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**QUEER ECOPOETICS: CONTEMPORARY AMERICAN POETRY
IN THESE SCANDALS OF TIME**

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**by
Emma Juliette Train**

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Dedication

To Lauren and all our furry kin.

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Abstract

Queer Eco poetics: Contemporary American Poetry in These Scandals of Time

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This dissertation establishes the urgent political stakes of reading environmental poetry through queer epistemologies. The heteronormative visions of future life that often tacitly shape how we read environmental poems rely on patriarchal logics that offer limited resources for an ethics of living in our precarious material present. I argue that queer poets offer a rich archive for theorizing alternatives to these normative models of time and of anthropocentric life. In constellating the three discourses that animate my dissertation (ecocriticism, queer studies, and poetic theory) around shared theoretical questions regarding futurity, reproduction, and beyond-human relationality, I illustrate how contemporary environmental discourses regarding human reproduction and (non)human futures cannot be extricated from anti-racist and feminist interrogations of gender and sexuality. Through theoretically-situated close readings of formally-inventive poems, I articulate the significance of experimental and mixed-genre verse to a long history of American postwar eco-poetry. Contemporary queer poets use these experimental forms and structures, I argue, to reconceptualize time (as well as what it means to be human) by producing capacious models of agency and voice.

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Introduction: Queer Ecopoetics

The title of this dissertation borrows the phrase “scandals of time” from the opening of Donna Haraway’s *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene* (2016). In this text, Haraway identifies a certain way of being in time—a temporal ideology—as the preeminent threat to the task of making kin with “chthonic ones.” Chthonic ones (like an earthier version of Haraway’s older cyborg) are the messy, beyond-human figures—“replete with tentacles, feelers, digits, cords, whiptails, spider legs, and very unruly hair” (2)—for making kin in the trouble, which is the urgent and ethical task that Haraway describes as “as a practice of learning to live and die well with each other in a thick present” (1). Chthonic ones are central to learning to live in the trouble, yet, as Haraway argues, “the scandals of times called the Anthropocene and the Capitalocene are the latest and most dangerous of these exterminating forces. Living-with and dying-with each other potently in the Chthulucene can be a fierce reply to the dictates of both Anthropos and Capital” (2). Following Haraway, if these scandals of time (which some might call the Anthropocene, some the Capitalocene, and still others Late Capitalism, or Plantationocene) are a totalizing temporal order violently defined and circumscribed by the brute forces of Anthropos and Capital, this dissertation emphasizes another (and perhaps older) name for this scandal of time: the heteropatriarchy. Anthropos and Capital are structured and fueled by the long and extractive history of white supremacist heteropatriarchal ideology, which, as I show throughout this dissertation, can also be understood as a way of hegemonically structuring temporality, or to borrow Elizabeth Freeman’s (2010) apt term, a *chrononormative* way of structuring temporality. These many scandals are, of course, intimately intertwined and mutually enforcing, but this dissertation contends that fixing on questions of gender, sexuality, and reproduction is an especially urgent and necessary task of staying with the trouble.

This dissertation argues that both poetry and queerness, as capaciously as these terms can be defined, can be read as epistemologies, even methodologies, for making kin outside of—and against—the bounds of Anthropos and Capital. I begin with time

because when analyzing queerness and poetry alongside an environmentally-oriented perspective (the fundamental task of this dissertation), temporality emerges as a shared theoretical through-line for an analysis of queer and environmental poetry.¹ As I show below, all three of these theoretical and literary objects—poetry, queerness, and environmental thought—contain their own thick relationship to questions and theories of time. Sometimes this temporal stickiness congeals into clear a figure—like, as I analyze in chapter three, the figure of the child—while sometimes it stubbornly orients itself in one direction, like toward the future or the past. I touch on these through-lines in the introductory sections that follow and I attempt to signal when they emerge and weave throughout each of these three chapters and one coda. Although an analysis of time could fill a thousand dissertations, I highlight this temporal through-line simply because time seems to be the residue that persists and remains both at the genesis and at the close of this project. Like Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, who proclaim at the beginning of the last book they wrote together, *What Is Philosophy?* (1991), that “the question *what is philosophy?* can perhaps be posed only late in life, with the arrival of old age and the time for speaking concretely...It is a question posed in a moment of quiet restlessness, at midnight, when there is no longer anything to ask” (1). Although this dissertation’s author is not in old age or late in life, I begin with the question of time because this author is perhaps late in love for this dissertation, *Queer Ecopoetics: Contemporary American Poetry in These Scandals of Time*. This is not to say that this dissertation begins from a place of love lost, but rather that, if this dissertation itself could be said to have a life it is both at the end and beginning of that life.

I invoke Deleuze and Guattari’s scene because this dissertation, too, may only have one question left to ask: why poetry? Why poetry *now*, or rather why poetry *ever*? Why does poetry—more specifically, why do some specific forms of poetry—offer us some vocabularies, some fragments, or some images to begin to answer (or to begin to critique) the questions posed in this dissertation? I outline these questions in detail below, but to summarize broadly, the questions posed by this dissertation might be epitomized by the following: What kinds of counter-narratives does poetry offer to the scandal of our

time and of our lives lived in the Anthropo/Capitalocene? What alternative models and images of life, love, and embodiment—sustainable, nonviolent, kin-making—can queer epistemologies offer environmental thought, and vice versa? What kind of queer desire, or queer touch, does the beyond-human evoke, repel, or demand? What is the relationship between queerness and the beyond-human? What is the time of life? A queer life? A non-human life? My hope is that by the end of these pages these questions have been, if not answered, sufficiently examined.

As this dissertation argues, time is a particularly dense theoretical nexus for a queer ecopoetics because poetry engages with time as a formal concern, as a kind of physical material of its being and production. In thinking about the relationship between poetic production and time, a recent text by the poet Eileen Myles comes to mind. In a presciently titled lecture, *For Now* (2020), Myles writes:

It really takes so much time to become a writer and you have to be able to roll in time itself, that was my experience, it seems to me, like a dog likes to roll in dead fish at the beach...But if you're somebody that wants to do that with your life which is just waste your time moment to moment, I mean it's great, I thought I will waste it being a poet, I threw the gauntlet down and what happened after that was nothing and nothing is where I work. I'll get to the why of it. I think literature is wasted time, I don't think there's anything good about it. It's not a moral project except in this profound aspect of wasting time. (6-7)

Following Myles, another way of explicating the ethical dimension of poetry—or literature more broadly—is its structural and formal antagonism to time. This is an antagonism to models of chrononormative time, to the scandalous Anthropocentric time that demands legible and measurable production, growth, movement, or monetary gain, almost always at a deep human and environmental cost. This is neoliberal time, tech time, boom time, managerial time, the time of fracking and the time of geoengineering. Another way of summarizing Myles's contention about literature as wasted time is to say that literature produces nothing. It is rather a way of being inside of time as a form of pleasure and play, like a dog rolls on a dead thing. This is a model of being in time that is both inside and outside of time in the sense that it signals a purity of presentness that shirks the concepts of “past” or “future.”

What is a temporality of the present only in and of itself? To return to Haraway, staying with the trouble is analogous to Myles's wasting time, as "staying with the trouble does not require such a relationship to times called the future. In fact, staying with the trouble requires learning to be truly present, not as a vanishing pivot between awful or Edenic pasts and apocalyptic or salvific futures, but as moral critters entwined in myriad unfinished configurations of places, times, matters, meanings" (1). As this dissertation contends, "the future" is a substantial theoretical problem for both queer and environmental thought, one that often leads to contentious debates and tepid, conservative worldviews. I love this Myles quotation so much because it is also so queer, recalling lines from their well-known 1991 poem "An American Poem": "I thought / Well I'll be a poet. / What could be more / foolish and obscure. / I became a lesbian" (Myles 2015,135). If poetry is wasted time, so is being a lesbian, a term that, as I explore in chapter one, is especially associated with unproduction, belatedness, and even abjection. As I touch on in the sections below and analyze in more detail in chapter three, queerness more generally has a long historical association with death and decay—Lee Edelman (2004) calls gay men the "the gravediggers of society" (74)—while the association of queerness with "perversion" and "inversion" can also easily be understood in the context of time: the perversion of queerness is its rejection of the biological and "natural" forwards march of reproductive time.

Put into an environmental context, a celebration of queer waste and queer unproductivity functions as a kind of environmentalist injunction against certain forms of ecologically destructive utilitarianism, economic "development," and consumption. In many ways, this dissertation argues for a natural (to use a fraught term) affiliation between queer studies and environmental thought, one that has literal historical antecedents (e.g. queer "back-to-the-land" movements in the 1970s and foundational queer environmentalists like Rachel Carson) as well as consistently shared theoretical orientations and interests. Even Eileen Myles, a New York School poet not commonly read as ecocritical, is a good example of how seamlessly a queer theoretical perspective lends itself to environmental ends. Organizing an environmental activist movement

against the impending destruction and development of New York City's East River Park, Myles describes the threatened park and its nearly one thousand heritage trees in language analogous to their above quotation. Speaking about their own relationship to the park beginning in the 1980s in the midst of the AIDS epidemic, Myles states in a recent *New York Times* article: "There was time to make lots of mistakes back then. There was time to waste, and that's the thing everybody deserves. And the park is wasted space. Uncontrolled vernacular space. So the city said, 'This can't be.'"2 Through the lens of waste, Myles links literal green space with the formal space of poetry, both spaces standing as radically queer sites for economically unproductive/creatively productive life.

Towards a Queer and Environmental Theory

Using theoretically-situated close-readings of poems by the poets Muriel Rukeyser (1913-1980), Etel Adnan (1925-2021), CAConrad (1966-), and Dawn Lundy Martin (1968-), this dissertation attempts to show how environmental thought is aligned with queer theory through a shared set of core concerns, which inexhaustively include: nature/culture binaries and the politicized mobilization of concepts such as "the natural" or "nature;" questions of survival, resilience, and bodily violence; alternative futurities and alternative temporalities, especially as these intersect with questions of reproduction; justice in, and freedom from, neoliberal systems of oppression; and political activism, especially as it pertains to intellectual labor and academic institutionalization. In short, the eco-theorist Timothy Morton's (2010) provocation that "ecology is queer theory and queer theory is ecology" is astute (281). Queer interest in environmental thought is apparent in, for example, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's (2011) turn to weather, in José Esteban Muñoz's (2015) turn to theorizing a beyond-human and anti-racist "brown commons," and in Jack Halberstam's (2018, 2020) recent interest in wildness. Notably, Mel Chen's and Dana Luciano's 2015 special issue of *GLQ* entitled "Queer Inhumanisms" shows the breadth of a queer theoretical interest in thinking beyond the human. In particular, this special issue makes clear that anti-anthropocentric thought is

necessary to, and inextricable from, decolonial projects, race-based justice, and to replenishing and sustaining the life-blood of queer critique's radical political potential. As Muñoz (2015) writes, "to think the inhuman is the necessary queer labor of the incommensurate" (209).

Moreover, a recent resurgence of queer and feminist theoretical interest in a *return to the natural*—especially a reevaluation of Charles Darwin's thought and of vitalist philosophy—underscores the continuing necessity of theorizing queerness in tandem with the messy category "human." This "feminist renaturalization"—to borrow Huffer's (2017) apt phrase—underscores (still) how urgent and prescient some of queer theory's foundational forays into the nature of "the natural," and into de-naturalizing categories like "nature" or "woman" or "sex," remain.³ The question, "has the queer ever been human?," continues to demand answers, but as Chen and Luciano demonstrate, these answers are necessarily routed through human-embodied analytics and categories, like race, gender, and ability. In this introduction I interrogate one of these analytics, gender, in particular. I turn to the highly gendered and feminized figure of the lesbian in order to ask what can lesbian, as a category of analysis, do for the burgeoning field of queer ecopoetics. Already, environmentally-oriented scholars across a range of disciplines have demonstrated how the interstices between the human, the animal, and the environmental are revealed through highly gendered, highly racialized, and often female bodies (see Chen 2012; Langston 2010; Murphy 2006; Stein 2004). These bodies are frequently double-burdened by their proximity to toxic environments and by their interpolation into regimes of reproduction, medicalized knowledge, and what Michael Warner (1991) calls reprosexuality.

The work of Donna Haraway, especially her concept of "kin," guides my analysis throughout this dissertation. Making kin (which Haraway often also calls "oddkin") is an ethico-temporal-praxis of creating beyond-human assemblages by "eschewing futurism" as the ethical horizon and instead "staying with the trouble." Staying with the trouble means entering a "thick copresence" and retooling (beyond heteropatriarchal and genetic family relations) "to whom one is actually responsible" (Haraway 2016, 2, 4). Kin-

making is a multi-species justice and a decolonial, feminist project. What might it mean to follow Donna Haraway's ethical injunction to *make kin and not babies* while considering Lee Edelman's (2004) argument that "*queerness* names the side of those *not* 'fighting for the children'" and that queerness might attain its ethical value by claiming that side, "the very space that 'politics' makes unthinkable" (3)? The exuberant ethical imaginary of *make kin* is followed by the intractable political quagmire of *not babies*, which, in the context of queer thought, positions Haraway alongside Lee Edelman. If Edelman is correct in that the figure of the child "serves to regulate political discourse" (11), I want to consider what this regulation means, particularly for an environmentally-attuned queer project.

Like the poets examined in this dissertation, both Haraway and Edelman offer expansive definitions of queerness that are environmentally radical. Haraway argues that the "response-ability" kin-making demands of us is adamantly queer, creating an array of planetarily enmeshed "queer litters," a queerness that Haraway defines as "not committed to reproduction of kind and having bumptious relations with futurities" (105). Edelman, on the other hand, positions his radically queer boundary-figure, the *sinthomosexual*, as a call-to-arms for theorizing an ethics "outside the recognizably human" (101). Edelman describes embracing this inhuman ethics as "the wholly impossible ethical act" (101); it is the "the ethical burden to which queerness must accede" (47), the "ethical task for which queers are singled out" (109). Significantly, for Edelman, part of this ethical task means rejecting the compulsion to turn time into history, a compulsion on which futurism depends. For Edelman, there is no alternative futurity, no vision of a queerer future; futurity cannot exist outside of the conceptual framework of history, which is antagonistic to the kind of wholly impossible ethics Edelman outlines because history, "whether polyphonous or univocal...displaces the epistemological impasse, the aporia of relationality, the nonidentity of things, by offering the promise of sequence as the royal road to consequence" (Dinshaw et al. 2007, 181). He thus argues that any fantasy otherwise "offers nothing more...than futurism's redemptive temporality gussied up with a rainbow flag...that's what makes queerness intolerable, even to those who call

themselves queer: a nonteleological negativity that refuses the leavening of piety and with it the dollop of sweetness afforded by messianic hope” (195).

If “No Future” is perhaps a shared rallying cry for strains in both queer theory (i.e. the anti-social thesis) and in environmental thought (i.e. “ecopessimism” and scholarship on species extinction, on the Anthropocene/Capitalocene, and on population and reproductive justice), I will argue that queer feminist and feminist environmental scholars and poets offer the most robust and nuanced discussions of nonreproductive futurity. For example, I will argue that the recent return to gender in queer theory—the call for gender as a renewed queer critical-analytic by queer feminist scholars (Huffer 2013; Wiegman 2012; Traub 2015; Deutscher 2017; see also Butler 2004b)—dovetails with the recent rallying cry in environmental thought for feminists to tackle the intersecting problems of human overpopulation, (non)human futures, and human reproduction. The theoretical constellation of futurity/reproduction/survival becomes a nexus for negotiating what queer feminist theorist Lynn Huffer (2013) describes as “robust historical thinking about how subjects actually live and negotiate their relation to moralities.” For Huffer, an ethical reinvigoration of queer theory requires “the development of what Foucault calls a desubjectivating ethics—an ethics of the self as a self-undoing practice of freedom” which “requires a retraversing, thinking-feeling transvaluation of the historical space that binds ethics to morality” (30). Questions of population and nonreproductive futurity cannot be separated from feminist interrogations of gender and sexuality and, as these concerns continue to grow and continue to be framed as an ecological and environmental concern, the insights of queer theory are urgent and necessary for environmental thought.

Following Donna Haraway’s (2015, 2016; Clarke and Haraway 2018) recent injunction to *make kin, not babies!* I will argue that queer environmental thought centers broadly on the highly temporal and highly ontological terrain of life (and survival), the natural, and futurity. The queer environmental thought I seek to explicate is defined by the following: 1. a commitment to nonreproductive futurity; 2. a commitment to alternative, more-than-human forms of social kinship and relationality; 3. a commitment

to defining and deploying a singular ethico-political dimension of ‘queerness’ itself. Edelman argues that the ethical burden of queerness is located “outside the recognizably human” (2004, 101). In this sense, how might queerness, as a political signifier and sexual identity, be a necessary site for theorizing multi-species *response-ability* in these scandals of times? My project will show how a queer theoretical ethics can expand and bolster the work of scholars who have demonstrated that an ethics of more-than-human kinship is inextricable from a human justice and human ethics, in which race, gender, and sexuality are immanent and constantly negotiated categories.

Following José Esteban Muñoz’s (2015, 2018) turn towards theorizing inhumanisms and more-than-human commons, the work of queer word-building during times of crisis and precarity must also be allied with anti-racist, anti-anthropocentric, and trenchantly feminist projects. As Muñoz (2015) writes:

queer thought is, in large part, about casting a picture of arduous modes of relationality that persist in the world despite stratifying demarcations and taxonomies of being, classifications that are bent on the siloing of particularity and on the denigrating of any expansive idea of the common and communism... The incommensurable thought project of inhumanity is the active self-attunement to life as varied and unsorted correspondences, collisions, intermeshings, and accords between people and nonhuman objects, things, formations, and clusterings. (209-10)

What is the incommensurable thought project of inhumanity (i.e. beyond-humanity) envisioning a queerly-ethical and environmentally-ethical future? Especially a thought project that is not subtended by delusions of technological progress (e.g. geo-engineering), evolutionary thought, species reproduction, the figure of the child, and the not-so-neo-patriarchal symbolic juggernaut of the infinitely cascading family tree? Muñoz here echoes the arguments of many environmentally-oriented scholars: namely, that an attention to ecological destruction (e.g. pollution, extractivist capitalism, species extinction, ecosystem collapse, food insecurity) must necessarily be routed through “real” bodies, real governed and regulated biopolitical bodies, and especially raced and gendered bodies. Environmental thought, then, must draw on theories antagonistic to the long and continuing colonial project, one centering on the ontological ground of this

project—the reproducing human. The insights of postcolonial theory, critical race theory, disability studies, queer and queer of color critiques, feminist theory, and environmental justice movements provide this antagonistic stance.

Although queer environmental thought can be traced to the early 1990s in the work of Greta Gaard (1997) and Catriona Sandilands (1994), a self-described queer and environmental scholarship can be summarized in the work of a few key authors.⁴ Broadly speaking, the vast majority of queer environmental thought is not literary in focus, often emphasizing the intersections of environmental movements and queer politics, as well as emphasizing more scientifically-oriented scholarship that involve “queering” the natural. The foundational volume in queer ecological thought—*Queer Ecologies: Sex, Nature, Politics, Desire* (2010)—traces the “blind spot” in biological and scientific discourse regarding sexual difference and non-normative sexualities, from Charles Darwin and Havelock Ellis onwards. Their focus therefore is less on the interplay between aesthetic objects and ecological discourse (although this informs many of the collection’s essays), and more on the following questions: “What do queer interrogations of science, politics, and desire then offer to environmental understanding? And how might a clearer attention to issues of nature and environment—as discourse, as space, as ideal, as practice, as relationship, as potential—inform and enrich queer theory, lgbtq politics, and research into sexuality and society?” (Mortimer-Sandilands and Erickson 2010, 5).

Of course, these urgent questions should not be viewed as separate from the work of literary criticism and of ecocritics. My point here is rather to highlight that the number of works that constitute a queer ecocriticism—reading literary texts and genres with a simultaneously queer and environmental lens—is small and that a significant portion of queer ecological thought concerns the discursive formations of heterosexist scientific and zoological discourses and methodologies. Nicole Seymour’s monograph *Strange Natures: Futurity, Empathy, and the Queer Ecological Imagination* (2013) is unique insofar as it is the first book-length work that explicitly frames itself as a field intervention in both queer theory and ecocriticism. Her second book, *Bad Environmentalism: Irony and Irreverence in the Ecological Age* (2018), similarly

positions itself as uniting these two fields. Additionally, the prominent ecocritic Stacy Alaimo has examined queer authors, like Muriel Rukeyser, but her most explicit discussions of queerness and the environmental are extra-literary and examine scientific discourses surrounding queerness in animals, what she terms the “zoological closet” (Alaimo 2016, 46).

Rather than draw a strict disciplinary *cordon sanitaire* between cultural criticism, literary criticism, science and technology studies, and environmental justice, I wish to demonstrate that a queer ecocritical methodology is still nascent in literary studies. In particular, queer poets remain an underexamined archive for a queer ecocriticism. My project therefore seeks to broaden the literary archive of queer ecocriticism as well as examine in detail the potential (dis)continuities of queer thought and environmental thought, particularly futurity, temporality, reproduction, and an ontology of the human and of human life. An enormous amount stands to be gained by dialoguing these bodies of thought, especially as environmentally-oriented scholars begin to tackle the herculean questions of human/species reproduction and extinction, methods for human and beyond-human survival, and alternatives to hegemonic patriarchal and capitalist societal structures. Although not usually under explicitly environmental and ecological rubrics, queer theorists and queer feminist thinkers have been preeminently concerned with these urgent questions; therefore, the body of queer theory stands as a rich toolbox for feminist environmental thinkers to draw on, while environmental thought increasingly provides a radical theoretical edge to enliven queer theory’s foundations. Later in this introduction, I explicate in detail why contemporary American poetry offers such a rich archive for a queer and environmental theory, but first I turn my attention to a theoretical discussion of futurity of reproduction, two concepts that animate this dissertation’s central theoretical questions.

Futurity and Reproduction

No theorization of queer futurities can ignore the intense field-polarizing debates surrounding the publication of Lee Edelman’s polemical *No Future: Queer Theory and*

the Death Drive (2004). Edelman's text has catalyzed debates regarding the controversial "antisocial thesis" (also sometimes called "antirelational") in queer theory (Caserio et al. 2006): a strand of thought seen to be primarily instantiated in the work of Leo Bersani (1987, 1995) and Lee Edelman (2004) and characterized by a radical commitment to desubjectification (i.e. Bersani's self-shattering), to a psychoanalytical and Lacanian framework, and to a redefinition of queer relationality as adamantly anti-communitarian and anti-progressivist (i.e. queer negativity). Prominent queer theorists have criticized Edelman's (almost exclusively) white male archive, and none have done so as extensively as Muñoz. Broadly, Muñoz has criticized the antirelational strand of queer theory for "imagin[ing] sexuality as a discrete category that can be abstracted and isolated from other antagonisms in the social, which include race and gender" (Caserio et al. 2006, 826). Further elaborating this critique in his enormously influential *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (2009), Muñoz argues that

all children are not the privileged white babies to whom contemporary society caters...theories of queer temporality that fail to factor in the relational relevance of race or class merely reproduce a crypto-universal white gay subject that is weirdly atemporal—which is to say a subject whose time is a restricted and restricting hollowed-out present free of the need for the challenge of imagining a futurity that exists beyond the self of the here and now. (94)

Akin to Edelman, Muñoz argues that queers, especially queers who do not choose to be "biologically reproductive," are cast off by culture as a people without a future and, as such, queers are cast in a "world without a utopia." The present is so "stultifying," as well as "poisonous and insolvent" (30), that queers must insist on a utopic futurity, symbolized by the spatio-temporal *then and there*. Muñoz further argues that hope "is the emotional modality that permits us to access futurity, par excellence" (98). In Muñoz's work, what emerges is the strong association of utopia with futurity and futurity with potentiality, particularly a potentiality that can offer subjugated queers a kind of transcendent communitarian "life itself" (i.e. an ethical relationality and a freedom offered from hegemonic "straight time"). Muñoz does not disagree with Edelman's queer negativity per se; instead, Muñoz disagrees with the queer antirelationist stance of

Edelman's Bersanian negativity. Notably, Muñoz even declares that *radical* negativity, in fact, can become a resource for queer utopianism (13). Muñoz admits that, in many ways, his and Edelman's texts are compatible: "I agree with and feel hailed by much of *No Future*... But as strongly as I reject reproductive futurity, I nonetheless refuse to give up on concepts such as politics, hope, and a future that is not kid stuff" (92). In other words, an affective critical disposition, what Muñoz calls a "politics of emotion" (97), is the crux of his disagreement with Edelman. Although often pitted against each other in a pro-future/anti-future binary, both theorists are united in their firm rejection of reproductive futurism. Yet, in locating hope as the vehicle for a queer utopic future, Muñoz is opposed, above all, to the narrowness of Edelman's affective critical disposition. For example, Edelman insists on queerness as a state of intolerability (Dinshaw et al. 2007, 195). And elsewhere, Muñoz makes very clear that the narrow scope of Edelman's argument and Edelman's archive is violent in its exclusions: "It has been clear to many of us, for quite a while now, that the antirelational in queer studies was the gay white man's last stand" (Caserio et al. 2006, 825-6).

I read Muñoz's "politics of emotion" as a kind of affective and ethical critical disposition, one that delineates a scholarly commitment to a more nuanced and inclusive notion of antagonisms to the social, or to modalities of contemporary social oppression. Jack Halberstam makes a similar, albeit more generous, critique of Edelman's *No Future*, writing that

Edelman's book constitutes a compelling argument against a United States imperialist project of hope and one of the most powerful statements of queer studies' contribution to an anti-imperialist, queer counterhegemonic imaginary... the real problem, to my mind, with this anti-social turn in queer theory has less to do with the meaning of negativity... and more to do with the excessively small archive that represents queer negativity" (Caserio et al. 2006, 823-4).

Following Halberstam's and Muñoz's critique of Edelman's narrow archive (and of Edelman's narrow theoretical framework), I want to posit an expanded aesthetic archive, as well as a more theoretically diverse and *specifically* a more feminist approach, to queer theory's engagement with nonreproductive futurity and to its engagement with queer

temporalities. Some of the theoretical questions this dissertation poses through its close-readings are: Why return to the well-critiqued anti-social thesis now? What might it mean to re-traverse Edelman's intensely polarizing argument using a queer feminist theoretical perspective? What can Edelman's total rejection of futurity (or Bersani's total rejection of sociality) offer to queer feminist imaginaries of counterhegemonic futurities? From a contemporary environmental perspective, this anti-imperialist queer counterhegemonic imaginary is inherently also an environmental activist imaginary, one specifically opposed to capitalist accumulation and the role of American imperialism in forming what many scholars call the Anthropocene.

Ecocritics and popular contemporary environmental authors, like Naomi Klein (2014), Roy Scranton (2015), Ursula K. Heise (2016), Clair Colebrook (2014a, 2014b), Elizabeth Kolbert (2014), and David Wallace-Wells (2018), have increasingly turned their attention to futurity, especially through the lens of threat, species extinction, and accelerating catastrophe. Similar to queer theorists, these authors have envisioned the kinds of futurities that implore us to imagine the implosion of normative visions of the social and of normative extractive human relationalities. Moreover, the staunchly anti-anthropocentric thrust of the queer anti-social thesis aligns with the feminist turn to new materialisms, to de-ontologizing the human, and to seriously re-considering population from a feminist, social justice perspective (Clarke and Haraway 2018; Coole 2018; Murphy 2017). As Rosi Braidotti (2017) argues, feminism is not a humanism. Perhaps the simplest "thesis" undergirding the anti-social thesis, *and* undergirding much feminist environmental scholarship, is a total rejection of the hegemonic humanism that subtends much of the humanities' theoretical thrusts.

This shared theoretical ground is defined by a rejection of normative temporalities and of hetero human-centric futurities *and* by an ethical commitment to more-than-human relationalities as a praxis for living and thriving in a precarious material present. Many other queer theorists have preempted or echoed these commitments to alternative visions to what Edelman (2004) calls "the Ponzi scheme of reproductive futurism" (4). A theorization of nonreproductive temporalities and queerness has been a foundational and

continuing concern of queer theory. For example, Michael Warner coined the term “reprosexuality” in 1991, which he defines as “the interweaving of heterosexuality, biological reproduction, cultural reproduction, and personal identity” (Warner 1991, 9); Jack Halberstam has consistently demonstrated an interest in queer time as “the perverse turn away from the narrative coherence of adolescence—early adulthood—marriage—reproduction—child rearing—retirement—death” (Dinshaw et al. 2007, 182; see also Halberstam 2005, 2011); and, most notably, Elizabeth Freeman’s work offers rigorous critical-methodological alternatives to “chrononormativity,” like a “erotohistoriography” or “bottomy historiography,” the latter of which she defines as “the potential for collective queer time—even queer history—to be structured as an uneven transition of receptivity rather than authority or custom, of a certain enjoyably porous relation to unpredictable futures or to new configurations of the past” (Freeman 2010, 109).⁵

Because of its association with deconstructionism and poststructuralism, a common critique of queer theory, particularly made by environmental thinkers, is that queer theory holds a staunch faith in social constructivism over material matters and is therefore incapable of thinking *beyond* the human. This overdetermined association with a narrowly envisioned calling-card of poststructuralist theory has clouded the potential that queer theory, too, might offer an ecologically resonant critique of human ontologies. For example, queer theory, especially many of its foundational texts, is no stranger to theorizing crisis, urgency, and material survival. Take the opening moves of two canonical queer theoretical essays, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick’s (1993) “Queer and Now,” which begins with adolescent suicide and with the “miracle” of queer survival, and Gayle Rubin’s 1984 essay “Thinking Sex,” which opens with the lines: “to some, sexuality may seem to be an unimportant topic, a frivolous diversion from the more critical problems of poverty, war, disease, racism, famine, or nuclear annihilation. But it is precisely at times such as these, when we live with the possibility of unthinkable destruction, that people are likely to become dangerously crazy about sexuality” (Rubin 2012, 137). Moreover, Lauren Berlant’s and Michael Warner’s (1995) much-cited article “What Does Queer

Theory Teach Us About X?” takes survival as one of the structuring paradigms of queer critique’s pedagogy:

Sometimes the question of what queer theory teaches us about x is not about politics in the usual sense but about personal survival. Like feminist, African American, Latina/Latino, and other minority projects, queer work strikes its readers as knowledge central to living. This demand puts tremendous pressure on emerging work, pressure that makes the work simultaneously conventional and unprecedented in the humanities and social sciences—traditional insofar as pedagogy has long involved the formation of identities and subjectivities, radical in the aspiration to live another way now, here. (348)

This *pressure*—this push-pull of urgency—is, I will argue, central to a queer environmental thought. The questions of survival and of living, of politics *as* collective survival, are the shared affective ground zero—a structuring ethos—of much queer and much ecocritical work. Today, in light of global climate change and catastrophe, living another way “now, here” means restructuring dominant and normative modes of imagining and enacting the future.

Moreover, as I examine thoroughly in chapter three, the child and human reproduction is a linchpin concept for environmental thought and for popular environmental rhetoric, one that betrays the normative thrust of much environmentalist rhetoric. Therefore, for critical and academic environmental scholarship, thinking the child and futurity becomes especially urgent, and fraught, from queer and feminist environmental perspectives. In particular, some of the most nuanced accounting of the child—and of the roles of reproduction, reproductive justice, and stratified population growth for environmental thought—is found in the work of feminist scholars.⁶ Moreover, the difficult and sticky questions posed by these queer and feminist environmentally-oriented scholars stands in stark contrast with popular environmentalism’s rote invocation of the child and of “future generations” as the *raison d’être* for environmental activism and ethical consumption. The child becomes a way of feeling the future, of congealing a temporal abstraction into an ethical demand. Yet the child is not an accidental symbol for environmental discourse; it a dense site with a rhizomatic web of significations especially

regarding (in the American context) the biopolitical management of race and a continuing legacy of settler-colonialism. The invocation of the child thus often comes with a genetic mandate in the form of the compulsory possessive article—“our” children or “my” child, as opposed to a more capacious future peoples or future generations.

Within popular environmental discourse, appeals to “our children,” to “our grandchildren,” or to “future generations” are practically compulsory.⁷ Recently, the viral success of Swedish child-activist Greta Thunberg reveals the symbolic force of the child. Thunberg’s powerful rhetorical flare is to use her own self as both a symbolic and literal child, in order to condemn a broken ethical obligation from present adult (i.e. global leaders) to present child (i.e. Thunberg) and future child (i.e. Thunberg’s future children). In Thunberg’s speeches, the child straddles a flickering line between the now and the future, as Thunberg-as-child creates herself into a symbol for the future standing before *you* now.⁸ Moreover, the child marks academic environmental discourse as well. Notably, the opening of Nicole Seymour’s *Strange Natures* demonstrates some of the central tensions in thinking the child for a queer environmentalism. Musing on a public ad for a local environmental organization—depicting a white toddler on a tiny bike next to the slogan “protect our children’s future”—Seymour begins with the figure of child in her search for a “queer ecological imagination”:

a perspective that cleaves closely to Edelman’s brand of queer theory might have us dismiss the efforts of environmentalists...and might also leave us incapable from distinguishing the heterosexism of the former’s appeal from the latter’s concern for those most vulnerable in terms of environmental problems: people of color, poor people, and their children. But on the other hand, a strictly “environmental” perspective would leave that heterosexism unquestioned... These points suggest that much environmentalist discourse depends on, or even requires, a white-centric heterosexism, if not homophobia. Thus neither a queer reaction per se, nor an environmentalist reaction per se, seems to be an appropriate response to this ad. (2013, viii)

According to Seymour, precisely because of the ultimate ethical aims of environmental activism—protecting the environment as well as society’s most vulnerable populations (e.g. “people of color, poor people, and their children”)—a queer critique of this ad’s heterosexism would be, presumably, politically short-sighted. Yet Seymour’s preface

seems to position “Edelman’s brand of queer theory” as synonymous with queer critique, or at least with a queer stance antagonistic to heterosexism as a dominant ideology. More specifically, the horizon of an environmental ethics and an environmental politics that, as I argue in chapter three, the poet CAConrad envisions would bristle at this ad’s heteropatriarchy *as* an environmental response. What, then, might a queer and feminist environmental politics *not* in the name of any child look like? In short, I cite Seymour at length because I think her explication of the binary structure plaguing a queer environmental critique (e.g. pro- vs. anti- child; narrow vs. intersectional/capacious identity politics; the value structure of ethical appeals) is instructive, if only for the way it rehearses the polarized and polarizing nature of thinking reproduction from both queer and environmental perspectives. Through my analysis of Conrad as well as my analysis of Muriel Rukeyser’s reproductively focused poem “All the Little Animals,” I hope to demonstrate the urgent need for nuanced ethical critique of futurity, the child, and reproduction from a pro-feminist queer *and* environmental stance.

Beyond (and before) Edelman’s polemic, the child also stands as a recurrent and dense figure within a queer theory.⁹ For example, the queer child and childhood is a central site in Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick’s oeuvre, operating variously as an affective space to articulate a queer “autotheory,” a place of origin for queer epistemologies, and an urgent figure signifying the lethal homophobia within contemporary culture. Sedgwick reveals how childhood can be a site for elaborating a queer poetics. In one of her most elusive and complex essays, “A Poem Is Being Written,” she writes: “When I was a little child the two most rhythmic things that happened to me were spanking and poetry” (Sedgwick 1993, 182). For Sedgwick, the child’s body—*her* child body—becomes the ground for analyzing “the general question of poetry,” both “the scene of poetry writing” and “the tableau of the poem itself” (178), and the ground for theorizing the origins of her own erotic attachments, trans-gendered identifications, and queer sexuality. The child and poetry become twin-sites for narrativizing and theorizing how queerness emerges through discourse and language as well as through early embodied experiences of violence and power. As Sedgwick writes, “in the grammar of the close-cropped lyric

tableau...decision became a power not to resist the poem but, more simply, to decide *it*" (186). Sedgwick-the-child (like poetry) is a temporally queer being, one who is reconstructed retrospectively in a temporal state of "lateness" and one who (in the literary present of writing) derives agency (i.e. a future tending-towards of subject formation) from poetic rhythm and poetic enjambment (i.e. formal techniques of time).

Genre, Poetic Form, and Time

Queer ecopoetics explores how the theoretical questions of a queer environmental thought is figured and illustrated in certain poets and poems. The term queer ecopoetics has been most concretely thematized in a recent special issue of *ISLE*, co-edited by Angela Hume and Samia Rahimtoola. Hume and Rahimtoola (2018) locate reproductive futurity and toxic discourse as "two crucial conversations for queer ecocriticism" (135). Citing Gloria Anzaldúa's concept of "homemaking" and of *mestiza* cultural formation as an example of how poets and scholars might figure a queer ecopoiesis "as the practice of forging human and nonhuman community beyond the bounds of nationality, territory, ethnocentrism, and the normative family unit," they underscore the centrality of this queer, anti-imperialist kin-making as distinctly embedded in queer literary practice: "In light of Anzaldúa, we might say that ecopoetics has been queer all along" (134). Hume and Rahimtoola define queer ecopoetics as a means to pursue "human and nonhuman associations beyond the conventions of heteronormative family bonds and anthropocentric ecological ones" (139). Positioning queer ecopoetics as an amendment to ecopoetical scholarship, they write

If ecopoetics has opened up crucial questions about how we might best dwell on earth *and* about the politics of such dwelling, queer ecopoetics orients us toward the affects, kinship practices, and erotic exchanges that shape dwelling as a relational endeavor... Poetry's reach mediates distance and desire. In doing so, poetry and the study of poetry inquires into the (im)possibility of relation, suggesting that our attachments may be more oblique and diffuse than we usually imagine. (139)

A queer ecopoetics, then, is a common ground on which to explore how poems figure the congruent beyond-human, kinship-building impulses of environmental thought—like, for

example, Donna Haraway's (2015) injunction to "make kin, not babies"—with queer theory's spatio-temporal mappings of queer erotics and world-building relationalities best exemplified by Muñoz's *Cruising Utopia*.¹⁰

Although ecopoetics is a legible disciplinary marker, there is significant debate about what makes a poem an ecopoem and a precise definition of "ecopoetics" is difficult to summarize. In *The Ecopoetry Anthology*, the editors Ann Fisher-Wirth and Laura-Gray Street (2013) argue for the distinctiveness of "ecological poetry" from its antecedents: "nature poetry" (e.g. shaped by Romanticism and American transcendentalism and often characterized by deep anthropocentricism) and "environmental poetry" (e.g. nature poetry's more modern descendent, concerned with environmental justice and highly influenced by social justice activism and postcolonial theory). Fisher-Wirth and Street characterize "ecological poetry" as influenced by poststructuralist theory, as often formally experimental (e.g. L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E poetry), and as engaging "questions of form most directly, not only poetic form but also a form historically taken for granted—that of the singular, coherent self" (xxviii-xxix). In contrast, John Shoptaw (2016) argues for a more strict definition of ecopoetry. He argues that ecopoetry must be "environmental"—"an ecopoem needs to be about the nonhuman natural world—wholly or partly, in some way or other, but really and not just figuratively"—and "environmentalist"—"an ecopoem is environmentalist not only thematically, in that it represents environmental damage or risk, but rhetorically: it is urgent, it aims to unsettle." Citing John Ashbery's poem "River of the Canoe-fish" as an example of what an ecopoem is *not*, Shoptaw writes: "Ashbery is a poet of manner, less of nature than of 'naturally.' A parody of natural history, the poem riffs on gay culture ('rainbow,' 'tumescant,' 'immune'). Ashbery's culture poem is still fine and fun. But in my terms it can't count as an ecopoem." Shoptaw's definition of ecopoetry thus hinges on two things: mimesis of a "real" natural world and explicit environmental activist (or rhetorical) intent.

The ethos of this project, and my choice of poets, is strongly opposed to Shoptaw's rigid definition and is more aligned with Fisher-Wirth's and Street's capacious definition of an ecological poem. In his dismissal of Ashbery's poem as not natural

enough (i.e. “Canoefish” do not exist as real fish), too concerned with discursivity (i.e. “naturally” versus “natural”), and too concerned with queer cultural play, Shoptaw reifies a nature/culture binary. His definition also implicitly reifies the theoretical association of queerness with social constructivism, especially the associations of queerness with culture (as opposed to “nature”) and urbaneness. In this sense, Shoptaw’s definition essentially positions ecopoetics and queerness as mutually exclusive. Moreover, shoehorning ecopoetics into the normalizing (and historically exclusionary discourse) of mainstream environmentalism notwithstanding, Shoptaw reveals the stark divide between a reactionary and normative definition of “ecopoetics” and Hume’s and Rahimtoola’s expansive definition of “queer ecopoetics.” I use Shoptaw as an example here because I would argue that it is precisely an interest in both “naturally” *and* “natural”—particularly an interest in how these categories are mutually reinforcing, in tension, or cohabitate—that defines a queer ecopoetics against a more rigid view of ecopoetics (i.e. somewhere between a “nature poem” and an “environmental poem”).¹¹

Moreover, this dissertation contends that *queer* poetry is a particularly apt archive for imagining, imaging, and theorizing alternatives to reproductive futurity, chrononormativity, and anthropogenic life. Following Michael Snediker’s (2009) argument for the “utility of poetry” as a queer theoretical archive, I demonstrate that not only does a queer environmental theory reflect on time, the environmental, and nonreproductive futurity, but that queer poets are uniquely positioned to provide objects of *response-ability* in environmentally catastrophic times. As Haraway (1997) argues, it matters *how* we tell stories, what metaphors we use, and what tropes *trope* what. Many queer ecocritics have hesitated to argue that queer authors or queer individuals have a necessarily predetermined, or unique, relationship to the environmental. Although queer theorists have long acknowledged that queerness itself does not predetermine any ethical radicality or any certain political orientations (e.g. Duggan 2002; Puar 2007; Warner 1999), one major premise of this project is that the queerness of queer poets matters and that queers actually might have something particularly prescient, or queerly singular, to

say about the aforementioned theoretical, epistemological, ontological, and political concepts and flashpoints.

Throughout these chapters, I trace a formal argument about the medium of poetry, arguing that it is a particularly rich literary form for theorizing temporality. Among scholars of poetry, as well as poets, poetry is often figured as a privileged medium for thinking, not just time and futurity, but reproduction, perpetuation, and (im)mortality. Moreover, I argue that the poetry this dissertation examines—what could be called experimental or formally-inventive poetry—contains, in its form, an inherently *queer* theory of time. In this section, I outline relevant scholarship on the relationship between poetry and time and then discuss how this theoretical relationship informs queer and environmental thought on reproduction, futurity, and the figure of the child. Much of this section foregrounds my readings of CAC Conrad's poems in chapter three and also serves as a useful context for my discussion of poetic closure and serial forms in chapter two. In short, although "immortality," "futurity," "reproduction," and "the child" are all distinct concepts, their overlaps and co-imbrications become evident in a counterhegemonic survey of modern and contemporary poetics. And this co-imbrication further demonstrates that an analysis of how poetry can respond to, complicate, or foster an ecological or environmental thought is often inextricable from questions of human reproduction and human visions of the future.

A concern with time and reproduction defines a long tradition in Anglo-American poetry. For example, Shakespeare's first seventeen sonnets are commonly referred to as the "procreation sonnets," as the male speaker channels his desire for a young man through an injunction to reproduce. And even as many of these first sonnets are explicitly concerned with literal human reproduction, reproduction also functions as a larger conceit for poetry itself and for its immortalizing potentialities. Helen Vendler (1997) observes that Shakespeare's sonnet 3—whose images vacillate between "both life-giving and death-dealing" and which ends with the couplet "But if thou love rememb' red not to be, / Die single, and thine image dies with thee."—foreshadows "the emphasis on memory that will replace, after sonnet 17, the emphasis on physical reproduction (itself subordinately

present in re-mem-*bred* in the Quarto spelling)” (58-60). Similarly, Aaron Kunin (2009) argues that Shakespeare’s sonnets constitute the poet’s “definitive statement” on the poetic fantasy of cultural preservation and survival-through-poetry. Kunin writes that Shakespeare’s preservation fantasy was heavily influenced by Horace’s odes and by Edmund Spenser’s *Amoretti*, works that position poetry as an immortality project, thus creating a “quasi-human space between life and death,” one that holds the potential to “enlarge the conditions of possibility for being human” (95).

For the Romantic poets, especially for William Wordsworth, the figure of the child-in-nature—a temporalized repository for innocence and a figure antagonistic to industrialism—is central to what we might call Romanticism’s ecopoetics, where the child becomes a kind of lost ontological state of peaceful communion-with nature, and even for the natural sublime. Furthermore, this traditional trope of poetry as a means to stave off annihilation by death and by time is especially consequential for modern American poetry and poetics.¹² For example, the (queer) “father” of contemporary American poetry, Walt Whitman, structures *Leaves of Grass* through an obsessive address to a future reader, theorizing poetry as a time-transcendent medium of communal address. In his 1855 preface to *Leaves of Grass*, Whitman writes that the American poet must “compete with the laws that pursue and follow time” and must act as bridge between the past and the future. Notably, the time-transcendent and immortal yearnings of Whitman’s speaker epitomize, not just the task of the *American* poet, but also, as Michael Warner (2005) argues, the *queer* American poet.¹³ Formally, Whitman’s poetry competes with the laws of time through the devices of apostrophe and direct address, devices that poetry scholars have frequently analyzed in the context of poetic theories of time.

