsson 280). Raven was intrigued by the commotion and decided that he wanted a few of the spirit stones for himself. Raven lands on top of the pile and is joined by some of the other supernaturals, Sisiutl and Dzoonokwa. They do not realize that the women are weaving a web with their dancing and when Raven tries to fly away with some stones, the sticky threads keep him and the others trapped. He starts to eat the stones, hoping that will save him, but it instead turns him into obsidian—forming the monolith which created the barrier that has been protecting the humans living on the Island for so long.

Virginia De John Anderson further extends Arthurson's argument by emphasizing that the relationship between humans and animal prey differed strongly between settlers and Indigenous people in that "native hunters treated their prey with respect and performed rituals defined by reciprocity. Although not quite a relationship of equals, the connection between Indians and prey was not essentially hierarchical" whereas "domination and subordination was central to the English" for whom the hunt represented "the divinely sanctioned ascendancy of humankind over animals" (58). Arthurson explains that the respectful relationship between Indigenous hunters and their prey stemmed from the belief that animals had souls that, "had the animal been killed and its body and sacrifice had not been treated with the proper respect, . . . [it] could stay behind and cause trouble" (8).

Shadows Cast by Stars demonstrates through Cassandra's apprenticeship that the fragile relationship between humans and the nonhuman world depends on notions of relationality and respect by making them part of living "the Old Way" on the Island. Those "who remember [the spirits], who honor their teachings" (Knutsson 280), know that everything has a soul and must be treated as such. If you break a branch or pull a plant out of the ground it requires you to say thanks for its sacrifice because, as the healer explains, "to be considered alive . . . it just needs to exist. Everything has a piece of spirit in it" (126). Cassandra's teacher later uses the same connection to explain why the stories/myths also have to be considered alive, only "in a different way . . .. Like this stone. It's got a soul, and I've got a soul, so in that we're the same, but what houses the soul, that's completely different. The stories are like that—alive, just housed in a different body, a body our words give them. And our voices are their food. They need us to keep them alive" (279).

It is understanding everything as alive and therefore equally valuable—or equally possessing of a soul—that makes Cassandra apologize to the tree whose branch she unthinkingly snapped off because her teacher cautions her, "The trees have long memories . . . and next time you take something without permissions, they might not be as willing to just let you go" (122). To further emphasize the value of considering everything—human and nonhuman alike—as part of a bigger circle, the healer offers the following thought: "Just think of what this branch might have become if you hadn't taken it—a nest for a bird, for example. Its cones might have fed a squirrel. Maybe, one day, if the tree was tall enough, this branch might have held someone's body after they passed over. That's a mighty powerful thing, don't you think" (122).[16] This thought-experiment acknowledges that humans are only one part of a much bigger system and that it is arrogant to presume that nonhuman beings are merely there for human entertainment—such as brandishing a stick around while walking. Cassandra's lack of relation to the trees around her is a form of disconnection; she does not consider herself connected to the tree or her actions connected to a wider context. Justice identifies disconnection as "cause *and* consequence of much of this world's suffering" (4, emphasis in the original), and argues that having "the full context [is] necessary for healthy or effective action" (5). Having learnt of the context—the ways in which the small branch she twigged is interconnected with the possibilities of what it might have become—affects Cassandra's behaviour from this moment forward. These webs of relations make a relative out of everything on this planet, which is why Justice's question ,"How do we behave as good relatives," not only addresses "relational rights and responsibilities to one another" but also "to the other-than-human world" (28).

Alaimo's monograph *Bodily Natures* further attests to human enmeshment in the world by providing examples of various material substances in the environment and their traces in the human body to illustrate that human corporeality is always a form of "trans-corporeality" (2). From a posthuman perspective, this means that "[w]e are no longer alone as transcendent Minds locked in decaying bodies on an Earth where we don't belong, and separate from the myriad creatures around us. Now we can see ourselves as vibrant bodies pulsing in harmony with our whole environment," so that "we live in symbiosis with thousands of species of anaerobic bacteria, . . . [t]iny creatures live all over our bodies, eating dead skin and performing many other kinds of housekeeping functions" (Westling 36).[17] Alaimo likewise highlights that Darwin's "community of descent," to which all animals but also humans belong, disables any "solid demarcations between human and animal" but rather understands "the human [as] coextensive with the emergent natural/cultural world" (*Bodily Natures* 151). Within such a conception, "[c]onscious thought—the much-vaunted mind that has dominated philosophical tradition for two and a half thousand years—is only a tiny winking of self-reflective light in this symbiotic community of our body" (Westling 37). This interconnected relationship—or by being more mindful of the role that everything plays in the grand scheme of things—Cassandra learns to have a more respectful relationship with the spirits, which is rewarded in the novel in that the spirits come to her aid at various points.

Recognizing nature as "an autonomous force, an active agent . . . does not necessarily mean that nature is personified, but that it is an active force capable of subverting cultural and social achievements" (Grewe-Volpp 78). One way in which nature is recognizable as an agent is in the way in which the "land, for example or, more specifically, a place, subtly or explicitly influences the psyche and the actual behavior of individual protagonists. Climate, wilderness conditions, technologically altered landscapes, topographies and many other environmental elements . . . function as a powerful force that human beings have to—and do—react to" (78). Cassandra experiences this when she first visits the monolith, which gives her "the weirdest feeling that the monolith is looking at [her]" (Knutsson 277). When Cassandra's teacher vanishes and does not return, Cassandra is slowly driven mad by the incessant hum coming from the monolith, which finally "ceases—a blessing!"—when a search party finds Cassandra. She notices then that "they don't want to come closer to the monolith. They're afraid of it. Their fear rolls off them, down into the crater. The monolith drinks it up" (289). Not only does the monolith spark specific affects in the people approaching it, which then in turn influence their behaviour, the description that it "drinks [the fear] up" also suggests that the monolith uses humans as a source from which to feed.

Being such a force, “[n]ature as a trickster cannot be contained and manipulated forever, it will reemerge in surprising and often unpleasant ways” (Grewe-Volpp 78). Nature is again synonymous with the spiritual world in *Shadows Cast by Stars* in that keeping these supernaturals trapped unleashes a new strain of the virus to which Indigenous people are no longer immune. The medicine women of old have trapped Raven and his companions for ages, but if the new outbreak of the “Plague” is to be stopped, then Cassandra is forced to release the supernaturals—and with them the protective barrier. It is as the older Ms. Adelaide tells her, “This place, this haven we’ve created? . . . It isn’t for free. Everything costs something” (Knutsson 377). It is instructive that the majority of the Island’s population does not remember humanity’s cruelty involved in creating the protective barrier, and that they are unaware that the disease is, indeed, self-caused. Indigenous traditions in general, not just within the novel, “are well stocked with warnings against human destructiveness and lessons for more respectful co-existence with our other-than-human relatives” (Justice 39). Yet, while this “should make us humble and thoughtful, . . . a great resource-consuming mass of humanity is busy ravaging those delicate threads of interdependence” (39). On the Island, it requires Cassandra’s learning from the women and the land to rediscover and honour the old stories; finding the root of the disease in the people’s self-serving abuse of the supernaturals enables her to stop it by releasing the spirits. In the end, she grasps the “key insight offered in so much Indigenous writing,” namely that “learning [from the more-than-human world] can only come from humility and relational understanding” (Justice 96).

In the Indigenous context of Knutsson’s and Dimaline’s novels and in the settler context of Boorman’s work, nature functions as an enabling agent, allowing for new modes of knowing and eventually becoming a catalyst that ends the apocalypse. “The decision to depict nature as an active agent or as a passive object reflects ideas of the self, about a community, and—in a larger context—even about a nation," argues Christa Grewe-Volpp (80). The re-evaluation of nature in the literature of Canadian settlers, such as Boorman, is also of particular interest given that "European settlers perceived the immensity of the Canadian landscape as a physical and psychological challenge, and this notion of nature as a threatening force came to be reflected in literary representations of the land" (Hartmann 90).

The novels examined here offer instead an exploration of a multinaturalistic worldview that understands all beings as subjects who are separated by their different bodies and therefore different needs (Hornborg 221). The decolonizing gesture of incorporating a non-hierarchical understanding of personhood that these novels perform can also be read as a form of survivance.[18] In Vizenor's usage of the term, the spirit world that makes itself known to Casssandra in *Shadows Cast by Stars* exists in defiance of the settler society that has all but eradicated Indigenous tribes and customs outside of the Island. The spirits cannot be silenced and their relationship with humans survives, even though most people—not even those on the Island—still live "in the Old ways." It is about more than mere survival, too, and the old woman Minerva in *The Marrow Thieves*, whom I will discuss in the following part, is another example of such survivance.

1.4. Kinship and Cultural Survival: Cherie Dimaline's *The Marrow Thieves*

Imagining nature as a liberating agent and an entity of power or force affects human interaction with it because

> [i]t makes a difference whether a swamp functions as a site of moral devastation or as an ecological biotope, whether a forest is the home of Satan as in Puritanism or of the

> sublime as in American Transcendentalism. Representations such as these reveal not only knowledge of natural phenomena or the lack of such knowledge, but ideological standpoints which reflect and influence how we deal with our natural environment. (Grewe-Volpp 81)

In a time when discourses of climate change represent the environment as something to be saved and apocalyptic narratives depict nature often as the cause of the disaster—as in natural catastrophe stories, such as the films *2012* or *The Day after Tomorrow* or Mullin's novel *Ashfall*—or as dead—for example the landscape in Cormac McCarthy's *The Road*, which is described as having been "consumed" (Dominy 143)—envisioning a relationship with the environment that is mutually beneficial has the potential to enchant readers. Jane Bennett defines enchantment as the "energizing and unsettling sense of the great and incredible fact of existence" (*Enchantment* 159), which makes us experience that "'we' are always mixed up with 'it' [the environment or outside world], and 'it' shares in some of the agency we officially ascribe only to ourselves" (99). This is necessary in order for humans to take ethical actions towards the planet and tread lightly on it because "the more thoroughly nature is depicted as a disenchanted set of defeated and exhausted objects," the less we are inspired to devote "the careful attentiveness that ecological living requires" (91).

The Marrow Thieves similarly imagines a salvation that is tied to the land, but it also moves beyond it by making the liberation not dependent on a place but on one's cultural teachings. In the novel, Indigenous people are hunted down for their dreams—which the leader of the Indigenous survivors, Miigwans, says are woven "into the[ir] [bone] marrow" (Dimaline 19)—which is the only thing that cures a disease that is taking the ability to dream away from non-Indigenous people, driving them insane and creating havoc in urban centres. The protagonist, teenage boy Frenchie, joins a motley crew of Indigenous people who try to make it north, where it is said that other tribes have found sanctuary. What they learn on their way north, however, is that it is the old tales, words from their all but lost Indigenous languages, the practice of storytelling, and most of all their songs that will protect them: The very body that was endangered becomes the weapon to fight back through the body's ability to produce songs and to become an expression of one's cultural identity.

In Dimaline's novel, it is therefore again a different form of learning that becomes the means of salvation. Miigwans teaches the group to hunt and track (Dimaline 34)—skills that directly impact their immediate survival, as Frenchie illustrates when he first comes to the group starving and delirious because he had no knowledge of how to survive in the wild (15). It allows the survivors to find food (44), to keep track of each other (44), and to find their way back (45). The different steps involved in acquiring food also teaches Frenchie about consumption and necessity: when he finds a large moose, he considers killing it because it means "food for a week. Hide and sinew to stitch together for tarps, blankets, ponchos. This was bone for pegs and chisels"—and it would make Frenchie "the conquering hero" (49). Yet, Frenchie also realizes that they would not be able to travel with this much fresh meat before it spoiled, neither would they be able to afford a fire for long enough to smoke and dry the meat. Knowing they would "be leaving half, at least half, behind to rot" (49), he decides not to kill the moose even if it means feeling like a "loser" and that the group goes "hungry for a day" (50).

Even more so than learning to read the flora and fauna, it is the bonds of kinship and re-claiming the different Indigenous cultures of the various survivors that eventually reverses the apocalypse. When a new form of residential schools springs up all over Canada to harvest the dreams of Indigenous people, killing them in the process, several Indigenous people begin the journey north believing that “north is where [they’ll] find home” (Dimaline 6). The group that takes Frenchie in after he lost the last remaining member of his family is introduced to him as Miigwans’s “family” (16), although “[n]ot one of [them] was related by blood” (20). Duties are split with one group being taught to hunt and to build shelter by the Elder Miigwans, while the other part of the group takes care of duties around the camp and looks after the other Elder, Minerva. Minerva “didn’t talk, and when she did it was in bursts accompanied by laughter and maybe a scream or two. Mostly she watched” (20), which is the reason Frenchie is glad to be in Miigwans’s group. However, he later finds out that “Minerva has *the* language” (38 emphasis mine)—referring to Indigenous languages in general and what the teenagers in the group call “old-timey ways” (20).[19] Knowing about the old ways is a source of pride for the adolescents who grew up without their Indigenous language and customs. Frenchie explains, “Us kids, we longed for the old-timey. We wore our hair in braids to show it. We made sweat lodges out of broken branches dug back into the earth” (22), and the ones old enough to hear it participate in “Story,” a weekly ritual in which Miigwans focuses on some part of history—residential schools, the wars over the water of the Great Lakes, the new schools where Indigenous people died.

“Story” becomes a structuring part of their camp because Miigwans says it is important for everyone to know these things as it is “the only way to make the kinds of changes that [are] necessary to really survive” (Dimaline 25). Miigwans’s “to really survive” suggests that there is a difference between their aim and that of just surviving.” Stories are a tool “to really survive” because they “help us find ways of meaningful being in whatever worlds we inhabit, whatever contexts we’ve inherited,” argues Justice (34). Yet, there is also a relationship between stories and mere survival, which is demonstrated in Miigwans’s coming-to-the-group narrative. His narrative illustrates that stories of the past and one’s family can form the basis for our decisions and protect us. When recruiters for the schools circle their cabin, Miigwans and his husband lose precious minutes to flee because the husband, Isaac, believes the stories about the schools to be "too ridiculous to be true" (Dimaline 106). He does not believe them because he

> didn't have memories in his family of the original schools, the ones that pulled themselves up like wooden monsters coming to attention across the land back in the 1800s—monsters who stayed there, ingesting [Indigenous] children like sweet berries, one after the other for over a hundred years. Isaac didn't have grandparents who'd told residential school stories like campfire tales to scare you into acting right, stories about men and women who promised themselves to God only and then took whatever they wanted from the children, especially at night. (107)

Because "[o]ur lives are incarnations of the stories we tell, the stories told about us, and the stories we inherit" (Justice 34), story-time becomes part of Miigwans's community in more personal ways as well. At different times in the novel, a different family member shares their "coming-to" story about where they were before they fled the schools and how they ended up in Miigwans's group. It not only bonds the people listening to the narrative, but it also provides some insight into who the storyteller is beyond their name and daily habits. Until Wab, the eighteen-year-old girl, shares her "creations story" (Dimaline 79), she remained "hard to figure out" and a constant source of anxiety and mystery (77). However, when Miigwans shares the coming-to story of the remaining members with Frenchie, it is also revealed that all of them are narratives of personal pain and violence done at the hand of others and that what bands them together is their ability to survive. The stories therefore allow the characters to relate to each other or, in other words, relations are formed through stories in the novel. The name "family" for their motley crew further suggests that they are doing more than just surviving together—which also explains why they keep Minerva, the old woman with them on their journey.

It seems as if Minerva is mostly a hindrance to the group's progress north. She "collect[s] odd things" (44), needs help "getting . . . washed up and ready for bed" (Dimaline 65), has to be hauled along on a two-wheeled cart (75), others have to pull "Minerva's share of the camp carry" (92), and later—after they lost the youngest member to a group of traitors that were working for the recruiters—two of the men have to carry "Minerva like a child on their backs while she wailed and sang and mewled in cycles" (138). Yet, when the recruiters catch up with them, she ends up sacrificing herself, "allow[ing] [the others] to remain hidden" (151), and while Frenchie acknowledges, "We were faster without our youngest and oldest," he also recognizes that they are now "without deep roots, without the acute need to protect and make better" (154). However, it is not Minerva's sacrifice itself but her knowledge of the language and the old ways that ultimately saves everyone. She is taken to one of the schools for processing where she

> hummed and drummed out an old song on her flannel thighs throughout it all. But when the wires were fastened to her own neural connectors, and the probes reached into her heartbeat and instinct, that's when she opened her mouth. That's when she called on her blood memory, her teachings, her ancestors . . . morphing her singular voice to many, pulling every dream from her own marrow and into her song. And there were words: words in the language that the conductor couldn't process, words the Cardinals couldn't bear, words the wires couldn't transfer. (172)

The entire building explodes and goes up in flames, killing several recruiters in the facility. While Minerva is later killed in the rescue operation, attempting to free her is rewarded. Choosing to track her kidnappers down leads to the discovery of the remaining Indigenous council members—including Frenchie's father and thereby reuniting him with his biological family, while also opening up space for reflections on the validity of kinship families or bonds.

The other group members are expecting Frenchie to leave their group now that he has found his father; however, Frenchie realizes that "family" means more than just blood relation. The other members have become his kin as well, through being his teachers, protectors, support, and by providing a cultural network. While Frenchie renews his biological bond with his father, he in the end also remains a member of Miigwans's family. This re-examination of the nuclear family and its superiority over other forms of kinship is not only important for understanding that we all always belong to several networks that are as vital as our family relations; it is also a decolonizing move as it points to the settler replacement of Indigenous kinship relations with the colonial family. Dismantling kinship systems "through cultural practices and representations which collectively became a coercive form of power" worked in tandem with "political and economic forms of colonial domination" (Emberley 3). As Julia V. Emberley lays out in her monograph *Defamiliarizing the Aboriginal: Cultural Practices and Decolonization in Canada* (2007), imposing European family structures also implemented patriarchal governance structures and therefore effectively destroyed the gendered but not hierarchical division of labour among hunter/gatherer societies (cf. 4, 61; see also Altamirano-Jiménez and Parker 95).

In addition to family models, sexual identities were likewise affected by colonial practices. Scott Morgensen, focusing on sexuality more broadly rather than family structures specifically, refers to the relationship model of heterosexual monogamy as "settler colonialism" to emphasize that not only kinship systems were negatively affected by colonialism: "A white national heteronormativity . . . regulates Indigenous sexuality and gender by supplanting them with the sexual modernity of settler subjects" (106). For that reason, Kim TallBear (Sisseton-

Wahpeton Oyate) blogs as “The Critical Polyamorist” to talk about non-monogamy as a “decolonizing project” (“About the Blogger”). In an interview with *Feral Visions*, she explains that her people, the Dakota, used to practise plural marriage—a form of extended family that was about taking care of children, the elderly, and the community. State-sanctioned marriage is an institution that was imposed upon her people along with compulsory Christianity. Monogamous marriage transferred the agency to the head of the household—the husband—thereby divesting women of their property rights and their ability to obtain a divorce, which they had previously held in Dakota society.

Not only did women lose their property rights, transforming “indigenous kinship relations by modelling gender inequalities on those of the imperial state” (Emberley 54) also affected Indigenous women’s relationship to the land negatively and devalued their knowledge. Kahente Horn-Miller, a Mohawk scholar, explains the effects of European patriarchy as a conscious omission of the role of Haudenosaunee women from the colonial narrative (34). We can see this exemplified in *The Marrow Thieves* when Frenchie is gleeful to be in Miigwans’s hunter group, the members of which are trained to track and hunt, rather than back in camp with Minerva and the other ”Homesteaders” (Dimaline 34). Yet, as Frenchie learns, Minerva provides access to cultural learning by teaching the girls in the camp her native tongue—which at the close of the novel is revealed as the means to liberating themselves.

Minerva’s death leads the characters to realize that she was a key to their freedom but not the only one. It leads them to understand that they can all “craft more keys” (Dimaline 214) by sharing the old stories, their languages, and by re-learning to write syllabics. The diversity among the different First Nations is also noteworthy; as Justice points out, Indigenous stories “help us bridge the gap of human imagination between one another, between other human communities, and between us and other-than-human beings." Furthermore, "they affirm Indigenous presence—and our *present*," thereby providing hope for Indigenous survivance (xix, emphasis in the original). Undertaking a cultural revival by organizing ways to share knowledge across the different surviving Indigenous tribes is rewarded in the novel—suggesting that they are on the right path—by reuniting Miigwans with his missing husband, who is not only Métis but also a linguist fluent in written and spoken Cree and therefore a teacher-figure that will be able to help with the creation of more keys.

We find a similar reclaiming of Indigenous women's knowledge of nature and the land in Knutsson's and Boorman's novel as well. In both of these texts, it is the female healer figure that teaches the protagonist how to relate to the land be it in the form of plant properties, respectful treatment of all things, or communication with the spirits. While this relationship between the healer and the heroine ultimately reverses the apocalyptic scenario, it is not a revered or esteemed position when the heroine enters into her training. While Madda, Cassandra's teacher, is feared by the Band and her counsel carries some weight with them, she is also an embodiment of the crazy old woman in the hut on the outskirts of town and her teachings are mostly disregarded by the all-male governance of the Band. Emmeline's teacher in *Winterkill* is likewise excluded from the politics of the counsel men and the fact that Emmeline, who is considered tainted and who has a damaged foot that causes her to limp, is taken in as a trainee indicates that Soeur Manon's status in society is low enough for there not to be any outrage over her taking an outcast as her apprentice.

Healing and the knowledge of plants is traditionally the domain of Indigenous women (Lévesque, Geoffroy, and Polèse 63-64).[20] What particularly Boorman's and Knutsson's novels stress through the healer and apprentice relationship, however, is that "Indigenous knowledge comes from social relationships and cannot exist without them" (Altamirano-Jiménez and Kermoal 8), and that these knowledge systems "are grounded in living relational schemas" where relationships are not only an attachment to the land but a reciprocal understanding "among people as well as between people and nonhuman beings" (7).[21] Acknowledging both the central position of relationships in Indigenous knowledge systems as well as the inclusion of nonhuman beings in these relationships enables us to conceive of landscapes as more than purely anthropocentric spaces (Altamirano-Jiménez and Parker 89). Fostering such a relational understanding of the environment in turn opens up ethical possibilities for relationships with other-than-human beings.

All three novels demonstrate the decolonizing and ethical potential of Indigenous knowledge, and they do so by showing the vital role that the physical body plays in communicating with its surroundings and to express one's cultural identity. In *Shadows Cast by Stars*, the healer claims that the stories are alive and that our body houses them (Knutsson 279). *The Marrow Thieves* gives this image shape by having Minerva's body become the vessel for Indigenous knowledge that—once given bodily form—is too much for her captors to handle. And *Winterkill* imagines a truth about one's identity—or being human in general—and the world that can only be learned by listening to the nonhuman voices of nature. As I stated earlier, a relationship with nature that is an active agent rather than "a set of defeated and exhausted objects" (J. Bennett, *Enchantment* 91), can translate into ethical actions, which will be more fully discussed in the following chapter.

However, it is not only nature that has affective power because so do human "artifacts. Man-made complexities also can provoke wonder, surprise, and disorientation. Take . . . the excitement and slightly unnerving power that personal computers can wield over their owners, as when one finds it difficult to pull oneself away from the screen after playing around on the Internet for too long" (J. Bennett, *Enchantment* 171). As the following chapter will show, we are just as reliant on our physical body for the ways in which we create memories, which ultimately form part of our identity, and for the ways in which we make sense of the world. Inanimate objects and the agency that they share with our bodies can affect one's actions and lead to a re-evaluation of how one interacts with the world. The disenchantment tale renders "history or nature but also the existence of each individual . . . tentative, contingent, provisional—and meaningless" (J. Bennett, *Enchantment* 60). Yet, this tale can only be supported "if 'matter' is conceived as inert" (64). Examining the lively matter of memory objects and their function in identity formation in Emily St. John Mandel's *Station 11* and Cormac McCarthy's *The Road* will therefore be the focus of the next chapter.

"Chile, corn, stew, soup, spaghetti sauce. The richness of a vanished world."

—*The Road* [1]

CHAPTER 2: Embodied Affect and Affective Objects

> In most post-apocalyptic novels, what stands out is the sudden lack of electronic things: No more diving into pools of chlorinated water lit green from below. No more ball games played out under floodlights. No more porch lights with moths fluttering on summer nights. No more trains running under the surface of cities on the dazzling power of the electric grid. . . No more concert stages lit by candy-coloured halogens, no more electronica, punk, electric guitars. No more pharmaceuticals. . . No more flight. No more towns glimpsed from the sky through airplane windows. . . No more internet. No more social media . . . (St. John Mandel 31)

What this excerpt from Emily St. John Mandel's novel *Station Eleven* implies, too, is that these objects—the trains, the electricity, the internet—are also intricately interwoven with experiences: the smell and the feel of the pool water, the stadium atmosphere, the energy of the crowd at a concert. Things become meaningful through the interaction with them—which is noteworthy in the context of the world of post-apocalyptic novels: the world is littered with objects. Here are a few of the things that fill the post-apocalyptic world of *Station Eleven*: a caravan, a twenty-five-year-old thermometer, trees, cracked pavement, horses, weapons, sandals made from a car tire, a paperback—and this is just from one page (St. John Mandel 37). Most often, the objects used to have value—either practical or monetary—before the collapse, but they now have ceased their (original) function—such as the car tire that is now repurposed as a shoe sole. Most notably, those things that require electricity have become obsolete. Faced with these suddenly useless objects that refer back to a different way of life pre-apocalypse, the contemporary post-apocalyptic novel offers a meditation on things—on matter—by foregrounding a contact zone between the characters and the useless or functional objects.

What remains, in any case, are the characters' attachments to these objects. The sudden vanishing of these objects brings them more into focus, as they are no longer something that can be taken for granted: "The last time I ate an ice-cream cone in a park in the sunlight. The last time I danced in a club. The last time I saw a moving bus. The last time I boarded an airplane that hadn't been repurposed as living quarters, an airplane that actually took off. The last time I ate an orange" (St. John Mandel 231). What the character does not make explicit is: what about that "last time"? There is an affective attachment associated with these events that is only revealed through their sudden disappearance. Clark probably did not pay much attention to the last orange he ate when it happened; however, realizing that he will very likely never eat another one brings a mindful presence to that memory, rendering the eating of that orange a conscious interaction—rather than a mindless consumption—in hindsight. Attachments are revealing because they are affective; they are built on emotional or mental stimuli. As Kathleen Stewart shows with her many "snapshots" of ordinary moments in *Ordinary Affects* (2007), affects may not have much meaning or importance in themselves, but they become significant through "the intensities they build and in what thoughts and feelings they make possible" (3). They carry potential to impact the one experiencing them, moving them to action (128). In other words, affects have the power to produce effects (J. Bennett, *Vibrant* 5).

Affects are useful for considering the interaction between humans and objects because they themselves present a kind of contact zone—Stewart calls them "a tangle of potential connections" (4), while Gregory J. Seigworth and Melissa Gregg describe affect as "an impingement or extrusion of a momentary or sometimes more sustained state of relation," in their introduction to *The Affect Theory Reader* (1). What the novels under study here demonstrate is that, in that space of interaction between the body and the nonhuman world, entanglements are created that have the power of moving the characters to "donating some of [their] scarce mortal resources to the service of others" (J. Bennett, *Enchantment* 4). Approaching these novels as a thought experiment that grapples with ideas of what would enable a reversal of apocalyptic modes of being in the world suggests that examining these entanglements more closely has ethical potential. Representing agency as much more evenly distributed between humans and things enables a re-evaluation of old hierarchies that delineate the divide between subjects and objects. The novels collected here suggest that it is precisely the power of humanity's entanglements with the nonhuman world and all of its "lively" matter—Bennett's term (*Enchantment*)—that creates a more optimistic future.

It is these encounters between the characters and the post-apocalyptic objects around them on which this chapter focuses; or rather on the entanglement of bodies and matter—matter because it is not always a singularly rendered object with which a character interacts, and entanglement because it is not always an intentional action but often a form of unintended intersectionality that brings bodies and matter together. The materialism which I am tracing is that of nonhuman thingy-ness, its entanglement with human and nonhuman bodies, and the material agency associated with those bodies that allows me to shed light on new ethical modes of being in the world. My focus on objects—or rather, matter in general—is intentional; it is motivated by the potential for rethinking the relationship between humans and their surroundings, both natural and manmade, in terms of relationality rather than hierarchies. The term "materiality" applies equally to humans and nonhumans and can therefore address a broader web of elements than does "nature" (Bennett, *Vibrant* 112). Furthermore, materiality "tends to horizontalize the relations between humans, biota, and abiota" (112), which we will find demonstrated by the novels in this chapter.

Oftentimes, interactions or more ephemeral entanglements evoke the idea among capitalist cultures of a human actor who acts upon an object of sorts, organic or artificial. Rather than to think of agentic subjects that interact with objects, Barad proposes an ontoepistemological framework of agential realism to consider this interaction as a relation between an apparatus and a phenomenon (132-85). It is the relation which produces agency through the "intra-actions" of two or more parts. Barad's term intra-action draws attention to the fact that there is no "prior existence of independent entities or relata" (139). Instead, "distinct agencies do not precede, but rather emerge through, their intra-action" (33), and are themselves again part of a larger network of intra-acting entities. [2] In this context, agency is not an inherent property, and neither are the boundaries that mark subjects and objects; subjects and objects are created through certain processes that depend on the chosen apparatus which in turn create the phenomena that are observable. The key point of Barad's ontoepistemology for my study is that it understands matter as "agentive, not a fixed essence or property of things" (137).

In the context of post-apocalyptic fiction, it means, for example, that it is the intra-action between the post-apocalyptic state of the world and the manmade objects that produces the post-apocalyptic object—in other words, the post-apocalyptic world provides the apparatus with which the phenomenon (that of human relations to these objects) is examined. In fact, an apparatus needs to be understood as "specific material reconfigurings of the world that do not merely emerge in time but iteratively reconfigure spacetimematter[sic] as part of the ongoing dynamism of becoming" and the reconfigurings "are productive of (and part of) phenomena" (Barad 142). What this means is that by using a particular apparatus, we are already determining (part of) the phenomenon we can observe.[3] For example, choosing post-apocalyptic fiction is part of the apparatus and already determines to some extent the kind of phenomena that can be observed. Furthermore, the objects that can be examined are related to the apparatus chosen to examine them, i.e., manmade objects in other types of fiction might behave differently than in post-apocalyptic fiction. Furthermore, the apparatus itself is also part of yet another phenomenon, which is again intra-acting with another apparatus, and so on, creating a rhizomatic—in the botanical sense—and dynamic articulation of the world.

The novels collected here are therefore speculative in a very literal sense: they present an experiment about the relation between all of the "stuff" of everyday life—manmade and organic matter—and the apocalypse. This chapter observes the phenomenon of human relations to the nonhuman world in these narratives and their role in moving from the apocalypse to a more optimistic future. At the same time, the novels themselves are objects in a time of climate change and a culture that has been termed "apocalyptic" (Heffernan). As in the way in which stories support more-than-survival in *The Marrow Thieves*, the stories that are told in the Anthropocene might similarly come to matter.[4] Referring to Indigenous stories, in particular, Justice sees in them something to "remind us about who we are and where we're going, on our own and in relation to those with whom we share this world. They remind us about the relationships that make a good life possible" (6). In *Station Eleven*, the phrase "*Because survival is insufficient*" is a Leitmotif for the travelling Shakespeare theatre (St. John Mandel 58). It refers to the reason for making art—performing Shakespeare and music—at the end of the world, a time when "it seemed a difficult and dangerous way to survive and hardly worth it" (119). While one of the actors claims, "that quote . . . would be way more profound if we hadn't lifted it from *Star Trek*," it is nonetheless "on the lead caravan" (119), and thereby opens up definitions of art to forms of popular culture as well.[5] Marilou Awiakta (Cherokee-Appalachian and Scots-Irish) likewise refers to the value of art for "a good life"—as Justice termed it (6)—because "art for Life's sake, as opposed to art for Art's sake" can "help create harmony and healing for the people and the environment" (Awiakta 43).

In paying close attention to matter in McCarthy's *The Road* and St. John Mandel's *Station Eleven*, I treat these novels as thought experiments that reveals humanity's tendency to underrate the extent to which it shares power, as J. Bennett describes, with the various types of (nonhuman) matter around it (*Vibrant* 34). While the characters themselves often lack the perspective to understand the role that matter plays in their development—either because they are too emotionally involved or because they are not aware of the significance of the experience—the narrative context of these post-apocalyptic worlds demonstrates the power of matter, namely that agency arises through the intra-action of the characters and their environment (natural as well as manmade). Redistributing agency this way has ethical implications. Ethics is more than the consequences of our interactions with the world in a chain of cause and effect; "[e]thics is about mattering, about taking account of the entangled materializations of which we are part" (Barad 384). Realizing that matter emerges out of intra-actions emphasizes that humans "are not the only active beings" (391)—and this realization affects human engagement with the world.

Carl Knappett and Lambros Malafouris point out: "We do not give a second thought, on the whole, to chairs, mugs, steps, litterbins, wooden, ceramic, concrete or plastic: these objects are overlooked because we engage with them habitually and haptically every day" (ix). Yet, if the material world is only filled with "lifeless stuff" (J. Bennett, *Enchantment* 4), then how are we to be motivated to act ethically toward it—for example with regard to the environment? This inattention to matter is rectified in post-apocalyptic fiction in which these objects suddenly take centre stage. While *The Road* focuses on objects' usefulness for survival and depicts a world in which objects are rendered meaningless and inert beyond their basic function, *Station Eleven* demonstrates the vibrancy and liveliness of things by examining the propelling force of affect and the agency of objects beyond their market purpose. In other words, objects become a focal point in one of two forms: 1) everyday objects become crucial to survival, or 2) objects speak to human attachment to them.

The first part of this chapter will turn to *The Road* to demonstrate that a world of "lifeless stuff" is a world devoid of life in general. With the death of nature, everything else dies, too—objects, language, culture. The world of McCarthy's novel illustrates the affective power of our environment—manmade or organic—by focusing on a general lack of things needed to survive in the face of a plethora of unnecessary things. In the second part, I will look at *Station Eleven*, in which the narrative alternates between the present-day post-apocalyptic life and that of Toronto before the pandemic hit, and where the titbits collected by the protagonist, as well as a few key items, tell the story of Arthur Leander's life before the apocalypse and that of his friends afterwards. The novel not only depicts the affective force that bodily engagement with one's surroundings creates, but it also illustrates the extent to which objects or artificial structures, as well as the natural world, inspire and enable one to marvel at the fact that one exists at all. Being able to marvel is a necessary component of ethical action for Janet Bennett, who argues that "one must be enamoured with existence and occasionally even enchanted in the face of it in order to be capable of donating some of one's scarce mortal resources to the service of others" (*Enchantment* 4).

2.1. *The Road* as Disenchantment Tale

It is through presenting the world as a disenchanted place, devoid of life, and lacking in everything—from colours to nature—that *The Road* opens up possibilities for recognizing the value of and for being moved by our current world. *The Road* is set within a few years of some not clearly defined catastrophe that has annihilated most of humanity and which turned the environment into an ashen wasteland.[6] The world of the novel is characterized by its greyness, as well as by its focus on survival—finding food, shelter, and protection defines the experiences of the characters: "Mostly he worried about their shoes. That and food. Always food" (McCarthy 17). The desolation is intimately connected to consumption; as Jordan Dominy argues, the anthropophagy occurring in the novel is used as a metaphor for unrestricted consumption in that *The Road* depicts a world in which everything—even the landscape—has been consumed and that even travellers, such as the father and the son, need to take care not to become a consumable. Accordingly, the question at the end of the novel is whether the son can save the world from "the realm of commodification" (144).

