

ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE METAFICTION:
Narrative and Politics in Contemporary Ethnic Women's Novels by
Louise Erdrich, Linda Hogan, Ruth Ozeki, and Karen Yamashita

by

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Dissertation Abstract

**Environmental Justice Metafiction:
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This dissertation argues that ethnic minority women authors are creating new models of metafiction—fiction which thematizes or theorizes storytelling—designed specifically to target environmental inequalities important in their communities and in a larger global context. Since environmental injustice has a disproportionate impact on women, low-income populations, and people of color, my project examines the intersection of literary narratives with social, economic, and historical narratives to understand how the exploitation of nature is linked to the exploitation of people. In particular, I examine recent novels by Native and Asian American authors, including Louise Erdrich's *Four Souls* (2004), Linda Hogan's *Solar Storms* (1995), Ruth Ozeki's *My Year of Meats* (1998), and Karen Yamashita's *Tropic of Orange* (1997) to show how a formal and thematic focus on storytelling allows these writers to scrutinize the role narratives play in perpetuating environmental injustice and to construct counter-narratives which encourage political self-consciousness and change. To account for the novels' metafictional political force, this project identifies four different models of metafiction, including "trickster" (Erdrich), "trauma" (Hogan), "documentary" (Ozeki), and "hypercontextual" (Yamashita), and then reveals how these models are used to negotiate specific environmental justice issues such as the exploitation of natural

resources and hydroelectric damming on Native lands, factory farming, and urban degradation.

Revising postmodern approaches to metafiction, I claim that these contemporary texts draw on alternative and ethnic storytelling/activist traditions not only to highlight the “constructedness” of narratives, but also the material effects of those constructions for people and environments. In so doing, this project critiques the mainstream environmental movement’s tendency to ignore race, gender, class, and non-wilderness environments. Although environmental justice scholarship is expanding definitions of the environment to include toxic/built spaces, my project argues for the need to focus on the literary and cultural narratives about these landscapes in addition to gathering social and scientific data. Ultimately, I claim that metafiction, and the humanities more broadly, are especially suited to addressing environmental injustice because understanding this phenomenon requires us to reflect on the relationship between “how” we tell stories and “how” we act in the world.

Introduction: Environmental Justice Metafiction

Doo Dat got a message for the hood:
 It's time to go green. We gotta go green.
 The food ain't fresh and the air ain't clean. . . .
 My little cousin got asthma, auntie got cancer.
 Look, I'm from the hood, we need better food and better air.
 You probably wouldn't ever care.
 Why? You ain't ever there. . . .
 Man we need green jobs, we don't need no jails.
 —Markese “Doo Dat” Bryant, “The Dream Reborn”

These lyrics, from a 2009 song by young musical artist Markese “Doo Dat” Bryant, are an example of an emerging movement known as “green hip hop.” Bryant is affiliated with Green For All, a national organization founded in 2007 which brings together musical artists, community leaders, and universities to promote an “inclusive green economy strong enough to lift people out of poverty.” Green hip hop is an exciting part of a growing grassroots movement that, as Bryant says, connects the “environmental justice aspect with the social justice aspect” (“Behind”). Bryant specifically situates his green “message for the hood” in terms of socioenvironmental justice. Rather than valorizing wilderness spaces, the song focuses on neighborhoods where problems like respiratory illness, lack of access to fresh food, and cancers from environmental toxins are most concentrated. Moreover, the song connects environmental and economic issues by opposing “green jobs” with “jails,” implying that without access to living-wage jobs many low-income and minority urban youth are forced to earn a living through crime. We need a new “green market” to replace the “black market” of the drug trade, he suggests, which perpetuates the destruction of communities and leads to high rates of

incarceration. Bryant's own experience growing up is the source of his personal commitment to "greening the hood": he lost his mother to drug addiction and his father to prison, and was raised by his grandmother in an East Oakland neighborhood where toxic sludge ran through a concrete channel in his backyard and the elementary school playground was mere feet from a smog-congested freeway. This kind of green rapping reflects a new environmental movement taking its cues not from the primarily white environmental conservation movement, but from minority traditions of resistance to injustice. Bryant's music references figures like Martin Luther King and Barak Obama instead of Henry David Thoreau or John Muir. Redefining "green" as a "black" issue, he sings about Obama as a positive example of a growing concern with environmental justice, saying "my president is black but he's going green."