In many ways, what contemporary literary scholars define as the “lyric” is inherently defined by a metaphysics of futurity. Jonathan Culler, perhaps the preeminent “lyric theorist,” attests to the centrality of temporality for theorizing lyric poetry. His canonical essay “Apostrophe” (1977) explores the “timeless present” of lyric apostrophe, which he argues is “a time of discourse rather than story” (1977, 66), and which he has

more recently described as “a ‘floating now’” or the “time of enunciation,” a temporal aspect that, because of its potential for reperformance and iterability, structurally defines the lyric (2015, 294-5).¹⁴ On the other hand, apostrophe, the poetic device that Jonathan Culler (2015) argues *defines* the lyric tout court, depends upon the existence of a future reader and therefore relies on a performative iterability and reproducibility (i.e. the poem’s ability to be re-read and re-uttered ad infinitum). Paradoxically, lyric address relies on what Culler calls a “timeless present,” defined as “a special temporality which is the set of all moments at which writing can say ‘now.’ This is a time of discourse rather than of story” (226). This special temporality, though, is more defined by a temporal durability than what we might think of as the fleetingness of the present. Put otherwise, the lyric “now” is structurally dependent on its ability to exist forever into the future; in other words, by its inherent ability to tend towards a kind of immortality. As Culler writes, “the bold wager of poetic apostrophe is that the lyric can displace a time of narrative, of past events reported, and place us in the continuing present of apostrophic address, the ‘now’ in which, for readers, a poetic even can repeatedly occur” (226). Along similar lines, the poet-scholar Allen Grossman begins his magnum-opus, the *Summa Lyrica*, with the claim that “the function of poetry is to obtain for everybody one kind of success at the limits of the autonomy of the will.” These limits are death and “the barriers against access to other consciousnesses” and, significantly, “the kind of success which poetry facilitates is called ‘immortality’” (1992, 209-10). Sharon Cameron’s canonical study of Emily Dickinson, *Lyric Time: Dickinson and the Limits of Genre* (1979) also establishes immortality as the central conceit of Dickinson’s poetics, writing that “in the imperative world of Dickinson’s poems, immortality exists because its absence would be intolerable” (2).

Culler concludes his chapter on lyric address in *Theory of the Lyric* by musing on the ecological and anti-anthropocentric consequences of poetic address, writing that poetic address “posits a world in which a wider range of entities can be imagined to exercise agency, resisting our usual assumptions about what can act and what cannot, experimenting with the overcoming of ideological barriers that separate human actors

from everything else” (242). Citing examples of “various recent philosophical developments” that seek to de-privilege humanist ideologies of human exceptionalism, including Jane Bennett’s *Vibrant Matter* and Bruno Latour’s actor-network theory, Culler strikingly proclaims “the poets, though, were here first” (242). Similarly, Anne-Lise François (2017) argues that poetry is a unique genre for addressing the temporal questions heightened by the Anthropocene and by geologic time. Moreover, Barbara Johnson argues for poetry’s ability to reimagine ontologies of life and material agencies and, in particular, positions poetry’s anti-anthropocentric thrust as consequential for feminist politics. In her now canonical essay “Apostrophe, Animation, and Abortion” (1986), Johnson defines apostrophe as “a form of ventriloquism through which the speaker throws voice, life, and human form into the addressee, turning its silence into mute responsiveness” (30). More recently, Johnson (2010) similarly argues that rhetorical and poetic devices (like apostrophe, prosopopeia, and personification) blur the ontological lines between “person” and “thing” and that, significantly, these poetic devices should be analyzed as negotiations with the gendered and racialized thingification (Aimé Césaire’s *chosification*) produced by capitalism and colonialism. On the other hand, feminist literary scholars have shown how figures of poetic immortality, futurity, and reproduction are subtended by the logic of a heterosexist gender binary. Rachel Blau DuPlessis (2006) argues that prevalence of “universalizing metanarratives,” especially gender ideologies, “reveal the deep sedimentations of gender conventions that form poetry both as an institution and as a praxis” (77). In particular, Blau DuPlessis critiques Grossman’s deeply patriarchal poetics, yet she argues that the broader canon of American poetics is structured by psychoanalytical oedipal narrative and theories of absolute sexual difference (i.e. female silence/lack) and on figures for heteronormative reproduction, especially phallogocentric models of ejaculation and propulsive/penetrative energies.¹⁵

In the spirit of Blau DuPlessis’s feminist-poetics, this dissertation seeks to center a canon of mid-century queer and lesbian-feminist poets and activists, like Gloria Anzaldúa, Audre Lorde, Cherríe Moraga, Adrienne Rich, and Muriel Rukeyser, who

theorize the raced, gendered, and sexed body alongside the environmental. These poets demonstrate that a commitment to ecopoetics is inextricable from queer activism. In addition, these lesbian-feminist poetries are characterized, in part, by a strong vein that makes them a particularly salient archive for this project. Moreover, of particular salience for my project is a broader lineage of post-45 experimental and avant-garde poets whose poetry demonstrates consistent concern for the natural, the environmental, and even for environmental activism. Examples here include Objectivist and Black Mountain School poets like Charles Olson, Lorine Niedecker, George Oppen, Gary Snyder, Robert Duncan, and Denise Levertov.¹⁶ Additionally, it is worth noting that many of the well-celebrated and formally inventive gay poets that have formed the body of much queer poetical scholarship, like Hart Crane, James Merrill, John Ashbery, as well as James Schuyler, are also explicitly attuned to the natural world and, in the case of Merrill and Duncan, to the threat of nuclear power and ecological collapse.

Throughout this dissertation, I use the imperfect term “American poetry” as non-hegemonically and non-prescriptive as possible and do not use it as a marker of nationality, origin, or political allegiance to the United States of America. In the context of this dissertation, “contemporary American poetry” rather refers to a fluid, unstable, and sometimes fraught lineage of poetic production, poetic history, and mutual influence among a vast coterie of poets loosely-based in North America in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. More broadly, this dissertation is interested in exploring this literary lineage’s relationship to land, space, and time. In other words, how do poets critique, reify, and explore a particularly American-historical relationship to their many environments: natural, historical, economic, political, religious, colonial, etc.? “American poetry” is as much an academic disciplinary marker as anything else and I mean it to stand as a marker of poetic form and scholarly history. As such, and as with all institutional markers, “American poetry” also inherently contains violent exclusions, displacements, and lacunae. The ongoing genocidal legacy of the American nation-state shapes literary and scholarly production; this legacy, as I articulate in the next section of this introduction, is central to the work of each poet I examine.

Similarly, this dissertation's concern over poetic canonicity and inclusivity also extend to the theorists I cite. My introduction has used much space explicating how male theorists debate and contest politics of reproduction and futurity. I wish to emphasize here that, although reproduction and futurity are certainly concepts of concern for any queer and environmental thought, theorizing reproductive politics does not necessarily mean one is practicing a queer *and* feminist politics of reproductive justice. Although the "canonical" queer theoretical debate over futurity (i.e. Edelman vs. Muñoz) is foundational scholarly context for this dissertation and for my close-readings, especially in chapter three, the ethos of this dissertation wishes to strongly underscore the work of feminist scholars in theorizing an anti-racist reproductive justice. Furthermore, I argue that this work is inextricable from environmental justice projects. A pathbreaking recent collection edited by Adele Clarke and Donna Haraway (2018) demonstrates the necessity of newer and more radical feminist environmental frameworks for enacting non-hegemonic futurities. They write: "We need new vocabularies for alternative futurities. We need legitimating vocabularies for not having biological children...we need an *elaborated vocabulary* for making kin and caring far beyond 'pro- and anti- and non-natalist,' and that does *not* use the binary-implying word 'choice'" (30-1). This dissertation asks: what affective-literary archives can provide these legitimating "vocabularies for alternative futurities"? In answering, this dissertation argues that poetry can provide such legitimating vocabularies. And, especially in pursuit of queer futurities and anti-reproductive futurities, I turn to the work of twentieth and twenty-first century American queer poets as a means of expanding feminist vocabularies, queer literary archives, and the theoretical nuance of queer theory.

I follow the scholar Elizabeth Freeman, who writes in the introduction of her most recent monograph on queer literary temporalities that "my touchstone thinker, then, is not the Freud of the death drive but Audre Lorde, whose 1978 paper 'The Uses of the Erotic' advocated the feeling body, in common pursuit with others, as a source of knowledge and power" (2019, 17). Following Lorde, Freeman theorizes what she calls "sense-methods," a model of queer sociality that centers "bodywork, of inarticulated or unspoken, carnal

forms of knowledge” (10). Central to a queer feminist centering of the body is an attunement to the quotidian and the everyday, a feminist material and embodied mode of being theorized by lesbian-feminist poet-scholars through concepts like Anzaldúa’s “la facultad” and Lorde’s “erotic,” concepts that both Anzaldúa and Lorde assert are inextricable from sexuality and from poetry. Although the concept of the “quotidian” and the “everyday” do not explicitly frame my chapters or my readings, the queer ecopoetics that my chosen poets present can be read as an embodied quotidian poetics precisely in the way that each poet frames their poetry as *praxis*, a term that I might define simply as a continually unfolding practice of applying knowledge. In the context of poetry, this applying of knowledge expresses itself in a kind of living-as-doing, or poetry-as-living, where poetry becomes the medium for articulating the poet’s embodied experience, memories, fantasies, and dreams. Put simply, poetry-as-praxis is synonymous with Lorde’s definition of poetry as “the skeleton architecture of our lives” (1984, 38). Poetry-as-praxis, as well as the concept of the everyday, are also deeply temporal terms, ones that help us think about poetry as complex temporal medium of repeated and dynamic engagement and attunement to the environmental.

What unites and electrifies these poets is the role of the poet’s body in the production and practice of poetry. Moreover, what is unique about each of the poets I examine is the central role the (human) body plays in an environmental consciousness, which expresses itself most often through forms of bodily touch, frottage, engulfment, ingestion, and enmeshment. As I argue most forcefully in chapters one and two, this embodied queer ecopoetics is a kind of, to quote Sara Ahmed, “queer phenomenology.” The queer ecopoetical praxis that Rukeyser, Adnan, and Conrad propose is a praxis of making-kin, creating beyond-human assemblages, diffuse environmental touch, and bodily porosity. This beyond-human worldmaking can also be contradictory, ambivalent, and hierarchical. After all, how can poetry, a linguistic and often philosophical (therefore deeply *human*) medium, be said to express the beyond-human? In many ways, these queer and environmental poems are always routed through and back to the poets’ (or speakers’) bodies, which often means back to an analysis of gender and queerness as an

embodied epistemology. I read this less as a shortcoming of the poetic medium and more as an opportunity to analyze queerness as an embodied epistemology, which also necessarily means analyzing gender alongside queerness and, as I explore in the coda, race alongside both gender and queerness. These poems also offer the opportunity to formally analyze how the beyond-human and environmental might be expressed, if not so easily through language, through form and structure, which are necessarily temporal propositions. Lastly, reading these poems allows us the opportunity to raise fascinating and complex questions about the relationship between gender, queerness, and the beyond-human. Can the sea have a gender? Can queerness be extricated from the human? What are the implications of more-than-human eroticisms for a queer and environmental thought? Or, to briefly quote the opening lines from a recent poem by queer ecopoet Brian Teare, what might it mean for time to have a have gender?

today's gender is rain
it touches everything
with its little silver
epistemology
mottled like a brook trout
with a hundred spots
white as bark scars (Teare 2019, 133)

Bio/Necropolitics, War, and Imperialism

To summarize, I contend that poetry's attention—especially its temporal attentions—are a privileged medium for thinking how power touches bodies day in and day out. In framing the relationship between the everyday and queer ecopoetics, the term “new materialisms” is a useful touchstone for thinking-through this complex theoretical nexus of queerness/gender/time/environment.¹⁷ In defining this loose body of scholarship and its critical-political application, I follow the editors of *New Materialisms: Ontology, Agency, and Politics* (2010) who write that

in short, the renewal of critical materialism after the cultural turn foregrounds an appreciation for just what it means to exist as a material individual with biological needs for survival yet inhabiting a world of natural and artificial objects, well-

honed micropowers of governmentality, and the more anonymous but no less compelling effects of international economic structures. (Coole and Frost 2010, 28).

In this sense, the political orientations of this project are the real-life ramifications of how biopower (and biopolitics) manifests itself today in macro and micro ways on queer, female, nonnormative bodies and how these “societies of control,” to quote Deleuze (1992), intersect with an accelerating global environmental destruction, on scales unprecedented in our 21st century.

As many scholars have shown, the concept of temporality is itself deeply imbricated with colonial ideologies and strongman theories of history (progressive or declensionist), as well as late capitalist techno-fantasies of progress and environmental redress. Mark Rifkin’s (2017) concept of “settler time”—that is, “notions, narratives, and experiences of temporality that de facto normalize non-native presence, influence, and occupation” (9)—reveals how the genocidal settler colonial history of the United States produces its own hegemonic temporal formation and theory, one profoundly affecting formations of borders, policies, and methods governance. Settler time “powerfully shapes the possibilities for interaction, development, and regularity within it. Such imposition can be understood as the denial of Indigenous *temporal sovereignty*, in the sense that one vision or way of experiencing time is cast as the only temporal formation—as the baseline for the unfolding of time itself” (2). Just as Rifkin also argues, queer temporal formations are one way of demythologizing the neutrality, singleness, and “naturalness” of heteropatriarchal settler temporal “baseline.” Although the poems I examine below are not explicitly concerned with indigenous temporal sovereignty, I contend that their temporal orientations challenge the colonial vision of settler time precisely in the ways that they proliferate temporalities. Just as much as environmental thought seeks to decenter and denaturalize hegemonic human temporal formations by envisioning the multiplicity of Earth’s temporal cycles, whether fungal, geological, insect, the poets in this dissertation strive to articulate and inhabit alternate taxonomies of being and experiencing time.

I invoke Rifkin's concept here because one final thematic through-line that courses through these poets' work is the specter of war and its relationship to legacies of American imperialism and colonialism. In very divergent eras, the poets in each chapter—Muriel Rukeyser, Etel Adnan, and CAConrad—explicitly and unapologetically frame their poetic praxis as anti-war and anti-imperialist. As I explore at the beginning of chapter two, Etel Adnan, herself a witness to the 1975 outbreak of the Lebanese Civil War, begins to write poetry as a response to US atrocities during the Vietnam War. Writing poetry in English also became a way for Adnan (who grew up speaking the colonial French of Lebanon) to protest the bloody Algerian War; as Adnan puts it, “I became suddenly, and rather violently, conscious that I had naturally and spontaneously taken sides, that I was emotionally a participant in the war, and I resented having to express myself in French” (2014a, 253). In short, for Adnan certain linguistic (e.g. English over French) and aesthetic (poetry over painting) mediums can feel formally complicit with imperialist violence. Similarly, CAConrad believes poetry to be a creative life-giving force that is urgently and structurally opposed to death and violence. Conrad cites the post-9/11 “War on Terror” and the 2004 invasion of Iraq as a catalyst for developing their singular poetic process and theory of (soma)tic rituals. As I explain in chapter three, Conrad positions poetry as a literal force of resistance against war, framing their dialectical relationship succinctly: “there is TOO MUCH WAR in the world, but never too much poetry!” (2012, 172). Put more lyrically, the first poem in their most recent somatic collection ends with the lines: “I ask all / you talented / people spending / many creative hours / perfecting killer drones / guns and bombs to please / know we are waiting for / you on the other side / of art in the No / Kill Zone” (2021, 1).

Conrad's words are contemporary echoes of Muriel Rukeyser's theory of poetry, which she most forcefully articulates in her book-length essay *The Life of Poetry*. Originally published in 1949 but initially conceived in 1940 during WWII and soon after Rukeyser's played witness to the 1936 Spanish Civil War, Rukeyser firmly frames poetry as a force diametrically opposed to war. In an uncanny echo of Conrad, *The Life of Poetry* concludes with statements like “we are against war and the sources of war. We are

for poetry and the sources of poetry” and “until the peace makes its people, its forests, and its living cities; in that burning central life, and where we live, there is the place for poetry” (1996, 213-14). Rukeyser locates American poetry, in particular, as a site to protest, critique, and theorize US involvement in war. As Rukeyser powerfully writes, “American poetry has been part of a culture in conflict... We are a people tending toward democracy at the level of hope; on another level, the economy of the nation, the empire of business within the republic, both include in their basic premise the concept of perpetual warfare. It is the history of the idea of war that is beneath our other histories” (61). Lastly, Dawn Lundy Martin, whose work I examine in the coda, examines how the ongoing legacy of slavery marks and shapes contemporary life for Black and queer Americans. For Martin, generic experimentation and genre-crossing becomes an aesthetic and theoretical mode of redress against violence; as Martin (2018) writes: “World re-imagining and re-building as we return again and again to the repetition of this assault on black people—this rip in our hearts—is also messy and destructive. Art and poetry, I believe, must be destructive too. We cannot be neat. We cannot stand smiling in front of the roaring crowd.”

Put in context with reproductive futurity, the presence of war and American imperialism throughout each of this dissertation’s chapters also raises thorny and contentious questions regarding what kinds of life are allowed to live and which are condemned to die. Within this necropolitical theoretical territory, the feminist historian of science Michelle Murphy’s critique of the concept of “population” is a helpful framework for my chapters’ close-readings. In particular, Murphy critiques Haraway’s embrace of “population” as a useful concept for environmental and reproductive justice.¹⁸ For Haraway, the injunction to *make kin not babies* evokes the concept of “population” because *make kin not babies* is an injunction on a planetary scale, which necessitates an accounting for who Haraway calls “the Born Ones” and “the Disappeared” (beings and peoples imbricated in vast necropolitical colonial legacies). (Clarke and Haraway 2018, 69). On the other hand, for Murphy population is an “an intolerable concept” that always contains a “eugenic residual” (Clarke and Haraway 2018, 105, 122). As Murphy further

argues in *The Economization of Life* (2017), “race is the grammar and ghost of population” (135), and experiments in population constitute decades-long entrenchment of a “postcolonial neoliberal practice” implemented on some of the world’s poorest (and colonized) peoples (90). These practices, which relied on “the necropolitical trilogy of death, not dying, and not being born” (103), targeted reproduction and included strategies such as (forced) mass sterilization, the distribution of birth control, and the selective investment in certain kinds of children, especially African girls. Life and death became aggregate “epiphenomena” on which (largely American) governmental and scientific entities could manipulate and experiment.

I outline Murphy’s critiques in order to show how queerness, as Jasbir Puar (2007) demonstrates, can also be “a process of racialization [that] informs the very distinction between life and death, wealth and poverty, health and illness, fertility and morbidity, security and insecurity, living and dying” (xix). Puar highlights how race is “the ghost and grammar,” to use Murphy’s phrase, of much mainstream queer politics. Moreover, Puar demonstrates how queerness’s “bio-necro collaboration” is, in our particular post-9/11 context, especially routed through the US security state and the US global War on Terror.¹⁹ Finally, Puar reveals what is at stake in analyzing the intersections between queerness, war, and futurity, as routed through an ethics of reproduction, when she queries: “How do queers reproduce life, and Which queers are folded into life? How do they give life? To what do they give life? How is life weighted, disciplined into subjecthood, narrated into population, and fostered for living? Does this securitization of queers entail deferred death or dying for others, and if so, for whom?” (36). Puar’s prescient questions both exceed and haunt the poems I analyze throughout these chapters, yet they remain a guiding theoretical framework for a queer eco-poetical reading methodology.

The work of CA Conrad and Dawn Lundy Martin most explicitly tackles Puar’s questions within their political and historical context. But if we suspend, for a moment, the contemporaneous post-9/11 historical context of Puar’s critique, her questions revolve around a more foundational question that strikes to the heart of both queer theory and

environmental politics: what is life (and who gets to decide)? Although this dissertation does not seek to draw any tidy or historicist narratives in the near century-long period between Muriel Rukeyser and CAConrad, the poetic lineage these chapters trace is, above all, one of formal poetic experimentation and of an avowed commitment to an ethos of poetry as political praxis—in particular, a queer, feminist, and environmentally-oriented poetic praxis. This politics I outline in the chapters below is committed to imagining, interrogating, and being-with a variegated multiplicity of life *through* poetry. First, my chapters begin with Muriel Rukeyser’s political vision of poetry, then move to Etel Adnan’s theories of art, language, and poetry, and finally tackle CAConrad’s performative-based poetics of queer antagonism.

Notes

1. Throughout this dissertation I use the terms “environmental,” “environmental thought,” “environmentally-oriented,” and “beyond-human” synonymously to designate a loose and capacious interest—whether philosophical, academic/disciplinary, theoretical, or popular—in the more-than-human, whether atmospheric, natural, animal, cellular, or anything exceeding the anthropocentric and anthropocentric forms of knowledge and agency. I use “beyond-human” more often when referring to a non-human agent, entity, or actant, while I use “environmental” more often to refer to the theoretical orientation of analyzing beyond-human worlds. I use the more capacious term “environmental” over “ecology,” although often broadly used, denotes a specific scientific term for relations and systems between living organisms. In this way, “ecology” implies a narrower definition of life and agency than does the beyond-human or the environmental. I use “ecopoetics” in the context of poetry because “ecopoetics,” by now, is codified academic terminology but I do not wish to draw any meaningful distinction between “ecopoetics” or, for example, “environmentally-

oriented poem.” Because the poets in this dissertation evince such a varied and effuse interest in the world around them—including imagined and speculative beyond-human entities—I err on the side of semantic capaciousness, rather than precision.

2. Alex Vadukul, “Eileen Myles Watches Over an Ever-Changing New York,” *The New York Times*, May 18, 2022, <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/05/18/style/eileen-myles-watches-over-an-ever-changing-new-york.html>.
3. The loose cohort of scholars Huffer describes as “feminist renaturalizers” includes those associated with “feminist new materialism” (or simply “new materialism”), like Stacy Alaimo, Karen Barad, Diana Coole, and Jane Bennett, among others.
4. Already, scholars across a range of disciplines have begun to define the interstices between queer theory, queer studies, and environmentally-oriented theory (Barad 2012, 2015; Chen 2012; Gaard 1997; Giffney and Hird 2008; Mortimer-Sandilands and Erickson 2010; Muñoz et al. 2015; Sandilands 1994; Stein 2004). Much of this work has been largely interdisciplinary, and literature has not necessarily been a primary object of study. Within literary criticism, a smaller body of work, often labeled “queer ecocriticism,” has emerged in tandem with, and is often influenced by, the aforementioned scholars (Alaimo 2016; Azzarello 2012; Ensor 2012, 2018; Hume and Rahimtoola 2018; Morton 2010; Seymour 2013; Sheldon 2016). The emergence of queer ecocriticism and queer environmental theory is influenced by feminist theory, especially ecofeminism (Gaard 1993; Merchant 1980, 1996; Plumwood 1986), (feminist) new materialisms (Alaimo and Hekman 2007; Barad 2007; J. Bennett 2009; Braidotti 1994; Coole and Frost 2010; Grosz 1994), and the work of feminist environmental historians (Langston 2010; Murphy 2006; Scharff 2003;

- Schiebinger 1993; Unger 2012). It is worth noting here that these three feminist strands owe an enormous debt to the pathbreaking scholarship of Rachel Carson, particularly her *Silent Spring* (1962), as well as to Carolyn Merchant's *Death of Nature* (1980). Feminist science and technology studies (STS), and in particular the work of Donna Haraway, has also exerted a monumental influence on queer and feminist environmentally-oriented work (see also Harding 1986, 1991; Hayles 1999; Irigaray 1989).
5. Here, I would add, too, the influence of Foucauldian and Deleuzian notions of subjectivity, identity formation, and desubjectification, which have frequently been re-theorized by scholars through intensely temporal frameworks. For example, I am thinking of Judith Butler's highly temporal post-Foucauldian theorizations of subject (de)formation (e.g. congealment) and Jasbir Puar's temporal definition of identity as assemblage. Additionally, "coming out" discourses are temporally-loaded, as is its critique, especially Sedgwick's (1990) work on closet epistemologies and reparative reading.
 6. Shulamith Firestone's classic second-wave feminist text, *The Dialectic of Sex* (1970), argues for the liberation of children (from the disciplinary mechanisms and sexual repression of the bourgeois family) and for the liberation of women from child-bearing and child-rearing roles (what Firestone calls "the heart of women's oppression") through "a seizure of control of reproduction" by technological means, such as artificial reproduction and cybernetics (2015, 11, 65). The centrality of children, of reproduction, and of female reproductive labor to Firestone's argument cannot be understated, as their decoupling from the heteropatriarchal "biological family" are absolute tenets—prerequisites—for the feminist revolution.
 7. For example, Al Gore's enormously successful and influential documentary *An Inconvenient Truth* (2006) ends with a plea (what Gore calls a "moral

imperative”) from the future: “Future generations may well have occasion to ask themselves: ‘What were our parents thinking? Why didn’t they wake up when they had a chance?’ We have to hear that question from them, now.” In a similar affective vein, the bestselling Canadian journalist Naomi Klein’s *This Changes Everything: Capitalism vs. The Climate* (2014) opens with a candid admission that the impetus for writing this book was the birth of her first child and a deep fear for her son’s future. In citing the following examples, my point here is not to draw any meaningful distinctions between “popular” and “academic” texts), but to briefly survey the child’s ubiquitous presence in contemporary environmental thought and to demonstrate that, as Donna Haraway frequently argues, that a nuanced and full accounting of reproduction and reproductive justice from both a queer and feminist environmental perspective is, not only urgent, but is still nascent. I highlight these various examples to, not excoriate these authors and activists, but to show how much the child affectively structures the feeling of fear, ethics, and responsibility towards the future in environmental discourse.

8. In her 2018 speech to the United Nation’s COP24 conference, delivered when Greta was fifteen years old, she stated: “The year 2078, I will celebrate my 75th birthday. If I have children maybe they will spend that day with me. Maybe they will ask me about you. Maybe they will ask why you didn’t do anything while there still was time to act. You say you love your children above all else, and yet you are stealing their future in front of their very eyes.”⁸ The “you” here are unequivocally those “in charge”—a wide swath of world leaders, politicians, diplomats, experts, etc.—yet also, significantly, adults. In a later speech at the 2019 UN Climate Action Summit, Greta speaks of the *burden* placed on present and future children by adults; her speech begins: “My message is that we’ll be watching you. This is all wrong. I shouldn’t be up here. I should be back in school on the other side of the ocean. Yet you all come to us young people for hope.

How dare you!” And, towards the end of her speech she continues: “You are failing us. But the young people are starting to understand your betrayal. The eyes of all future generations are upon you. And if you choose to fail us, I say: We will never forgive you.” The child activist thus stands in for the potentially curtailed and not so distant future (e.g. what kind of life will I have?) while also signaling the absurdity of the child-activist’s ethical dilemma (e.g. I should be in school right now. The children should not have the burden of securing the future). In short, Thunberg’s signals an additional modality of the child in mainstream environmental activist rhetoric—a marked shift from Al Gore’s traditional rhetoric of acting *now* for our *future* grandchildren—one that shifts the temporality of environmental change into a kind of present-future tense and into the realm of the child: the child is not just the future, but the only hope of saving the future. In other words, only the children can save themselves from their own bleak future.

9. In addition to Edelman and Sedgwick, two pathbreaking texts inaugurated queer theoretical interest in the child: Steven Bruhm and Natasha Hurley’s edited collection *Curiouser: On the Queerness of Children* (2004) and Kathryn Bond Stockton’s *The Queer Child, Or Growing Sideways in the Twentieth Century* (2009), the latter of which I will discuss in more detail. More recently, the child is increasingly of interest for transgender studies. See, for example, Julian Gill-Peterson’s *Histories of the Transgender Child* (2018).
10. Other scholars have examined queer poets and poems through an environmental lens without explicitly adopting the conceptual label of “queer ecopoetics.” For example, Christopher Schmidt (2014) analyzes the poets Gertrude Stein, John Ashbery, James Schuyler, and Kenneth Goldsmith through the framework of queer waste and excess. Additionally, several recent articles have examined the queer environmental orientations of canonical poets like Elizabeth Bishop and

Marianne Moore, particularly through an analysis of Charles Darwin's influence on their writings (Giragosian 2016; Laity 2016; McCabe 2009). Although the body of work on queer ecopoetics is becoming a field in its own right, this scholarship has developed from a longer lineage of ecopoetics. The British scholar Jonathan Bate's *Romantic Ecology* (1991) is sometimes positioned as the first influential work of ecopoetics (see also Bate 2000). More recently, some scholars working in ecopoetics include Margaret Ronda (2018), Jonathan Skinner (founder of the journal *ecopoetics*) (2001), and Angela Hume (2012).

Additionally, Scott Knickerbocker's monograph *Ecopoetics: The Language of Nature, The Nature of Language* (2012), as well as the anthologies *Ecopoetry: A Critical Introduction* (Bryson 2002), *This Compost: Ecological Imperatives in American Poetry* (Rasula 2002), *Eco Language Reader* (Iijima 2010), *The Ecopoetry Anthology* (Fisher-Wirth and Street 2013), and *Ecopoetics: Essays in the Field* (Hume and Osborne 2018), demonstrate the legibility of ecopoetics as a codified field of ecocriticism for the past two decades. Similarly, Angela Hume's work organizing a 2013 ecopoetics conference attests to a growing interest in ecopoetics as a critical and creative methodology (Hume, Osborne, Ronda 2013; see also Hume 2012).

11. Although ecopoetics is a legible disciplinary marker, ecopoetical scholarship has generally centered around a rather small coterie of contemporary poets, and the analysis of gender, sexuality, and race is now becoming an increasingly primary concern of an ecopoetical methodology. Some examples of important scholarly work on decolonizing the ecopoetical canon include Camille Dungy's anthology *Black Nature: Four Centuries of African American Nature Poetry* (2009) and Sonia Posmentier's *Cultivation and Catastrophe: The Lyric Ecology of Modern Black Literature* (2017). More generally, the growing body of postcolonial ecocriticism seeks to decenter the prominence of literature from the global north

- and of non-Indigenous voices in ecocriticism (DeLoughrey and Handley 2011; DeLoughrey 2019; Monani and Adamson 2016).
12. A notable early poetic example is Anne Bradstreet's (who is sometimes considered "the first American poet") well-known poem "The Author to Her Book," which takes the form of a direct address by the poet to her literary-child. Here Bradstreet's poet-speaker does not celebrate her child-as-book as a ticket to immortality, but rather considers her child as defective, disgusting, malformed, and allowed life only due to economic necessity.
 13. Warner argues that the queerness of Whitman's work lies in how he negotiates "the paradigmatically liberal erotic dilemmas of recognition and mutuality," dilemmas that are most salient in Whitman's oeuvre when liberal self/other dynamics are muddled and are "not stabilized by heterosexuality, which is to say, by the modern ideology that interprets gender difference as the form of self-other difference" (289). Warner further argues that "Whitman's poetry may in fact be the earliest instance of a theme that has come to be taken for granted in Euro-American culture: the idea of sexuality as an expressive capacity of the individual" (287). Significantly, Whitman theorizes this expressive capacity of queerness through text through the same formal structures (i.e. direct address and injunctions to future readers) that subtend a faith in poetry as a kind of immortalizing project, even as, in the case of Whitman, this faith acknowledges what Warner describes as "the definitional impossibility of intimacy" between writer and reader (285).
 14. I want to underscore that the terms "lyric theory," or "lyric," are not necessarily synonymous with poetry or poetic theory. Lyric theorists, especially scholars who seek to reveal the limitations of "lyric reading" like Virginia Jackson (2005; Jackson and Prins 2014), have spilled much ink trying to extricate "lyric" from "poetry." I acknowledge the specificity of lyric scholarship's archives and the

limitations of theorizing lyric temporalities as opposed to a broader and more capacious poetic temporalities. Be that as it may, Culler defines lyric so capaciously—from Pindar to the present—that his model could apply to the majority of 20th and 21st century American poetry. Excepting, at times, Rukeyser, the poets in this project do not write the kind of legible “lyric poetry” that Culler might identify as such. Yet I do not find the separation of lyric and non-lyric to be especially fruitful for thinking about the history and lineage of modern to contemporary American poetry. It is hard to define what is not lyric, although the non-lyric is often thought synonymously with a 20th century avant-garde poetics, especially Language poetry (we might think here of the West coast/East coast, Perloff/Vendler standoff in American poetics).

15. Regarding Grossman’s *Summa Lyrica* : Blau DePlessis writes “Grossman’s idea about poetry rests on the transfer of semen into the unprotesting mother; the power to speak as a poet is the power to conceive oneself—*literally*, a most intimate event of pure oedipal fantasy” (80). Alongside Grossman, Blau DePlessis cites Charles Olson’s theory of “projective verse” as a preeminent example of how patriarchal gender ideology structures poetics and specific poetic production (Blau DePlessis discusses at length the unacknowledged influence of Olson’s lover, Frances Boldereff, on his work).
16. Canonical antecedents to this coterie of poets include Ezra Pound, William Carlos Williams, and even Wallace Stevens, who, in tandem, constitute a strong cornerstone of American modernism and furthermore act as “bridge” poets from modernist formal experimentation to a mid-century and contemporary American avant-garde. Marjorie Perloff’s (2002) argument in her self-described manifesto, *21st Century Modernism: The ‘New’ Poetics*, is relevant here for understanding the relationship between modernist poetry and post-45 (or “postmodern poetry”) in an American context. Due to the rupture of WWI and the subsequent decades

of global political turmoil, Perloff figures modernism as a kind of “unfulfilled project” of radical avant-garde poetics, one that planted the seeds for the “materialist poetics which is increasingly our own,” a poetics we would now call contemporary. Perloff is interested in locating poetic continuities, especially in locating how the “forms of life” of the early 20th century and the turn of the millennium “converge and cross” (5-6). More broadly, a strong eco-poetical vein runs throughout many of the towering and canonical figures of twentieth century American poetry. For example, Charles Olson’s famous 1950 poetics statement cum manifesto, “Projective Verse,” defines a poem as “energy transferred” from poet to poem to reader. In this transference, the poem itself—especially the play between its constituent parts like the syllable, the verb, the sentence—is an agential force, in charge of its own composition and guiding the poet’s hand. But the poet, ultimately, derives their force from nature. Olson argues that “breath is man’s special qualification as animal” and that it is “nature” that grants both an ontology of human and poet life. Olson’s concept of projective verse was strongly influenced by William Carlos Williams’s definition of a poem as a “field of action” developed in his 1948 essay “The Poem as a Field of Action.” Furthermore, in *Spring & All* Williams writes that “the imagination is an actual force comparable to electricity and steam” and that “the work of the imagination not like anything but transfused with the same forces which transfuse the earth” (2011, 49-50). The imagination here is the raw material for poetry. This echoes Wallace Stevens’s consistent championing of the concept of “imagination” and how it is influenced by, and draws from, the natural world. Stevens’s *Adagia* is replete with propositions on the direct relationship between nature and poetry; he writes that “all of our ideas come from the natural world. Trees=umbrella” and that “the theory of poetry is the theory of life” (1990, 189 and 202). It is also worth mentioning that TS Eliot’s *The Wasteland* is, in part, an extended allegory

for natural, seasonal cycles of birth and death and the poem is highly concerned with environmental destruction due to industrialization and pollution. On *The Wasteland* as ecocritique see McIntire (2015); on Stevens and eco-poetics see Eeckhout (2009) and Knickerbocker (2012); on Williams and eco-poetics see Long (2002), Nolan (2014), and Wallaert (2005); on Olson and eco-poetics see Cooperman (2001) and Skinner (2018).

17. Throughout this dissertation I have avoided using the term “feminist new materialism” (often abbreviated FNM), opting for the more capacious and less controversial term “new materialisms,” even if my arguments traverse similar theoretical terrain as feminist new materialist concepts like Stacy Alaimo’s “trans-corporeality,” Jane Bennett’s “vibrant matter,” or even Karen Barad’s “intra-action.” I wish to stay cognizant of the nuanced critiques of feminist new materialism, especially the tendency of FNM to produce erasures in previous feminist thought (Ahmed 2008), especially Black feminist thought (Z. Jackson 2018), and a long history of Indigenous thought and Indigenous epistemology (Pugliese 2020, 24-9). I do not wish to reproduce this same epistemic violence, especially when discussing concepts of agential matter and agential atmospheres/climate, which I do frequently in Chapter Two. It is also worth noting that the “materialist turn” in general has been critiqued for its unnuanced analysis of race and indigeneity. The indigenous anthropologist Zoe Todd (2016) discusses the particular pernicious total erasure of Indigenous epistemology to the theories that constitute the “ontological turn,” a turn in which we can locate the (feminist) new materialists in perhaps uncomfortable proximity. Reflecting on Bruno Latour’s recent theorization of Gaia, Todd writes that she is struck by “the unintentional (even ironic) evocation of theories about the climate as a form of *aer nullius*, which it often becomes in Euro-Western academic discourses: where the climate acts as a blank commons to be populated

by very Euro-Western theories of resilience, the Anthropocene, Actor Network Theory and other ideas that dominate the anthropological and climate change arenas of the moment” (8). FNM, in particular, frequently evinces this gesture of theoretical *terra nullius*, where much of FNM’s scholarly thrust lies in myopically underscoring perceived gaps and lacunae in previous scholarship.

18. Haraway summarizes her political stance regarding the utility of larger-scale concepts, like “population”:

I have little sympathy for what I experience as a taboo in progressive thinking, including feminist, antiracist, decolonial, reproductive thinking, which seems to hold that practically any topic or category can be brought into intersectional work on generations and reproduction except counting increasing and decreasing human numbers, no matter how nuanced, situated, and attentive to violence. What I want is a different demography, one that worries about how, when, and if to count human beings in entangled living and dying with microbes, plants, animals, and apparatuses, and one that asks about numbers-in-worlds from non-Malthusian foundations. I am not interested in starting from comparative birth, death, and growth rates of the eaters and the eaten. I want a radical, nonhumanist demography embedded in multi-kinded/multi-species justice and care. (Strathern et al. 2019, 169-70)

19. Just as Puar reveals how queerness can be imbricated in a bio/necropolitics of war, Jairus Grove (2019) reveals the environmental consequences of this particularly American forms of bio-necro collaboration. Coining the term “savage ecology,” Grove writes that “geopolitics, enacted through global war, is itself a form of life that pursues a *savage ecology*, radically antagonistic to survival as a collective rather than discriminatory goal” (4).

Chapter 1: Muriel Rukeyser and the Beyond-Human: A Queer/Lesbian/Feminist Ecopoetics

A poem does invite, it does require. What does it invite? A poem invites you to feel. More than that: it invites you respond. And better than that: a poem invites a total response.

—Muriel Rukeyser, *The Life of Poetry*

As the above epigraph makes clear, Muriel Rukeyser believed poetry inherently contained a formidable power, one that could enact political change and build alternate worlds. As this chapter analyzes, Rukeyser often imagines the space of poetry as a space of fantastical relationalities, like a threshold to more-than-human worlds. In Rukeyser's epistemology, poetry requires a de-centering of the self, of human anthropocentrism, and an abolishment of political cowardness. Before I map out Rukeyser's poetic worlds, I begin with a brief mediation on Rukeyser's own fascinating and fraught relationship to the textual and archival. Rukeyser's bold lyrics and clear-voiced speakers stand in productive tension with her own political relationship to the biographical and confessional, a tension that, as I explicate below, is also instructive.

From the early 1940s until her file was officially "closed" in 1973 (only seven years before her death), the poet Muriel Rukeyser was actively surveilled by the FBI for alleged Communist activities. With offices in several states involved as Rukeyser moved back and forth across the country, the resulting file mostly consists of interminable lists of "known addresses" alongside letters from one office to another requesting "confirmation" of such addresses. Upon reaching the last fuzzy photocopy-of-a-photocopied page where Rukeyser's name is cleared with an anti-climactic thud—"due to the apparent lack of extremist activity re subject, this case is being placed in a closed status"—the formidable figure of Rukeyser herself, and her radical mid-century feminism and her queerness, appears to have befuddled even a decades' long institutional will-to-

truth. Albeit heavily redacted, the file contains no mention of Rukeyser's sexuality; one of the most intimate descriptions of Rukeyser is a brief mention of her child under the "Marital Status" section of a 1952 report:

[redacted] advised that the subject, while residing at the above address, was known by the name of MURIEL RUKEYSER and she had a son approximately four years of age living with her. [redacted] further stated that the subject had often referred to the fact that she was a widow, but she could furnish no information concerning the subject's husband.¹

Rukeyser kept the identity of her only child's father, a son of the well-known poet Robinson Jeffers, a secret for many years, often telling others she was widowed.² In a remarkably candid essay published nearly twenty years after his mother's death, Rukeyser's son William writes the following about his parentage:

my mother often talked the way some people felt she wrote: indirectly, tossing seemingly contradictory clues rather than simple declarative sentences...It is also impossible to say whether there was affection between her and her mate. Some indications are that she went searching for a father for her child the way people go to The Gap: she was shopping for genes" (Rukeyser 1999, 300).

Additionally, Rukeyser's granddaughter Rebecca Rukeyser (2020) writes, "although there has been great interest and more than a few attempts, everyone who has tried to write a biography of Muriel has ultimately given up." Scholars further remark on Rukeyser's vexed relationship, textually and personally, with disclosure and with autobiography. For example, Eric Keenaghan (2013) details how, struggling to adopt a legible and textual lesbian identity, Rukeyser abandoned a foreword to *One Life* (1957), her experimental biography of the politician Wendell Willkie, that would have made clear the romantic nature of her relationship with her literary agent Monica McCall, whom *One Life* was dedicated to.³

I open with these anecdotes in order to demonstrate how Rukeyser—even as a heavily surveilled political "subject," as well as a well-known poet, a mother, and lover—remains an opaque figure. I find it rather apt that the mysteries surrounding Rukeyser's life presents a titillating gap in the archive, especially one that encompasses questions of poetic lineage, reproduction, sexuality, as well as historiography. In this way, Rukeyser's

opacity is inextricably bound up with her queerness, a queer opacity in paradoxically queer tension with her lifelong political commitment to documenting the historical. Rukeyser exuberantly believed in the power of a poetry of witness and of justice, a belief well-explicated in her 1949 prose manifesto *The Life of Poetry*. Her position as poet-documentarian during historical events like the Alabama Scottsboro trials, the West Virginia Hawk's Nest Tunnel disaster, the Spanish Civil War, and South Korea's imprisonment of the poet Kim Chi-Ha attests to her radical commitment to the documentation of war, ecological catastrophe, social injustices, and their intersections (Kaufman and Herzog, xxxv).

Although Rukeyser did not speak publicly about her sexuality, her writing is characterized by a sexual openness and sexual explicitness that could at times be called heterosexual, at times bisexual, and at times lesbian. The closest thing scholars—who variously hail Rukeyser as bisexual, lesbian, or queer—cite to a “coming out” is Rukeyser's planned participation in a 1978 MLA special reading for lesbian poets, an appearance that she had to cancel due to illness.⁴ Thus Rukeyser embodies an opaque, or what is sometimes called a “pre-stonewall,” relationship to a public sexuality. Although biographically she may not comfortably inhabit the category of “lesbian,” many of her poems are suffused with scenes of lesbian desire and literary scholarship has mostly interpellated her as a lesbian poet. Rukeyser embodies the radical opacity that Judith Butler (1993) attributes to the sign of the lesbian, destabilizing binaries of outness/closetedness and troubling the academic institutionalization of sexualized knowledge. If, following Butler, identity categories are sites of necessary trouble, I argue that Rukeyser, precisely *because* she does not fit easily into the category of “lesbian” (or because she queerly fits the category “lesbian”), can serve as a vibrant test case for queer-lesbian-feminist eco-poetics. In the logic of the test case, I take Rukeyser as a point of departure for a retraversal of the category “lesbian” in order to arrive at a feminist and queer eco-poetics.

Precisely because the term “lesbian”—as a sexual, political, and theoretical category—has a precise, sticky, and contentious relationship to gender, it is an especially

necessary category for elaborating a queer and feminist ecopoetics. Kadji Amin (2016) argues that the term “queer” is affectively sticky with history, despite the hard work of queer theory to “keep queer slick rather than sticky, un-bound, detachable” (181). If so, the term “lesbian” is perhaps even stickier, trailing the extra baggage of gender essentialism and a particularly overdetermined association with an exclusionary second-wave feminism. My point here is not to abandon the term queer, but to reinvigorate what Jack Halberstam (1996) called, over twenty years ago, a “queer lesbian studies,” where the term queer alongside lesbian works to destabilize any assumed and static gender or sexual identity. What might it mean to retrace this sticky terrain, adamantly not in order to reify any stable gender ontology but instead to respond to Lynne Huffer’s (2013) injunction to “claim” a queer feminism? Taking up Valerie Traub’s (2015) provocation that the figure of the lesbian can produce a necessary field-destabilizing force for queer theory, this chapter asks: what can this theoretically sticky lesbian do for a burgeoning field of queer ecopoetics? Or, to use Elizabeth Freeman’s (2010) language, what kind of gravitational pull, what kind of drag, does the category of “lesbian” exert on a poetic and environmental imagination?

Traub (2015) argues that the figure of the lesbian presents a limit case for queer theory, a methodological release point for theorizing a historiography of sexual knowledge production, particularly through the conceptual lens of opacity. Arguing that queer theory is allergic to history, she contends that queer theory’s attachment to the term “queer” (and its concomitant capacity to be simultaneously universalizing and exclusionary) is symptomatic of an embedded historiographic problem in queer theory. To underscore her argument, Traub concocts a neat analogy: *lesbian is to history as queer is to theory*. For Traub, the point is to read these conceptual categories—“history,” “queer,” “lesbian,” “theory”—as necessarily entrenched and overdetermined. Leaning into their overdetermined relationship is precisely what creates an epistemological point of entry capable of re-nuancing and re-inscribing the constantly shifting queer definitional nexuses of sex, sex object, sex act, sexuality, and gender at the heart of queer critique and at the heart of Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick’s (1990) concept of nonce taxonomy.

What both Traub and Robyn Wiegman (2012) deem the “defunct” figure of the lesbian is an opaque and hypervisible figure, a bucket of contradictions, clichés, and loaded historical flashpoints. “Lesbian,” as a theoretical marker, is extra sticky with a certain uncertain temporality; “lesbian” is temporally textured—temporally gooey—because just as it is invoked it is often always already superseded, superannuated, out-of-joint. Elevated to the throne of cultural trope (yes, *The L Word*), this sticky lesbian often produces what Wiegman describes as a *real* “disidentification with *that* lesbian—wearing her womonbornwomononly button and clad in that dowdy dress” (129). Beyond the joke of *that* awkward lesbian, I want to take seriously Traub’s and Wiegman’s injunction that the category of lesbian is a necessary and fruitful provocation to a contemporary queer theory, particularly queer theory’s sometimes-vexed engagement with feminism. If the defunct lesbian is perceived as stale and historically entrapped, the term is nonetheless utterly specific, concrete, and still an actively mobilized, politically-legible, and beloved identity category—one that continues to animate scholarship on feminism. As Wiegman notes, “*the desire for gender* has become one of the most powerful and interesting features of both US queer culture and academic queer critique today” (131). Whoever she may be, it is the utter specificity of *that* lesbian, and her thick relationship with gender, that is in productive tension with the forcefield of opacity “the lesbian” generates throughout the foundations of queer theory. I want to recall here Butler’s (1993) desire to preserve the opacity of the lesbian sign, to “have it permanently unclear what precisely that sign signifies” (308). This opacity is generative for Butler as it is the identity-sign’s “strategic provisionality”—the preservation of the lesbian-sign’s openness and “future use”—that guarantees its immanent political potential (311-12). As the scholarly body of queer ecopoetics—and queer ecocriticism, more broadly—continues to grow, the defunct and opaque figure of the lesbian might provide some counterweight in conceiving a queer and environmental poetics, especially in conceiving a poetics that “nonces,” and nuances, gender as a necessary queer analytical category.