Dominy's reading, however, focuses on the remnants of consumer culture and thereby unwittingly treats nature as a silent and dead backdrop. Yet, it is specifically the lack of a natural environment—living matter in general—that posits such rich ground for ethical gestures, for it is not merely a desire to consume that leads people to cannibalism in the novel. It is the lack of edible things, of a landscape that provides food, of animals that highlights the interdependency of humans and their environment. In emphasizing the importance of food sources and the lack of nourishment in a dead landscape, it paints the grim picture that cannibalism will be the only solution left if the environment does not provide food anymore. It is precisely the desolation of the setting in *The Road* that allows for a celebration of the natural environment (Hicks 86), because foregrounding the lack presented by the world of *The Road* enables the demonstration that the more-than-human world is a necessary component if one wants to do more than just survive.

Nature in the post-apocalyptic world of *The Road* has been read as "an actively malevolent force" (A. Keller 189). Since the catastrophe, the world has been reduced to a grey wasteland that is getting progressively colder. The boy and the father's survival is not only challenged by the dropping temperatures, but also by the fact that no food can be found except for what can be scavenged from abandoned houses or taken from other travellers. It is a world that is "[b]arren, silent, godless" and only getting worse: "There'd be no surviving another winter here" (McCarthy 4). What there is left of nature appears dead, even the river is "still" and "gray" with only "a burden of dead reeds" for vegetation, while the "weeds they forded fell to dust beneath them" (6). Because of its predominance, many critics have paid attention to the colour grey and the hostility of the surroundings.[7] This lifeless setting leads to a narrative that is "permeated by feelings of loss for personal relationships . . ., society . . . and the natural world" (A. Keller 190). It is a dying world in which nights are "dark beyond darkness and the days more gray each one than what had gone before," and which has the father compare it to "the onset of some cold glaucoma dimming away the world" (McCarthy 3).

Yet, the human-made world—and the human survivors themselves—cannot be disentangled from the natural environment. The buildings and objects that the boy and the father come across are no less dead than the plant life around them. When they come to a gas station, they "cross[] the broken asphalt apron" to find the "pumps standing with their hoses oddly still" (McCarthy 6); a ham that they find in an old barn appears "like something fetched from a tomb" (17). Signs of human habitation and access points to human dwellings are sources of anxiety and fear, so that the boy often begs his father not to open a door for fear of what they may find inside (108, 134), because “[w]hat if someone’s there” (106)? Nature might be “malevolent” (A. Keller 189), but so are humans. They are the reason the father needs “a chrome motorcycle mirror . . . to watch the road behind him” (McCarthy 6), and why the son cannot abandon his function as scout even if it would mean the ability to take a second shopping cart with them (150).

The ashen wasteland that remains leads Dominy to argue that *The Road* functions as a parable that imagines the result of insatiable consumption and blind consumerism (143). I want to offer an alternative reading in that it is not the loss of the market but the loss of the natural world that leads to a lack of meaning and purpose in the post-apocalypse world of *The Road*. It is the threat presented by falling trees, earthquakes, and plummeting temperatures that “echoes the demonic accounts of the wilderness by the Puritans” (A. Keller 201), thereby necessitating a focus on survival as absolute priority. Such a narrow focal point leaves little space for anything that we might term “life,” and it is therefore not surprising that the child, shortly after having been given a flute by his father, simply throws it away (McCarthy 159). Even in the few moments in which the child makes music with it, the father already realizes how misplaced it is: “The man thought he seemed some sad and solitary changeling child announcing the arrival of a traveling spectacle in shire and village who does not know that behind him the players have all been carried off by wolves” (78). In short, there is no use for music in their lives, which are preoccupied by the need to find food and shelter.

While nature is depicted as a foe to survival, the relationship that the boy and his father have with consumerism and technology is ambiguous. Human ingenuity is most apparent in the repeated claim that the father and his son are “carrying the fire” (McCarthy 83, 129), which represents the “transmission of human culture and technology” (A. Keller 206). “Carrying the fire" becomes synonymous with being "good people," which means that they would never eat another person (McCarthy128), and that, therefore, no trees will fall on them (35) and nothing else bad will happen to them (83, 193). Andrew Keller also understands the shopping cart as an indication of a positive consumerism, as it transforms from a symbol of excess into one of fulfilling basic human needs by serving as food storage or shelter (199). Yet, the oil company map that the father and son use to navigate would suggest otherwise. As an item tied to mining the planet for resources, it provides little guidance for the father as it represents a loss of referents since the cities and bridges and other distinguishing landmarks have often been destroyed; this leads to difficulties reading—or navigating—the post-apocalypse world and the father is often forced to make corrections or use approximations to find their way (McCarthy 182, 275; see also A. Keller 215).

As Barad insists, a phenomenon is always dependent on the apparatus used to observe it. The use of an apparatus, however, leads to specific, intentional cuts, which means some things will appear in focus at the expense of others—that is, we are able to examine a particular phenomenon within a certain (limited) framework or context but never in its entirety (148). If the apparatus suddenly changes, the phenomenon cannot be expected to remain the same; it might cease altogether or reveal something very different from the original intention. It becomes clear that the apparatus that enabled a translation of the map is working no longer. While the fire might represent mankind's triumph over the elements and therefore function as a metaphor for the father and the boy's ability to outlast the inhospitable environment, petroleum usage appears in a less favourable light. While oil—in the form of gasoline—provides access to light and much needed warmth in the novel, the father can only scavenge small amounts from time to time. Larger quantities of gasoline mostly appear in relation to the cannibals that comb the roads for survivors they can consume, in that they power the trucks used by some of the gangs (McCarthy 61). Most of modern consumer culture is oil-dependent with a plethora of objects that are petroleum by-products; however, its usage appears to be in opposition to the "good guys" of *The Road*.

Consumerism is also a concept that only holds meaning for the father; he experiences a vanishing of objects around him and his hope is dwindling along with them. The son, in contrast, has no reference frame for the world before the apocalypse. For that reason, the signs he discovers bear no prior meaning. The can of Coca Cola that the father gives his son to drink represents a rhizome-like intra-action between an apparatus and a phenomenon—incorporating advertising, capitalism, supermarkets, logistic companies, jingles, brands, consumerism, to name just a few. When the father comes across the can, he calls it "a treat" and opening it has almost ritualistic qualities, with every step of the process described in detail: "He slipped the boy's knapsack straps loose and set the pack on the floor behind him and he put his thumbnail under the aluminum clop on the top of the can and opened it. He leaned his nose to the slight fizz coming from the can and then handed it to the boy" (McCarthy 23). The father is a spectator while his son drinks, repeatedly encouraging his son to "[g]o ahead," and insisting his son "drink it," whenever the son attempts to share it (23). The father communicates that this is a special occasion even to his son by suggesting, "Let's just sit here" (23), which makes the son realize that he "wont [sic] ever get to drink another one" (24).

Yet, while the father affords the can of Coca Cola such a ritual and thereby suggests it is something worth savouring, it is merely a good-tasting drink to the son. While the son states, "It's bubbly," and also that "[i]t's really good" (23), the moment holds no more reverence for him as any other time when they find food. When they come across a well-stocked bunker, for example, the boy is similarly—if not more so—impressed by the coffee, ham, and biscuits: "Wow, the boy said" (144). The father's focus is mostly on the consumption of the foods that they find, for example promising the son, "These will be the best pears you ever tasted . . . The best. Just you wait" during their stay at the bunker (141) For the son, however, the food never just exists outside of relationships and so, despite enjoying the food, it is also something he feels grateful for, as evidenced by his exclamation that they "should thank the people . . . who gave [them] all this" (McCarthy 145). He is not attributing any particular significance to specific foods—in contrast to his father, who attaches a special quality to some foods, such as the Coca Cola beverage.

Matter is an intricate aspect of making sense of the world. For the father, the remaining signs of the pre-apocalypse consumer culture translate into a collection of hard and soft facts about the world, such as memories, values, and information. Yet, the world is no longer the same; the father's reference frame is no longer useful. This discrepancy seems to be noticed by the father himself, who at first describes his son as having "the look of an alien" with his "great staring eyes" (McCarthy 129), but who later realizes that he himself appears as an alien to his son, "[a] being from a planet that no longer existed" (153). Hicks, who reads *The Road* as an intertext of Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*, compares the son therefore to Defoe's Friday—the native of the island where Crusoe comes ashore (80). The man clings to old world values and encourages the boy to make music, learn the alphabet, tell stories of his own and in all instances his efforts are in vain, as these things hold no meaning in the new world and the boy's refusal to indulge in any of them might indicate an understanding on his part of the futility of keeping them alive (Woodson 22-23). For the son, the Coca Cola bottle still exists, but it provides different meaning—instead of the nostalgic attachment of the father to the old world, it represents a good-tasting drink for the son (McCarthy 23).

Animals are likewise often treated as objects; however, *The Road* makes the boundaries between human and animals unstable in that various similes are used to highlight the animal-likeness of the human survivors (Steven 67). Anthropomorphism has the power to reveal isomorphism by acknowledging "similarities across categorical divides" and thereby shared materialities rather than "ontologically distinct categories of beings (subjects and objects)" (J. Bennett, *Vibrant* 99). *The Road* blurs the boundaries between people and animals, describing that people "sleep under the tree like some hibernating animal" (McCarthy 103).[8] Mutually taking on each other's attributes indicates that the human body and the environment equally affect and transform each other, and recognizing the connection invites an understanding of kinship. Kinship might be necessary in order to "ensure a world where suffering is minimized" (Justice 101) because if animals "matter" less than humans—if there are no bonds or forms of relationality—then there is little preventing the justification of their abuse. If, on the other hand, we have "a roughly if not entirely horizontal model of relationship, then monolithic settler colonial authority is difficult to maintain or justify, and widespread exploitation of land, plants, and animals, as well as humans, is difficult to fully realize" (90).

A fact that *The Road*, with basically no animals left—save for a dog—illustrates, as humans become abused in their place. People of all age and gender become food, and so the father finds "naked people, male and female," and a "bearded" man held captive until they are eaten (McCarthy 110, 111), as well as the remains of a baby, "headless and gutted and blackening on the spit (198). People that are captured by the gangs that roam the roads also become objects in a sexual sense, with convoys sporting "women, perhaps a dozen in number, some of them pregnant, and lastly a supplementary consort of catamites illclothed against the cold and fitted in dogcollars and yoked each to each" (92). *The Road* is a cautionary tale about a lack of kinship (between humans and the nonhuman world, but also a lack of kinship between people), presenting instead a world of us versus them—of "good guys" versus "bad guys."

As my reading of the novel illustrates, this world is to a large extent the result of a "dead" nonhuman world. Matter is often understood as the opposite of "spirit," but "only spirit can resist calculation and inspire us morally" (J. Bennett, *Enchantment* 64). In McCarthy's novel, matter is devoid of spirit because it is literally dead: the world has been reduced to an ashen wasteland. In focusing on the lack—of colours, of wildlife, of human structures, of flora, of the arts—*The Road* highlights that human existence would shrink down to bare survival if the environment dies. This lacking world illustrates that people in such a setting are not willing to give their own time or resources to aid another—the man's refusal and constant explanation that they cannot help others because it might risk their own lives in the form of starvation or capture is an example of this unwillingness (McCarthy 127, 174). Even when the father apprehends the robber who tries to take their belongings because he's "starving," the father still insists on taking everything the man owns, down to all of his clothing: "I'm going to leave you the way you left us" —despite his son's attempt to intervene and despite the fact that the man is no threat anymore. The father's retaliation is based on the simple principle of what "would have happened to [them] if [they] hadnt [sic] caught him" (258). The child, however, is different: he is empathetic—which in turn makes him the receptacle of hope in the narrative, hope for a world in which humans are treated as subjects, not food source or liability. The son demonstrates his aptitude at navigating the post-apocalypse world around them in particular in his reactions to the travellers they meet. He recognizes them as simply being "scared" or "hungry" (McCarthy 162, 259)—merely other survivors trying to stay alive—whereas the father sees only ill-intentions or risk in them.

The boy therefore wants to help them, and at times even insists on it despite his father's wishes—for example in their encounter with Ely, in which the boy shares their food with the old man even though the father "wouldnt [sic] have given [him] anything" (McCarthy 173). The father himself cannot explain why his son would be moved to extend such kindness, only saying that he knows the son does not do it to evoke gratitude (173). To the father, the son risks their survival, admonishing him, "When we're out of food you'll have more time to think about it." The boy, however, refers to their different understandings of the post-apocalyptic world, saying, "I won't remember it like you do" (174). For the boy, the exchange is not about giving away supplies; it is about recognizing the kinship they share with the other traveller. Perhaps even alluding to the fact that the father's behaviour continues the cycle of us versus them in which one either takes what one needs—even if it is at the expense of others, such as in the case of the robber—or one becomes a commodity to be used by others.

The survival of the son is therefore one of the elements that allows for an optimistic interpretation of the ending. Another key element that supports such a reading of the ending as being life-affirming is the living map that appears in the last paragraph of the novel. In this last section, the reader is invited to look back to a time when "there were brook trout in the streams in the mountains" (McCarthy 286). These fishes had "vermiculate patterns that were maps of the world in its becoming" on their backs and where they lived, everything "hummed with mystery" (287). These living maps present a juxtaposition to the outdated oil company map used for the journey (A. Keller 215). The description of the fish as "smell[ing] of moss" and looking "polished" (McCarthy 286), and the resulting mesh of animal, plant, and stone in conjunction with the world in a state of “becoming” can be read as pointing “to a better way of perceiving and interacting with our environments” (A. Keller 214). Allen Josephs further interprets the almost tangible “mystery” that ends the final paragraph as “the mystery of love, incarnate, emanating from the boy” and that the novel therefore “shines a ray of hope in all that cold and all that dark” (143). The living map offers potential for a relational human and nonhuman entanglement in the future beyond the pages of the novel.

However, the living map is in contrast to the newly established family unit at the close of the novel. Not only does the ending reinforce the nuclear, heteronormative, patriarchal family as the future, the man who takes the son in at the end appears to be even more “the heroic frontiersman of the new world that [the son’s] father aspired to be” and it can therefore be assumed that he upholds “the same hierarchical view of others that the boy’s father did” (Hicks 91). While the “mystery of love” surrounding the boy might present the final take-away of the narrative (Josephs 143), the father-substitute represents the values and hierarchies of the old world and thereby undermines the potential for change embodied by the son (Hicks 102).

Despite some readings that understand the ending to indicate “a resurgence of color and hope and the possibility of some version of the former world . . .” (Cooper 149), it is the discrepancy between the optimistic and pessimistic interpretations of the novel that points to some uncertainty as to whether the future of the dead world of *The Road* can improve. In fact, one reviewer sums up the novel as “a story about the end of the world in which the world ends” (Clute). Emily St. John Mandel’s novel *Station Eleven* provides a compelling contrast to McCarthy’s novel as it features the survival of the arts—both original pieces of art, as in the creation of a graphic novel, as well as the performance of classics, such as Shakespeare’s plays—and that of countless objects. It thereby offers a meditation on what is necessary for more-than-survival, and on the intertwinedness of humans and their surroundings through their everyday engagement with objects and the natural world.

2.2. *Station Eleven* and the Entanglement of Affect and Agency

"I wanted to write a love letter to the modern world," says St. John Mandel in an interview about her novel (Alter). *Station Eleven* "is not about the struggle to survive . . . but rather the question of how to survive, and why" (Acciavati 538)—and bodily entanglements with all of their affective power are a fundamental part of the answer. I also want to build on this argument by highlighting that St. John Mandel's novel not only ponders the question of *how* to survive, but that it repeatedly returns to the fact that survival is not enough: "*Because survival is insufficient*," is written across the travelling theatre's wagon and the protagonist, Kirsten, has it even tattooed on her arm (St. John Mandel 58). What the novel demonstrates is that more-than-survival is dependent on relations—or the intra-action of human and nonhuman beings. Barad's agential realism informs my reading of *Station Eleven*, as it allows me to attend to the agency of the various human and nonhuman entanglements and their mutual constitutive qualities.

Station Eleven combines two different temporal strands in its narrative. One is that of the protagonist, Kirsten, and her travelling Shakespeare theatre about twenty years after the Georgia Flu wiped out most of humanity. The other one depicts the outbreak of the flu, its most immediate aftermath, and presents glimpses of the years between the apocalyptic event and Kirsten's timeline. The two strands eventually merge when Kirsten arrives at the Museum of Civilization. Both Kirsten and Clark, the museum's curator, are survivors of the initial breakout of the flu, but while the narrative chronicles little of Kirsten's time of the years right after the breakout, Clark provides a window to the years following it. Jeevan, another survivor, likewise contributes moments of the years on the road: “This silent landscape. Snow and stopped cars with terrible things in them. Stepping over corpses. . . The road was all travellers walking with shell-shocked expressions, children wearing blankets over their coats, people getting killed for the contents of their backpacks” (St. John Mandel 193-94)—reminiscent of McCarthy’s novel.

Both timelines are filled with entanglements between the characters and the nonhuman world around them. Examining the affective power that marks these entanglements demonstrates the potential for action that they carry. The novel opens before the world in *Station Eleven* ends with a last performance of King Lear in Toronto. Jeevan—a member of the audience—administers CPR to the main actor, Arthur Leander, who dies from a heart attack despite Jeevan’s efforts. Yet, when Jeevan is on his way home, “he [finds] himself blindsided by an unexpected joy” (St. John Mandel 11). He acknowledges that there is really no cause for happiness seeing that the actor died, but he cannot help feeling “exhilarated” because performing first aid made him realize that his decision to become a paramedic was the right one, as it is exactly what he wants to do (St. John Mandel 11). This affective spark—this sudden enchantment with his own life choices—causes Jeevan to feel “an absurd desire to run into the park. It had been rendered foreign by the storm, all snow and shadows, black silhouettes of trees, the underwater shine of a glass greenhouse dome” (11).

Jane Bennett defines enchantment as a “sense of fulness” that is connected to feeling gratitude for being alive (*Enchantment* 156). In Jeevan’s case, his enchantment transforms the world into a fresh, unfamiliar place to him and this propels him into movement. However, shortly after this burst, he receives a message from his wife with whom he is having marital problems. Immediately, “all momentum left him. He could go no farther” (11). With this intrusion of his private problems, the enchantment comes to an end and without it, “Jeevan [is] cold. His toes [are] numb. All the magic of the storm [has] left him" (12). Being enchanted briefly connected Jeevan deeply to a love for his life and resulted in energy spent without an exchange-value; he ran for the joy of it and to better experience this fresh-looking world and not to get anywhere faster. When the enchantment fades, his energy recedes again, and he is defeated rather than spirited.

Jeevan is not the only character who is moved by the power of affect. Miranda, the dead actor's first wife and the creator of the comic books that give St. John Mandel's novel its title, finds herself on a beach in Malaysia as the world ends. Looking out at sea at the dormant container ships, she is suddenly "seized by a loneliness she couldn't explain. She'd thought she knew everything there was to know about this remnant fleet, but she was unprepared for its beauty" (St. John Mandel 28-29). Opening herself to this unexpected aesthetic experience causes her to feel "stranded, the blaze of light on the horizon both filled with mystery and impossibly distant, a fairy-tale kingdom" (29). In Miranda's experience, too, we can find the sense of the magical, the sensory experience of affect that gives a new look to a world that has become less familiar and therefore more wondrous.

Affect is not only relevant for its activating force in the case of enchantment, but also in what it can tell us about our attachments to certain things. Examining our relationship with objects, Peter Schwenger argues that "things reveal us to ourselves in profound and unexpected ways" (3). It is important to note, however, that "this does not mean that things reveal themselves, only our investment in them (3). In *Station Eleven*, we find objects that have been repurposed, such as airplanes: "In the cold months, they [are] ideal for food storage. In the summer the ones near orchards [are] filled with trays of fruit that dehydrated in the heat" (Mandel 31). As in McCarthy's novel, most of the objects that are still used by humans have practical usage—often a repurposed one, as in the case of the airplanes. The backpack of the protagonist, Kirsten, is another example; it

> . . . was child-size, red canvas with a cracked and faded image of Spider-Man, and in it she carried as little as possible: two glass bottles of water that in a previous civilization had held Lipton Iced Tea, a sweater, a rag she tied to over her face in dusty houses, a twist of wire for picking locks . . . . (66)

Most interestingly, though, are the objects that are carried around despite their lack of practical value, such as Kirsten's collection of tabloid snippets, her two *Dr. Eleven* comics, and a paperweight. The only items, then, that Kirsten carries despite not needing them have affective value; they are memory objects to which she is attached. This value is in stark contrast to the world of objects presented in McCarthy's novel, where items that are not useful as tools for survival have become dead matter; objects in *The Road* that cannot be used to ensure survival are therefore presented as inert or meaningless—like the flute, which the son throws away (McCarthy 159).

Station Eleven counters this narrative of lifeless matter that can only be animated if it fulfills a purpose for human actors. The paperweight, for example, Kirsten admits, is "nothing but dead weight in the bag but she found it beautiful. A woman had given it to her just before the collapse, but she couldn't remember the woman's name" (St. John Mandel 66). While it has no practical value, the paperweight is a reminder of her last day before the apocalypse and of the theatre in which she performed in Arthur Leander's *King Lear* as a small girl on that very evening. It is a link to Kirsten's life before the pandemic and thereby a reminder of who she is: as Kirsten explains, looking at her memorabilia "from the shadow world, the world before the Georgia Flu" functions as "a steadying habit" (66). Memory objects, such as Kirsten's paperweight, serve as a reminder of a person's identity, as I will explain further below. Furthermore, it has meaning for the structure of the novel and functions as a similar link or "ligament" within the narrative, keeping the different narrative strands connected. I will return to the relevance of the paperweight as well that of the *Dr. Eleven* comics in my discussion of affective narratives.

Kirsten's tabloid collection is revealing—and as Schwenger argues, it reveals something about herself rather than about the items in the collection (3)—in that she cannot remember things like "her street address, her mother's face" (St. John Mandel 40), but she does remember the actor who died on stage during her own last performance. In searching for print fragments of him, she assembles a collage of the man Arthur Leander:

> A picture of Arthur alone on the beach, looking pensive and out of shape. A picture of him with his first wife, Miranda, and then later with his second wife, Elizabeth, a malnourished-looking blonde who didn't smile for cameras. Then with their son, who was about the same age as Kirsten, and later still with a third wife who looked very similar to the second one. (St. John Mandel 40-41)

Kirsten becomes an archaeologist, as one of the other survivors calls her (41). She gives shape to a person in a way that reflects how imperfect or maybe imprecise memories are because "[n]othing in Kirsten's collection suggested the Arthur Leander she remembered, but what did she actually remember? Arthur was a fleeting impression of kindness and grey hair, a man who'd once pressed two comic books into her hands" (41). For Kirsten, the snippets that she finds add layers to her memory of Arthur Leander even though she cannot always be sure if the memory that resurfaces is actually real—that is whether she actually experienced the moment depicted in the picture or newspaper article that she finds (201).

As José van Dijck explains, "To the extent that emotions inform our memories, the 'stuff' of memory may be partly derived from the external object itself," and the "loss of these items is often equated to the loss of identity" (356, 358). If there is a conflation between the object holding the memory and the identity of the possessor of the memory, then we can understand Jeevan's struggles to remember who he is during his long time on the road, where he hardly meets anyone and where nothing is familiar. On his own, Jeevan "felt himself disappearing into the landscape" (193). Without other people, Jeevan becomes just another part of the environment, and who he is becomes increasingly difficult to define. In an attempt to remember, he is therefore reciting "a litany of biographical facts as he walked, trying to anchor himself to this life, to this earth" (194).

The importance of markers—such as memory objects—to hold onto one's identity is also exemplified by the actor Arthur Leander himself, who grew up on a small island off Vancouver Island and who can never quite make people understand what living on Delano was like, so that people always seem "a little incredulous, like he's describing an upbringing on the surface of Mars." This repeated experience leaves Arthur "in a permanent state of disorientation like a low-grade fever, the question hanging over everything being How did I get from there to here?" (St. John Mandel 77). A place is just as much a part of someone's identity, and familiar spaces are filled with all kinds of memory objects that attach a person to lived moments in that particular place.

Returning to the beginning of the novel again, for example, as Jeevan is walking through the snow after failing to save Arthur, a yard that he passes by sparks the memory that he used to enjoy lying on his back in that yard to watch the snow fall (St. John Mandel 11). During his walk, he orients himself by realizing that "Cabbagetown was visible a few blocks ahead," as well as recognizing “the snow-dimmed lights of Parliament Street” (11). The things he sees—the objects that form Cabbagetown—change through the apocalypse. The physical objects, such as the buildings or street signs, might still exist—or have crumbled or been destroyed—but through the intra-action of the apocalyptic event and the character, they also become new objects.

During the “before,” these objects are signs that are decipherable by the characters, like the lights of a particular street which help navigate his way home. The streetlights, the buildings, all of it create “meaning” and a sense of identity for the character; they tell him where home is. After the apocalypse, however, they become part of a painful process—especially for those to whom these signs are not memory markers but rather a form of foreign language. In *Station Eleven*, the adults debate whether it still makes sense to teach their children “about the way things were” (269). They are aware that most of these things are “science fiction to [the kids]” and that “it only upsets them”—one of the parents even acknowledges that it makes his daughter less happy to learn about the world before the collapse (270). It is the parents who “don’t want to let go” of these things from before the collapse (270)—“[a]ll that knowledge, those incredible things [they] had”—because of what they mean to their understanding of their own identities and lives.

One solution in the novel lies in the creation of the Museum of Civilization in an old airport. Clark, Arthur Leander’s oldest friend, starts it in an airport lounge by adding his iPhone to a credit card and a driver’s license, then later his laptop, at which point others begin contributing items as well: another phone, high-heels, a snow globe. In the post-collapse world, “all objects were beautiful” to Clark (St. John Mandel 255), and the incomplete list of things that are no longer available or possible that make up chapter six of *Station Eleven* might explain the sense of wonder and admiration that “all objects” now spark: “No more diving into pools of chlorinated water lit green from below. No more ball games played out under floodlights . . . No more concert stages lit by candy-coloured halogens, no more electronica, punk, electric guitars . . . No more flight . . . No more internet . . .” (31-32).

These ordinary things become re-invigorated through the apocalypse: “These taken-for-granted miracles had persisted all around them” (233), Clark muses, and thereby expresses an ability to be affected by these no longer ordinary things. Instead of taking these things for granted, they now evoke a sense of marvel. Twenty years after the collapse, Clark finds himself trying to explain the function of these objects to the people born in the airport. These “taken-for-granted” things now reveal the extent to which they were always intimately interwoven with human experiences: “The airplanes outside once flew through the air,” a teacher explains, immediately following it with, “You could use an airplane to travel to the other side of the world” (262). Explaining the internet without human involvement is even more difficult, because “it was everywhere and connected everything, [and] it was us” (262).

A museum is defined as an “institution in which objects of historical, scientific, artistic, or cultural interest are preserved and exhibited. Also: the collection of objects held by such an institution” (“Museum”). The iPhones, laptops, ID cards, and other objects gathered in the Museum of Civilization are therefore no longer important for their intended purpose—which has become obsolete; instead, they are relevant for what they communicate about the pre-collapse world. In addition—and more interestingly—the shift from commodity to artifact also reveals that objects possess an agency that is independent from that of humans. Electricity is a particularly good example of this, as Jane Bennett’s reading of an electrical blackout in *Vibrant Matter* demonstrates. A huge blackout in 2003 affected 50 million people and twenty-four thousand square kilometres in the United States. All of the different parts in the distribution chain of the electric grid in Bennett's example show that agency needs to be "conceived now as something distributed along a continuum, [which] extrudes from multiple loci—from quirky electron flow and a spontaneous fire to members of Congress who have a neoliberal faith in market self-regulation" (28). This example suggests that everyday objects have power, not in the form of intentional agency, which is limited to humans (Knappett and Malafouris ix), but, as the following will explain, if we understand them as part of an intra-action.

Chen demonstrates in *Animacies* (2012) that we attribute the most agency to things with the most animacy. Therefore, humans—in particular white men—are at the top of this hierarchy, followed by nonhuman animals, inanimate objects, and incorporeal things. Accordingly, everyday technology would possess less agency than a human. However, what the example of the school children shows is that humans have limited power over these things. The loss of electricity in the text robs humans of their control of machines and it highlights just how strongly people rely on amenities, such as airplane travel or air-conditioning. Most of the adults in the novel are unable to explain how these technologies work, let alone reproduce them, placing the machines beyond human control.

Post-apocalyptic fiction highlights the need of "[c]onceptualizing agency as variously distributed and possessed in relational networks of persons and things" (Knappett and Malafouris xi), because the loss of electricity and modes of production demonstrate that humans alone cannot produce certain effects, neither can the machine without human input. When the electricity comes back on at the end of *Station Eleven*, it is likewise framed in the context of human relations. Clark shows Kirsten the lights of another town and "[catches] the excitement in her voice. She [i]s beside herself with impatience to see the far southern town with the electrical grid" (331). At the same time that Kirsten sees the lights (and in the same short chapter), Jeevan is completely unaware of the return of electricity; he bakes bread for his family, interacts with his son, and generally “rarely thinks of his old life anymore” (313). Clark’s own pondering of the lights evokes Miranda’s magical experience with the ships off the Malaysian coast, as he imagines “the possibility . . . the thought of ships moving over the water, towards another world just out of sight” (333). It is “the possibility” and “the curiosity” that frame his consideration of electricity and—through his contextualization of Miranda’s experience with the ships (331)[9]—it appears as something that can enchant again. Not something mundane or background noise, but something that might drive “curiosity” and also rekindle global relationships as sailors set out to discover “whatever became of the countries on the other side” (333).

In contrast to *The Road*, *Station Eleven* is not a world filled with dead objects.[10] Instead, the objects in Clark’s museum highlight the coalescence of human and machine existence. Clark urges the reader:

> Consider the snow globe. Consider the mind that invented those miniature storms, the factory worker who turned sheets of plastic into white flakes of snow, the hand that drew the plan for the miniature Severn City with its church steeple and city hall, the assembly-line worker who watched the globe glide past on a conveyor belt somewhere in China. Consider the white gloves on the hands of the woman who inserted the snow globes into boxes, to be packed into larger boxes, crates, shipping containers. Consider the card games played belowdecks in the evenings on the ship carrying the containers across the ocean, a hand stubbing out a cigarette in an overflowing ashtray, a haze of blue smoke in dim light, the cadences of a half dozen languages united by common profanities, the sailors’ dreams of land and women, these men for whom the ocean was a grey-line horizon to be traversed in ships the size of overturned skyscrapers. Consider the signature

> on the shipping manifest when the ship reached port, a signature unlike any other on earth, the coffee cup in the hand of the driver delivering the boxes to the distribution centre, the secret hopes of the UPS man carrying boxes of snow globes from there to the Severn City Airport. (St. John Mandel 255)

This lengthy excerpt demonstrates two things: 1) that the snow globe already has had a life before it ever became the possession of a consumer, 2) that the long chain of production and logistics, of which the snow globe is a part, is never devoid of human influence. The existence of the snow globe is intertwined with that of all the people it encounters along its life, emphasizing the human life that is still a quintessential part of the modern, mechanized mass-production process. Jeevan comes to a similar realization during his travels, stating, "We bemoaned the impersonality of the modern world, but that was a lie . . . it had never been impersonal at all. There had always been a massive delicate infrastructure of people, all of them working unnoticed around us, and when people stop going to work, the entire operation grinds to a halt" (178). The world of *Station Eleven* is therefore not one full of dead objects but one devoid of most of the human population, reinforcing the argument that humans and objects are part of the same network.

Another example of this network—or the ways in which an apparatus and a phenomenon are never discreet entities existing prior to their intra-action—is brought up by Jeevan when he first sets out into the post-Georgia Flu world. The snow that he is using to keep himself hydrated brings up memories of making snow ice cream with his brother when they were little. Remembering his brother, Frank, standing "on his wondrously pre-Libya legs" in that memory brings forth an interconnected rhizome of things:

> the bullet that would sever his [brother's] spinal cord still twenty-five years away but already approaching: a woman giving birth to a child who will someday pull the trigger on a gun, a designer sketching the weapon or its precursor, a dictator making a decision that will spark in the fullness of time into the conflagration that Frank will go overseas to cover for Reuters, the pieces of a pattern drifting closer together." (St. John Mandel 191)

None of these things ever physically collide—except for the bullet and the spinal cord—and yet they are intricately connected, one thing dependent on all the others.

This returns us to the topic of those objects that are important cornerstones of the narrative itself in *Station Eleven*, such as the comic book but especially the paperweight. The various characters of the world of *Station Eleven* are all in one way or another connected to the actor Arthur Leander, who died on stage on the evening of the onset of the apocalyptic pandemic. Some of the people we encounter, such as Jeevan or Kirsten, were actually in the theatre at the time and interacted with Arthur. Others, such as Clark, Arthur's oldest friend, or Miranda, Arthur's first wife, were in a different part of the world but are connected to everyone else through their shared relationship with the dead actor, which is revealed through their stories and memories.

People connect people; we see this acted out again when Kirsten and the other members of her travelling theatre group decide to abandon their regular route in order to follow the traces of two previous group members. Tracking their missing friends leads them to Clark's airport museum and thereby connects Kirsten to Clark—at the same time as the paperweight does. What I will now trace is the life of the paperweight, which also journeys through the chapters of the novel and, as it does so, it connects the different characters through a web of relationships. The narrative, then, is created through an intra-action that contains the paperweight as well as the comic books, and the various people that come into contact with either of them.

In Barad's ontoepistemology, the paperweight and the characters that intra-act with it would all be part of the apparatus—but it also includes the various social encounters that affect the journey of the paperweight, such as the awkward dinner party at which Miranda finds out that Arthur is cheating on her (98), or Arthur's death which prompts his newest love-affair, the child-minder at the theatre, to give the paperweight to Kirsten, one of her charges (15). It would also include Clark's profession, which enabled him to travel to Rome to buy the paperweight in the first place (93), and so on. The phenomenon produced by this apparatus, is then the novel itself with its distinct chapters and changes of point-of-view.[11] Let us now follow, how this particular rhizome of interconnections creates the narrative structure of the novel itself.

As the novel progresses, the episodes move further and further back through Arthur's life; not so coincidentally, the itinerary of the paperweight is thereby followed as well. It becomes part of a network of relations, not just between people—as it moves from the hands of one character to another—but also between narratives. The story begins with the end of Arthur's life and Kirsten's possession of the paperweight. However, as we go backwards, we learn how the paperweight came into Kirsten's life. The caretaker of the children at the theatre gave it to Kirsten; that woman also happened to be Arthur's newest love affair, and she received the paperweight from him. Arthur had been given the paperweight only shortly before by his first ex-wife, Miranda, who visits him prior to his final performance. She had taken the paperweight with her on the night of their breakup, when Clark had brought it with him as a souvenir "from a museum gift shop in Rome" to Miranda's and Arthur's anniversary dinner party (St. John Mandel 93). As the narrative moves backward in time, Kirsten's journey continues onward to unchartered territory that eventually brings her to the Museum of Civilization. At that point, the narrative also comes full circle as it recounts the last few weeks in Arthur's life, leading up to just moments before his death on the final few pages of the novel.

The comic books of *Dr. Eleven* are similar in their power to create the narrative of the novel to the paperweight. However, while the paperweight connects people, the comic books create events that move the plot along. Both items—the paperweight, as well as the comics—demonstrate the liveliness of matter by directly inspiring and influencing the behaviour of certain characters. The books were created by Miranda in a long and very personal process. Arthur encourages her to publish them, but Miranda herself is unsure why she is creating them in the first place (St. John Mandel 94-95). While drawing, Miranda realizes that her well-known surroundings have inspired her. In the process of depicting Dr. Eleven's office on his space station, she notices that the office is a direct copy of her boss' office. It was not an intentional modelling, but when she is drawing amid having a relationship argument via text message, the familiar surroundings of her boss' office "convey the serenity of this place where she spends her most pleasant hours, the refinement of it" to the fictional world of her comic (St. John Mandel 87).