Not only does this song emphasize the publicly ignored environmental issues in low-income minority communities but it also self-consciously reflects on the role of hip hop in encouraging political change. The song begins with a meta-commentary on the function of hip hop to provide valuable insight, as we hear a clip of President Obama saying "the thing about hip hop today, it's smart, it's insightful." In the song itself, Bryant makes a meta-critique of popular music that ignores environmental injustice, saying that "rappers never rap about it . . . while these companies going toxic in my backyard." Meanwhile, he indicts economic and social narratives that legitimate environmental injustice, defining toxic industries, for instance, as "pimps" with the publically-sanctioned authority to exploit such communities. Moreover, Bryant self-consciously addresses his message to two audiences: those inside the "hood" and those

outside it. His music both seeks to inspire people from neighborhoods like his to take action and becomes a form of witnessing to the larger public, raising awareness and critiquing those who do not “care” about environmental and health degradation in the hood because “you ain’t ever been there.” Finally, he specifically situates music as an important element in a movement which requires convincing people to become personally invested in issues that occur over a wide range of geographical areas and take place gradually over an extended time period (through what Rob Nixon calls “slow violence”).¹ “A movement without music is like a movie without music,” Bryant claims in an interview, “the audience gets bored quick because they are not emotionally attached to what they are seeing” (Box). Thus green hip hop like this self-consciously foregrounds the links between artistic expression and justice while making environmental issues “emotionally” accessible to audiences. This is one exciting way in which the call for environmental justice is starting to gain traction in popular culture, a trend that I believe will continue to escalate as environmental crises in such areas become more publically visible.²

¹ Nixon defines environmental “slow violence” as “a violence that occurs gradually and out of sight, a violence of delayed destruction that is dispersed across time and space, an attritional violence that is typically not viewed as violence at all” (2). Since violence is typically equated with a “time bound” and “spectacular” event, addressing the slow violence of environmental degradation poses a particular challenge to representation. “We also need,” Nixon asserts, “to engage the representational, narrative, and strategic challenges posed by the relative invisibility of slow violence” (2). This is precisely the challenge taken on by music like Bryant’s and by the novels examined in this dissertation.

² Other well-known hip hop artists that have partnered with Green For All include the Black Eyed Peas, Ludacris, Wiz Khalifa, Common, Drake, Wyclef Jean, Will.i.am, and Dead Prez. For more on the “small but growing genre of green hip hop” see, for example,

I start with this example because it introduces some of the fundamental concerns of my project: its environmental justice (rather than conservationist or wilderness-centered) approach to the environment; its focus on the growing awareness of the environment as a fundamental issue for low-income, women, and people of color; and its emphasis on creative works which self-consciously reflect on the ability of art to promote justice. How are contemporary writers, specifically ethnic minority women novelists, depicting environmental issues in their work? How are such works employing self-conscious, metafictional strategies to interrogate the relationship between narratives and politics? And, finally, how does a formal and thematic focus on storytelling allow authors to articulate and critique environmental injustice?

My dissertation attempts to answer these questions by examining a range of novels by Louise Erdrich, Ruth Ozeki, Linda Hogan, and Karen Yamashita that represent important contributions to narrative and environmental thought. Spanning texts from the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, this project is situated in a period which has been shaped by accelerating processes of globalization and exploitation of natural resources, the increasing pervasiveness of media in daily life, and the expanding power of both transnational corporations and trans-cultural resistance movements. In responding to such contexts, these novels help advance our thinking about the relationship between literature, humans, and the environment.³ I chose novels by Native and Asian American

Ike Sriskandarajah's broadcast "Hip Hop for the Environment" on Public Radio International (PRI).

³ Greg Garrard's 2004 book, for instance, notes that "the relationship between globalization and ecocriticism has barely been broached" (178). Similarly, Nixon's 2011

women authors not because they are the only ones doing this kind of work, but because these two bodies of literature are particularly absent from studies on metafiction and because they offer some of the most fascinating representations of environmental justice in contemporary American fiction.