If the ways Rukeyser’s queerness suffused her life and her writing sits in rich tension with her status as a documentary poet, this tension between Rukeyser’s queer

opacity and her commitment to historiography is further heightened by scholarship on Rukeyser, which frequently frames her as an understudied, neglected, and lost figure in American poetic history.⁵ Notably, Rukeyser is steadily becoming associated with a twentieth century canon of American eco-poetics. Her long poem *The Book of the Dead* (1938) features prominently in Stacy Alaimo's influential ecocritical monograph *Bodily Natures: Science, Environment, and the Material Self* (2010) and continues to be analyzed in ecocritical scholarship today. As a work of eco-poetics, *The Book of the Dead* lays bare the disjuncture between human, historical epistemologies and non-anthropocentric, non-teleological knowledge. It is also Rukeyser's most famous work, garnering an enormous amount of scholarly attention and codified in *The Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics* as an early exemplary work of documentary poetics. Precisely because the limits and possibilities of a queer eco-poetics remain open to definition and exploration, this chapter is interested in how a queer eco-poetic methodology emerges in poems by Rukeyser that do not, like *The Book of the Dead*, so obviously signal a concern for ecological destruction and are not so self-consciously works of documentary poetics girded to concrete historical moments. I am interested in reading the queer and lesbian poems of Rukeyser's that signal a more oblique and opaque relationship to both the historical and the environmental. How might poems that are unexpectedly, paradoxically, and even counterintuitively environmentally-oriented complicate the historical overdetermination of the category "lesbian"?

Rukeyser inhabited the very historical moment that codified, as Victoria Hesford (2013) argues, the feminist-as-lesbian as a key (albeit ambivalent) figure for the women's liberation movement. I hope to demonstrate how Rukeyser's work might embody and exceed what Hesford calls "the spectrality of the feminist-as-lesbian," a spectrality stemming from her status as both "everywhere and nowhere" (16). I contend that it is precisely because of queer eco-poetics' still-burgeoning critical status that the work of the queerly lesbian, the staunchly feminist, and the formally-inventive Rukeyser presents a rich occasion for a theoretical foray into a queer and feminist eco-poetics. In reading Rukeyser's poetry, I follow Sara Ahmed (2017) in exploring how the figure of the lesbian

might be a “feminist snap” and “an energetic becoming” (224-25), a becoming-snap that (as I will demonstrate) is antagonistic to the medicalized, heteropatriarchal interpolation of reproducing female bodies. As Hume and Rahimtoola make clear, what most cogently binds ecopoetics to queer theory is a deep commitment to ethical praxis, to the kind of ethics described by Lee Edelman (2004) as a “radical challenge to the very value of the social itself” (6). Key to a queer ecopoetics, then, is an incisive elaboration of the affects, erotics, and attachment-drives of these ethical poetic spaces.⁶ I contend that one site of affective density for a queer ecopoetics involves feminist questions of reproductive justice. The recent return to gender in queer theory—the call for gender as a renewed queer critical-analytic by queer feminist scholars like Huffer, Wiegman, and Traub—dovetails with the recent rallying cry in environmental thought for feminists to tackle the intersecting problems of human overpopulation, (non)human futures, and human reproduction (see Clarke and Haraway 2018). The theoretical constellation of futurity/reproduction/survival thus becomes a rich site for negotiating what Huffer (2013) describes as “a robust historical thinking about how subjects actually live and negotiate their relation to moralities” (30).⁷ Rukeyser’s poems stage these queer and feminist negotiations.

To this end, I read three Rukeyser poems: the first from her early collection *Beast in View* (1944) and the latter two from *Breaking Open* (1973), one of her last collections. The first two poems—“Drunken Girl” and “All The Little Animals”—figure lesbian desire and the female body in conjunction with a concern for beyond-human, especially animal, ontologies. In contrast, the third and final poem I read—“Looking at Each Other”—is less explicitly concerned with the beyond-human, or the natural, and is on the surface perhaps Rukeyser’s most well-known and overtly lesbian poem. My readings will demonstrate that, for Rukeyser, questioning human ontological boundaries is inextricable from her exploration of queer human desire, and especially inextricable from her vision of queer futurity. These readings are not intended to be programmatic or comprehensive but are meant to model the kinds of reading practices that a queerly lesbian, environmental, beyond-human nonce taxonomy might engender. Rukeyser’s poems,

above all, demonstrate the capacious nature of a queer eco-poetics, that an orientation to the literal environment around a body encompasses an attention and a concern for multiple scales, multiple modalities of agency, and innumerable categories of being. Akin to what Kathleen Stewart (2011) calls “atmospheric attunements,” a queer eco-poetics thinks the desiring queer body as never-just-human, and as inhabiting and comingling with entities, agencies, and figures both real, intangible, and imagined, including sea, sun, worms, monsters, rabbits, and windows. In particular, I argue that Rukeyser uses animals to elaborate a queer stance towards institutional and heteronormative reproduction as well as a queer vision of futurity that is still compatible with the biographical facts of Rukeyser’s own familial life. Rukeyser’s constant return to the animal in her poetry demonstrates a queer theoretical and eco-poetical concern for destabilizing an ontology of the human where it hurts—sex, reproduction, birth, creation, and an uncertain species-future—in order to enact the possibility of livable queer life free from violence, especially a queer life that tends, and extends, towards the future.

Becoming-Animal, Becoming-Lesbian

I want to turn now to “Drunken Girl,” a short poem from *Beast in View* (1944). In a tone both playful and didactic, the speaker (troping off the male “carpe diem” poetic tradition, e.g., come to bed with me since we will both be dead someday), implores a beloved to come to bed while musing on violent anthropocentric taxonomic projects. I situate this poem as exemplary of the theoretical concerns Rukeyser addresses through animal figures—notably, the entanglement of lesbian desire with leaky human ontologies—and I will show how this poem demonstrates the queer eco-poetical potential of Deleuze’s and Guattari’s figure of the body without organs, especially queer and feminist reevaluations of this figure. The poem, “Drunken Girl,” reads:

Do you know the name of the average animal?
Not the dog,
Nor the green-beaded frog,
Nor the white ocean monster lying flat—
Lower than that.
The curling one who comes out in the storm—

The middle one's the worm.

Lift up your face, my love, lift up your mouth,
Kiss me and come to bed
 And do not bow your head
Longer on what is bad or what is good—
 The dead are terribly misunderstood,
And sin and godhead are in the worm's blind eye,
We'll come to averages by and by. (Rukeyser 2005, 222)

The poem begins with a speaker asking a simple question, what is the name of the average animal. The demand here is not for the average animal itself, but for the *name* of the average animal. The emphasis on name rather than being marks the speaker's concern for a kind of linguistic taxonomy. The following lines establish the hierarchy of this taxonomy through a simultaneous process of elimination. The average animal is not the dog; the average animal is lower than the dog. Below the dog is the frog, who is also not the right name for the average animal, and below the frog is the "white ocean monster." The inclusion of this monster, a vaguely mythological creature, explodes the taxonomic parameters already established by the poem, calling into question the validity of the category "animal," while also playfully demonstrating the farce of the speaker's taxonomic hierarchy.

After the taxonomic disruption of the monster, the speaker reveals the answer to her initial question: "the curling one who comes out in the storm— / the middle one's the worm." Here, the speaker reveals the actual *name* at last, even while hedging the riddle's revelation with a description of the animal's physical characteristics, behaviors, and environment. While revealing the worm as the correct answer to their initial question, the speaker slips up and reiterates the parameters of the question differently. The worm is the middle one, now, *not* the average one. And, like the ocean monster above it, the worm also does not anecdotally fall into the usual classification of "animal." If we read the speaker's own taxonomy in light of a Linnaean standard, the worm (as opposed to the dog, and the frog) falls into the lowest class of Linnaeus's "Animal Kingdom." Yet where the speaker lands with the worm is not the bottom, but the "middle." The ocean monster's

own exemption from any standard classificatory system serves as another signal that the speaker dismantles the very system she purports to create.

Furthermore, the imperfect yet highly visual rhyme between “worm” and “storm” links the worm with an occurrence or happening, like a weather phenomenon. The worm is an event, a significant force; notably, the line in which the worm appears inaugurates the only stanza break of the poem. This break marks a shift to a more traditionally lyric address between speaker and beloved: “Lift up your face, my love, lift up your mouth, / Kiss me and come to bed.” We might assume the “you” here is the titular “drunken girl.” A sense of care for the “you” resounds, as the speaker takes the young woman *in*—into a house, a room, a bed—while her drunkenness further implies vulnerability or disorientation.⁸ In this moment of taking-in, or taking-shelter, the speaker instructs the drunken girl to stop musing—stop bowing her head—on binary moralisms of bad or good. The em-dash following this line suggests a kind of absent “because”: do not bow your head on what is bad or good *because* the dead are terribly misunderstood. Yet the caesura-like quality of the em-dash leaves a paratactical opening, marking a vocal shift in the following lines, which read almost like maxims: “The dead are terribly misunderstood, / And sin and godhead are in the worm’s blind eye, / We’ll come to averages by and by.” There is much to unpack in these last maxim-like three lines, but I am interested in how the rather heavy-handed binaries of human morality—bad/good, sin/godhead—are not separated from the worm’s sphere of existence. The expression “in the worm’s blind eye” still implies the worm is aware of their existence. The worm can see them but chooses to turn away. At the very least, the worm exists parallel to, or in tandem with, the human conceptual realm and, strikingly, this fact is offered by the speaker in an effort to comfort to the beloved.

In addition, the shift to the plural “we” in the last line could be the ostensible “we” of the human but, in fact, nothing in the poem indicates that this “we” cannot be read as a collection of all of the poem’s entities, human and non-human alike, even including “the dead.” This final phrase, “by and by,” in conjunction with the plural “we” further suggests a sense of succession and progression, as if an entire taxonomy of

creatures would, one by one, come to an average. The phrase “by and by” also connotes a temporality, either of an emergent future or a kind of atemporal realm of never-endingness that prevents any easy delineation of present from future. What does it mean for every being, dead or alive, to approach an average in a manner that is anti-teleological? If an average is used in order to not account for the multiplicities of a whole, then the average is the antithesis of the taxonomic project, rendering it useless. The movement of approaching an average is also antithetical to the movement of biological evolution, where beings progress into greater and greater complexity along the ever-expanding branches of a taxonomic tree. Approaching the average is thus a consolidation into a kind of epitome, or an ur-being, an existence that is representative of a whole field of agentic possibilities. In this way, the average could be read as violent, as it is a reduction of multiplicity. Yet the average is also a refusal of the taxonomic imperative—a grandiose gesture towards a whole, or a unity. The poem’s proposition that the average animal life is exemplified by a worm is a kind of farce, signaling the rejection of the functional utility of a concept like “average” and the functional utility of taxonomy altogether. Thus we might read the worm as a symbol of a critical opacity, a creature that is banal and quotidian yet utterly opaque and illegible within human epistemologies.

The worm here evokes Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari’s (1987) body without organs, which they define as (not just a notion, or a concept) but an experimental praxis. It is *the* immanent limit, a limit marked by ecstasy, intensities, and, above all, multiplicity. The body without organs “is the *field of immanence* of desire” (154). Thus the worm itself becomes an object of desire, while also becoming a site of desire-making, a place for the speaker to transpose and translate her desire for the beloved: a place of contact, of experimentation in and through desire. Elizabeth Grosz’s (1995) reevaluation of Deleuze and Guattari’s framework of desire is relevant here for elaborating the relationship between lesbian desire and the radically anti-anthropogenic stance of “Drunken Girl.” Indebted to this notion of desire as a becoming or process, which privileges multiplicities and flows over any stable notion of being or identity, Grosz theorizes the concept of becoming-lesbian. Grosz situates her becoming-lesbian as a

corrective to Deleuzian-Guattarian becoming (particularly the concept of becoming-animal and becoming-woman) by stressing becoming's anti-ontological thrust. That is, Deleuzian-Guattarian becoming does not terminate in being, or in "residing in a position or identity;" rather, Grosz writes:

the question is not am I—or are you—a lesbian, but rather, what kinds of lesbian connections, what kinds of lesbian-machine, we invest our time, energy, and bodies in, what kinds of sexuality we invest ourselves in, with what other kinds of bodies, and to what effects? What is it that together, in parts and bits, and interconnections, we can make that is new, exploratory, opens up further spaces, induces further intensities, speeds up, enervates, and proliferates production (production of the body, production of the world)? (184)

I turn to Grosz's early work because she explicitly frames the stakes of her Deleuzian-Guattarian critique in terms of sexuality and the lesbian. At its simplest, Grosz's becoming-lesbian is congruent with queer theory's foundational impetus to loosen the binds between gender, sexuality, identity, and sexual act (i.e. the question is not *am I*, but *what are we together*). Yet, what is most striking about Grosz's becoming-lesbian is its ability to further loosen the binds between the lesbian *and* the human. Like the field of desire delineated in Rukeyser's "Drunken Girl," lesbian desire configured as a becoming destabilizes anthropocentric world-models and opens possible avenues— what Deleuze and Guattari call lines of flight—for human-animal assemblages.

Grosz takes up the horizontalizing political potential of becoming by rejecting any impulse to hail becoming-lesbian as utopic or prophetic. Rather, Grosz figures becoming-lesbian as a "way of levelling, of flattening" hierarchical relations and "of eliminating the privilege of the human over the animal, the organic over the inorganic, the male over the female, the straight over the 'bent'" (185). In this way, Grosz succinctly encapsulates the core aims of a queer ecocriticism. I contend that Rukeyser's poem illustrates the potential of Grosz's becoming-lesbian as an ecopoetical reading praxis, a praxis of reading *for* the lesbian, without reifying the lesbian, or making any (potentially pigeonholing) claims for the speaker's or the poet's sexual identity. In this way, Rukeyser's animal poems are blocks of becoming, where sexuality is not ontological but is relational. Like a

Deleuzian-Guattarian becoming-body, whose ontological unity is constituted by multiplicity, the field of lesbian desire marked by “Drunken Girl” does not hinge on that bastion of Humanistic self-definition, that declaration of the *I* so critiqued by Judith Butler and others (i.e. “I am lesbian”), but on an active relationality between an I and a You in the midst of, and among, a multiplicity of creatures.

Moreover, the I/You relationality of the speaker to the drunken girl further recalls Butler’s (1993) discussion of a opacity, where it is in the moment of revelatory speech (from an I directed at a you) that a forcefield of opacity is created. Although the speaker elides the exact category of speech Butler critiques (i.e. the confessional mode of “I am a lesbian”), the “drunken” state of the titular girl might signal another kind of critical opacity, one perhaps still attached to the lesbian sign’s opacity and one that also signals the possibilities of beyond-human communication. The liminal nature of a state of drunkenness, where speech is made opaque or even impossible, might be akin to the state of becoming-lesbian. If opacity or a liminality might be a means to attain the immanent limit of a body without organs, drunkenness might further be a means to elide human speech altogether, which would explain the silence of the addressee and the speaker’s association of animality with drunkenness. Perhaps the drunken state that allows access to the beyond-human opacity of the worm allows a collapse of the I/You (or I/other) distinction so central to the Foucauldian incitation of Humanistic sexualized discourse through the act of confession or revelation.

In conclusion, although the tone in the last line of “Drunken Girl” might verge on weary (or even dismissive), ending on “by and by” opens up a space of potentiality outside of heteronormative, anthropocentric, and teleological time. Perhaps this is a space cleared by the speaker for the beloved just come to bed, a space that can only be accessed by a passage *through* a normative human limit. This passage through is enabled by a state of drunkenness which frees the drunken girl *into* a state of opacity. “By and by” is thus the speaker’s anticipation of an approach towards the worm: come to bed with me since we’ll both end up like the worm by and by. An elision of the average *through* the invocation of “by and by” opens up the potentiality of “a production of the world.” Here

the lesbian and queer desire envisioned in Rukeyser's poem is reinvented as a means to live queerly, and ethically—ethical in the sense of multi-species care and an anti-speciesism that also means living outside of a hegemonic normal and the structural average of heteropatriarchy. "Drunken Girl" ultimately imagines a means of living with desire and of finding refuge within multiplicity.

Queering Human Ontologies

It is precisely the presence of the animal, the creaturely, that enables Rukeyser's speaker to clear the space for lesbian desire. Queer scholars have explored the queer anti-essentialist potential of the animal; one notable example is Mel Chen's (2012) brilliant work on queer animality. Analyzing the linguistic concept of "animacies," which refers to the grammars of linguistically and culturally entrenched agential hierarchies, Chen argues that "animacy can *itself* be queer, for animacy can work to blur the tenuous hierarchy of human-animal-vegetable-mineral with which it is associated. Recentering on animality (or the animals who face humans) tugs at the ontological cohesion of 'the human,' stretching it out and revealing the contingent striations in its springy taffy" (98). Animacy does not just refer literally to the agentic capabilities of animals but gestures towards the potential for encounters with atmospheric and with non-"living" materials, matter, and objects. These latter encounters are those that produce the theoretical conditions for much new materialist thought. I hope to have shown it is precisely these animacy hierarchies, so encoded in imperialist thought and language, that are troubled by Rukeyser in "Drunken Girl," a poem doubly-queer in its frank portrayal of lesbian love and its commitment to pulling at the ontological taffy of the human.

Following Chen, I turn now to another poem that prominently features queer animality, from Rukeyser's later collection *Breaking Open* (1973). The poem, "All The Little Animals," is perhaps less overtly queer in content than "Drunken Girl." Written towards the end of Rukeyser's life, this poem's reflection on family and reproduction stands out within the larger collection *Breaking Open*, a collection that includes some of Rukeyser's most explicitly queer poems and a collection that demonstrates a frank

commitment to a queer politics. In “All The Little Animals,” I feel Rukeyser grappling with, even trying to *queer*, what might generally be considered heteronormative biographical content (i.e. pregnancy, mother to son love, a concern for familial lineage) by positioning the animal as central to human reproduction. “All The Little Animals” uses a queer animality to elaborate a tenaciously feminist critique of medicalized knowledge, reproduction, and genealogy. This poem demonstrates what is *queer* about feminism, and reveals how sexuality can be expressed and instantiated through gendered knowledge:

“You are not pregnant,” said the man
with the probe and the white white coat;
“Yes she is,” said all the little animals.
Then the great gynecologist examined. “You are not now,
and I doubt that you ever have been,” he said with
authority.
“Test me again.” He looked at his nurse and shrugged.
“Yes she is,” said all the little animals, and laid down their
lives for my son and me.

Twenty-one years later, my son a grown man and far away
at the other ocean,
I hear them : “Yes you are,” say all the little animals.
I see them, they move in great jumping procession through my waking hours,
those frogs and rabbits look at me with their round eyes,
they kick powerfully with their strong hind legs,
they lay down their lives in silence,
all the rabbits saying Yes, all the frogs saying Yes,
in the face of all men and all institutions,
all the doctors, all the parents, all the worldly friends, all the
psychiatrists, all the abortionists, all the lawyers.
The little animals whom I bless and praise and thank forever,
they are part of my living,
go leap through my waking and my sleep, go leap through
my life and my birth-giving and my death,
go leap through my dreams,
and my son’s life
and whatever streams from him. (Rukeyser 2005, 489)

The poem begins in direct dialogue with an authoritative statement from a male doctor. The doctor's knowledge, his assertion that the speaker is not pregnant, is contradicted by the voice of "the little animals," who assert the speaker's pregnancy with a simple statement: "Yes she is." The animals hold knowledge against and beyond the limits of the doctor, who embodies both the austere medical institution (the *great* gynecologist) and a paternalistic patriarchal knowledge. In fact, before the doctor is bestowed with the title of "great gynecologist," he is first figured plainly as a "man" in possession of the banal and superficial objects of medical authority (i.e. the probe and very white coat). Therefore, the poem emphasizes the doctor's maleness as primary, or a prerequisite, to his institutional status. The underscoring of the doctor's gender is juxtaposed with the speaker's possessive of an extremely feminized knowledge—pregnancy. Yet this knowledge is possessed by the speaker seemingly *only through* the little animals. Thus, the poem destabilizes essentializing conceptualizations of feminine experience, or of femaleness, as deriving from direct bodily experience.

The naturalization of gendered experience is abruptly and violently troubled by Rukeyser's little animals, as the domain of pregnancy is not just de-gendered, but de-humaned. Here, the speaker is not reified as a woman-who-knows pregnancy. Instead, pregnancy-as-knowledge and pregnancy-as-feeling is jettisoned from the human domain. In the first stanza, the little animals act as a chorus, whose epistemological certainty over the speaker's gendered body is more authoritative than the absolute and resounding "no" of the great gynecologist's prophetic pronouncement that the speaker is not now, nor never has been, pregnant. The great gynecologist's pronouncement is epistemologically violent because of its temporal scope; with a couple prods of the probe, the doctor claims knowledge of the speaker's past and present. The wide temporal reach of the doctor's probe—the frightening totalitarian possibility that a medical institution can know you now and how you have been in the past—is again put in contrast with the future-oriented work that the little animals perform for the speaker in the last two lines of the first stanza: "Yes she is," said all the little animals, and laid down their / lives for my son and me." These lines are notable because they constitute a vocal shift from the omniscient,

narratorial voice of the previous lines—a voice that has only recounted dialogue or simple declarative statements—to a first-person lyric voice.

In the first direct attribution of speakerly voice, the speaker is compelled to speak by the heroic actions of the little animals, whose prophetic and ambiguous sacrifice (did the animals actually sacrifice their lives for the speaker, or were they merely willing to?) enables the speaker's successful pregnancy. The poem's only stanza break creates a direct causal link between the little animals' sacrifice and, as the first line of the second stanza makes clear, the birth and existence of a child, who is now a gendered adult (i.e. "a grown man"). The little animals were necessary to the speaker's pregnancy and to her giving birth; in the world of the poem, they were the sole enabling force of the son's existence, and the sole force against the violence of the doctor. In this way, it is as if the little animals were both progenitor and protector of the speaker's child, an entity essential to both an intuition-mediated moment of conception—I, the great gynecologist, now pronounce you pregnant—and the biological time of growth from embryo to newborn to adult. Therefore, the little animals are integral to the generation of human life itself, but their presence continues in the speaker's life once her son is grown "and far away / at the other ocean." The second stanza's marked temporal shift ("twenty-one years later") creates an extreme presentness, as the speaker's now present-tense and first-person voicing reveals a narrative return to the "now" and "today." Yet the little animals are still here and still speaking and, in fact, they now are an even stronger presence in the speaker's life as she both hears *and sees them* with lucidity: "I hear them : 'Yes you are,' say all the little animals / I see them, they move in great jumping procession through my waking hours."

Furthermore, in this second stanza, the little animals are animated, active, and formidable forces. They jump and move in great processions and they "kick powerfully with their strong hind legs." Most strikingly, the little animals are now diversified and differentiated. Although the poem only names two different kinds of animals—the rabbit and the frog—the little animals are no longer solely figured as a monolithic group but as a multi-species coalition. Significantly, this nuancing of the little animals allows for a

specific and reciprocal interaction between the speaker and the animals as exemplified in the animal gaze: “those frogs and rabbits look at me with their round eyes.” The poem’s invocation of a human-animal gaze evokes Derrida’s (2002) cat, where the gaze of the animal is like “the gaze of a seer” (372). Although the speaker elides the structure of human shame that imbues Derrida’s cat with visionary abilities, Rukeyser’s human-animal gaze is quite congruent with Derrida’s central thesis, namely that “the gaze called animal offers to my sight the abyssal limit of the human: the inhuman or the ahuman, the ends of man, that is to say the bordercrossing from which vantage man dares to announce himself to himself” (381). Rukeyser’s animals mark the bright human limits of institutional and scientific epistemologies, and as the second stanza progresses, the little animals disrupt the ontological status of the human through their insertion into human genealogies. The affirmative and tonally ambiguous (ebullient? solemn?) yesses of the rabbits and the frogs fly “in the face of all men and all institutions, / all the doctors, all the parents, all the wordly friends, all the / psychiatrists, all the abortionists, all the lawyers.” Here, the affirmations of the little animals are pitted against a wide scope of social power structures, like familial genealogies, as well as more individualized sociality, like friends, disrupting human social fabrics from the top-down.

The speaker clearly states that the animals are part of her living, that they move through her material life cycle (life, birth-giving, and death) and her more spiritual and psychic dimensions (my death, my dreams). The poem ends on a firm assertion, too, of the animals’ enfoldment in her son’s life and “whatever streams from him.” Therefore, the animals continue to exact presence and influence on a generalized future, as embodied in the child living on past the mother’s death, and in the speaker’s own specific family lineage, as embodied in the son’s future children and their future children, continuing as long as the “stream” keeps running. The speaker venerates these little animals (“I bless and praise and thank forever”) for their vital living-giving and living-sustaining abilities (“they are part of my living”). In other words, the speaker affectively turns away from the human world—what, in this poem, is metonymized by the various vertical hierarchies of human relationality, from friendship up to the law—and towards

the simultaneously concrete and ethereal little animal world. Ultimately, the speaker makes clear there is no *cordon sanitaire* separating human and animal spheres.

The animals are always already part of the speaker's living, ontologically necessary to her son's existence, and will forever be part of her son's (biological) legacy. It is hard not to read "whatever streams from him" as a reproductive legacy, as the classic descending branches of the speaker's family tree. In this sense, reading the last line's conjunctive "and" as the last item of a list chained to "they are part of my living," the little animals could be read as *queering* heteronormative, reproductive-oriented human sex, as well as queering normative nation-state familial models. In this sense, the little animals *are part* of whatever streams from the son. "Part of," though, could be read in two ways. On the one hand, the little animals will be a present, and active, force in the lives of the speaker's grandchildren, just like they have been in the lives of the speaker and her son. On the other hand, the little animals will be ontologically constitutive of the son's children; that is, these future-children will be *part* little animal. In both of these future possibilities—possibilities that seem, in this poem, to exist simultaneously and to be mutually-enforcing—the animal inserts itself into human sexuality, disrupting and influencing human proliferation.

In some ways, these ontologically slippery future-children may initially be read as actually reinforcing human hierarchies. Mel Chen (2012) is careful to note that "in some sense, the animate leakage within the strictest hierarchies is what paradoxically enables that hierarchy to become what it is imagined to be; biopolitical governance, conspiring with the 'rehoming' assertions of those who traffic wrongly, steps in over and again to contain these leaky bounds" (129). I would argue, though, that it is Rukeyser's commitment to an expansive futurity through a water metaphor—the vague unboundedness of "whatever streams from him"—that makes the leakage here uncontainable.⁹ In "All the Little Animals," it is the co-constitution of the speaker's life with the animals that enables her to speak of a rich life—full of dreams—at all. This is more than a mere dialectic or hybridization, for the deep embeddedness of the little animals within the speaker's reproductive capacities locate the animals in a human future.

Like the unbounded temporality of “by and by” in “Drunken Girl,” the last line, “whatever streams from him,” cements the perpetual presence of the animals into a horizontal future.

Moreover, we might read the dream-like, or surreal-like, tone of this poem—of the ecstatic “great jumping procession”—as a fantasy that enables the speaker to enact a queer and feminist life. Recalling Butler’s (2004) description of how fantasy functions to make a life livable by “allow[ing] us to imagine ourselves and others otherwise; it establishes the possible in excess of the real” (29), these animals are not oppositional to reality. They constitute instead what the speaker’s present reality forecloses, a foreclosure symbolized by the doctor’s patriarchal epistemology, which simultaneously forecloses a feminist *and* multi-species social life. Following Butler, if “the struggle to survive is not really separable from the cultural life of fantasy, and the foreclosure of fantasy—through censorship, degradation, or other means—is one strategy for providing for the social death of persons” (28-9), then “All the Little Animals” can be read as a queer and feminist poetic praxis for survival. Significantly, it is a fantasy of trans-species comingling, a destabilizing of the category “human,” that inaugurates a queer and feminist life as not just livable, but *tending towards* the future.

In summary, Rukeyser’s poetic turn to the animal demonstrates a queer eco-poetical concern for destabilizing an ontology of the human. According to Carla Freccero (2017), this radical ontological destabilization *is* the queer potential of Derrida’s cat, as “animal theory is a queer theory” (134). For Freccero, Derrida’s desire for animal identification signals something of a magnitude more profound than a simple relationality; rather, the cat watching Derrida constitutes “a queer ontological abyssal relation” (160). It is at this abyssal limit, this zone or bordercrossing, that an ontology of the self, and an ontology of desire is reconfigured and reimagined by Rukeyser as a feminist crossing. “Drunken Girl” does this queer ontological work, while “All the Little Animals” imagines how this queer ontological work intersects with gendered bodies, gendered temporalities, and queer futurities. It is in this last regard that the queer potential of Rukeyser’s animal poetics speaks to Elizabeth Freeman’s (2010)

conceptualization of queer time as a disruption of chrononormativity. Following Freeman’s concept of temporal drag and temporal transitivity, the animals constitute a kind of drag on human temporalities; they constitute a “retrogression, delay, and the pull of the past on the present” (Freeman 2010, 62). I turn to Freeman here to underscore that Rukeyser’s queer eco-orientations, although they trouble human ontologies, are still entangled in very human questions of gender and sexuality.

The Space of Lesbian Desire

Thus far, I have argued that Rukeyser’s eco-poetical concerns are often instantiated in her use of animals. These animals are queer in how they de-ontologize of the human as category, especially at sites of reproduction and hierarchical relations, and in how they serve as witness to queer and feminist desire. Building on Rukeyser’s concern for lineage and hierarchies, and by way of conclusion, I turn to Rukeyser’s poem “Looking at Each Other.” Following Freeman’s metaphor of gravitation, pulling, and weighing down, I would like to show the kind of lesbian pull or drag this poem can exert on Rukeyser’s aforementioned ecological and environmental concerns. Specifically, I will use Sara Ahmed’s (2006) figure of the “contingent lesbian” in order to elaborate how Rukeyser figures lesbian desire in terms of spatial orientation and a lived phenomenology of the environment. Notably, “Looking at Each Other” reveals how temporal ambivalence can be harnessed as a queer political mode. Like the ambivalence of force and time in the son’s “stream”—stream as in trickle? stream as in fast moving?—Rukeyser’s rejection of chrononormativity on its firmest terrain (i.e. human reproduction cum familial lineages) is, above all, a doubly gendered and queer environmental concern. “Looking at Each Other” reads:

Yes, we were looking at each other
Yes, we knew each other very well
Yes, we had made love with each other many times
Yes, we had heard music together
Yes, we had gone to the sea together
Yes, we had cooked and eaten together

Yes, we had laughed often day and night
Yes, we fought violence and knew violence
Yes, we hated the inner and outer oppression
Yes, that day we were looking at each other
Yes, we saw the sunlight pouring down
Yes, the corner of the table was between us
Yes, bread and flowers were on the table
Yes, our eyes saw each other's eyes
Yes, our mouths saw each other's mouths
Yes, our breasts saw each other's breasts
Yes, our bodies entire saw each other
Yes, it was beginning in each
Yes, it threw waves across our lives
Yes, the pulses were becoming very strong
Yes, the beating became very delicate
Yes, the calling the arousal
Yes, the arriving the coming
Yes, there it was for both entire
Yes, we were looking at each other (Rukeyser 2005, 473-4)

There is much to say about this deceptively simple and chanting poem, but the poem's affirmation of lesbian love is clear: its firm and ebullient "Yes," like the yesses of the previous poem, resound. In my mind, this poem is eco-poetical in the precise way that it adamantly carves out a space for lesbian desire, an adamancy underscored by an intensely repetitious language of affirmation. This space is not metaphorical, as in "Drunken Girl," but is obstinately literal. The speaker is staging something in physical space, around a table, and creating a setting (or, to return to Hume and Rahimtoola's Heideggerian formulation, creating a "dwelling") for, not just lesbian love, but lesbian sex. This staging of lesbian space is quotidian (the kitchen table, the shared meal), atmospheric (ambient sunlight, pulses, waves), and naturally-oriented in its water/sea metaphor. Most notably, the poem is radically queer in the ways it stages an instable and flowing temporality. Shifting between multiple forms of the past tense (i.e. "we were," "we knew," "we had"), the poem suddenly concretizes a specific moment—"that day"—when the speaker's and the addressee's bodies aligned and mirrored like a zipper: breast to breast, mouth to mouth, eye to eye. The speaker describes an emergent force that occurs on that day and

around that table and that, while located in the past (“it began that day”), is continuous, present, and still resounding into the future—“it threw waves across our lives.”

Like the continual, uncertain temporality of the little animals, this *it* permeates both “our lives” while it begins separately, yet simultaneously, in each body. By the end of the poem, this abstract *it* becomes literalized as orgasm. The instantiation of a theoretical abstracted life-force or love-force—what is the “it” of any life?—into a lesbian sex act occurs at the singular moment of formal rupture. In such a tightly constructed and refrain-reliant poem, the white-spaced caesuras between “the calling” and “the arousal,” and between “the arriving” and “the coming,” are space-clearing gestures: verbless moments outside of time and tense. The emergence of the “it” as arrived or complete offers itself up to the speaker and her lover in its entirety: “Yes, there it was for both entire.” The repetition of the first line as the last line spectacularly, and perhaps paradoxically, tucks the poem into itself, not so much in a collapse of space or possibility, but rather in an assertion that the reciprocal sex- and love-laden lesbian gaze persists as an anchor defying chrononormative time. The queer and lesbian temporality delineated in “Looking At Each Other” is spatialized and phenomenalized, inextricable from the scene of sex, and is in defiance of a “lesbian invisibility,” in defiance of, to return to Wiegman (2012), “that seemingly defunct figure, ‘the lesbian,’ who has been reduced, unsexed, domesticated, uglified, and abjected” (102).

I end with “Looking At Each Other” to rearticulate the political stakes of a queer-lesbian-feminist eco-poetical methodology. As Ahmed (2006) forcefully argues, the naturalization of certain orientations of bodies towards each other, especially as idealized in the heterosexual couple and in the ever-proliferating family tree, produces the compulsion to “become straight,” which is to be brought under the rule of law. In other words, the image of the hetero-couple that becomes one through reproduction “brings the future subject into line, and as another point of the vertical line” (84). Therefore, the hetero-couple becomes a disciplinary “orientation device,” creating the fantasy that “as if it were from this ‘point’ that the world unfolds” (85). Rukeyser’s insistence on a disruptive lesbian mirroring abolishes this fantasy of the vertical line’s timeless march, as

does the imbrication of the animal in the son's stream. Ahmed proposes the figure of the "contingent lesbian" to underscore the temporal, even experimental nature, of lesbian sexuality. Akin to Grosz's becoming-lesbian, the contingent lesbian's contingency derives (in part) from her temporality, from the time-work it takes to create the spaces and possibility of lesbian bodies and lesbian desire. As Ahmed writes, "it takes time and work to inhabit a lesbian body; the act of tending toward other women has to be repeated, often in the face of hostility and discrimination, to gather such tendencies into a sustainable form" (102). Lesbian desire, then, gathers into a literal "space for action" (102).

"Looking At Each Other" formally enacts the repetition-gathering that sustains a lesbian form. In this poem, the lesbian form is at once linguistic—a speech act reliant on positive affirmation and utterance and on a continuous not-quite-past tense—and physical, or the things we literally *do together*, like sex but also like going to the beach. Furthermore, the "sustainable form" that gathers through lesbian repetition work is not just the gathering of sexed and relational lesbian bodies (e.g. the erogenous vibrating body that Grosz describes). This sustainable form becomes a locatable place of potentiality, a space for action. The gathering and sustaining of this space within a poem is a queer ecopoetics. It is the space that limns queer sex and queer love as political praxis, the kind of praxis that reverberates throughout an environs. For Ahmed, the political potential of lesbianism is in inhabiting this space, inhabiting the intensity of its moment and its potential disorientations away from hegemonic straightening devices:

Yes, we are hailed; we are straightened as we direct our desires as women toward women. For a lesbian queer politics, the hope is to reinhabit the moment after such hailing: such a politics would not overcome the force of the vertical, or ask us to live our lives as if such lines do not open and close spaces for action. Instead, we hear the hail, and even feel its force on the surface of the skin, but we do not turn around, even when those words are directed toward us. Having not turned around, who knows where we might turn. Not turning also affects what we can do. The contingency of lesbian desire makes things happen. (107)

"Looking At Each Other" responds to the questions by which we began by inhabiting this exact space after a hailing. As Ahmed makes clear, this exact space is the space of

potentiality and possibility for a queer lesbian political praxis. This is the political ground of a queer-lesbian-feminist methodology where the enactment of queer desire becomes an enactment of a livable queer life outside the bounds of the human. The speaker and her lover turn to each other and each other only. They recreate a moment to occupy, an intimate moment sheltered from the compulsory hailing of a straight world. The oxygen is sucked out of the room; there is nothing outside of this “Yes, we were.”

Notes

1. Muriel Rukeyser’s Federal Bureau of Investigation file (file number 77-27812) can be accessed online at <https://vault.fbi.gov/Muriel%20Rukeyser>.
2. Although the father of Rukeyser’s son had not been previously revealed in scholarship, Rebecca Rukeyser (2020) recently writes: “Muriel conceived my father with the very dashing, very alcoholic son of poet Robinson Jeffers. Only while reading through scholarly articles to research this essay did I realize that Muriel withheld the identity of my grandfather—Donnan Jeffers—from my father until he was all of twelve.”
3. According to Keenaghan (2013), McCall became Rukeyser’s agent in 1950, and her lover a few years later, a relationship that lasted until Rukeyser’s death in 1980. Keenaghan (2013) also describes Rukeyser’s vexed relationship to autobiography and self-definition. As Keenaghan writes of the unpublished forward, “only in that abandoned frame is McCall’s presence, and thus the trace of lesbianism, registered in the book.” Rukeyser’s notes further reveal that she toyed with the idea of including explicitly queer sexual content in *One Life*, content that was never included in the final published text (Keenaghan 2013, 276).
4. This 1978 MLA event has been variously described as a “lesbian poetry reading” (Bulkin 1978, 884) and “a special session...on the topic of ‘Lesbians and

Literature’” (Kaufman and Herzog 2005, xl). Rukeyser’s name appears in the program for the 1978 93rd MLA convention under “Lesbian/Feminist Poetry and Fiction Reading,” organized by the Gay Caucus for the Modern Language. My reading of Rukeyser as “lesbian” is not intended as an act of reclamation over and against other identity categories such as “queer” or “bisexual.” Yet Rukeyser has been influential as a lesbian poet, she had lesbian relationships, and her acceptance to participate in a lesbian-designated poetry reading can be read as a willingness to “come out” publicly under the category of lesbian. I read Rukeyser’s willingness to participate in this reading as an indication that, towards the end of her life, she felt hailed by the identity “lesbian poet.”

5. An example of this tendency to frame Rukeyser scholarship as an act of correcting scholarly neglect is exemplified in *Textual Practice*’s 2018 special issue on *The Life of Poetry*. The body of scholarship on Rukeyser is certainly not as large as some of her poetic contemporaries, but one could confidently say that Rukeyser, as a poetic figure, is no longer neglected. See especially Parks (2018) and Keenaghan (2018).
6. This kind of affective reading also elegantly dovetails with the historiographic ‘strand’ of queer theory a body of work often concerned with mapping an affective genealogy of “the lesbian.” See Elizabeth Freeman (2010), Heather Love (2007), and Christopher Nealon (2001).
7. For Huffer, an ethical reinvigoration of queer theory requires “the development of what Foucault calls a desubjectivating ethics—an ethics of the self as a self-undoing practice of freedom” which “requires a retraversing, thinking-feeling transvaluation of the historical space that binds ethics to morality” (Huffer 2013, 30).
8. I read both speaker and addressee as female. The latter is clearly gendered by the title and, although the former is never explicitly gendered, reading the speaker as

male would be idiosyncratic in the context of Rukeyser's oeuvre. Her first-person lyric "I" often blurs the line between speaker and poet. Many of her poems are explicitly autobiographical and, as texts like *The Book of the Dead* demonstrate, Rukeyser (perhaps more than most poets) viewed poetry as an explicit medium of subjective witness and of life writing. Regardless of the speaker's gender, Rukeyser's use of the carpe diem structure is notable as a feminist subversion of a traditionally heterosexual poetic trope. Here I follow Muñoz's (2009) suggestion "to lean on biography" in order to read for queer poetic traces (72). In reading "Drunken Girl" with a queer optic, the poem's immanent field of desire becomes a field of lesbian desire.

9. Chen's usage of the term "leaky" evokes Donna Haraway's "A Cyborg Manifesto," in which she describes a "leaky distinction" in the boundaries between animal/human, organism/machine, and physical/non-physical (1991, 151-3). As disability studies scholars (Kafer 2013) have shown, the cyborg can also betray a not-so-leaky ableist vision of normative (beyond)human bodies.

Chapter 2: Etel Adnan's Queer Atmospheric Orientations: Queering a Poetics of Place

The poet and painter Etel Adnan, who was born in Beirut in 1925, describes in detail her process of becoming an “American poet,” which she frames as an act of anti-imperialist protest against the Vietnam War and as a means to break free of the French colonial binds of her youth. In a striking moment of happenstance during the mid-1960s, Adnan, who was living in the California Bay Area, finds a call in local literary magazine, the *S-B Gazette*, for poems that respond to the Vietnam war. Disgusted by the images of American military violence she sees every day in the media and recently resolved to quit writing in French due to the atrocities of the Algerian War, Adnan decides to write her first two poems in English. After quickly receiving an enthusiastic acceptance from the *Gazette*, Adnan is literally catapulted into American poetic history by one of these poems, “The Enemy’s Testament,” as it is subsequently published by the Communist poet-activist Walter Lowenfels in his 1967 anthology *Where Is Vietnam?: American Poets Respond*. This pathbreaking anthology includes some of the most influential poets of the era, including Allen Ginsberg, Denise Levertov, Robert Creeley, Donald Justice, William Stafford, and Robert Lowell, among many others. Adnan recalls this moment, especially her excitement that her poem is the very first in Lowenfels’s anthology: “So I thought, Well, I am an American poet...My poem, in alphabetical order, was the first. That’s how I started writing in English. I was exhilarated. My parents had disappeared, I was on my own—this was a new language, a new life, a new world...The ‘60s in America, I thought the world was going to be that way forever. It was such a creative decade” (Adnan 2014a, 105).¹

In essays and interviews, Adnan traces her evolution of becoming “an American poet” as a process of exile and anti-imperialist protest that occurred during this transformational decade between the mid-50s and mid-60s. Yet I do not read Adnan’s consistent and adamant declaration that “I am, above all, American” as a celebratory narrative of diasporic belonging, in other words an embrace of Americanness-as-

homecoming (Adnan 2014b, 382, vol. 2). Rather Adnan's clinging to Americanness—of *becoming-American* as both a poet and a visual artist—is felt by her as a process of attachment to a particular experimental American poetic lineage. As Adnan makes clear throughout her visual work and her poems, “American” is less a clear national and identity marker and more of a useful shorthand for describing Adnan's attachment to a particular place and climate and landscape—Northern California—that also happens to contain a rich poetic history. For Adnan, this history is particularly marked by the large footprints of Charles Olson and by the poets and artists associated with Bolinas, California, especially Joanne Kyger. Tiny Bolinas, just a stone's throw away from Adnan's home in Sausalito where she resided for over fifty years, stands as both geographic marker and poetic-historical zeitgeist—a momentous site of convergence for many postwar American poetic movements like the San Francisco Renaissance, the Beats, the Black Mountain poets, the New York School, as well as Language poets and writers associated with the New Narrative.

In short, “American poet” becomes a place of aesthetic and linguistic possibility for Adnan, which underscores Adnan's investment in playing with normative grammars of place, geography, and national borders. The concept of “American poet” should not only be read without suspicion. In many ways, Adnan's insistence on being “an American poet” exemplifies precisely how Adnan troubles the concept of “place.” “American” is an aesthetic and linguistic field that is marked by the serendipitous yet precise planes of *place* (especially natural landscape and terrain) and *time*. Yet, in this context, “American poet” also exceeds and critiques the violent anthropogenic use of these concepts like place (e.g. borders) and time (e.g. settler time) in controlling and governing populations. As this chapter will demonstrate, Adnan's poetics and politics are shaped by a uneasy desire for place, both literally—place as in land, geography, climate as well as physical orientation or grounding—and aesthetically—place as codification into an aesthetic lineage, a political movement, or a historical record. In particular, a generative contradiction courses through *Sea and Fog* (2012), as the speaker's expressed desire for place—a specific desire for an orientation—itself results in an experience of

disorientation. This desire to be grounded and orientated is a desire for a particularly disorienting relationship towards the natural and towards a particular landscape. In this case the speaker desires an orientation towards the Pacific Ocean from the shore of Northern California, one that she experiences (corporeally and affectively) as a profound and tumultuous disorientation. In Adnan's work, these magnetically orientating natural objects like the sea or the fog—natural entities that both define and exceed a specific place or geographic location—are queer and queering objects. Drawing on Sara Ahmed's (2006) definition of "queer objects" as those objects that produce *disorientation* as the catalyst for a queer politics and a queer epistemology, I therefore read *Sea and Fog's* speaker's lament, "O to be / a place with nothing around" (Adnan 2012, 48), as a queer lament, in the sense that it expresses a craving for disorientation, especially a disorientation of the biopolitical consequences of place, the governance of country rather than land(scape). In many ways, "place" is actually an illusion and an elision, a disidentification for Adnan's queer and environmentally-attuned speaker.