In similar fashion, St. John Mandel drew some of her inspiration for scenes in the novel from the world around her. In the acknowledgment section at the back of her novel, she refers to an article on a fleet of ghost ships off the coast of Malaysia that inspired her to write the scene about Miranda watching the ships from a beach in Malaysia (334). There are more acknowledgments—inspiration that came from popular culture, such as *Star Trek*; or high culture, such as an actual *King Lear* production that had been staged in Toronto; as well as from other books, such as Justin Cronin's vampire trilogy *The Passage* (334). I am briefly moving outside the world of the novel here to again illustrate that the relation between an engagement with objects or the outside world and the human counterpart promotes further webs of relations. Through the intra-action of St. John Mandel and the cultural products she encountered, a creative process was started that in turn led to another object with which again other people, the novel's readers, interact. St John Mandel used inspiration from the external world—items or landscapes outside her own imagination—and so does Miranda on the level of the plot when she is creating her own work of fiction. In addition, one set of finished copies of Miranda's comics inspires yet another character to create his own religious system and interpretation of the post-apocalypse world.

Through Arthur, one set of Miranda's comic books ends up with his second ex-wife and their son. Both survive the pandemic and the son grows up with fervent readings of the Bible and of Miranda's comics as only source of entertainment once the batteries of his Gameboy die (St. John Mandel 254). As an adult, he arrives in the town of St. Deborah by the Water where he creates a religious sect. His cult imposes strict laws on all residents and only permits the practice of his own worldview—which is based on a mixture of the biblical scriptures and the events of the comics. His extremist views lead two of the residents—the former members of Kirsten's theatre troupe—to flee the city and eventually make a new home in the Severn City Airport. It is the encounter with this prophet and the knowledge that Kirsten's friends must have escaped that changes the travelling theatre's itinerary for the first time in years (St. John Mandel 66, 114). Arriving at the airport—where they are indeed reunited with their friends—and learning of the museum leads Kirsten to part with one of the two comic books in her possession. She gives them to Clark to display in his collection along with all other artifacts from the before. While Kirsten, the prophet, and Clark never realize that they share a personal connection through Arthur

Leander, the narrative creates this web of relationships through the characters' intra-action with the paperweight and the comic books. These items provide the framework or—to also enmesh them metaphorically with the structure of the novel—ligaments that keep the different chapters of the novel, and thereby the characters, linked.

One other object deserves mention for, while it does not possess the same significance as the other two, it performs the meaningful task of taking the place of the human involved. Throughout his life, Arthur writes letters to an old childhood friend called Victoria, whom he addresses, "Dear V." These letters are interspersed throughout the novel, yet no character—least of all the recipient—performs the action of receiving or reading them. We later learn that they have been published by Victoria to make money (St. John Mandel 210), and it can therefore be assumed that the reader is simply stumbling upon excerpts from this book. It is also possible, though never mentioned, that Kirsten herself reads the published version, as she was only allowed to bring one book when she originally set out on the road after the apocalypse and she chose "*Dear V.* because her mother had told her she wasn't allowed to read it" (153). These letters also fill gaps in the narration and provide a look inside of Arthur's mind.[12]

Furthermore, the actor himself admits that he mostly used his friend "as a repository for [his] thoughts" and that he "stopped thinking of her as a human being reading a letter" (St. John Mandel 211). The letters actively perform this loss of human agency in the novel: the person receiving the letters, reading them, and reacting to them is omitted—except for a few occasions, such as when Miranda finds the fragment of a letter in chapter fifteen (104). Mostly, though, they appear without human agents to interact with them; chapter twenty-five, for example, consists entirely of a collection of these letters after the first line states, "A few of the letters" (St. John Mandel 153). What remains are therefore mostly the letters themselves, presented with the same lack of introduction or response in which they appear in V.'s publication. The person V. becomes a repository and the letters function without the human mediator, who might create a context for them and put them into the character portray of Arthur that is assembled through the different narrative strands—and objects—in *Station Eleven*.

The inseparability of the self and the objects it interacts with can also be found in the memory objects that Kirsten seeks out and collects. Memory is often figuratively compared to an archive or museum in popular culture,[13] which suggests a static location to which things are added in an orderly fashion, such as a catalogue. Calling upon a memory—so the image of an archive further implies—depends on accessing the storage of that specific event and bringing it to the forefront. According to the metaphor of memory as an archive, memories are stored in the brain in specific places until they need to be retrieved. However, neuroscience tells us that this is not only an inaccurate but also an incorrect representation of memory, which is "an ongoing process of memory (re)construction" in which "the deposits themselves are *agents*" (Dijck 360, emphasis in the original). The father in *The Road* emphasizes memory's performative nature and that memories do not represent the accuracy of the event recalled when he muses, ". . . each memory recalled must do some violence to its origins. As in a party game. Say the word and pass it on. So be sparing. What you alter in the remembered has yet a reality, known or not" (McCarthy 131). In the game that the father refers to, the meaning of what is originally said inevitably changes as the word passes from one person to the next, suggesting that memory changes as well with every retrieval and that it might misrepresent the original event.

Being interconnected with the objects around oneself not only furthers one's understanding of the ways in which the human is always enmeshed in a rhizome of networks that includes human as well as nonhuman entities. This interconnection is also of interest with regard to the notion that disembodiment represents the future—an idea that our digital age seems to make all the more plausible because so many objects nowadays appear intangible. However, the assumption that we can leave our bodies behind is based on the false presumption that digitization is a form of dematerialization. As José van Dijck lays out in her article on memory studies,[14] due to its intangibility, data is often perceived as immaterial; however, this understanding "is as erroneous as the idea of analogue mediated objects' [sic] being static reminders of past experience" (369). She argues that the "coded layer of digital data is an additional type of materiality" and just as our old photographs yellow and the ink in our diaries becomes illegible, "this new type of materiality is equally vulnerable to decay" because not only is data dependent on corresponding software and hardware, files themselves degrade and can become unreadable (370). Understanding matter as lively not only minimizes the gap between subjects and objects, it further heightens "the shared materiality of all things" (J. Bennett, *Vibrant* 13), which becomes the guiding concept in chapter three.

Following the materiality of our identities enmeshed in the high-tech world of data will be the focus of the next chapter. Lissa Price's novels *Starters* (2012) and *Enders* (2012) and Julianna Baggott's *Pure* trilogy (2012-2014) imagine a future of advanced technology that eclipses our present means, but that we can already find in current research. Among the achievements envisioned by these novels are the attempts of extending life indefinitely, creating and sustaining life in a hermetically-sealed ecosphere in the case of a nuclear disaster, as well as the transfer of human consciousness between bodies—again a form of prolonging life beyond the biological death of the body. In addition to *Pure,* Benjamin Percy's *The Dead Lands* (2015) further allows an examination of the future as a state of becoming, as humans mutate—respectively illustrating the inextricably link between humans and their environment—and thereby end up becoming humanity’s best chance at survival. Examining the body enmeshed with technology as well as with the external world in these novels makes visible that “[w]e are vital materiality and we are surrounded by it,” even though we do not often acknowledge that our bodies are already organically made up of countless microorganisms and bacteria (J. Bennett, *Vibrant* 14).

> "We know you are here, our brothers and sisters. We will, one day, emerge from the Dome to join you in peace. For now, we watch from afar, benevolently."
>
> —*Pure*[1]

CHAPTER 3: Becoming Human—Posthuman Futures

Human materiality, its relevance for (cultural) survivance and its entanglement with objects, has been explored in the two previous chapters. The novels I have considered so far present worlds in which the technological infrastructure has crumbled after the apocalypse, transporting survivors into an age before electricity. However, apocalyptic worlds of exceedingly advanced technological means contrast these types of narratives within the post-apocalyptic setting. The cyborg often represents the future of humanity in these narratives, and it can take a variety of different forms: Julianna Baggott's *Pure* trilogy features bioengineering and surgical enhancements, Benjamin Percy's *The Dead Lands* engages the possibility of mutants with supernatural abilities, while Rick Yancey's *The 5th Wave* series (2013-2016) imagines a body powered by nanotechnology. What role does the body and its corporeality—that is, "the material self [which] cannot be disentangled from networks that are simultaneously economic, political, cultural, scientific and substantial" (Alaimo, *Bodily Natures* 20)—play in a future where the bodily limits can be transcended, where information and materiality are conceived as two separate entities, thereby creating "a hierarchy in which "information is given the dominant position" while embodiment is "a supplement to be purged" (Hayles 12)?

What these post-apocalyptic narratives achieve is a rendering of Alaimo's "trans-corporeality"—the ways in which "the human is inextricably intermeshed with the more-than-human world" and "the extent to which the substance of the human is ultimately inseparable from 'the environment'" (*Bodily Natures* 2). Understanding people and the environment—or nature and culture—as inseparable from each other facilitates ethical frameworks that recognize the value of nonhuman life. The post-apocalyptic narratives collected in this study all demonstrate the enmeshment of humans and the nonhuman world. It is the apparatus and the phenomenon together that create "wholes whose properties emerge from the interactions between parts" (de Landa 5) or what Deleuze defines as an assemblage, namely "a multiplicity which is made up of heterogeneous terms and which establishes liaisons, relations between [them]" (69). These relations—this intra-action—between substances, organisms, and bodies underlie Alaimo's concept of trans-corporeality. This chapter will both unpack the strategies with which these recent post-apocalyptic novels reveal human corporeality as trans-corporeality, while also attending to its ethical potential of dissolving hierarchies.

The novels that I examine in this chapter connect the post-apocalyptic and the posthuman by thinking through a continuum of current environmentally exploitative practices. Some post-apocalyptic fiction pushes these practices to its logical conclusion: A world at the brink of extinction.[2] Note, too, that this threat is brought about by various forces in these narratives—such as environmental changes that no longer sustain life—but also human actions—such as the nuclear detonations that precede the events of *The Road* or the superflu that escapes a laboratory in *Station Eleven*. Yet, by focusing precisely on the end of the world, post-apocalyptic narratives usher in a posthuman ethic by demonstrating a need for ethical models that are based on a definition of the human that accounts for its networked or relational qualities, namely that the human is part of an intricate and infinite phenomenon comprising of millions of bacteria (cf. Jane Bennett), environmental toxins (cf. Alaimo), and a whole host of other nonhuman actors (cf. Westling).

The cyborg is one of the posthuman elements that can both draw attention to bodily boundaries or blur them. For example, in Yancey's *The 5th Wave*, people are altered through a virus called the 12th System that works much like a severe fever would. Through the injection, nano-bots are embedded into the body, existing enmeshed with the bones, sinews, and muscles, going wherever they are needed. Once enhanced this way, the modified human functions with the accuracy and speed of a computer. Deciding that she needs to get past an armed guard, Marika describes the process like this: "The 12th System locks in on [the gun] and thousands of microscopic droids go to work augmenting the muscles, tendons, and nerves in my hands, eyes, and brain to neutralize the threat. In a microsecond, objective identified, information processed, method determined" (Yancey, *The Infinite Sea* 247). The cyborg might therefore appear as an overall superior version—or the future of—the human in these texts.

Oftentimes, these techno-futures offer a meditation on the role that technology plays for survival which—at first glance—might appear to suggest a certain redundancy of the biological body. They seem to suggest that the body is what limits human experience and keeps people mortal. Yet, examining the cyborg further reveals attachments to our corporeality and bodily entanglements with the material world as well as concerns regarding technological advances. In addition, the cyborg reveals hierarchies that often underlie discourses of biomedical or technological progress.[3] These hierarchies, I would add, draw attention to the fact that bodily transcendence is unlikely to achieve equality among humans. I am referring to a concept that underlies transhumanism,[4] which takes the humanist notion of a shared human essence into the advanced technological age and promotes bodily transcendence through technological or other means as the next step to equality. Race and sex are left behind and all that remains is that supposed shared essence. However, in this thinking, transhumanism fails to account for all of the people who have been denied human status at various points in history—and even beyond their exclusion: people whose lives function as “an insurrection at the level of ontology” (Butler 33). Humans whose bodily life has been or is being negated, who “suffer[] the violence of derealization” which makes them “neither alive nor dead, but interminably spectral” and therefore an inexhaustible object of violence (33).[5] The prevalence of the cyborgean human across these texts reminds us of Booker’s assessment that dystopias are “one of the most revealing indexes to the anxieties of our age” (4)—and that the future of the human embodies one of these anxieties.

Referred to as posthumanism, the result of technological modifications and bioengineering, “have put into crisis the boundaries among human, animal, and machine” (Vint, *Bodies* 8). The intersection between the human, the animal, and the machine can be understood as “a general critical space in which . . . the categories of the ‘human’ and ‘nonhuman’ can be investigated” (Waldby 43). The preoccupation with this intersection—with the posthuman—can be found in the twenty-first century’s novel renewed interest in the material body and “the bonds between interiority and rapidly transforming bodily and material forms in which mental processes find extension” (Boxall 11). In the case of the novels presented here, they all explore a human enmeshed with the environment—often in very visible forms, such as fusings between the human body and other life forms or objects or through radioactive mutations. Thus affected, these novels present a “subject who is ‘situated’ in a more material manner, as the very substances of the world cross through her, provoking an onto-epistemology that reckons, in its most quintessential moments, with the self as the very stuff of the emergent world” (Alaimo, *Exposed* 8). These novels invite therefore an examination of “a materiality that is never merely an external, blank, or inert space but the active, emergent substance of ourselves and others" (178).

3.1. The Posthuman

The debate within bioengineering, stem cell research, and other fields that focus on modifications of the human body around the definition of "the human" in the twenty-first century—what alterations or interventions should or should not be allowed—is often fraught with anxiety stemming from a need to differentiate: what makes a machine a machine? What makes a human human? The cyborg blurs the boundaries and it can raise questions about which side is in control; for example, when we return to Marika's experience in Yancey's novel: "My body is numb. My mind is empty. I've completely surrendered to the 12th System. It isn't part of me anymore. The 12th System is me. We are one" (*The Infinite Sea* 271). Is the 12th System taking over the human part if she is "surrender[ing]" to it? Or do her last two sentences indicate that a distinction between her organism and the technology of the 12th System is not possible? The takeover by alien technology or the complete merging with it, making the human part indistinguishable, is not a surprising move for this genre. YA fiction, but also dystopias more broadly, are considered to be generally anti-technology, to portray machines as threatening rather than enabling (Flanagan 2, Mohr 30). However, Victoria Flanagan examines the intersection between the human and the machine in recent YA fiction, and comes to the conclusion that these fictions not only use technology in the form of robotics, cybernetics, or digital surveillance to interrogate the meaning of the human, but to question and critique humanist models of the self (186).

A similar shift can be observed across Yancey's trilogy. The very technology that is used in the first novel to eliminate the remaining human survivors, becomes the means to save everyone as the story progresses. One of the ways in which humans are hunted down in *The 5th Wave* is by making some human survivors belief others are infected by an alien virus. A screen shows people the supposedly affected area of the brain, demonstrating that the person attached to the screen has been infected:

> She [the doctor] presses a button and zooms in on the front part of Chris's brain. The pukish color intensifies, glowing neon bright. . . She zooms in tight on an area no larger than the head of a pin, and then I see it. My stomach does a slow roll. Embedded in the soft tissue is a pulsing egg-shaped growth, anchored by thousands of rootlike tendrils fanning out in all directions, digging into every crease and crevice of his brain. (*The 5th Wave*, 122)

Based on this evidence, people are then asked to push "the button. It has a label: EXECUTE" (122)—because the doctor reminds everyone, "You're not killing Chris. You're destroying the thing inside him that would kill you" (123). As is slowly revealed throughout the novel, though, the evidence is fake. It is in fact regular human survivors that are being sorted out this way and killed.

Yet, in *The Last Star* (2016), the last book of the series, the very computer setup that had been used to eliminate survivors becomes the tool for Cassie, the protagonist, to fight back against the alien invaders because it has mapped every human that ever got strapped to it and "there are thousands of them" (Yancey 286). In downloading all of these people, Cassie becomes a kaleidoscope of humanity or—as the title of chapter ninety-eight calls her—"The Seven Billion Billion" (304). Written in the first-person plural, chapter ninety-eight recounts who Cassie is and who by extension all of humanity is: "WE ARE HUMANITY. We are one. We are the girl with the broken back . . . We are the prisoners aboard the Black Hawk . . . We are the lost ones, the solitary ones, the ones who did not board those buses . . . We are the lonely hunters designed by our makers to drive survivors onto the buses . . . (304-305). It is the sum of all people that enables Cassie to take out the mothership—and it is only through the same technology that appeared to infiltrate humanity in the beginning that Cassie can become all of humanity.

Even Marika's relationship with the 12th System appears more complex in the last novel: "I don't serve the 12th System. The 12th System serves me. Unless it decides that it won't. The hub pulls the plug on the drones that enhance my muscles: If it can't stop me, at least it can slow me down. My speed drops. Abandoned, I'm running like an ordinary human. I feel chained and unbound at the same time" (292). The 12th System is now more than an alien technology that might have taken over her body and to which she has to "surrender" (*The Infinite Sea* 271). Neither one serves the other; instead, the intra-action between Marika and the 12th System has created a new being—"The 12th System is us and we are the 12th System" (*The Last Star* 305). This new being invites a meditation on what the human relation to its technological component is, which is the reason I am examining posthuman forms of the human in post-apocalyptic narratives.

My interest in posthuman representations in post-apocalyptic fiction stems from its productive potential for imagining social change. The Anthropocene requires us to acknowledge that "Man" is not the measure of all things anymore;[6] acknowledging this displacement in turn demands that we "devise new social, ethical and discursive schemes of subject formation to match [this] profound transformation" (Braidotti, *The Posthuman* 12). The post-apocalyptic novel presents a space to imagine what some of these necessary changes might entail. As Mary

Manjikian points out, post-apocalyptic fiction can enable the reader to imagine a radically different world, thereby opening up our imagination for new social and ethical formations (291). In themselves, the narratives offer ideas about the kind of changes that would interrupt the apocalypse. They present theories, which I unpack here. The texts I have selected offer a progression of sorts—ranging from establishing the need for embodiment on an individual level to the link between bodily specificity and the system of slavery—-which allows me to demonstrate several key points about the human-machine-animal intersection.

In short, Lissa Price's duology *Starters* and *Enders* assumes a world in which the human mind—which equals a person's essence or subjectivity in the novel—can be transferred between people. It is this premise as well as what is rewarded and what is punished within the narrative that enables me to unpack why the biological body cannot merely be left in the dust by the people who opt for transcendence when the mind is separated in Price's novels. *Pure*, Julianna Baggott's trilogy, in contrast, presents a future in which some humans have been fused to their surroundings—random objects or even living animals or other humans—while others have managed to remain "pure." These Pures live in almost normal conditions, with modern amenities and protection from the elements, while the fused ones have to fight for their daily survival under brutal conditions. Mutations similar to those in *Pure* are likewise a focal point of Benjamin Percy's *The Dead Lands*. In Percy's narrative, however, they are interwoven with America's founding narrative—the westward expansion along the Oregon trail—providing a space to critically think about the ramifications of a potential future "super" race. Both texts envision a future that favours humanity in a state of mutation, where it is the interchange between the environment and the human body that supports survival, while purity or an attachment to a quintessential idea of humanity endangers the survival of the human race—or, at best, does not advance it.

All of the texts in this chapter present posthuman futures. As a brief repeat of my earlier explanation, posthumanism is a field in which critical debates about definitions of the human take place. Posthumanism is often conceived as a state of transcendence, in which our bodies become increasingly irrelevant (Kroker xiii).[7] Bradford et al. likewise define posthumanism as favouring the immaterial, stating that it is "the erasure of embodiment and concomitant privileging of cognition, which gives the posthuman its specifically *posthumanist* turn" (158, emphasis in the original). Although Bradford et al. clearly delineate posthumanism from humanism, others disagree with this linear progression. In *The Posthuman* (2013), Rosi Braidotti highlights the importance of anti-humanism for posthuman thinking, but furthermore understands posthumanism as a marker for "the end of the opposition between Humanism and anti-humanism," and instead as a movement "looking more affirmatively towards new alternatives" (25, 37).[8] Furthermore, Braidotti endorses a form of embodied posthumanism which cautions against definitions of the human that do not take bodily specificity into account. Cary Wolfe, to distinguish between the two movements, terms the former one "transhumanism" and the latter one "posthumanism" (xv).

Scholars working in the field of embodied posthumanism at the junction of new materialism, such as Sherryl Vint, Stacy Alaimo, or Rosi Braidotti, urge us not to neglect the body when it comes to defining the posthuman, so as not to build on liberal humanism's "tendency toward false universalism, abstraction from body, and distanced relation to nature" (Vint, *Bodies* 13). This universalism is predicated on the Cartesian dualism of mind and body and assumes that our subjectivity is rooted in our minds, "which historically has meant" that this "human sameness" or "'essence'" is, in fact, "male, white, and propertied" (11-12). However, this argument neglects all those groups who have been denied human status at one point or another, such as women, slaves, or non-white people, and omits that Enlightenment humanism also rests on "the subject as citizen, rights-holder, property-owner, and so on" (Wolfe qtd. in Braidotti, *The Posthuman* 1), and thereby linking the human subject not only to gender but to class, labour, and ownership.

It is also worth emphasizing that men are traditionally associated with rationality in Western thinking, which is an argument that has been used to disadvantage women and their access to the public sphere. Michèle Le Doeuff's 1998 *The Sex of Knowing* highlights that even at the end of the twentieth century, "the old spectre of an incompatibility between women and knowledge" persists (xiv), knowledge here being science, philosophy, or any other "serious" intellectual labour which would cause women to "lose their identity if not their soul, unless they develop a specifically feminine mode of knowledge" (xiii). If knowledge is treated as gendered, a favouring of the mind might risk an implicit superiority of men over women, as women—according to the knowledge-myth—do not possess the same ability for rationality or reason.

My conceptualization of posthumanism aligns with that of Braidotti and Wolfe in that it rejects the goal of humanist transcendence or transhumanism; it is an embodied posthumanism that I seek to explore in the post-apocalyptic narratives collected here. Arguing for an embodied or material posthumanism is not a technophobic gesture, as it is neither about the return to a "natural" body nor a denial of the massive impact that information technology has on our understanding of selfhood. Rather, it is an ethical and feminist commitment since "[w]hat is at stake, supremely, in the debate about the implications of digital, genetic, cybernetic and biomedical technologies is precisely what (and who) will define authoritative notions of normative, exemplary, desirable humanity into [sic] the twenty-first century" (Graham 11).

As my following close reading of Lissa Price's *Starters* and *Enders* will show, understanding the mind as able to transcend the body creates two classes of people—those who can afford to treat their body as a mere vessel and those who cannot. However, assuming everyone's human quality lies exclusively in a mental process that everyone possesses, i.e., the mind or the ability to think, obscures the lived inequality that people experience, which drives my examination of posthuman elements in post-apocalyptic fiction more generally. This inequality is also emphasized by technological enhancement in these novels. While technology could theoretically be used to lessen the disparity between people, the novels under examination indicate that the opposite is true: technological enhancement is only available to some people—such as wealthier groups in *Starters* or men in *Pure*—thereby further reinforcing systemic inequalities.

3.2. The Transcendental Mind: Lissa Price's *Starters* and *Enders*

At the start of Lissa Price's novel *Starters*, a war that resulted in the use of biochemical weapons has left only the people below twenty, called Starters, and those above sixty, called Enders, alive, and medicine is so advanced that the lifespan can easily be prolonged to two hundred years. Yet, this is not the same as staying young longer. For that reason, rich Enders "rent" the body of a Starter to use their body for a day, a week, or even a month. They choose a Starter based on their capabilities, as the body—so it is told—retains the muscle memory of the host. Being in a young body, Enders can now enjoy horse-riding, fencing, or even extreme sports. The Ender's body remains asleep while their brain is synchronized with a chip in the

Starter's brain, whose "being" is also put to sleep, leaving room for the Ender's subjectivity to use the body to do whatever they like. Moving in the new body works pretty much like moving in one's own: just thinking about doing things propels the body into action.

Within the novel, the mind is a separate entity from the body that can be transferred at will. During a rental, the Ender's mind is transferred into a Starter to enable the Ender to take control of the young body. However, when the chip in the protagonist's brain—a Starter named Callie—is altered, she retains control over her body—and ends up sharing it with the mind of the Ender who is renting it. The renter cannot interfere with the protagonist's control of the body, but can feel, see, and hear everything that the donor experiences. The renter makes the equation of the self with the brain even more explicit, saying that she and the donor are "two brains in one body" (Price, *Starters* 182). Subjectivity and personality are supposedly completely detached from the physical body. While renting a body, the Enders feel like themselves, just younger—as young as their renter's body: "When I did my first rental, and I was in that young body, I felt like I was home again. More like myself, the way I used to be, healthy and fit and spry," one of the Enders explains (209). Not even new sports cause much of a reflection on the part of the renter. From parasailing (76), to a form of bungee-jumping (117), the renters try everything with nary a thought because "at least it's not [their] body" (117).[9] The body is only a "shell" (*Enders* 86) to use the words of the male character Hyden. To him, the self is different from the physical body; what he thinks, believes, and feels comprises who he is (86).

It is curious in the novel that feeling should be associated with the mind rather than the body. Hyden was traumatized by severe burning and since then experiences pain whenever someone touches him. He explains it as a "disconnect in [his] brain. [His] brain perceives pain when [he's] touched" (Price, *Enders* 79). What this neglects to take into account is the fact that it is still his body—the sensory capacities of his skin—that cause the sensation of pain and transfer this knowledge to the brain. Recent research in neuroscience further elaborates that our bodies play a vital part in our brain activities. One such example is Anna Taylor, who sums up her collaborative research in a recent interview, explaining that her latest experiments show that gut bacteria "make neurotransmitters, which bind to our receptors and activate regions in our brain" (Purvis).[10] In that sense, yes, our brains transmit certain responses—but their creation or the process of transmitting them is an intra-action between something as "feeling-oriented" as one's gut.[11] Furthermore, through the novel's concept of renting, *Starters* explores the web of connections between experiences and a mediating body. In the novel, the renter can experience skills that the donor possesses; they could, for example, play a sport with which they are unfamiliar, but that their donor excels at, with their same level of skill. A related technology might be VR (Virtual Reality) games, where the accompanying goggles allow for the experience of a roller coaster, for example, while the actual body is safely ensconced in one's living room.

Starters realizes this experience through Callie's narration and the gaps that open up between the events she has knowledge of and the ones she does not because her renter was in control at that time. As Justice points out, narration is a powerful tool not just for making sense of the world but for understanding what it means to be human—even when the context, such as the specific technological means, vary and therefore "the specificities of each of our experiential worlds is different" (34). The narrative fashions a protagonist and it is the plot that acts as a mediator "between permanence and change" of this protagonist's narrative identity (Ricœur 77). The mediation, in turn, allows for the drawing of ethical conclusions as the protagonist's behaviour is placed in the context of the plot. In *Starters*, having rented out one's body comes with unanticipated side effects for the Starter Callie, such as being assaulted by memories of the renter at random times. Instead of merely seeing the memory, however, the donor actually experiences the feelings that accompanied that moment, highlighting again that—within *Starters*—the body and the brain are not as separable as they seem. In addition, as my discussion of the memory process in chapter two has drawn out, the creation of memories is always interrelated with bodily processes—*Starters* emphasizes this by making the memories inseparable from their bodily relation, so that Callie experiences the feelings associated with the memories that were made while the donor used her body even though her brain had technically been asleep at the point of their creation.[12] And the persistence of this connection is made evident whenever the topic of death is brought up in the novel. When the Ender renting Callie's body plans on using her to assassinate someone, another Ender points out that the Starter-donor will be shot if she is caught killing someone, and Callie realizes, "That's me! . . . My body! Me!" (Price, *Starters* 125).

The dependence on one's own body becomes even more emphasized when we learn that the ultimate goal of the rental organization is to provide Enders with Starter bodies for sale, to be used for permanent occupancy (207). The donor's personality will be permanently put to sleep and the Ender will be able to stay in the donor's body forever. Forever comes with a catch, though, in that the exchange is not a physical swap or move into the donor. It is still only a synchronization, dependent on two bodies and two functioning brains. What this means is that the renter can only occupy the newly bought body until their own physical body, the one that is old, dies. In this way, the novel remains implicitly attached to the importance of one's own material body. At the same time, Callie's experience as a donor reveals that the body is part of an intricate network. With Callie's renter occupying her body, it fulfills the renter's desires—such as killing someone in revenge (Price 152). Yet, when Callie comes back to her own body to find herself holding a gun, she reacts with fear and revulsion (149). However, when the connection between the donor and the renter is tinkered with (151), it enables Callie to talk to her renter. With both of them being in the same body, Callie forms a relationship with her renter, which in turn influences Callie's actions from then on. Callie's identity is in flux, multiple rather than singular, as it changes in response to her experiences—which are also the experiences, or based on the experiences, of her renter.

The ending of *Starters* reinforces the importance of living in one's own body and everything that entails. At the close of the novel, the organization is shut down and the renters return to their original bodies and the donors are freed. The protagonist Callie returns to her own identity and enables a return of all other renters into their original bodies, which is ultimately rewarded by having her inherit the estate of the renter who occupied her body and who dies at the climax of the novel. Living in one's own skin and accepting that one's body, too, is who one is thereby becomes the conclusion promoted by this happy ending.

On the level of plot, the sequel *Enders* is even more overt about the importance of the material body. The creator of those chips and the one interested in selling the technology behind the so-called transpositions, or body rentals, to the highest bidder, is still on the loose at the end of *Starters*. In *Enders*, it is divulged that the chip implant cannot be removed without causing it to explode and that the necessary hardware exists to detonate the chips manually via remote access. The technology presents the danger, but it is only through the separation of the mind and the body and the mind's ability to be transferred that the body—and thereby the actual life of all donors—is put into jeopardy. One Starter dies in such a remote-access detonation and Callie is supposed to be sold to the highest bidder with the chip-creator explaining her usefulness thus: "Imagine this. You could have a team inside her body—say, an intelligence expert, a hacker, a bomb specialist all at once. And when they've found their way into the hideout of that terrorist or that ex-employee who has stolen your trade secrets, you personally can enjoy the thrill of being behind her eyes when she takes him out" (Price, *Enders* 253). The pleasure that such a body takeover can afford emphasizes again the need for a physical body with which to experience things as well as for a consciousness to be aware of them.

While I have shown that these narratives focus on the material body and demonstrate its importance for the construction of the self, I will end by illustrating the need for an embodied subjectivity. The fact that Callie can be sold at all also demonstrates an important difference that is mapped onto people's bodies in Price's novel. The body is treated either as a necessity or a frivolity, creating two classes of people: those that depend on their body to provide a livelihood—namely the Starters who rent out their bodies for the money—and those that can switch bodies at will—the rich Enders who can afford to let someone else, in this case the donors, do the work for them, for example in the form of extreme sports or other dangerous activities. Callie's feelings when she becomes a donor illustrates this because the contract makes her "sound like a rental car" (Price, *Starters* 7). The Enders' ease with which they occupy the Starters' bodies is likewise indicative of the Starters' value as people: "Oh, that'll be fun," one of the Enders exclaims when new bodies become available for rent, "I'd love to try Chinese"—making "an entire nationality sound as trivial as a menu item" (207). For the most part, the Enders are unaware that renting Starters is not the same as "picking out a new dress or a car or a house;" it takes Callie pointing out that permanent occupancy by an Ender effectively means stealing someone's life before the implications of what this means for the Starter occurs to the renter (208). The difference between the two groups also resonates with Boxall's observations about the clones in Kazuo Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go* (2005) in that there is a chasm created between those who own a body and who can do whatever they like to it and those that do not fully own their bodies because it is used as a (medical) commodity (102). What these texts highlight by exploring a self that can—in the extreme case of *Starters*—literally transcend the body, is the fact that not everyone can afford to consider their body a shell or a mere vessel and that assuming everyone can divides people into those who can afford to do so and those who cannot.

I want to briefly return to the equation implicit in *Starters* and *Enders* that the voice in one's head is the same as the self by providing another example from *The 5th Wave* series. Yancey's trilogy challenges the concept of a mind-based subjectivity by pointing to the dangers of basing our epistemologies on the voice in our heads through the character of Evan. He is introduced as an alien sleeper agent, explaining, "There was a boy, a real human boy, named Evan Walker . . . Before he was born, I was inserted into him while his mother slept . . . For thirteen years I slept . . . waiting to wake up" (*The 5th Wave* 368). He is part of an alien race that decided the human species needs to be eradicated to save the planet before the aliens could inhabit Earth themselves. This self-understanding determines Evan's actions, such as hunting humans or his feelings of betrayal when he falls in love with the human protagonist. There are thousands of these sleeper agents on Earth with the mission to kill the remaining human survivors.

He clarifies even further that his true self is only what exists in his mind by explaining, "We are pure consciousness. Pure being. Abandoning our bodies and downloading our psyche into the mothership's mainframe was the only way we could make the journey" (369). However, his reliance on what he believes to be true about himself based on his alien memories turns out to be a self-deception with almost catastrophic consequences. In *The Infinite Sea* (2014)*,* and almost four-hundred pages later, we find out that "[t]here are no entities downloaded into human bodies. No alien consciousness inside anyone. . . . It's a . . . program, a delusional construct. Inserted into their minds before they were born . . . it's a lie. They're human. Enhanced . . . but human" (Yancey 282). Believing in the truth of this program, thinking he truly is part of a different species, almost results in humanity's annihilation. What a person thinks they know about themselves may be a delusion, based on certain feedback from the environment (such as, I am faster or stronger than a human; therefore, I have proof of my alien nature). Studies on racism, for example, demonstrate a similar problem in that groups of oppressed people might—through continued exposure to external influences—internalize negative racial stereotypes (Campón and Carter 497-98). Who a person thinks they are is never a unified or completely coherent construct; human identity is fragmented and to a large extent based on its surroundings or external feedback (as studies in psychoanalysis, such as Freud's *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* 3-8, 12-15; trauma theory, for example Cathy Caruth's *Unclaimed Experiences* 3-8, 160-163;or Peter Ricœur's work on narrative identity show).[13]

While Yancey's series emphasizes the dangers of technology and in particular those kinds of technology that blur the boundaries between the human and the machine or the organic and the artificial, it also highlights that what we think of as ourselves—the thoughts and memories in our minds—are a construct and that it can be manipulated. *The 5th Wave* suggests that there is an inherent danger in reducing the self to the mind, and through the 12th System it furthermore demonstrates that human perception of the self is made more complicated by integrating technology into the body. *Pure* and *The Dead Lands* complicate the question of the self even further by blurring the borders of the human body.

3.3. Julianna Baggott’s *Pure*: Mutation or Survival of the Fittest

Similar to *Starters* and *Enders*, Baggott’s *Pure* trilogy pits two groups of people against each other, a dominant and a marginalized one, a setting that the protagonist has to navigate and to end. In *Pure*, technological advancement, modern luxuries, and a perceived superiority marks one of the groups, which is situated in the Dome, an enclosed space with strongly restricted access, while the other side is made up of the poor, the deformed, the savage—those who do not belong anywhere in Dome society. *Pure*—as well as the other texts collected in this chapter—revolves around the question of the greater good, a theme that Sharon Sutherland and Sarah Swan argue is particular dominant in dystopias after 9/11 (231).