My main argument is that such contemporary ethnic women writers are using metafictional strategies to scrutinize the role of literary, historical, social, and economic narratives in perpetuating—and challenging—environmental injustice. These metafictional narratives, I claim, are particularly interesting to consider in terms of environmental justice because they examine how these narratives shape our values and beliefs about the relationship between humans and the environment. Thus, I selected these novels in particular because they each have different approaches to metafiction and address a variety of environmental justice issues in diverse locations, giving my project a narrative and geographical breadth even as they provide a thematic and theoretical common thread. The novels' metafictional approaches range from Erdrich's trickster-based model and Hogan's trauma-structured narrative to the self-conscious documentary form of Ozeki's novel and the "hyper" attention to literary and historical contexts that shapes Yamashita's fiction. As this dissertation shows, these authors use their metafictional narratives to address specific environmental injustices—including the exploitation of natural resources

book sees the developing transnational turn in American Studies as having the "potential to shift the intellectual centers of gravity away from the in-turned, American exceptionalist tendencies of wilderness literature and Jeffersonian agrarianism and toward more diverse environmental approaches" that could articulate connections between "environmental justice movements around the world" (261).

and hydroelectric damming on Native lands, factory farming, and urban degradation—that have particularly damaging effects on marginalized populations.⁴ In so doing, the novels position these issues simultaneously in local and transnational contexts, showing how they transcend borders between, for instance, the U.S. and Canada, Mexico, Japan, or Native nations.

However, while both environmentally- and self-conscious, these novels subscribe neither to the conventions of traditional American environmental writing nor to those of metafiction's postmodern heyday. Rather than adopting conservationist approaches to preserving "green space," these authors examine how the exploitation of both "green" and "brown" (urban/degraded) spaces is related to forms of social and economic oppression. In so doing, such texts draw specifically on alternative and ethnic traditions of socioenvironmental thought. My project reflects not only the growing awareness of connections between environmental and social injustice, but also the growing recognition of the historical contributions such traditions have made to our understanding of the environment. Moreover, I demonstrate how the novels' self-conscious attention to the construction of narratives allows them to articulate the complicity of narratives in legitimating environmental injustice, and to create counter-narratives which highlight the importance of "how" we tell stories about the relationship between humans and the environment.

⁴ Throughout the project I use "marginalized populations" as a short hand to refer to people who are marginalized through race/ethnicity, gender, sexuality, class, or location.

Metafiction—fiction which thematizes or theorizes storytelling—is conventionally associated with hyper-aestheticism, pervasive irony, and white male postmodern writers. Recent novels by the authors in this dissertation appropriate metafiction not just to highlight the constructedness of narratives and environments, but to analyze their material effects and ideological implications. My understanding of metafiction as a mode that seeks to reveal narrative practices by telling stories about how we tell stories, and about how those stories produce material and political effects, has proven an exciting way to understand how contemporary ethnic women writers are seeking to redress environmental injustices. Rather than meditating on political paralysis, such texts specifically reflect on how analyzing narrative construction can both raise public awareness and encourage readers to take action on environmental justice issues.

Since environmental injustice has a disproportionate impact on women, low-income populations, and people of color, my dissertation examines the intersection of literary narratives with broader environmental, social, economic, and historical narratives to understand how the exploitation of nature is linked to the exploitation of people. Thus this project is necessarily interdisciplinary, drawing on a wide range of discourses and supplementary texts to provide a nuanced understanding of these novels and the environmental contexts in which they are situated. In the following sections I outline my approach and contributions to the two primary discourses with which my work as a whole engages: metafiction/narrative and environmentalism.

Metafiction and the Political Work of Narrative

How do these novels depart from the conventions and concerns of postmodern metafiction, and to what effect? While the focus of my work is not on comparing these texts with postmodern ones, I do want to suggest some of the rough distinctions between these bodies of work since metafiction is so commonly associated with the specific techniques and themes of postmodern fiction. Critic and novelist William H. Gass coined “metafiction” in a 1970 essay to describe fiction that was about fiction itself and to distinguish the movement in postmodern literature away from the representational assumptions of realist fiction. Of course metafiction did not abruptly appear in the postmodern period, but has roots in some of the earliest novels such as Sterne’s *Tristram Shandy* and Cervantes’s *Don Quixote*. At its postmodern inception, metafiction was alternately derided or celebrated as being a self-indulgent, apolitical exercise in formal experimentation, a kind of narrative navel-gazing that signified the “death of the novel” or the “crisis of the novel.”