Adnan's desire for this other sense of place, as an aesthetic and poet lineage, is expressed as a formal desire and becomes structurally inscribed throughout her poetry and visual work. I contend that Adnan's late verse, which encompasses her collections of roughly the past ten years including *Sea and Fog* (2012), *Night* (2016), *Surge* (2018), and most recently *Shifting the Silence* (2020), stages an examination of a kind of queer environmental phenomenology of place—how the body is orientation/disoriented and what does it touch—as well as the drama of time, as instantiated in poetic form and in the concepts of both history and apocalypse. Semantically and formally, dynamic tensions between stasis/movement, disorientation/orientation, repetition/accumulation, meter/parataxis, stanza/sentence pervade these poems. And, in many ways, Adnan's poetry exemplifies Lytle Shaw's (2013) argument that the history of post-war experimental American poetics can be told through a shift from theorizing "place" to theorizing "site." Of particular interest for Adnan's work is Shaw's astute observation that this shift also marks a formal shift away from the discrete (lyric) poem and towards longer-form poetic practices, especially the book-length or longform poem (a form which

reveals itself to be significant for theorizing queer environmental temporalities). Shaw argues that an ecologically attuned praxis of poetry-as-fieldwork traverses the coterie of Bolinas and Bolinas-adjacent poets that Adnan situates herself in proximity to, both theoretically and geographically. As Shaw writes, Bolinas should be understood as “part of the same transformation of the poetics of place: from the atomistic, future oriented practices of William Carlos Williams and Charles Olson, to the collective attempts to live place undertaken by 1960s poets—to merge a literal space with the kinds of social formation that remained merely potential in Williams and Olson” (118-19).

Yet Bolinas further complicates any stable notion of place or place-based poetics as the Bolinas poets exemplify this incontrovertible aesthetic shift for American poetry, as Shaw writes:

The attempt to be fully *inside* Bolinas, both geographically and socially—a concern for many of the poets—produces a crisis in representation wherein deictic references to “here” and “now” create a kind of incantatory mantra that, paradoxically, only signals presence as a greater and ultimately unmasterable concern. Phenomenological being gets undermined in Bolinas by an acid-tinged linguistic turn. So, too, the poem as the self-evident unit of composition and experience gets displaced—at least in the practices of [Robert] Creeley, [Joanne] Kyger, and [Lewis] Warsh—by the ongoing serial temporality of the book as frame. As such, this writing participates in a wider shift...that occurs throughout American experimental poetry in the 1960s from the poem to the book as unit of composition. (119)

In short, Adnan rubs-up against an eco-poetically consequential canon of experimental, politically-engaged, and serially-oriented American poetics, the likes of which we could trace, following Adnan, from Olson to Joanne Kyger to Etel Adnan herself.² Adnan thus situates herself, and is deeply situated, in a tradition of postwar American eco-poetics and her work presents a rich opportunity for analyzing the queer and feminist interventions and counter-narratives within this poetic site/project.³ In this sense, “American poetry” becomes an environment and an atmosphere, a literal container—an aesthetic and formal epistemology—for Adnan to theorize her queer environmental poetics. I contend that Adnan queers the concepts of place and of site, therefore formally queering a praxis of eco-oriented place-based poetics. Significantly, this queering hinges on Adnan’s

relationship to the environmental, a relationship that (as her visual work also exemplifies) is deeply formal and one that is instantiated in a queer, lesbian desire for beyond-human relationality, queer touch, and queer material entanglements. To summarize, I hope to demonstrate how the serial and book-framed structure of Adnan's poetic investigations (not to mention the serial nature of her paintings and other visual works) are formally and theoretically linked to her queer atmospheric poetics.⁴

Becoming an American Poet, Affect, and Aesthetics

American poetry becomes a catalyzing site (linguistically and geographically) for Adnan upon her moving to California in 1955 to pursue graduate studies at UC Berkeley. Adnan describes this move as a seismic shift and as “a total subversion of one's own thinking, a little earthquake...like changing planets” (2014b, 251, vol. 1). She experiences this totally new *environment*, spatially and temporally: “living in a new time and space scale, in the absolute sense of the present, merging my own mythical time with America's own” (Adnan 1995, 6-7). At this time, Adnan begins to paint, a means to both distance herself from the French language's violent colonial grammar and in order to gain proximity to Arabic, the language of her father and the colonially-jettisoned language of her native Beirut: “I soon realized that to me this meant a new language and a solution to my dilemma: I didn't need to write in French anymore, I was going to paint in Arabic. All this was happening around the year 1960. Furiously, I became a painter. I immersed myself in a new language” (2014b, 253, vol. 1). As she develops her artistic practice, Adnan falls more “at ease” with American English, “living it” as the Vietnam War accelerates and as she is inaugurated into American poetry like a kind of home-coming: “I felt great being an ‘American poet,’ I had a home” (2015, 40).⁵ If painting-in-Arabic is a form of redress against linguistic and cultural exile, American poetry becomes a medium for (re)attachment to land and, notably, to an environment. Adnan's use of “American poetry” is not about nation or national heritage at all but is rather an argument regarding the transformational nature of space, especially a space's unique *natural* signature (the interplay of landscape, atmosphere, climate, flora, and fauna), and of those

who inhabit that space, like fellow poets and artists. In this way, we might read Adnan's over-determined use of "American" as both playful and critical and as re-framing our normative understandings of literary lineage and history. I might even contend that Adnan feels attachment to poets like Charles Olson and Joanne Kyger precisely because of their shared obsession for natural landscape, for geography, for cataloguing the minutia—for example, the light, the fog, the rain, the deer, the plants—of one particular space *in* and *beyond* time.

As demonstrated above, just as Adnan's feeling of finding a "home" is precisely a process of finding oneself *at home in* a specific poetic lineage (especially a poetic lineage that mobilizes poetry as a means of political protest against imperial and colonial violence), this being-at-home in an aesthetic medium is highly dependent on geographical location, landscape, and climate—all factors that contribute to Adnan's conceptually capacious understanding of "environment," a conceptualization exemplified in Adnan's writings about her childhood in Beirut. Adnan frames her love of Beirut in highly ecological terms, rather than in the imperially-inflected tones of nation, motherland, or homeland. In other words, Beirut was an atmosphere and a feeling of being-in an environment, one that was irrevocably lost and changed: a place altered through a total epistemological rupture. Adnan describes in detail her feeling of Beirut as a child, where the sun and the sea were objects of desire and love. Adnan explains how the environmental became a literal force and presence in her life: "The environment was my life, maybe because I was an only child. I didn't have brothers and sisters to play with, so the light coming in through the window was a great event for me. I played with that instead of playing with other children. It was my companion...Light is an extraordinary element. It's a being on its own, it's something you look at, and that also you inhabit" (2014a, 104). Adnan writes of a parallel experience with the sea, another environmental force structuring her early experience of Beirut: "My greatest passion was for the sea. I had swum from the age of five, and very few girls of my generation were allowed to swim. There were mainly European children who were lying on the beaches. I loved the sea not only for the pleasure of swimming, but for herself. Her colours and her

movements used to hypnotise [sic] me” (Adnan 2004, 20). Like light, the sea here stands as an agential entity (i.e. the sea *herself*) as well as for a kind of affective and corporeal relationality (i.e. a pleasure of *being in* the sea), the latter of which is forbidden or taboo. The European children occupying the beaches and shoreline in passive ignorance of the sea’s pleasure—in an almost comical image of colonial myopia and environmental disregard—further marks the intensity of Adnan’s environmental communion, one of absolute envelopment and touch.

These forces—the sea and the sun’s light—indelibly mark Adnan, so much so that nearly eighty years later she makes them the centerpiece of her poetry, particularly the collections *Sea and Fog* (2012) and *Night* (2016). Just as Adnan experiences California as an “open-ended provisional situation” (1995, 9), a description of place and space as enablers of an experimental aesthetic praxis, her oeuvre broadly testifies to a heightened awareness of the absolute specificity of place and environment’s interactions. Writing about her return to California in the late 1970s, after moving back to Beirut in the early 1970s and subsequently living through several years of the Lebanese Civil War, Adnan declares: “Back in California. What would I do in California but paint and also write. I realized that I think more happily, and with a more natural flow, when I don’t fight my environment. I would even say that my writing is influenced, or rather grows, the way plants grow out of soil and water, from the land I am inhabiting. So whenever I write in America, I write in English” (2014b, 256, vol. 2). In other words, Adnan’s art derives from an attunement to her specific environmental milieu, a milieu that is experienced as a geographic, natural specificity (i.e. the California Bay Area) as well as linguistic specificity (i.e. the intonations and inflections of American English). In this sense, Adnan’s use of a plant metaphor—an image of botanical indigeneity—gestures towards a definition of place-based aesthetics as an environmental attunement, or even an environmental praxis. The poet’s or painter’s body thus becomes a vehicle for channeling the environment into aesthetic form, while acknowledging an environment’s various scales of entanglements between “the natural” and “the cultural.”

If a poetics of place, and place-based writing, has been a fundamental concern for contemporary ecocriticism and for a long history of eco-poetics, reaching back to the Romantic poets and continuing for eco-oriented post-war American poets (e.g. William Carlos Williams, Charles Olson, Lorine Niedecker, and Gary Snyder), Adnan's work provides an archive for interrogating the affordances and limitations of place-based writing for contemporary queer eco-poetics.⁶ I turn to Adnan because her environmental poetics stands in productive juxtaposition with more traditional (eco)poetics of place. In particular, this chapter attends to what I call Adnan's poetics of atmosphere, a more capacious and diffuse poetics of place, one that underscores the centrality of the environment to poetic making while also expanding the notion of environment beyond coherent landscapes or geographical designations to account for other kinds of environmental forces that might define a place, like for example the weather (e.g. fog), light (e.g. sunlight, moonlight, night), or gravitational/temporal forces (e.g. tides, seasons). Furthermore, in Adnan's work these latter forces might be said to *queer* a place, or even to *queer* the concept of environment, by expanding the forms of relationality (and agential reciprocity) a human subject can experience within an environment. Exceeding the queer image of the environment that *touches back*, this chapter will also examine what it means to image environmental relationality as queer because of Adnan's metaphors of gender. In other words, Adnan's atmospheric poetics also becomes an atmospheric erotics. For example, Adnan's poems stage questions such as: What might it mean for a female speaker to desire the sea *as* a female entity? How might a poem about the sea become a poem about intra-agential, beyond-human lesbian erotics?

In analyzing Adnan's work as a queer environmental poetics, the theory of lesbian-feminist poet and theorist Gloria E. Anzaldúa influences this chapter's inquiry. Anzaldúa's thought has been foundational to queer of color critique (see, for example, Muñoz 1999) and central to the formation of Chicana and Latinx studies, yet Anzaldúa is a necessary and undertheorized touchstone for a history of eco-poetics, and especially for a lineage of experimental feminist queer eco-poetics, one that notably resists a hegemonic understanding of place, land, and nationality.⁷ In particular, Anzaldúa's concept of *la*

facultad, and her belief in identity formation—especially sexual identity—as an environmental co-collaboration, provides a useful theoretical context for Adnan’s queer and environmental poetics. Anzaldúa (2000) describes *la facultad* as a kind of “creative life force” that queer individuals develop and possess due to cultural marginalization (123). More specifically, *la facultad* is a form of heightened perception and intuition (akin to a radar) that allows queers, and in particular queer artists, access to anti-rational epistemologies and to anti-hegemonic understandings of human and beyond-human relationality. When put in the context of Anzaldúa’s ecological understanding of consciousness, *la facultad*—which enables “building a bridge to the source—to the creative life force, the substance that’s in everything” (125)—is an apt tool for theorizing how particular kinds of environmental attunement can be understood as a queer epistemology and as a queer political praxis. As Anzaldúa writes, “the universe is a text we cocreate” (75), one especially created jointly by “all forms of consciousness, not just human” (20). Moreover, Anzaldúa emphasizes the corporeal consequences of beyond-human relationalities and environmental awareness because she positions the corporeal body, especially the gendered, sexed, and racialized body, as the vehicle and material medium through which this cocreation is enacted and experienced. In short, Anzaldúa argues that “one’s own *body* is not one entity” (158), and demonstrates how flesh both enacts and exceeds the sightlines of gender, race, and sexuality. Notably, Anzaldúa argues that an understanding of the body as both spiritualized and subjected to violence and trauma can open channels of environmental perception that Anzaldúa describes as follows:

You come up against an awareness that the universe is alive. It pulsates, everything’s alive: nature, trees, the sky, and the wind. Once you connect with that, you feel like you’re part of interconnecting organisms—vegetable, animal, mineral—and everything has some kind of consciousness. If this pulsating rhythm, vibration, is some kind of awareness, of aliveness, then it’s conscious. You start looking at rocks in a different way—at birds—and when they appear and when they don’t appear and you let your imagination act as a center that connects and sorts through all the data and comes out with what you want. I think the imagination does that: it will look at the clouds and project certain images in the clouds so that you see certain patterns, and the clouds stop being some kind of

weather phenomena and become part of this force that pulsates, that's everywhere. (160)

Anzaldúa's prescient description of the interplay between weather phenomena and human imagination foregrounds my analysis of Adnan's poetry. Anzaldúa's pulsating universe offers us a model for what I am identifying as "the atmospheric" in Adnan's work, while also illuminating the political potential of a queer (and a queering) atmospheric attunement. Adnan's ecopoetics theorize an intense porosity between human consciousness and the environment, especially elemental and atmospheric forces.

For Adnan's speaker, poetry flows from this Anzaldúan interplay of consciousness, body, and climate; poetry is a literal technology of environmental consciousness and environmental augmentation. In the shift from place to atmosphere, Adnan demonstrates how poetry can play a role in de-centering the human by offering an aesthetic imaginary of how beyond-human relationalities and assemblages structure daily life. Moreover, like Anzaldúa, Adnan underscores the queerness of these quotidian environmental assemblages and demonstrates the body's, especially the gendered body's, role in channeling this environmental awareness. In the case of Adnan, her work figures a queering and gendering of affective atmospheres, and a queer erotics of space and place, amid the specter of environmental threat and destruction.⁸ This is a retooling of environmental consciousness and of atmospheric attunements, one that intervenes in—and exceeds—ecocritical theorizations of place and landscape. Adnan's work stages the questions of how certain bodies, especially bodies marked as female or woman, interact with, manipulate, and experience an atmosphere or an environment differently. If the poet's and painter's mind and body are the medium for perceiving environmental consciousness, then beyond-human relationalities and atmospheric attunements are inextricable from the life of gender and how gender sitemaps sexual desire and erotic attachments.

Although this chapter will focus on Adnan's three recent poetry collections, I want to first begin by briefly reading Adnan's 1986 hybrid text *Journey to Mount Tamalpais*, because this text articulates Adnan's thought regarding the relationship

between poetry and painting as well as exemplifies how Adnan situates relationships to place and landscape via an aesthetic and generic theory. An attention to form and genre undergirds my analysis of Adnan for several reasons. Most simply, Adnan's status as both poet and visual artist enables her unique position to put pressure on contemporary poetry's generic boundaries and formal structures. In addition, many of Adnan's texts innovate literary form by integrating drawings and paintings; one notable example is Adnan's collection *The Arab Apocalypse* (1989) (originally published in French in 1980; the English translation is a self-translation) where visual symbols and glyphs become poetic vocabulary. I am particularly interested in Adnan's recent verse because of its jarringly unique and recognizable formal signature, which can be broadly categorized by the following: blocks of prose stanzas consistently interspersed by white space; an almost total avoidance of lineation and enjambment; the use of the sentence as driving unit of composition; a distinctively prosaic, meditative, and often passive voice; and, finally, the frequent invocation of philosophical and abstract concepts like Being, time, History, mythology, memory, etc. As I argue in the latter half of this chapter, Adnan's formal signature is central to her queer ecopoetics, especially in the ways this poetic structure demonstrates and enacts a queer temporality.

I begin with *Journey* because it is here that Adnan articulates her aesthetic theory of place, as instantiated in a specific place: Mount Tamalpais, a peak that is just north of San Francisco and that towers over Adnan's Sausalito home. Throughout the text, which reads like an essay or *ars poetica*, Mount Tamalpais acts as a kind of anchor and guiding star for Adnan, always visible from great distances: "Year after year, coming down Grand Avenue in San Rafael, coming up from Monterey or Carmel, coming from the north and the Mendocino Coast, Tamalpais appeared as a constant point of reference, the way a desert traveler will see an oasis, not only for water, but as the very idea of home" (2014b, 293, vol. 1). Additionally, throughout *Journey* Adnan describes her body's position in relation to the mountain, often rotating around the mountain via car, witnessing the mountain from her window, or being on top of, or hiking up, the mountain. For example, Adnan writes:

Often coming back from the Richmond Bridge, just when San Quentin is left behind, as a certain curve of the road, there surges an event, there happens a double movement: the lateral movement of the car, to my right, and the vertical movement of the mountain which seems to be rising from the ground. She seems to be rising and filling a configuration that I already know is hers. That's where comes, for me, that feeling of latent prophesy that I associate with the vision I have of the mountain. (299)

And, a few paragraphs later, she continues: "I am at the window and Tamalpais looks back at me. I am in pain and it is not. But we are equals tonight. I am sitting in front of that window as if I were in a movie house. The screen is miles away. Tamalpais is spread over it" (299). Tamalpais offers a reciprocal exchange with Adnan, it looks back at *her*, and its existence—although geographically and physically stable—is marked by an almost agential dynamism. Tamalpais surges into place ("filling a configuration") and gives Adnan an uncanny temporal feeling of inevitable return and of latent prophesy fulfilled (i.e. Tamalpais will always emerge, in the future, as she has been guaranteed in the past). If, above all, Mt. Tam "has an autonomy of being" (331), "she" is in constant flux; her emergence is a series of singular events constantly changing in relation to not just human bodies, but the light, the seasons, the weather.

Thus, even as Adnan clearly depicts Tamalpais as agential, the central drama of *Journey* (one that also animates Adnan's later collections) is the tension between Tamalpais's fluidity of being, the mountain's flux and movement—an ever-changing dance of light, its imbrication with seasonal and temporal change, and its literal ability to move—and the mountain's stasis. Mt. Tam "spins the seasons and stands still" (319), yet Tamalpais "was sliding. It was a big sail and it was going...The eucalyptus, which make a tall forest all around, were marching" (339). Adnan's insistence on movement positions *Journey* as more than explicating a (queer) phenomenology of a human-in-landscape. Material natural entities, in this text a mountain but in others the sea or the fog, are autonomous and yet, for Adnan, they exist in a dialectical relationship to the self. Adnan writes: "We need the mountain in order to be. Or to disappear. When we return from the Sierras we see it on the horizon and we know it is home. Its form is the substance of what

we are. When I make a gesture, casually, I draw it in the air, without even realizing it” (301). The mountain delineates and defines Adnan’s human being and her body. Notably, Adnan here plays with both form and substance. The mountain’s form (not substance) constitutes our substance, which in turn prompts Adnan to bodily enact the mountain’s form. Her body molds to the form of the mountain; her body becomes a gesture of mountainous form through embodied gestural movements, like the conversational gesticulation of hand and wrist or the stroke of brush on canvas.

What I find imperative to highlight is the imbrication of movement, especially natural, beyond-human movements, with both being and perception. In this way, Brian Massumi’s (2002) relational model between movement, perception, and affect is useful for analyzing Adnan’s radically anti-anthropocentric aesthetic theory. Massumi defines affect as relations of motion (movement) and rest (stasis, or taking-form) within and between bodies. This relationship—a process of transformation and of the immanent potential of bodies—between motion and stasis, constitutes, not a logical binary, but a *dynamic unity*. In other words, they are *ontogenetic* to each other (e.g. they co-constitute and co-imbricate each other). Put simply, Adnan continually figures herself—as a corporeal entity (her body oriented in space) but also especially (as I will explain more fully later) her mind (a porous phenomenon)—as ontogenetic with the mountain and, as we see in other works, with other atmospheric and natural bodies. For Massumi, the theoretical and ethical stakes of affect are clear: a radical reappraisal of the nature/culture binary and a radical refiguration of (non)human being. As Massumi argues, “the concepts of nature and culture need serious reworking, in a way that expresses the irreducible *alterity* of the nonhuman in and through its active *connection* to the human and vice versa. Let matter be matter, brains be brains, jellyfish be jellyfish, and culture be nature, in irreducible alterity and infinite connection” (39). In other words, nature and culture constitute a continuum; they are “in mutual movement into and through each other. Their continuum is a dynamic unity of reciprocal variation” (11). Most significantly, regarding “the difference between the physical and biological, it is clear that there can be no firm dividing line between them, nor between them and the human” (37). The nature-culture

continuum thus becomes a “continuum of existence” between entities, one “differentiated into levels, or regions of potential, between which there are no boundaries, only dynamic thresholds” (38), in which affect suffuses every level.

In *Journey*, Adnan literalizes Massumian affect as aesthetic praxis. In the natural world, what becomes perceivable to Adnan is movement, and this movement-perception is expressible in painting. Adnan writes that “painting and perception formed an unbreakable dual concept” (2014b, 310, vol. 1). This perception is ultimately a perception of movement, which she delineates between a false or hubristic perception and a kind of pure perception: “Our century is a boat many want to leave: some went to the moon, others are going into the past, looking for ancestors, ruins, records, measurements, fossils, photographic plates or past events...But we don’t need to move. To perceive is to be the movement, not the object” (311). Here Adnan rejects technology (and techno-futurity) alongside historicism—the former is at fault for its obsession with embodying movement as ideology (i.e. space is the new frontier) while the latter is myopic for its obsession with quantitative empiricism (i.e. change only exists if it is measurable)—in favor of a more spatially and temporally grounded, particularly a more *quotidian*, praxis of perception and attunement. Adnan’s painting and drawings are demonstrative documents of obsessive repetition and seriality, of trying to capture the body of Mt. Tamalpais in its affective toggling between virtuality/transformation and actuality/form. Seventeen of Adnan’s drawings of Mt. Tamalpais are interspersed throughout the text of *Journey*. Each drawing captures the variegated movement of Tamalpais from a different angle or using a different gestural form.⁹ I read Adnan’s “movement” as shorthand for the autonomous and agential affect of natural entities, and I read her being-movement over being-object as an exemplification of Massumi’s concept of “movement-vision” which he describes as “a continuous displacement of the subject, the object, and their general relation” (51). As Massumi states, “affect is *the virtual as point of view*” (35). Central to movement-vision are corporeal and fleshy methods of perception, notably proprioception, which underscores the material and muscular/cellular memory of relationality between subjects and objects and between bodies.

Thus Adnan's emphasis in *Journey* on bodily orientation via the mountain and on sensations felt through the mountain underscores the corporeal nature of Adnan's poetics—a term I am using here to refer both to Adnan's theory of poetry and theory of painting (which as I have hoped to demonstrate are deeply intertwined). As I discuss later, for Adnan this push-pull of the visual and the linguistic, often figured as a push-pull of the mind and the body, becomes formally instantiated in poetry via chronic serial form, a formal structure that is temporally consequential for a queer eco-poetics. In other words, I mean to gesture at what the poet and translator Cole Swensen (2011), a frequent scholar of Adnan, calls "andscapes," a concept Swensen derives to describe Adnan's serial landscape paintings. In painting hundreds of landscapes, Swensen writes that Adnan

has made the act of painting into the bridge between self and world that lets consciousness disperse, lets the I overflow the body and spread out across that world a field of bright attention traversing an earth that will not stop—and so the excess becomes manifest as a serial action, an insistence on the instance, and on its immediate repetition, on its *and*, in which it starts again, never contingent in its sovereign presence, the spark that also cracks as another world splits off. Gesture alone can enact the world as verb. (145)

If gesture alone can enact the world *as verb*—in other words, enact pure movement or affect—Adnan also takes the verbal nature of the world literally through her use poetry, which enacts a more suffuse kind of accumulative/additive *andscape*. In short, *Journey* foregrounds Adnan's characteristic play between poetry and painting, as Adnan writes: "It seems to me that I write what I see, paint what I am" (2014b, 311, vol. 1). While a page later, she adds: "Poetry, it is believed, is the revelation of the self. Painting, the revelation of the world. But it could also be the other way around" (312). Directly parallel to the ontogenetic relationship between self (human) and world (mountain), poetry and painting form, for Adnan, a double-sided coin where linguistic and visual praxis are inseparable tools for, not just figuring or representing, but instantiating dynamic thresholds between the human and beyond-human, which I would describe in shorthand as the crux of a queer eco-poetics.

For Adnan, painting and perception form an unbreakable dual concept, a relationship she further elaborates:

A visual expression belongs to an order of understanding which bypasses word-language. We have in us autonomous languages for autonomous perceptions. We should not waste time in trying ordinary understanding. We should not worry, either. There is no rest in any kind of perception. The fluidity of the mind is of the same family as the fluidity of being. Sometimes they coincide sharply. We call that a revelation. When it involves a privileged “object,” like a particular mountain, we call it an illumination. (333)

Adnan highlights the centrality of the natural world to anti-rational epistemologies, in which category we might place poetry and painting, thus underscoring the centrality of natural “objects” to artistic praxis. If Adnan’s believes that visual expression, like painting, is a medium for a more direct, or proximate, expression (e.g. autonomous language) of the natural world, her poetry also attempts to approximate the autonomous (i.e. exceeding the linguistic) perception of a body and mind in flux with/in the world. The mountain is perhaps a “privileged object” because of its immensity, and the intensity of its visual perceivability compared to myriad other natural forces, notably atmospheric forces. The fluidity of the mind, and its relationship with being, is a leitmotif in Adnan’s later work, in which Adnan evinces a “fluid” theory of being whose articulation relies on an environmental attunement. Put otherwise, and as evinced in the passage above, the mountain functions almost as a pedagogical object, shedding light on the relationship between the human body, the natural world, and artistic expression.

Matter’s Feminine Essence and Queer Environmental Eroticism

In *Sea and Fog*—a diptych consisting of the two long poems, “Sea” and “Fog”—the speaker proclaims, “Mind has its own technologies; poetry is one, but it eludes total comprehension. Open the window, let air in. The sky is now a rubbery orange-colored fluff, and the ocean behind me, a child’s tempest” (34). Poetry may be a technology of the mind, but like visual expression, it is also autonomous, elusive, beyond mastery. In response to poetry’s elision of comprehension, the speaker opens the window, letting the ocean air and the colors of the sky suffuse the room, as if the atmosphere were necessary

to complete poetry's meaning. In other words, the autonomy of poetry as a technology derives precisely from the mind's co-constitution with the natural. This ontogenic co-constitution is precisely how Mount Tamalpais functions as a "revelation." Adnan contends that natural entities, like a mountain or the sea, triangulate mind and body (being) in order to produce poetry and produce painting. The mountain is introduced like a third term that catalyzes a mind and being into manifesting poetry. This is one way to understand Adnan's theory of ecopoetics, in which the mountain is not a "revelation" in the sense of Romantic or Kantian sublime, but rather the mountain and the poet exist in a mutually constituting relationship, both corporeal and metaphysical, to each other.

Moreover, what makes Adnan's ecopoetics a queer ecopoetics is Adnan's consistent gendering of these "privileged" revelatory natural objects. By the end of *Journey*, Mount Tamalpais becomes a vehicle for constructing gendered identity as well as a kind of incantatory object of female desire. To quote the final stanzas of *Journey*:

Each woman is a mountain. I remember those barren hills, ochre, yellow, amber-like, dry and crissing under the feet, quivering on warm nights, shrieking pain in summers of sunlike violence. I remember orange-colored mountains worshipped silently by dissident tribes. I remember plateaus fornicating with wind and dust, burning with desire, exploding in volcanoes under earthly malediction. I remember that mountains are women.

In this unending universe Tamalpais is a miraculous thing, the miracle of matter itself: something we can single out, the pyramid of our own identity. We are, because it is stable and it is ever changing. Our identity is the series of the mountain's becomings, our peace is its stubborn existence. (2014b, 339, vol. 1)

In the penultimate stanza, Adnan establishes a metaphoric slippage between "woman" and "mountain." Each woman is a mountain because Adnan remembers how mountains (and the land adjacent to the mountains) perform femaleness as tumultuous and unbearable desire: the mountain-scape "quiver[s]," "crises[s]," "shriek[s]," "fornicate[s]" and "burn[s] with desire" for the matter around it. The initial and ending shift from the statements "each woman is a mountain" and "I remember mountains are women" puts productive pressure on an ontology of gender, arguing that gendered epistemologies derive from the natural world. The emphasis on "I remember" amends the causal logic of

equivalency in Adnan's initial statement; "women" function like "mountains," not vice versa. Additionally, via an experiential memory of landscape Adnan can make sense of "women." Adnan remembers the dynamism and desire encompassed by the category "woman" by observing mountain-scapes. I contend that this statement is adamantly different from a patriarchal and colonialist logic that genders a landscape female in order to claim human dominance over the natural (e.g. Merchant 1980). Rather, Adnan's statement argues for an attention to the materiality of the beyond-human world precisely in order to reconceptualize a feminist and queer politics. As the following stanza clarifies, Mount Tamalpais explicates "the miracle of matter itself," that *we are* because the mountain is. Or, more precisely, the mountain frames and anchors human identity, allowing it to congeal and also to develop. Significantly, it is the mountain's status as both stable and ever changing—the mountain's perpetual becomings—that constitutes human identity, especially gendered and sexual identity.

In other words, human identity is co-constituted through a natural and material epistemology of movement. Over and over, Adnan explicates this co-constitution as a queer process, especially when this process concerns another privileged natural object: the sea. In her 1993 collection of epistolary essays *Of Cities & Women (Letters to Fawwaz)*—comprised of a series of long letters Adnan wrote on the topic of feminism and Arab writing—Adnan writes:

Yes, I contemplate the sea, what else is there to do? To dive in. Sensations of coolness followed by waves of heat rush through the body. There is no separation between the sea and a woman and it is futile to look further, in thought or through experience of others, in order to come close to the essence of what is feminine: water, salt, phosphorus, plankton, all the minerals in liquid form, and the sun covering it all. To come close to the sea, to look into her until nothing else is visible, and finally for a fraction of a second, to finish in the gaze of this shifting mass that has neither beginning nor end...to look at the sea is to become what one is. (2014b, 110, vol. 2)

Similar to Adnan's discussion of Mount Tamalpais, the sea enables a becoming that is explicitly gendered. Adnan emphasizes the centrality of gendered experience to identity,

contending that this experience derives from beyond-human materiality. Adnan contends that what materially constitutes the sea—water, salt, phosphorus, plankton—is the most proximate essence of female gender. In this way, Adnan de-*humans* gender by identifying its beyond-human affects and by extricating gender's restriction to, on the one hand, the purely cultural realm of human experience and, on the other, a purely biological realm of sexed human-animal anatomy. Furthermore, despite this passage's emphasis on the visual—"to finish in the gaze of this shifting mass" and "to look at the sea is to become what one is"—the sea, even more so than Mount Tamalpais, is a privileged queer object in Adnan's oeuvre as it is the sea that offers an embodied experience of reciprocal touch as well as envelopment. One can be *in* the sea, and this total fleshy and caressing experience of being-in the essence of what is feminine becomes allegorized as a queer female encounter.

Adnan further emphasizes the sea's material femaleness throughout *Sea and Fog*. Like in the above passage, the sea is gendered female throughout this collection. The speaker's gendering of the sea is much more than a grammatical flourish as the sea, as both object of desire and a material epitome of femaleness, becomes a kind of lesbian erotic entity, one allegorized as queerly female in Adnan's poetry. For example, in the long poem "Sea" Adnan's speaker states: "Yesterday, I went to bed with the sea because I was feeling / that we were both structurally alike. She lives off the universe's pulls/and pushes, the way, at home, we lived off my mother's beauty" (2012, 51). For Adnan's speaker, the sea's erotic appeal lies in her structural sameness, a sameness anchored by gender and by a co-constitution of bodies that parallel the speaker: on the one hand, the sea (who is materially female) "lives off" the world's energy and material flux (e.g. "the universe's pulls and pushes") just as the speaker "lived off" her mother's beauty. The speaker's assertive statement (i.e. "*I went* to bed with the sea because *I was feeling*") is notable as the pronoun "I" is sparingly present and stands out within the *Sea and Fog*. Here it is the speaker who actively and definitively beds the sea. According to Adnan, if the sea *is* the feminine then the mother's beauty is precisely derived from the sea;

maternalism is derived from the greater material world. The natural thus becomes the ontological engine of life.

This, by itself, is not a revelatory statement and might be read as a banal scientific fact. But in Adnan's cosmology, it is in the gendering of natural entities, like the sea or mountains, that a literal queering of nature occurs. It is precisely because of the sea's feminine materiality that the desiring (human) female body is drawn to the sea.¹⁰

Furthermore, about a dozen stanzas earlier, the speaker states:

She's youth mixed with algae, contaminated by cells from sunken sailors. Tides ebb and flow while in their beds women swell up with erotic fantasies; they are envying her, having always got some gripe.

I will spread a piece of soft linen, somewhere, and lie, invite a slow air to fill my lungs and return the world to itself...O to be a place with nothing around. (48)

Again, a relationship is drawn between female eroticism and the flux of the sea, a structural relationship imaged as movement: the ebbing and flowing of the tides mirror the action of the women swelling up. The sea is depicted like a dynamic vat filled with the cellular stuff of the world (even including human/cultural concepts like "youth"), and women envy this vast entity. Yet what do women envy about the sea? I read this latter statement as ironic, perhaps even sarcastic. The image of women swelling with desire at the sea, or parallel to the sea, is juxtaposed with an image of envious women. The semicolon that separates these two images of "women" highlights the stark divide between a sensual image of female sexuality and the flat, clichéd statement of female emotional excess. The phrase, "having always got some gripe," mimes a banal misogynistic truism: women have so many gripes they are even mad at the sea. The mimed misogyny of the statement is further heightened by the pronoun *they*, producing "woman" as a monolithic and predictable entity. Yet the tension between *they* and *her*, between plurality and gendered singularity, is interesting given Adnan's argument for the sea's assemblage-like nature. Or, following the above quotation about the structural equivalence between the sea and woman, it is rather "the feminine" that is an assemblage,

an assemblage reflected and embodied in the sea's material and natural makeup: "the essence of what is feminine: water, salt, phosphorus, plankton, all the minerals in liquid form, and the sun covering it all."

Here, as in the image of maternal beauty as a life-giving force, Adnan plays with a kind of a materialist-tinged strategic essentialism (e.g. woman are "closer" to nature) reminiscent of Luce Irigaray's feminist theory. In other words, the *they* in the above stanza muddles any bright boundaries between human/non-human, between an us and a them. The second stanza asserts this porosity of human being—a material porosity and a porosity inscribed on subjectivity—as the speaker "invites" the world to enter her via air. This elemental shift from water to air further emphasizes the centrality of the incorporeal, as well as the centrality of (non)place, to Adnan's eco-poetics. Through her invitation to the air to fill her up, the speaker (who is already ambiguously "somewhere") becomes a "a place with nothing around." Here the body, in its comingling with air, becomes anti-place, or more precisely, embodies the paradox of non-place (i.e. that non-place can function as a place). The speaker's subjective desire to become the paradox of "a place with nothing around" further structurally aligns the speaker's body with the sea. For example, a specific sea or especially an ocean, like the Pacific, is always a geographic place that exceeds itself; it is on a scale too large to be a precise and legible "place" and it exists in an unbounded and continuous relationship to other oceans and other seas, as well as to land. In addition, the speaker's use of "O," part lamentation and part apostrophe, recalls the women's "envy" towards the sea, as the speaker seems to express a form of regret or of a want born of loss. What women envy of the sea is therefore the sea's structural placelessness. The speaker articulates a desire to embody the material condition of the sea as both exceeding place while also exceeding any coherent material status (e.g. algae mixed with youth contaminated by the cells of innumerable and anonymous "sunken sailors").

Thus, recalling Ahmed's (2006) definition of "queer objects," the sea, like Mount Tamalpais, stands as a queer object for Adnan's speaker. Ahmed argues that if sexual orientation can be understood literally as spatial orientation (i.e. how bodies are

“straightened” and compelled by force towards other bodies), then queerness arises in how certain bodies and objects, in contact with one another, become *oblique* to one another through a disruption of their habitual arrangement: “queer becomes a matter of how things appear, how they gather, how they perform, to create the edges of spaces and worlds” (167). Touch, as well as the interplay between distance and proximity, are key to understanding how queer objects produce queer effects and affects. As Ahmed writes, “a queer object hence makes contact possible. Or, to be more precise, a queer object would have a surface that supports such contact. The contact is bodily, and it unsettles that line that divides space as worlds, thereby creating other kinds of connections where unexpected things can happen” (169). And, sometimes, the unsettling of this normative line occurs when contact is lost, when queer is experienced as a “nonresidence” and the question then becomes “how we are oriented towards queer moments when objects slip...Queer would become a matter of how one approaches the object that slips away—as a way of inhabiting the world at the point in which things fleet” (171-2). This concept of queerness as a mode of inhabiting a nonresidence caused by the fleeting of things—the space cleared by a displacement of usually proximate things—resonates with the sea in the above stanzas.

The speaker’s desire for the sea exists in a space of nonresidence—a positionality of queer disorientation—in which location is fraught and contact is diffuse (e.g. the sound of the sea outside of one’s window) and always in flux. We can read the ebbing and flowing of the tide as a process of contact and withdrawing, a dance of tenuous yet constant erotic contact. I contend that for a queer ecopoetics it is especially significant when a disorienting queer object is also a natural object, like the sea, one that exceeds its status as “object” by its very vastness. The sea produces a productive queer orientation on a massive scale, troubling the speaker’s sense of groundedness (e.g. here on stable “land”) vis-a-vis an agential surround (e.g. the ebb and flow of the sea). In other words, in “Sea,” the sea is not just a queer object through a gendering logic of female-female eroticism, but is also queer in the way that it disorients, destabilizes, and unsettles

normative (i.e. straight) human epistemologies and human realities. This is underscored in the next two stanzas following the two quoted above, which together read:

Poland is not Colombia, not Bolivia; not a pool for the former Soviet Union; not Eastern, being west of Mongolia; is a big surface on a map... and that's the way we think.

This synthesis of mineral memories, this matrix, is, of things to come, the mercurial certitude. Its underbelly is distended, malicious, rotten, but the climate takes on the hues of its will.
(48)

This third stanza, which directly follows the speaker's desire "to be / a place with nothing around," is a blunt critique of the violence inherent in human epistemologies governed by binaries—West/East, here/there—borders, and nationalistic othering. The only stable knowledges possible in the third stanza are derived from negation and opposition—Poland *is not* Colombia, *not* Bolivia; *not* a pool—while the only positive statement of certainty reduces the reality space and place to the simplifying metaphors of a map. In this way, this passage is reminiscent of Haraway's (1991) critique of "god-trick" perspectives and an example of *Sea and Fog*'s continual preoccupation with scale, especially how the material world of the micro and the atomic shift and slide into the trans-corporeal nature of the human body, while also influencing the macro phenomenon of agential forces like "the climate." In this way, Adnan reaches towards a situated material feminist epistemology, while adamantly queering the phenomenological lived experience requisite to this epistemology.

Said otherwise, Adnan's speaker experiences and images atmospheric entanglement as an erotic experience, and one that extraordinarily seems to predetermine future climate. What is "this matrix" that constitutes "things to come," where the line's grammar becomes deliberate, meticulous, and almost bated in its semantic logic? This passage's grammar demonstrates a disorienting combination of desire for precision (via deictic markers and determinate articles, like *this* matrix, *this* synthesis, *the* mercurial certitude) and an expansive universality. The *this* is unmoored by a paratactical gulf and cannot certainly call back to any stable referent, while "matrix" stands as a resolute

(almost artificially so) image of consistency, equanimity, and even infinity. Further, the speaker's overdetermined and overstated female gendering of the natural helps to blur any clear narrative of queer desire and queer agency—who is desiring whom? what (or whom) can even be said to be outside, or “other,” to the speaker or the eponymous women? where is desire generated and then directed?—as if female queer desire were intrinsic to the sea, the atmosphere, the climate, ultimately its “mercurial certitude.” Above all, this matrix, made up of a “synthesis of mineral memories,” evokes a convergence point, even a point of origin, a place where things gather and accelerate outward. And what converges here, in the sea first and then subsequently “the climate,” is an admixture of the mineral/the elemental/the mercurial with *memory*, which in contradistinction to the mineral here stands in for the irrevocably human. In short, echoing and expanding the preceding image where the speaker's intake and exhalation of air and atmosphere “return[s] the world to itself,” the inextricability of mineral and memory underscores the queer kind of assemblage Adnan's atmosphere denotes: the poet's (or painter's) mind becomes an agent or actant on the environment, an interconnected “matrix” allegorized as a formal poetics. Similar to Gloria Anzaldúa's model, the mercurial certainly of the natural world is the climate taking on the hues of the mind's will, and vice versa.

Similarly to this image of the mineral/material/memory matrix—one held and instantiated in the sea—the opening stanzas of *Sea and Fog* establish the notion of a material “feminine essence.” I turn to the opening next to demonstrate how an entrance of gender dovetails with how the queer beyond-human desire evinced in the above passage also becomes expressed as a kind of formalism and queer poetics. In short, I turn my attention to the formal characteristics of *Sea and Fog*, characteristics that also broadly describe collections published after *Sea and Fog*, particularly *Night* (2016) and *Surge* (2018), to which I turn my attention to at the end of the chapter. I quote this opening at length to give an example of Adnan's stanzaic structure. These prose blocks of text, separated by even white space and often by paratactical leaps, constitute the formal structure of Adnan's last four collections. With just a handful of exceptions, this formal

structure is insistently consistent and marks Adnan's late work like a signature. In this sense, the formal structure of Adnan's work, especially her consistent use of prose lines and resistance to lineation, is temporally consequential. Her thick and visually chewy prose blocks slow the reader's pace, which—in conjunction with her frequent use of white space, unnumbered section breaks, and parataxis—creates a sense of stillness, congealment, and temporal duration.

An attention to Adnan's formal structure is also key to understanding the relationship between gender and time in Adnan's work. As Lynn Keller (1997) notes, in analyzing the rise of book-length poems written by contemporary female poets, the experimental excess of longform and serial poems can act as a radical “kind of expansive frontier” for a feminist poetics, especially one that wishes to resist the norms of the “personal lyric” dominating poetry in the latter half of the twentieth century (306). Serial forms enact a “depoeticization” (a term Keller borrows from DuPlessis), which in the context of Adnan we might read as a feminist queering of form and (poetic) time that intentionally enacts the anti-anthropocentric thrust of poetry's content. Duplessis writes that “a serial form is an argument made of leaps” (qtd. in Keller 1997, 242). Following this theorization of seriality itself as a kind of argument, I read Adnan's formal signature as, to borrow a term from Elizabeth Freeman (2010), a queer accent.¹¹ DuPlessis (2009) defines working in the long poem “as a kind of erotic charge as well as an ambition—both expressing excess and desire—a longing and a sense of a vow. That is, long poems are a passionate activity, *working inside time*” (para. 1) (emphasis mine). The particular tempo of Adnan's stanzas, a slowness particularly evident in the opening of “Sea,” stands in striking tension with *Sea and Fog*'s often urgent tone and frequent apocalyptic images. As in the stanzas below, these apocalyptic images are often martial and hawkish and invoke a constant movement or restlessness: the whole world is aflame with movement, from soldiers to the sky to the sea.

Because queerness is so often located in Adnan's work as a kind of disorientation or dislocation, the dynamism of Adnan's images are queerly tempered by the literal framing and structure of her text, from a micro level (sentence structure and punctuation)

to a macro level (the book-unit as frame). The opening page of the collection, that is, the opening of the long poem “Sea,” reads:

The sea. Nothing else. Walls ruptured. Sea. Water tumbling.
Oil transparency. The sea. Field of stirring liquid. Gathering
of pouncing waves going to battle. Into one’s mythology trees
intrude, expand, shed shadows.

A wave, a mouth; a horse arrives, submits, drowns. Streaked and
bleeding sky. What is sky? to climb mountain peaks to overlook
clouds. Water on water reverberates memory’s mechanisms.

Oh fire’s explosion from a woman’s gut! Organized fearful
battalions on the march. Soldiers cover their eyes with flowers,
given the season. Continents of drifting clouds on the move.

Sea insomniac with jealousy, sky moving eastward. White foam
covers the water. Disquieting silence. Matter’s feminine essence
surging as sea’s quiddity. (3)

From the opening of the collection, the sameness of body and sea significantly hinges on gendered embodiment, an embodiment at once human and beyond-human (i.e. elemental, material, and even atomic). Reading Adnan’s poetic structure as a nuanced method of working inside time, the temporal-formal tension between a fast-paced parataxis and congealing attachment to imagery intensifies the queer argument of *Sea and Fog*. In other words, Adnan works within a deliberately queer poetic form, one that locates gender—in particular what Adnan calls the “feminine”—as a triangulating concept for beyond-human relationality. For example, in the fourth stanza the speaker allegorizes the sea’s movement bathetically (“sea insomniac with jealousy”) and introduces the notion of the sea’s constituting femininity: “Matter’s feminine essence / surging as sea’s quiddity.” *Sea and Fog*’s preoccupation with queering both place and time thus dovetails with the sea’s continual becoming-female. The latter phenomena—that is, the speaker’s consistent feminizing of a natural materiality, allegorized on a macro scale through archetypal natural entities like the sea and the mountain—renders the speaker’s environmental orientations as a queer (erotic) praxis.

The dynamic of orientation/disorientation can thus also be understood as a desire for gender—or, said more precisely, a desire for gender’s locatability in a natural materiality. What are the stakes of this naturalizing/materializing of gender for the speaker? To echo Judith Butler (2004), if gender can be understood as desiring something, what does matter’s feminine essence want? How does it leave the sea wanting? I contend that, for the speaker, this desire for gender’s materiality is itself a formal concern, expressed both metaphorically within the poem (we might even call this *Sea and Fog*’s structuring conceit) and much more literally in this long diptych’s formal structure. There is something inherently *form*-al about the speaker’s insistence on “matter’s feminine essence”: the speaker betrays desire to map gender’s material architecture, and to chart an organizational schema for the relationship between (and within) all kinds of bodies (bodies of water, human bodies, cellular bodies, etc.). Moreover, most simply, Adnan’s insistence on gendered matterings reminds the reader how gender itself can be understood as formal, in other words a kind of structure or disciplinary/generic convention.