While neither *Pure* nor *The Dead Lands* directly comment on the events of 9/11, the terrorist attacks do pose useful for thinking about the threat envisioned in both of these narratives. Giovanna Borradori refers to 9/11 and the rise of global terrorism as the “opening trauma” of the twenty-first century (2), thereby supporting its possible relation to themes in contemporary fiction. Brian Massumi offers another concept for thinking about 9/11 which helps contextualize it specifically with regard to recent post-apocalyptic narratives: it is “not an origin” but rather “a threshold”—“a turning point at which the threatening environment took on an ambient thickness” (60). He identifies 9/11 as “an excess-threat-generating actual event” (60), which is relevant because, as Massumi clarifies, threat does not follow linear time (54). Instead, “[t]hreat is from the future. It is what might come next. Its eventual location and ultimate extent are undefined. Its nature is open-ended” (53).[14] Conceiving of 9/11 as “a threshold” that amplified the threat perception in the Western world presents a less linear procession of events because “[t]he future of threat is forever” (53).[15] In recent post-apocalyptic fiction, too, the threat is more often anchored in social relations rather than in the post-catastrophe landscape: instead of, or in addition to, an outside threat—such as environmental collapse—the threat is imagined as coming from within society itself; it is the breakdown of existing societal structures through the apocalyptic event that lead to uncertainty and fear and therefore provide a canvas for human imagination and threat perception. Even in *The Road*, where the environment undoubtedly poses a challenge for human survival, it is the groups of survivors that practise anthropophagy that present the more dangerous threat. In *Station Eleven*, similarly, the threat to survival predominantly stems from other people once the pandemic has passed. The same is true for *The Marrow Thieves* or *Shadows Cast by Stars* in which the Indigenous populations are in danger from white settler groups.

Pure likewise illustrates this by presenting two groups of people and the threat to survival that they pose to each other. However, *Pure* also brings the landscape back into focus, in that it fuses the marginalized group with the post-apocalyptic landscape. The human survivors outside of the Dome—in which all the Pures live under protected conditions—have been exposed to an experimental form of nuclear attack, effectively fusing them to their immediate surroundings: Handlebars of a bicycle, a window frame, but also living birds, other humans, or parts of the landscape. Pressia, one of the affected survivors and narrators in the novel, states, "the breeds only seem to get more convoluted, a mix of human, animal, earth, objects" (Baggott, *Pure* 25). People and nature become one, thereby destabilizing a clear distinction between human and nonhuman. The nuclear detonations were supposed to get rid of the surplus of humans, but also designed to mesh human DNA with that of their surroundings in order to visibly mark any survivors and to accelerate the healing process of the land (44-45). Focusing on the ways in which the environment and humans mutually affect each other—and are enmeshed with each other—pays attention to "the sort of entanglements that are the very stuff of ethical and political relations" (Alaimo, *Exposed* 183). Perceiving humans and the nonhuman world as inseparably entangled disables narratives of human superiority or detachment from nature, which affects human action with regard to it. *Pure* demonstrates the fatal consequences of the hubris of thinking humanity separate from nature—for humans and nonhumans alike—through its cause of the apocalyptic event, as I will examine in more detail now.

The detonations and their intended effect on the environment can be interpreted as the ultimate result of the Anthropocene, a time in which humanity has the power to directly influence the ecosystem and potentially cause its own extinction. Anthropologist Bruno Latour warns that "[w]e have already crossed a few of the nine 'planetary boundaries' considered by some scientists as the ultimate barrier not to overstep," such as crossing the maximum CO2 limit (1). In *Pure*, this sense of crisis—but also the recognition of humanity's power—leads to the belief that humanity can regain control by "restarting" the world and thereby "regain our rightful place as full participants and re-creators of the natural landscape" (Baggott, *Pure* 37). In destroying everything with the help of nuclear weapons, the people in the Dome believed to create a new beginning. However, humanity has underestimated nature's agency. It has become harder to control by humans; it has been deformed as well and is now "alive—hatefully alive" (*Burn* 123), creating new plants and animals that all display hostile traits, such as sheep with quick tongues, "almost sharp looking, some shining like razors. . . Their eyes rove out of sync and their horns—sometimes too many horns to count, sometimes a row of horns, a spiked ridge down the beast's back—are grotesque" (*Pure* 93). An "attention to wildness[] underscores the unpredictable vitality of nature as itself an anarchic force" (Alaimo, *Exposed* 9). However, Alaimo argues that wildness "needs to be complemented by . . . the interacting or intra-acting material agencies of the objects, substances, and environments, produced by or at least altered by humans" (9). Novels such as *Pure* or *The Dead Lands* present just such a complementary case by imagining bodies that are affected by the environment, which has, in turn, been affected by humans.

By expanding its focus beyond the boundary of the human, *Pure* explores a posthuman future in which the environment—organic as well as manmade—becomes indistinguishably enmeshed with humans. Outside of the Dome in which the unscathed survivors live, and past the gravel fields that mark the end of the human settlement, survivors are faced with the Meltlands, the suburbs in which brightly coloured garden chairs and children's toys have become grotesque structures and humans are preyed on by gangs employing guerrilla-warfare; beyond that the Deadlands await, a place that deserves its name less for its barren-ness than its deadliness as, out there, humans have fused with rocks, sand, and beasts, becoming part of nature but also investing inanimates and animals with agency, allowing the rocks and the dust to express hostility toward humans and to prey and feed on any who venture onto their land.

They are "[c]reatures so fused or burned or scarred that no one can identify them anymore. They've lost something elementally human. And cut off from others, they've become vicious," one of the protagonists explains (Baggott, *Pure* 119). It is ultimately the characters' lack of understanding how deeply intertwined everything and everyone is as well as their attachment to hierarchies that prevents a truly optimistic future at the ending of the novel, which I will turn to later in my examination. I will also return to the implied importance of good relations between humans later with the help of the character El Capitan who is permanently fused to his younger brother Helmud, but the different human voices that make up the narration of the novels already point to some of the important work that is achieved by having groups of survivors rather than lone individuals.

The narration is polyvocal, using several narrators to present the events, which disables any attempts at a coherent grand narrative as the view changes between the two groups and presents both male and female perspectives. Within the posthuman context of *Pure*, this polyvocality supports a form of embodied posthumanism in that it highlights that the posthuman "regeneration of the human is not unilateral or universal, but rather situated, perspectivist, and hence internally fractured and potentially antagonistic" (Braidotti, *Posthuman Knowledge* 38). Carrière sees in polyvocal narration an opportunity for a feminist intervention. Using *MaddAddam* (2013) by Margaret Atwood as an example, she argues that the "ultimately random composition of life stories, rather than a grand narrative of origin and creation" that is presented through various characters "def[ies] the authoritarianism of monolithic history" ("Metafeminism" 239). The continuing shift in narrator from inside of the Dome to outside, from female to male in *Pure* similarly rejects universal truths. While polyvocal narration will be examined in more detail in chapter four, I will briefly highlight the ways in which it affects the posthuman world of Baggott's trilogy.

A posthuman view of the future has the potential to destabilize hierarchies, and *Pure* draws attention to the fragility of these hierarchies in our Anthropocene times. Yet, despite its representation of posthuman characteristics as something liberating, the future presented at the end of *Pure* suggests a continuing of the cycle in which humans attempt to engineer themselves, their surroundings, and the future. This cycle also continues the apocalyptic thinking that led to the apocalypse at the beginning of the trilogy. However, this continuation is only suggested, never definitive, and *Pure* ultimately demonstrates that history is always a form of narrative—who is in control is dependent on who narrates or interprets the events. The narrator Bradwell, one of the people outside of the Dome or what the Dome-survivors call "wretches" (Baggott, *Pure* 21), at one point comes across a collection of boxes, repositories that contain information about the world before the detonations. He cautions his companion, “They contain a *version* of the Before . . . Information is not necessarily the truth” (*Fuse* 33, emphasis in the original). The polyvocal narration is a reminder that there is more to the chain of events than a single truth. Partridge is the heir to the Dome and while he has every intention of reuniting the wretches and the Pures, he struggles and fails under the oppressive system that has been in place for more than a decade. When the wretches brand him a traitor, he reflects on his failures and asks, “Will anyone ever look at this series of events and know that he tried so hard to do the right thing—while it all crumbled down around him” (*Burn* 303). The multitude of perspectives complicates any unified version of events and *Burn* (2014)—the last book in the trilogy—fittingly ends with a chapter that focuses on each of the different characters, letting their own perspectives stand side-by-side. These perspectives do not always harmonize with each other and often present antagonistic versions of the same event; yet, they are the situated voices that form a messy but more accurate picture of what happened.

A posthuman perspective supports the conception of humans as relational or plural beings; not only are humans always inextricably enmeshed in various inter- and intra-acting networks, human identity is also fragmented and mediated. Furthermore, technology and other advances affect the human body’s interactions with the world beyond its borders by acting as support, prothesis, filter, mediator, or even as substitute (if we consider progressing developments in virtual reality). The survivors outside of the Dome, the so-called wretches, embody a posthuman future. In their diverse mutations they are instances of Haraway’s cyborg that promotes a kinship between humans, animals, and machines (151-153). One of Pressia’s hands has been replaced by the head of the doll she had been holding at the moment of the detonations, Bradwell has three living water birds embedded in his back, while the leader of the Mothers—a group of female survivors that has become fused to their children—has a big metal cross from a window pane incorporated into her torso along with her baby in the form of its mouth on her biceps.

It is also important to point out that the objects do not merely replace the body parts—they become enmeshed. When Pressia touches the doll head, "[s]he can feel the ripple of her finger bones within it, the small ridges and bumps of her knuckles, the lost hand fused with the rubber of the doll's skull" (10), and when another character touches it he realizes, "It isn't with her, but of her. He can feel the humanness of it—the warmth, the play beneath of the real hand, alive" (366). Pressia's doll head recalls Alaimo's trans-corporeality which "denies the splitting of subject and object: the subject, the knower, is never separate from the world that she seeks to know" (*Exposed* 7). However, by still distinguishing "the real" hand from the doll head with which it has been merged, the character misses the opportunity to recognize that the reason the doll head is "of her" rather than "with her" is precisely their enmeshment.

Pressia's hand is, indeed, not a separate hand underneath a doll head—they can no longer be distinguished. Pressia finds this out when she tries to cut the doll head off to "free herself from it," only to realize that there is no separate doll head; all she achieves is cutting into her own flesh: "When she slid the razor in deep at the back of the doll's neck where it met her wrist, it wasn't as painful. But the blood flowed so brightly, and with such force that . . . [s]he had to tell her grandfather," who stitches her wound (Baggott, *Pure* 131). Pressia's hand and the doll head have become the same thing. For an ethical framework, trans-corporeality "denies the human subject the sovereign, central position" exactly because it acknowledges the inseparability of the human from the nonhuman world (*Bodily Natures* 16). The landscape, the objects, the animals, and the human bodies in *Pure* are all marked by trans-corporeality in action; the one cannot be separated from the other and the series thereby prompts considerations of boundaries, such as the limits of the human body and the "outside" world or the divide between nature and culture.

In the case of animal fusings, the connectedness is even more explicit: Bradwell has three birds integrated into his back and "they are his body now—just as the doll head is part of [Pressia's]. The birds merge with his life span. They live as long as he lives" (Baggott, *Pure* 131). What these fusings make visible is that "the human is always intermeshed with the more-than-human world" (Alaimo, *Bodily Natures* 2). As I have laid out before, the characters for the most part still operate on presumed hierarchies that afford superiority to the human. Helmud's case—while an example of human-to human fusing—enables a more nuanced examination of this supposed superiority of the dominant part of the fusing (we will discuss him in more detail below), and Bradwell's birds likewise allow a questioning of such a hierarchy. When he is mortally wounded in *Fuse*, the birds take over. Faced with the possibility of saving him, Pressia chooses to administer a serum designed to "push the body to self-generate cells" to the birds in Bradwell's back (Baggott, *Fuse* 446). The fatal chest wound knits close in response, but it now also "seems like he's wearing a thick, dark cape—a feathered cape . . . She knows the birds have taken hold . . . Six wings start to riot on his back." And when Bradwell asks, "What did you do to me," Pressia responds, "I brought you back" (448). This interaction is noteworthy for two observations. First, the language used to describe the sudden shift in proportion from human to bird (the three pairs of wings end up extending all the way to the floor in the end) imbues the birds with more power; they "have taken hold" and begin "to riot," implying newfound control. Second, Pressia does not distinguish between the birds and Bradwell. She "brought [him] back" by injecting the birds—they have always been a part of him, but now they are visually dominant. She has not actually "done" anything to Bradwell that has not been the case before, except for changing the proportions of the pre-existent fusing. The bigger wings do affect his control over his body now because they "make him ungainly, clumsy, and tentative—almost like a colt trying to get used to new legs" (*Burn* 14). While Bradwell feels betrayed by Pressia and less like himself, the scene illustrates that his control over the birds had merely been enabled by their size difference rather than any actual power he has over them.

As Alaimo argues, there is a "pervasive assumption . . . that people are separate from nature, the environment, and other material substances and forces. Witness, for example, the blasé use of dangerous pesticides and herbicides" (*Bodily Natures* 16). Yet, as Alaimo's chapters on mercury ("Bodily Natures") and asbestos ("Eros and X-Rays") demonstrate,[16] the substances that humans put into the environment interact with the human organism and become inextricably intertwined with it (cf. *Bodily Natures*). Similarly, the nuclear strikes in *Pure* did not just merely deform people; they visible merged them with their surroundings in ways that makes it impossible to determine where the human ends and the object begins. Myra J. Seaman further argues that an embodied "posthumanism rejects the assumed universalism and exceptional *being* of Enlightenment humanism and in its place substitutes mutation, variation, and *becoming*" (emphasis in the original 247).[17] The wretches represent this rejection; the narrator Lyda—who voluntarily leaves the Dome to join the wretches—confirms, "It seems to be honest to say that *she's becoming*. The becoming is what matters maybe more than the result" (Baggott, *Burn* 231, emphasis in the original). Leaving the Dome means opening herself up to the mutating world outside, to choose change over stasis, and to participate in the flux of natural adaptation that results from living enmeshed with everything else as part of a mutually constitutive network.[18]

Designed to be the new slave-race once the Dome survivors can leave the Dome and reclaim the Earth (*Pure* 384), the wretches have now become perfectly adapted to their hostile environment. In rather ironic contrast, the Pures—the very ones who intended to take control over the environment back and to subjugate the mutant survivors outside the Dome—have become fragile and sickly and are unable to survive outside of the Dome's shelter (*Burn* 67).

So, while people in the Dome, cut off from nature, are slowly dying, the nature outside becomes more aggressive, adaptable, and gains new agency from its fusings—and, as Lyda explains, these mutations might be more synonymous with life than the carefully engineered environment of the Dome: "The people, the Beasts and Dusts, the deformities, the grotesque…You can't imagine what beauty there is in their lives. Everything's dirty and real. There's nothing fake or sterile. It's…life" (Baggott, *Burn* 46). And again the nonhuman world and its human inhabitants mutually affect each other because "[i]t's *alive*, and she's alive in it" (*Fuse* 413, emphasis in the original), whereas "[t]he Dome is the real wasteland" (442). While some of the deformities might strike one as grotesque, Pressia also learns that beauty is not necessarily a quality of the "natural" or the privileged, like the Pures with their unmarred skin. When she finds her mother, who has prosthetic legs and arms, "her limbs are beautiful to Pressia" and when she looks at "the metal seams, the stitching in the leather straps, the covered bolts, the stippled design of the perforations," she realizes, "There's delicacy, care, love that's been poured into them" (Baggott, *Pure* 370).

In contrast to the grotesque but "real" life on the outside, humanity's last survivors in the Dome live a life of perceived normalcy; they go to work, have medical care, schools, and shopping malls, but life in the Dome is also carefully monitored and people live in what resembles strongly controlled gated communities—access to all areas is the privilege of only the upper echelons. Sick people and old people are whisked away to the infirmary on the lower level, but no one that has ever been taken there has returned. In its description, it shares several characteristics with the strongly dystopian compounds of Atwood's *Oryx and Crake*.[19]

3.4. Bodily Hierarchies

Yet, for all its success at questioning hierarchies, *Pure* ultimately fails to dismantle them. Chen defines the animacy hierarchy as ordering humans, nonhuman animals, inanimates, and incorporeals according to their perceived animacy. To a certain extent the world of *Pure* follows this hierarchy. Inside as well as outside of the Dome, humans are at the very top of this pyramid and perceived as having the most agency (Chen 27), as can be seen represented in *Pure* by the different fusings. There are three types of fusings in *Pure* and the more fused you are, the more fearsome you become: there are those, like the protagonists, that are still mostly human but who incorporated something else into their bodies, be it organic or inorganic; then there are the groupies, fusings of several previously independent people leading to any possible number of limbs or heads; and lastly, there are the Dusts and the Beasts, humans who are more nature or more animal than they are human. The enmeshment of humans and the nonhuman world around them ultimately enables the wretches to end their apocalyptic living conditions because they are so much more adaptable; however, the insistence on hierarchies likewise precludes a peaceful co-existence of everyone at the close of the novel, thereby possibly restarting the apocalyptic cycle.

Chen also makes the distinction that among humans, the white male has the most agency (27). While *Pure* does not offer many racial markers, some things can be observed about this differentiation. Within the Dome, it is certainly the case that a single white man is in absolute power; Partridge's father has not only designed the building (*Pure* 20), he is also considered the leader of the surviving community in the Dome (21). His close advisors are furthermore also all male, such as the scientist Arvin Weed, and "the face of the Dome's leadership," Foresteed (*Burn* 16). While the adolescent men in the Dome are educated and some are selected for genetic alterations, "basic overall enhancement to better the species" (*Pure* 17), girls are trained in being wives—being successful for a girl means being allowed to carry children (98), "which is more important than enhancing their minds or bodies" (323). Outside of the Dome, however, where the environment has meshed with the human survivors, the hierarchies among humans are differently distributed. Instead of being gendered, it is the amount of fusings that determines agency.[20]

Among the people outside of the Dome, the regular wretches are considered the average human. Groupies, however, lose their independence because they can only move as one entity; they are also reduced to a mob-mentality: they are rowdy, they attack and rob others, and they are not very intelligent (Baggott, *Pure* 105-06). Even lower than the Groupies are the Dusts and Beasts. They prey on humans and have lost their ability to speak as well as their understanding of reason. They are part of the environment and their humanity is the only point of vulnerability; if you can find the remnants of their human body, they can be killed (120). And until the wretches learn that the people inside the Dome are unable to survive outside, the Pures—the ones without any fusings—are considered superior.

Pressia remains ashamed of the doll head that has become her fist and yearns to become "pure" for most of the trilogy. In the novels, the wretched body is aligned with a diseased one in that the protagonists later come into a formula that could reverse the fusings and "cure" the wretches; Pressia in particular keeps referring to it as "the cure" (Baggott, *Burn* 315). Eli Clare writes about his disability that strangers consider his body *unnatural*, and in assuming there is a normal body, they expect that he desires a cure (206). And this, Clare points out, is the problem with the concept of cure because it presupposes that there is a problem with the disabled body and that it can be restored to a previous, non-disabled state (207). Pressia wants to acquire a "normal" body throughout the trilogy and it is only when she enters the Dome that she can surrender the notion of being cured because she realizes that even without the doll head she would never fit in.[21] The experience of having it, the circumstances that led to her having it, define her and separate her from the Pures. She cannot be cured because there is no "right" body; or rather, even if the fusing could be removed it would not make her a Pure.

When it becomes clear that the Pures are slowly dying because of too many brain-enhancements and genetic alterations, but also because they have lived in a too-controlled environment for too long, the hierarchy is suddenly flipped: the mutations are an advantage to survival. Being enmeshed with the environment has made the wretches more resilient. Not only do the people in the Dome learn what their leader has known for a long time, the wretches find out, too, that they have become the new super-race, superior in their adaptability to the sickly and weak Pures (*Burn* 68). Yet, the inextricability of humans from the environment does not automatically lead to a more harmonious future, as the shift in power dynamics is not accompanied by an understanding of humanity's relationality. It therefore does not lead to compassion, or to a new dialogue. Instead, the wretches take revenge by releasing a bacterium that will take down the protective layers of the Dome's wall, effectively exposing the population inside to almost certain death. The sudden understanding of how quickly power can change hands also does not cause a re-evaluation of the Groupies' or the Dusts' agency.

Furthermore, while the polyvocal accounts depict a series of events that is spiralling to a violent confrontation despite good intention, more sympathy is afforded to the wretches. The Dome, with all its surveillance, regulations, and narcissistic inhabitants, is a dystopia that has to be prevented. And in all cases, the reasons are highly personal: Pressia realizes she cannot be pure nor does she want to be anymore; others want revenge for the life that was stolen from them; Lyda, the female narrator from inside the Dome, wants the freedom that the world of the wretches offers her, away from being evaluated on her worth as a vessel for future generations. The Dome is only ever depicted as a place of restrictions, control, lies, and deception—both from the narrators on the outside as well as on the inside. While it is easy to sympathize, too, with the people living under this restrictive rule, Partridge's struggle to end the oppressive regime makes it clear that this part of society should not become part of the future.

By taking revenge on the Dome, the ending indicates a continuation of the apocalyptic cycles of power that keep structural hierarchies intact. For one thing, the wretches will not necessarily be the future of the human race after all. Another group of survivors in what used to be Ireland has taken to cloning, with women non-stop carrying and giving birth to clones, repopulating the whole community with eerily similar children. At the same time, the genius scientist of the Dome has also invested in cloning and seals himself in his underground lab with his new creation before the Dome can be taken down: babies created from the DNA of Pures and of wretches alike, supposed to become the new super-race with the completely human look of the Pures but the adaptability of the wretches. Both of these groups might take over power in the future and fight the wretches for control. In addition, the future represented by the laboratory babies is one that supposes man's superiority over nature because, as Braidotti cautions in her article "Mothers, Monsters, and Machines," if reproduction becomes a purely mental labour then it will fulfill the “dream of dominating nature through . . . self-inseminating, masturbatory practices” (71). Alaimo along similar lines argues that the fixation on DNA coding as a master plan leads to assuming that the mental effort is superior to the physical labour (149); an assumption that would lead to a re-appropriation of nature and with it a re-enactment of the plan behind the Dome. Yet, it is left open as to what will happen once this next generation comes of age. The potential for an embodied posthuman future is there, if thrown into question.

Furthermore, as I stated before, the variety of narrators complicates this conclusion and retains a glimmer of hope that the future will be based on an enmeshment of human and nonhuman entities rather than on human engineering. Pressia is a posthuman subject, which is necessarily fragmented and plural, to use Flanagan’s definition (3): the reader’s knowledge of Pressia and her own knowledge of herself has to be adapted several times throughout the novel. She feels that she does not know who she is because not only does she marry and then become a widow in the course of the trilogy, but she also finds out that the narrator from inside the Dome is her half-brother and that the old man who raised her is not her actual grandfather. She finds and then again loses her mother, but in exchange she finds clues about her father and his whereabouts. These experiences lead her on a quest to find him—and through him herself. It is this quest narrative that Flanagan argues affirms individualism, which aligns the young adult protagonist more closely with humanism’s “advocacy of individualistic forms of agency and empowerment” (22). However, Pressia ultimately chooses the destruction of the Dome over the chance to communicate with her father through the help of Dome technology and it remains unknown whether she will continue on her quest for him after the events of the novel; in her choice to bring down the Dome, she implicitly terminates or at least subordinates her personal quest.

Other narrators, such as Bradwell and El Capitan, openly reject the quest narrative and the attempt to return to a pre-fused existence. El Capitan, another narrator from outside of the Dome, is fused together with his younger brother, Helmud. Both of them depend on the survival of the other because "[i]f Helmud died, [El Capitan] would, too . . . They are both . . . too entwined" (Baggott, *Pure* 144). At first, it seems as if El Capitan has more agency than Helmud, who is attached to his back and only capable of limited speech. While Helmud thus appears to be mostly a burden, El Capitan repeatedly acknowledges that "he wouldn't have made it without him" (150). It is having to care for his younger brother that often enables El Capitan to go on surviving (423), and it is the "feel of his brother's heartbeat through his own ribs . . . that wouldn't let him pull the trigger" even when he considers suicide shortly after the detonations (148). Furthermore, throughout the narrative, Helmud proves several times that he has his own ideas and is not merely an attachment that echoes what El Capitan says. Not only does it turn out that Helmud made a lariat with which he could have killed his brother had he chosen to (392), he later diffuses a bomb attached to El Capitan's leg (*Fuse* 126). Yet they always remain one entity, so that their work as surgeons is described as that of "one man with four arms" (189). El Capitan reflects at some point that maybe "Helmud has changed, come into his own somehow," but he also acknowledges the possibility that he "has always been more complicated than El Capitan has given him credit for" (*Burn* 28). The two brothers—as well as everyone else—remain fused at the end of the novel and represent the future of the posthuman, plural self.

In summary, *Pure* presents a posthuman future in which the supposed hierarchy of humans, animals, and things is blurred, and in which nature has taken back control, further destabilizing humanity's position as ruler over everything. This blurring of hierarchies enables a critical rethinking of human and nonhuman relations in our Anthropocene moment. However, these hierarchies are ultimately merely reversed in *Pure*, which suggests a continuation of the apocalyptic cycle rather than new ethical models. Imagining a future dominated by genetically engineered humans further suggests that humanity is attempting to regain control over nature. Yet, the posthuman future is not conclusively negated, which is noteworthy, as *Pure* thereby draws attention to the fact that it is humanity's relentless desire to control everything that prevents a more relational engagement with the world. Its ending can therefore be read as a warning that, as long as humanity insists on engineering its own future and perceiving it as unrelated to the nonhuman world, the apocalypse will start.

3.5. Revisiting Lewis and Clark: Rejecting Manifest Destiny in Benjamin Percy's *The Dead Lands*

In Benjamin Percy's *The Dead Lands* it is likewise mutation brought about by an enmeshment of the human body with the environment that enables a future after the post-apocalyptic event. The story begins in St. Louis where a community of people survived the super flu and nuclear attacks that eradicated most life. The rulership of the town is oppressive and living conditions harsh, and when a messenger arrives from beyond their territory with news of new settlements and flourishing life, Wilhelmina Clark and Meriwether Lewis set out west in an effort to build a future that is about more than mere survival. However, while mutations dominate the future of humanity, *The Dead Lands* employs the historical Lewis Meriwether and William Clark expedition to subvert the manifest destiny used to justify American expansionism. Rather than new discoveries and territories, the narrative foregrounds a commitment to what already exists. Like *Pure*, the novel emphasizes the dangers of a two-class system presented by different bodies—humans and those considered lesser humans—and the ways in which such a future is intertwined with slavery.

The Lewis and Clark expedition was organized by then president Thomas Jefferson and took place between 1804 and 1806.[22] Of particular historical interest—as well as for the context of *The Dead Lands*—is the expedition's outward journey from St. Louis to the Oregon coast, which lasted until the end of 1805. While it was "never regarded as being on a mission of military conquest" (Kerrigan 33), one of its most noteworthy achievements was the effective conquest of the Pacific northwest by the growing United States.[23] Furthermore, as Michael Kerrigan notes, the mapping, charting, and measuring of the natural world was the primary occupation of the expedition and it also represented a form of making "the world [one's] own" (33). Discovery, especially that of a route across the continent, was the true prime objective of the expedition (Ambrose 94-95). The emphasis on discovery is particularly relevant for the means of conquest under expansionism and Peter A. Appel refers to the Lewis and Clark expedition as "the signal event that made the [Louisiana] purchase truly part of the United States" (88). The Lewis and Clark expedition enabled the United States as we know it nowadays: a nation that spans from coast to coast across the entire continent. [24]

Due to its role in American expansionism, the Lewis and Clark expedition is also directly interlinked with manifest destiny, which means there are certain assumptions on which the Corps of Discovery operated. While the term manifest destiny was only coined in 1845—almost forty years after the expedition—American expansionism and the assumptions inherent to manifest destiny had governed American politics much earlier (Miller 115, Furtwangler 11). John L. O'Sullivan, who first used the term, also applied it specifically to the possession of Oregon in an editorial for the *New York Morning News* (Miller 118), which is the context relevant to *The Dead*

Lands. The rhetoric around manifest destiny was used across several presidencies, for example Andrew Jackson, or John Tyler who "had maintained that the destiny of America was to expand to the Pacific" (Morrison 15), as well as James Knox Polk (to name a few) to justify wars over territory—such as the Mexican War—and to support westward expansionism.

Manifest destiny assumes, for one, "that the United States had some unique moral virtues that other countries did not possess" and that it was its mission, therefore, to bring its form of government and way of life to other peoples (Miller 3). It also has "a messianic dimension because it assumed a faith in America's divinely ordained destiny," which is of particular interest with regard to Percy's novel, as is the fact that such thinking depends on "an ethnocentric view that one's own culture, government, race, religion, and country are superior to all others" (3). While I laid out some common themes in the use of manifest destiny, the concept itself lacks a consistent definition, as Ernest Lee Tuveson emphasizes in *Redeemer Nation* (91).

It also has to be noted that manifest destiny was not a concept accepted or promoted by everyone across the United States during the age of expansionism. While Democrats largely supported the idea (Joy 62), as did many intellectuals (Merk 40), some scholars argue that "it had never attained the momentum of a national drive" because "[i]t lacked national, sectional, or party following commensurate with its bigness" (215, 216). For one, the Whigs largely resisted the idea of fast-paced expansionism. Second, and an even bigger dispute, was encountered over the annexation of Texas, as it would have meant "a very large slave state" (Joy 62).

However, despite manifest destiny's contentious history, both the religious undertone as well as the supposed superiority of one group of people over another inform the post-apocalyptic expedition that takes place in *The Dead Lands,* which thereby strongly draws on the concept of manifest destiny. And the new future that the narrative of *The Dead Lands* aspires to is intimately connected to slavery, as is America's history of expansionism—be it through the Lewis and Clark expedition or later territorial growth by the means of wars or annexation. Yet, by ultimately refusing to participate in the nation-building out west in Astoria, the novel rejects manifest destiny—and expansionist politics—as a foundational principle for the future of the American nation.

This rendition of the historical and ideological context of the original Lewis and Clark expedition now allows me to unpack the changes performed by Percy's adaptation and to explicate their significance within the context of posthuman ethics. Several historical names appear and invite comparison or relation to their historical namesakes. Wilhelmina Clark and Lewis Meriwether lead the expedition, while John Colter, York, and Gawea—who functions as "other" and guide—as well as Minda Shields, a doctor, represent some of the historical expedition members. Thomas Jefferson appears in two forms: He is both found in the character of Thomas Lancer—who is after a first introduction continuously referred to as only "Thomas"—the mayor and government of the remains of St. Louis called the Sanctuary, as well as in President Jefferson in the epilogue. Aran Burr—playing on then-Vice President Aaron Burr—is the leader and de facto government of Astoria, Oregon. All three government representatives—Thomas, Jefferson, and Aran Burr—offer a different form of stewardship and versions of America and therefore invite reflection on the founding history of the United States, particularly through their interactions and conflicts with the expedition members.[25]

Aran Burr represents the posthuman future. As in Baggott's *Pure*, the nuclear fallout has caused mutations among majorities of the survivors everywhere across the country:

> Deformities are normal. Some are born with extra fingers and toes, others with diminutive limbs, crooked spines, birthmarks, brightly staining their faces. In their

> village, a child was born without any mouth, only a slitted nose, and without any genitals, just a fleshy mound where there might have been a cleft or a shaft. Another child, a boy with gigantism, was cut from his mother's belly after only seven months, because they worried his kicks might shatter her ribs. . . And then there was Denver. . . The buildings glowed at night, some said, as did the people, all of them with skin like melted wax and hair that grew in patches, their mouths hissing a language no one understood but them (Percy 180-81).

As in *Pure*, the fictional future envisions humanity as visibly affected by changes to the environment. Alaimo argues that "the enmeshment of flesh with place . . . [is] suggesting a mode of being that deviates from the predominant Western mode of distancing the human from the material world" (*Exposed* 1). Instead of a human whose body is separate from the heavy metals that pollute the environment or an understanding of the Earth as something that can be observed via satellite, as if its human inhabitants can just opt for a distanced position when it suits them, *Pure* and *The Dead Lands* visibly—and inextricably—enmesh the human characters with the nonhuman world. The wretches are marked by the place in which they live, which visibly affects them and distinguishes them from the Pures, and *The Dead Land*'s Denver functions similarly.

The ways in which the environment affects the bodies of the characters cannot be ignored or pushed aside—it is a lived reality for them that, at the very least, draws attention to the contact zone between the human body and the nonhuman world and the intra-actions that emerge from it. The majority of survivors in *The Dead Lands*, like the people in the Sanctuary, are mostly affected by the almost perpetual glare of the sun which leads to melanomas and cancerous growth; others, however, have developed almost supernatural abilities—Aran Burr, Gawea, and Lewis among them. What these different forms of mutation demonstrate is that "[e]xposures may be differential, uneven, or incommensurate;" however, both deliver "the intuitive sense or the philosophical conviction that the impermeable Western human subject is no longer tenable" (Alaimo, *Exposed* 5)—which is also supported by the way in which some of these new abilities work.

Deformities exist in the case of those with special abilities as well: Aran Burr's head is disproportionately large in comparison to his body and Gawea's eyes are entirely black with no white to distinguish the iris; yet, what truly marks them as different is their ability to communicate with their surroundings. Several times, Gawea is aided by birds whom she "asks" for assistance (Percy 145). Repeatedly, she stresses, "ASK. NOT MAKE," to make it clear that she cannot order anything to do her bidding, but that some will listen if she asks (145)—and this can even include an animal sacrificing itself because Gawea has asked it to when they desperately need food (333). Gawea's otherness calls attention to the posthuman predicament in that it questions the definition of the human. It also opens up postcolonial discourses of using the animal to "lessen" the human qualities of particular groups of people.[26] Gawea's otherness makes Clark, for example, wonder whether she is "less than or more than human" (47). The answer has ramifications not only for Gawea's treatment by others but also for the general vision of the future. If she is animal-like—"insectile," as Clark calls her (47)—then she might be considered a mere aberration, another deformed victim that would be considered less valuable than others. If, however, she is more-than-human, then it implies a power or superiority over "normal" humans and she might, in fact, represent the future of the human race.

Gawea's status is indeed the fulcrum around which the expedition operates. Aran Burr considers her and people like her the future of humankind, which is why he is beckoning Lewis to Oregon. Lewis can similarly affect the environment by drawing on the elements. When a group of people holds him hostage to force him into lending his knowledge of maps by serving as a guide to escape the Sanctuary, "he can feel a heat in his hands. He hurls it—he does not know a better way to describe it than this, as if the heat were a heavy ball—at the figure across from him. The room brightens. The figure flies backward, as if dragged by an invisible wire, until stopped by a stone pillar" (Percy 53). And "if he concentrated deeply," he possesses the skill "of seeing without his eyes" and he can also "turn pages of a book or nudge a bird of a high ledge or roll a ball by merely sweeping his hand through the air" (55). These abilities make them what Gawea and Burr call "the next" (107). People that are "special, gifted . . . who are born with oversize eyes that can see a mile, see in the dark" or that "are born walking on all fours and able to outrun a dog" or that "can lift boulders" represent a "[m]utational genesis" for Burr (352).

The choice of the word "genesis" and its religious connotation has further implications for Burr's vision of the future. "Genesis," the English title given to the book of the Bible (*New King James Version*), comes from the Greek word for "origin, creation, generation" and is "related to *genos* 'race, birth, descent'" ("Genesis"). Not only is Burr referring to the next as a new creation, a new origin story for humankind, he relates this new future to a hereditary process—rather than the randomness that usually marks mutation. And indeed, Burr is trying to purposely create more people like him by exposing pregnant women to high levels of radiation, but the experiment is not successful (Percy 390), implying that—for all of Burr's feeling of control over the process of this new evolution—it remains a random phenomenon that cannot be engineered or inherited. The reference to the book of the Bible also implies a certain assumption of destiny, as if it were written that the next shall become humanity's future, and like a biblical manifestation, Burr often appears in Lewis's and Gawea's dreams as a somewhat enigmatic father figure in white billowing robes who summons them and promises guidance (Percy 316, 145), and who tells them that they are "special" (213).