While it certainly exceeds any monolithic description, postmodern metafiction has often been characterized by an apolitical formal self-reflexivity, an anxiety about the influence of literary predecessors, a thematic emphasis on solipsism, and a focus on discursive “play” and the “deconstruction” of stable meanings. A quintessential postmodern metafictionist himself, Gass claims, for instance, that the “perfect” work of metafiction would be completely self-contained, without any political or historical content. Novels, he asserts, are not meant to “expose slavery or cry hurrah for the worker” because this “robs” works of their aesthetic reality (283). Robert Scholes offers a less polemical formulation of metafiction, but still emphasizes the “introspective, self-

centered strain of the genre,” casting metafiction as “narcissistic, elitist and fundamentally apolitical,” and Robert Alter critiques the tendency of some self-conscious novels toward “excessive cerebrality” and an “unchecked playfulness that may become self-indulgent” (Ommundsen 84; Alter 182). Referencing their thematic commonalities, Larry McCaffery claims that many postmodern metafictional texts are about “the difficulties of making contact or sustaining relationships with others,” and focus on “revealing insights into the sadness, anxieties, terrors and boredom of the modern world” (100). Similarly, critics like Margaret Heckard and Elizabeth Dipple have characterized metafiction by its preoccupation with “form to the exclusion of content,” which results in “anti-mimetic” texts that eschew references to “human experience” to focus on “the self perceiving the self” (218, 9). While these kinds of descriptions accurately characterize many postmodern metafictional texts, narrow definitions of metafiction both overlook the more “political” texts of the period and conflate particular formal and thematic preoccupations with metafiction itself.

Although metafiction has no inherent political or ideological meaning, the novels I examine in this project use self-conscious forms and themes not to underscore literature’s solipsism, but to demonstrate how this very self-consciousness can prompt readers to reflect on the ways fictional, as well as social and historical narratives, shape our interpretations of the world, and specifically of environmental justice issues. The celebration of linguistic “play” may be liberating for those not excluded from dominant literary and historical discourses, but for marginalized populations which have frequently been defined through stereotypes or other oppressive uses of language, language cannot

remain an abstract form of “play” that elides its material effects. Whereas postmodern metafiction often thematize an anxious obsession that stories are inevitably repetitive and unoriginal, the authors I address position their texts within ethnic narrative traditions and justice movements that serve as a source of positive location instead of anxiety. If, for writers like Gass, fiction is fundamentally anti-utilitarian—the artist’s job is to “concoct amusements for our minds, foods for our souls, foods so purely spiritual and momentary they leave scarcely any stools”—for these authors storytelling is not an amusing intellectual exercise but an important strategy for personal and cultural survival (285).

Wider conceptions of metafiction, in contrast, emphasize the relevance of fictional self-consciousness to our understanding of meaning-construction in a broader sense. According to Wenche Ommundsen, for instance, metafiction allegorizes fiction as a “model for all acts of cultural construction and interpretation,” yielding insights into the “myths and ideologies which organize reality according to narrative structures” (12). Criticizing attempts to define metafiction by specific “objective characteristics,” Mark Currie suggests that metafiction exhibits a more general “reflexive awareness of the conditions of meaning-construction” (15).

I define metafiction in an even broader sense as fiction that “thematizes or theorizes storytelling” because the novels I examine are interested in reflecting not just upon the writing of novels but upon the ways “stories” or “narratives” in general (including historical and political ones) are constructed, and on how those constructions