Death of Nature and the Collapse of Gender

As the opening of “Sea” suggests, the natural world appears inextricable from its present destruction. The presence of oil and of a polluted sea erupts in the second line of *Sea and Fog* as a fragmented conceptual collage comes into focus: “The sea. Nothing else. Walls ruptured. Sea. Water tumbling. / Oil. Transparency. The sea. Field of stirring liquid.” This strange opening admixture is punctuated by fragmented full stops and held together by the resolute logic of the fragment and the caesura, which in comparison to the rest of the collection stands out in resistance to the grammatical sentence. Almost like a mythic origin story, here at the beginning the sea seems to precede grammar and human language. There is simply light, movement, the sea and its (polluted) materiality. As the opening stanzas progresses, a more speakerly presence emerges as the lines loosen into longer sentences and mythically apocalyptic—even millenarian—images accelerate: a lone horse, drowning and headbanging war, explosions and fire, all reflected in the

“streaked and / bleeding sky.” The specters of human violence, death, and war pervade the rest of “Sea,” haunting its waters, yet I contend that the (almost neutral) originary presence of oil in the opening stanza showcases the material and cellular inextricability of anthropogenic environmental contamination.¹²

In juxtaposition with the frequent mythic images and historic symbols of violence and trauma (which include, among others, Achille’s death, Ophelia and Medea, Mayan temples, Ahab, the Minotaur, the Final Judgment), oil stands as a strikingly beyond-human image for change and destruction. Oil also defines this (perhaps tragic) movement towards unity that Adnan theorizes above and exemplifies the inextricable material entanglement between human and environment. A few stanzas after the opening of “Sea,” the speaker states:

Water’s iridescence is language. An exchange of blood endangers our arteries for this salt, this oil. A privilege. Brown stains line the sea as she furiously breaks herself against the coast’s tormented rocks. ‘I,’ lighthouse waiting for storms. (6)

The comma between “this salt, this oil” unites and equivocates a traditional metonym for sea (e.g. salt) with *the* contemporary metonym of environmental pollution and climate change (e.g. oil). The two material metonyms of sea—salt *and* oil—illustrate how deeply oil has become assimilated as a key ontological component of sea (and has become part of what the speaker later describes as “this synthesis of mineral memories, this matrix”). The sea here is visibly marred by oil yet the indelibility of oil’s presence in the sea creates the dazzling iridescence that becomes water’s language. Can this language be decoded by the speaker? A clear corporeal threat looms for the speaker and for a collective human “us.” A desire to incorporate the sea, this symbolic “exchange of blood,” literally “endangers” the speaker’s physiology, yet desire for *this* salt, *this* oil is still ultimately a “privilege.” Akin to how Adnan describes Mount Tamalpais as a “privileged object” necessary to artistic revelation, here the sea—in her present state, not an idealized state of pre-industrial “purity”—is an urgent and indispensable entity for the speaker.

At the end of the stanza, the poetic “I” is imaged as a “lighthouse waiting for storms.” Waiting is a temporalized affect for anticipation and desire yet the lighthouse is a solid bulwark against the sea, standing apart from its object of desire. The waves literally *break* against the “I” yet the “I” would ostensibly not exist without the sea; what use is a lighthouse without the sea? If the former is ontologically dependent on the latter, here again the speaker highlights the *infrastructural*, architectural (e.g. the metaphoric circulatory system of blood and arteries) relationship between sea and human—a formal relationship that is inextricable from questions of language and thus poetry. As a preeminent symbol for ecological destruction, the oily sea catalyzes, as we will soon see, a movement towards androgyny and unity—towards a kind of radical post-gender age of the human person. This de-gendering of the human is precisely imaged throughout *Sea and Fog* as a corporeal and structural enmeshment between speaker and sea and, towards the end of “Sea,” the speaker proposes a strange metaphor for their inextricability:

And what if the mind were a well, deep but still with a firm base, though not a material limit? There would be water in there, real water, dark oily, at turns slimy, that once in a while rebels, overflows; and isn't that cataclysmic even what we name “sea?” (57)

Here the sea is the literal manifestation of the mind; the sea’s material composition—“real water, dark oily”—is the material stuff of the mind. Again the presence of oil defines the “real”-ness of the sea’s water and thus defines the real essence of the mind. In this way, oil marks what Adnan’s speaker later calls “a new rapport with Nature,” a condition that physically affects both the speaker and her environment:

We’re sliding inexorably toward a new rapport with Nature:
would the trip to Mars alter the way we shoot birds?

The rosebush in the remaining garden will remain equal to itself,
but would our sense of smell respond?

Still, we’re going into deep sky. We monitor hydrogen’s particular radiation when heated by the birth of new stars and detect photons escaping and being intercepted by clouds of interstellar gas and dust. We’re getting ready.

In the mean-time empires are crumbling. Earth has become too small for the energies that are being unleashed. As revolutions have lost their appeal, mega-storms are in the making, involving weather, matter, and destruction. (94)

The presence of radiation alongside interplanetary travel punctuates a literal death of nature that Adnan describes elsewhere in *Of Cities & Women*, where she writes that “the notion of place is replacing the idea of Nature.” In these stanzas, the speaker implies that this obsession with place is marked by a paradoxical abandonment of the planet earth.¹³ The ominous line “we’re getting ready” harbingers a planetary-scale cataclysm, where energy from the cosmos is both the potential cause of destruction (release of radiation) and a symbol for the future and for rebirth. The birth of new stars signals a dynamic and explosive futurity, one that exemplifies the science-fictional promise and potential of “going into deep sky.” Here this promise is nothing less than the fantasy of a techno-futural manifest destiny: a new human colony on another planet. The speaker scoffs at this pursuit of the alter-earth; a trip to Mars is not even capable of enabling humans to re-vision their current relationship to the earthly natural world, even if this means killing nature *more* efficiently. Ultimately, “the rosebush in the remaining garden will remain equal to itself,” but human perception of this pure vegetal quiddity (to borrow Adnan’s word) remains just as dulled as ever.

As the environment becomes more agential, human attention turns to a faraway elsewhere and—even as mega-storms accelerate—corporeal beyond-human relationality becomes strained: birds are shot from a distance and a rosebush’s fragrance, even when pressed against the face, is undetectable. Moreover, the foundations globally structuring human life, namely empire and its resistance, have become superseded by non-anthropocentric forces. “Mega-storms” consisting of “weather, matter, and destruction” have replaced “revolutions,” which have now “lost their appeal” due to the dissolution of empire. Here it is as if history itself (the cycles of human power and resistance) has become replaced with a furious and wild agential nature, one that is metonymized as environment or atmosphere—a stormy swirl of weather and matter and, notably, an anti-teleological entropic force shorthanded simply as “destruction.” Like a twenty-first

century “Anthropocene” version of Walter Benjamin’s angel of history, it is not the winds of Paradise blowing the angel towards the future but the hyperwinds of an anthropogenically-induced superstorm. In this way, the speaker communicates a feeling of the future—symbolized by the deep sky and by an interplanetary elsewhere—as fraught and foreclosed:

The horizon asks not to be pursued. We can’t figure out what was whistling all night long, having lost our deed of ownership for the sky. Ghosts stand as sentinels of past loves. Nature doesn’t deal with the past; nowadays uncertainty skims its waters. (12)

There is an uncertain temporality to the threat of these mega-storms which are, ambiguously, “in the making.” The speaker also implies a kind of temporal disinterestedness on the part of this new agential nature. Nature does not deal with the past; the past accumulates at nature’s feet like a midden:

To what are we destined? It’s getting cold. Hurricanes are devastating the land. Night has descended. It’s sucking the years to come as it did the former ones. Time is a utopia. It leaves no residue on our hands.

They project running contests of fabulous storms. The mind is keeping up with the hullabaloo and it’s useless to hurry given that history has no radical closure. (36)

As mega-storm brew, a sense of timelessness descends on the speaker. Time is utopic because it leaves “no residue on our hands,” in other words we are not accountable to its consequences. It is a consistent medium, a constant pressure/presence, that cannot mark the speaker because history has no closure. It is difficult not to interpret “history” as perhaps a motivating force for these fabulous storms and these hurricanes devastating the land.

Like the panoply of mythological figures that populate the expanses of Adnan’s long poems, the atmosphere has reached an inflection point of pure saturation—an accumulation of human violence—that needs to discharge. “What can one do with the possibility / of uprooting the forest, seeding the waves with uncertainty? Our / load of

melancholy has no itinerary. Why should it?" (20), the speaker implores earlier. Melancholy's load is literally too heavy as the material weight of human history is overwhelming nature as images of "sea vomiting corpses" abound (43): "the great slaughters consistently perpetrated throughout history / are jamming the conduits to the sea" (37). Here history is what overloads the sea with bodies like a kind of garbage:

A cosmology of terror: History's recurrent theme of tortured bodies dumped as garbage. The sea commits incest regularly with primordial violence and fanfare. She moos. We believe in the uniqueness of these times as in the originality of this sky. The tribe needs to. (29)

In these passages, history thus emerges as distinct from time. History stands in for the horrifically cyclical nature of anthropogenic death while time represents a utopic realm that transcends the bloody annals of human life. Time in this way is like a beyond-human force, one that is paradoxically atemporal or timeless. The sea here is a (almost complicit) witness to history's violence yet she seems to stand alongside, or even synonymous, with time. The sea, like time, is a total environment—ubiquitous and material yet beyond the bounds of human comprehension. The sea is a trickster; she moos in a farce of human domestication. Humans believe in time as textured and differentiated; we believe in certain ages—"these times"—as unique and unprecedented, just as we believe in the sky as original. The "tribe"—a term I read as the speaker's firm but resigned condemnation of human historical barbarism—needs to believe in the sea as knowable and stable entity.¹⁴ The sea cannot moo.

Key to understanding Adnan's ecological apocalypticism is Adnan's striking association of ecological disaster with a collapse of the gender binary. This association lends another valence to Adnan's dense understanding of historical time and to concepts of historical recursion and progress. As discussed in the previous section, Adnan's use of the word "essence" is significant as it recalls the concept of "essentialism" as it pertains to feminist theory. In evoking the image of "matter's feminine essence," might Adnan be striving for a theory of "gender essentialism," one that particularly prioritizes the beyond-human, and the natural, in the epistemological formation of gender? Elsewhere Adnan

theorizes the relationship between women and nature, demonstrating a particular attunement to a long history of symbolic associations attending femininity. In a significant passage from *Of Cities & Women*, she writes: “There is no more Nature, I tell myself, in the near metaphysical, ecstatic sense of the word. And if there is no ‘Nature,’ there is no ‘Woman’” (75). For Adnan, the conceptual apparatus of Nature/Woman is so ontologically intertwined that the disappearance of one also abolishes the other. In this schema, “Woman” virtually transcends the matrices of sex and gender to become a pure symbol, near metaphysical, that Adnan further describes as a “mythic reality”: “The idea of Nature in Western or Arabic though has been tied to that of the feminine. ‘Plough your women,’ tells the Koran. And elsewhere: the reclining, or swimming, or fantasized woman, perhaps, what does it matter, for she is a mythic reality in any case” (75). Adnan’s prose here is instructive: the feminine, as epitomized in the hyper-eroticized nude, is such a historically consistent symbol as to be empty. Adnan can even pretend to typify how this woman is represented because—oh, what does it matter!—she is always the same myth.

This oxymoronic epithet, “mythic reality,” is notable in the context of what follows, where Adnan essentially argues that global ecological destruction is leading to the collapse of the core patriarchal ideology subtending reality:

We are experiencing an ecological disaster, we are killing “nature.” It is nearly impossible to imagine a nature that would be immense and virgin, and since this space is filled up, our imagination turns towards an idea of the universe, of the cosmos. The opposition of city/nature was similar to the opposition man/woman. This contrast is disappearing. We are moving again, perhaps unhappily, toward unity: the cosmos, for thought, androgyny, for humans. The notion of place is replacing the idea of Nature. The notion of the human person is replacing the masculine/feminine couple. Where are we heading?! Forests are disappearing at the same rate as concepts...What are we going to lose in losing our forest and our myths? The myth of the feminine is dying. Are we going? to lose our feminine identity, which is to say substitute for the image we have of it some concept which will appear as being monstrous, or are we headed toward freedom, which is to say a renewal? (2014b, 75, vol. 2)

In this complicated passage, Adnan inextricably locates ecological disaster as the trigger for a total reappraisal of a deep cultural mythology of gender—what we might think of as a long history of patriarchal thought and of a hierarchal male/female binary. The “killing of ‘nature’” is both literal and symbolic, yet Adnan establishes a clear causal relationship between these twin deaths: it is the literal “ecological disaster” that catalyzes a conceptual and metaphysical rupture of the masculine/feminine binary on an almost global cultural level. Significantly, ecological disaster leads to a post-gender conceptualization of “the human person,” just as a conceptualization of “place” is supplanting a capital-N mythos of “Nature.” Adnan’s initial anxiety—“Where are we heading?!”—regarding the loss of nature and the myth of the feminine relaxes into a radical proposition coyly phrased as a question between monstrosity and freedom. Will the loss of the feminine lead to a monstrous vacuity (e.g. a shapeless “androgyny”) or will the death of “the myth of the feminine” (e.g. woman:nature, woman:wildness, woman:virgin, woman:beast) present an opening toward freedom from millennia of heteropatriarchal logic?

I want to acknowledge that, on the surface, the argument of the above passage may read as, at best, retrograde and, at worst, phobic of nonbinary, or trans, genders. Furthermore, at first glance, it is undoubtedly difficult to herald the liberatory potential of the collapse of “the masculine/feminine couple” when that collapse is catalyzed by global ecological disaster. Adnan’s use of the interrobang (i.e. “?!”) to punctuate the exasperated “where are we heading?!” preserves this passage’s ambivalence: for Adnan, on the one hand, the ideological loss of normative sexual difference is as lamentable as the “killing of Nature” because it leads to a loss of “our feminine identity” yet, on the other hand, where we are heading holds the unmistakable promise of “freedom” and “renewal.” As challenging as Adnan’s tone may be to parse, Adnan unequivocally locates “androgyny” as a movement (even if unhappily, for some) towards “unity.” The proposition of freedom, and of a universal—read *equal?*—category of “the human person,” establishes the paradoxically liberatory stakes of ecological threat. This passage helps clarify the urgent tone that suffuses Adnan’s poetry, as the omnipresent specters of

ecological violence give way to sometimes ecstatic apocalypticism. This is how I understand (and how I read reparatively) Adnan's "mythic reality" in light of a contemporary environmental poetics: Adnan theorizes the queer and feminist potential of an acute ecological crisis.¹⁵

Surge and the Incorporeal

In many ways, the temporality of ecological crisis—the acute feeling of bottleneaking that defines the Anthropocene as a discrete era, or rather that acute feeling that *necessitates* defining this era as such—is another way of problematizing place, especially from a queer perspective. As exemplified in *Sea and Fog*, the movement towards a gendered unity is explicitly imaged in the natural, notably the sea, as if the myth of the feminine were superseded by a beyond-human life of gender. As the hegemonic gender binary collapses due to the disappearance of the feminine myth idealized as nature, the human sloughs off gender and thus becomes necessary to express in an environmental vocabulary. In other words, to return to the opening of "Sea," the image of "matter's feminine essence / surging as sea's quiddity" epitomizes this transference of gender, specifically the feminine, from the human to the environmental. As I discuss later, the centrality of this verb surge cannot be understated. This action of surging courses throughout *Sea and Fog* and becomes the title of Adnan's later collection *Surge* (2018). I contend that this beyond-human life of gender, and the radically destabilizing "movement toward unity" that Adnan describes in *Of Cities & Women*, is expressed in this concept/image/affect of *surge*.

If the mega-storm has not yet made landfall, its immanent threat and its future certainty of destruction exemplifies the uncanny temporality and affect of Adnan's concept of "surge." The rather peculiar verb surge appears eight times in *Sea and Fog*. This, in and of itself, may not appear significant in a hundred plus page poem but this verb courses through the collections *Sea and Fog* (2012), *Night* (2016), and the titular *Surge* (2018). Surge, or surging, encapsulates Adnan's queer eco-poetics as it metaphorizes the movement that Adnan describes in the above quotation from *Of Cities*

& *Women*: the movement towards “unity” where a binaric gender system collapses. The surge marks a profound shift in the speaker’s environment; a palpable yet incorporeal force (like a sharp drop in pressure or a sudden gust of wind) marks an indelible change in the speaker’s world. In *Sea and Fog*, surge both defines and exceeds the sea and, at times, the excess that surge—or surging—expresses defines the speaker’s precarious relationality to her environment:

And what is this surge of the stupendous and quasi un-namable entity, where un-numbered amounts of bubbles unbreakably bound to each other make a eulogy of smallness while creating the most maddening form of an elusive infinity?

Measure beyond measure, we shift to discover a longing that pulls us toward the universe’s destiny.

Thus waves come in pairs. (10-11)

The queer nature of this precarious kinship between human and elemental, atmospheric matter cannot be understated. Again and again, beyond-human relationality—analogue to Haraway’s “making-kin”—is expressed as an erotic process. This image of waves coming in pairs is significant in its formal starkness. The waves symbolize a poetic call and response, a sensual coupling between the speaker and her addressee, here, inexorably, the sea. Adnan’s concept of surge and the ways she maps both environmental threat alongside a kind of environmental ecstasy dovetails with Margaret Ronda’s theorization of “ambient poetics.” Analyzing the work of John Ashbery, Ronda demonstrates how Ashbery represents air as an “ecohistorical medium,” a perception of the atmosphere that offers an “expanded sense of environmental consciousness [that] yields a different model for how a literary text conveys the complexities of ecological being in a given present than do ecocritical orientations that stress awareness and ethical activism” (44-45). Ronda contextualizes Ashbery’s “ambient poetics” alongside a shift in environmentalist thought that occurred in the 1960s—one exemplified in the work of biologists Rachel Carson and Barry Commoner—to the ways in which “environmental crisis remains recalcitrant to perception and comprehension, even when signs of imbalance abound” (47). Attuning to “partial sensing” and “unlocalizable anxieties,”

Carson and Commoner “orient us towards a *structure of feeling* of ecological crisis in this period—what Raymond Williams calls ‘a kind of thinking which is indeed social and material, but each in an embryonic phase before it can become fully articulate’ (48).

Adnan’s surge is a similar structure of feeling, one that marks the queer and female body in the twenty-first century. In the passage above, surge is felt as a gravitational pull on the speaker where we might read the “universe’s destiny” as the bittersweet yet catalyzing death of nature. If the universe’s destiny might be destruction, this destruction also is the engine of new life. The entanglements of the bubbles further signal something formal about this beyond-human eroticism, where the vulnerability of individual parts mesh together to form a cohesive and powerful whole. Ronda further draws on Angus Fletcher’s (2006) concept of the “environment-poem,” which, in the context of Adnan’s work, helps us retool a poetics and an eco-poetic reading praxis that accounts for what Adnan describes in *Sea and Fog* as “this diffused environment” (96).¹⁶ This reframing of environmental consciousness involves tensions between perceptibility and invisibility, as well as attunements to atmospheric and environmental forces on multiple scales, which both dwarfs and heightens the speaker’s corporeality:

Heat accumulates on the sea and we’re as naked as the landscape.
The fog’s skin bears no marks. Empirical reality submits to mist,
drugs, sleep... attracts lines, shapes, dimensions or noise; lower
temperatures, too. (64)

Following Ronda, Adnan’s poetics demonstrate how the present atmosphere’s palpable weight—allegorized as surge—might also be a queer ecohistorical medium. Just as Ashbery’s airy poetics reformulates an environmental awareness that orients us away from a simple representation of symmetry between the self and the natural and towards “the changing material surround and the complex forms of consciousness it engenders” (58-9), Adnan’s poems engender a queer environmental consciousness by underscoring how the gendered body and gendered conceptualizations, like “the feminine,” also mark landscape and the realm of the natural, as well as playing a role in the (im)possibilities of imaging and perceiving the material world of climatological and atmospheric entities, like the interplay of fog, air, tides, saline, and light on a northern California beach.

The surge exemplifies the immanent force of beyond-human entanglements on the speaker's mind and body. In *Night* (2016) the speaker declares: "There must be non-human memories from where our own / surges, take us to the next thing" (16). A similar image appears in *Sea and Fog*, when the speaker describes an anonymous woman (the speaker herself?) being hailed by a kind of surging call: "On solid ground, a woman / turns her back to the day's last moments. Something non-human, / immaterial, is calling her spirit" (16). We might image the woman here "on solid ground" turning her back to the expanse of land that symbolizes the death of the day (and the passage of time) and facing the sea, this immaterial material that embodies something both beyond time and beyond the human. Later in *Night*, the speaker further implies the rich and enigmatic temporal relationship between the human and the beyond-human as the speaker declares that "horses impregnated my father's genes during the last days of / a vanishing empire. I hear their hooves on the dust road that / leads to my door." The horse stands as a complex image for both the non-human and for history itself. The horse is a symbol for both human technology as well as death; in particular, it is a symbol for farce of human exceptionalism and the necessity of animal labor in conquest and the pursuit of empire. This image of the impregnation of the father during the waning of an empire muddles normative visions of gender and time. The trans-species interruption of the speaker's DNA signals history's recursion into the present and its indelible mark forever into the future. The speaker, although always already marked by the horses' impregnation of her genes, still awaits their immanent emergence into the now. Just as the surging of non-human memories "take us to the next thing," the beyond-human propels the speaker into a thick temporal relationship with the present, past, and future.

Significantly, the previous stanza begins with the searing line, "I find redemption in desire; no interruption, in Nature," while the stanzas immediately following read:

Between the "I" and the "me" a rain of poisonous lilacs, and
your body next to mine as a distant and forbidden sunken sun.

These were velvety times as you had returned from a long
journey that had taken you into the mystery of your flesh. The
hours were raining like autumn leaves. (2016, 29)

Sexual desire and erotic touch offer redemption to the speaker, a condition that seems to stem directly from “Nature.” The difficult syntax of this line and the bifurcating semicolon—“I find redemption in desire; no interruption, in Nature”—links desire with Nature, even implying that desire’s redemptive qualities derive from Nature. What is the speaker here redeemed from? There is trespass in desire; the threat of distance in proximity. The distance between the “I” and the “me” signals the difficulty of poetic speech, even poetic embodiment, while the desire to achieve such representation signals a kind of ecstatic danger (e.g. “a rain of poisonous lilacs”). Even as the lover’s body lays next to the speaker that body is as irretrievable, as forbidden, as reversing the passage of a day. Here time is perceivable only as it marks the environment: the setting of a sun, seasonal leaf drop. In a sense, the speaker’s body and her lover’s body remain obscured, inaccessible. The lover’s flesh is a mystery only accessible by a solitary inward journey, one that brings into relief the languid texture of time.

It is difficult not to contrast the sensuous “these were velvety times” with the apocalyptic time of “Sea,” as if the speaker were desperately clinging to the measure tempos of the natural. Perhaps desire’s redemption can only occur within this structure of time: a velvety time of “no interruption” marked by predictable cadences and atmospheric rhythms, as opposed to the temporality of crisis or the time of apocalypse. Velvety time is expansive and capacious while the time of apocalypse limits vision, narrows and funnels possibility into the one singular “event.” In other words, this is one way to read the temporality of surge. The surge is less one discrete event (one cataclysmic release) but is rather the moment where nature’s time becomes momentarily perceptible, where the bulwarks between the natural and the human begin to leak. As *Night*’s speaker queries, “memory, and time, both immaterial, are rivers with no / banks, and constantly merging. Both escape out will, though / we depend on them. Measured, but measure by whom / or by what?” (14). And, as if to firmly answer her own question a few pages later, the speaker states that “night and memory mediate each other” (18). The speaker can “hear the night’s pulse. Divine will circulates around its / edges” (26), while,

almost triumphantly, she then weds her own pulse to beyond-human structures of time: “My own rhythm: a winter ending, mountains dissolving, waters / on the rise” (28). If both memory and flesh are the two entities that define the human and define the speaker—what marks the distance between the “I” and the “me” as well as between the lover and beloved—they are mediated by time which is, in Adnan’s cosmology, seemingly inextricable from the atmospheric, the natural, the environmental.

Said otherwise, time itself is a beyond-human hyperobject. The beginning of Adnan’s collection *Surge* (2018) further echoes these images of beyond-human relationality as the collection notably begins with an image of animal disorientation. The opening stanzas read:

Rains return to the sound of their origins when night
begins to spread; over the land the night is as long as
a city’s deserted avenues,

...or the way to distant galaxies. The animals feel the
disorientation.

Thoughts are metallic and melt in salt water. Their
frequency increases the melancholy, the pervading
melancholy.

Meaning is ephemeral.

The world reverberates its disorder, creates waves of
determination. (1)

Similar to *Sea and Fog*, images of oceanic entanglements pervade an atmosphere of ordered disorder. The opening image is almost one of peace and balance, albeit an image of an almost threatening emptiness. What triggers the animals’ *feeling* of disorientation is the sudden intrusion of distant galaxies, a jarring zooming out of scale. Melancholy courses through the speaker yet, just like the speaker’s insistence on the consistently tempered calm of melancholic affect rather than fear or rage, in the disorder there is a sense of peace. The world’s reverberating disorder produces determination. And, later, what emerges from this unsettling scene of quiet disorientation is the surging of love: “I

still prefer love's power, though it keeps us dangling / between obscurity and daylight. // Love is the result of a throw of dice, Mallarmé's historic / throw. Sometimes it surges with the evidence of a / theorem in geometry, cleans out everything on its way / —lands us on a remote planet, yet, it can sink in a gutter, / kicking fallen leaves down the side of a dirt road..." (30-1). Adnan's allusion to the French symbolist poet Stéphane Mallarmé's notoriously difficult and opaque 1897 poem *Un coup de dés jamais n'abolira le hasard* [*A Roll of the Dice Will Never Abolish Chance*] helps to clarify the meaning of desire's redemption. The gamble of a dice's toss either results in fate or in chance. In the same way, the force of love might surge with a precision that screams out for an overdetermined interpretation, or it might reflect the quotidian material banality of flotsam on the side of a road. Love is thus akin—perhaps even an expression—of the atmospheric surge palpably felt by the speaker. Love, like queerness, springs from this force but is not reducible to it—an excess of atmosphere and of the natural-material world, a vector flowing into and out of it.

I read Adnan's surge as a useful concept in negotiating current theoretical debates regarding materialism, especially materialism's relationship to gender and queerness. Surge is akin to what Elizabeth Grosz (2017) calls "the incorporeal," which, in part, revises and expands Michel Foucault's (1971) concept of "an incorporeal materialism" [un matérialisme de l'incorporel]—a concept, it is worth noting, that also influences Massumi's thought in *Parables for the Virtual*. Grosz defines the incorporeal as the virtual, or conceptual, residue that sticks to the material and to materialism, essentially an "extramaterialism" (5). For Grosz, the incorporeal is necessary for theorizing what she calls "an immanent ethics" (255), a radical ethics that is attuned to the entanglements of human and beyond-human agency and one that is insistently oriented towards the future. Surge, in a similar way, helps negotiate between the fraught binary of materiality/discursivity that pervades contemporary debates in feminist and queer theory. The interplay at work in Adnan between the materiality of gender—the unmistakable "feminine essence" found in matter—and the post-ness, or even fluidity (e.g. "androgyny"), of gender should be read in the context of queer theoretical discussions

regarding the affordances and limitations of “fluid” conceptualizations of gender and sexuality. Omise’eke Natasha Tinsley’s (2008) critique of queer theory’s attachment to a fluidity metaphor complicates Adnan’s concept of surge and of “matter’s feminine essence / surging as sea’s quiddity. Tinsely argues that fluidity/water metaphors perpetuate an anti-Black erasure of how the sea functions as a queer of color space of both pain and liberation. Moreover, Jack Halberstam (2005) arguing that the transgender, or “post-gender” body, emerges “as futurity itself” in postmodern culture (18), belying how models of gender flexibility and fluidity all too often function in service to late capitalist exploitation.

In this sense, Adnan’s gender theory is contradictory and complex, at times seemingly both reifying and eliding essentialists notions of gender. As opposed to Adnan’s previous collections, like *Sea and Fog*, in *Surge*, the speaker appears to want to transcend identitarian models of gender altogether, definitively stating: “Your identity is your prison” (14). In *Surge*, there is something to Adnan’s insistence on a gendered life of matter and to her emphasis on love and desire as a redemptive force. Similarly, we might read Adnan’s insistent gendering of environmental collapse as an intentional over-emphasis, an overdetermination. Just as Adnan heralds a proverbial “end” of gender, the male/female gender binary is invoked. Adnan’s speaker claims “your identity is your prison,” yet this same speaker is incapable of describing the natural or beyond-human world without a gendered vocabulary. In short, the life of gender both clings to and exceeds the speaker and both suffuses yet transcends the beyond-human world. This contradictory relationship to gender encapsulates what Adnan describes as “a double trajectory of the world to us and from us to the world” (Fitch 2017).¹⁷ Gender here travels while also remaining rigidly material, but the context of its embodiment and materiality—the precisely queer and environmental argument of Adnan’s work—transcends the human. This is how queer desire and queer love can also transcend the human, how (as Adnan writes in an essay on love) “it may also sometime happen that the element that provokes love is not necessarily human” (2014b, 373, vol. 2).

The Night Palace: Temporality and Form

To summarize, the speaker's adamant attachment to physical, corporeal, and spatial *disorientation* is the crux of Adnan's queer eco-poetics and her queerly environmental attachment to place and landscape. Significantly, Adnan's queering of (dis)orientation is achieved through the temporalization of place and vice versa, imaging landscape in a temporal vocabulary that is consistently environmental and atmospheric, while also imaging time as a kind of place (e.g. "country"). As the speaker describes the sea early in *Sea and Fog*: "And this erratic edge called restless tide changes its geometry, and / with urgent, terrifying power, covers the flat rocky formations / that were here and are no more, when waters and foam are so icy / that the spine calls for mercy" (7). The speaker's desire to inhabit *this erratic edge* showcases the queer corporeal precarity of the speaker's body, a body always on the edge of dynamic and momentous action. This erratic edge is both physical—the violence of the tides, their ability to soak (or sweep away) a body with frigid waves or to alter the landscape—and metaphysical. The spine may call for mercy in response to the water's temperature but the relationship between the speaker's body and the sea transcends a merely physical encounter of water, atmosphere, and body. As the speaker later states, "with phenomenal perversity the sea enters fissures, transforms/the body into a sieve" (33). Similarly, the speaker commands a few stanzas later: "Let your back lie on the water and be a raft for birds, then in the / middle of the night, dive. Your ears will, ring, spit fire; the waters / will remember that once they were you" (35). The sea is a penetrating, even dissolving, force on the speaker's body; the self's corporeal boundaries are abolished as the sea literally runs through the body. Sea and (human) body are ontologically the same—the waters once were you—in a kind of elemental primordial and *pre-temporal* zone of memory.

Moreover, Adnan's particular formal structure—especially her emphasis on longform poems—enacts a key theme of *Sea and Fog*: the materiality of time. As Adnan writes near the beginning of "Sea": "The sea is momentous duration. / A passion for her is love for an illusion. But what else is there to / be had?" (18). Notably, this notion of a durational natural entity is further echoed in the striking close of "Fog," when the speaker

states with finality: “Time is my country, fog is my land” (101). Throughout the collection, the material nature of time is explicitly argued via a kind of making-place of time: in the former example, a making-place of time *as* the sea (which, as I noted earlier, functions as an orienting object for the speaker) and in the latter a literalizing of time as country. In this way, time is spatialized. Furthermore, the line’s chiasmic structure equates “time” with “fog,” again underscoring the environmental nature of the materiality of time. Although time may inhabit an elusive materiality for the speaker, it is extremely significant that the speaker figures time via natural *durational* entities, like fog or the sea. At their simplest, fog and sea are highly rhythmic temporal entities. The tides rise and fall and, if one lives in a place like coastal northern California, the fog can be a metonymic presence, rolling in thick each evening, a product of both place (e.g. a specific sea) and of atmosphere (e.g. temperature, humidity, etc.). This paradoxical nature of time—which, like an atmosphere, is at once material and elusive—queers the speaker’s relationship to both place and the natural. The final line of the collection places “country” and “land” in an ambiguous logical relationship, further queering the speaker’s desire for a concrete ground (i.e. a being somewhere or a belonging somewhere), as if geographic place were something to experience durationally (a being *in* or *biding of* time) and as a corporeally experienced atmospheric envelopment (fog *as* a concrete land). Just as “country” might be understood as a durational magnification of “land”—for example, legal citizenship can hinge on a temporal accumulation, like an establishment of residency or of linguistic and cultural assimilation over time—fog might be understood as a kind of durational experience of sea, especially of residing in proximity to sea.

We might view the insistent serial nature of Adnan’s stanzas as allowing her text to function as a kind of demonstrative text. And this emphasis on serial temporalities, which is expressed formally through duration and rhythm, again functions similarly to much of Adnan’s serial visual work. In other words, there is something unique in Adnan’s status as both a painter and a poet of seriality. To return to Cole Swensen’s (2011) analysis of Adnan’s paintings and to Swensen’s concept of “andscapes,” there is a kind of excess in Adnan’s serial action, “an insistence on the instance, and on its

immediate repetition, on its *and*" (145). Swensen's claim that "gesture alone can enact the world as verb" is interesting when applied to Adnan's textual serial gestures and repetitions. It is as if Adnan's stanzas, precisely because of their consistency and the paratactical feel of their *and*-ness, are formally attempting to enact the grammatical structure of a verb. This kind of metaphoric enacting of the verb is put in striking and counterintuitive tension with the frequent absence of verbs on a sentence level. This is one way to read the queer temporalities of Adnan's verse—the interplay of parataxis, stanza, and image counter chrononormativity, and taking up this persistence of hetero-hegemonic time as triply a queer-feminist concern, a poetic-aesthetic concern, and an environmental concern. Returning to the relationship between gender and time in Adnan's work, I would like to recall DuPlessis's (2009) argument that "seriality accounts for itself by a heuristic sense of event-in-language that becomes a rhythm of thought, accountability via accumulation" (para. 1). Perhaps another name for an environmental poetics, accountability-via-accumulation describes the texture of Adnan's temporal imaginings: the paradoxical boiling point of threat-time and crisis-time with the uncanny congealment of myth-time recursions. This is the precise way, perhaps, time accumulates and clings to a body, to a queer body, female body, aging body, exiled body.

The serial form of Adnan's work should also be read as an intentional resistance to poetic closure. This is how I read DuPlessis's "depoeticization": the poem that never ends resists categorization as a "poem." Resisting closure for Adnan is rather a means to radically de-anthropocize poetry. Yet over-determining the meaning, or political consequences, of closure—the traditionally "bounded" poem—against the expansive serial poem risks obscuring how poetry might function as a medium (perhaps a paradoxical one at that) for encountering/interacting the beyond-human. I am thinking here both of Lyn Hejinian's (2000) argument for the rejection of closure as a radical (even feminist) act and of John Emil Vincent's (2002) argument that closure can act as "a site of heightened poetic agency" (121), especially for queer poets. The debate over closure is generally a debate over definition of the lyric, which I read (treading carefully) as a rather anthropocentric debate: the role of the reader in poetry, and, in general, a

psychologizing of the intent of the poet *and* the literary critic (or at least the agency of voice in poetry, presumably a human speaking voice). I read Adnan's intense—what I might even describe as over-determined—use of mythic/Biblical/archaic imagery as an argument against the human and cultural limits *hamstringing* poetry as a historically privileged medium for the expression of human culture (e.g. human subjectivity, agency, scriptures, law). If “there must be non-human memories from where our own / surges,” then Adnan is necessarily arguing that poetry (as a technology of the mind and thus of memory) can and should transcend the human, exploring other forms of agency, life, and memory. In many ways, this is precisely where the queer stakes of ecopoetics as a creative *and* critical methodology lie: in articulating how poetry is a prescient medium for theorizing whether, following Luciano and Chen's (2015) query, the queer has ever been human.

Keeping these formal concerns in mind, I would like to conclude on one notable image, of a “Night Palace,” that recurs throughout Adnan's recent poems and that exemplifies the materiality of atmosphere as a kind of place, or dwelling, the phenomenon I describe above as the “temporalization of place.” The image of a “Night Palace” (always capitalized in Adnan's poetry) is derived from a Joanne Kyger poem of the same name and showcases the profound influence of Kyger (and the greater poetry community of the California Bay Area) on Adnan. I would like to conclude here on the Night Palace, and on a discussion of Adnan's formal structure, precisely because the Night Palace is a gathering place for the concerns of this chapter, in particular: Adnan's place in a lineage of experimental poetics, the materiality of atmospheric time, and the relationship between atmospheric/environmental entities and queerness.¹⁸ Adnan (2014a) describes the profound way Kyger's poem “Night Palace,” first published in 2004, influences her thought, stating that it “change[d] my life, in a way” (104). Adnan continues, explaining the influence of Zen Buddhism on Kyger's work, and defining the Night Palace as both a theoretical and physical space:

The poem opened up infinity for me—it was actually a revelation. The universe makes sense as infinity, not as a continuation of objects. I don't know Buddhism, but I suppose, in one way, that it considers everything to be spiritual. To look at

Kyger's poem muddles any normative vision of human time and human growth. Postmortem, one *grows up* into a future that is not a future at all, but a progressive recursion of the past projected forward—an agential past “happening / ahead,” and independent of, you. There is a sense in Kyger's poem of time felt less like a mandate or a natural law and more like a propulsive force. The past pulls you forward, toward it, both out of your life but into some life, some thick of *it*: the lively dance of the past always just a short reach “ahead of you.” The past is both witnessed and witnesser; the reciprocal gaze of the past testifies to the (even jubilant?) extrication of the human *from* time. Kyger's “post human”—no capitalization, no hyphen, no reification as concept—divorces subjectivity, even life itself, from the concept of the human. As Adnan writes in *Of Cities & Women* (a thesis further explored in *Night's* stanzas), “sexuality is tied to the night” (2014b, 77, vol. 2). Like her previous description of love which “keeps us dangling / between obscurity and daylight,” the Night Palace is a charged site—a literal gathering space—that offers queer refuge from the violence of time.

Notes

1. In this period, Adnan (who grew up speaking Greek, Turkish, and French) writes that she “fell in love with the American language” around the same time that she decided to quit writing in French. Elsewhere Adnan describes the English language and her consequent association with “Arab-American literature” as a kind of home: “On occasion somebody asks me for a text in French, so I find out that I am a bit embarrassed because I don't have this sense of belonging that I have with English. By now there's a lifetime of history behind my writing in English and my being part of what they call ‘Arab-American literature’” (2014a, 105).
2. Take for example, Adnan's (2016) own description of reading Charles Olson's *The Maximus Poems*, written in 2014 when Adnan was 89 years old. I read the

ethos of Adnan's letter (reprinted as part of an collection of letters in homage to Olson) as a touching description of an aging poet come late and come again and again to a poetic teacher that continues to illuminate and inspire: "Years ago I loved Olson because I considered *The Maximus Poems* as a sort of 'total' biography. The archetypical dream of any poet/any person. That remains true. Now, I love the poems but I love the poet equally. I don't sound reasonable, I know. I am confirmed in my deep feeling that poets ought to change the world, and they do, regardless if it is noticeable or not" (13).

3. In an fascinating slice of small press poetic history, Adnan literally had a hand in producing these experimental feminist interventions, as her lifetime partner Simone Fattal (also a visual artist) founded the Bay Area-based The Post-Apollo Press in 1982, a significant independent literary press that has an impressive publication history containing some of the most influential innovative feminist poets in contemporary American poetry, including Lyn Hejinian, Anne Waldman, Leslie Scalpino, Joanne Kyger, Joan Retallack, Fanny Howe, Barbara Guest, and Cole Swensen. The Post-Apollo Press was also integral to Adnan's visibility as a writer in the United States, as Fattal published several of Adnan's collections, notably publishing the first English translation of Adnan's novel *Sitt Marie Rose*. Adnan fittingly produced the artwork for many of The Post Apollo Press's book covers.
4. Here I also follow Ramazani (2015) in pointing out the aesthetic and critical limitations that a "poetry of place" offers in the 21st century. The critical approaches to poetry that Ramazani identifies as "loco-materialist approaches" (which include New Historicism and New Formalism) elide how badly suited the genre of poetry is at indexically, empirically, or referentially documenting locality and place, *especially* in comparison to other textual genres like the novel, the guidebook, and journalism. As Ramazani argues, "Pin a poem to a place and it's

likely to squirm away” (679). As Ramazani notes by way of Doreen Massey, place is defined by a “counterposition” to its outside and thus the local is always defined by the extralocal: “The local isn’t a pregiven fact that exists only in relation to itself; it’s a relational construct, the microcosmic obverse of the global, on which it obliquely depends” (676). Ultimately, it is poetry’s formal and linguistic density that makes it a particularly allusive medium and self-referential medium. Poems and poets talk to each other and the meta-textual layering of place-oriented poetry is particularly consequential for even the most “meticulously topographical” (693) of American eco-poets (Ramazani cites Olson’s *Maximus Poems*, Gary Snyder’s early rock-oriented poems like those in *Riprap*, and Lorine Niedecker’s *Lake Superior*), who bely how place is less a hyperspecific spatial designation than a site for the layering of human and natural and poetic histories, and for recirculation, flows, and global confluences, what Ramazani ultimately describes as “the translocalization of locality” (696). Significantly, one of the ways in which American eco-poets, including the eco-poets Ramazani cites, enliven the concept of place is through an interest in decolonizing the historical record. As Shaw shows, for poets like Olson, Snyder, and Williams this involved a turn to Indigenous histories and knowledges, an attempt to reach beyond the colonial archive and the dominant historical narrative of Gloucester M.A., Northern California, and Patterson, N.J. respectively—which should not be read as an uncomplicated or unproblematic investment in Indigenous epistemologies. Adnan’s earlier poetry, too, demonstrates a fascination with Indigenous knowledges.

5. Thus a tension between the concepts of home—whether feeling “at home” is a linguistic designation or a designation of, for example, familiarity with a region’s landscape—and exile structure Adnan’s thought during her inauguration as “an American poet.” A few years after writing her first “American” poems, Adnan

returned to live in Beirut in the early seventies, just before the onset of the Lebanese Civil War in 1975. Adnan subsequently lived in Beirut for the first several years of war, an experience that later informed her first novel and best-known work *Sitt Marie-Rose* (originally published in French in 1977). She writes about these years in an article “Voyage, War and Exile,” in which she describes the onset of war as the experience of as exile-at-home: “I was discovering—living—exile’s profound meaning. What is exile if not the violent and involuntary loss of all the living symbols of one’s identity? At this point, instead of me leaving, it was Beirut which was leaving me, and, we know it now, forever. Here was an exile which was total, absolute: I was in Beirut and I was witnessing that she was never going to grow normally, to remain the core of what she was. I was seeing (without any exaggeration) the meaning of Paradise lost” (1995, 8). Adnan further describes exile as “a dispossession with no recourse” (8), a total loss. On the other hand, her life in California, to which she returned in the late 70s, “was not perceived by me as an exile but as an open-ended provisional situation,” one in which Beirut’s recent destruction functioned as “a revelatory factor” for Adnan, bringing “a sharp light on the whole of my life” (9). To put it briefly, this sharp light prompted Adnan to reflect on the multi-generational exile experienced by both herself and her parents (Adnan’s mother was a Christian from Greek Smyrna and her father a Muslim from Damascus, Syria) and the brutal psychological effects of French colonial rule in Beirut, which deeply structured Adnan’s education and upbringing. As Adnan writes in one of her many essays that recount her parents’ lives and her early life in Beirut, the French established a colonial school system run by the French Catholic church, schools in which “Arabic was a forbidden language” and where Adnan “grew up thinking that the world was French” (2004, 7). Thus, even if exile does not describe the condition of Adnan’s “being American” and of living in California (which she did for

several decades until very recently), a structure of exile/homecoming influences Adnan's relationship, not just to language, but to form and medium as well. Of her parents' exile, Adnan paints a melancholic picture, writing that

they exiled themselves into charm and beauty. Geographically it was a bearable exile for my father, for after all, he was on Arab Land and close to his birthplace, Damascus. But he was living another exile, a terrible one this one: the empire that he knew and served had disappeared; he was living on enemy territory, a country under French occupation. *I lived since my childhood with a knowledge which remained inscribed in me: that geographical exile is but the frame for an exile which goes much deeper and against which one can do nothing.* As for my mother, she thought of Smyrna day and night, suffering from its absence, and often, I would say too often, I saw her questioning the horizon which encircles Beirut and wondering where Smyrna would have been, behind which cloud, on which side of the North of the setting. (1995, 5)(emphasis mine)

6. Notable examples of place's central role in contemporary ecocriticism include Heise (2008) and Keller (2017). Keller, in particular, draws heavily on the feminist geographer Doreen Massey's definitions of space and place.
7. In part, I follow Angela Hume and Samia Rahimtoola's (2018), who presciently cite Anzaldúa as foundational for theorizing queer ecopoetics. They argue that Anzaldúa "at once extend[s] and contravene[s] an ecocritical tradition that has long based environmental ethics in cultivating deep relationships to place" and that consequently "through Anzaldúa, we may approach *ecopoiesis* as the practice of forging human and nonhuman community beyond the bounds of nationality, territory, ethnocentrism, and the normative family unit. In light of Anzaldúa, we might say that ecopoetics has been queer all along" (2018, 134). Similar to Hume and Rahimtoola, I'm interested in how Adnan *contravenes* in an ecocritical tradition of place, refiguring a poetics of place as a poetics of atmosphere.
8. Also central to my analysis of Adnan's atmospheric poetics are the insights of affect theory, especially Brian Massumi's (2002) highly anti-anthropocentric definition of affect and Ben Anderson's (2009) conceptualization of "affective

atmospheres.” Particularly because affect theory has been enormously influential to queer theory and to the work of prominent queer feminist thinkers like Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, Sara Ahmed, Lauren Berlant, and Ann Cvetkovitch, I contend it offers a firm (and perhaps lightly trodden) bridge between queer theory and ecocriticism. In this chapter I use the term “affect” in a more Massumian sense, in other words as not necessarily synonymous with a discrete emotion. My use of affective atmospheres is also influenced by Kathleen Stewart’s (2010) definition of atmosphere and atmospheric attunement(s).