Burr's portrayal as father figure is also important for his political role. Not only is he presented as a substitute father for Lewis[27]—whose own father rejected him for his supernatural abilities (Percy 55)—but Burr also considers himself the father of America's future. As in the patronizing manner in which all Indigenous people became the children of "father" Jefferson,[28] Burr assumes a natural—as a parent to a child—superiority toward the people in Astoria and the general masses of survivors that are not "special, gifted" (Percy 352). It is based on Burr's perceived superiority that all the people in Astoria are treated as and referred to as "slaves" (351, 371) and "tools" (351). This new status is also communicated to the people themselves: "You're a shovel, you're a hammer, you're a sickle, you're a trowel" (187). As Burr argues, "on the long hoof-marked trail of history, slaves are the standard of empire. Rome. Egypt. The Macedonians and Ottomans. The Chinese dynasties. These United States. That's how you build something big. You have to abuse some to benefit many" (371). In *The Dead Lands*, the "some" that are being abused are the masses of normal people without special abilities. They are only useful to Burr as tools:

> Some of the slaves work on construction, raising barns, repairing fallen chimneys, hammering together houses. Some of them farm, digging irrigation canals, hoeing and planting and reaping. Some grade roads. Some repair train tracks. Some log trees and some mine coal in the Powder River Basin. Some birth children. They are, all of them, building something. (351)

And while Burr's rhetoric announces that he is employing slavery to benefit "the many," it is only the next that would benefit from Burr's American nation (as everyone else is a slave) and those are—if the small number introduced in the course of the novel (Burr, Gawea, Lewis, and a small boy) is anything to go by—a small minority.[29]

That only a small percentage of the population should reap the benefits of the hard-working and exploited masses is keeping in line with the empires that Burr quotes to Lewis, as well as with modern capitalism. In Percy's novel, Burr has established himself in Astoria's Flavel mansion, an opulent house that was built by Captain George Flavel in the late eighteenth century. Not only was Flavel "one of the most influential citizens" at the time ("Flavel House Museum"), he was also one of the wealthiest. His home cost an alleged $36,000 and he died having amassed a fortune of about one million dollars ("Capt. George Flavel").[30] Burr not only considers himself as the leader of a future empire that is built on slave labour, he is—through his occupation of the Flavel mansion—also aligned with business millionaires and enjoys a luxurious lifestyle that is at odds with that of the majority of the people.[31]

In *The Dead Lands*, the making of a grand narrative from the perspective of a colonial historian—Burr—is repudiated by the intrusion of other histories that offer points of resistance. Burr wants Lewis to continue his work, which not only consists of overseeing and organizing the slaves in Astoria, but sending out convoys via the railroad to raid surviving enclaves to resupply and grow the slave labour in Oregon—so that at one point the whole of the United States might be rebuilt and repopulated that way. A form of resistance to this recolonization can be found in Lewis's refusal to help Burr at the close of the novel. However, there are other groups that reject Burr's future. In Bismarck, North Dakota—just south of where the original expedition made its first winter camp—the post-apocalyptic expedition comes across an encampment of women and girls—escapees from one of the slave raids. The group of survivors allows for a re-enactment of an encounter with the Other, just as the encounter with the Mandan people had been for the original Lewis and Clark with whom they spent their first winter. They are at first "[s]trangers" who "wear stitched gray furs, maybe made from rabbits, coyotes. Their faces are hidden beneath scarves and googles. Their hands are the only part of them exposed—in order to better grip their bowstrings" (Percy 270). They take the expedition hostage at first but then provide shelter.

The group of women and girls escaped the slavers because bison had overturned the train on which the women had been transported and trampled the slavers. The scene is ripe with symbolism: the bison destroy the train that historically sped up the settlement of the west and the bison's near extinction, while the women take up arms against their male captors. Both groups refuse to become a commodity, an object that can be used at will by another. Likewise, two women, the Field sisters, commit acts of terrorism in Astoria on behalf of the American government in Washington, D.C. In the historical expedition, the two Field siblings are brothers and they are members of the group. Here, they appear only at the end of the novel as a choice that opposes Burr. *The Dead Lands* therefore affords glimpses of different perspectives—groups that do not agree with Burr's vision—and thereby manage to complicate any grand narrative, in contrast to the original expedition which has foremost been remembered for its scientific and intellectual value and its achievements for American westward expansionism and only more recently with regard to its consequences for Indigenous lifestyles—due to the fact that only the expedition members chronicled their interaction with native tribes and the expedition's relevance was evaluated by white settlers.[32]

Lewis has to make a choice as well: support "progress"—or evolution as Burr calls it (Percy 352)—and accept the ramifications, such as the use of slaves to get there, or to find a different vision of the future. In the novel, Thomas Jefferson represents the government as two different people. One instance is Thomas, who controls the Sanctuary in St. Louis.[33] Like Burr, who also represents a one-man government, where “everyone else [is] an extension of Burr, a million-limbed monster” (Percy 390), Thomas is the sole ruler over the Sanctuary. This form of government is in contrast to Jefferson’s other alter ego. It only appears briefly in the epilogue as actual President Jefferson in office in Washington, D.C. Nothing about his administration is revealed, except for the fact that he is working together with his cabinet—rather than as sole ruler—and that they are in possession of a map that indicates blast zones and threats, but also possibilities, such as the reconstruction of railroad lines (Percy 398).

This alter ego, I would argue, is less important for any possible shared characteristics with the historical Jefferson or his government, then for its location and origin. As in the case of the original expedition, Lewis and Clark arrive in Washington, D.C. after their journey to Astoria. However, this time they return having rejected Burr’s vision of an American empire built on slavery. Instead of choosing expansionism at the cost of others, they return to what remains of the government in order to “help” (400). The future is not out west, it does not lie in expanding out in Oregon: it remains east. Furthermore, it cannot be found in the post-apocalyptic government in St. Louis—which is not planning any future but rather attempts to preserve the conditions within the Sanctuary—or the new nation-building in Oregon—which is not interested in rebuilding what has been lost but instead aims to foster a new human race to the detriment of the remaining survivors. Lewis and Clark give their support to pre-existing government structures, and thereby forsake the possibility of a new two-class society. Lewis has, in his own words, “bet on humanity” (394). It is less, however, a rejection of his own mutation or a stigmatization of people born with additional powers and more a refusal of accepting a dominant or superior race as the only possible future, as a closer look at Lewis’s struggle with humanity will show.

"The lingering worry that humanity isn't worth saving after all and would be better off extinguished" is visited repeatedly and in different permutations throughout the novel (Percy 334). The first type of humanity that is considered in such a way is found in the "normal" survivors in the Sanctuary and elsewhere. Even there—without a posthuman alternative to replace them—the survivors who might "threaten" the "organism" of the Sanctuary "will be excised like the melanomas that stain the skin of so many" (Percy 24-25). In this case, humans do not threaten the ecosystem or other livings beings, but by referring to the Sanctuary as an "organism" (24), it is compared to a living entity which might be better off without humans who behave like cancer cells. Lewis in particular is pessimistic about the future; he "feels they have as a society cycled back without the hope of moving forward again" (30). Leaving the Sanctuary introduces mutants—such as man-sized spiders and bats—and the expedition's experiences outside destabilize the categories of "normal" or "abnormal." As Lewis states, "In the previous world, the bats would be considered abnormal, but who remains in this world to designate what is normal or not? This band of humans [the expedition members] might as well be considered the unfamiliar . . . They are the mutants" (166). If ordinary people are not worth saving, maybe the mutants are—which is the future that Burr represents.

Outside the Sanctuary, "normal" survivors are measured against people like Gawea or Aran Burr. While other survivors consider them "different" because they are afraid of change, and Burr, Gawea, and Lewis are "evidence of change," these mutants "would help the world. They were healers, builders, innovators, and it was up to them to fit together the pieces of a broken country" (Percy 215). This posthuman future is also marked by a more nuanced understanding that humans are but one force on the planet; Gawea educates Lewis about this, explaining, "'There are forces—there is energy—all around. Not only in gravity, but in air and earth and water and fire.’ Energy that makes things slow and speed up, cool and burn, grow and shrink” (Percy 220). The future of mankind can communicate with these forces and, as Gawea stresses, ask them for assistance, not control them. This ability to affect one’s surroundings is also only made possible by first understanding that “everything is born of something else, everything twinned” because of which “[w]e’re all made of the same thing” (251). Lewis needed to understand that first and “once Gawea helped [him] recognize that, to see how everything is connected, it was a little like growing another eye. Or another hand, another nose. Another level of sense. And with that sense comes the ability to manipulate” (251-52).

The rest of the world becomes something akin to an additional body part—an extension of the body into the world—whose sensory capabilities allow an interaction with other types of energy beyond the borders of the body. Presented as “evolution” and therefore the natural next step in humanity’s development, mutants mark another group of humanity whose worth is being considered in the novel. Burr’s version of this mutant future, however, is hierarchical. Due to their superhuman powers, Burr considers the mutants superior to other humans and intends to exploit that power differential, for which reason his vision is tied up with the system of slavery. It is the exploitation that disillusions Lewis with regard to this new, bright future he was following all the way from St. Louis, which is why it is “not only the landscape that disappoints,”[34] but “humankind” (321).

The question of humanity’s worth is evaluated by Lewis throughout the novel. He is the one who explicitly expresses the worry that it might not be worth saving (Percy 334), but also the one who has the power to decide humanity’s fate—which is, through its interwovenness with the historical Lewis and Clark expedition, also that of the American nation and vice versa. Lewis represents America as “[t]heir purpose in exploring the country grows more and more wrapped up in his self-discovery, as if he were America, the next America" (218). At the same time, he eclipses America when he feels compelled to become "a creator, too," who can "tinker with the world" (249). As such—as America, as creator—Lewis holds the power over the future in his hands. Yet, he makes an important decision by embarking on the quest for Oregon that largely affects the type of nation or world he will create. Because he is not on the expedition to be "studying and pinning and labeling the world as if it were a still life;" leaving the Sanctuary means a choice of "activity . . . movement, engagement" (217), indicating that he wishes to be part of the world rather than its colonizer.[35]

It is this choice of engagement over colonization that influences Lewis's decision about the fate of humanity. When he learns of Burr's plan to enslave the other survivors to build the next America, he considers that he might have supported him at one point: "The old Lewis might have believed him. The old Lewis, who held others in disdain, who clapped himself away in his office, studied the world with a cold remove" (Percy 271). Yet, the journey has changed them; it "has humanized them" (380), allowing him to see "a magic in himself and others" (371), rather than just in those with special abilities. Even back at the Sanctuary, where no road has provided opportunity for growth, Lewis's former assistant argues that love—as opposed to terror—holds more power because people are willing to lay down their life for it and "that's a denial of the most basic human instincts: survival" (320). However, Burr—who had promised a new future—also makes Lewis second-guess his newfound faith in humanity. If slavery is the answer that people find when they consider rebuilding the world, maybe Lewis "should take out the rest of the human population. Destroy what destroys" (394). He has on him a vial of the virus that killed most of the human population prior to the events of the novel and could use it to "wipe away the human infection" (374); yet, he decides not to.

Lewis rediscovers humanity's potential through the people that shared the journey with him. When he considers that "Burr is wrong. The world is not evolving . . . The world has always been destroying itself, a perpetual apocalypse" and asks himself, "What hope is there" (379), Clark appears at his side. She asks him what happened to him and his reply is enigmatic: "You. You happened" (380). Her arrival leads to a reflection on how the journey changed them and "[h]e feels a small flash of hope once more," realizing he did not come to Oregon "to join something" but "to stop something" (380). Even his decision to kill Burr is based on his responsibility to other humans because Colter asks Lewis not to let him down (366), and he remembers this demand placed on him when Burr explains his vision for the future of America (371). It is Clark's laughter—"a hard woman giving herself up to joy" (394)—that anchors Lewis and reminds him of the connections he has forged over the course of the journey. He realizes that it is "the beginning of the community and renewal he imagined he might find [in Oregon] all along" (395). It is this realization that sparks another: "There is hope after all" (395), which leads to the virus being destroyed rather than released by Lewis.

This decision is a marked difference from *Pure*, in which the wretches release the bacterium that will expose and thereby kill the Pures. The release of the bacterium triggers a chain of reactions that include sealing away a lab in which Pure and wretch hybrids have been growing and which might turn out to be the new super race—in which case the destruction of the Dome merely led to the beginning of another cycle of violence in that the hybrids might fight the wretches for resources at a point in the future. The people with power and influence survived in the Dome and became the Pures at the expense of the wretches, who were intended to be slaves. When the wretches turn out superior—due to their resilient immune systems—they have a chance for retribution and effectively kill the Pures and take control, but they might be surpassed by another—even better adapted—species, indicating a cyclical structure. A similar cyclical structure underlies Burr's vision for the future, who repeats histories of slavery for a new beginning. Rather than perpetuate the cycle, however, Lewis decides against a new slave race and a new future by investing in the present and choosing people—both superior and normal—over hierarchies.

These texts of posthuman futures discussed so far all consider the worthiness or potential of a future that includes humanity, often a humanity enhanced in some form. Both *Pure* and *The Dead Lands* present—at least until the conclusion—the idea that the future will rest with an enhanced form of the human. These enhancements can be the result of evolution, as in *The Dead Lands*, or of genetic engineering as in *Pure*, and it can take different forms: genetic engineering leads to disease-free and extremely long-living humans in the Dome, while nuclear-induced mutations lead to incredibly resilient or supernatural mutants in *Pure* and *The Dead Lands*, respectively. Neither narrative, however, ultimately portrays a future that has been enabled through these alterations: in *Pure*, what at first appears to be a superior human race, is revealed to be less adapted to survive; in comparison, *The Dead Lands* rejects these enhancements as they re-inscribe the system of slavery. Instead, these narratives demonstrate that placing all hopes for the future in a further advanced species might merely lead to a repetition of history, an establishing of new hierarchies and—in the worst case—the division between a dominant and a slave race.

The Dead Lands introduces the importance of understanding oneself as part of a community, as intermeshed with the lives and experiences of the people around one. It prevents Lewis from supporting Burr's vision of a new slave race and it likewise prevents him from killing the rest of humanity for its shortcomings. The posthuman qualities that he and Gawea, and most likely others, possess will undoubtedly influence the kind of future they will help create, but they are not what enables it. Having at length examined the ways in which the posthuman body and its entanglement with the nonhuman world—in short, its materiality—enables survivance, I now want to turn to the question of the type of future this relational materiality creates. What marks some of the communities that do more than survive in recent post-apocalyptic fiction from Canada and the United States? The following chapter will take up this question and turn to the ethical potential of feminist care ethics in Lee's *The Age* and

Atwood's *Oryx and Crake* trilogy, in particular its last book, *MaddAddam*.

“And Oryx had only one desire—she wanted the people to be happy, and to be at peace, and to stop eating up her children. But the people couldn’t be happy, because of the chaos. And then Oryx said to Crake, *Let us get rid of the chaos*. And so Crake took the chaos, and he poured it away.”

–Oryx and Crake[1]

CHAPTER 4: Embodied Ethics—A Future Based on Care

The collected texts so far form a diffraction pattern, to return to Barad’s conceptualization (29-30)—of narratives in which the body becomes the locus for an intervention in the apocalyptic paradigm. As Carrière has argued, the apocalyptic paradigm is employed in contemporary fiction to deal with crisis (“Ailing Bodies” 50). It is therefore always indebted to the time that produces it and a reflection of contemporary anxieties (Leigh 5-15; Grubisic et al. 15). At the same time, it remains part of—and draws from—a longstanding canon, for example Mark 13 or the Book of Revelation in the Bible (*New King James Version*, Mk 13.7-33, Rev. 1-22). As such, “apocalypse is an open text. It opens into our present” (Pippin 6). Some post-apocalyptic narratives focus on the apocalypse and its relationship to women by using the Book of Revelation as their intertext. These narratives align their female characters with the women in Revelation, such as the Whore of Babylon and Jezebel, and situate them in a larger framework, for example those of medical discourse or global commodification. In this chapter, I attend to this larger web of entanglements—including the intertextual ones—to examine apocalypse’s exclusionary nature, i.e., that the apocalypse always contains two groups: those who are being saved and those at whose expense this happens. In these narratives, the female body and feminist care ethics become the means through which a break with the apocalyptic is made possible. And so in order to bring our conversation on the role of embodiment for intervening in the apocalyptic to the space that opens up toward a new—possibly revolutionary—future, I will first return to the cyclical nature of the apocalypse to explain why an interruption is necessary in the first place; for if the apocalypse were merely an origin catastrophe from which humanity can recover in linear fashion, no intervention would be required. However, the apocalypse repeats in a cyclical pattern—and so to stop a new cycle, a break with apocalypse is necessary.

I have referred to the apocalypse as a text "that opens up into our present" (Pippin 6), but it not only stretches forward; it is also cyclical. While Frank Kermode argues that "apocalyptic thought belongs to rectilinear rather than cyclical views of the world" (5), as it "depends on a concord of imaginatively recorded past and imaginatively predicted future" (8), I would amend that this is only accurate as long as the apocalypse remains self-contained in individual narratives, while apocalyptic patterns—Catherine Keller's term (11)—are disregarded. Tina Pippin provides a less neatly ordered perspective on the apocalypse through her ongoing engagement with the apocalypse in the Bible. In her readings, the apocalypse is not a stable text—such as Kermode's apocalypse with fixed points in a line—because for Pippin "every new reading disrupts the previous reading, and on and on" (xi). "Every "apocalypse is a sequel," Pippin goes on, in that "[t]he story becomes the neverending story, in ever-evolving renditions (1). For one, maybe "apocalypse began at creation, out of the violence of creative chaos, and every retelling is a sequel, a trace of a trace of the journey toward the end of time" (1). Secondly, the Bible features more than one apocalypse, such as the flood that eradicates everyone except for those on Noah's ark.

The apocalypse also threads through our contemporary moment, for one with regard to the COVID-19 pandemic,[2] but also because it appears "difficult to separate from the emergence of a new kind of apocalyptic fear, the sense in the culture not only that we cannot envisage the future clearly, but that there might in fact be no future for us at all" (Boxall 216).[3] Boxall's examination of the environmental apocalypse narratives, such as McCarthy's *The Road* and Atwood's *Oryx and Crake*, yields the realization that "there is also in these visions of planetary death a kind of bleak utopianism, a vision of another kind of future" (221). I see a relation between this "vision of another kind of future" and the increase of narratives that take place not at the onset of the apocalypse, but afterwards, when the question is not how the world will end, but if and how it will recover. *The Road* takes place after the world has been mostly destroyed and Atwood's series likewise takes place after most of humanity has died, looking back at history to see what led to this point. In a time when humanity is faced with the death of the planet, the "use of eschatological archetypes, i.e., the end of the world and the post-apocalypse motif" can also "heighten the moral pressure on readers" to avoid such a course of events at all costs (Mohr 32). So, what form does the "bleak utopianism" of these contemporary narratives take?

Texts that are set or eventually move into the post-apocalyptic, provide not only a vision of the way in which the world will come to an end but of what—if anything—will enable the move past this crisis. After the almost total destruction of humanity and civilization—if not also the planet—several of these narratives look forward and provide a glimmer of hope that a future is still possible.[4] Some texts provide more grounding for the hope that what will come after the end (of the novel) will be a break from the apocalyptic cycle. Atwood's and Lee's novels, for example, are using a feminist framework based on an ethics of care to create a narrative of counter-apocalypse to “interrupt the habit” of apocalypse (Keller 19). This interruption is vital to break out of the cycle of “clinging to some millennial hope of steady progress [and] then flipping, disappointed, back to pessimism”—a vicious cycle of the following dualism: “We wish for messianic solutions and end up doing nothing, for we get locked into a particularly apocalyptic either/or logic—if we can’t save the world, then to hell with it” (14). However, Atwood's *Oryx and Crake* and Lee's *The Age* tease out the messiness of apocalypse and refuse to present it as a neat choice between saved or damned.

While several of the texts that have been examined in previous chapters have already touched upon the kind of communities that weather the apocalypse and provide hope for an ongoing future, the focus has predominantly been on single individuals and their relations and engagement with the world. In order to get at the governing principles and values of post-apocalyptic communities, I will, in this chapter, examine more closely the ways in which these relations and engagements are embedded within the context of networks—which always are, but particularly in this chapter, not restricted to human subjects—and the feminist ethics that governs them.

Even though not all post-apocalyptic novels provide a clear sense of what the future community—if there even is one—will look like, some narratives do offer glimpses of the communities that take shape once the violence of the apocalypse has ended. The resulting communities of survivors are guided by “an ethics of survival,” which is “embodied” and “contextual rather than universalist” (Carrière, “Ailing Bodies” 57). The fact that it is an “embodied” ethics is significant as the body is related to social hierarchies because “[t]hose who are thought of as ‘others’ in society are often thought of in bodily terms: . . . they are considered ‘dirty,’ they are considered more ‘natural” (Tronto, *Moral Boundaries* 114). Indeed, the ways in which the body—the “normal,” abnormal, gendered, racialized, sick, engineered, modified body—is regulated exposes the normative scripts of these post-apocalyptic societies, and also the means of intervening in them.

According to Carrière, it is “a feminist ethics that intervenes in the social and apocalyptic dystopias projected in post-9/11 writings” (“Metafeminism” 226). Indeed, the futures under discussion in the novels selected here are based on a feminist ethics. It is a polyvocal future built on an ethics of care—that is with a relational subject aware of their own interdependence. Care theory originated with moral psychologist Carol Gilligan’s *In a Different Voice* in 1982 in which she presented the findings of her own study of the Heinz problem, undertaken with male and female test subjects. In the Heinz dilemma, Lawrence Kohlberg originally presented male participants with a story in which a man needs a medicine from an apothecary to save his wife. The apothecary refuses to give it to the man for the price that the man can afford because the apothecary wants to make a profit. In the end, the man steals the medicine and the participants were asked whether that was the right thing to do. What Gilligan noticed was that female test subjects were often dissatisfied with the lack of context provided in the story. Gilligan realized that “the moral problem arises from conflicting responsibilities rather than from competing rights” and that a satisfying solution needed “a mode of thinking that is contextual and narrative rather than formal and abstract” (19).

The perceived problem with Gilligan’s first foray in what came to establish care theory is its essentializing conclusion that there is something particularly feminine about this type of moral reasoning. Nel Nodding's *Caring: A Feminine Approach to Ethics and Moral Education* followed briefly after Gilligan's work, in 1984, and was similarly criticized.[5] However, while Gilligan herself attempted to correct these essentialist readings of *In a Different Voice*, saying, "the different voice I describe is characterized not by gender but theme. Its association with women is an empirical observation, and . . . the contrasts between male and female voices are presented here to highlight a distinction between two modes of thought and to focus on a problem of interpretation rather than to represent a generalization about either sex" (2), her first work remains the voice of the "white, heterosexual, middle-class woman in the United States of the 1980s" (Heyes 148). Underlying this early conceptualization of care ethics is the assumption of a unified category of "woman" and, for example in the case of Nodding's focus on motherhood, a link between care and maternalism.

An anti-essentialist feminist care ethics, in contrast, exposes male-biased assumptions in ethical discourse (Jagger 86-87), and takes into account the ways in which not all women are equally situated when it comes to care. Joan Tronto's work and Rianne Mahon and Fiona Robinson's collection *Feminist Ethics and Social Policy: Towards a New Global Political Economy of Care* (2011), which focuses on care in a transnational context and in areas as diverse as human trafficking, elderly care, and migrant care labour, are examples of a feminist care ethics that is more situated and focused on care as a practice from different perspectives.

Gilligan's later work *Between Voice and Silence* (1995) responded to charges of essentialism and uses female subjects from a variety of ethnic and class backgrounds.

[6] Cressida Heyes also presents some context for the limited scope of Gilligan's earlier work by pointing to the historical conditions of second wave feminism, which consisted "mainly [of] white and mainly middle-class" feminists (143)—precisely the reason for Elizabeth

Spelman's larger critique of essentialism in feminist theory in *Inessential Woman* (1988).[7] However, despite these charges, Gilligan's work provides an important distinction to moral theory that rests on the assumption of a universalized response, such as that of Gilligan's mentor Kohlberg. Maurice Hamington attends to this distinction, arguing that Gilligan's conceptualization of moral theory instead "views individuals as entangled in a web of dynamic relationships, not all of which are freely chosen. For Gilligan, humans are interconnected, and ethics is an expression of sustaining these connections, which are concrete and therefore particular" (15).

Morality is then not an impersonal act of logical reasoning, but something embedded in the context of people's lives. As Patricia Paperman explains, instead of using generalized principles to make moral decisions, care employs a narrative frame with details that are specific to the particular situation; thus, "*la morale se manifeste par et dans l'attention au particulier, la perception aiguisée des traits moralement pertinents en context*" (31).[8] Within post-apocalyptic fiction, the narrative frame of the post-apocalyptic novel provides a similarly situated perspective from which to examine the practice of care, thereby anchoring care not only in a specific time and place, but also often presenting several points-of-view through multiple narrators. Such situatedness in turn allows for an examination of privilege—such as the need for work to survive and the types of work available, the freedom of movement, or the ability of self-governance—as well as of bodily specificity and differences in experience with regard to care as a practice.[9] My readings therefore enable me to demonstrate that the restriction of care to motherhood is reductive for care's political potential,[10] whereas care as a concept across species has ethical potential.

Since its conception, the definition of care has remained in flux, so that the *Encyclopedia of Bioethics* acknowledges, “The history [of care] reveals, not a unified idea of care, but a family of notions of care” (qtd. in Hamington 1). Maurice Hamington and Dorothy C. Miller offer a philosophical definition of care which emphasizes people’s interdependence and their function as part of an intricate network of human and nonhuman relationships. According to Hamington and Miller, “Care describes a relational approach to morality born out of the notion that human beings are not simply independent rational agents” and that it is based on “the premise that humans are fundamentally social beings enmeshed in a web of relationships” (xii). Care as a practice therefore possesses critical potential for understanding our own responsibilities as human beings not only with regard to other individuals but as part of a society and with regard to the environment—a potential which I will examine in the context of this chapter.

In the new millennium, care theory re-emerged with renewed urgency, as Tronto argues that, in a meritocracy, neediness is considered harmful to autonomy and therefore all people with more needs are seen as “less autonomous, and hence less powerful and less capable” (*Caring* 120). Yet, in some of the literary examples provided in my analysis, basing the future on care as a practice intervenes powerfully in this representation of care as something only weak individuals need. Tronto’s monograph *Moral Boundaries: A Political Argument for an Ethic of Care*, published in 1993, was among the first works to recognize the social and political implications of care (Hamington and Miller xiii). But this trend has continued; Tove Pettersen states, the recent focus in care ethics “has been on the political implication of the ethics of care in relation to social politics as well as to global ethical challenges” (x).[11] Atwood’s trilogy will serve as a fictional example that explores the role of feminist care ethics for global challenges.

In my discussion of the *MaddAddam* trilogy and *The Age*, I return, in particular, to Gilligan's focus on context and narrative to examine the function of care in post-apocalyptic fiction. Exploring care in these texts lends insight into care's complexities by depicting caring scenarios in particular contexts and relationships. As Amelia DeFalco argues in her work *Imagining Care: Responsibility, Dependency, and Canadian Literature* (2016), "the narratives we choose to reproduce, circulate, and consume offer important insights into individual and cultural identities and knowledges" (8). This is also interesting in the context of U.S. and Canadian literature since "[h]istorians and philosophers have often characterized Canada as a caring nation . . . in contrast to Canada's individualistic, revolutionary neighbour to the south" (DeFalco 17). And yet DeFalco's analysis of care in Canadian literature demonstrates that the myth of the autonomous subject and the related "sense of shame, failure, and exclusion commonly associated with dependency is not unique to American culture" (22).

However, in some of the Canadian post-apocalyptic narratives that I examine, care functions counter-apocalyptically. As Carrière has presented in her publications on post-apocalyptic Canadian fiction, practicing care reverses the apocalyptic imagery; it encourages the forming of bonds or communities which in turn enable the individual to create a new future—a process that we can observe in Nancy Lee's *The Age*, where learning that care is a mutual responsibility and becoming a receiver as well as a giver of care leads to a more optimistic future. Similarly, Atwood's *MaddAddam* series—consisting of *Oryx and Crake*, *The Year of the Flood* (2009), and *MaddAddam*—demonstrates care's political potential as it enables a polyvocal account of events that foregrounds humans as interdependent beings. A focus on care as a form of interdependent reliance on others can in turn be used "to involve the relatively disenfranchised in the political world" (Tronto, *Moral Boundaries* 21)—as illustrated by the female protagonists of *The Year of the Flood*, in particular Toby whose role I discuss in detail below.[12] Acknowledging mutual interdependence collapses hierarchies, which ultimately leads to a (new) future for the survivors. Not only does this future allow different voices to write the historical account of the events, it is also posthuman. It challenges assumptions about who can be a political subject and an agent by expanding the boundaries past the human; the future society includes the recognition of genetically modified pigs and of the completely biologically engineered human/animal hybrids, the Crakers, as agents. This recognition leads to interspecies cooperation rather than domination by one group and to the acknowledgement that the contributions made by the different species are all equally valuable.

Care ethics also draws attention to the fact that care work is mostly carried out by those of lesser power in Western societies and is often devalued (Tronto, *Moral Boundaries* 113). By basing the future on an ethics of care—by foregrounding human interdependence and care as a need shared by all—these narratives re-evaluate the significance of the material body. And raising the value of the body has, in turn, potential for an embodied posthumanism, as my reading of *MaddAddam* will demonstrate.

4.1. The Apocalypses of the New Millennium

The apocalyptic worlds of Lee's *The Age* and Atwood's *Oryx and Crake* both employ terrorism as a trope. *Oryx and Crake* was a novel still in progress on September 11 in 2001. Although it does not re-enact the events of the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center, it is in many ways informed by the events. In the anthology *From Solidarity to Schisms: 9/11 and after* *in Fiction and Film from Outside the US*, Sutherland and Swan argue for Canadian fiction's particular position as the "intimate outsider" (228, 234), a term used by Atwood in her "Letter to America," according to which Canada has a ringside seat to everything that happens in the U.S. without ever fully understanding its southern neighbour (281). While this suggests a rather distanced position for Canada, and one that is less involved in American affairs as is actually the case, as I will explain in more detail shortly, there are some similarities between *Oryx and Crake* and this position of "intimate outsider." As noted by Sutherland and Swan (228), Jimmy the Snowman, who narrates the novel, witnesses the steps of Crake's plan to wipe out humanity and to replace it with his own genetically engineered hybrid. But despite being directly affected by the results of Crake's actions, Jimmy is not privy to the plan itself, nor is he in a position to change its outcome.

Oryx and Crake represents other features that are intimately related to 9/11 and its aftermath, such as the "fears of bioterrorism, increased government information-collection and surveillance, and a loss of individual freedoms in the face of global threats" (Sutherland and Swan 219). Furthermore, its tightly-controlled corporate compounds mimic the post-9/11 metropolis in which people have traded freedom for around-the-clock "surveillance, searches, and policing" (225). The backdrop of 9/11 also provides the space to consider which lives are worth preserving in the novel according to Crake. As Butler's inquiry into the value of certain human lives in the aftermath of 9/11 demonstrates, censorship does not only affect what can be said but also who counts as human; by censoring the voices and the representation of specific groups of people, they become ungrievable. Through this process, they lose their status as "normal" people, as humans—they become effectively "derealized" (34). In *Oryx and Crake*, it is not “Arab peoples . . . [who fall] outside the ‘human’” and thereby become ungrievable (32); through Crake’s machinations, it is all of humanity that becomes derealized.

In the aftermath, Jimmy is (at first) the only human survivor among the Crakers, and the obliteration of humanity in favour of the Crakers leaves Jimmy with no possibility to grieve the lost ones. He is prevented from grieving humanity because the Crakers—unaware of the world outside of their dome and unfamiliar with concepts such as “killing” or “death”—make any rendering of genocide and its victims impossible.[13] Moreover, their lack of understanding disables grieving not just for the human lives but for the entire way of life that was lost, thereby oftentimes reinforcing Jimmy’s grief, so that he “feels like weeping” when the Crakers ask him about items that they found because “[w]hat can he tell them? There’s no way of explaining to them what these curious items are, or were” (Atwood, *Oryx and Crake* 9). Even his new identity—the Snowman—remains a mystery to the Crakers not just for its biblical reference but even its face value in that “his name is just two syllables. They don’t know what a snowman is, they’ve never seen snow” (10).

Similarly, Butler’s observations regarding the function of discourse in the aftermath of 9/11 is also echoed in the novel, as *Oryx and Crake* mirrors the context of 9/11 “where spin doctors are employed to fashion language that will engage the public on the side of a ‘War on Terror’” (Sutherland and Swan 229). Jimmy’s ability to manipulate language enables the events leading up to the apocalypse, as it is employed by Crake to distribute the pills containing the virus to wipe out humanity. After high school, Jimmy becomes a student at the Martha Graham Academy, a liberal arts college where he takes classes like “Spin and Grin” (Atwood, *Oryx and Crake* 228), designed to help him “decorat[e] the cold, hard, numerical real world in flossy 2-D verbiage” (229). However, throughout the novel, Crake raises questions about what is even real—“What is *reality*?” (101, emphasis in the original)—suggesting reality is something that can be created or that does not exist in any factual sense. Jimmy, who sometimes invents “books that didn’t exist” and then manages to turn papers on them into a senior dissertation worth an A because “nobody would spot the imposture” (239), becomes a needed tool for Crake, who is in need of disguising the true effect of his BlyssPluss pill—death—so as to create his own vision of Paradise.

When Jimmy starts at AnooYoo, a company that sells cosmetics and health-related products, it is his job “to describe and extol, to present the vision of what—oh, so easily!—could come to be. Hope and fear, desire and revulsion, these were his stock-in-trade” (300). These remain his constants when he designs the ad campaign for Crake’s pill, which is marketed as a sexual stimulant with a whole host of benefits pertaining either to heightened pleasure or protection from sexually transmitted diseases.[14] Jimmy’s active—if unwitting—participation in Crake’s plan renders Canada’s position as non-participating “outsider” less stable. Rather, it mirrors the political aftermath of 9/11 in that Kent Roach has shown that American policy-making after 9/11 in turn strongly influenced Canadian policies regarding immigration control and surveillance (8). It could therefore be argued that Canada is participating in the course that the United States has set for its international policies and in that way its engagement is not dissimilar to Jimmy’s involvement. If Jimmy indeed mirrors Canada’s position with regard to America’s policy-making, then Jimmy’s lack of understanding of the consequences of his actions would suggest less an intentional support of the effects created by these policies—such as the potential ethnic targeting enabled by Bill C-36 (Roach 57)—but rather that the participation results from an attempt of maintaining the relationship with the U.S.

Boxall examines *Oryx and Crake* more generally as a twenty-first century text rather than a post-9/11 one and therefore reads it less as a response to international terrorism or Canadian and American relations and more as an example of a contemporary moment that is foremost marked by climate change, advances in bioengineering and biomedicine, and global capitalism. He observes another function of language and narrative in Atwood's novel, namely the demonstration of their failure, which he recognizes as a common characteristic of contemporary fiction (217). At first, Jimmy considers keeping a journal, but in the end, he abandons the idea because he cannot envision a future readership, and despite his efforts to keep lists of words he knew, he loses more and more of them each day. Boxall sees in this dissolution of language and the resulting futility of all acts of narration the recognition "that the inherited narrative forms no longer correspond to the predicament that [the characters of the post-apocalyptic world] witness" (217). After all, what use do words have if the objects they signify no longer exist? And what is the purpose of record-keeping if no one will be left to read these accounts?[15] The ways in which the *MaddAddam* trilogy stages the production of knowledge and the creation of history—particularly as a site of contestation—contributes to its posthuman ethical framework and we will return to it in more detail later.