impact actual practices.⁵ Linda Hutcheon, perhaps the most prominent critic of postmodern metafiction, begins her seminal work *Narcissistic Narrative* by chastising critics who equated the rise of metafiction with the death of the novel. Metafictions may refer to fiction, but “this does not mean they do not have ideological implications for the ‘real’,” because “our common-sense presuppositions about the ‘real’ depend on how that ‘real’ is described, how it is put into discourse and interpreted. There is nothing natural about the ‘real’ and there never was” (*Poetics* 197; *Politics* 33). While this points to a valuable insight with continuing relevance in fiction, Hutcheon’s approach inevitably reflects the postmodern texts she analyzes. Using “historiographic metafiction” as an exemplar of postmodern literature in her later work, for instance, she argues that while the postmodern “has no effective theory of agency” to allow political action, it does become a site of “complicitous critique” that allows us to see through the “spectacles of irony” (*Politics* 3, 123). Hutcheon makes a distinction between the politics of postmodern texts, which are always compromised, and overtly political texts, like feminist novels. However, this schema offers no way of theorizing novels which are both postmodern and feminist, for example. Furthermore, Hutcheon’s formulation both conflates metafiction with postmodernism itself and implies a separation between metafiction and politically

⁵ Unlike narrow definitions, I do not see metafiction as a specific genre associated with postmodern techniques. While some texts foreground issues of meaning-construction and storytelling more than others, in my view it is possible to read any text for its “metafictionality,” to read it through a metafictional lens like we might through a feminist or Marxist lens (even if it is “against the grain” of the text). In this, I agree with critics like Currie, who claims that “metafiction is less a property of the primary text than a function of reading,” or Patricia Waugh, who says that “metafiction is a tendency or function inherent in all novels” (3, 42).

engaged literature which obscures its intersections in novels like those examined this dissertation.

So, where does this leave us today? On the one hand, postmodern ironic self-reflexivity has become so pervasive that it has to some extent been co-opted by television and advertising that ironically parody themselves even as they attempt to sell products or attract viewers.⁶ On the other hand, metafiction, or at least the postmodern version of it, has become worn, leading to pronouncements like the one by Mark Shechner that “metafiction was a concept-ridden fiction . . . for which we now have less patience” (38).

I argue that the contemporary novels in this study are reinventing this well-worn form in two major ways. First, they exhibit a formal and thematic focus on how we construct stories in order to interrogate not only literary, but also historical, social, and political narratives—with a particular emphasis on the way these narratives are constructed to legitimate environmental injustice among marginalized populations. Second, they draw on a different set of intertexts and on different storytelling traditions than most white male postmodernists, grounding their metafiction in literary and philosophical traditions that contemplate human rights, alliance-building, and resistance to injustice. In contrast to an emphasis on ironic or “complicitous” critique, on the “play” of language and the “deconstruction” of stable meaning, for instance, the texts I analyze acknowledge the constructedness of literary and historical narratives while also insisting on the importance of examining the material effects of those constructions. In these novels, attention to the constructedness of such narratives aims to prompt political action

⁶ For more on this phenomenon, see David Foster Wallace’s essay “E Unibus Pluram.”

rather than reflect paralysis or apathy. These texts insist on the ability of literature to make genuine claims for justice, to construct as well as “deconstruct,” and to forge a renewed connection between artistic form and politics.

In so doing, these novels align less with postmodern metafiction and more with what some recent scholarship is calling “renewalism,” “neo-realism,” or, simply, “post-postmodernism.” Robert McLaughlin, for instance, identifies a sea change in fiction since the early 1990s which seems to reflect a “desire to reconnect language to the social sphere . . . to reenergize literature’s social mission, its ability to intervene in the social world, to have an impact on actual people and the actual social institutions in which they live their lives” (55). While postmodern metafiction may have focused more on aesthetic acrobatics and debunking simplistic models of referentiality, it is an overstatement in my view to say, as some critics do, that it eschewed any attempt to represent “real world” or “political” contexts. The relationship between these two approaches, then, is not one of opposites but of emphasis. Post-postmodern writers, according to McLaughlin, focus “less on self-conscious wordplay and the violation of narrative conventions and more on representing the world we all more or less share” (59). Even though we can only know this world through “language and layers of representation,” the better we understand the ways language, narrative, and representation work, the better we can “disengage them from the institutions that encourage cynical despair . . . and claim them for our own purposes” (59). For instance, the authors in this study highlight the constructedness of political and epistemological discourses while still insisting on the need to make truth claims for human and environmental rights. Josh Toth describes a similar phenomenon in

what he calls “renewalist” or “neorealist” fiction which “seems to move beyond the problematic truth claim that all truth claims are dangerous illusions and embraces the need for such claims while simultaneously demonstrating an awareness of their illusory status” (119). The question for the novels I examine here is not “does a narrative tell the whole truth and nothing but the truth?,” but, since this is impossible, they ask “which truth does it tell? And how does its truth benefit some and disadvantage others?” Both absolutist and relativist discourses legitimate socioenvironmental injustices, so although these novels undermine a singular concept of “Truth,” they insist that we must posit “truths” in order to enable real change.