9. In general, Adnan’s visual oeuvre is marked by serial studies and serial forms. For example, she frequently creates “leporellos” (small accordion booklets inspired by Japanese calligraphic forms) and generally paints or draws in series. Mt. Tamalpais is an image Adnan returns to again and again throughout her career, including a series of oil paintings from 2000 all titled *Mount Tamalpais* (painted nearly 20 years after *Journey*) and a leporello entitled *Journey to Mount Tamalpais* (2008). In particular, Adnan’s interest in leporellos underscores the centrality of formal repetition and seriality. For more on Adnan’s painting and visual work, see Wilson-Goldie (2018).
10. Undeniably, the image of “mother’s beauty” offers a rather traditional image of feminine essence as deriving from maternity. Yet we might read a mother’s beauty as a kind of de-sexualized and de-objectified image of femaleness—perhaps even a de-idealizing of the category “woman” as it is synonymous with “mother.” The daughter’s gaze towards her mother is intimate and is adamantly not the gaze of a male other or of a stranger. If “beauty” implies a passive, and even violent, relationship of optic theft, the more active and dynamic “living off” evokes an act of sustenance and even sustainability. But oddly, the possessive pronoun “my” stands in strange tension with the collective “we.” This pronoun slippage, coupled with the qualifying phrase “at home,” perhaps allegorizes the

- mother as land, as a *motherland*. If Adnan's speaker here gestures towards an ontology—a life-giving source—located in female beauty, its comparison with the sea's ontology (living off the movement & flux of the universe) again establishes a clear relationship between gender and the beyond-human.
11. There is a queer poetic history worth uncovering behind a feminist poetic attraction to serial forms. Although Keller does not explicitly emphasize these queer valences, she highlights the indispensable role that queer poet Robert Duncan plays in tracing a feminist lineage of serial poetics, describing him as “a central figure in the tradition of serial writing,” and as occupying “a crucial mediating position between the practices of male and female innovative writers and between modernist and postmodernist literary genres” (243-4).
 12. As the ending of “Sea” makes clear, Adnan understands the sea and apocalypse as mutually constituting. The last stanza of “Sea” reads: “It’s scary. The storm is hissing. Waves are brutal. The wind is / whistling and the cold is lonely. Everything is apocalyptic” (58). It is worth noting here that apocalypse is not unique to *Sea and Fog* and pervades much of Adnan's oeuvre, including her famous collection *The Arab Apocalypse*. As Teresa Villa-Ignacio (2014) demonstrates, apocalyptic presences also bear formal significance in Adnan's work. In particular, the use of prose stanzas and parataxis underscores the poethical (Joan Retallack's term) weight of Adnan's poems to imagine “radically alternative modes of ethical encounter” (318), especially those modes that produce a responsibility towards the environment and all beings.
 13. The trope of space exploration pervades “Sea,” and the speaker consistently and vehemently rejects space exploration as a symptom of the destructive and myopic anthropocentric logic causing environmental destruction. For example, the speaker states that “outer space is morally neutral, not a solution” and later states “we're looking, throughout / outer Space, for earth-like environments. We're

incapable of / facing a dream different from the flatlands we live on” (43, 56). In a more recent essay, “The Cost of Love We Are Not Willing to Pay” (originally published 2011), Adnan further elaborates on the ecological consequences of a space exploration: “More and more people behave as if they ignore Nature, dislike it, or even despise it...Earth is mother. It sustains life. We come from it: religions say it their way; science says it too, as well as common sense. So we do not love our first, our original, mother. We quit her. We left her behind. We went to the moon...Because the price for the love that will save her [Planet Earth] would reach an almost impossible level” (2014b, 371, vol. 2). Adnan’s attachment to the traditional gendered metaphor of earth-as-mother as a *productive* conceit echoes her discussion in “Sea” deriving sustenance from a mother’s beauty. The notion of earth as “our first, our original, mother” demonstrates how deeply Adnan believes in the female ontology of matter (e.g. “matter’s feminine essence”).

14. As I indicate in a previous note, Adnan’s oeuvre contains frequent invocations of indigenous peoples in ways that feel fraught and that perpetuates the colonialist tropes constituting what Rifkin calls “settler time.” Her use of the term “tribe” here is difficult to read outside of this context, as the passage seems to connote “tribe” as a kind of mythic and foundational humanity, reifying this equation of indigeneity with a distant and mythic pastness.
15. Cassergård and Thörn’s (2018) analysis of “postapocalyptic environmentalism” provides a framework for reading the potential liberatory stakes of environment collapse. They define postapocalyptic discourse and environmentalism as “based on a catastrophic loss experienced as *already* having occurred, as ongoing or as impossible to prevent, rather than as a future risk or threat” (563). As opposed to “future-oriented pessimism” or “future-oriented optimism” (i.e. the fraught dominant modes that pervade much contemporary environmental thought), a

postapocalyptic environmental perspective “can be empowering and even attain a utopian function—not in the sense of providing a blueprint for a better society but in the sense of providing a place from which to look at ourselves in a new light, thereby freeing us to think and act in new ways” (574). If the sober acceptance of loss is central to this freeing of the imagination, Adnan’s evocation of ecological death should be understood as a kind of space-clearing gesture for heralding alternative gender epistemologies.

16. Fletcher (2004) posits that the “environment-poem *is* an environment, that such a poem does not merely suggest or indicate an environment as part of its thematic meaning, but actually gets the reader to enter into the poem as if it were the reader’s environment of living” (122). In this sense, Fletcher emphasizes that the environment-poem is a formal and generic designation, one that is, in particular, defined by “the eccentric deployment of phrase-units, an extreme grammatical endeavor” (104). Both Fletcher and Ronda note that Ashbery’s ambient, atmospheric poetics are influenced by the Romantic poet John Clare, who Mary Jacobus (2012) recently analyzes in pursuit of what she describes as cloud studies—a kind of aesthetic-atmospheric mode of reading that seeks to explore the relationship between realms of affectivity and material, natural phenomenon, notably the weather. As Jacobus writes, for both poets and painters the sky “functions both as an organ of sentiment and as a form of nonreferential free association—as both visibility and invisibility, form and l’informe—but above all as a mode of perception. But clouds also carry a material freight along with their aesthetic and emotional connotations” (14). Drawing from the work of phenomenologist Maurice Merleau-Ponty, particularly his final work *The Visible and the Invisible*, Jacobus argues that clouds and their material freight “provide a metaphor for what Merleau-Ponty calls an element or incarnate principle (like water, air, earth, fire) ‘midway between the spatio-temporal individual and the

idea' (33-4).” In short, Ronda, Fletcher, and Jacobus enable us to analyze how an environmental perception—that is, a perception *of* the environment—might be formal, or even might become a governing poetics.

17. Just as in *Journey*, where Mount Tamalpais acts as an ontogenic entity for the human, Adnan also figures the fog similarly to the sea, or perhaps as an extension of the sea. Like the sea, we feel that the fog is a part of us. In a recent interview, Adnan states:

It seems to me that we are a porous material: there is a double trajectory of the world to us and from us to the world, because ultimately we are part of each other. But this belonging comes in ways that make us feel both autonomous and linked. At privileged moments, all this happens clearly. We feel that the fog needs us, and that it anticipates us, and I will go as far as to say that it can even need us in order to be. These are evidences, perceptions, perceptions of thoughts and feelings — experiences even. And of course, it’s needless to say, we need the world to be, in every possible way. (Fitch 2017)

It is interesting that here, in this interview, that Adnan figures how this desire for the fog or sea functions in reverse. We feel that the fog that needs us, and that feeling of being desired is the crux of beyond-human relationality, what Adnan calls a linkage.

18. Alongside frequent mentions of the Night Palace throughout *Sea and Fog*, Kyger’s name directly appears in all three of the recent collections (*Sea and Fog*, *Night*, and *Surge*) pertaining to this chapter. The Night Palace, as both concept and entity, also appears in several other texts by Adnan, including the poem “Baalbeck” published in *Time* (2019) and the long poem-essay *Seasons* (2008). In short, Kyger is a major interlocuter of Adnan’s work and the long poem *Surge* ends with a touching homage to Kyger, written immediately following her death in 2017.

Chapter 3: CAConrad's (Soma)tics for Survival: Queer Praxis, Reproduction, and Futurity

Someone asked me if I ever thought about what it would be like to survive a plague and I said I do not need to think about it. My boyfriend Tommy died of AIDS and many of our friends and neighbors also died. It was all around us for years, the clinics, the experimental drugs, the fundraisers, and of course the funerals. And also the paranoia from families and the general public had to be confronted. Not to mention the paranoia about our own bodies... There is only one thing I miss about that time: the anger. We queers were so angry back then and we were not taking shit from anyone anywhere. You would have never convinced me in the 80s or 90s that by 2010 gays would be putting rainbow stickers on machine guns on behalf of the United States military.

—CAConrad, "The Queer Voice: Reparative Poetry Rituals & Glitter Perversions"

Ecopoet, performance artist, healer, occultist, queer deviant: this chapter examines the contemporary poet CAConrad (born 1966) and their ongoing poetic project, (soma)tic poetry rituals. (Soma)tics are both a theory and a praxis of how poetry can manifest radical queer and environmental politics and epistemologies, as well as (among other things): how poetry can open lines of communication with beyond-human realms and entities; how poetry can manifest communal healing from homophobic violence and from sexual trauma; and how poetry can enact a queer ethics of trans-corporeality and vital materialisms. Conrad conceptualizes radical queer political praxis *as* a contemporary environmental politics and *as* a poetic process. Queer poet contemporary, Eileen Myles, writes that Conrad "always argues (from the inside of [their] poems) for a poetry of radical inclusivity while keeping a very queer shoulder to the wheel." Following Myles, we might read Conrad as the inheritor of a queer American poetic tradition of democratic inclusivity, from Allen Ginsberg (e.g. "America I'm putting my queer shoulder to the wheel") via Walt Whitman. Yet Conrad generically and aesthetically explodes this masculinist-leaning lineage, citing instead the influence of a queer feminist (and mainly experimental) American poetic lineage, including Eileen Myles, Audre Lorde, Alice Notley, Bernadette Mayer, Mina Loy, and Emily Dickinson, in addition to a lineage of American and international avant-garde writers, including Charles Olson, André Breton, Robert Desnos, Vladimir Mayakovsky, Franz Kafka, and Jack Spicer.¹ Much like the other poets in this study, Conrad's work embodies a mixed-genre and hybrid aesthetic, a generic dexterity that is at the core of Conrad's praxis. As

Conrad explains in a 2011 interview with Thom Donovan, published in Conrad's first collection of (soma)tics, *A Beautiful Marsupial Afternoon*,

there is TOO MUCH WAR in the world, but never too much poetry! The world needs everyone understanding our creative viscera NOW, not later but NOW! There are nearly seven billion people on the planet at the time we're having this conversation Thom, but soon there will be nine billion. We NEED to find the way to permission, to unlock the imagination. Real change requires real thinking. The definition of art is always annoying to me. It needs LESS definition, borders that are not brick but something more porous, like pudding, yes, I prefer art with pudding borders, and you have a delicious snack as you eat your way out. (Conrad 2012, 172)

This passage is notable because it demonstrates how Conrad underscores the urgent relationship between aesthetic hybridity and innovation and a contemporary world governed by twin biopolitical and necropolitical forces (i.e. population growth and ongoing war). In particular, when asked by Donovan what inspired (soma)tics, Conrad cites the invasions of Iraq and the AIDS crisis as twin-impetuses for the development of their (soma)tanic rituals; in this way, these rituals therefore stage a vast field of critique to respond to state violence, specifically the American state's various forms of sexed, gendered, and racialized neoliberal biopolitical management. This is a field of response where queer experience and particularly homophobic forms of violence inhabit the same plane as imperial violence, a response to how a particularly American legacy of violence is refracted in the post-9/11 public sphere through the politicization of social issues (i.e. gay rights, abortion) and amid the backdrop of the endless global war on terror. (Soma)tics is thus framed as both political praxis and protest; as Conrad further explains, "war is a fact we're told to accept. I refuse to acculturate, meaning that mine is a poetics of uncooperation for all the brutal strategies built to sustain capital gain. I insist we make these national tragedies personal" (161).

(Soma)tics, too, are a praxis of healing and survival, especially a means of redress from the ways in which collective violence becomes refracted individually, and vice versa. In the same interview, Conrad describes (soma)tics as "one possible reconciliatory motion" against both the inevitability of death and against a contemporary American culture of death, inattention, and violence: "Could we PLEASE get to work LIVING IN THIS WORLD? Poetry is living! Let's live!...Life WILL get harder, and soon, as the human population grows and GROWS and the wars THE WARS!...Resistance is the most urgent. Resistance is the real magic. As soon as you set yourself down the path of NOT being agreeable to the directives of others your poetry

becomes THAT LIFE! It becomes YOUR POEMS, YOUR LIFE!” (176-77). Thus, poetry is an absolute tool for survival. As Conrad (2016a) writes in “Poetry & Ritual,” a verse essay that reads as an *ars poetica*:

A ruthless, racist, misogynistic,
homophobic, fearful, litterbug,
wasteful, ungrateful, stingy, war
hungry, bloodthirsty, terrified
male fist is upon our world.

[...]

It is important for those of us
who are actively creative to
encourage others to find their
own creativity because our very
survival depends on it, maybe now
more than ever.

In short, Conrad moves beyond the adage that poetry is politics and their work attests to a form of queer poetic politics akin to what trans poet kari edwards (2013) calls a “narrative of resistance.” The force of Conrad’s (soma)tics lie in how the enactment of a queer poetics—the material and embodied conditions of its making—is an unequivocally environmental politics. In other words, Conrad’s commitment to a “radical” queer politics is inextricable from an environmental politics of what Conrad calls a “radical inclusivity.”

In particular, I turn to Conrad as a case-study because of the pervasiveness of the child and of reproduction in their work. I argue that this pervasiveness in Conrad’s imaginary is significant because, ultimately, Conrad rejects the future as privileged temporal mode for a queer and environmental political imaginary. In Conrad’s poetry, the contemporary status quo of unchecked environmental destruction forces the child into an urgent reckoning with its own discursivity. I demonstrate how an emphasis on reproduction and temporality, especially as these two concepts congeal in the figure of the child, unite the three discourses animating this dissertation and animating Conrad’s oeuvre: queer theory, Anglo-American poetic theory, and environmental theory (including popular environmental rhetoric and various academic fields, such as ecocriticism and feminist science and technology studies). From a queer theoretical perspective, I will show how Conrad’s attention to the child presents a nuanced negotiation

between the field's attachment to queer political radicality and to alternative futurities, a negotiation of what Kadji Amin (2017) argues is the theoretical heart animating contemporary queer studies: "to be *against the norm*, to be *politically radical*, and to open the way to *world making*" (172).

My analysis in this chapter does not aim to present a stance on literal human reproduction, whether figured as ethical or otherwise, but instead examines the discursive figure of the child and how, in Conrad's poetics, the child becomes a theoretical vector for a queer and environmental critique. As I elaborate in the next section, Conrad's entire poetic oeuvre and poetic theory is founded on a staunch commitment to what they define as the extreme present. Furthermore, Conrad's queer temporalities are less defined by an Edelmanian rejection of futurity and are more—significantly, paradoxically—defined by a rejection of time altogether. And, although I ultimately argue that Conrad strongly rejects the child-figure, they do *not* reject the political entirely, as Edelman demands; nor does Conrad embrace Muñoz's radical utopian political imaginary where futurity and hope are the modes *par excellence* of queerness, queer politics, and a queer ethics of relationality. In short, Conrad's uses of discursive child(ren) provides us with an exit out of the epistemological maze of both queer and environmental thought on the child and futurity. The child might be simultaneously too full and too empty to mean anything at all. In many ways, Conrad shows how the child itself is a red herring; Conrad's child is like a discursive hologram, in uneven and unstable relationships to time and to the affective structures of a theoretical field. Instead, Conrad uses the child to raise questions regarding the future's relationship to a queer environmental ethics and praxis. Following Laura Briggs's (2017) argument that "in the United States, all politics are reproductive politics" (18), Conrad demonstrates how a queer environmental politics clings to the child, yet also ultimately exceeds the child by elaborating questions that traverse the terrain of the child, like the (im)possibility of the future, (social) reproduction, queer relationality, and even agency.

Because poetry is often figured as a privileged medium for thinking not just time and futurity, but reproduction, perpetuation, and (im)mortality, I contend that Conrad's innovative and singular (soma)tic theory of poetry presents a nuanced aesthetic critique of hegemonic temporal and reproductive ideologies. Recalling my discussion in this dissertation's introduction, a concern with time and reproduction defines a long tradition in Anglo-American poetry and what some define as the "lyric" is inherently defined by a metaphors of futurity. On the other

hand, well-known feminist poetry scholars, like Rachel Blau DuPlessis and Barbara Johnson, have shown how figures of poetic immortality, futurity, and reproduction are subtended by the logic of a heterosexist gender binary. As I discuss in the introduction, concepts like “immortality,” “futurity,” “reproduction,” and “the child” co-imbricate themselves in a counterhegemonic survey of modern and contemporary poetics. Thus, if “hyperactive gender binaries seem to be one major ideology of the institution called ‘poetry’” (Blau Duplessis 2006, 93), Conrad’s queer attention to poetic children, specifically, and Conrad’s (soma)tic project, broadly, should be read as a two-pronged critique of how gender norms 1) subtend a long history of American poetry and even some queer American poetry (as instantiated in patriarchal and heterosexual figures for poetic time, poetic production, and the ethical value of poetry) and 2) subtend contemporary American politics, including both queer and environmental politics.

What, then, might a queer and feminist environmental politics *not* in the name of any child look like? To return to Nicole Seymour’s (2013) preface, which I quote in the introduction, the binary structure plaguing a queer environmental critique (e.g. pro- vs. anti- child; narrow vs. intersectional/capacious identity politics; the value structure of ethical appeals) is instructive, if only for the way it rehearses the polarized and polarizing nature of thinking reproduction from both queer and environmental perspectives. Through my analysis of Conrad, I hope to demonstrate the urgent need for nuanced ethical critique of futurity, the child, and reproduction from a pro-feminist queer *and* environmental stance. Moreover, recalling Sedgwick’s articulation of the relationship between the child and poetry, as forged in and through time and through power, this chapter similarly asks what the child-in-time can offer to a queer poetics. *Especially because* the child-in-time is often inextricable from the child-as-time (i.e. child as privileged symbol for the future and for teleological biological development), this slippage reveals the inextricability of the child from temporality—an inextricability that I argue becomes both a queer and an ecological problem.

Yet, as Sedgwick demonstrates, the child also paradoxically turns our attention towards the present. This chapter will follow this child’s recursive movement from a normative image of futurity to the thickness of the present. Here, I am less interested in the (queer) child per se—its histories, its lived experiences, or its various life-worlds—than in tracing how the child becomes a dense affective gathering for a queer environmental ethics of time and the political future. For both queer studies and for environmental theory, the child stands as rallying cry and a pariah,

both the face of a more equitable future and the face of fascism. Here, a significant question is not how the child might come to signify otherwise—to be queerer, more subversive, or the figure of a more equitable future—but rather: why the child at all? What would it mean to wrest time from the grasp of the time-straight child, and even more difficult, from the grasp of the human altogether? This entails a decoupling of ethics from the human and a total decoupling of ethics from the certainty of—and the compulsion towards—what Derrida (1994) has famously called the ghosts of “those others who are not yet *there*” (xviii).

Lastly, recalling Michelle Murphy’s (2017) argument that “race is the grammar and ghost of population” (135), I argue that CAConrad’s attention to the child is especially relevant because of their political attunement to the white supremacist consequences of queer liberalism and its homonationalist imperialist intensification. For Conrad, race, too, is the grammar and ghost of the child, as is environmental destruction and the impossibility of futurity. Through a critique and subversion of the child-figure, Conrad draws particular attention to the ecological consequences of homonormativity, as the grammar of oil and ecological warfare cannot be extracted from the global war on terror and from a poetics of quotidian American life.

(Soma)tic Temporalities

Because of the singular nature of Conrad’s work—formally and theoretically—I want to first define and describe Conrad’s theory of (soma)tic poetry, which Conrad theorizes across several collections, interviews, readings, and essays. Notably, in defining Conrad’s (soma)tics, two key concepts—temporality (specifically an orientation to the present) and praxis—operate in Conrad’s queer environmental critique. In delineating how (soma)tics creates what Conrad calls an “extreme present,” I will demonstrate how Conrad’s temporal orientations undergird their queer political praxis and how Conrad’s emphasis on presentness offers an invigorating line of inquiry into current queer theoretical and environmental debates regarding futurity, human reproduction, and endurance/resilience/survival in precarious times. But first, I would like to give some examples of the wide-ranging nature of (soma)tic rituals.

Conrad (2012) states that “(soma)tic poetry is a praxis I’ve developed to more fully engage the everyday through writing” (1). Defining *soma* as an Indo-Persian word that various means “the divine” or “to press and be newly born” and defining *somatic* as the tissue or nervous system (1, 166), Conrad states that “the goal” of a (soma)tic poetry praxis is “to coalesce soma

and somatic, while triangulating patterns of experience with the world around us. Experiences that are unorthodox steps in the writing process can shift the poet's perception of the quotidian, if only for a series of moments. This offers an opportunity to see the details clearer. Through music, dirt, food, scent, taste, in storms, in bed, on the subway and at the grocery store" (1). Broadly speaking, the majority of Conrad's rituals can be defined by four characteristics: procedure, performance, ingestion, and relationality. These are less categories or types, as many rituals encompass all four of these characteristics, but four broad descriptive categories that help define the modalities and aims of (soma)tic rituals as a poetic praxis. I outline these facets to give texture to Conrad's (soma)tics. Key to understanding Conrad's poetics is a shifting attention from poem to poetics. This means a shift from analyzing how a text discursively signifies, whether politically or otherwise, to analyzing the material conditions, and even the authorial intent, of a text's creation. The paratext of Conrad's (soma)tic collections attest to this shift (e.g. the table of contents lists the ritual titles only, never any poems and, most significantly, *Beautiful* includes several blank "NOTES" pages for the reader). In other words, Conrad's (soma)tics urge a shift in how we normatively *do* literary critique. For Conrad, the poem is the aesthetic result of a highly constructed and highly planned scene, a ritual often tied to a particular place or time or to particular material actors. Attending to the various scenes and performances of Conrad's rituals allows a unique opportunity to restage how both poetry and literary critique might enact a queer environmental politics. Conrad's (soma)tic rituals are less an archive for a queer environmental theory and more of a guidebook or recipebook for a queer environmental theory.

First, regarding the procedural quality of Conrad's (soma)tics: many rituals describe a complex and highly constrained set of actions usually unfolding over several days and/or several sites. These rituals read like a set of extremely detailed instructions. The intensely specific nature of these procedures, paradoxically, make the rituals difficult to replicate. Many are temporally or seasonally specific (for example, occurring only during a certain weather event or during an equinox) and are labor and prop intensive. For example, in Conrad's collection *A Beautiful Marsupial Afternoon*, one ritual, "Feast of the Seven Colors," requires the poet to eat foods of a single color for seven days while wearing, or surrounding oneself, with that color. Another requires sand to be collected from both an Atlantic and a Pacific American shore, another the saving, cleaning, and cataloguing of a week's worth of trash. And, in the titular ritual "A Beautiful Marsupial Afternoon," Conrad transforms an extremely large cardboard box into both

a pseudo-marsupial pouch and a sex object for the poet while Pasolini films play in the background. As “Feast of the Seven Colors” demonstrates, many rituals are primarily focused around a praxis of corporeal ingestion or absorption; poems are thus produced through the frequent ingestion, absorption, or insertion of foods, crystals, seeds, rain water, dirt, and other objects (like bible pages, poems, catheters) into the body. In this way, (soma)tics often rely on an individual embodied experience, a honing of psychological attention towards one’s body in the midst of a chaotic environment. For example, one ritual, “Digital Cognizance,” requires the poet to (for the next seven days) clench their toes hard every time they are being dishonest.

On the other hand, the intensely interior nature of some rituals contrast the public and performative aspects of (soma)tics. Conrad’s rituals, in many ways, could be described as performance art, especially a performance art of public protest. Many are site-specific, rely on a public setting (usually an urban setting such as a city street or a museum) and are directed towards a chance audience of passersby. The force of many rituals occurs in that liminal zone between public and private, a zone that Conrad queerly occupies. For example, in “Catheter Enjambment,” Conrad goes about their day with a catheter inside their penis as an act of queer political resistance and “a chronic reminder of HOW this culture inserts its will on my penis more and more each day” (2014, 131). Additionally, in two of my favorite performance-oriented rituals, “M.I.A. Escalator” and “Security Cameras and Flowers Dreaming the Elevation Allegiance,” Conrad challenges gender norms by showing a picture of themselves to strangers in elevators while asking “have you seen HER?” and Conrad interrogates the surveillance state by standing in front of public security cameras while pollinating flowers with their tongue and chanting “I’M A POLLINATOR, I’M A POLLINATOR!!” (2014, 1).

Lastly, Conrad’s (soma)tics provide a poetics of corporeal and textual relationality. Similar to their emphasis on ingestion, many rituals stress beyond-human interaction—talking, touching, meditating, sexual interaction—with natural agents, especially trees, plants, and insects in a co-creation of poetry. Moreover, Conrad’s (soma)tics reveal a commitment to poetic lineage and homage and reveal a rigorous practice of dialogue with other poets and artists. Virtually every ritual Conrad publishes is dedicated to another poet or artist. Although many of Conrad’s dedications are made for contemporary poets, (soma)tics create a trans-temporal community of poets as rituals and dedications are framed as homages (or even séances) with dead poets. Notably, the literal and theoretical community formed by Conrad often traces a queer American

poetic lineage. The opening ritual of *A Beautiful Marsupial Afternoon* involves a poetic pilgrimage to Emily Dickinson's house (Conrad subsequently coats their body for three days in dirt taken from Dickinson's backyard) and the following ritual involves a séance with the trans poet kari edwards. Additionally, Walt Whitman and Shakespeare are complex sites of queer poetic identification and disidentification for Conrad. Yet each ritual also transcends their specific dedication as each ritual is a set of instructions *for* all poets. In this way, (soma)tics constitute a broad address to all readers, who are always already assumed to be poets as Conrad believes anyone and everyone can and should be a poet. Injunctions like "Take notes for the poem" and "use these notes to form a poem" are refrains throughout the text of the rituals.

(Soma)tastic exercises are therefore a strategy of poetic creation *and* an embodied, material praxis meant to reorient the body towards overseen or neglected environmental forces, especially forces that exist not "out there" in nature, but also in built environments like a busy city street or the inside of a supermarket. In Conrad's imaginary, wildness also denotes a political condition, a kind of literal freedom from human governmentality, which is both a freedom from brutality and a freedom "to construct new chords of thought without fear" (Conrad 2012, 2). In short, Conrad's environmental imaginary locates "wildness" as a key conceptual site for their (soma)tics, even while they eschew any binary between nature/city, or wilderness/urbanity. "Wildness" functions much like "queerness" in Conrad's work—a radical and creative force that enables resistance to neoliberal power structures antagonistic to human and beyond-human thriving. Wildness, like queerness, is a force that enables thriving and survival, on an embodied corporeal and aesthetic plane. As Conrad (2012) writes, "I cannot stress enough how much this mechanistic world, as it becomes more and more efficient, resulting in ever increasing brutality, has required me to FIND MY BODY to FIND MY PLANET in order to find my poetry. If I am an extension of this world then I am an extension of garbage, shit pesticides, bombed and smoldering cities, microchips, cyber, astral and biological pollution" (1). The twenty-first century poet is all of these things, but also "the beauty of a patch of unspoiled sand, all that croaks from the mud" (1). Conrad continues, arguing that because "the last wild beasts" are hunted, poisoned, and destroyed "the transmission of their wildness is dying, taming. A desert is rising with this falling pulse" (1-2). Ecological brutality is coterminous with human war—an expression of an imperialist impulse—and coterminous with a weakening of poetry as a viable source for making life livable. Here I quote Conrad at length as, below, they provide the most

cogent definition of how (soma)tics can combat this encroaching desert of literal and creative death and decay:

It is our duty as poets and others who have not lost our jagged, creative edges to FILL that gap, and RESIST the urge to subdue our spirits and lose ourselves in the hypnotic beep of machines, of war, in the banal need for power, and things. With our poems and creative core, we must RETURN THIS WORLD to its seismic levels of wildness. The aim of (Soma)tic poetry and poetics is the realization of two basic ideas: (1) Everything around us has a creative viability with the potential to spur new modes of thought and imaginative output. (2) The most vital ingredient to bringing sustainable, humane changes to our world is creativity. This can be enacted on a daily basis. (2012, 2)

Thus poetry, or more broadly “creativity,” is a primary victim of same forces that cause environmental destruction *and* a means of redress for that destruction. Key to this environmental redress is achieving a state of seismic wildness—a force and condition that also appears endemic to the creative and poetic impulse. The poet’s body is horizontalized with all things (other bodies, with material agents and actants) and therefore stages what Jane Bennett (2010) calls a vital materialism—which, above all, is a means of enacting the radical political potential of beyond-human assemblages—and what Stacy Alaimo (2010) defines as a trans-corporeal ethics. In short, what Conrad identifies as wildness and as creativity is adamantly opposed to neoliberal capitalism and imperial violence.

Moreover, (Soma)tic poetry presents a theory of time and, as a queer environmental temporal praxis, argues for a reorganization of time in the name of queer and multi-species liberation. Conrad’s temporal imaginary is notable, though, for its staunch adherence to the present as the privileged temporal modality of queer environmental poetic and political praxis. Conrad re-envisioned the future as the temporal zone of a queer environmental worldbuilding. In lieu of the future, Conrad imagines a “future wildness”—a condition less defined by normative affective and temporal yearnings (i.e. the future as a condition of hope, liberation, or change) than by radically queer beyond-human relationalities and ecological assemblages, a condition enabling what Haraway calls a “radical, nonhumanist demography, embedded in multi-kinded/multi-species justice and care.” Thus wildness serves as a placeholder for a then and there futurity, positioning the future less as (Muñoz argues) a *horizon* of queer desire and queer relationality and more as an environmental condition defined by exuberant beyond-human agencies. Conrad’s (soma)tics offer a third route between, on the one hand, Muñoz’s rejection of

the present for a future *place* (a then and there) of ecstatic queer utopias and, on the other, Edelman's rejection of a politics in the name of the future.

Conrad's alignment of wildness with poetry and poetry with an environmental praxis and ethics reveals the significance of resisting and rejecting certain hegemonic ways of organizing and conceptualizing time—especially spatializing the future as a place (e.g. Muñoz's queer utopia) or of allegorizing time into temporally-dense symbols and proper nouns (e.g. Edelman's "the Child").² The violence and brutality of this mechanistic world due to technological advancement is a force of regression. Conrad's wildness is not exactly located in the past. Violence and brutality is a subduing force, whereas wildness is a creative, propagating, force. Here wildness seems to be wrested from death, while still opposed to normative forms of life and to epistemological structures antagonistic to broad species thriving (e.g. a pronatalist, prolife, super-consumer reproductive futurism). When Conrad calls for poets to "fill that gap" left by the extinction of animals, the redress Conrad demands is not about the rebirth of new wild animals, for the direct redress and inversion of a particular extinction is impossible. In other words, Conrad's invocation of wildness acknowledges a logic of the "tipping point," that we cannot a return to an originary, pre-destruction "wild" state. Yet wildness is something that the world can be "returned to," but not in a normative teleological or temporal sense. There is no return to the past here—this world is inevitably "garbage, shit pesticides, bombed and smoldering cities, microchips, cyber, astral and biological pollution"—but an enactment of a creative wildness in the present, a force antagonistic to the violent evolution of empire.

Conrad's dismissal of "the past" as a fruitful or rejuvenative concept for an environmental politics—as instantiated in a rejection of wildness as temporally associated with pastness—is exemplary of Conrad's broader rejection of temporalities outside of the present.³ As Conrad frequently states, their orientation to the present is a result of growing up poor in rural Pennsylvania in a family of factory workers. Conrad witnessed the destruction of lives governed by factory time, which caused their family members to "switch the present off" in order to cope with the alienation of being mere tools of machinic labor. As Conrad (2019b) explains to an audience during a reading:

I started writing poetry in 1975. I grew up in a working-class town in rural Pennsylvania and all of my family were factory workers. At some point I realized they had developed a coping mechanism to deal with these jobs, meaning that they are extensions of machines most of the waking hours. Why would you want to be present for that? So they switched

the present off and they focused on the past and the future, and they don't know how to turn that back once they leave. When I speak to my family, they are either depressed about the past or anxious about the future. I developed (soma)tic poetry rituals because I realized this had followed me throughout my life.

Thus Conrad's (soma)tics should be understood, first and foremost, as a resistance to the time of capital and to the bodily alienation produced by living and working under capital. As Conrad (2014) makes clear, factory time is not only a condition of the factory worker: "I had an epiphany that I had been treating my poetry like a factory, and assembly line, and doing so in many different ways, from how I constructed the poems. to my tabbed and sequenced folders for submissions to magazines" (xi). Factory time pervades as a structure throughout contemporary daily life and all, even artists, must make a conscious effort to "climb out of these factory-like structures." In this sense, Conrad's present is not just a temporal state, or how we might normatively think the present. It is an embodied, fleshy experience of the present, as well as an affective orientation to the present. In many ways, what they call "an extreme present" is actually outside of time altogether. The extreme present created through (soma)tic praxis is rather a phenomenology of time—a corporeal condition where kin-making and trans-temporal communication can occur.

In "Poetry & Ritual," Conrad (2016a) further explicates the extreme present of (soma)tic rituals:

To me it is the opposite of time
travel, it is the halting of
time, it is the collapsing of the
walls separating us from where we
have been, where we are going,
and beyond.

[...]

It is through our connection to
ritual where the experience is
horizontal, where we can imbibe
with everyone living and dead and
with people yet to be.

The poet Robert Desnos has a line, “the living and the dead give in and wave to me”

This is a place where poetry is capable of taking us, a real place where all of time is suddenly present.

Later in the essay, Conrad argues for the absolute urgency of accessing this poetic place “where all of time is / suddenly present,” as the stakes are nothing less than survival. Conrad writes that “our very survival depends” on accessing the “creative viability in / everything around us.” This is a human and beyond-human survival, as Conrad writes that they created (soma)tic rituals to heal from the trauma of watching their boyfriend and so many others die of AIDS in the 1990s and they believe that (soma)tic poetry has the ability to “reconnect” us to “the natural cycles of/life and help put an end to our/alienation from the planet.”⁴ Again, Conrad brings queer survival, mass species survival, and ecological survival together in a tight assemblage of interrelated lifeworlds all subject to the same necropolitical forces of annihilation. The horizontalizing “real place” where all of time is (not exactly abolished but) suddenly present is an imaginative poetic and political praxis of radical care.

Thus (soma)tic rituals disrupt teleological time—collapsing the tripartite “walls” between “where we / have been, where we are going, / and beyond”—as well as disrupting the binary of life/death, especially as it is instantiated in teleological time (e.g. the dead are past, the living are present, and the soon-to-be-living are in the immanent beyond). Furthermore, this is a space where “we can imbibe / with everyone living and dead and / with people yet to be.” In Conrad’s staging, people-yet-to-be are accessible, are here in the extreme now of the space cleared by (soma)tic praxis. In other words, the future reader, as traditionally imagined by poets like Shakespeare, is not deferred; they do not exist in a contingent temporal state called “future.” Conrad’s use of the word “imbibe” is striking here as it connotes a mutual (and perhaps celebratory) ingestion. Going a step further than Desnos’s image of a distant acknowledgment (where living and dead wave at each other), the place where poetry is capable of taking us is a mutually interactive, highly material space of imbibing-*with*—being-with those of the past, future, and present. Conrad imagines a literal space of being-with others, as opposed to a theoretical space of feeling-with temporally inaccessible others. This is what distinguishes

Conrad's extreme poetic present from a lyric theory of time, especially concepts like "the lyric present" (Culler 2015), "lyric time" (Cameron 1979), and "the literary present" (Saint-Amour 2018). These concepts privilege temporality as a textual, generic, and formal condition of poetic enunciation—for example, a tense, as in the case of the literary present, or a particularly mode of interpolation and discourse (from speaker to addressee), as in the lyric present—whereas Conrad's extreme present privileges the materials condition necessary for poetic articulation. In other words, the rituals—the compositions, organizations, and gestures beyond bodies and between material actors—create the extreme present as a precondition for poetry. We might call Conrad's ethics of being-with a materialist ethics, where imbibement, ingestion, and bodily enmeshment is key to their environmentally-oriented, temporally-present poetic praxis. In short, the importance of liquid, porous, and even contaminated bodies (i.e. "I am an extension of garbage") mutually interacting, enmeshing, and rubbing together create the temporal conditions necessary for poetic manifestation.

Bless Your Child Queer

As the epigraph to this chapter attests, Conrad's oeuvre is a lightning in a bottle queer assault on contemporary governmentality; their work re-invigorates the foundational queer theoretical definition of queerness as a "broad critique of multiple social antagonisms, including race, gender, class, nationality, and religion, in addition to sexuality" (Eng et al. 2005, 1). Yet Conrad further posits the ultimate goal of queerness's multiple social antagonisms to stop no shorter than a total multi-species REVOLUTION. In many ways, Conrad's (soma)tics embody the performative and aesthetic structure that Sianne Ngai defines as zaniness, an aesthetic that highlights "the affect, libido, and physicality of an unusually beset agent" in order to negotiate the increasingly fuzzy dialectic between work (especially emotional labor) and play in late capitalism (7).⁵ Even as Ngai describes the affective register of the zany variously as "hot and bothered," "seemingly lighthearted but strikingly vehement" "noticeably stressful," and "savagely playful" (7-11)—all descriptors that could easily be attributed to Conrad—the most elucidating affective-performative aspect of zaniness for Conrad's aesthetic is located in what Ngai attributes to the zany's *vehemence*. Significantly for Conrad's (soma)tics, zaniness is a vehement mode of performance precisely because it is marked by an extreme desperation and precarity: "the zany thus has a stressed-out, even desperate quality that immediately sets it apart

from its more lighthearted comedic cousins, the goofy or silly...it is an aesthetic of action pushed to strenuous and even precarious extremes” (185). This stressed-out aesthetic mode reveals the lethal and violent catalysts of (soma)tics, a praxis of redress against socially and state-sanctioned necropolitical structures deployed by the US. The desperation and vehemence subtending Conrad’s rituals is what structures the comedic and satirical performative nature of their most public-facing (soma)tic rituals, a zany aesthetic that, as I describe below, also marks their radical queer critique of contemporary American culture.

For example, Conrad’s (soma)tic ritual, “Power Sissy Intervention #1: Queer Bubbles,” is the first of three “Power Sissy Interventions” in their 2017 collection of (soma)tics *While Standing in Line for Death*, a series of rituals Conrad (2018) describes as “political action poetry writing rituals.” These rituals, entitled “Power Sissy Intervention #1: Queer Bubbles,” “Power Sissy Intervention #2: Apostle Paul Suppositories,” and “Power Sissy Intervention #3: Powerball Vagina,” constitute some of the collection’s most trenchant queer critique of American homophobia, particularly a homophobia derived from Christian extremism. In this chapter, I will examine both rituals and poems, yet not always in tandem with each other. I do this for several reasons. First, I find the relationship between ritual and what Conrad frequently calls the “resulting poems” tense. I often feel a false invitation to read the poems in deep conjunction with their ritual, yet reading the poems in this light does not necessarily deepen a reading of either poem or ritual. I wish not to create an overdetermined relationship between the ritual and the resulting poems. Conrad emphasis on praxis over poem is clear. Furthermore, each ritual is written as an instruction for further enactment. The reader is meant to undertake the rituals as well, creating their own poems. Conrad’s poems are thus just one possible iteration of the poetic potential of any one ritual. Second, I read the rituals as complex texts in their own right that do not need their resulting poems to be intelligible.

In the first Power Sissy Intervention, Conrad occupies a busy street corner in Asheville, North Carolina and blows bubbles at every child who passes in order to turn them queer. In the second intervention, Conrad turns pages from the Book of Romans, which “is very popular in the United States among Christian extremists who justify genocide of queers,” into an anal suppository as part of protest of anti-LGBTQ legislation in front of a courthouse. Finally, in “Powerball Vagina,” Conrad panhandles on the streets of downtown Asheville to raise money for a lottery ticket that might buy them “a new vagina.” Conrad promises to name a “patch” of their

new vagina's pubic hair after the (now former) North Carolina governor Pat McCrory, who is hostile to LGBTQ rights and who signed into law the 2016 HB2 anti-trans bathroom bill. Although I will be focusing on the first power sissy intervention, I briefly highlight these three rituals in their mutual context in order to underscore the centrality of contemporary queer politics to Conrad's staging of the child. Conrad claims their bubbles will "bless children with bubbles that will make them queer. Not gay and lesbian but QUEER!" As Conrad blows these bubbles towards each child's "little hands," they tell the parents: "These bubbles will assure that your child will grow up to be a healthy, happy, revolutionary Queer who will help rid the world of homophobia, misogyny, racism, and other forms of stupidity." Conrad then describes the intensity of the parents' reactions. While some parents know "bubbles have only the power to be bubbles...and thought the whole thing was funny and would say, 'that's cool, I will love my children no matter what,'" Conrad writes "MOST parents were not happy about Queer Bubbles at all." These other parents "pulled away nervously saying, 'Sorry, sorry.' One mother abruptly yanked her blond son's hand, 'C'mon honey ice cream, ice cream!' The boy cried, reaching for the bubbles as she refused to look in my direction, pulling him from the queering of the bubbles. Most parents though just said, 'Sorry, I'm sorry,' as they walked away" (46).⁶

In this ritual, Conrad mobilizes and subverts what could be read as a homophobic discourse of contagion and disease (as well as homophobic "groomer" discourse) through its most literal enactment: that queer touch and queer proximity produces a queer identity. Conrad's bubbles matter queerness, yet the ultimate comedy of Conrad's performance hinges on the polarized perception of the bubbles as either literally or discursively queer. In other words, Conrad admits in the first few sentences that, *of course*, there is no such thing as a queer-producing-bubble. The queer knows these bubbles comprise a symbolic act, the material of a simple performance piece, yet the parents (ostensibly the non-queers) believe—and therefore manifest—the literal function of the bubbles' queering power. The instantaneous contagion-effect of "the queering of the bubbles" relies on a pure faith in queerness as a kind of environmental pollination, even an insemination, of queerness from one person to another through a material agent.⁷ These bubbles stage a physical, albeit materially fragile and ephemeral, manifestation of queer relationality and queer production that will come to bloom into a future. The subjective temporality of Conrad's Power Sissy Intervention #1 produced by the triple future-tense "will"— "these bubbles *will* assure that your child *will* grow up to be a

healthy, happy, revolutionary Queer who *will* help rid the world of homophobia, misogyny, racism, and other forms of stupidity”—is in tension with the immediacy (i.e. the extreme presentness) of the queer bubble ritual. This (soma)tic ritual relies on the logic of performative speech act—I now *bless* you to be queer—in which queerness is bestowed here and now. The event of queer blessing, its extreme presentness, stands in striking juxtaposition with the future-oriented unfolding temporality of the transformation from simply “child” to “queer child.” Again, Conrad blesses “children with bubbles *that will make* them queer.” Conrad seems to acknowledge the horizontal temporality of revolutionary queerness, and its concomitant anti-racist and feminist work, even as the (homophobic) parents, who fiercely vanguard their children away from a queer touch, believe in the present potential of child queering as a cliff-event or point of no return.

Thus Queer Bubbles stages queering as temporally ambiguous process, both an instantaneous transformation and an unfolding process with queerness as (maybe!) a terminal point somewhere in the future. This terminal point—the child who will become queer—is defined by a political praxis, defined as revolutionary and marked by its resistance to homophobia, racism, and misogyny. The sticky film of the bubbles, if popped against child skin, will begin to attract and amalgamate a radical queer politics like a magnet. Queering the child, then, describes an accrual of a coalitional radical politics, where Conrad’s rejection of the labels “gay” and “lesbian” for the exclamatory, all-caps QUEER unequivocally positions queerness as a becoming-revolutionary. Conrad thus establishes a precise and tight stricture through which the child is allowed to be a queer political agent, marshalling—drafting the child—towards what Cathy J. Cohen (1997) calls a “genuine transformational politics” (444). In this ritual, “queerness” definitively flickers between a purely political orientation, a speech act, a curse, and a sexual identity. At the very least, Conrad believes queerness to be, almost, like a performative ontological political condition that an individual can commit to in order to engage in an ethics of queer worldbuilding.⁸

I want to pause here and emphasize the site of Conrad’s intervention, the specificity of children as opposed to adults or anyone else walking by on the street. If Conrad’s ritual positions queerness as a political condition, why are just the children blessed with queerness, rather than their parents as well? There is something distinct about the Child as embodying the immanent potential for a future politics. In this way, Conrad seems to deftly acknowledge and embrace

reproductive futurity's equivocation of Child with Future. Rather than rejecting wholesale what Edelman (2004) calls "the figure of the Child" or "the image of the Child," which "prescribes what will *count* as political discourse," Conrad makes this figure the target for a queer subversion of political discourse. If Edelman argues that "we are no more able to conceive of a politics without a fantasy of the future than we are able to conceive of a future without the figure of the Child," Conrad demands their reader (and the literal passerby in Asheville) to consider how we might make the fantasy of the future queer by queering the future's very ideological ambassadors.

What is most striking about this (soma)tic ritual is how Conrad is able to apply and make literal the discursive power of queerness onto children. These literal children—the actual children walking by Conrad that day in Asheville—are imbued with time. They are chock-full of the future, especially in contradistinction to their parents or Conrad or other adults, literally and discursively. And although Conrad marks the future queer child as an impossibility—that is, the child who "will grow to be" queer will inevitably cease to be a child—their intervention is intentionally staged for children, as if only in childhood can one be successfully blessed queer. Even, as I discuss above, as the temporality of the Asheville children's queerness is ambivalent due to the subjunctive tense, Conrad leaves open the possibility of a child's queerness in the present tense. In this way, the temporality of Conrad's queering bubbles embodies the asynchronicities of Kathryn Bond Stockton (2009) concept of the queer child's "sideways growth." Stockton's spatialized temporal remappings—sideways embodies temporalities such as delay, recursion, asynchronisities—are especially relevant for thinking through Conrad's staging of the queer child somewhere between the present and the future. What marks "the ghostly gay child"—one of Stockton's most compelling figures for the queer child—is that its "identity is a deferral (some time powerfully and happily so) and an act of growing sideways, by virtue of its *future retroaction* as a child" (11). Thus the extreme presentness (the extreme present-tense-ness) of the Asheville children—the physical weight of their little bodies standing before Conrad—muddles normative equivalencies of child with future, while also muddling a too-easy celebration of the present-tense queer child as an identarian certainty.