Lee's *The Age* is likewise a text in which language becomes an indicator of the apocalypse. Here, the words do not dissolve; rather, they mimic the apocalyptic threat experienced by the protagonist. The apocalyptic threat of *The Age* is experienced by Geraldine, called Gerry. *The Age* is set during the Cold War and tells the story of Gerry's struggle with her parents' divorce and with the fact that her father is now living with a new family. The divorce prompts Gerry's personal apocalypse—it is a personal one in that no actual apocalypse happens; there is no large-scale destruction or otherwise destructive event that affects anyone beyond

Gerry herself. At the same time, the event *is* experienced as an apocalypse—or as something that has all the ramifications of one—by Gerry in that it causes an end of life as she knew it. Through the divorce, she becomes obsessed with end-time scenarios. This obsession manifests itself in the constant attention she pays to the news, ripe with Soviet war ships and the threat of nuclear disaster, and in her time spent imagining how the world would end and what she would do, creating more details and plot points for her post-apocalyptic scenario throughout the novel. Her apocalyptic mindset is expressed by her metaphors and similes, which speak of war and violence: she describes that "teachers perch like sentries" (N. Lee 44), how she sprays a group of boys "with a fan of gravel, listens to it hit like shrapnel" (2), or how "the words hit, like small detonations" (211). Everyday events and ordinary objects, such as gravel, are infused with apocalyptic power, as the imagery evokes the war with the Soviet Union that Gerry fears. Moreover, Gerry imagines the consequences should this nuclear war come to pass; it would reduce the world to ashes, leaving behind nothing but a post-apocalyptic wasteland.

The Age, like *Oryx and Crake*, incorporates the theme of terrorism. Gerry joins and actively participates in a terrorist group which is planning an attack in protest of the war. Her involvement is again personally motivated, as Gerry hopes it will hurt her father when the news will describe her as coming from a broken family (N. Lee 42). This desire to cause pain reveals that Gerry's preoccupation with the apocalypse is not only fuelled by the wish to end everything but to make everyone else feel her pain. Her last name, Cross, defines her character: She is constantly cross with everyone, lashing out whenever she feels insecure or hurt. She is what Sara Ahmed terms an "affect alien," someone who is alienated because they are affected in the wrong way or by the wrong things—that is by not reacting in the way that is expected of them (164). Gerry refuses to move past the hurt at her father's abandonment and estranges others by inflicting the pain she feels upon them. Yet, Gerry's antagonism stems from the pain caused by her father's absence and in that sense she is also burdened, carrying a cross, which aligns her with the figure of a martyr. And in many ways, her actions are self-destructive; she provokes a group of boys which results in her getting beaten up (N. Lee 2), she attempts to seduce her mother's boyfriend (213-14), and she insists on playing a key role in the terrorist attack (134-35), to name just a few.

4.2. Care as an Interruption of the Apocalyptic Mode

Gerry's lashing out and putting herself in harm's way is in part due to her inability to accept care. Admitting that she is hurt would be an admission of weakness, something she hates and that she links to being female. For her, being female makes her vulnerable and when she fantasizes about the world after the apocalypse at night, her mind "casts her in the body of a boy . . . Her inner self still her self but distilled to only strengths, all her curves and weakness cut away" (N. Lee 18). In real life, she approximates the gender switch by shaving off her hair. Gerry refuses feminine beauty ideals and therefore does not care when her friend warns her that boys will not find her new hairstyle attractive (35). Carrière also points out that the same indeterminacy applies not only to Gerry's gender but to her age as well, which is never explicitly stated. This in-between state makes Gerry "constantly located in a middle region: of male and female, of activity and passivity, of self-destructiveness and yearning for love, of illness and health, of self and other, of intimacy and politics" ("Ailing Bodies" 51).

Her need not to be considered weak—which for Gerry is a gendered quality—makes it impossible for others to offer comfort or emotional support, which makes it more difficult for Gerry to overcome the hurt caused by her father's abandonment. In neoliberal terms, needing care means a lack of capability, a failure in personal responsibility (Tronto, *Caring Democracy* 42). And in an individualistic society it is increasingly difficult to understand care as a basic human need which is shared equally (29). In *The Age*, Gerry continuously struggles with her desire to be cared for and her need to be independent. Learning to receive care is a decisive change in Gerry's development, one that brings hope for an end to her apocalypse. This change also affects Gerry's understanding of femininity as a weakness, in that protection and strength ultimately lie with the female characters and the birthing imagery of her post-apocalyptic fantasy, as I will explore further down.

In order for Gerry to understand that giving and receiving care is not a weakness, she needs to reconsider the gendered assumption that protection is a masculine task. Protection is a matter of anxiety for Gerry because "what could they do to defend themselves, a woman and a child? Her mother offered no real protection" (N. Lee 195). This realization further explains her gender-switch in her apocalyptic fantasy, in which she is a boy with the task of protecting another survivor, a girl, who later becomes the mother of Gerry's child. In *Caring Democracy*, Tronto states that police protection is recognized as a form of public care and therefore considered masculine, whereas feminine care takes places in the private sphere, feminizing the recipients of this form of care (75). Gerry yearns for the masculine protection her father personifies, but by the end of the novel she recognizes that her mother can fill the role of protector as well. The planned terrorist attack goes awry in the end and the bomb accidentally explodes, killing the friend who was trying to protect Gerry. As the other members of the terrorist group scatter, Gerry is left alone with her grief. Her downward spiral climaxes when she takes pills and, not so accidentally, falls into the pool behind her house where she is rescued by her mother.

At first, being saved is not enough to pull Gerry out of her catatonic state. However, she soon realizes that her mother feels alone and unable to help her daughter when she overhears a phone call in which her mother tries to reach Gerry's father. This recognition—that her mother needs care and that Gerry is in the position to provide it—rouses something in her (264-270). Gerry decides to turn her back on violence by surrendering herself to the police, where she testifies against the other members of the terrorist group. It is again her mother who helps her by taking her to the police station and organizing a lawyer. The same lawyer that assisted in the mother's divorce is now helping Gerry to cut the ties to her violent past and to move past her need to punish her father.

Gerry's understanding of care as something relational and therefore not a weakness functions counter-apocalyptically in that it helps construct a more optimistic future; here, in the form of emotional support and protection, rather than focusing on violent retaliation. The apocalyptic metaphors are missing from the ending, enabling an optimistic reading of her future, in which she is walking toward her mother, taking "each step with care" (N. Lee 281). Her choice of a future with care in it is also powerfully symbolized in her post-apocalyptic imagination. Her male alter ego surrenders the girl and her child to a female settlement because, in the post-apocalyptic chaos of Gerry's fantasy, men are violent; they rape and kill, while the women provide one another with a safe community. This all-female family at the conclusion of the post-apocalyptic fantasy "mirrors the . . . legitimization of the non-patriarchal and non-normative family unit which Gerry forms with her own single mother" at the close of the novel (Carrière, "Ailing Bodies" 56), so that both narratives end with female bonds as a form of strength and protection.

Furthermore, Gerry's imaginary tale of male violence against women draws on the Book of Revelation. The unnamed male narrator—who is Gerry's alter ego—fills the role of John of Patmos and lends his gaze to recount the events of the post-apocalyptic narrative. It is through his narration that the girl he is involved with takes on the role of the Whore of Babylon: not only for her seductive qualities but also for her monstrous nature. Crucial is, however, that it is Gerry herself who fills the role of John by imagining herself the male survivor in her fantasy, and that her alter ego is not merely a witness but an active participant in the events. While John recounts the events of the vision without being able to change their outcome, Gerry's alter ego is directly involved and makes choices that affect the ending of the post-apocalyptic narrative. Moreover, Gerry takes on the role of a male survivor due to her belief that women lack the skills to protect and because of her feelings that being a woman makes her vulnerable (see above). However, as my following reading will unpack, it is through her exploration of this role that Gerry comes to understand that being a woman and being strong is not mutually exclusive. In Gerry's post-apocalyptic fantasy, the Whore of Babylon is entangled in the narrative of a monstrous pregnancy and echoes both parts of the Whore's title in the Book of Revelation as "THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND OF THE ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH" (17.5).

Gerry's pregnant body is treated as being on the threshold of "abnormality" and the grotesque (N. Lee 171). The foetus inspires visions of the monstrous, something "covered in spikes," "a thorn covered, squid-tailed beast" (197), and an abortion is suggested as the "safest thing" (171).[16] The pregnant girl also further functions as a double of the Whore in that she is presented as the seductress, whereas the boy is merely following along. While the boy feels "his hardness pressed against her backside" every morning, he "abuses himself to dilute the wanting" (N. Lee 112). It is the girl who "is on him," "undoes him," and "pushes him down, down" (141).

The pregnancy is her idea—"the idea sickens him with worry"—and it is she who "corners him in the hut each day to ensure success. He is helpless to resist" (169). The boy becomes a "helpless" victim of the girl's sexuality. The fear of the other people in the camp, which is directed at the pregnant girl, and the visions of the monstrosity growing in her belly further align her with the Whore: the mother of all abominations on earth (Rev. 17.5)—but a counter-apocalypse is also revealing itself through this mirroring of the Whore in the girl. The pregnancy intervenes in the misogynistic violence of Gerry's apocalypse to create a counter-narrative based on care.

Despite the fears of the boy and the doctors around her, the girl decides to carry the baby to term. Its (potential) monstrosity is not feared by the girl whose gait, after deciding to keep the baby, is "lightened by a sureness [the boy] cannot grasp" (N. Lee 172). It is the baby and the girl's decision to care for it that intervenes powerfully in the apocalyptic paradigm of the narrative. Even more so, it intervenes in the misogynistic, post-apocalyptic monstrosity that frames the girl up until then. Caring for the baby humanizes the girl: instead of becoming a double of the Whore of Babylon by giving birth to an abomination, the birth sparks "laughs," "hug[s]", and "embrace[s]" in the doctors who were previously disapproving (N. Lee 252-53). When the fresh parents leave the clinic, the girl and the baby are received by well-wishers and "cheers" (253)—a whole community ready to accept them.

It bears pointing out that the approval of the men in the camp reminds the boy of "patrons at a strip bar," as the men make comments about the girl's future looks and stake claims based on who "saw her first" (N. Lee 254). While it remains somewhat ambiguous whether they are talking about the baby girl or the mother, previous instances in the novel suggest that both might equally likely become the victim of male violence. In either case, the men's reaction reinforces again the misogyny of Gerry's post-apocalyptic community and the precarious position of women in it. This scene furthermore indicates the cyclical nature of the apocalypse: at the point when the monstrosity of the mother and the possible doom represented by the baby are resolved, further violence already looms in the future. However, the boy's demonstration of care at the end, when he surrenders the mother and her baby to the female community, suggests a break with the violence of apocalypse.

In *The Age*, growing up means learning how to care and the decision to keep the baby leads to caring acts by both the boy and the girl, as both demonstrate that care is a quality required for life: the boy in the form of "[g]rowing up," the girl in the form of fostering (a new) life. At first, believing he knows what is best, the boy takes the baby into the woods with the intention of killing it. But as "he waits for the right moment, for certainty" (255), he finds no such sign. Instead, he realizes that caring for someone enables their survival, and the girl has cared for the baby all along, despite the baby's limited survival chances He, on the other hand, "still feels like a child, a boy, unskilled at taking care. All along he has relied on the girl's strengths" (278).[17]

By acknowledging that care is an important skill, Gerry's male alter ego transforms care from a weakness into a strength. Indeed, examining not only the pregnancy in Gerry's post-apocalyptic fantasy but also that of one of the terrorists in the main storyline leads Carrière to conclude that "both . . . narratives of *The Age*, through their shape-shifting and rebirthing imagery posit acts of friendship, compassion, and maternal love as modes of alternative survival and being" (55). While *The Age* demonstrates that "care often stems from the zones of intimacy, of the body and of the publicly unacknowledged" (57), the care taking place in *The Age* is foremost happening between Gerry and her mother (or the girl and her unborn baby in the post-apocalyptic fantasy), which is hardly surprising since women have traditionally been cast in the role of care-giver (Tronto, *Moral Boundaries* 55; *Caring Democracy* 70).

However, restricting care to the dyadic model of mother and child is reductive; as Fiona Robinson points out, this model draws attention away from care's political aspects (133). Atwood's *MaddAddam* trilogy is particularly helpful in demonstrating that care is not an inherently maternal trait because her series features uncaring birth mothers, such as Ren's mother, whose life decisions affect Ren but are only made in the mother's self-interest. In *The Year of the Flood* and *MaddAddam*, care is not an intra-family activity, but—considering that it involves genetically engineered bio forms as well as the human community—a concept across species.

4.3. A Future Based on Care

The Age—due to its setting in the 1980s, which anchors it in a time already past, but also due to its entirely imagined post-apocalyptic narrative—emphasizes the personal character of the apocalypse rather than presenting it as a global event. Atwood's *Oryx and Crake* likewise features personal apocalypses—that is, apocalypses who function as a rupturing event but that are confined to the experience of a single individual, such as Gerry's—for example that of Jimmy, but they are at the same time contextualized in a global frame to not only demonstrate the fluidity between the personal and the global sphere—that one indeed affects the other—but to thereby enable a critique of global capitalism.

While Atwood's *Oryx and Crake* recounts the events that led to the annihilation of most of humanity at the hands of genius-scientist Crake, who has become scientifically detached "to the point of total alienation" (Lapointe 138), Atwood's *The Year of the Flood* is set after Crake has succeeded in exterminating most of mankind with the help of a super virus. Disguised as a new and euphoria-inducing designer drug, the virus quickly spreads, leaving very few survivors beside Crake's genetically engineered creation, the so-called Crakers. As the second book in the trilogy, it tells the story of some of these survivors, members—or, rather, previous—members of God's Gardeners, an ecologically conscious, vegetarian, Christian sect. *MaddAddam* provides the conclusion and offers a future in which a "break from the cycle of apocalyptic misogyny and racism" seems possible (Hicks 53).[18] The future community in *MaddAddam* is based on a posthuman feminist ethics of care, in which humans are part of an intraspecies network, and women have reclaimed their embodiment by refusing to be a male commodity and gaining a voice.[19]

Oryx and Crake takes current developments in genetic research and the exploitation of animals under late capitalism to the limit by presenting pigoons, gene-spliced pigs that can grow "an assortment of foolproof human-tissue organs" for uncomplicated transfer into human patients (Atwood 26), and the grotesque ChikiNob, "a large bulblike object that seemed to be covered with stippled whitish-yellow skin. Out of it came twenty thick fleshy tubes, and at the end of each tube another bulb was growing"—chickens but reduced to its "parts. Just the breasts, on this one" (246). The exploitation of animals, however, is also further employed to emphasize just how blurry the lines between animals and humans in the capitalist world of the novel are. It likewise illustrates the extent to which embodiment—i.e., ownership of one's body and the lived reality that transcending or disregarding the body is a luxury that is not possible for large groups of people who rely on their bodies for their livelihood—is vital to read, and resist, the sites of oppression. *The Year of the Flood*, therefore, in turn demonstrates the slippage between food, animals, and women in an utterly commodified world.[20]

According to Chen's animacy hierarchy humans are considered the most active agent and are therefore understood to be at the top (Chen). Yet, *The Year of the Flood* is ripe with "[t]he pervasive knowledge among Atwood's feminine subjects that they exist within the same categories as their food [the animals]," which marks "how they are constrained by their status of women" (Lapointe 134). Annette Lapointe illustrates this in her reading of the two female characters Toby and Ren: Toby becomes animal through her bodily fragmentation, Ren through her sex work in animal disguise. Toby "fragments her embodiment" by selling her eggs twice, but due to complications on the third attempt she becomes infertile—"[t]he categories of woman and animal (bird) overlap: Toby must first cease to be able to "lay" eggs before she can become meat" (Lapointe 142). The latter transformation then occurs through Toby's employment at a restaurant of the fast food chain SecretBurgers, where she first serves meat, but then ends up being "sexual 'meat ' for the management;" her relentless sexual abuse during her meal breaks means no time to feed herself and so it gradually consumes her (143). Ren visibly blurs the categories women and animals because she wears a Biofilm Bodysuit for her work at the Scales and Tails nightclub. The transformation is so "real" that Toby, when she later encounters Ren, at first thinks she is "a huge bird on a leash" (Atwood, *The Year of the Flood* 350). Through Ren, "[e]very consumed animal, no matter how pathetic, returns in the moment that the woman disguised as/mistaken for an animal is raped" (Lapointe 146).

In the context of posthuman ethics, the women's fate is instructive. It is their animal status that marks these women as commodities for consumption, and their animalization recalls the long history of devaluing human life by using animal names for people of colour. It is a history, though, that remains silent in Atwood's trilogy. Racial diversity is mostly absent from the trilogy: the reader learns almost nothing about the experiences of people of colour in the strongly misogynistic apocalypse of *Oryx and Crake* and its aftermath. The most strongly racialized character is undoubtedly Oryx, but while she is used to critique human trafficking, she is also the exotic Eastern object "constructed externally by the Western observer" (Talon 289),[21] and other scholars have similarly found her to be appropriated by Jimmy (see Dunning).[22] As Chen demonstrates at length in his chapter on linguistics and agency, however, "the 'animal' is relentlessly recruited as the presumed field of rejection of and for the 'human'"—not just in a gendered but a racialized context (23-24). A thus achieved "human animality (or barbarity) represents the simultaneous legitimation of enslavement . . . and a dispossession of right to self-determination" (47). While colour-blind, we can nonetheless see the dispossession at work through Toby's status as meat, and I will also examine the relation between her status as meat and her turning animal further below. Toby's rapist continually reminds her

> that a woman with an ass as skinny as Toby's should consider herself in luck if any man wanted to stick his hole-hammer into her. She'd be even luckier if he didn't sell her to Scales as a temporary, which meant temporarily alive. She should thank her lucky stars. Better, she should thank him: he demanded a thank you after every degrading act. He didn't want her to feel pleasure, though: only submission. (Atwood, *The Year of the Flood* 38)

Not only does Blanco possess the power to just "sell her," he also explicitly links Toby's worth to his own desire. Toby has become a commodity that can be sold and used at the will of another.

Her transformation into an object of consumption is directly related to capitalist practices. "Capital's only measure of success is *accumulation*" (Angus 114, emphasis in the original), and so companies need to create profits. In *Oryx and Crake*, health companies—like HelthWyzer, the company Toby's mother works for—actually create diseases and sell them in their supposed health products because, as Crake explains, "[t]he best diseases, from a business point of view, . . . would be those that cause lingering illnesses. Ideally—that is, for maximum profit—the patient should either get well or die just before all of his or her money runs out" (Atwood 256). Toby's mother becomes a victim of this practice and when she eventually dies, Toby's father is left destitute and commits suicide. The illegal gun used for his suicide and her father's remaining debts leave Toby no choice but to give up her identity, which leaves her limited means of income (*Year of the Flood*, 30). Without money, her body loses its human status and becomes instead a commodity to sell: she first works as an advertising mascot wearing "fake-fur animal suits" (31); after that, her transformation begins as she sells first her hair and then her eggs (31-32). When there is nothing left to sell, the rest of her body becomes a good for consumption as well (Lapointe 142).

Toby's fate and that of the chickens is not so different; when there is no more to be gained from Toby, she is reduced to her only remaining value—consumption. The ChikiNob likewise does away with all of the parts of the chicken that do not produce profit to create something that is entirely consumable. Atwood's speculative realism here effectively blurs the borders between a dystopian future and an already existing present; even today "[t]he climate crisis is upon as not because markets aren't working well enough but because the market system is working too well in accelerating global energy and material cycles" (Hamilton 35). The way this plays out is that

> it took sixteen weeks to raise a two-and-a-half-pound chicken in 1925, while today it takes just six weeks to raise one twice as big. Selective breeding, hormones, and chemical feed have enabled factory farms to produce not just more meat, but *more meat faster*. The

> suffering of the animals and the quality of the food are secondary concerns…. (Angus 120-21, emphasis in the original)

Toby's reduction to meat might seem a future dystopia—though colonial history and the lived realities of people of colour suggest otherwise—but the ChikiNob is almost here, with factory-farmed animals whose bodies cannot sustain the animals' rapid growth—drastically reducing their life-span—and an increase in "meaty" parts that often conflicts with the animals' ability to move.

Both Toby and Ren become "meat" and Toby is thus slowly being consumed: "Day by day she was hungrier and more exhausted . . . She'd be used up soon" (Atwood, *Year of the Flood* 38). Toby and Ren's status as meat to be consumed echoes the fate of another woman who is referenced in the Book of Revelation: that of Jezebel, the false prophet—the eternal "Other, the foreign, the dangerous, and thereby seductive woman" (Pippin 42). When Jezebel is sentenced to death and thrown out the window, not much of her remains that could be buried as she has been eaten up by dogs (2 Kings 9.32-37). Employing the women from the Book of Revelation, *The Year of the Flood* suggests that the apocalypse is already here; it is already happening. Before Crake even released his deadly pill, the torture and suffering that precedes the coming of Christ is already underway.

To draw further from the biblical script, "[i]n the Apocalypse the two major patriarchal institutions (earthly government and heavenly government) are represented as women. All female spaces are male controlled/dominated" (Pippin 96). In the Book of Revelation, both governments are represented in the form of cities—Babylon and New Jerusalem—and described as female. Babylon is a "woman . . . arrayed in purple and scarlet, and adorned with gold and precious stones and pearls, having in her hand a golden cup (Rev. 17.4); New Jerusalem is introduced as “the bride, the Lamb’s wife” (21.9), and “[h]er light *was* like a most precious stone (21.9, emphasis in the original). God controls both spaces: He sentences Babylon and determines access to New Jerusalem. And while the divine being on the throne is not explicitly described as male in Revelation, Stephen D. Moore points out that the scene of the throne in Revelation 4 mimics a previous one from the book of Ezekiel in which God shares “a likeness with the appearance of a man” (Rev. 1.26; Moore 183).

We see a mirroring of this domination in *Oryx and Crake*. The compounds and corporations are male-dominated spaces in that women who do not want to become consumable “do so by de-emphasizing their sexuality and refusing animal identification, such as the female scientists who are completely desexualized and a mere symbol of their work (Lapointe 140). Paradise, too, is a designated location in the novel: spelled Paradice—though nothing in it is really left up to the chance of a dice—is the dome in which Crake engineers the Crakers and creates his virus. Paradice thus presents another male-controlled space in which women lose their human status: the only women in Paradice are scientists—see above—and Oryx, who appears inside the dome as one of the Crakers. She thereby shares their status as a commodity, as “floor models,” who might demonstrate various traits or characteristics that ambitious parents might chose for their offspring (Atwood, *Oryx and Crake* 367).[23] Furthermore, Oryx is likewise used “as a mere instrument” in that Crake in the end kills her to incite Jimmy’s murderous wrath as a means of not having to commit suicide himself (Hicks 48).

Hicks correctly points out that Crake occupies both positions: he is both Satan and Christ at the same time. While he sets himself up as the figure of the redeemer who rules Paradis/ce and saves the earth—by “bring[ing] a plague down upon the unworthy while protecting the ‘chosen’”—he is also the biggest mass-murderer the earth has ever seen (33). This double status even remains after his death, as it lives on in the creator stories that Jimmy feeds to the Crakers. On the one hand, Jimmy considers giving him "horns, and wings of fire, and . . . a tail for good measure" (Atwood, *Oryx and Crake* 127), while still making him the creator God in this improvised theology (Hicks 33).

Modelling Crake on this Satan/Christ duality opens up a space to interrogate the apocalyptic dualism of the saved and the damned and asks whether there truly is a difference between the forces of good and evil. The answer might depend on who is asked because for those condemned, God's wrath is horrific and no less fearsome than visions of hell. For example, in Mark 13, Jesus prophesies that "there will be tribulation, such as has not been since the beginning of the creation" (Mk. 13.19), and for those who do not belong to the chosen, the suffering will indeed be great because "unless the Lord had shortened those days, no flesh would be saved; but for the elect's sake, whom He chose, He shortened the days" (20). Likewise, for the New Jerusalem to rise in the Book of Revelation, those undeserving first need to be punished. Jezebel, accused of "sexual immorality" among other things (Rev. 2.20), shall therefore be "cast . . . into a sickbed, and those who commit adultery with her into great tribulation" (2.22), while "her children [will be killed] with death" (2.23). Similarly horrific is the fate of those who do not repent and who suffer "the bowls of the wrath of God" (16.1): "a foul and loathsome sore came upon the men who had the mark of the beast" (16.2), while the sea "became blood as of a dead *man;* and every living creature in the sea died" (16.3, emphasis in the original), and "men were scorched with great heat" and "gnawed their tongues because of the pain" (16.9-10)—among other punishments.[24] Important here is that this suffering is deemed just because God is "righteous"—he has "judged these things" and "it is their [the non-elect] due" (16.6). Crake's function as both Christ and Satan embodies this double bind of a just God and horrific terror, but it also goes further than that because in his orchestrated apocalypse, it is all of humanity that has no place in Paradise.

The issue of judgment and whether the punishment is deserved is also taken up in *Oryx and Crake* to provide a more situated or contextualized encounter with the victims of the apocalypse in the Book of Revelation. As my introduction to care has laid out, it is particularly the narrative frame with its attention to details and relations that enables ethical action as it takes into account the specificity of each case—rather than assuming universal models. Through her fascinating reading of the doubling of the Whore of Babylon in Atwood's novel, Hicks demonstrates that the Whore is mirrored in *Oryx and Crake* in a way that places her within larger systems of power, thereby creating a counter-narrative to the apocalypse in which she is judged. Hicks finds renderings of the Whore in the mothers of Crake, Jimmy, and Oryx, as well as in the three protagonists themselves.[25] While the Whore in Revelation is presented as inherently morally corrupt,[26] thereby justifying the violence done onto her, the Whores in *Oryx and Crake* refuse such a simplified reading. Hicks demonstrates the counter-apocalypse at work in Atwood's novel by attending to the Whore's doubles within the late-late capitalist context of *Oryx and Crake*, which reveals that the Whore is the product of "a scientific-capitalistic system that has forsaken human bonds of love in an individualistic and misogynistic quest for immortality that itself finds its origin in Revelation" (51). Paying particular attention to Oryx as a double of the Whore, the novel's global scope is further emphasized, as Oryx represents the legacy of colonial practices such as human trafficking—which situates prostitution in a global framework of (female) commodification (43). Thus contextualized, the Whore becomes a more complex narrative that traces the relationship between the personal and the global because—

while all of these family stories are personal apocalypses—the larger context and the ultimate actions of the characters lead to a global apocalypse in the end.

4.4. Posthuman Futures

The strategies of doubling and contextualizing that Hicks focuses on are, however, not the only ones that enable the trilogy's counter-apocalypse. Beyond the doubling of the Whore, the interruption of the apocalyptic cycle is enacted even more strongly by the posthuman future posited by the end of *MaddAddam*. In a posthuman feminist gesture, the Crakers provide a means to an actual break with the cycle of apocalyptic violence of colonialism and misogyny—as will be explored in more detail with the last two books of the trilogy, *The Year of the Flood* and *MaddAddam*.[27] Having explored the relationship between the (female) body and apocalypse, I want to shift focus now to consider the counter-apocalypse of Atwood's trilogy as a whole by including the post-apocalyptic narrative of *The Year of the Flood* and the posthuman world of *MaddAddam*. In contrast to the apocalypses taking place in the commodified world of the compounds and corporations of *Oryx and Crake*, *The Year of the Flood* presents the eco-militant counter group God's Gardeners. This group holds particular meaning with regard to the survivors who form the new future in *MaddAddam*, as the survivors constitute both a continuation as well as a divergence from the Gardeners. Toby, for example, to escape her hell at the fast food restaurant, takes a chance to join the group of Gardeners who are protesting the meat consumption at the place where she works.

The community of the Gardeners is based on some of the principles of an ethics of care, yet it fails to fully practice what it preaches. The strongly hierarchical text of the Bible is reinterpreted by the Gardeners, so that the interdependency of humans and the value of all lives are stressed: “why do we think everything on Earth belongs to us, while in reality we belong to Everything” (Atwood, *Year of the Flood* 52-53). This question translates into a recognition of human and nonhuman animals as equals, which is expressed in most sermons by addressing them to people and creatures alike (11, 125, 159, 195). This flattening of hierarchies between the species is also practiced within the human community of the Gardeners. Officially, there is no hierarchy among the members (45), and even the clothing everyone wears is identical, reducing potential differences in social standing (46, 66). In most ways, they are all treated equally; daily showers are prohibited (Atwood, *Year of the Flood* 64), for example, so that the Gardeners all share the same earthly smell (101, 209). Their “naturalness” is another feature often connected with care. It is the association with the body that devalues care work and the people who do this kind of work (Tronto, *Moral Boundaries* 114). Hierarchies therefore devalue care in our society because care work is mostly carried out by people of lesser power (113). In accordance, the Gardeners, too, are at the bottom of society. They are not consumers and are therefore not considered proper citizens by the corporations who form the *de facto* government, but rather “twisted fanatics who combine food extremism with a bad fashion sense and a puritanical attitude towards shopping” (Atwood, *Year of the Flood* 48). While this makes them autonomous to a certain extent, they are also interdependent subjects. Not only do they depend on the environment to produce their own food, they also rely on each other to fulfill their respective tasks, such as scavenge for recycled objects, build shelter, or cook.

Hierarchies maintain privilege by allowing people who can afford it a “caring-pass” (Tronto, *Moral Boundaries* 21), meaning that if someone can afford to pay someone else to care—or if they are the breadwinner in the family—they can delegate the care work to others. It is here where, if we look closer at the societal structure of the Gardeners, it becomes clear that they are better at preaching about the equality of all things rather than practicing it because gender hierarchies are kept intact within the community. The term "Man" is used to refer to people, and the Adams, the male members of the group, rank above the female Eves (Atwood, *Year of the Flood* 143-44). The tasks for which the two groups are responsible are likewise gendered: men herd the animals and keep guard, while women mostly stay in the camp, where they work as cooks or healers. The ones with protective duties or who ensure the livelihood of the group—the Adams—do not need to bother themselves with childcare, taking care of the sick or wounded, or with household chores; they are afforded a "caring-pass."

It is therefore noteworthy that the group that actually survives Crake's apocalypse—and on which the last book in the trilogy focuses—is not a continuation of the Gardeners *per se*, but a version of them that is not only feminist in that it is based on an ethics of care, but also through its embodied posthuman conception of community. The community that comes together in book three consists of a crew of some former Gardeners, but also of some of the scientists who were involved in the creation of the Crakers. Most noteworthy, some of the most important members are disenfranchised women who, in the course of the trilogy, reclaim their embodiment and through it their voice (Lapointe 147)—such as Amanda, Ren, and Toby. Both Toby and Ren spend some time with the Gardeners, but as Lapointe states, Toby "remains uncomfortable within the Gardener community, and aware of her limited status and authority as an Eve" (144). She "didn't really believe in their creed" or that she was one of them (Atwood, *The Year of the Flood* 96), and both she and Ren survive on their own when the "flood" hits—Toby at the spa where the Gardeners placed her, and Ren in the sex club where she is employed.

MaddAddam, the last book in the series*,* develops the concepts of *The Year of the Flood* further by challenging humanist thinking through an embodied posthuman lens. It thereby questions humans' supposed superiority not only by drawing attention to the problematic assumption of a universal human subject,[28] but by using the Crakers to interrogate humanity's need for categorizing everything according to hierarchical power structures. The Crakers embody Crake's "'for the greater good' argument taken to the extreme" (Sutherland and Swan 233), in that they were designed to replace humanity. For Crake, humanity could not be saved because "the only way to reconcile humanity with nature is to annihilate all that we identify as human, leaving only an engineered, commodified version of the species whose ambivalence regarding animals, eating, and even gender has also been erased" (Lapointe 141). For that reason, he bestowed several animal traits on his creation: the Crakers are able to purr, they live off plants, and have a sex drive that follows mating cycles. They might be considered similar to the pigoons who, after all, also share human tissue; however, the Crakers are humanoid-looking: they come in "all available skin colours" (Atwood, *Oryx and Crake* 363), and apparently look so human that Jimmy also at first does not notice the actually human Oryx among them (370).

Their human semblance invites the human characters with whom they interact to reflect on the definition and the supposed superiority of the human species. Because while the Crakers seem to embody the correctness of Crake's argument—by living peacefully and in harmony with their environment—they also do not form the full picture: "Humanity . . . persists precisely by defying the mechanical construction of culture on which Crake relied" and the feminist culture of the former Gardeners exemplifies this (Lapointe 141).[29] Having both groups survive means that the Crakers complicate the animacy hierarchy. The Craker's are hybrids, humanoid-looking but displaying animal traits, and causing debate among the Gardeners, which draws attention to people's need to rank all entities. To Rebecca, they are not like humans (Atwood, *MaddAddam* 35), and Swift Fox refers to them as a type of vegetable (19); yet, Toby thinks that we humans must seem “subhuman” to the Crakers “with our flapping extra skins, our aging faces, our warped bodies, too thin, too fat, too hairy, too knobbly” (36). And the superiority of the human race is not only questioned with regard to the Crakers. A Mo’Hair, a genetically altered sheep breed that grows human hair, grooms Toby’s leg because it mistakes her for a relative (30), and when one of the Mo’Hairs goes missing, the group of human survivors wonders if a wild animal got it—or “something worse, . . . something human” (105). Similarly, one of the Gardeners thinks that the pigoons consider themselves generals and humans as mere infantry because to them humans seem “dumb as a stump” (340).

These examples reflect that hierarchies are not pre-existent, but instead created by the ones in power. By presenting the animacy hierarchy from different viewpoints, it becomes visible that the position of human is not fixed: The Mo’Hairs consider humans part of their kind, the pigoons think they are intellectually above humans, and the Crakers could be seen as inferior or superior to humans, depending on the traits with which one chooses to define “human.” In the end, the sentient groups understand that it is not about superiority, as they all need to rely on each other’s specific characteristics if they are to apprehend the Painballers, a group of murderers and rapists that threaten the future of humans, Crakers, and pigoons alike. The pigoons with their superior senses and underestimated cognitive abilities are able to track the Painballers; the Crakers can communicate with both pigoons and humans and are thus able to serve as mediators; and the humans have weapons and the ability to use them. This inter-species cooperation ultimately becomes more than mere functionality: when two of the Gardeners die in the following battle, the pigoons carry the fallen to the funeral site and collect flowers with which to cover them, despite not having death rites of their own, while the Crakers sing (Atwood, *MaddAddam* 373). This cooperation demonstrates that humanity’s interdependence exceeds its own species and it is only this realization that enables them to overcome the animosity that previously coloured the interactions with the pigoons.[30]

Acknowledging that the differences between all living things are valuable to everyone's very existence, not just to that of humans, is embedded in the narrative structure of the series as well. Multiple perspectives stand side-by-side with no single narrator throughout the three novels. Jimmy tells *Oryx and Crake*, but even his point-of-view alternates between his old self, the Jimmy he was when Crake and the rest of humanity was still alive, and Jimmy the Snowman, the mythical figure he has become to the Crakers in the post-apocalyptic world. *The Year of the Flood* is told both by Ren and Toby, providing two perspectives of women that used to be members of the Gardeners. And *MaddAddam* is told by Toby until the narration is taken over by a young Craker boy called Blackbeard, who learns how to write.

Carrière points out that there are not only multiple narrators, but multiple life stories that are being told—such as that of Toby's lover, Zeb; that of his brother and founder of the Gardeners, Adam; or that of Ren's friend, Amanda, in addition to those I already mentioned. She sees this collection of life stories as part of a feminist intervention, as refusing to condense history or its outcome to a grand narrative by keeping the storytelling polyvocal ("Metafeminism" 239). I want to build on this in that the outlook on the future in *MaddAddam* also remains polyvocal as Blackbeard continues the narration for the next generation: the offspring of human women and Craker fathers that will be cared for not only by the Craker community but by the human men as well—again breaking open the binaries of mother and child as the primary location for care. And this next generation does more than merely challenge the mother/child dyad when it comes to care as a practice.