While the fictions I analyze “deconstruct” historical and national narratives by pointing to their assumptions and underlying ideologies, they also seek to “construct” new narratives that model strategies for resistance and make genuine claims for justice. Post-postmodern writers want to find a way “beyond self-referential irony” to express a sense of “reverence and conviction,” because, as David Foster Wallace has said in a critique of postmodern fiction, “irony’s singularly un-useful when it comes to constructing anything to replace the hypocrisies it debunks” (McLaughlin 64; Wallace 67). However, this renewed effort towards construction and genuineness does not mean that contemporary writers are simply ignoring the lessons of postmodernism, but that they are demonstrating the need to move beyond its more paralyzing and navel-gazing tendencies. “Post-postmodernism seeks not to reify the cynicism, the disconnect, the atomized privacy of our society nor to escape or mask it,” argues McLaughlin, but to make us newly aware of how this reality is constructed and to “remind us—because we

live in a culture where we're encouraged to forget—that other realities are possible" (67). Thus, part of my project here is articulating how these novels go about revealing the constructedness of discourses and constructing new stories of resistance.

Given the underrepresentation of ethnic women's writing in most critical surveys of metafiction, this project also aims to expand the range of texts under consideration and to demonstrate how these recent narratives broaden our understanding of metafiction by explicitly linking it to calls for environmental justice. Most proposed lineages of metafiction include little mention of women and even less of ethnic minority writers.⁷ Hutcheon, for instance, proposes an arc for metafiction that begins with Cervantes, goes through Sterne and Diderot to the *Künstlerroman* and finally to postmodern novels about novels, most of which are by white male metafictionists. Moreover, many scholarly books on metafiction focus solely on texts by white male writers.⁸ Hutcheon's work and that of even more recent critics tends to overlook the use of metafiction by non-white women authors. While she rightly points out that many broad theories of postmodern metafiction leave out writing by "ex-centric" authors who have influenced and are influenced by the postmodern, her own scholarship does not focus on these texts. She

⁷ One of the best known American metafictionists, John Barth, charts a line of descent running from Donald Barthelme, Robert Coover, William Gass, John Hawkes, and Thomas Pynchon to Raymond Carver, Ann Beattie, Joyce Carol Oates, Anne Tyler, and John Updike (125). Raymond Federman, another major metafictionist, argues for a tradition extending from William Burroughs, Kurt Vonnegut, Thomas Pynchon, John Barth, and Donald Barthelme to Kathy Acker and William Vollman (*Critifiction* 132).

⁸ These include such books as Robert Alter's *Partial Magic: The Novel as Self-Conscious Genre*, Inger Christensen's *The Meaning of Metafiction*, and Larry McCaffery's *The Metafictional Muse*. Others, like Robert Scholes's *Fabulation and Metafiction*, include one or two brief examples from women or ethnic minorities.

does draw on a few “ex-centric” authors, like Ishmael Reed and Maxine Hong Kingston, to show their engagement with postmodern “questions of discourse and of authority and power,” but her work does not take on an extended examination of how such novels challenge conventional views of metafiction (*Poetics* 16). Likewise, Ommundsen uses examples by Toni Morrison and Salman Rushdie to demonstrate that women and non-whites do write reflexively, but her book also deals mainly with white male metafictionists. My study examines some of the same gender and racial power dynamics as hers, but from the point of view of the “ex-centric” texts themselves rather than the more conventional ones. Similarly, while Patricia Waugh emphasizes significant differences between the metafictional approaches of contemporary women-authored texts and “classic” metafiction, she focuses chiefly on white women writers. Ann Heilmann and Mark Llewellyn’s recent book also addresses women writers, arguing that because women have often been omitted from official histories they are interested in undermining them through “metafictional and metahistorical” writing (3). Although their study establishes an important tradition of women’s metafictional literature from Aphra Behn to Jeanette Winterson, they too discuss only white women writers.⁹