The performative space of the (soma)tic ritual, in part, never lets the queered child slip wholly into a discursive space whereby they come to embody an Edelmanian reproductive futurism. I find it significant that the queering of the child occurs only within the space of the

(soma)tic ritual, rather than the space of a poem. As I will soon show, Conrad's poetic children occupy less ambivalent ground than the flesh and blood Asheville children and, as discursive entities, are more clearly harbingers of a violent biopolitical order that limns the intersections between (white and American) reproductive futurism and imperial violence. There is (almost) a tenderness Conrad grants to these literal Asheville children, as if they are offering them an exit ticket from their inevitable discursive fate to always already occupy "the shrine of the child." Conrad seems to extend a political life-line to these children, a life otherwise than the neoliberal wet dream of the upper-middle class suburban heteropatriarchal fantasy of reproductive futurity and the forever cascading family-tree. Conrad literally offers these children a future, not as a child or an adult, but as "revolutionary Queer." Following Stockton, the bestowal of this future through queering—through the bubble's queer touch—allows the possibility of sideways growth for these children, a growth into something other than the future. But, what the child *must* grow into—whether sideways or straight—is clear. In this way, Conrad's tenderness towards these children only extends as far as they can politically throw them, that is, as long as the children's political utility to the queer revolution remains secure.

In many ways, Conrad's desire to transform these children into foot soldiers for queer revolution against broad systems of power and domination echoes Donna Haraway's injunction to make kin not babies. As Haraway (2016) writes, "kin making is making persons, not necessarily as individuals or as humans" (103). In other words, Conrad does not wish to populate the future with children, but with revolutionary queer persons. The plural is significant here, as Haraway refers to planetary-scale systems of relationality; because of the masses need for Conrad's queer revolution, Conrad's queer children are not queered into individual personhood, but into a political wave. This is the only way Conrad allows these children a present tense queerness, by granting them a future as queer persons whose sole task will be to guarantee a liberatory future. Conrad intervenes into the humanness of normative growth and therefore places these children into a queer temporality, which in the words of Jack Halberstam is "the perverse turn away from the narrative coherence of adolescence—early adulthood—marriage—reproduction—child rearing—retirement—death" (Dinshaw et al. 2007, 182). Yet Conrad does not allow these children just any "future"; the way these children are allowed a future is highly circumscribed and contingent. Their future—and their queer "persons"-hood—depends on their conscription in the queer revolutionary. In this sense, Conrad seems to ironize liberal-humanist

notions of individual subjectivity and the natalist notions of neoliberal human capital—the narrative coherence of a child’s personal growth into an individual and productive citizen. Even in queer terms, Conrad is not transforming these children into variegated and nuanced queer subjects; rather Conrad leans into the “crypto-universal” queer figure-head Muñoz (2009) critiques, a “queer subject who is abstracted from the sensuous intersectionalities that mark our experience” (95-6).

Conrad’s queer environmental critique, as instantiated in their rituals and poetry, enables a total retheorizing of contemporary subjectivity, embodied experience, and political action. In this way, Conrad’s work elucidates the theoretical orientation that Diana Coole and Samantha Frost (2010) call “new materialisms,” a stance that requires a “truly radical” reprisal of materialism and “entails sensitivity to contemporary shifts in the bio- and eco-spheres, as well as to changes in global economic structures and technologies. It also demands detailed analyses of our daily interactions with material objects and the natural environment” (3-4). Moreover, Conrad’s (soma)tics enables what Annie McClanahan (2019) calls a rethinking of the neoliberal subject, which demands a movement away from the abstractions of a human capital managerial class and of soft power towards an analysis of the material conditions of the present, especially an acknowledgment of how much of the world’s people are actually “a surplus population that capital seeks to contain, not to credit; to export, not exploit; to annihilate, not invest in” (122). In short, a Conradian rethinking of time-in-capital and materiality—a retooling of consciousness so that it “might mean being intimately, immediately aware of the moment’s specific texture and possibility, of its power and capacity but also of its sites of fragility and fracture”—cracks open the possibility to enact that neoliberal “fantasy’s historical end” (McClanahan 2019, 127).

Moreover, at the end of the (soma)tic ritual, Conrad turns to love. Mimicking a rhetoric of salacious exposure (i.e. pulling aside a veil), Conrad writes:

The fear of queer will not dissolve with sorry, the apology is not acceptable, especially if their children grow up to be queer. Asheville purports to be a liberal, laid-back city, but Queer Bubbles pulled the veil aside for a closer look. One man said, ‘Jesus loves you,’ I said, ‘I don’t think so.’ His face screwed up and he yelled, ‘YES HE DOES!’ Jesus loves the queers, isn’t that nice? And his angry messenger roams the street to tell us so. WE MUST INSIST that a redistribution of wealth always include The Love. How can we be there for one another? How can we be assured that everyone gets The Love? Notes from the ritual became a poem. (2017, 36-7)

In a playful ironizing of both economic metaphor and Christian rhetoric, it is unclear whether “The Love” here is a positive social force or is an antithesis to transformative force of the queering bubbles. Are queer bubbles an agent of The Love? Or might The Love stand in for the hypocrisy of allegedly progressive neoliberals who respond to the challenge of their child’s potential queerness with the empty stock answer: that’s cool, I’ll love my children no matter what. The capitalization of The Love seems to imply a kind of rhetorical farce or even a branded, commodified object. Furthermore, the grammatical curttness of this phrase leaves us wondering what or who is loving: The Love of what? The Love of Jesus or The Loves of queers? Might The Love be the veil preventing the political transformation envisioned by Conrad’s army of future revolutionary Queers ridding the world of all forms of “of homophobia, misogyny, racism”?

Conrad embraces love, as opposed to the commodified “The Love,” as an alternative to an Edelmanian empty reproductive futurism. In a (soma)tic ritual entitled “Bee Alliance” that occurs later on in this same collection, Conrad writes: “Love is not hope because hope is about the future. Love is about the present and being firm inside that space, waking us to the bodies we are living in, not the bodies we had, not the bodies we wish we had. I am 50 goddamned years old, and it is just fine with me that it took me this long to understand love as a condition of the present or not at all” (74-5). Again, Conrad’s staunch commitment to the present as the preeminent temporal modality of (soma)tics and of love reveals an alternative means of temporalizing queer kin-making and of a queer revolutionary politics. If hope is synonymous with the future, the future is a temporal mode where action is continual deferred (i.e. you hope for something that has yet to come). Love, then, as a condition of the present and the present only, is a form of immanent action. Within the broader context of this Bee Alliance ritual, love’s present-tense condition is unequivocally of queer beyond-human kin-making and therefore constitutes a methodology of queer environmental praxis.

In short, if Conrad’s queering can be read as an expression of love for Asheville’s children, this love can only be understood as divorcing the child from the future. In a direct affective contradiction with queer utopic thought—what Amin identifies as one of the main contemporary “aspirations” of queer studies (i.e. to “open the way to *world making*”) and what is best exemplified by Muñoz’s (2009) thesis that “hope is the emotional modality that allows us access to futurity, *par excellence*” (98)—Conrad locates queer beyond-human relationality in the present, dismissing the future as the horizon of queer world-building. Elsewhere in the collection

Conrad expresses a kind of frustration or anger towards (or on behalf of) the child; a poem, entitled “Jupiter.3,” reads:

can I babysit
teach them
basic disobedience
to be deaf to factory bells
there’s an annoying poet
who says she killed poetry
just ask her at each poetry reading
“Is this another memorial service for you”
if poetry is dead call me a necrophiliac
I don’t want children to inherit the earth
I want them to snatch it from heedless
adults before it’s milked
all wish lists at
once is
heavenly (2017, 107)

Here children are not a kind of genetic and monetary return on a parental investment—patiently waiting their turn for an earthly inheritance—but gregarious and anarchic agents who will not abide by the chrononormative order of late capital. Instead, inheritance is juxtaposed with a radical re-possession. Children thus should not inherit the earth in the future but take it in the present, and, as Conrad makes clear through the metaphor of the milked earth, the children’s present imperative to “snatch” the earth is an act of environmental protection.

Most significantly, “Jupiter.3” positions poetry as a catalyzing force for these radical children who, similar to the revolutionary Queer of Asheville, will resist capitalistic time (i.e. “be deaf to factory bells”) in order to ostensibly save the planet from the adults who are destroying it. The final three lines—“all wish lists at / once is / heavenly”—echo the multi-systemic and coalitional urge of Conrad’s revolutionary Queer children to rid the world of homophobia, misogyny, and racism. Ultimately, perhaps love for the child is removing the child from the future *and*, returning to Haraway’s formulation of “persons,” from the “human” altogether. This distinction between child as revolutionary actor—revolutionary queer or revolutionary disobedient—and child as a (future) coherent liberal subject is a deft inversion of the Foucaultian model of biopolitical management (including reproductive management) *in and through* populations. In Conrad’s formulation, it is a mass of queer persons—a queer population—that

emerges to destroy biopolitical control, including its imbrication with capital-driven eco-destruction. “Children,” then, in Conrad’s queer environmental imagination, are an untapped resource for future queer and environmental liberation. In short, Conrad’s speaker begs the question: is the revolutionary queer “child”—a creature cleaved from its normative temporal and ideologically milieu of capital accumulation, futurity, and eternally deferred hope—even a child at all? Conrad figures a de-childing of the child, where the outcome is no child at all (not even a “queer child”).

Write War on Your Newborn’s Face

What makes Conrad a unique thinker regarding queer theoretical questions of reproduction and futurity is their ability to harness—to subvert—the child into a conceptual sandbox for a queer and environmental imaginary. Significantly, Conrad also stages a distinction between child/children *and* baby, a distinction between the queer infiltration of already living children and the future (or present-tense) creation of new future children in the form of newborn or young babies. This distinction comes into focus in two untitled poems produced by the (soma)tic ritual “Power Sissy Intervention #2.” In these two poems, which are placed on facing pages and which dialogue conceptually, Conrad more clearly tackles reproduction and reproductive futurity. The first poem, “[the tongue gives],” centers around the figure of the clone, where “your clone” stands in for a baby or for progeny more generally. In this poem, Conrad puts tension on the teleological temporality of reproduction by imagining what it might mean to *put* “what fell / from the body back in.” On the following page, Conrad examines the uneven toll of reproductive futurity, where every wealthy (and presumably white) newborn obscures a shadow baby of the Global South, and especially the Middle East, where American imperialism and American disaster capitalism has resulted in decades of human death and of environmental destruction.

The “[the tongue gives]” functions through a chain of comparisons and associations. We start with the embodied experience of reciting a poem, where the tongue—as opposed to “the mind” which is debilitated or seized “thunderstruck”—becomes the vehicle for poetic enunciation. The speaker, in recounting this bodily poetic experience (again, an example of Conrad’s belief in poetry’s ability to create an embodied extreme present) compares it to playing with “your clone.” The poem reads:

the tongue gives
 the mind a chance to get
 thunderstruck reading a
 poem aloud you know how it is
 the first time your clone catches your
 ball we sit at dinner
 differently for a
 night or two
 the way your
 hands learn to
 fit around a
 crystal they just met
 the way family holds
 their newest member
 hug your clone darling
 show them you care
 you have to show
 for them to know
 tenderly putting what fell
 from the body back in (2017, 50)

In a kind of “baby’s first,” the ostensible “parents” of the clone are changed, or jarred, by the clone’s successful participation in a game of catch. In that moment of catching, the clone suddenly has the agency to return the tosser’s ball. Yet because the clone is, technically, yourself, the simple game of catch becomes a strange game of fort-da, a literal staging of playing with oneself. The latter half of this brief poem further situates the clone as a “baby” (or at least a kind of surrogate for a baby). The sardonic lines—“the way family holds / their newest member / hug your clone darling / show them you care / you have to show / for them to know”—with their rhyming couplet mimes a child-rearing truism straight out of a parental guide book. Furthermore, the initiatory temporalities of “the first time” and “their newest member” additionally mark the entrance of the clone as an event, yet an event to be monitored: every “first” to be noted and subsequently measured.

Notably, the parenting of the clone (i.e. hug them darling) and what we might call the clone’s first act of agential reciprocity (i.e. catching the ball) is mediated by the presence of a crystal. “The way your / hands learn to / fit around a / crystal they just met” is positioned seamlessly as a simile for both the clone’s ball catching and for “the way family holds / their newest member.” Although the quick pace of these lines—quickened by an absence of

punctuation as well as a tendency towards brevity (e.g. “skinny” lines) and monosyllables—is typical of Conrad’s poems, in this instance, what is particularly formally notable about “[the tongue gives]” is the lack of parataxis between the poem’s central images. In other words, Conrad draws a clear line between poetic enunciation, the clone’s interaction with its “parents,” crystal kinship, and the jarring final image of “tenderly putting what fell / from the body back in.” Conrad forces these images into a comparative chain, pushing a similaic logic to the limits. Within the logic of the poem, baby, clone, crystal, and poem all refract each other as forms of reproduction and kinship. Yet these terms are not equally interchangeable. For example, the baby (i.e. as distinguished from “clone”) is a structuring absence in the poem, but it does not hold the same agential force as the crystal (a vital object for Conrad’s poetic praxis and their (soma)tics). And even the clone, who holds the uncanny power of the self-same gaze and of the ontological mirror, seems to hold a secondary position in the poem, compared to the crystal’s position as central hinge.

The crystal, in particular, represents the kinds of beyond-human queer kinships antagonistic to biological heteronormative reproduction and to bio-kin. Moreover, I would argue that the clone, in contradistinction to the crystal, straddles the extreme limit of biological human reproduction. If the prototypical baby (the ideological capital-C Child) is normatively produced through a heterosexual couple and is normatively figured as a genetic extension of that couple into the future, then clone is the extreme outcome of human reproduction’s genetic obsession. The clone is the self completely extended into the future and therefore, paradoxically, breaks the sacrosanct heterosexual genetic bond of reproductive futurity as the clone can only be a copy of one individual, rather than the copy of the couple-as-unit (e.g. he has daddy’s nose and mommy’s eyes). Significantly, the clone deeply disturbs the chrononormative temporality of human reproduction and human futurity. The clone is, in a sense, a reproduction of the present and, if we think about the image of “birthing” a clone that Conrad’s poem invokes, the clone can even be figure as the reproduction of the past—a rebirth of an adult who was born years ago.⁹ Thus the tautological temporality of the clone queerly critiques the farce of heterosexual reproductive futurity *as capable of producing* a viable future. Human future collapses into itself in a closed loop of the present playing catch with itself. The clone thus produces the recursive temporal conditions that Edelman (2004) ascribes to “futurism”: “generat[ing] generational

succession, temporality, and narrative sequence, not toward the end of enabling change, but, instead, of perpetuating sameness, of turning back time to assure repetition” (60).¹⁰

This temporal loop is underscored by the final lines as the ultimate act of care for the clone is to *tenderly* put it back into the body. The clone must be re-assimilated with its original body, becoming one with itself. These striking last lines hinge on the action of falling—“putting what fell / from the body back in”—as if the clone were accidentally brought into being, a kind of detachable appendage that might haphazardly come loose. If, as I have been arguing, the clone figuratively stands-in for the baby—the specter that haunts the poem—then these final lines make a clear argument for an imaginative reversal of human reproduction. The ultimate form of care for the baby, then, is its developmental rewind back into inexistence. The poem therefore forecloses the possibility of the clone’s future and, because this foreclosure is framed as an act of care, we might read this foreclosure as a form of imaginative ethics—one that imagines both a present and a future decoupled from biological reproduction. The poem’s ethical imperative to put what fell from the body back *in* emphasizes the interior space of the human body, inversely mirroring the poem’s opening image of poetic embodiment, of feeling poetry come out of the mouth. The poem’s orifice-bookends—coming out the mouth and (presumably) falling down and out of the genitals—strikingly frames poetic production as an oppositional movement to Conrad’s nonreproductive imperative. In other words, the spilling out of poetry is the externally-oriented vector that encourages, or enables, the internally-oriented movement of the final lines and of what I am calling the poem’s ethical imperative, which (albeit figured in embodied terms) might also be read as a temporal imperative to close the loop that enables the present to extend into the future.

The final phrase *back in* returns us to the body: the site and the ground of Conrad’s (soma)tics and therefore to the corporeality of Conrad’s extreme presentness. Here the only clone Conrad’s imaginary allows is the poem, figured as an extension and imprint of the poet’s (and even the reader’s) body. The poem, generated within the body (and frequently figured by Conrad as generated by interactions with vibrant matter and by the absorption of foods) is a form of kin-making, a production of worlds. Thus it is the poem itself, not the clone or baby, that emerges as the privileged object and outcome of reproduction. The seamless and quick movement between the embodied experience of poetic enunciation and playing with your clone— “thunderstruck reading a/poem aloud you know how it is/the first time your clone catches your/ball”—

proximate and equates both experiences and their ability to profoundly change the poet-speaker (i.e. thunderstruck and sitting differently for a night or two). The clone, then, and its game of catch might be a metaphor for poetic (re)production and authorial play. The poem-cum-clone, like a literary golem, throws back to the poet—a movement we might even read as a metaphorical speaking back to the author—and sits as apart and independent from the poet as two people across from the table. Conrad thus complicates traditional models of poem-as-offspring and disrupts the temporally hierarchical relationship between poem and reader; unlike Culler’s lyric model of poetic iterability, where the poem sits waiting for a future reader to give it life, Conrad’s poem figures a more dynamic agential and temporal relationship between poem and poet, and poem and reader. The poem that throws back offers a sustainable model of reproduction, where a lifeforce produced in and birthed from the body cycles back towards and into the producer’s body. This temporally recursive movement gives ironic weight to the poem’s final lines—akin to the ironic disjuncture between the queer children who will grow up to destroy the structures that necessitated their existence and the child-bearing children that straight parents hope for—as the speaker, whose only real baby is a poetic baby, addresses and instructs the parents of bio-babies. Conrad’s poet-speaker says: parents, do what I do and take your poem-clone and tenderly reincorporate it into your body, so you can then produce more and more poems.

The irony here, of course, is the non-possibility of the bio-baby’s re-assimilation and recyclability; as opposed to the poem-clone, the baby-clone is inept and impotent, incapable of creating the richness of response-able multi-kinded/multi-species kinships. In a recent interview, Conrad (2019a) expresses a similar temporally queer reproductive imaginary for poet-poem collaboration, explaining to the interviewer that they “have been thinking a lot about hypogea in ancient Greece. Hypogeum was circular burial chambers, and pregnant women would visit the remains of their dead ancestors to invite them to inhabit the bodies of their unborn babies...it is exciting thinking of such an experience coursing through my electrical circuitry and nervous system, my blood pumping into the heart of my unborn child and ancestor simultaneously.” Conrad continues, explaining a dream they had where they encountered everyone they ever knew who died of AIDS, alive and laughing and happy: “If I could get pregnant, I would want to be in a hypogeum with these friends and lovers and invite them to revisit the physicality of Earth

through the life of my baby. Without hesitation, I would do it and write poems with my baby, a true collaboration.”

This temporal thick space of the hypogeum recalls Conrad’s invocation in “Poetry & Ritual” of the “place where poetry is / capable of taking us, a real / place where all of time is / suddenly present.” But even more so, the hypogeum creates a ritual and poetic space in which reproduction—here figured as human gestation—becomes the central conduit for making all of time suddenly present. In the hypogeum, the baby is figured as a fetal re-embodiment, or a parturient reincarnation, of Conrad’s dead loved ones into Conrad’s own body. Thus the poet’s body becomes, not just a means of gestating poetry (as figured in “[the tongue gives]”), but also a means to material communication and to poetically collaborate with the dead. Here, again, Conrad imagines a process of queer (and transgendered/genderqueer) reproduction and uses the figure of a queer baby to imagine redress from queer violence, queer temporalities, queer kinships, and queer(ing) poetic production. Like the poem-clone in “[the tongue gives],” it is the queer baby that is capable of producing queer worlds and queer poetry, as well as being capable of materially accessing beyond-human and natural forces (e.g. “the physicality of the Earth”). On the other hand, the alternative to biological reproduction (in the form, for example, of poetry-inducing crystal kin-making) is precisely ethical *not just because* it is opposed to biopolitical mechanisms of reproductive management, but because it enables survival. To return to Conrad’s poetics statement in their essay “Poetry & Ritual,” our very survival (as queers and humans) and the very survival of the planet depends on poetry.

The significance of survival to Conrad’s anti-reproductive ethics comes into focus in the facing poem, where catastrophe looms in the absence of a revolution. The poem reads:

let us write the news on your newborn’s face
war on left cheek famine on right
mothers
fathers is it the
revolution you
are raising?
on
deep
breaths
in the breakable city
I want my hunger with
me after life

we are all
creatures of appetite
astronauts are hungry
after leaving the planet
to the child in the painting I said
*I'm sorry to inform you but you
are going to have to fight
there is no awakening on
the horizon only the
war to survive* (2017, 51)

This poem begins with a chilling imperative to brand the newborn child with the twin conditions of war and of famine, conditions which could be read either as a present-tense description of current global conditions or as harbingers of the future. Notably, the conditions of war and famine, as both a present or future reality, are conditions undeniably exacerbated, and often even caused, by climate change and by the disaster capitalism of (decades) of US policy. Thus for Conrad's speaker, the newborn's plump cheeks become the literal discursive reflection, a kind of symbolic canvas, for the crimes against humanity wrought by imperialism. Again echoing the Queer Bubbles rituals, the question immediately following these opening lines—"mothers / fathers is it the / revolution you / are raising?"—demands an accounting for the newborn's coming into being. This question mark baits the parents; the speaker implies that, of course, mother and father never thought of raising their child to be the revolution yet, for the speaker, the newborn's future possibility as "the revolution" is unequivocally the only acceptable outcome to the words inscribed on its own cheeks. Thus the newborn's body becomes a text but, unlike the previous figure of the (queer) baby as poetic collaborator, this newborn body harbingers violence rather than healing. In addition, the speaker's demand to the parents—is it the revolution you are raising?—further recalls Conrad's distinction between an unruly queer mass of children and the singular child.

Therefore, this poem, in much less ambiguous terms, seems to target bio-normative reproduction—e.g. the birth of a "newborn" to a "mother" and a "father"—as a nefarious agent of war and famine. If we follow the logic of the queered Asheville children, it is the becoming-revolution of the newborn—the immanent potential that the newborn, in the future, might fight against war and famine—that is the only possible queer outcome (and here I use "queer" in Conrad's sense of queerness as a political praxis that rids the world of war and famine) for the

newborn in the future. Within the space of these two poems, the child's ability to enact a *better* future than the present—to bring about a utopic future through political revolution—is what distinguishes the newborn-as-clone from the newborn-as-person. In other words, reproduction is a failed project if its outcome does not ensure the future's liberatory (queer) promise. On the other hand, it is necessary to underscore here the speaker's deep ambivalence about the future, especially the child's ability to be the queer-eco-warrior "the planet" needs. Through the intense emphasis on the newborn's corporeality (i.e. physically *writing* its skin) the speaker demands a kind of ethical tax to offset the weight of the newborn's birth and its continued fleshy existence.

The fleshy reality of the newborn is further underscored by its juxtaposition with the symbolic child "in the painting," who ironically is the child the speaker addresses and entreats: "to the child in the painting I said / *I'm sorry to inform you but you / are going to have to fight / there is no awakening on / the horizon only the / war to survive.*" The juxtaposition between a fleshed newborn baby and the symbolic painted child—the latter of which is granted advice or a warning and the former of which is linguistically coated with destruction—further parallels the distinction between kin and persons and further implies the speaker's weariness towards flesh and bone children versus discursive children. In other words, the corporeality of the newborn does not catalyze the speaker into action or hope; for the speaker, the fleshy newborn can only signify war and famine, can only exist as a bleak future. The precarity the speaker experiences in the middle of the poem ("on / deep / breaths / in the breakable city") is evoked as hunger, a condition the speaker desires "after life." Hunger echoes the impending famine of the opening lines (e.g. a certainty for a lethal earthly future) while also encompassing a beyond-earthly techno-fantastic future, as "astronauts are hungry / after leaving the planet." The emphasis on hunger as a condition of afterness—"after" the speaker's life and "after" the astronauts have left—places hunger as a temporal condition in *lieu* of a concept such as "the future," which, Conrad reminds us elsewhere, can only be structured by "hope."

Hunger, then, is an alternative to the equation of *newborn=future=hope*, whereby hope obscures the present ecological and political certainty that *future=war + famine* for the majority of (present and) future people. Hunger again brings us back to the body and to the material-spiritual condition of a body in need of sustenance as well as a body desiring—striving—for the present to be otherwise. Hunger, in short, is the body attuned to the "war to survive." The speaker's dialogue to the painting-child—"I'm sorry to inform you but you / are going to have to

fight / there is no awakening on / the horizon only the / war to survive”—seems to dispel any lingering ambivalence that futurity can hold redemptive potential. There is no awakening to a utopic horizontal future-elsewhere or future-otherwise, there is only the extreme present conditions of hunger and of a war for survival. The speaker tells the child to ostensibly fight *for* “the planet,” as opposed to the astronauts who leave the planet in hope of a future that might quell their burning hunger. Again, there is a deep irony in the speaker’s bathetic turn away from the newborn and towards a painted child. We might read this as an affective turn towards a kind of queer and ecological pessimism, where (à la Edelman) the future has become so synonymous with heteropatriarchal futurity that *only* a turn away from the future offers the political possibility of change *now*. The poem’s syntax further places *leaving* as an ambiguous action undertaken by either the astronauts or the speaker (e.g. “after leaving the planet / to the child in the painting I said”). In the latter scenario, it is the speaker, who after leaving the planet, enlists the painting child into the war to survive. In short, the ambiguity of sequence in “after leaving” places further tension on normative notions of inheritance, where only through oblique or fugitive means (e.g. abandonment or flight) can survival be secured.

Here I would like to recall how, in the Thom Donovan interview, Conrad (2012) cites the 2003 invasion of Iraq as an impetus for the development of (soma)tic rituals. And elsewhere, the Afghan child stands, for Conrad, as a kind of preeminent symbol of American imperialism and of American bio-necro governance. In this poem, the act of inscribing the newborn’s face, transforming it to literally signify “war” and “famine,” forecloses the possibility that the newborn in the name of an imperial US state can ever signify otherwise (like as “the revolution”). In the same interview, when asked to explain what is at stake in their (soma)tics, Conrad (2012) elaborates the contemporary political stakes of (soma)tics amid the global war on terror: “In 1835, Alexis de Tocqueville wrote, ‘The greatness of America lies not in being more enlightened than any other nation, but rather in her ability to repair her faults.’ In 2011 I’m not so sure we’re capable any longer. I’m completely discouraged. How will we ever be able to apologize to the mothers of Afghanistan? Last year three children died of war-related injuries every single day in their country” (164-5).

Over and over, Conrad uses the Afghan child as an affective counterpoint to the newborn’s face, thereby instantiating their critique of American state-sanctioned violence in the figure of a young child. Significantly, Conrad’s collection *Ecodeviance: (Soma)tics for the*

Future Wilderness ends with a striking poem, entitled “Oblivious Imperialism Is the Worst Kind,” that subverts a late capitalism’s banal obsession with fashion as both (highly gendered) self-expression and privileged labor by declaring “everyone around / the world knows / america’s real / fashion statement / is bullet holes.” With rapid-fire enjambment, the poem continues:

every single
day we
spray the
arab world
with bullets
sometimes in
the faces of
babies we
don’t have
special
little
bullets
for the
baby
faces they
have to take
our adult-sized
bullets right in
the middle of
their little
crying baby
faces BLAM take
THAT BABY it’s
american
fashion (2014, 138)

Conrad thus figures a kind of mathematical global tally of making babies and not kin. The newborn’s face becomes an affective and material gathering place for what sociologists call “stratified reproduction” (Ginsburg and Reiter 1995), a broad analytic that described the uneven global distribution of resources and care for reproduction and which today encompasses work on the imbrication of transnational biocapital chains, reproductive technologies, and the state-sanctioned genocidal consequences of selective pronatalism (Smietana et al. 2018; see also Briggs 2017 and Lewis 2019). In unequivocal terms, the coming into being of every American

newborn means the erasure and death of innumerable, for example, Afghan babies. In a kind of anti-imperial addendum to Edelman's (2004) famous phrase the "fascism of the baby's face" (75), Conrad lays bare the toll of human reproduction and of reproductive futurity in America and the global north more broadly, staging what Michelle Murphy (2017) calls the economization of life.¹¹

Moreover, Conrad's particular emphasis in "Oblivious Imperialism Is the Worst Kind" on the newborn's *face* resonates with both contemporary queer and environmental scholarship on the child. For example, Rebekah Sheldon's (2016) ecocritical analysis of the child begins with the child face, arguing that the child's face is such a dense affective site that it "remains pivotal to the affective adhesiveness of biopolitics in the twenty-first century" (12). Furthermore, Kathryn Bond Stockton (2016) revises her own theory of the queer child in order to account for the increasingly racialized global effects of America turning its part-imperialist, part-NGO'ed gaze towards what we might call the "third-world" child. In particular, the modality of this "kid Orientalism" is the face, which turns the mediatized face of the-child-in-crisis into a frozen, empty image. Wary that the face necessarily catalyzes ethics, Stockton calls for a "queerer" ethics of the face that attunes to how desire structures an ethics of the other, especially when the other is a racialized Other (i.e. when a colonialist residue clings to that other). Conrad's newborn, tattooed with the words "war" and "famine," might be an exact figure for Stockton's queer ethics of the face, where (following Lacan) desire and seduction are always routed first through language.

But if we are not seduced by a Lacanian latency, or if we simply move outside of a poststructuralist/psychoanalytic linguistic framework of desire, Conrad's newborn does not signify but corporeally embodies. The newborn is not a signifier for war and famine—a complex temporal metaphor for (delayed) growth, precarious life, and future death—rather the newborn *is* war and famine. The newborn does not signify a futural process of delayed accumulation—that is, the newborn as a harbinger for a bleak future to come—the newborn is future catastrophe now. It is difficult to read the speaker's call-to-arms to the painting-child, that "there is no awakening on the horizon," without feeling the speaker's rejection of the newborn. The turn away from the newborn—which is staged in the poem as a long look at the newborn—positions (soma)tic praxis at the form of redress for not-so-future destruction. (Soma)tics is thus a staving

off of death, a war to survive that can only ever unfold now in the present, because as Conrad's newborn demonstrates: the war is here.

Ecodeviance

As "Queer Bubbles" and the above poems demonstrate, the child-as-war stands in contradistinction to the-child-as revolution (or "rebellion"). Even as the newborn child is a harbinger of death, overall Conrad's (soma)tics and poems presents a relationship to the child that embodies Sedgwick's (1993) definition of the queer avunculate, a queer form of kinship relationship (and even, to use a well-loved phrase of Sedgwick's, "queer tutelage") that deconstructs the hegemony of the biological family and clears space for children to develop queerness. Recalling Conrad's anti-futural definition of love, Conrad's speaker *loves* children out of straight time and out of the future, rescuing them into a queer relationship to time: a relationship epitomized by Conrad's extreme present. Moreover, as we have seen, Conrad's queer avunculate role also fosters an ecological consciousness, in "Jupiter.3" for example, urging children to *snatch* the earth before heedless adults succeed in completely milking it. The opening thrust of "Jupiter.3," where Conrad's speaker facetiously asks the "adults"/the reader "can I babysit / teach them / basic disobedience," recalls another poem from *Ecodeviance*. The poem, entitled "Act Like Polka Dot on Minnie Mouse's Skirt" reads:

I am not a
family-friendly
faggot I tell
your children
about war
about their tedious future careers
all the taxes bankrolling a
racist tyrannical military
i'm the faggot at
dinner asking to
be alone
with the
children
tell them their
future happiness
depends entirely
on how well they
cultivate rebellion against

any structure that
 does not hold their
 autonomy and
 creative intelligence as a priority
 CHILDREN your bliss is at stake
 CHILDREN listen carefully for the
 lies your parents tell you
 CHILDREN prepare for joys in ways
 none of them will ever imagine
 prepare to live with no regrets (2014, 126)

In a perfect portrait of the queer avunculate—the faggot invited to dinner who warns the kids about the heteropatriarchy and the military-industrial complex—Conrad’s speaker triangulates the relationship between bio-families and oppression, between creativity and survival, between queer labor and the possibility of a future (and of future happiness and future joy). This labor is queer in its emphasis on kinship over family and in its alignment with the foundational queer theoretical definition of queerness a broad critique of multiple social antagonisms. Furthermore, the injunctive repetition of “prepare” (heightened, too, by the present-tense “listen carefully” and by the repeated all-caps rallying cry “CHILDREN”) underscores that only through the present attention and present work can the CHILDREN enact a future. In short, there is the future that queer children can create and the future that parents phantasmagorically imagine, and the gulf between these futures is nothing less than bliss.

I turn to this poem, not just because it so succinctly articulates the queer care Conrad’s speaker extends to the subjunctively queer children of the future revolution, but because the (soma)tic context which produced this poem invokes one last concept—abortion—key to understanding Conrad’s concept of ecodeviance, a concept that beautifully encapsulates the aims of a queer eco-poetics. “Act Like Polka Dot on Minnie Mouse’s Skirt” is one of a series of nine poems produced by the (soma)tic ritual “Radar Reveries,” which involves Conrad sitting in a bathtub and “meditat[ing] on arguments from the archive of my unforgiving brain.” Conrad describes a childhood memory of hearing an argument between their sister and their mother, in which their mother yelled at their sister “I SHOULD HAVE ABORTED YOU!” and their sister retorted: “GRANDMOM SHOULD HAVE ABORTED YOU AND WE WOULD ALL BE FREE FROM THIS GODDAMNED MESS!” Conrad recalls how their mother burst into tears, and Conrad and their sister embraced in celebration at having won the argument: “The

MOMENT we embraced THE RELIEF of our grandmom’s imaginary abortion WASHED OVER US BOTH! We laughed from so much pain and nonsense for a rolling tide. The brain holds all of our disasters in little, decrepit files marked and mismarked and repeating their vomitus sick, and sometimes a little too quiet from too much damage. These notes became nine poems, my homage to my mother who was not aborted, and to her children who were also not aborted” (118).

In this scene, the imaginary space created by the abortion of their mother and thus the un-birth of both Conrad and their sister is a space of intense reprieve from familial trauma. In other words, the immanent possibility of a past-tense abortion—that one’s ancestors could have always already been aborted—creates an ebullient present-tense space of freedom and healing. Conrad’s emphasis here on homage, an homage to a non-abortion, positions the act of abortion as an act of care. Conrad’s homage is adamantly not in homage to a pro-life ideology that celebrates every instance of an abortion’s foreclosure; rather, Conrad writes in homage to the imaginative possibility of abortion, an imaginary that inversely mirrors the productive creative potential of the hypogeum’s ritualistic space. The fact of Conrad’s life (due to their mother’s and grandmother’s non-abortion) ensures abortion as an imaginative possibility, particularly one that allows imaginative possibilities free from teleological temporal constraints; Conrad writes in homage of their ability to dwell and creative in the space of the abortion that could have been. This imaginative space of all future and all past abortions recalls the ending of “[the tongue gives],” where “tenderly putting what fell / from the body back in” might be read as an act of abortive care between child and parent. As Conrad makes clear in “Radar Reveries,” imagining their grandmother’s act of “tenderly putting what fell / from the body back in” frees Conrad and their sister: a freedom from the oppression of time, death, trauma, and violence.

Abortion’s possibility as an act of love for future children is further echoed in *Ecodeviance*’s titular poem, where abortion and (non)reproduction become the conceptual nexus through which “ecodeviance” is articulated and also become the site for an exploration of queer literary lineage and production. Broadly speaking, this collection’s full title—*Ecodeviance: (Soma)tics for the Future Wilderness*—is significant for its invocation of futurity, and for its assertion of (soma)tics in service of—*for the*—future. To recall my earlier discussion of wilderness and wildness, a compound concept such as “future wilderness” is decidedly oxymoronic in Conrad’s environmental imaginary. “Wilderness” is simultaneously haunted by

temporal connotations—especially colonial temporal grammars of pastness and timelessness—while retaining an insistent materiality and spatiality; the wilderness is a place, one usually imagined elsewhere. In short, I read Conrad’s title less as a Muñoz-esque argument for a utopic space of futurity (the “then and there”) and more as a promise that the material praxis of extreme presentness—of (soma)tics—will bring about a state of wildness into a future present. It is not as if Conrad disavows a tomorrow; rather, Conrad maintains that only through a continuous attention to the present can change be enacted. The future is not the location of politics, nor a queer horizon to reach towards, a threshold to transcend, or a better place to enter *into*. For Conrad, what is salient is the ever-unfolding *now*, a now that endures and extends rather than future-leans.

One particular praxis of this *nowness* is ecodeviance, which I read as an environmental enhancement of Conrad’s definition of deviance as the radical and ecstatic potential of queer relationality and of queer desire in resisting governance.¹² “Ecodeviance,” a poem resulting from a (soma)tic ritual that acknowledges the silence created by mass species extinction, begins in the epistolary mode. The full poem reads:

dear glen of
goldenrod
I would have
your abortion
not being devoted to the way
things appear
you want me to
be fearless but
I cannot relax in
your world I can
go home where
success collides with
all the bad
behavior that
fed me to the
chrysalis
you ask if
Shakespeare
was queer
I say the love of
his Juliet and his
Romeo was as

outlaw as it gets
 devoted to the way
 things are means the
 odds are bad
 sometimes white men
 with long hair nod to
 me downtown because
 I'm a white man with
 long hair
 you think
 having your
 abortion means
 I love you
 what can
 I say (2014, 14-5)

Albeit focalized through the (human) speaker, this poem is structured as a series of confession and answers to the goldenrod's absent questions. Notably, the speaker begins their address to "glen / of goldenrod" by declaring their desire to have the glen's abortion. This subjunctive expression of desire for another's abortion evokes a previous sexual encounter or a desire for a future sexual encounter. This is perhaps one meaning of "ecodeviance": an eco-sexual expression of sexual desire for plants or other natural objects that is queer, or deviant, in the sense of a trans-species or a trans-agential intimacy. This meaning ecodeviance is also queer in the sense that it imagines a non-reproductive form of sexual intimacy, one that never produces offspring. Or, taken less literally, the speaker's desire for the possibility of having a glen of goldenrod's abortion signals a wish for a physical closeness with plant beings, particularly a corporeal intimacy that embodies the logic of insemination. Furthermore, the tone of this poem feels intimately lyric, like a love letter. And, notably, the object of the speaker's affection is, not only non-human, but further playfully straddles the distinction between an individual (a goldenrod plant) and a collective (an entire glen of goldenrods). Here, again, Conrad plays with notions of scale and of synecdoche, of multiplicity, populations, and masses.

On the other hand, "Ecodeviance"'s opening epistolary address—"dear glen of / goldenrod"—also evokes a kind of old world title, or even a Homeric epithet, where an individual's name is associated with a place or with a certain quality. The archaic sounding nature of "Glen-of-Goldenrod" is perhaps heightened by the speaker's invocation of Shakespeare, which further structures this poem as a queer love lyric. Notably, it is glen who

demands an accounting of Shakespeare's queerness and, ironically, the speaker responds with a paradoxically un-queer example from Shakespeare's oeuvre: "you ask if / Shakespeare / was queer / I say the love of / his Juliet and his / Romeo was as / outlaw as it gets." The speaker's slippage between "queer" and "outlaw" places an ambivalent stress on the fact of Shakespeare's queerness. The speaker's answer, then, could be read in two appositional ways: Shakespeare is so *not* queer that Romeo and Juliet, one the most canonical heterosexual love stories in European literature, is the queerest thing about Shakespeare; or, Shakespeare *is as queer as* it gets, just look at how outlaw his love stories are. The latter reading is further supported by the following lines, which read in the context of Conrad's association of queerness with deviance, positions Shakespeare's work and his characters as antagonistic to the status quo.

In this poem, then, the speaker proposes a capacious and relational definition of the word "queer" (i.e. queer as a radical act of social protest instantiated through acts of love), a word that functions as a central hinge between their initial and concluding invocation of abortion. Queerness (albeit a paradoxical or fugitive queerness) seems to function for the speaker as a means to negotiate "the way / things are" and "the way / things appear." At the beginning of the poem, the speaker seems to offer up abortion as a gift. The stark left-hand justification of the line "not being devoted to the way," especially as it immediately follows the lines "I would have / your abortion," positions the speaker's possible abortion as a political act of protest, an act by an individual *not* devoted to the way things appear and an act demanded by that individual's lover: "you want me to / be fearless but." Yet this dangling "but" underscores the speaker's fear and hesitation, and even alienation *from* the addressee, where glen of goldenrod exists in a world apart or separate from the speaker, whose world is comparably bleak and full of threat: "I cannot / relax in your world I can / go home where / success collides with / all the bad / behavior that / fed me to the / tyranny of the / chrysalis." The threat and oppression the speaker feels in their own world is expressed in the metaphor of the tyranny of the chrysalis, a rather abstract image that juxtaposes a figure for insect reproduction and growth with a figure for absolute (human) sovereignty. The juxtaposition between these two states—a human epistemology of power and an insect ontology of life—dovetails with the juxtaposition between the glen's "world" and the speaker's "home," the latter of which exists as an interior space of retreat or ingress from the exteriority and the surround of the glen's environment. Yet "home" is not a place of sanctuary. The speaker's home feeds them to the tyranny of the chrysalis. Moreover, the chrysalis evokes a

sense of entrapment, particularly a temporal entrapment, as if the speaker were being forced into a birth or forced into biological and teleological growth.

In other words, the chrysalis's tyranny lies precisely in its foreclosure of abortion, and in its concomitant foreclosure of queer temporal gestures like recursion, asynchronicities, or communing with the dead. The chrysalis thus allegorizes a devotion to the way things appear and the way things are. This slippage between appearance and being inaugurates the speaker's comedic critique of race and gender norms: "devoted to the way / things are means the / odds are bad / sometimes white men / with long hair nod to / me downtown because / I'm a white man with / long hair." In this satirical image of white male legibility and (self)recognition, white maleness can only articulate itself through a narcissistic grammar of sameness and banal gestures. White maleness proliferates itself through celebrations of white maleness, ad nauseum. The *mise-en-abyme* of a white man with long hair nodding at a white man with long hair (an image that recalls the clone throwing back) epitomizes what Conrad is up to in their slippage from the way things appear and the way things are, which might best be encapsulated in an argument for epistemology over ontology and gender over sex (i.e. maleness a cultural "code" over maleness as an ontological fact). In other words, this scene reveals the superficiality of white masculinity at the moment of its cultural (re)production and proliferation.

In these final lines, it might be the white man with long hair, the passerby, who questions the speaker's assumptions and who challenges the initial premise of the entire poem, namely the fact of abortion as an act of love for a non-human entity: *you* (speaker) think having your own abortion means "I love you." The speaker responds confidently—what can / I say—where the absence of a question mark transforms this conversational non-sequitur into a declaration of certainty. What can I say: nothing. I do believe having your abortion means I love you. In these final lines, the speaker thus negates any recognition or complicity with the long-haired white man, and thus puts into question their own statement of identity, an identity that is structurally dependent on a banal and fleeting external recognition. In short, the final lines of the poem stage a scene of interpolation and reveal's the total incoherence of "ecodeviance" when routed through the hegemonic logics of white patriarchy. Abortion's Conradian meaning as an act of love becomes unintelligible when routed through anthropocentric and highly gendered logics. The poem's query, put most simply, is therefore: what might it mean to divorce the concept of abortion from narrowly gendered human bodies?

To conclude, key to “Ecodeviance” is the relationship between abortion and extinction, both terms united by a fraught and impossible logic of choice. If the former term is ideologically framed by a rhetoric of “choice” versus “life,” extinction seems to only ever signify an imposition of lethal violence. Can a species choose extinction? The speaker’s fear of the chrysalis’s entrapment signals their desire to have power over death. Temporally, the space of abortion might be read as the possible space of (non)existence before life. In other words, abortion limns and occupies the moment of vibrant possibility, where existence can unfold in any direction but where life is not yoked to the future. If abortion is love then abortion manifests the possibilities of living backwards or even living outside of time. Extinction, on the other hand, is a form of genocide, where agency and ecstatic experience (or, to recall “Radar Reveries,” even a body steeped in memory) is annihilated by an outside force. The speaker seeks to bridge the human and the beyond-human by offering up abortion as love and freedom, even offering abortion as a tool (one already highly volatile in contemporary human epistemology and culture) to fight back against human-driven ecological harm and mass species extinction. By offering, for example, a goldenrod the possibility of abortion, Conrad offers this plant a form of agential self-determination, and, especially, a form of resistance and flight from the lethal harm of others. Abortion thus constitutes a form of environmental praxis, one that is queer in their multi- and trans- gendered and species manifestations.

I conclude with ecodeviance as praxis against extinction because extinction concerns Conrad’s most current (soma)tic project, *Amanda Paradise: Resurrect Extinct Vibration* (2021), includes a series of rituals that involves Conrad traveling through each state, laying on the ground, and playing the sounds of extinct species. As Conrad (2019b) explains during a reading, they wanted to “push further” the healing potential of (soma)tic poetry—which helped them heal from the trauma of their boyfriend’s brutal and homophobic murder—to account for the fact that 60% of the world’s wildlife has been lost in their own lifetime and to account especially for the loss of sound and the “vibrational absence” this mass extinction causes: “I’m thinking of eco-poetics as not just focusing on degraded soil, air, and water but also on vibrational absence. When a species leaves the planet they take all of their sounds with them: heartbeat, footfall, breath, cries. Gone.” As Conrad furthers elaborates elsewhere, queerness and queer genders play a vital role in this ritual of ecological redress: “In the end it is a poem pointing a finger within the body living inside the structures of capital and religion and how those forces worked together to

shape ideas that in turn reshaped the planet. As a transgendered/gender-fluid person I will write through the broad spectrum of my experienced genders as a vehicle for the poetry to compound its message and song” (Conrad 2016b).