The Craker-human generation demonstrates not only that Crake's apocalyptic plan ultimately failed (as humanity will continue), but also that the boundaries of the human need to be expanded in order to ensure humanity's survival. The future of humanity will not be "purely" human. And the communal parenting-style at the close of the novel further suggests that both species will take equal part in raising the offspring, thereby imparting culturally specific knowledge, customs, and values. It is a future that represents a particular form of posthumanism, one that does not try to erase difference in order to achieve equality.[31] Braidotti and Vint stress the need for such an embodied posthumanism as the only way to prevent a repeat of liberal humanism's false universalism that people are "based on some human 'essence' shared by all, which ignores the exclusion of women and non-Europeans (particularly non-whites)" (Vint, *Bodies* 12).[32] The Crakers continue to be different and while some cultural exchange takes place—Blackbeard learns to write, for example—the Gardeners are not trying to "make" them human.

The Craker's independence is further emphasized by the fact that Blackbeard takes over the narration, leaving a record for both Crakers and humans behind. Blackbeard's writing epitomizes that the subjective position of the "I" is potentially not shared by everyone. The group which the "I" represent cannot always be identical with all the readers of his accounts. Most often, subjectivity is understood as an inner voice in our head (Vint, *Bodies* 6), thereby equating the self with the "I." For Blackbeard, this is bewildering, as his writing shows: "And I (Blackbeard) said . . . Blackbeard (I am ~~Blackbard~~ Blackbeard) does not see why . . . He (I, Blackbeard) asked . . ." (Atwood, *MaddAddam* 379). Blackbeard's switching between the first and the third person accounts for the gap between his own experience and the knowledge that his readers might not share this perspective. His writing thereby demonstrates the problem of perceiving subjectivity as an I without a you, without an Other that is always already implicated in the conception of the I. The need to clarify who this "I" is in his writing demonstrates that the equation of the first-person pronoun with Blackbeard's own identity is not one without problems. His shift from first-person narrator to third-person narrator has a distancing effect; it acknowledges that the subject reading this account will not have shared the experience that is being narrated. The reader will be an outside observer and the third-person narration pays tribute to the potential difference that this reader will bring to the report by not forcing them into the personal experience of the "I." Blackbeard's writing thus articulates further differences between human and Craker understanding of the world and their ways of engaging with it, and is as such testimony of a future in which "history" might be written differently—or, as Hicks put it, the clock is reset and the door is opened "for a new era to begin," one that breaks with previous cycles of misogynistic and colonial violence (53).

Despite the predominance of post-apocalyptic themes in some twenty-first-century fiction, the novels by Lee and Atwood retain the hope for a future. Incorporating care as an embodied practice into the everyday structure of the protagonists' lives functions counter-apocalyptically by meeting needs and by emphasizing their own interdependence. And while Lee's novel focuses on a personal form of care—that between a mother and a daughter—my reading of Atwood's series laid out that care can be embedded in the structure of society rather than taking place between two people or, more specifically, between women or mothers and their children. Embedding care at the societal level leads to a collapsing of hierarchies, which not only highlights everyone's interdependence, but also extends to species beyond the human. The posthuman society that is created in this way provides a more optimistic outlook on the future, as it ensures humanity's survival without re-inscribing its supposed superiority.[33]

The apocalyptic novel provides an effective frame to advocate for new ethical modes of being in the world. The apocalypse has long since provided people with an outlet for grappling with existential anxieties (Kermode 8)—and the Book of Revelation has been read as "a liberatory narrative" of oppressed people (Pippin 10). Yet, it also reveals the "violent, exclusionary history of the Apocalypse" (10), and thereby presents it also as a narrative of horror for those who have been excluded from Paradise. The violence and exclusion are particularly relevant to both Catherine Keller's and Heffernan's understanding of the apocalyptic as a cultural mode of the twentieth—and as Boxall, Carrière, and Hicks indicate the twenty-first—century. Keller stresses that the apocalyptic "habit" of the Western world is "self-destructive" (11), and what is needed therefore is something to interrupt it (19).[34] Post-apocalyptic fiction differs from apocalyptic one in that it is set after the calamity. The beginning of post-apocalyptic novels—usually opening *in medias res*—coincides with the aftermath or even the ongoing apocalypse.[35] What these texts offer, then, is a rumination on what needs to change to break out of the apocalyptic cycle—not just within the novels, but in the time of the writing. The texts under study here suggest that it is situated knowledge, bodily engagement with the world, and practising care that interrupt the "apocalypse habit" and lead to a future that—at least at the close of the novel—seems more optimistic, by offering an existence beyond mere survival.

“The world is not evolving . . . The world has always been destroying itself, a perpetual apocalypse . . . What hope is there?”

—*The Dead Lands*[1]

CONCLUSION

No more striking up spontaneous conversation with another passenger on the LRT. No more watching the latest hockey game together with others in a pub. No more revelling in a shared sense of accomplishment at the end of a sweaty gym class. No more toilet paper. This is not another list from St. John Mandel’s novel *Station Eleven*. It is an excerpt of my own experiences of living through March 2020. As I am writing these concluding pages in Edmonton, Alberta, Canada, a state of emergency has been declared in this and other provinces. The pandemic of the novel Coronavirus COVID-19 that marks the year 2020 renders several tropes from post-apocalyptic fiction a lived reality: empty shelves in the supermarket, armed forces containing civilian populations in quarantine zones, closed public institutions, an overload on internet servers,[2] and websites and phone lines that no longer provide specific information but instead link to the city’s update on the virus situation.[3]

It is not possible to research post-apocalyptic fiction for five years and not be struck by the apocalyptic feeling created by COVID-19 across social media, but also by the lived experiences arising from social distancing measures and what one would call “Panikmache” in German: a sense of panic that spreads—mostly through the mediation of information—in excess of the actual threat. In Germany, where the numbers of infected cases had eclipsed 10,000 at that time, my mother informed me people were now fighting in the aisles of supermarkets over the few remaining items. Less than a week separates the declaration of COVID-19 as a pandemic by the World Health Organization on March 11 from the imposition of state of emergency in

Alberta on March 17. In between, several laboratories and some forms of research slowly ceased operation and campuses emptied; public institutions, such as recreation centres and libraries, closed; medical services became available in emergency cases only, with dentists and other medical practitioners closing their offices. As Kim Stanley Robinson writes in *The New Yorker*, the Coronavirus changes “the structure of feeling” in a way that marks a decisive shift (“The Coronavirus”). It sparks action in a way that the impending extinction events caused by climate change have not achieved in the last sixty years. Suddenly, “the time horizon is so short that we are the future people” and it overcomes the inertia of reasoning that people in the far away future will “be richer and smarter than we are and so able to handle their own problems,” and that therefore no immediate action is necessary.

Robinson might have identified a key point because with a death rate of 1.4% (Begley), the disease is far from apocalyptic in that it does not present an acute threat to the survival of the human race. However, the felt reality does not reflect that fact. My students seem more afraid of getting infected or that one of their loved ones could get infected than they are about the virus’s other implications, for the economy or the health care system, for example—a focus that is shared by the post-apocalyptic novel, as I will unpack further below. On social media, as well as in everyday conversations, people make references to the apocalypse when talking about COVID-19, thereby drawing on a public imaginary that appears to capture the changes to and limitations for everyday life since the outbreak.[4]

Yet, the scenes of raided supermarkets and people fighting over goods is not the whole story. There is also the story of the graduate student of the Faculty of Music at the University of Alberta, who was supposed to give his senior recital when all in-person exams were suspended. Instead, his basement became the stage and the internet provided the means for friends and family and music afficionados—as well as his evaluating committee—to connect and participate in his concert of one. There is the story of the two entrepreneurs of the Edmonton personal trainer company *Body by Me*, who—despite having lost almost all sources of income due to the closure of gyms and the implementation of social distancing protocols—shared a free workout program to do at home with anyone who still wanted to exercise during the lockdown (@bodybyme_training).[5] And there is the globally publicized story of quarantined Italians, jointly making music from their balconies and filling the streets with song (Higgins). COVID-19 is a narrative that features many perspectives, not all of which seem to agree with one another, which is again not dissimilar from (other) apocalyptic narratives.

The apocalypse might even raise questions about the survival of the planet itself and whether a continuation of the human race would actually be a good thing. As such, apocalyptic narratives can open up inquiries into the value of human lives. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the reactions by some governments—such as Great Britain or the U.S.—particularly highlighted this issue, as their lack of protective measures seemed, at times, to indicate that human lives are an easier toll to pay than facing economic breakdowns. When I started this dissertation, I had begun researching post-apocalyptic fiction with the hypothesis that it might provide a framework for less anthropocentric thinking. Yet, one of the things no post-apocalyptic narrative that I came across succeeded in was complete anti-anthropocentrism. Perhaps it is not possible to tell a post-apocalyptic story where all humans die because is not one of the premises of the post-apocalyptic that it chronicles the struggle of a small number of survivors? It might be the reason why *The Road* is read as an apocalyptic—rather than post-apocalyptic—narrative by Boxall, in that the narrative suggests to some reviewers that it is “a story about the end of the world in which the world ends” (Clute). Can we, members of the human race, ever truly aspire to desire a future without us? And would it be possible for a human to call such a future "better"? What the post-apocalyptic narratives I encountered in my research present—instead of a planet better off without humans—are ideas of a relational existence of humans and the more-than-human world. These narratives about overcoming the near death of the planet and the human race all share an interest in speculating about ways that would enable a less apocalyptic future—not just for humans.

Throughout my project, I have been vague about the exact nature of what makes the future at the end of these novels more optimistic. Chapter four undoubtedly comes closest to defining it as one based on feminist care ethics and relationality, but I have overall referred to it as "optimistic," "harmonious," "ethical," or "sustainable." One reason is the lack of detail provided by the narratives themselves. The narrative arch in the texts I have collected clearly—and in cases like *The Road* perhaps less clearly—provides a progression toward a kind of "happy" end. Yet, the novels usually end with just a glimpse. What the future will actually look like beyond the pages of the book is not clearly defined. In *Station Eleven*, the lights come back on. In *Shadows Cast by Stars*, the disease is cured but at the cost of the barrier protecting the Indigenous population of the Island, while the characters in *The Marrow Thieves* obtain the means to fight against their oppressors. The endings—and what defines a "good" ending—are different for each narrative, as they depend on both the type of apocalyptic event as well the affected population.

As COVID-19 has illustrated, not all people are affected equally by calamities. While searching for a job has not been made easier for me by the pandemic, working within academia as a permanent resident of Canada, and being from a white middle-class background, makes my situation less precarious than that of millions of others. Working in the humanities also means I am less affected by a lockdown of the actual university buildings, as my research is not confined to a physical setup that needs my bodily presence to operate it. People who are less privileged need to go to work despite exposing themselves to the risk of infection because they cannot afford to stay home.[6] People with children are likewise in a more difficult situation with schools and day-care centres closed. A phrase that aptly catches these lived experiences, and that has cropped up in various sources around the internet, is that "[w]e are not all in the same boat. We are all in the same storm. Some are on super-yachts. Some have just the one oar" (@Damian_Barr). As I have discussed in several chapters, the apocalyptic event and the living conditions in the aftermath of post-apocalyptic novels likewise do not affect all ethnicities or genders equally.[7] Chapter one has examined in detail that the apocalypse in post-apocalyptic fiction targets some populations more than others. It is the body of the vulnerable populations—such as ethnic and racial minorities—that become more strongly exposed to the negative effects. For example, while the disease that prevents people from dreaming drives white people insane in *The Marrow Thieves*, it is the Indigenous population whose lives are endangered because their bodies are "used" as the cure.

Chapter two focused on the relevance of the nonhuman world for ethical action, showing both that 1) a world in which only survival matters leads to a world full of dead objects and a mentality of everyone-for-themselves, and 2) objects and humans are part of a rhizomatic network of connections, which emphasizes our interconnectedness. As the scenes in supermarkets across the Western world in March 2020 highlight, a focus on survival can pit people against each other in a fight over resources. *The Road* illustrates at length that everyone else is a potential threat to one's own survival—and yet this mentality is dependent on one's perspective. While I have demonstrated that the father in *The Road* is continuing the cycle of violence by treating all other humans as either a threat to his personal safety or his resources, I have also shown that his son recognizes the kinship that connects them to other survivors. This recognition leads him to ethical actions, such as sharing their food with others. Recognizing our interconnectedness likewise promotes ethical action with regard to COVID-19. As somebody tweeted on Twitter on March 14,

> [t]he most dangerous #coronavirus myth is that only old/sick people will die. When the disease consumes every ICU bed, anaesthetist, ventilator etc. available, the 25 yr old in a car accident, the 19 yr old with appendicitis will suffer. We are ALL in this together. (@drvyom)

Yet, the example of the son in *The Road* also emphasizes that ethical action is not dependent on reciprocity—he does not receive anything in exchange for his help or kindness; he helps because the people he encounters need it.[8] It is a sentiment that can likewise be found in response to COVID-19, for example in the post by Ally McCarter through Act.tv's Facebook page: "I see a lot of people being like 'I would survive the Coronavirus. I'm taking my chances.' The way I see it, yeah. I'd survive it. But I might carry it to someone who wouldn't. And that, folks, is the problem" (@OfficiallyAlly).

Station Eleven has been examined in chapter two as a story about interconnectedness. Not only are all of the characters interconnected because they are all associated with the late Arthur Leander, who dies at the outbreak of the Georgia Flu, they are also interconnected through their engagement with specific items. The paperweight that moves from one character to another links the different narrative strands and when Kirsten, the last owner of the paperweight, arrives at the Severn City airport, she meets Clark, the person who originally purchased the paperweight. In between, the paperweight appears throughout the different storylines as it changes owners, thereby connecting the owners' stories—often without the characters' awareness of their connectedness. The graphic novel that one of the characters draws within the narrative is another item that has significant agency, as it sparks various events within St. John Mandel's novel. It furthermore illustrates the permeable border between art and reality—also emphasized by people's references to pop culture since the outbreak of COVID-19[9]—in that the character who creates the graphic novel draws from her surroundings—just as the actual author of *Station Eleven* has done when she wrote the book.

In social media, zombies are often referenced with regard to COVID-19—such as the movie poster montage of the film *I Am Legend* featuring the main actor and the caption "I am going to Costco" (Brown) or the pie chart depicting associations with the apocalypse, which is split in expectations (zombies and anarchy) and lived reality (home office and toilet paper shortage) (Terrones). These references do not indicate an actual similarity between cultural or media representations of zombies and the symptoms of the Coronavirus, but rather that the threat is perceived as being posed by other people. As I laid out in note four of my introduction, I have intentionally excluded zombie narratives because they so heavily rely on the threat posed by a nonhuman other. Indeed, a majority of post-apocalyptic narratives include a threat that comes from inside society, rather than from natural catastrophes or other external factors. Chapter three has examined a selection of those narratives, in which some humans are altered in some way and now present a threat to "normal" people. These alterations include technological enhancements, but also mutations, and they often enable a questioning of universal truths—such as who is the actual threat. Percy's *The Dead Lands* as well as Baggott's *Pure* trilogy draw attention to lived inequalities as the consequences of perceived otherness of some groups of people. *Pure* makes visible the entanglements between humans and the environment by actually fusing the two together; yet, it also demonstrates that rendering such an enmeshment visible is not enough. In fact, the ending suggests that as long as hierarchical understandings of the world persist, a future that sustains all life remains impossible.

Using the historical Lewis and Clark expedition as its foil, *The Dead Lands* echoes the question whether humanity is worth saving. The answer is not a straight-forward one, as it is dependent on the ways in which the protagonist is situated along the narrative—it is his active engagement with the world around him, which he chooses over a more intellectual form of getting to know the outside world, and his entanglement with the other characters that shape the answer. By affirming at the end that, yes, humanity is worth saving, the novel draws a picture of these engagements—being bodily present and connected to others—as life-affirming. In both *The Dead Lands* and in *Pure*, the mutated and deformed body is revealed to be superior to that of a "pure" human. While this emphasizes the human as a state of becoming rather than a fixed inscription, it also draws attention to the fact that power dynamics can flip: the so-called wretches in *Pure*—the mutants—designed to be the slave-race of the pure humans, end up in control at the close of the novel. However, it is only by rejecting the hierarchies governing these power dynamics that a more optimistic future can be achieved, as the protagonist's rejection of the proposed two-class society (which would put the protagonist in power) at the end of *The Dead Lands* suggests.

Chapter four has therefore turned more closely to those narratives that examine the violent history of the apocalypse—which is, particularly in its biblical origins, conceived of as the ascension or rescue of one group of people at the cost of another. Lee's *The Age*, as well as Atwood's *Oryx and Crake* and *The Year of the Flood*, explore the violence directed against the excluded groups, such as women, and present their own counter-narrative to break the cycle of apocalyptic violence. Atwood's series, in particular, allows for situating the apocalypse in a colonial framework, which enabled me to demonstrate that apocalyptic thinking has negative effects for women and ethnic minorities. The future communities imagined by Lee and Atwood furthermore practise feminist care ethics, which leads to an understanding of the subject as embedded in relations and therefore always interdependent—rather than an independent being. Such an understanding leads, in the case of Atwood's concluding novel *MaddAddam*, to a relational co-existence between different species and a hopeful future.

While the exact details of these more optimistic futures are often left up to the reader to imagine, what enables the interruption of the apocalypse across my selection of texts is always a recognition of the human as a being inextricably entangled in a web of relations. It is the intra-action between the human and the nonhuman world that moves to action and defines people, as in *Station Eleven*; it also enables more-than-survival, as in *Shadows Cast by Stars*; and it sparks ethical relations across species, as in *MaddAddam*. Due to its relationality, I have at times called the future at the close of the novels a "sustainable" one. However, my usage of this term needs to be more nuanced at this point. In her work *Exposed*, Alaimo criticizes the concept of sustainability for its links to conservative preservation practices (169), and "a desire for inertia" in which sustainability becomes the practice "to keep things going, despite, or rather because of, the fact that we suspect economic and environmental crises render this impossible" (170). Sustainability in that sense would indicate a conservation of resources, taking only as much as can be replenished. Alaimo therefore rightly criticizes sustainability for to "its tendency to render the lively world as a store-house of supplies for the elite" (*Exposed* 169).

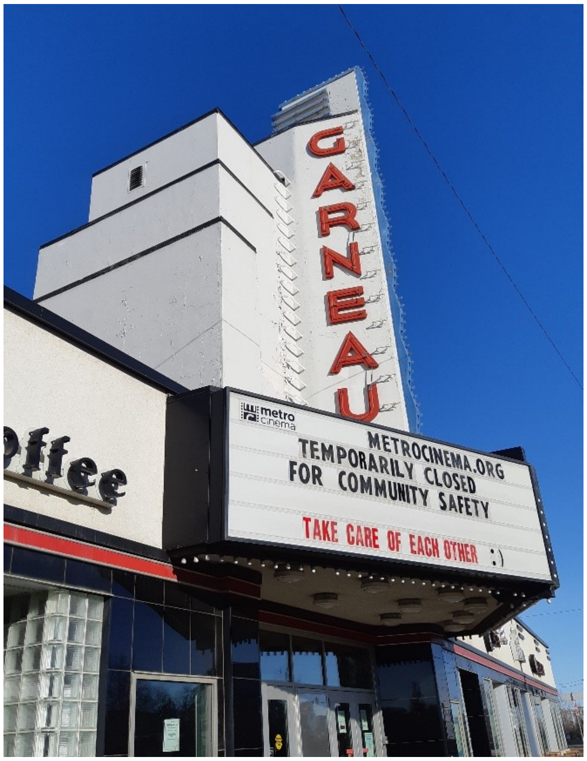
In my use of the term, I am not referring to resources, but rather to the holistic notion of a way of being that sustains all life. A future becomes sustainable when it is based on understanding life as a network of relations—or of kinship. Not all novels go as far as imagining relations beyond the human species—as I have discussed above, due to its setting of chronicling groups of human survivors, post-apocalyptic fiction has a tendency to remain focused on the human race. Among my samples, Knutsson's *Shadows Cast by Stars* and Atwood's *MaddAddam* trilogy might be the examples that render a future which includes more than just humans most concretely. However, as my examination of the various novels lays out, even the novels that do not necessarily explicitly explore relations between species do imagine strategies that would interrupt the apocalyptic cycle and therefore think through concepts of trans-corporeality and intra-action—including their ethical consequences beyond the human.

My framing of the post-apocalyptic narratives in light of COVID-19 might be criticized for being overly simplistic or reductive. What about the economic implications? Or the buckling health care systems? Or the re-inscription of the national citizen with country after country closing its borders to "outsiders"? What about the largely uneven distribution of risk and wealth among populations? What my brief summary of the pandemic aims to establish is an indication of the many facets that make up the lived experiences of COVID-19. Furthermore, my own narrow depiction is related to post-apocalyptic fiction: as I have indicated in the beginning of my conclusion, the post-apocalyptic novel is rather specific in its focus due to its *post*-apocalyptic setting, and therefore only offers a limited range of phenomena that can be observed through it. At the same time, its narrow focus is not unlike that of many people during the Coronavirus outbreak. Ally McCarter's post—"I see a lot of people being like 'I would survive the Coronavirus. I'm taking my chances'" (@OfficiallyAlly)—which I referenced before, highlights a common attitude during the pandemic. An attitude such as this, which only takes into account personal well-being or survival chances, is reductive given the large-scale consequences of the pandemic.

The post-apocalyptic novel—due to its setting post-catastrophe—for the most part does not chronicle the full ramifications of the apocalyptic event. What phenomena can be observed through the post-apocalyptic novel is limited to the scope of the apparatus with which these phenomena are observed—to engage again Karen Barad's useful conceptualization of the intra-action between an apparatus and a phenomenon. At the beginning of the post-apocalyptic novel, health care, the economy, citizenship are all things that already no longer exist. For that reason, Brent Ryan Bellamy criticizes post-apocalyptic fiction on the ground of its "cognitive reduction" (26-27)—rather than the cognitive estrangement of science fiction,[10] which allows for a triangulation between the reader's perspective, the fictional events, and the reader's actual world (Moylan xvii). It might present a kind of simplification; however, I want to highlight the useful work that the post-apocalyptic novel enables specifically because of its simplified framework. This project arose from a felt prevalence of the apocalyptic and the post-apocalyptic in twenty-first century popular culture in relation to the Anthropocene moment. In examining these post-apocalyptic narratives, I have approached them as theoretical experiments that attempt to think through various worst-case scenarios (i.e., apocalyptic events), and solutions for interrupting what C. Keller has identified as an "apocalypse habit" (19), or what Hicks and Pippin refer to as an apocalyptic cycle (Hicks 52, Pippin 1).[11]

For the context of my study, the reductive framing of the post-apocalyptic novel means more easily recognizable causes—or behaviours—that resulted in the apocalypse at the onset of the narrative, and more clearly identifiable strategies that lead to its interruption at the close of the narrative. It is correct to argue that the post-apocalyptic novel for the most part reduces the complexity of the world—it is not chronicling the progression of the collapse and the many ways in which capitalist consumerism is interwoven into the common practices of everyday life. Yet, my reading of *The Road* and *Station Eleven*—but also the many other novels of my selection—has demonstrated that remnants of the complexity of the pre-apocalypse world often shine through and remain implicated in the development of the post-apocalyptic narrative, for example through the objects that are left behind or the rendering of the lived inequality that people experience in the aftermath of a large-scale catastrophe.

Due to its narrative frame, post-apocalyptic fiction supports a disentangling of the apocalyptic elements from their more optimistic future, as it presents a voice—and often even many voices—that chronicle the events of the novel as part of someone's lived experience. This is not to say that the focus of the individual novels is always the same. A useful metaphor for thinking about the various different post-apocalyptic narratives is again that of the physics concept of diffraction because "a diffractive methodology is respectful of the entanglement of ideas and other materials" (29), and can therefore "help illuminate differences as they emerge: how different differences get made, what gets excluded, and how these exclusions matter" (30). The Coronavirus, as I have to some extent already laid out, likewise presents a prism of different stories: on the one hand, there are the aforementioned stories of raided supermarkets, but also potentially rising divorce rates (Gordon), and an expected increase in domestic abuse cases (Silva); on the other hand, there are the many public reminders to take care of each other, as for example captured in this photograph from Edmonton's Garneau theatre:



1: The Garneau Theatre, Edmonton, AB (22 March 2020)

The phrases “it’s not about you” and “we’re all in this together” also crop up in relation to the Coronavirus across several social media platforms, likewise emphasizing a sense of shared kinship. These rather contrasting effects are all aspects of the same phenomenon, in this case COVID-19. One finds similarly contradicting elements in post-apocalyptic fiction as well.

Within my selection, we have the starkly different responses to the other travellers in McCarthy’s *The Road*, embodied by the father and the son, respectively. In *Station Eleven*, the interconnectedness of the characters is juxtaposed by chapter ten, which chronicles the discontent that arises from being part of a community with other people. The discontent is visibly captured in the slogan that one of the members of the Travelling Symphony had written in one of the caravans: “‘Sartre: Hell is other people,’ and someone else had scratched out ‘other people’ and substituted ‘flutes’” (Mandel 48). While the characters themselves ultimately agree that “this collection of petty jealousies, neuroses, undiagnosed PTSD cases, and simmering resentments” is balanced out by “the friendships, of course, the camaraderie and the music and the Shakespeare, the moments of transcendent beauty” (47), both aspects—the interconnectedness and the misanthropy—are part of the same post-apocalyptic phenomenon.

The fact that each post-apocalyptic novel offers slightly different facets of the post-apocalyptic phenomenon explains the choices for grouping my texts into chapters the way I have. Some novels—like *The Marrow Thieves* and *Shadows Cast by Stars*—focus more strongly on the fact that the apocalypse does not affect all people equally, a fact that can also be seen in the *Pure* trilogy. However, the *Pure* trilogy and *The Deadlands* serve even more so as examples of thinking through definitions of the human and the ways in which “the human” becomes the basis for hierarchical structures. *The Road* and *Station Eleven* present less of a rumination on who is saved and who is damned in the case of an apocalypse; yet, they stage an encounter with the nonhuman world that “allows one to perceive reality with fresh eyes by removing elements from the world as we know it” (Bellamy 14). Atwood’s trilogy and Lee’s novel excavate the violence of apocalypse and—in the case of Atwood’s novel—situate it in the global framework of late capitalism.

If stories matter, as *The Marrow Thieves* suggests, then these speculations about ways of being in the world that would interrupt the apocalyptic cycle are instructive thought experiments. The post-apocalyptic narratives collected in my study all retain the hope for a more-than-human future and suggest that a bodily engagement with the world and an understanding of the human as something always inextricably enmeshed with the nonhuman world can interrupt apocalyptic habits and break the apocalyptic cycle of violence.

NOTES

PREFACE

1. Roll, Rich. “A Pandemic of Possibility.” *Rich Roll Podcast*, Episode 508, 26 March 2020, www.richroll.com/podcast/zach-bush-508/. 1 April 2020.

INTRODUCTION

1. Naomi Klein, *This Changes Everything*, p. 4.)

2. Both Teresa Heffernan and James Berger argue for a shift from the apocalyptic to the post-apocalyptic since Frank Kermode wrote *The Sense of an Ending* in 1967 (Heffernan 6, Berger xiii).

3. Epidemics have also become interwoven with zombie apocalypses—and to a lesser extent with vampires—around the turn of the millennium, for example in the *Resident Evil* franchise (1996-2019), and in the movies *28 Days Later* (2002) and *28 Weeks Later* (2007)—a trend that continues if Justin Cronin’s *The Passage* trilogy (2010-2016) is any indication. Rather than zombies being people that return from the grave, it is the spreading of a virus which causes the zombie transformation. In contrast, zombie films from the twentieth century—such as George A. Romero’s films *Night of the Living Dead* (1968), *Dawn of the Dead* (1978), or *Day of the Dead* (1985)—either feature resurrected people or remain unclear as to what caused the zombie threat. Supernatural apocalypses, such as zombies or vampires, have not been included in my study, as they focus so heavily on defending against a monstrous threat. Rather than examining humanity’s endangerment by an evil Other, my research is committed to tracing humanity’s grappling with post-apocalyptic living conditions—due to inhospitable climate conditions or lack of resources, which are more likely extinction scenarios.

4. Heise's review is entitled "What's the Matter with Dystopia," thereby indicating that she considers the novels she discusses within her review a form of dystopian writing.

5. Meanwhile, the internet community Goodreads classifies both of these novels as science fiction narratives.

6. Booker and Thomas refer to the New Wave of speculative fiction as "'soft' science fiction, which is more character driven and more concerned with the social and political ramifications of technological developments than with the technologies themselves" (9)—and which aligns with my own definition of post-apocalyptic fiction—in opposition to "hard science fiction, "in which the emphasis is on particular technologies and on scientific accuracy" (Booker and Thomas 9).

7. Oziewicz locates the usage of the more blanket meaning of speculative fiction in the early 2000s with an emergent culture of "younger readers, authors, scholars, grassroots initiatives, online resources, fanzines, and more" and notes that speculative fiction as a cultural field has gained more traction within the fan community than in institutionalized scholarship.

8. The speculative fiction label has become a rather influential distinction, as other writers are likewise using it to differentiate their work from science fiction—such as Ian McEwan who took care to promote his last book, *Machines Like Me* (2019), as a form of speculative fiction. As *The Guardian*'s recent article about genre conventions illustrates, speculative fiction is often foremost an important marketing tool rather than a precise distinction from sci-fi (Ditum).

9. For a more detailed discussion of the shortcomings of Atwood's distinction see Oziewicz.

10. See Haraway, “The Promises of Monsters.”

11. The majority of post-apocalyptic fiction features either a first-person or a third-person narrator. The first-person point-of-view enables a particularly intimate look into the characters’ thoughts and feelings, such as that of the different protagonists of Yancey’s *The 5th Wave* series. In contrast, the third-person perspective often allows for a more contextual experience as the narrator can either give additional information—for example in Toby’s parts of Atwood’s *The Year of the Flood*—or it can put an emphasis on the characters’ actions by not providing much insight into the characters’ thoughts, such as in McCarthy’s *The Road* where the conversations often stand alone without further explanations on the characters’ feelings.

12. Reviews of poetic works that engage the apocalypse, however, do suggest some similarity with their fictional counterpart. Dionne Brand’s *Inventory* (2006) or Dennis Lee’s *Testament* (2012), for example, offer glimmers of hope amidst the bleak landscape that their poems present. While reviewers state that “Lee’s penetrating lament is also a testament to the wonders of being alive” (“*Testament*”), *Inventory* in turn has sparked ethical readings that interrogate the meaning of citizenship and the role of colonialism and globalization on subject formation (Barrett), as well as interpretations that recognize the ways in which the poem produces embodied subjectivity and affective intimacy (Vellino).

13. In “Symbolic Action in a Poem by Keats,” Kenneth Burke close reads the same poem that Brooks reads in “Keats’s Sylvan Historian;” yet, Burke employs material outside of the text itself for his analysis and places the poem in its historical context (76). He argues that, were there no further knowledge about the author, his time period, and his body of works, an interpretation

could be made of the text itself, but that any such knowledge leads to a much richer understanding of the work (74-75).

14. Teresa Heffernan argues that, in post-apocalyptic fiction of the twentieth century, "[t]he present world is presented as exhausted, but there is no better world that replaces it—these narratives refuse to offer up a new beginning or any hope of rebirth or renewal; the end is instead senseless and arbitrary" (5).

15. *The New York Times*' review nonetheless groups *Station Eleven* with other dystopian publications, subtitling their article "*Station Eleven* Joins Fall's Crop of Dystopian Novels" (see Alter).

16. Not all reviewers agree with John Clute about the bleakness of *The Road*. Other reviewers note that the story "does not add to the cruelty and ugliness of our times; it warns us now how much we have to lose," and highlight the "beauty and goodness" (Warner), "the extraordinary tenderness" (Maslin), and the "compassion and empathy" (Wallach) that can be found in the novel, echoing St. John Mandel describing her book as a love letter.

17. See Kroker xviii. Cary Wolfe terms this type of posthumanism "transhumanism," a definition opposed to posthumanism, which he understands "in the sense that it opposes the fantasies of disembodiment and autonomy, inherited from humanism" (xv).

18. See also Braidotti, *The Posthuman* 92-93.

19. I had not been exposed to Canadian literatures before moving to Edmonton. When I moved here, I was curious about the cultural artifacts from the country in which I would spend several years of my life. Immersing myself in texts from the places in which I choose to live has always

been a way for me to connect culturally to my new homes and moving to Edmonton was no exception.

20. This could be another example of Barad's diffraction phenomenon where the "diffraction patterns are simply the result of differences in . . . overlapping waves" (80). Between my parents in Germany, my sister in Singapore, and myself in Canada we have three experiences of living through the pandemic, but while we have several things in common—as all three countries have implemented a form of lockdown—our individual perspectives and the stories that we tell differ both with regard to felt security and with regard to the consequences for our daily lives.

21. While there are no specific markers, references to the "Cape Cod-style frame house" in which Jimmy grew up (Atwood, *Oryx and Crake* 32), and "the eastern horizon" which Jimmy watches (5) would support the novel's New England setting.

22. Cf. Petter Skult examined the importance of place in the post-apocalyptic novel in general and comes to the conclusion that place is either an absolute necessity for the production of hope and a future—as is the case in Max Brooks's *World War Z*—or it can be completely insignificant—as in the case of *The Road* (1).

CHAPTER 1: ETHICAL RELATIONSHIPS AND THE BODY

1. *Indigenous Literatures Matter*. Wilfried Laurier Press, 2018, p. 88.

2. See Wingrove 455, 461.

3. Feminist new materialisms faces some conceptual hurdles, in particular with regard to its "glorification of *indeterminacy*" and dynamism, which Lena Gunnarson explains is due to the

fact that nature is neither as indeterminate as some feminist scholars present it nor would indeterminate change necessarily be a desirable outcome for feminist projects (8-9, emphasis in the original). However, as Wingrove repeatedly notes in her chapter on "Materialisms," the two feminist conceptualizations of materiality do not represent a choice between the "better" or more correct one, but rather two different points of departure for analysis that are "a matter of interpretative disposition and aesthetic sensibility" (465; see also 454-55, 462-63).

4. See Haraway "A Cyborg Manifesto" 150-52, "Gender for a Marxist Dictionary" 83.

5. In most of Curry's texts, these forces appear in the form of oppressive governments that control whose life is worth preserving and whose life can be used as a resource.

6. See also Emberley 4, 54, 61.

7. Kermoal uses the example of section 35 (1) of the Canadian Constitution, which concerns Aboriginal and treaty rights of Canada's Indigenous people. Should development projects infringe upon Indigenous rights, the government needs to consult and accommodate the affected Indigenous community. To prove the infringement, Indigenous people need to demonstrate the traditional use of the area in question. Altamirano-Jiménez and Parker further point out that women are most often not considered repositories of geographic knowledge and therefore excluded from the process (93).

8. Cf. the works cited for examples by Moylan, Mohr, and Baccolini.

9. Similarly, Diana Taylor examines the term "performance"—particularly in its artistic sense—and likewise relates performance to a form of learning (10). Knowledge and performing are intimately related as "[d]oing is fundamental for human beings who learn through imitation, repetition, and internalizing the actions of others" (13). Situated knowledge, however, is not

bound to the performance of actions but rather draws attention to the power structures governing knowledge and promoting a less universal and more contextual form of knowledge.

10. In his work *The Country and the City* (1973), Williams further demonstrates that the definitions of countryside or what is associated with living in nature rather than the city is dependent on the historical context (9-12).

11. Reports of early explorations of the New World, such as by Columbus, provide a sense of this patriarchal entitlement through their descriptions of the continent, which liken it to “the virgin body ripe for the plucking” (C. Keller 157).

12. It is also revealed at the end of the book that the barrier which protects the Sanctuary has been created by imprisoning some of these supernatural beings, Raven and Dzoonokwa among them. The disease which is now spreading is the spirits’ revenge on the humans who committed this offense.

13. The supernaturals choose Cassandra in order for her to free them from an ancient magic that keeps them trapped. They need her body and willpower to defeat the evil spirit that is trying to keep them confined.