⁹ This kind of work is especially important given the fact that many postmodern metafictional texts have an explicitly masculine orientation that literalizes the textual/sexual metaphor. Gass, for instance, conceives of the author as a male lover facing the blank page as a woman with a “passive mind” who is “utterly receptive” (13). The artist’s job is to “woo his medium till she opens to him” (287). Commenting on Calvino’s *If on a Winter’s Night a Traveler*, Teresa de Lauretis notes that “the vision of woman as passive capacity, receptivity, readiness to receive—a womb waiting to be fecundated by words (his words), a void ready to be filled with meanings, or elsewhere a blank page awaiting insemination by the writer’s pen—is a notorious cliché of Western literary writing,” especially the “classic” metafictional texts (75). In such novels the “pleasure of the text . . . is

Why are ethnic women writers usually ignored in critical studies of metafiction or self-conscious writing? On the one hand, because most of these critics focus on a particular strain of postmodern metafiction, they tend to overlook the self-reflexivity of ethnic women's novels or to categorize them as outside the scope of their projects. On the other hand, these novels *are* outside the scope of their projects in the sense that such writers cannot be neatly integrated into a literary trend that often sought to eschew the very political contexts that animate their fiction. Marginalized writers, of course, have a fraught relationship to conventional postmodernism, and particularly to the hyper-intellectualism and aesthetic acrobatics of postmodern metafiction. The novels I examine, then, are not simply "responses" to postmodern metafiction (though some engage it more than others), but are responding to a range of literary, cultural, and historical phenomena outside of white formal experimentation. How must we revise approaches based mainly on white male postmodern metafictionists (or even white female metafictionists) in examining contemporary novels by ethnic women writers who use metafiction as a political critique of environmental justice?

My dissertation argues that these novels challenge and reinvent metafiction not only through their "post-postmodern" approach, but also through the sorts of intertexts they engage and through drawing on ethnic traditions of storytelling. Erdrich, for instance, characterizes postmodern metafiction's "emphasis on pure technique and

gender-specific," claims Ommundsen, because the author is the creative penetrating force and the blank page or passive reader is generally represented as female (98). This phenomenon, though of course not restricted to metafiction, does point to a male-dominated tradition that is refigured by female metafictionists.

language” as a literary “dead end,” and instead models her metafiction on the self-conscious storyteller-trickster figure Nanabozho to create a form that articulates Ojibwe political issues (Caldwell 68). Ozeki’s novel, which has been criticized for being too “political” and not sufficiently “literary,” strategically models the interpretation of a diverse range of intertexts from scientific articles on estrogen poisoning to history textbooks, in order to contextualize her metafictional critique of factory farming practices and “red meat” nationalism.

Furthermore, in contrast to the traditional tendency to emphasize the political “content” of ethnic novels, this project is part of the growing interest in returning to “form” as an analytical focus. In fact, I suggest that analysis of narrative form enhances an understanding of these texts’ political commitments. In *Black Metafiction*, Madelyn Jablon critiques the lingering assumption that “because [metafiction] is innovative, it is white, and because it is white, it is unable to articulate the political sentiments” of African Americans (18). This exposes the bias that the ethnic writer’s job is to provide realistic, didactic messages for the reader—thereby creating an inverse relationship between the writer’s level of “authenticity” and their use of self-conscious forms. Instead of subordinating politics to white aesthetic tastes, black metafiction, as Jablon shows, represents a “recognition of the very political issues implicit in aesthetic theory” (18).

This kind of innovative work is prompting a current renewal of interest in metafiction. Although not focused on contemporary texts, Susana Araújo critiques the “tradition of white middle class male writers . . . who rejected ‘representation’ and ‘realism’,” looking at how, for marginalized writers, “metafiction provided ways to resist