Notes

1. Notably, Conrad’s current biography on The *Poetry Foundation* website cites Myles, Lorde, Notley, and Dickinson as influences. The other authors are cited as influences by Conrad in their 2011 interview with Donovan. Conrad’s decision to emphasize a feminist poetic lineage in the first lines of their author biography attests to the significance of influence and homage to Conrad’s poetry.
2. Foucault (1984) notes in his lecture on heterotopias, “Des Espaces Autres” (“Of Other Spaces”), that the ideological conflicts animating the mid-late twentieth century could be described as occurring between [se déroulent entre] those who privilege time and those who privilege space. I think this dialectic constitutes key disagreements between Muñoz and Edelman (a dialectic Conrad deftly negotiates).
3. For example, Conrad associates temporalities outside of the present with death and they locate the present as a privileged space of survival. Conrad (2015b) explains in “The Queer Voice”: “Death is laziness I realize when I sit with the giant redwoods of California. Death is stupid and YES people will chime in and say why death is a necessary part of life, but I still don't like it, but also know it will happen to me when I am at my laziest. I have seen a lot of death, having survived a plague, watching many others slowly succumb. But the laziness of how we no longer (maybe never did) have the proper tools to engage the 3 children dying a day in Afghanistan of war.”
4. I acknowledge here the phrase “natural cycles of/life” may imply a fraught romanticization of nature, especially coupled with Conrad’s constant invocation of “wildness.” But I would argue that, in Conrad’s imaginary, a natural kind of life is a life free from violence and death due to hegemonic necropolitical structures. Conrad, like many other queer theorists and historians of the AIDS pandemic, argues that the innumerable queer lives curtailed by AIDS during the 1980s and 1990s was a direct result of the Reagan administration’s lethal homophobia. The tragedy of AIDS—

however “natural” any viral pandemic may signify in popular or scientific discourse—was a direct result of the unnatural (i.e. orchestrated planned-outcome) non-response of the American government towards the queer community; as Conrad (2020) writes in a recent essay, they and many in the queer community were haunted by the belief that AIDS was a manmade form of “population control” meant to target queers and people of color.

5. Additionally, the textual aesthetic of zany language—which Ngai describes as “bristl[ing] with markers of affective insistence: italics, dashes, exclamation points, full capitals” (184)—accurately describes Conrad’s affective typography and visual-textual tics. Moreover, zaniness is singular for its performative qualities, for its ability to describe a form of comedic performance art. The zany is an “aesthetic of nonstop acting or doing” is singular for its performative qualities, including its reliance on a “zany character” that interacts with others or an audience in a way that incites distance or a lack of identification in the spectator (one might even argue fear or revulsion) (9).
6. In a brief essay for Lambda Literary, Conrad (2018) describes this ritual slightly differently, highlighting how “Queer Bubbles” targets the progressive neoliberal political decorum of “feel-good Democrats” and “good liberals” and their complicity in homophobia through heteropatriarchal family structures. Conrad explains: “I was unconvinced that the liberal town of Asheville, North Carolina was as progressive as it purports to be. With my Queer Bubbles poetry ritual I sat on a lawn chair on a very busy street corner one Saturday afternoon where many feel-good Democrats like to stroll and window-shop with their children... Terrorizing parents with bubbles is one way I have a different kind of conversation about the violence many are complicit in with their faux-political concerns.”
7. Read through the paranoid heterosexual epistemology of straight parents, this faith in queerness-as-contagion evokes a long history of homophobic discourse, what Valerie Rohy (2012) identifies as an anxiety of influence stemming from the belief in homosexuality as a “meme”: that is, the belief that homosexuality functions mathematically (i.e. meme) rather than genetically (i.e. gene) within culture, spreading and reproducing horizontally and metonymically across a population (109). Rohy’s

discussion builds on work by Lee Edelman and Guy Hocquenghem, who write, respectively, that “even before the historical accident of the outbreak of ‘aids’ in the gay communities of the West, homosexuality was conceived as a contagion, and the homosexual as a parasite waiting to feed upon the straight body” and that homosexuality is regarded as “the ungenerating-ungenerated terror of the family, because it produces itself without reproducing” (qtd. in Rohy 107-8).

8. As Conrad (2020) explains elsewhere: “At a potluck dinner in the early 90s with Earth, there were a few straight people who asked what they could do to help. I jumped in and told them to call their families, bosses, landlords, friends, everyone they knew, and come out of the closet as queer. They were shocked and said, ‘But we’re not queer!’ Earth said, ‘Look, you asked what you can do, and you have been told!’ If every straight ally came out as queer, we could put an end to the violence in our community overnight. Does it mean I want to be straight? No, it means I want straight people to be queer, and queer is political, queer is against racism, misogyny, and transphobia. Queer is also anti-war, and if you are not, queer will show up to your party and fuck things up! Queer wants this world beautiful, and it is not truly beautiful unless everyone has the room we all need to make it so!”
9. The clone, too, connotes a form of asexual reproduction, as if Conrad were saying that the logic of heterosexual reproduction is essentially anti-reproductive. Asexual reproduction, furthermore, connotes prevalent forms of beyond-human (especially plant) forms of propagation. In this sense, I read the clone as an ambivalent figure which, on the one hand, is a clear critique of heteronormativity’s reproductive compulsion (e.g. Conrad riffs on the idiomatic notion that having children as a form of extreme narcissism) and, on the other hand, gestures towards (like the crystal) queerer alternatives to reproductive futurity. To complicate matters further, to my mind the figure of the clone connotes contemporary medicalized reproductive technologies, like IVF, which were made possible by much research regarding literal clones (like Dolly the sheep).
10. I am reminded here of Sara Ahmed’s (2006) reading of the heteronormative familial reproduction, in which the child is imagined through the model of the gift and

subsequent debt and return. She writes: “The demand to return the gift does not return to the not-yet subject, whose debt cannot be paid back. The failure of return extends the investment. The failure of return extends the investment. So the gift, when given, produces the one who has received the gift as indebted and demands its endless return. Heterosexuality is imagined as the future of the child insofar as heterosexuality is idealized as a social gift and even as the gift of life itself...Heterosexuality becomes a social as well as familial inheritance through the endless requirement that the child repay the debt of life with its life. The child who refuses the gift thus becomes seen as a bad debt” (86).

11. Edelman coins this phrase while discussing the pervasive stereotype of gay men as “the gravediggers of society,” where the reproduction (i.e. choosing life), especially for gay men, is a means to combat the specter of death (i.e. AIDS) that haunts them. Thus the baby’s face is “fascist” because the baby-face-as-symbol (as instantiated in the prolife billboard that inaugurates Edelman’s text) becomes a repository for genocidal-tending homophobia, even as compulsory reproduction is felt as feeling for the other. See chapter three, “Compassion Compulsion,” of *No Future*, especially pages 74-5.
12. I glean this earlier definition of deviance from Conrad’s first full-length collection *Deviant Propulsion* (2006). See especially the titular poem.

Coda: Trans*Genre Black Ecopoetics: Gender/Genre and Lyric

Dislocation

What is the human? What defines, limits, and excludes the human? To which subjects does human(ity) attach and congeal? As we have seen over the course of this project's three chapters, these questions are central to both environmental thought and to queer studies. From Muriel Rukeyser's imaginative "little animals" that "go leap through / my life and my birth-giving and my death" (2005, 489), to the speaker in Etel Adnan's verse that goes "to bed with the sea because I was feeling / that we were both structurally alike" (2012, 51), to CAConrad's concept of ecodiviance, mapping the limits of "the human" is rich poetic ground for these poets' expression of queer desire, erotic attachments, and radical visions of how the world might be otherwise. In this coda, I turn to the work of poet Dawn Lundy Martin, and show how the throughlines that emerged in the previous chapters—especially, the relationship between form and gender as well as definitions of "life" and agency that exceed the human—congeal in Martin's work. In particular, I turn to Black radical thought and trans studies to examine again the limitations of the human and I seek new theoretical lines of inquiry that investigate how these Black radical thought and trans studies converge when we analyze queerness's exclusion from the normative category of human.

Queerness's socio-ideological boogeyman status as ontologically inhuman (or, more simply, anti-life) is impossible to analyze without the analytics of both race and trans*ness.¹ To summarize a major tenet of Black radical thought: the nonhuman/human binary (which is always both a racialized and a queered boundary) is marked by death. The work of contemporary Black and queer poet Dawn Lundy Martin explores this necropolitical field. Glimmers of life abound throughout Martin's poems, and she situates death alongside life in order to mark her speaker(s)'s Black trans* subjectivity and embodiment. Martin's poetry testifies to death through a consistent use of natural imagery and metaphor, especially images of botanical systems and biological and/or cellular models. Martin's turn to the natural and the material exemplifies a Black and queer project of survival. As Martin writes at the beginning of her most recent collection, *Good Stock Strange Blood*, "the question at the center of this collection is why doesn't one just die?" I read this question as a query to Audre Lorde's proposition in "Transformation of Silence into Language and Action" that "to survive in the mouth of this

dragon we call America, we have had to learn this first and most vital lesson—that we were never meant to survive. Not as human beings” (1984, 41). Martin’s query is also an Afropessimist stance, echoing Frank Wilderson’s (2020) definition of the term: “Human life is dependent on Black death for its existence and for its coherence” (41).

Like Lorde, Martin’s examination of what defines “the human,” as well as “a life” or “living,” is necessarily a poetic question. Most significantly, Martin’s formal and generic questions are closely intertwined with thinking the beyond-human and thinking the environmental. For Martin, both (in)humanity and fixed gender are conditions imposed on the speaker, particularly on the speaker’s body, marking and hamstringing conditions for autonomous speech, movement, and being. For Martin’s speaker, femaleness, especially when fixed to a Black body, becomes a lived condition of animality. In other words, throughout Martin’s poems the human/animal binary corrals the grammar of the Black queer body. Conversely, the expansive realm of the natural—one that challenges and transcends any human/animal distinction and includes, for Martin in particular, the botanical—becomes a site for the speaker’s fugitive identification and becomes the ground for imagining flight. In Martin’s work, this human/animal distinction is less a strict binary and more of a fluid envelopment as “the human” always risks, colloquially and ontologically, becoming synonymous with “the animal.” This human-animal is humanity’s fuzzy friend, forever stalking the realm of the “human.” For Martin’s speaker, the animal does not stand for the total alterity that might mark imagining the world “otherwise.” For the speaker, the animal, in its proximate co-constitution with the human, epitomizes the realm of normative discourse and ideology. In contrast, the botanical (even the oceanic) signals the poetic possibility of speaking *outside* of that discourse. Said otherwise, for Martin’s speaker this non-mammalian and anti-Linnaean natural realm signals the possibility of not being compelled to speak *within* or *beside* a discourse that so narrowly defines being-human; it signals the fugitive and liberatory poetic possibility of not being compelled to position oneself *anywhere*. As Martin writes, in an utterance muted by brackets, “[I wanted silence in the flowers, not to not say, but to not have the impulse of saying.]”

Central to understanding Martin’s Black and trans* eco-poetics is understanding the theoretical relationship between gender and genre in her work. This relationship is also a core theoretical question animating queer environmental thought and animating this dissertation. Two

special issues, published almost simultaneously in 2015, establish the stakes of rethinking gender alongside the more-than-human. In their *TSQ* special issue “Tranimalities,” Susan Stryker and Paisley Currah write that “the human/nonhuman distinction is inextricably tied to questions of gender and sexual difference” (Stryker and Currah 2015, 189). This forceful argument regarding gender’s central role in defining and delimiting the human is echoed by Mel Chen and Dana Luciano in their *GLQ* special issue “Queer Inhumanisms,” where they write that the term “queer inhumanisms”

does not declare an identity so much as it stages an encounter, one that seeks to discover what each of its terms might do to the other. The encounter with the inhuman expands the term *queer* past its conventional resonance as a container for human sexual nonnormativities, forcing us to ask, once again, what “sex” and “gender” might look like apart from the anthropocentric forms with which we have become perhaps too familiar. (189)

I read the encounter, then, between queerness and beyond-humanness as a deliberate attempt to de-human gender. In Martin’s work, this deliberate dis-attachment of “the human” from gender results from the inherent lethality in assuming and asserting legible gendered embodiment for Black subjects, especially Black queer and trans* subjects. In other words, Martin stages the question: what happens when “gender,” like “the human,” becomes an ideological cudgel for regulating the agency and speech of Black individuals? For Martin’s lyric speaker, when gendered humanity converges in a racialized and binary specificity—for example, in the phrase “Black female”—all speech becomes impossible. To combat the impossibility from the bottom of a pigeonhole, Martin argues for a trans*genre poetics, a poetics that realizes gender’s queerest potential through generic hybridity. Said otherwise, the hegemony of all outwardly imposed categories—be they the category “woman” or the category “lyric poem”—hamstring poetic speech. In this way, Martin exemplifies Marquis Bey’s (2017) claim that “trans* and black thus denote poetic, para-ontological forces that are only tangentially, and ultimately arbitrarily, related to bodies said to be black or transgender. They move in and through the abyss underlying ontology, rubbing up alongside it and causing it to fissure” (276). Bey continues, succinctly and powerfully stating that “trans* is black and black is trans*” (278).

I end with Martin’s genre theory because her thought on genre is key to articulating the formal stakes of this dissertation’s reading. Building especially on my formal discussions of Adnan’s use of seriality as well as the iterative and performative nature of Conrad’s embodied

poetics, I propose here the concept of “lyric dislocation,” which I see throughout Martin’s thought on genre. Martin’s formal theory is defined by a fascinating spatialization—notably, the figure of “the I alongside the I”—which I elaborate below. Resonate in function with Adnan’s spatialized (and even utopic) image of the Night Palace and with Adnan’s emphasis on spatial disorientation, I argue that Martin’s strategy of lyric dislocation injects dynamism and movement into the formal structure of her (anti)lyric address. In other words, analogous to Jack Halberstam’s (2018) description of how an asterisk following trans* “modifies the meaning of transitivity by refusing to situate transition in relation to a destination, a final form, a specific shape, or an established configuration of desire and identity” (4), lyric dislocation gestures towards transitivity, fugitivity, dissonant doublings, and the flighty terrain of gendered and racialized embodiment. As Martin’s speaker playfully declares in *Life in a Box is a Pretty Life* (2015), “When they said they’d split me in two, I was overjoyed, wanting to / get at the rip of things. // How to inhabit the sensation of living” (47). In Martin’s work, this emphasis on dislocation and disarticulation—this *rip of things*—gravitates, as I show below, toward the realm of the natural, botanic, material, and more-than-human.

Martin most clearly articulates what I am calling “lyric dislocation” in two essays. The first essay, entitled “Genre & Genre Theory” (2018), explicates the political potential of genre crossings to combat lethal violence against Black individuals. The second, entitled “The I Alongside the I: A Poetic of Indeterminacy,” appears in the pathbreaking collection *Troubling the Line: Trans and Genderqueer Poetry and Poetics* (2013) and analyzes the relationship between lyric experimentation and a trans* poetics. In “Genre & Genre Theory,” Martin explains that she became a poet in direct response to white supremacist violence. She writes that “the first poem I wrote that let me know that I might be a poet” was written in response to the killing of Yusef Hawkins in 1989, who was murdered by a white mob in Brooklyn. For Martin, “poetry was the genre that allowed for a manipulation of language so that it could be stretched beyond its everyday capacity to accommodate horrific realities that make up human experience. It creates an illogic, an appropriate response to the rational narratives that attempted, with little success, to provide language for Yusef Hawkins’s murder.” In particular, Martin argues that generic experimentation is the core of poetry’s power; it is when poets “push outside of the genre itself” that “this thing we call poetry puts me in an irregular feeling—a discomfort.” That discomfort,

the subversion of rational and normative linguistic categories, allows poetry to derive force from violence.

Significantly, Martin explicitly links a lack of generic experimentation with histories of American violence. For Martin, the stakes of textual and literary experimentation, of crossing “genre-borders,” are nothing less than dismantling the white supremacist regime of American violence. She writes that many are “comforted by the stroke of genre-borders like nations like colors like races that glow only because a construction is successful when it feels like a natural thing. A cross burns in that front yard because someone put it there and set it right on fire. The American landscape is lit up by such iconography. Where is the outside of this textual interpretation in our USA?” She continues, arguing that

If we cannot communicate across a genre “divide,” then perhaps we cannot communicate across a race “divide”... If we can communicate in between or trans-genre, then maybe the thing we’ve agreed to call “race” isn’t an impasse at all. Maybe these speech clots, when they come together, are regurgitant tears, the panicked stare of a squirrel shaking in the middle of the highway. Maybe my body belongs to no category. This is not, a Rodney King-like plea, as in, “Can’t we also just get along?” but an argument for rogue, innovative, disoriented languages, knowledges, forms, and genres—ones that splinter our otherwise cohesive thoughts, body imaginings, and our frozennesses. The elasticity of the so-called “poem” can change the shape of a room.

Martin envisions transness—literal in-betweenness—as a recourse for violent political and historical stasis. The “impasse,” “clot,” and “frozenness” of the long project of racial equality can be reimagined and retheorized in the elastic and rogue forms poetry can offer. This is a call to action for a poetic-political revolution, one that locates the body as central to poetic innovation. Here the elasticity of poetic utterance mirrors the infinite elasticity of embodied experience—maybe my body belongs to no category. The *no category* bodies Martin imagines are free from race as well as from gender. It is worth noting how much Martin privileges illogicality, dis-cohesion, and disorientation as the politically-operative mode of poetic speech. If the maddeningly restrictive cohesion of raced and gendered categories—“Black,” “white,” “male,” “female”—clog and clot speech, then poetic utterance might begin from the disjunctured and refusing body. This is the body that, as Martin further argues in “The I Alongside the I: A Poetic of Indeterminacy,” refuses to be *neat*.

Martin’s emphasis on genre-clogs and genre-impasses evokes Lauren Berlant’s discussion of impasse, gender, and genre in *The Female Complaint* (2008). Broadly, Berlant

defines genre as “an aesthetic structure of affective expectation,” one “with porous boundaries allowing complex audience identifications” (4). Much like Culler’s model of lyric reading, Berlant’s definition of genre privileges interaction and variability between reader and text; it is relational and dynamic, promising the pleasure of a fulfilled expectation while also “absorb[ing] all kinds of small variations or modifications” (4). If her definition emphasizes porosity and if its affective structure guarantees a certain level of improvisation and performativity to each textual encounter, then Berlant’s model celebrates blockages and impasses, demonstrating how bending but not breaking generic convention renews and fortifies genre norms. Highlighting the relationship between genre, gender, and sexuality, Berlant writes that

to call an identity like a sexual identity a genre is to think about it as something repeated, detailed, and stretched while retaining its intelligibility, its capacity to remain readable or audible across the field of all its variations. For femininity to be a genre *like* an aesthetic one means that it is a structure of conventional expectation that people rely on to provide certain kinds of affective intensities and assurances... Even the prospects of failure that haunt the performance of identity and genre are conventional: the power of a generic performance always involves moments of potential collapse that threaten the contract that genre makes with the viewer to fulfill experiential expectations. But those blockages or surprises are usually *part* of the convention and not a transgression of it, or anything radical. (4)

I would argue that Berlant’s is a slow model of genre, one that sits in (rather uncomfortable) juxtaposition with Martin’s splintering generic transgressions. As Berlant makes clear above, there is ultimately a ceiling to gender/genre’s potential for aesthetic revolution. If, as Berlant claims, “blockage is central to any genre’s successful execution” (18-19), I use her discussion of genre here in order to more deeply underscore the radical nature of Martin’s call to trans*gress genre. Similar to Berlant, blockages, for Martin, literally kill rather than enable us to transgress in order to imagine a world otherwise. In Martin’s mind genre blockages cannot fully realize a rejection of the terms that bind them; in this way they are not a radical antagonism to the project of (neo)liberal subjecthood. As Martin further writes in “Genre & Genre Theory,” “if one person says, ‘You take away my guns, you’re taking away my freedom,’ and another says, ‘Your right to guns does not trump my right to life,’ and another says, ‘I cannot even walk across my own back yard carrying a cell phone without being shot dead by police,’ then what kind of impasse of language and understanding creates the unfathomable gulf? What is the depth of this devastating breach?” These highly charged speech utterances epitomize, for Martin, something deeper than a breach of a utopic idea of democratic *communitas*. This devastating breach is, instead, the

foreclosure of the basic right to life, which includes both freedom of utterance and freedom of movement.

Within the context of gender, what would it look like to conceive of gender—or of genre—as *not* haunted or dependent on failure? In other words, I contend the central question of Martin’s trans*genre theory is what might it mean to theorize a concept of gender not haunted by failure’s happier twin, success (a concept which signals a total reification of the norm, the perfect wish-fulfillment of convention)? In juxtaposition with Martin’s “Genre & Genre Theory,” the precision of Berlant’s conceptualization of genre/gender leaves little room for the descent into illogicality and incoherence that Martin’s trans*genres demand. If the conventionality of an identity category like “femininity,” “race,” or even “the human” is ontologically circumscribed by violent exclusion, Martin’s trans*(genre)gression demands a total refusal of *the terms* of genre’s pre-inscribed performance-within-constraint. Hemmed-in, a trans-genre poetics, screams: death to *your* kind of genre!

In “The I Alongside the I: A Poetic of Indeterminacy,” Martin articulates the relationship between (un)gendered embodiment, race, and the refusing body. In this essay, which itself is trans-generic (part poetics statement and part auto-theory), Martin theorizes a poetics of unspeakability, one that hinges on the genderqueer image-concept of “the I alongside the I,” a linchpin image that also appears throughout her verse. This essay is significant because it establishes the generic stakes of Martin’s verse, while also explicating the relationship between Martin’s gender theory and her genre theory. Martin weaves together three narrative threads to articulate her poetics of unspeakability: first, an analysis of the actress Tilda Swinton, especially her portrayal as Virginia Woolf’s character Orlando in Sally Potter’s 1992 film *Orlando*; second, autobiographical musings on Martin’s own childhood gendered embodiment; and, third, a haunting poetic voice that interrupts, in italics, every few paragraphs. Martin uses Swinton’s cinematic body to query whether “her beautiful androgyny” and her “beyond white” and “almost translucent” body is “emblematic of the white background upon which the black writer and other writers of color are forced to reproduce their narratives?” (138). For Martin, the answer is yes and no. On the one hand, Swinton’s “extreme whiteness” produces a frighteningly “hard stability” yet, on the other hand, Swinton’s face contains an intense boyish androgyny (what Martin describes as “not quite a boy boy; instead, more like concentrated boyness”) which signifies, Martin argues, that “in the gender realm, she is not stable; in fact, she is profoundly

unstable especially after giving birth to a child and living her public life as a ‘heterosexual.’ If this is a white background upon which our stories must be written then it is a confusing whiteness since gender affects/produces the racialized body and vice versa” (139).

Martin continues, writing that “there is no such thing as single identities and/or single selves. We are multiple from before, already. We are multiple, maybe, in the very first instances of loss, as girl children, our shirts suddenly removed from the fences where they once hung and placed onto our resistant bodies” (139). Here, Martin’s multiple selves argue for an intersectional approach to Black poetics and evokes the queer-feminist theory of Audre Lorde, among others. Yet, throughout the essay, Martin resists the total submersion of whiteness the Black poet must struggle against; she resists the compulsion to only write *against* whiteness, because this inevitably produces a monolithic category of “Black writer.” She writes: “Imagine that the poem is lit by darkness, that its persistent markers—its letters, words, lines, stanzas, and spaces—are only foregrounded or brought to approximation by 1) ‘an absence or want of light (total or partial)’; 3) ‘a want of sight (blindness)’; and/or 7) ‘obscurity or meaning’; and/or ‘darkly in a moral sense, horridly, foully’” (139). If darkness is defined by and against whiteness, if darkness is only produced by its negation—its language defined by the official and authoritative archive of the *OED*—then, Martin demands, “What is possible against this backdrop? Is anything possible? Are not our mouths gagged, our hands tied, our legs bound, our cunts exposed? This is our primary setting. Where the entirety of our story takes place” (139). It is here, Martin continues, that “the body exceeds its boundaries, spills out into blackened space, becomes undone. It cannot contain itself. It is piecemeal and/or falling / and/or pieces / or spilling from itself / grotesquely / or doubling or tripling / or it is watching itself / or not watching itself but blank / not a blank state / but an absence.” Martin describes how this undone body is subjected to violent racial stereotypes; it is “a dancing figure in your landscape.” This body is “cast upon” and in the midst of indeterminacy, an unrecognizable body that is ultimately left devoid of speech and reduced to state of inhumanity: “What is there left to say? The maw, drunk and ajar, the head back, the throat open. Gaping. No sound” (139).

Martin locates this site—where the Black body spills out, exceeds itself and doubles and triples—as where poetic speech (unspeakable and impossible speech) arises. More specifically, this site, where a violent doubling of the subject occurs, produces what Martin calls “the post-traumatic body.” This post-traumatic body is made double, often via violent racialization: “the

black body is always spilling out. It cannot be contained by its borders. Even with the borders are visible [sic], there are new (fictionalized) discursive borders that are cast onto it” (140). Like in the above quotation where Martin describes the piecemeal body, this doubled, spilling, and traumatized body’s fragmented speech is marked by abundant slashes, signaling shattered and stuttering speech as well as poetic utterances. Here the typographical violence of the forward slash also signals the propulsion of the enjambed line; it is a speech that, although fragmented, moves forward. Calling back to the poetic voice that erupts and queries early in the essay—*“when language refuses to tip over into speech—recognizable or other—when it is non-reproductive of what has already been produced for us”* (138)—this undone post-traumatic body demands an accounting of the space *between* language and speech. When language grabs towards speech, when the body begins to tip over and spill, it is tracing (even as it hits) its discursive borders, and testing the give of power’s borders.

Martin’s doubling, incongruous, and spilling body is key to understanding her poetics and her poetry’s mapping of the relationship between gender and genre. Towards the end of the essay, Martin theorizes what kinds of agential speech this body might produce. As Martin makes clear, the post-traumatic body is a kind of body in diametrical opposition to Tilda Swinton’s ethereally white body, which attracts Martin precisely because of “the restraint of her material.” Tilda’s body is “a container of resistance and unfazed by gender discourse. It is a body that investigates, instead of being under investigation” (140). This oscillation between the spilling body’s state of subjugation (i.e. a lack of discursive agency, including speech) and the possibility of agential privilege (i.e. being a body that is allowed to investigate, rather than be investigated) epitomizes the poetic question of Martin’s verse. This question is a queer and trans* question and an eco-poetical question. The discursive doubling and splitting of the speaker(s)’s body occurs most sharply through the imposition of gender, a discursive imposition that throws the already-fraught ontological coherence of the Black body into disarray and often into violence. Martin concludes “The I Alongside the I” with the following paragraph, which I quote in full:

However, to hover at the edge of some utterance is to be liberated from the need for frivolous speech. What is relinquished in this attempt at speech and its failure? Its unspeaking? What is falsified if one tips over into coherence? What can or cannot be enclosed within a pre-determined discourse. The poetics at work here are of *unspeakability* or *impossibility*—what cannot in the first place be said, what is already foreclosed by the thing that seeks to be spoken, what the body cannot hold. Who can say which gender? Is what? When gender is present it comes in the form of the standing

alongside, the figure alongside the figure (the shadow of the figure), the moving outside of what has been pre-determined. Who can say what race is? The I is a hateful subject carrying its flesh bag. It is, too, an ecstatic signaling—reverberating itself, resonant. The I alongside the I. This can be a place of power. (140)

I quote Martin's essay at length because this figure of the *I alongside the I* recurs again and again throughout her poems. Moreover, in this essay Martin notably articulates this figure of poetic blockage—of lyric mutability—alongside (un)gendered embodiment and race. Put simply, for Martin, “the moving outside of what has been pre-determined” is both a queer and trans* movement—a movement away from pre-determined gender discourse—and a linguistic-poetic movement. Gender here, like race, is felt as an excess; it is what the I/subject, *not* the body, cannot hold. The “I” here (which we might read as shorthand for the traditional lyric “I”) is the normative discursive marker of that “hateful subject,” its speaking face or figure. The I/subject is the stale humanist subject, a subject completely legible by normative discourses of gender and race. Discursive legibility grants the subject speech, but, even if this realm of discourse is *coherent*, it is frivolous and false because its outcome is always pre-determined, always reifying what Martin calls “our frozenness.” This kind of discourse-speech is stable, predicable, a tape played on loop. And, most significantly, this kind of pre-determined speech is adamantly *not* poetic utterance.

Martin's poetics of impossibility teases poetic utterance from “speech,” locating the former in profound contradistinction with the latter. The ability to move beyond—to trans*gress—the pre-determined speech of the I-as-subject not only makes poetic utterance possible but also produces the radical conditions for a body's liberation from the yoke of a racialized or criminalized or gendered body. This hateful subject speaks askance, besides, in spite of its body; it totes its “flesh bag” around like cumbersome weight, completely incapable of inhabiting this flesh, because its flesh is ideologically pre-inscribed and hamstrung by power's mechanisms. I read this image of the “flesh bag” *not* as a rejection of the embodied subject or of phenomenological being, but rather an indexing of the ways embodied being is already always curtailed and controlled. We might read the “hateful subject” as akin to the Foucauldian body, caressed and produced by power's discourse. Its hatefulness is not an accusation or condemnation, but instead might be read as a lamentation, a textured cry that is always verging on a kind of ecstatic utterance.

Martin's refusing body is not simply a poetic metaphor but also describes the agential conditions of a body that is free to move, to live, and to signal *otherwise*. Poetry is a medium for querying and modeling the conditions of this freedom. The acknowledgement of this shadow I—which, Martin believes, is made possible by poetic utterance—is what allows even the hateful subject an ecstatic kind of utterance, what Martin describes as a vibrational “signaling.” It is significant to note here that the subject's ecstatic signaling is only possible in the space between the hateful subject and its shadow figure, whose presence marks the irrefutable existence of gender *in excess* of the discursive norm. This shadow figure is the body that refuses; its presence disrupts the coherence of power's discourse. It symbolizes the flesh—the life of gender, so to speak—that erupts from the body. If this doubling of subjectivity, the I alongside the I, “can be a place of power,” its power is produced precisely through the resonant energy of recognition and disidentification that reverberates between these two selves. This uncanny, almost cinematic, visual trick of one subject stepping outside of oneself to look back *at oneself* is an image of fugitivity and elision. Said otherwise, I need to first see the restraints that hold me—to understand their construction and material—in order to sever them. The ability to move outside of oneself allows the oppressed, marginalized, or curtailed body a point of exit, a small point where pressure can be applied, where gender's fictional coherence can shatter. In the context of gendered embodiment, this doubling is akin to the discord between how others perceive or code my gender and how I feel (or don't feel! what gender is “no gender?”) my own gender.

In the context of Martin's poetry, I want to call this discord a *lyric dislocation*. Or rather, to preserve the highly sonic and musical quality of Martin's resonantly reverberating “I alongside the I,” I might call it a *lyric dissonance*. This is less a scene of total cacophony, or of two figures screaming at each other, and more an image of two distinct voices, not harmonizing with each other, but rather preserving their own pitch and tenor, separate from each other but each still resonating with and against the other. Throughout Martin's poetry, the lyric I—like gender—is a kind of conceptual artifice that, although pressured, deconstructed, and interrogated by Martin's verse, still exists as a literal prop within the space of the poem. Like the lyric I (or what we might more broadly call “the literary”) gender becomes something to wrest from the racialized body codified within western modernity and within literary canonicity. Martin's speaking “I” is totally deconstructed, stripped of subjectivity and turned into a kind of body-puppet, a flesh bag, an object among objects. Throughout Martin's verse the I is constantly de-

familiarized by the speaker. The I is constantly doing things, or is described in a state of action, as if the speaker were narrating stage directions for an I separate from themselves. For example, in Martin’s collection *Life in a Box is a Pretty Life* (2015), the speaker states: “[the I in dramatic gesticulation, its façade trembling]” (14); “the I stuffs hands in pockets and walks in a small circle” (22); “the I distends” (32); “The I radiant in heat” (44); “the I is left to encounter an aged woman” (56); “I insertion into vagina” (65); “the I is collecting documents in her body.” (83). Or, sometimes the I is interpolated in the clipped moment of speaking: “When the I speaks, it speaks into an other’s speech” and “When the I speaks accosted—” (47, 52). In *Discipline* (2011), the speaker is often watching the I, guardedly or as if with surprise: “There are no crossings here. But, there the I is, reflection and delivered, on the other side” (35); “And here the I is culling” (41); “I am the I watching the I lift” (45); “Always the I is fissure recklessly yearning for its whole self sense of wholeness like a potato” (47); “There is this place where the I is am now and there is the no place” (53); “The I of the I is absolutely, is promisingly approaching a, or, the way back” (58); and, most hauntingly, “The I is/more relaxed/when it is hunted” (30).

I pull these numerous lines out of their context to show the accumulative effect of the speaker’s constant distancing of themselves from “the I.” As the above lines attests, the pairing of “I” with the definite article is almost ubiquitous, and attests to the speaker’s association of “I” with “*the I*” of (lyric) poetry. “The I,” in order words, could be said to symbolize the hateful subject and therefore represents the realm of pre-determined discourse (that is, the realm of *speakability*). If Martin’s poetry seeks to challenge the literary prop (which functions almost like a stage prop) of *the-I-who-speaks*, I read this project as a speculative challenge, a challenge to imagine *through* poetry how the Black queer and/or trans* and/or female body might speak otherwise. Speaking otherwise, of course, might mean, as Martin implies above, not speaking at all—or, at least, not speaking a speech or discourse legible within a lethal status quo. As the cutting voice in *Good Stock Strange Blood* demands, “What speech do we have when we are crawling around on your / kitchen floor?” (87). Returning to Wilderson’s (2020) definition of Afropessimism—that “human life is dependent on Black death for its existence and for its coherence... There is no world without Blacks, yet there are no Blacks who are in the world” (41-2)—Martin’s poetics of impossibility and unspeakability are also a poetics of fugitivity and

mutability. If not speech, then sound! The speaker asks: “What is the black / body but an aching tone?” (87).

What I am calling here Martin’s *lyric dislocation* is also a literal challenge and critique to the concept of “contemporary American poetry” tout court. If, diegetically, lyric dislocation functions most simply as the speaker’s constant de-familiarizing—stepping *away* and taking a hard look—of the lyric I, on a meta-poetic level lyric dislocation also describes Martin’s rejection of the normative, imaged social contract that defines lyric poetry—this Jakobsonian relationship between an I and a You, between the writer and the reader—and that defines the hegemonic economic and market conditions that propel what is called “contemporary American poetry.” Martin’s speaker is hyper-aware of their addressee—continuously flickering between reader and critic—who demands that the speaker *perform* Blackness. Martin outlines these questions in a poem about midway through *Good Stock Strange Blood*, where the speaker states that “To be an orphan inside of ‘blackness’ / —is the condition of it (us). We can love it, sure, cradle its beauti- / ful head, and eyes looking. It wants to be performed, leaping, but the / I is not a good actor. The problem with the book is that it’s never quite / ‘black’ enough.” (47). The speaker scathingly continues, mocking the white and waspy *you* in “your tennis shorts or salmon-colored pants,” a *you* that is both reader and critic: “It’s a good idea to have ‘black’ in the title of the ‘black’ / book in case there are any questions as to its race. The ‘black’ bits will / be excisable, quotable in reviews.” But, “what the book actually wants, however, is to know the distance / between the ‘I’ and the ‘you.’” Martin ultimately condemns this “you,” obsessed with “Black poetry” as an abstracted and commodified object of cultural capital: “For / you, the text lives in the floating unreal, a document that has noth- / ing to do with you, but, my dear, it *is* you, the grotesque monument to / the regime, so perfectly sculpted you cannot see yourself in the mirror” (47).

If Martin rejects the tenets of this lyric contract as based on a compulsion to *perform* Blackness, Martin also reveals how this compulsion-to-performance (so quick to devolve into imperial grotesquery) also limns the realm of gender. Gender is felt as a performance, but the I is *not* a good actor! As Martin’s speaker proclaims in *A Gathering of Matter / A Matter of Gathering* (2007), “I want to tell you about the splitting of a female body—how I squeezed into it—fitting barely, of the texture of melancholy, of a sycophantic love, draw a flicker for you, let you enter as if entering me” (12), and later in the collection, “I was illustrative, an example

angled toward proof. I was biologically female but that was of no use. Whose holes are these, begs one” (60). In these latter lines, the imperfect but notable rhyme between use / proof echoes Martin’s above critiques. The compulsion-to-perform both Blackness and femaleness forces the speaker into a kind of embodied condition of alienation, a stepping inside/outside of oneself, that feels both farcical—a squeezing into a body—and melancholic. The speaker is only of use if there is *proof* of their biological femaleness, proof of their anatomical holes as sexually or reproductively useful. Whose holes are these *for*, begs the speaker? In this way, “biologically female” becomes a condition imposed onto the speaker, distorting their body and situating them in a liminal condition of (im)possibility: an example forever *angled toward* an ideologically imposed proof.

The splitting of the female body that Martin’s speaker experiences is a complex and ambivalent (dis)indentificatory gender performance. As if “femaleness” was flickering in-and-out like a badly screwed lightbulb, the speaker implies an ambivalent desire to please the “you,” even though they know the performance of femaleness is fraught and even violent. Significantly, the speaker professes a “sycophantic love,” one that is ambiguously directed: a sycophantic love of wanting to fit the female body, a sycophantic love of the “you,” a sycophantic love for the you’s desire of the speaker’s femaleness? The speaker’s tautological phrase “let you enter as if entering me” signals that the speaker feels femaleness as a condition of “being able to be entered.” Yet this gendered and sexualized condition of penetrability is, for Martin’s speaker, a performance borne out of this sycophantic love. There is no true entering of the speaker by the you, but instead a mirage of enterability (i.e. let you enter *as if entering me*). The “me” is never actually allowed to be entered, signaling that some deeper form of the speaker’s authentic being cannot but feel femaleness as an embodied condition of proneness and violation.

In short, what the speaker expresses here is the inability to feel in spatial or directional control of their body. We might then read the speaker’s aforementioned query “who’s holes are these, begs one?” as another way of saying that, for the speaker, “biologically female” is inherently a condition of subjugation, of being not in ownership of one’s self. In contradistinction to Judith Butler’s definition of gender, which she most succinctly defines in *Undoing Gender* as “a practice of improvisation within a scene of constraint” (2004, 1), Martin forces the question: what if constraint is, quite simply, *intolerable*? Martin’s poetics of unspeakability and impossibility demand an absolute disidentification with gender’s legibility. If,

as Butler and others argue, gender—or rather, gender’s discursive legibility and intelligibility—traces and polices the limits of the human, Martin demands whether a rejection of gendered coherence might also be a rejection of the human altogether. The realm of in-humanity, of beyond-humanity, then becomes (like the split I/I’s ecstatic signaling) a place of power, too. Martin’s verse is suffused with natural imagery and Martin’s speaker, hard against the limits of humanity’s pre-determined discourse, turns to the elemental, the botanical, the animal to source a different kind of speech. The natural becomes a staging ground for imagining a Afrofuturist speculative poetics of Black and trans* possibility.

If Martin’s trans*genre poetics hinges on a discursive rejection of normative genres of the human, including rigid race and gender categories, this rejection is strongly subtended by an invocation of beyond-human modes of being and of life. Martin reaches towards beyond-human realms as a means of signaling outside of humanity’s oppressive regimes of pre-determined discourse. Even though Martin does not explicitly demonstrate any self-conscious entrance into a contemporary environmental or climate discourse, Martin’s poetics demonstrate a consistent and complex relationship to multiple scales and multiple forms of beyond-human agency, including flesh, cells, blood, flora, and fauna. Her first collection, *A Gathering of Matter / A Matter of Gathering* (2007), is suffuse with images of trees and with metaphors structured by feminized wild and domestic animals, like cattle or deer—what the speaker at one point calls “the economy of fawn” (21). Her second collection, *Discipline* (2011), is an interrogation of trauma and violence, in which the speaker bleakly questions the solidity of their epistemological relationship to, not only their own body, but also the exterior world of objects. “The I struggles to become / a part of the reeking body,” the speaker bemoans, and “the body drifts off to fuck like a ghost. / In countries with barriers, an attack, unwarranted. Wrists held / tight behind the back. Great views from the wooden window / toward whatever” (11). This speaker refuses any easy allegorical slip or transference of trauma from speaker to natural world, or vice versa. Neither does the speaker take solace in the world, its beauty or its ignorance of their pain. Almost like a kind of anti-ecopoet, the speaker simply refuses description and refuses the world beyond the window. The biting *whatever* signals the refusal of any conventional or Romantic indulgence in natural beauty, epitomized in the bland phrase “great views.” Instead, the realm of the natural haunts the speaker and becomes the mis-en-scene for more violence, including a chiaroscuro of racialized violence. A few pages later, the speaker continues:

In December, lights blanket snowing streets. A dark girl under cover of white. There is no world outside of this. Walls of white and white bliss, flakes sting skin, undeniable and wanted. We could find incidents toward exigencies. Moments that should urge, compel. Which accumulated evidences would suffice? There are bodies stuffed in trees—we know that. We see them when we do not anticipate them. Hungry and echoing into chilled air. (13)

Echoing the ethereal snowy whiteness of Tilda Swinton's Orlando, the winter snow here might initially appear to be a coded scrim of harm, blindingly white, for this anonymous "dark girl." There is no world outside of *this*—this "cover of white," this sardonically "white bliss." Yet the englobed muteness of the natural landscape (e.g. "no world outside" of these "walls of white") seems to compel or heighten the speaker's sense of urgency—or, more precisely, the speaker's sense that they *should or could* feel urgency. Significantly, in this scene it is the natural landscape that enfolds and reveals bodily violence like a hushed but open secret. As if the trees were colluding with the winter snow and the winter air, the natural environment here seems to hold and preserve memories of lethal violence. The trees mummify evidence of the dead. The "chilled air" carries, or even amplifies, their echoes. The cold snow stings the skin of the living, as if reminding the speaker of the paradoxical fact of that they are both alive and precarious, never far from the possibility of death.

In this way, the winterized landscape here functions less as threat to the speaker and the "dark girl" and more as a companion and witness. After all, the "dark girl" might very well welcome the snow's "cover of white" as a helpful camouflage or shield against a threat of violence or violent visibility. Even though the trees, who only sometimes reveal their secrets, stand in stark contrast with the ultra-visibility of historical images of lynched Black bodies hanging from American trees, the opacity and reticence of the natural environment testifies to the difficulty of historical memory and historical trauma as it continues to unfold into a contemporaneous present—what Saidiya Hartman (2008) calls "this silence in the archive" (3). "Which accumulated evidences would suffice?," demands the speaker. The natural landscape here provides some evidence, some response, and some accounting of racialized violence, even if its evidence does not seem to ever congeal into movement or urgent action. If the bodies stuffed into trees cannot ever become the smoking gun of "incidents toward exigencies," in this poem the natural landscape is an undeniable text that holds the thick temporal layerings of racial

violence. Holding and *reading* these layerings, with both care and suspicion, seems to be the only way this speaker can respond and be *in* her environment.

For lack of a better word, this radically critical stance towards the natural environment signals the speaker's awareness, as evidenced in the above poem, of the ideological violence possible in a weaponization of the natural. In other words, Martin's speakers evince an oblique and a *queer* stance toward the beyond-human world, always reminding her reader of the uneven discursive histories of "the natural." For this poetics of indeterminacy, the natural/material world becomes a means to articulate what is outside of predetermined speech and in the realm of unspeakability. In short, her poetry is a testament to the deep entanglements of environmental consciousness with a queer ecopoetics, and, in particular, her poetry is an example of the inextricability of decentering the human from the project of radical queer thought. As Dawn Lundy Martin reminds us, a radically queer anti-anthropocentric project is also a project of radical Black thought. Race-based justice is also trans*species justice, and vice versa. To quote Muñoz's (2015) theorizing of queer inhumanisms, if queer thought is about de-humanizing epistemologies and modes of relationality then "the incommensurable thought project of inhumanity is the active self-attunement to life as varied and unsorted correspondences, collisions, intermeshings, and accords between people and nonhuman objects, things, formations, and clusterings" (209-10).

I will end here on lines that both resonate with and complicate Muñoz's vision of active self-attunement and unsorted correspondences. About midway through *Life in a Box is a Pretty Life*, the speaker exclaims: "Awareness / of being in a female body is a tinge of regret. 'The human frame / to adapt itself to convention though she herself was a woman.' To / receive, to be entered, to fret around upon entry. It's grand. I'm a / system. Plants tall as wheat to hide in." (25). Put in the context of the rest of the poem, the metaphors of entering, being entered, and boundary-play are explicitly queered, but in these final lines the twitchy dynamism of movement found in this vacillation between receiving/entering foreground how the natural becomes a medium into which the speaker can flee or escape. Here the female body is associated with regret or pastness. The poem further borrows from Woolf's *Orlando* a truncated sentence that expresses the truncation the speaker feels *adapting* the form of "woman," as if the "human frame" itself must sacrifice its innate form for the sake of strict gendered embodiment.² The speaker's declaration "It's grand. I'm a / system" acts as a hinge between questions of gender and genre, as

well as the status of the botanical for Martin's speaker. What is the system? Either the fleshy sex/gender system of "woman" or the rhizomatic root system of "plants tall as wheat"—a phrase that itself evinces a playful anti-taxonomic impulse. The generic plants are themselves *not* wheat; they are simply *as tall as* wheat. Here the infinite and generic "plants" seem to exist as a place for the speaker to both find and elide form. The grandness here might lie in the speaker's ability to exist both within and between these two systems—gendered or botanical—and to use one or the other as the ground for complex (dis)identifications and imaginative zones of flight.

Notes

1. Here I follow Jack Halberstam's (2018) rationale in writing the term "trans*" with an asterisk. Halberstam explains that the asterisk, when used to modify trans "open[s] the term up to unfolding categories of being organized around but not confined to forms of gender variance" (4).
2. The quotation here is from a very queer moment in Virginia Woolf's *Orlando*. The sentence, which occurs about midway through the novel in chapter four, reads: "And as all Orlando's loves had been women, now, through the culpable laggardry of the human frame to adapt itself to convention, though she herself was a woman, it was still a woman she loved; and if the consciousness of being of the same sex had any effect at all, it was to quicken and deepen those feelings which she had had as a man" (79).

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