14. As Carrière’s reading of Paul Ricoeur’s argument makes clear, basing the same/self “on the principles of totality and separation” means that “there can be no relation or language to express the other;” however, Ricoeur’s expansion on Levinas’s ethics can get beyond a totalizing same to a “subject as both generator and product of an ethics” (37). In Ricoeur’s ethics, the other is not added to the self from outside; rather, it has always been a part of the self (*Writing in the Feminine* 38).

15. It bears pointing out that mythical beings in Indigenous stories are often multidimensional, fitting no single definition throughout their various encounters with other beings. The most often referred to is the trickster, which has been likened to the chaos principle (Suzuki and Knudson 35), but shapeshifters have also appeared in modern Indigenous narratives particularly since the 1960s (Payne 189). Moreover, animals often appear as other peoples, who can think and talk (Payne 187), and even get married to humans (Hornborg 221). These characters therefore often necessitate a "letting be" for they defy definitive characterization.

16. In the novel, the dead are placed face-up in the canopy of trees, so that they can be with "the wind and the rain and the sun . . . with the stars, the moon. What better place to rest than under the heavens?" (Knutsson 294)

17. While the microbiome is an easy to grasp example of trans-corporeality, Alaimo's work mostly focuses on less symbiotic or benign networks, such as humanmade materials that have been released into the atmosphere, for example as building materials, and that find there way back into the human body through living in the buildings in which these substance were used.

18. Derrida uses "survivance" in his last seminar, *The Beast and the Sovereign Vol. II*, in a related manner. He defines survivance as "a sense of survival that is neither life nor death pure and simple" (193). In Derrida's conception, it is a survival which "does not add something extra to life, any more than it cuts something from it, any more than it cuts anything from inevitable death" (194).

19. The group Elders are Anishnaabe, but seventeen-year-old Chi-Boy has Cree roots, Frenchie and the youngest girl, Riri, are Métis, Frenchi's love-interest, Rose, is half White River

First Nations and half black, and others remain undefined. The language can therefore not refer to each character's Indigenous language, but is rather used as an umbrella term for Indigenous languages in general.

20. See also Kermoal 110.

21. See also Jobin 40.

CHAPTER 2: EMBODIED AFFECT AND AFFECTIVE OBJECTS

1. Cormac McCarthy, *The Road* p. 139.

2. Barad offers a thought experiment that illustrates the problem of determining an apparatus by distinct borders or localities. For example, "What if an infrared interface (i.e. a wireless connection) exists between the measuring instrument and a computer that collects the data? Does the apparatus include the computer? Is the printer attached to the computer part of the apparatus? Is the paper that is fed into the printer? Is the person who feeds in the paper? How about the person who reads the marks on the paper? Or the scientists and technicians who design, build, and run the experiment? How about the community of scientists who judge the significance of the experiment and indicate their support or lack of support for future funding? What precisely constitutes the limits of the apparatus that gives meaning to certain concepts at the exclusion of others" (142-43)? Apparatuses therefore need to be understood as material-discursive and boundary-making practices that produce and are part of phenomena, are open-ended, and furthermore are not "located in the world but are material configurations and reconfigurations of the world . . ." (146).

3. An example that Barad provides is that of the Stern-Gerlach experiment which ultimately led to the discovery of the electron spin. Defining an apparatus as merely the external borders of a machine or a constellation of a machine and researchers “makes one susceptible to illusions made of preconceptions, including ‘the obvious’ and ‘the visible,’ thereby diverting attention from the reality of the role played by smoke and mirrors (or at least smoke, glass, and silver atoms)” (165). For in the experiment, the eureka moment was only made possible due to an entanglement—or an apparatus as material-discursive and boundary-making—because it was the combination of the bad cigars that Stern smoked due to his low salary and the traces of the silver atom left on the plate that led to the breakthrough, and so his “gendered and classed performance of masculinity (e.g., through his cigar smoking) mattered” (167)—as did the various external funds that enabled the experiment in the first place (164), thereby again challenging one’s understanding of an apparatus as a closed system.

4. Cf. Davis and Todd 763.

5. It is noteworthy in this context that the Shakespeare performed by the Travelling Symphony is also more the Shakespeare of popular culture, performed under the open sky, in sometimes stinking costumes (St. JohnMandel 60), for all people and ages.

6. Scholars have speculated about the origin of the calamity that ends the world as we know it in *The Road*, and while some interpret the sudden flashes of light and the stopping of the clocks as a meteorite impact or other natural catastrophe (Dominy, Mundik), others understand it as a form of nuclear fallout or manmade disaster (Josephs). Some even see the novel’s refusal to be specific about the cause for the catastrophe as pointing to the inevitability of the world’s end and to the insignificance of the human race (Cooper 134).

7. Cf. Cooper, Danta, and Hicks.

8. Mark Steven offers further examples from the novel on page 67: people shiver "like a dog" or stand "in the rain like farm animals" (McCarthy 69, 20).

9. The scene begins with Kirsten and the Travelling Symphony leaving for the electrified town and leads to Clark reading one of the Dr. Eleven comics, which, in turn, brings back memories of Miranda and the thought of "ghosts" as well as that "[s]he went into shipping" (332). The ships off the coast of Malaysia are likewise compared to a "ghost fleet" in the original article that inspired St. John Mandel (back matter), and they appear as something out of "a fairy-tale kingdom" to Miranda. Thinking of Miranda and shipping makes him wonder about "the possibility" of ship travel and other things resuming (332-33).

10. It has to be noted that it takes Clark fifteen years and three-hundred residents at the airport before he can care full-time for the museum. The immediate years after the breakout of the Georgia Flu are—as in *The Road*—dominated by survival needs and violence, as stories of sharpshooters in the Sears Tower in Chicago indicate (St. John Mandel 66). Yet, the Travelling Symphony forms as early as year five after the collapse (37), and Kirsten's timeline further illustrates that an engagement with the nonhuman world—the various objects, artifacts, and art forms—is a vital component of doing more than surviving. It is her timeline that presents a turning point from the apocalyptic conditions of the previous years, and the marked difference between the two timelines are the entanglements between the characters and the nonhuman matter around them. As Jeevan's brother during the immediate aftermath asserts when Jeevan claims, "There's still a world out there"—"I think there's just survival out there, Jeevan" (183).

11. As my examination of the paperweight and its function for the narrative structure of St. John Mandel's novel makes clear, I find particular value in Barad's conception of the apparatuses as "themselves phenomena (constituted and dynamically reconstituted as part of the ongoing intra-activity of the world" (146). It means there is never an apparatus that exists completely independently or without further connections to other apparatuses, which is precisely the entanglement that exists between the characters in the novel and the various items with which they inter—or rather—intra-act.

12. The photograph in chapter thirteen likewise fulfills a similar role in that it fills in part of Arthur's early life, such as his childhood and University years. While it is found by Kirsten in a prior chapter, the photograph "speaks" on its own without Kirsten as a mediator.

13. The new BBC adaptation of Sherlock Holmes, for example, represents Holmes's photographic memory by using the image of a vast building filled with shelves and objects—each one representing a specific memory—that he can "visit" at will to retrieve the desired memory. Cf. "The Hounds of Baskerville" and "His Last Vow" (2012), as well as "The Abominable Bride" (2016) (Gattis and Moffat).

14. "José" van Dijck's full name is Johanna Francisca Theodora Maria.

CHAPTER 3: BECOMING HUMAN—POSTHUMAN FUTURES

1. Julianna Baggott, *Pure,* p. 2.

2. The extinction event is not restricted to the human species—the global flora and fauna is equally affected: Consider the rise in natural disasters (wildfires, floods, earth quakes, etc.) and

the dwindling species among plants and animals due to these events in addition to human actions.

3. See Francesca Ferrando's discussion of designer babies in part three of *Philosophical Posthumanism*.

4. Transhumanism is the term coined by Cary Wolfe to denote a definition of posthumanism as a state of transcendence, in which our bodies become increasingly irrelevant. For a more detailed discussion, see the introduction.

5. Writing within the context of 9/11, Judith Butler asks, "To what extent have Arab peoples, predominantly practitioners of Islam, fallen outside the 'human' as it has been naturalized in its 'Western' mold by the contemporary workings of humanism?" (32). Using them as an example—among others—she goes on to demonstrate that their lives are ungrievable because "they were always already lost or, rather, never 'were,' and they must be killed, since they seem to live on, stubbornly, in this state of deadness" (33).

6. Feminism—and material feminism in particular—has criticized Anthropocene theory for its reiteration of "man as a bounded being with unilateral agency" (Alaimo, "Your Shell on Acid" 89). All too often, Anthropocene frameworks and artistic representation focus only on "stark terrestrial figurations of man and rock in which other life-forms and biological processes are strangely absent" (89). To think the Anthropocene from a material feminist position, it "must be thought with the multitude of creatures that will not be reconstituted, will not be safely ensconced, but will, instead, dissolve," such as the billions of ocean creatures whose shells dissolve due to the acidifying seas (89).

7. See also Braidotti on "techno-transcendence," *The Posthuman* 90-91, 97.

8. It is worth noting that my broad division of posthuman thought into an embodied and a transcendental camp does not manage to capture the often contradicting elements that feed the posthuman debate. Braidotti even assumes that living with these contradictions is an important part of being a posthuman subject and scholar (cf. *Posthuman Knowledge*).

9. The lack of responsibility for the rented body also does not remove feelings of anxiety over jumping off a bridge with only a bungee cord to protect them. Seeing others jump leads one of the renters to exclaim, “Not on your life,” and another one to state, “This isn’t funny.” However, the reminder that it is not actually their own body—“You mean not on *his* life” (emphasis in the original)—eases the tension again and has everyone laughing and eventually jumping (Price, *Starters* 117), indicating that the renters do experience feelings of worry of getting hurt or even potentially dying, but that knowing the threat is not real (for the renters) enables them to put the body at risk despite of their fear.

10. Lee, Kevin, et al. “The Gut Microbiota Mediates Reward and Sensory Responses Associated with Regimen-selective Morphine Dependence.” *Neuropsychopharmacology*, vol. 43, 2018, pp. 2606-2614. doi.org/10.1038/s41386-018-0211-9. Accessed 16 March 2020.

11. The gut is colloquially associated with feeling, as in “having a gut feeling about something.” This association, however, far pre-dates neuroscience and goes back to ancient Greece (“bowel”).

12. See the discussion of memory in chapter two.

13. In *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, Freud expands on his earlier conceptions of the ego and considers the ways in which traumatic events cause a conflict in the ego which results in their repression—these events nonetheless influence the subject through their (unconscious)

compulsion to repeat but are resisted by the conscious part of the ego (13-14). Early trauma theory—such as Cathy Caruth's work—is strongly indebted to Freud's work on neuroses due to its focus on trauma as an event that is unspeakable due to its repressed nature (2-5). Later developments in trauma theory moved away from a strict neurobiological model and more toward a pluralistic understanding of trauma, which takes into account cultural inscriptions (Kirmayer 191), for example Naomi Mandel's work *Against the Unspeakable*, which examines the ways in which external, cultural influences affect silence and forgetting around traumatic experiences (2-13, 19). Ricœur likewise questions identity as a permanent or singular self and conceives of identity as a form of narration (73), in which the identity takes shape "correlative to the discordant concordance of the story itself" (77). Similarly, Erving Goffman's *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (1956) and his following research are one of the cornerstones of sociology that demonstrated the ways in which everyone takes on slightly different identities depending on the social role one inhabits, such as daughter, student, teammate, etc. All roles are equally valid and vital aspects of one's identity, and yet there are usually slight identity differences between these roles.

14. The ways in which threat translates into real world effects is also touched upon by Judith Butler in her discussion of prisoners at Guantanamo, as it is not a specific crime that the prisoners are charged with but rather the perceived threat they *might* pose. And even if a "prisoner is exonerated by trial [they] might still be 'deemed dangerous'" and "the executive branch's power to deem a detainee dangerous preempts any determination of guilt or innocence" (75).

15. The apocalypse shares the qualities of being “open-ended” and “forever” with Massumi’s conception of threat. Tina Pippin addresses the non-linear nature of the apocalyptic by pointing out, “Every apocalypse is a sequel. A sequel is a work which follows another work and can be complete in itself and seen in relation to the former and also what follows it. The story becomes the neverending story, in ever-evolving renditions. Perhaps as a reader of the apocalyptic I do not want the end or the ending to come” (1).

16. She has more examples in chapter five, entitled “Deviant Agents.”

17. As Seaman situates posthumanism in opposition to the Enlightenment, her understating of posthumanism is mostly congruent with the embodied posthumanism of Braidotti, Vint, or Wolfe. As I laid out in the introduction and in this chapter, the term posthumanism is far from being used according to a consistent definition.

18. Alaimo maintains that “what was once called ‘nature,’ acts, interacts, and even intra-acts with, through, and around human bodies and practices” (*Exposed* 1), for example through the substances that humans put into the environment. Therefore, while humans affect the environment, the reverse is also true. The heavy metals that leech into the water and soil through human actions interact with marine life, which in return affects the people who come into contact with it through exposure or ingestion

19. As the building is a dome, where one can go is very limited. While people do not live in compounds, they live on levels with different privileges according to elevation. Everything is monitored and recorded, and food is mostly fabricated (*Fuse* 224-225). For a more detailed discussion of the compounds in *Oryx and Crake*, see chapter four.

20. Pressia is female and half-Japanese (Baggott, *Pure* 8) and she becomes one of strongest leaders of the rebellion. Lyda, likewise among those leaders, decides not to return to the Dome, in which she had been deemed unfit for procreation (323). Being on the outside allows her to become someone "new," "someone who isn't a girl anymore. This person who isn't going to follow Partridge back to an old life. She isn't walking across the Deadlands, trailing behind him" (*Fuse* 151).

21. To smuggle her into the Dome, she is given a bandage to hide the doll head fist and is told to say she was in an accident. Pressia "nods, but she feels sick. It was no accident. That's the whole reason she's here. This was done to her on purpose" (Baggott, *Burn* 285). The more people refer to it as "an injury" or "an accident" (*Burn* 287), the more enraged Pressia becomes, and the glaring differences between her covered-up arm and the beautiful wedding reception which she attends while outside the wretches are being killed makes her "ashamed that she bought into the joy, love, and emboldened hope of a wedding—even if for a second" (304).

22. The actual name recorded in the journals is the "Corps of Volunteers of North Western Discovery" (Miller 110).

23. The land was far from uninhabited, as Lewis and Clark were well aware of even before setting out into unknown territory. "Conquest" was the term used by the courts "to describe the property rights Europeans gained over the Indian Nations after their first discovery" (Miller 5). Indian land claims were at best considered trading opportunities and at worst irritating occupations by savages and by no means a legal hindrance in laying ownership to a portion of land. As long as no other European power had previously claimed the land—as was the case with Oregon—any nation with discovery rights might do so (see Miller, also Furtwangler).

24. Taking possession of Oregon was made possible because the U.S. owned the land adjacent to it (Louisiana), and because they could prove that they had actually possessed and settled the land (Miller 3)—which was made possible through the actions of the Lewis and Clark expedition by enacting land claims over Indigenous territories and building settlements.

25. Percy's reimagining differs in various instances from the facts of the historical expedition. First, Thomas, the authority in St. Louis, is not commissioning the expedition; while he and Lewis have known each other since childhood—as have their historical counterparts—it is Aran Burr who sends for Lewis to make the journey west. Secondly, Lewis is an intellectual—an introverted curator, tinkerer, and scholar; as such, he possesses no outdoor or leadership skills and is often a hindrance for the expedition, which is organized and led by Clark. Thirdly, York is not Clark's slave but half-brother. York is nonetheless presented as Clark's possession. Clark usually feels that she has the authority to berate him for his actions and to tell him what to do. To Clark, "He is hers" (125), he "belonged to her" (276), and York himself recognizes her control over him, saying, "I don't want another boss . . . when I've already got you" (68). He even accepts her power over him because "whatever she told York to do, he did" (275). As the original York, the post-apocalyptic one is an entertainer who uses street performance to amuse the crowds (67). Unlike the historical character, though, the fictional York is mauled by a bear in the end and dies. In addition, John Colter appears to have been based more on his legacy as wilderness man which was largely formed during the years after the Lewis and Clark expedition. Percy's John Colter is initially sent to intercept the expedition party. He demonstrates the hunting skills associated with his historical namesake by both surviving the journey on his own—safe for the company of several wolves that obey him—and catching up with the

expedition. Contrary to Thomas's order, Colter does not stop the expedition; he joins it instead. Chapter thirty-nine also stages an encounter that effectively recounts what has become immortalized as "Colter's Run," in which a group of Indigenous people made him strip and then gave him a head start on some of their best hunters. Colter managed to outrun them and survived to tell the tale. "Colter's Run," however, did not take place during the Lewis and Clark expedition but a few years later. Gawea fulfills the role of Other as did the original Sacagawea; yet, her heritage is indeterminate. The character Gawea, however, is the main guide of the expedition and thereby given a more active role than in the original trip west.

26. For a more detailed discussion, see chapter one and two. For a discussion on the animalization of the human in the context of gender, see chapter four.

27. In several instances, Lewis thinks of Burr as a father and makes comparisons between him and his biological one. For example, Burr "appears the same age as his father, his hair and beard wilder, but his appearance otherwise similar, so they are beginning to merge in his mind. Burr wants him—his father wants him—and he feels as excited by this as he does frightened" (Percy 145). Later, when they get close to Astoria, Lewis "cannot [even] remember his father's face. It has been replaced by Burr's" (316).

28. Lewis referred to the members of Indigenous tribes as "children" and told them that they now had a new "father" (Jefferson) who lived in Washington and who would now take care of them (Jefferson, *Writings*, vol. 16 420). It is clear from some of the original journal entries that the Americans mistook the acceptance of gifts and offer of hospitality by the Indian nations for acquiescence of their new status as American subjects (Gass 17).

29. The alleged need for slave labour to build a nation represented by Burr needs to be examined in more detail, particularly as the Lewis and Clark expedition marks one of the founding moments of the present-day United States and Thomas Jefferson likewise employed slaves on his plantations. One of the big controversies of Jefferson's legacy is the discrepancy between the slave owner and the author of the Declaration of Independence with its famous phrase "all men are created equal." The same discord between his words and his actions can be found in his treatment of Indigenous affairs. Jefferson was fascinated by Indigenous cultures and gave Lewis clear instructions on collecting vocabulary sheets from all tribes with whom the expedition came into contact (Miller 84-85, Woodger and Toropov 127), making the expedition an ethnographic in addition to geographic endeavour. Furthermore, he wrote of his belief that Indigenous people are, "in body and mind, equal to the white man" (Jefferson, *Letters* June 7, 1785). Yet, his desire to expand the territory of the U.S. seems to have eclipsed his scholarly interest and feelings of respect, as he realized "expansionism could only come at the expense of Indian Nations" (Miller 77). Some scholars call Jefferson "one of the most aggressive expansionist presidents" (77), and his use of discovery rights (cf. Furtwangler), as well as his later forceful removal of Indigenous communities from Virginia would support this assessment—Stephen E. Ambrose also argues that Jefferson already had plans for a later removal of Indigenous populations at the time of the Lewis and Clark expedition (336).

30. The numbers differ slightly, ranging from half a million to over one, but he was, in any case, an extremely wealthy entrepreneur in Astoria at the time (cf. "Capt. George Flavel," and "The Flavel House").

31. During Lewis's and Burr's meeting, for example, Burr has a slave serve "black coffee roasted from chicory nuts" in "porcelain cups [which] she carries on a silver tray," while the slave herself "is primitively dressed in a rough brown dress" (371).

32. According to Miller, some historians have downplayed the significance of the expedition for the settlement of Oregon (6), claiming that the westward expansion would have happened with or without Lewis and Clark (100). However, as Miller laid out in *Native America, Discovered and Conquered*, several of their actions immensely strengthened the U.S.'s claim to Oregon (108, 112).

33. Various similarities can be found between the fictional Thomas and Thomas Jefferson. Thomas, like the historical president Jefferson, has been acquainted with Lewis since childhood and St. Louis is where the original expedition started. His government, while not employing slaves, benefits some people at the cost of others: while St. Louis is experiencing a severe drought, Thomas takes lavish baths and throws balls for the loyal and important people in the Sanctuary at which both food, liquor, and water is served in copious amounts. He recreates the American flag by keeping the red, white, and blue, "but carrying a single star" (Percy 41). In the beginning of the Sanctuary, the founders drafted a Constitution; in its second amendment, "all rifles and pistols were destroyed" (43). In the beginning of the narrative, Thomas urges Lewis to create guns and black powder for him. While this demand is unconstitutional, several scholars have also examined the Louisiana Purchase in the context of the Constitution. The purchase of Louisiana from France was likewise not constitutional and Jefferson was well aware of that (Appel 96, Miller 81); yet, "for the overall good of the country," Jefferson decided to follow through on it (Appel 97, also Woodger and Toropov 219-20). Likewise, Thomas sees the

guns as necessary because he considers the Sanctuary the only real future; guns would allow him to intimidate people into staying and thereby surviving: “The Sanctuary has survived by keeping people afraid . . . We’re talking about the survival of the human race. Forty thousand people. I am responsible for them” (Percy 45).

34. Lewis had been expecting “[a]n emerald city. Elysian field,” but is instead confronted with “the bone-riddled ruins of Bozeman,” Montana (321).

35. Gathering precise information and “making the world one’s own” through mapping and naming the geography (Kerrigan 33) was an integral part of the historical expedition and of relevant legal weight for declaring ownership over the newly discovered land in inter-European disputes.

CHAPTER 4: EMBODIED ETHICS—A FUTURE BASED ON CARE

1. Atwood, *Oryx and Crake* 125.

2. This is expressed in a variety of forms: 1) the threat that it represents as a potentially fatal disease, 2) the way it is referred to, for example by now being included in university courses on the apocalypse (McMaster), and 3) the way in which it acts as a “change in the way we were looking at things, and it is still ongoing. The virus is rewriting our imaginations . . . We know we’re entering a new world, a new era” (Robinson). I address the Coronavirus and its apocalyptic feeling in more detail in the conclusion.

3. For a more detailed examination of the apocalyptic in the twenty-first century, see chapter one and, more specifically, Marie Carrière’s “Metafeminism and Post-9/11 Writing in Canada and Québec,” Peter Boxall’s *Twenty-First Century Fiction: A Critical Introduction,* and

Tom Moylan's *Scraps of the Untainted Sky*. The introduction to *Blast, Corrupt, Dismantle, Erase* likewise acknowledges an apocalyptic trend in contemporary fiction, even though the collection itself focuses on the mid-to late 1990s (Grubisic et al.).

4. Several scholars argue that the 1980s-1990s saw the emergence of critical dystopias—or utopian dystopias—particularly in feminist science fiction. What is notably different about this new type of dystopia is that it contains hope. While Raffaella Baccolini sees this hope created by the ambiguous ending of the critical dystopia (18), Dunja M. Mohr considers it embedded continuously throughout the narrative (53). Both scholars, however, agree with Tom Moylan that the incorporation of utopian elements breaks with previous genre conventions (Baccolini 18, Mohr 67, Moylan 189), and anchor this development in novels of the twentieth century. It is possible that a similar move can be observed in the end-time scenarios of the twenty-first century novel in general, as Boxall argues (14).

5. Nodding's model of care ethics was based on motherhood. It was primarily criticized for its reliance on chains of connections (Card 102), and for not accounting that not everyone is in healthy caring relationships (105-06). See also Sarah Lucia Hoagland's "Some Thoughts about Caring," in which she similarly critiques that Nodding's ethical model is rather one-directional and reinforces oppressive institutions (109).

6. However, here, too Gilligan is not entirely successful in avoiding essentialism; Cressida Heyes points out that Gilligan is still too uncritical of the power relations inherent in the research process and that, in order "[t]o avoid essentialism, Gilligan needs to interrogate further the relevance to the research process of the identities of the interviewers, their relation to the girls they interview, the epistemological significance of the 'interpretive community,' the

influence of the interviewing method itself on the research findings, and the ways differences may or may not emerge in the research process" (153).

7. Heyes also emphasizes the political significance of Gilligan's early work despite its essentialist methodology, as it provided a space for girls to be heard in psychological theory, which at that point mostly focused on boys (149).

8. In this sense, morality manifests itself through and within the attention to the particular, a sharpened perception of traits that are morally relevant within this context (translation my own).

9. Amelia DeFalco's *Imagining Care: Responsibility, Dependency, and Canadian Literature* (2016) likewise uses the narrative frame to examine the role of care.

10. In *Maternal Thinking* (1989), Sara Ruddick specifically roots her political conceptualization of a feminist care ethics in maternalism, based on maternal qualities that oppose violence. However, here, too the problem remains that a generalized maternalism that is shared by all provides the basis for this approach.

11. An example of this focus would be the collection *Feminist Ethics and Social Policy: Towards a New Global Political Economy of Care* by Rianne Mahon and Fiona Robinson, which focuses on care in a transnational context and in areas as diverse as human trafficking, elderly care, and migrant care labour.

12. The fact that the disenfranchised in *The Year of the Flood* are female also emphasizes that care is often used to maintain male privilege. While "'taking care of' [is associated with] masculinity, 'caring about'. . . becomes gendered, raced, and classed" (Tronto, *Moral*

Boundaries 115). Foregrounding everyone's interdependence exposes such a division of public and private acts as based on the false assumption that only the needy or the weak need care.

13. In addition, the colossal scale of Crake's murder complicates Jimmy's grief, who is, for the most part, unable to grieve for the vastness of life lost: "Oh look, another dead man. Big fucking deal. Common as dirt. Yeah, but this one's in a tree. So, who cares?" (Atwood, *Oryx and Crake* 427). Everything happening outside the Dome, "the fear, the suffering, the wholesale death—did not really touch him. Crake used to say that *Homo sapiens sapiens* was not hard-wired to individuate other people in numbers above two hundred, the size of the primal tribe, and Jimmy would reduce that number to two" (409). Yet, even though he fails to feel empathy for the individual human lives lost due to Crake's virus, he is struggling throughout the novel with his inability to grieve Oryx's death, his own "structured" ignorance that led to this point (224), as well as with his melancholy regarding the magnitude of what has been lost. In a sense, the entire novel is Jimmy's attempt to come to terms with that loss and his own responsibility in a setting in which this loss is not speakable and therefore the lives lost are not grievable.

14. The protective feature is particularly attractive in the world of *Oryx and Crake* where sexual practices are only limited by imagination or money, while the risk factors are often high, as abusive, risky, or adventurous sexual encounters can mostly be obtained in places like the pleeblands, where you need a "nose cone" to filter the air because they function like "a giant Petri dish: a lot of guck and contagious plasm got spread around there" (Atwood 346).

15. Moylan establishes that language is usually controlled by the oppressive institution that controls the world of the dystopia and that it becomes therefore important for the protagonist

to reclaim it (148-50). The works of Mohr (2005) and Cavalcanti (2000) further explore the function of language within a specifically feminist dystopian context.

16. See also Carrière's reading of the pregnancy in "Ailing Bodies."

17. My own reading has been strongly influenced by Carrière's article "Ailing Bodies" which focuses on care in *The Age* in the context of biopower and medical institutions. While my own reading is mostly interested in the mirroring of the relationships between the mother and the daughter and that of the boy and the girl, as well as the girl's monstrous body, Carrière's article also attends to the role of the boy and adds that he, too, "embodies a feminist (indeed rather than feminine) ethics of care" because he "physically cares for the pregnant girl and also for the horribly sick and dying at the clinic in the camp" (56).

18. Hicks examines only the first book in the series; however, her argument applies to all three and is, in fact, even more relevant for the last one.

19. Cf. Lapointe 147. Both Ren and Toby escape their life as sex object—Ren as a sex worker in the Scales and Tails club, Toby as a rape victim of her boss at SecretBurgers—and function as the voices of *The Year of the Flood* and, in Toby's case, *MaddAddam* as well.

20. Cf. Lapointe 140-143.

21. Helen Mundler likewise sees Oryx as a construct of Jimmy's imagination rather than her own subject. However, both Susan L. Hall and Hicks understand Oryx as what Hick's calls an "open signifier" (41) because, while Oryx does conform to racial stereotypes, "she highlights the diverse structures, both political and psychic, that impinge on Oryx's ability to speak in a meaningful way" (Hall 180).

22. Atwood's work has been criticized for its colour-blindness with regard to other works as well, particularly in the case of *The Handmaid's Tale*. While the novel only mentions people of colour in a few sentences and otherwise presents a white world, its recent TV adaptation features a very racially diverse cast. Yet, it only succeeds to "erase the experiences of people—particularly women—of colour, for no reason other than to make its cast more diverse" (Liddle). See also Angelica Jade Bastièn's review of the show, and Karen Crawley's article on the neoliberal production of whiteness, which illustrates that the show's "thematic engagement with gender, sexuality and resistance actively disavows national and international histories of racist state violence and white supremacy" (333). The neoliberal discourse of colour-blindness suggests that race is no longer a limiter to success or that "the inequality between whites and people of color—especially blacks—in the United States, is no longer caused by racism" (Wise 63). One of the problems with post-racial liberalism, which is "characterized by its rhetoric of racial transcendence and its policy agenda of colorblind universalism" (63), is that racial inequities—economic or otherwise—do exist and are, in fact, based on skin colour and far from colour-blind. This colour-blind rhetoric reinforces the importance of an embodied and situated understanding of politics and its people, so that the body—and with it sex and race—remain visible and therefore linked to systemic injustices. Otherwise, these injustices become naturalized as results of people who are not hard-working, motivated, skilled, etc. enough to be successful, while the actual causes for disparities become invisible.

23. While the Crakers were never intended to be showcases for what can be done to human offspring with the help of genetic engineering, they are introduced to Jimmy as such to hide their real purpose, and that is also the context in which he encounters Oryx.

24. These are only some examples of the punishment that the non-elect suffer in the apocalypses of the New Testament. Merely within the Book of Revelation large numbers of people are exposed to all kinds of suffering, ranging from war (6.4) and famine (6.6) when the seals are broken, to different weather disasters when the trumpets sound (8.5-12), in addition to mass death caused by various forces (cf. 6.8; 9.18-19; 11.7).

25. Jimmy's mother Sharon first abandons her son and is then involved in terrorist attacks that kill children, while she also "produces 'demonic offspring'" because not only does Jimmy become an important part of the apocalypse, he also refers to himself as "an abomination by giving himself the name Snowman, which is short for Abominable Snowman" (Hicks 37). Crake's mother murders his father and likewise produces "demonic offspring"—as Crake is the mastermind behind the apocalypse—while Oryx's mother sells her daughter which eventually lands her in the sex trade and also creates "demonic offspring" in that it is Oryx who—knowingly or unknowingly—distributes Crake's drug (39, 43).

26. The angels present her as a willing participant—if not instigator—of all of the deeds she is charged with. Her "fornication" and the "abundance of her luxury" are among "her sins . . . and God has remembered her iniquities" (Rev.18:3, 18:5). The angels absolve the people consorting with her, telling them: "Come out of her, . . . lest you share in her sins" and to instead "repay her double according to her works" (Rev. 18:4, 18:6). In other words, she is solely to be held responsible for the charges and deserves God's judgment.

27. Hicks also touches upon the Craker's importance for breaking the cycle of violence, but she sees the interruption more firmly anchored in Jimmy. She argues that it is Snowman's defence of the Crakers which "suggests what might come not *from* but *after* the legacies of the

Whore of Babylon . . ." (53, emphasis in the original). Her reading focuses solely on *Oryx and Crake*, however, and including the two sequels shifts the agency of intervening in the apocalypse from Jimmy as the sole saviour to an inter-species collaboration.

28. As the argument has established so far, the assumed human subject is male (and white), while women occupy the same position as animals in *The Year of the Flood*.

29. Lapointe refers to the community of the survivors as "organized on feminine/environmentalist lines" (141), which risks essentializing their ethics of survival as a "feminine" trait. Such gendered reductivism, however, misrecognizes the potential of a feminist posthumanism, which—through its emphasis on embodiment—stresses the role of the gendered/racialized/aged/etc. body for constructions of (in)equality, and therefore extends beyond issues of gender—and even beyond species' limits.

30. In a fight for resources, the Gardeners repeatedly tried to scare the pigoons away and to pigoon-proof their shelter—at times killing pigoons in order to succeed. In return, the pigoons were likewise trying to secure resources and reacted with further hostility after some of their kind were shot by the humans.

31. The assumption that erasing differences would result in equality is based on the Cartesian dualism of mind/body and the construction of subjectivity as originating in the mind. Declaring that the body does not matter to subjectivity is then assumed to create equality. However, posthuman feminists stress that "[u]nacknowledged disparity, not equality, is created when we erase bodily specificity from the social order" (Vint, *Bodies* 23).

32. See also Braidotti, *The Posthuman* 15.

33. Humanity’s self-importance leads to its downfall in *Oryx and Crake*, as it prevents Crake from envisioning a future in which humanity lives in a sustainable way and treats all other living entities ethically. The only way, then, for the planet to survive that Crake can see is to replace humanity with a creation that is forced—due to its genetic programming—to adopt this kind of lifestyle.

34. Catherine Keller does make the caveat that the “apocalypse pattern” with its “proclivity to think and feel in polarities of ‘good’ versus ‘evil,’” and which therefore demands “undivided unity before ‘the enemy,’” is not necessarily fundamentally good or evil. In fact, it can manifest itself as “sometimes very good and sometimes very evil.” However, “the [apocalypse] habit *as a habit* [is] destructive, and perhaps first of all self-destructive” (11, emphasis in the original).

35. While the mass annihilation of life on Earth has usually already taken place in post-apocalyptic texts, the apocalypse is far from over: survival is still at stake and the dying is often still continuing. Even texts like *Station Eleven*, which take place decades after the apocalypse, situate themselves in the aftermath by moving towards a different future at the close of the novel.

CONCLUSION

1. Benjamin Percy, *The Dead Lands* p. 379.

2. On March 17, the radio host of *NOW! radio 102.3* responded to listeners’ complaints about the stuttering quality of the stream, which he explained as a result of excessive access of the servers with people tuning in through the app on their mobile devices.

3. When the city's recreation facilities closed on March 15 of 2020, all of the rec centres' websites included a banner that noted the closure for the unforeseeable future and a referral to Edmonton's status page on COVID-19. Trying to call any of the recreation centres about existing memberships led to a voice recording that declared individual inquiries would not be addressed at this point and to check the city's update page for information.

4. Most often referenced is the "zombie apocalypse" through the use of the Twitter hashtag #zombieapocalyspe, but various Facebook posts likewise make use of the term, most likely due to the conflation of virus and zombie narratives in popular culture at the turn of the twenty-first century (see note four of the introduction).

5. They did accept donations, but the fact remains that they shared a 1-month workout plan, which they would normally sell for 80 CAD, with anyone who emailed them—regardless of whether a donation was made or not.

6. Cf. Jaya Saxena or Abby Vesoulis.

7. See the introduction for a discussion on equality in the context of the Anthropocene and definitions of the human; chapter three for Enlightenment's false universalism of the human subject; and chapter four for childcare as a predominantly female duty.

8. Simone Weil conceives of ethics as something that is born out of attention, without any incentives (107). In her essay "The Love of our Neighbour," Weil makes the point that for ethical action to be just—rather than a form of charity that seeks gratitude or a form of debt (139-40)—the one who gives needs to treat the other as equal, only then does the act bestow "the quality of human beings, of which fate had deprived them" (144).

9. Common references included the apocalypse, specifically the zombie apocalypse, for example with pie charts depicting that what people had been expecting was anarchy and zombies and what they got was home office and a shortage of toilet paper (Terrones). *Forbes* is also among the sources that has collected Coronavirus memes that circulated the internet; one of them includes the poster for the post-apocalyptic movie adaptation *I Am Legend*, featuring Will Smith, with the caption: “I am going to Costco” (Brown).

10. See Suvin.

11. Pippin does not use the word “cycle;” however, her description of the apocalypse as “sequel” and the story that “becomes the neverending story, in ever-evolving renditions (1) is likewise attributing a cyclical nature to the apocalypse.

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