the hegemony of established realistic forms” while retaining an ability to engage with “the other, the audience, the world” (109, 117). Analyzing texts by women authors including Morrison and Erdrich, Sharon Rose Wilson explores connections between story and identity in what she calls contemporary “metafairy tales” (1). In his recent book *Africa Writes Back to Self: Metafiction, Gender, Sexuality*, Evan Maina Mwangi considers the self-reflexive, intertextual conversations between African novels about the construction of discourses around homosexuality and women’s political rights. Although my work deals with different texts, contexts, and political concerns, I see it as related to these kinds of renewed efforts to revise the category and canon of metafiction. While politically-oriented ethnic metafiction that critiques discourses of race and class, for instance, is not an entirely new phenomenon—one might think of Ishmael Reed or Ralph Ellison—my project is interested in looking at the emerging tendency of marginalized writers using metafiction to address environmental injustice. The novels I examine here reinvent metafiction to lay bare the political role of narratives in constructing the physical and social environments that impact marginalized populations in particular. In positing its relevance to contemporary communities with material needs, these authors establish metafiction as an important form of the recent literary imagination in the U.S.

Environmentalism and Environmental Justice

Just as these novels depart from traditional or “mainstream” approaches to metafiction, so they deviate from traditional approaches to environmentalism in the U.S. How are ethnic women writers representing environmental issues? And what role do their metafictional strategies play in responding to environmental injustice? In order to answer

these questions, we first need to ask some more general ones. What is the relationship between the environment and categories like race, class, gender, and nation? Why has environmental degradation had a disproportionate impact on marginalized populations? And what is the relationship between traditional preservationist or wilderness-based approaches to the environment and environmental justice ones?

What might be called traditional American “environmentalism” tends to emphasize the value of wilderness spaces (and writing about those spaces) for edifying both individual and national identities. Wilderness, usually defined as huge tracts of “uninhabited” land with spectacular natural beauty, has been characterized since the late nineteenth century as a place where one could temporarily escape from the taint of human industrial civilization. While not monolithic in its concerns, American nature writing and thought from Thoreau and Emerson to Muir and Abbey developed around the idea that in the wilderness one could experience an ecstatic rejuvenation of the self. However, this kind of “wilderness experience” was usually reserved for white men seeking to act out the fantasy of rugged individualism so foundational to U.S. national identity. William Cronon traces preservationist models of environmentalism specifically to American anxieties about the closing of the frontier. “It is no accident that the movement to set aside national parks and wilderness areas began to gain real momentum at precisely the time that laments about the passing frontier reached their peak,” he argues, because “to protect wilderness was in a very real sense to protect the nation’s most sacred myth of origin” (77).

However, the wilderness/frontier myth that underlies U.S. national identity relies particularly on controlling access to wilderness by marginalized populations. The irony of the “preservationist” approach is that it does not actually “preserve” places as they are, but alters them to manufacture the fantasy of experiencing nature as pristine and untouched. For instance, Native peoples who inhabited these places for millennia were removed so that “national” parks could be established, with “the result that tourists could safely enjoy the illusion that they were seeing their nation in its pristine, original state” (Cronon 79). This illusion relied simultaneously on the removal of Native inhabitants and on the fantasy that these areas were untouched by human intervention. While grandiose landscapes like Yosemite were seen as ideal sites for satisfying the American longing for a sublime “wilderness experience,” this landscape had actually been carefully shaped by indigenous people through, for example, controlled burnings to create meadows and the mass cultivation of oak trees for harvesting acorns. In other instances, U.S. national identity was maintained through the containment of marginalized populations in “the wilderness” rather than their removal. For example, the internment of Japanese Americans, an event referenced in Yamashita’s novel, involved relocation from urban to rural areas. Most of the ten internment camps were purposefully located in remote, interior areas of the western U.S., suggesting that America’s “wide open spaces” could not only edify national and individual character, but also contain foreign threats against it.

The “enduring and persistent” conception of wilderness “as the site par excellence for (re)invention of the self” continues to shape not only common perceptions of the

environment and governmental policy, but also the study and teaching of environmental literature (Evans 182). While “first wave” ecocriticism focused almost exclusively on traditional nature writing and the wilderness experience according to Lawrence Buell, the current “second wave” tends to account for both anthropocentric and biocentric concerns, both natural and built environments. Although there is increasing attention to “eco-injustice” and “society’s marginal groups,” wilderness-based approaches continue to influence the field (24). For instance, John Tallmadge’s recent forward to *Teaching North American Environmental Literature* (2008), describes his own self-affirming experiences in places like Big Sur and the Sierra Nevada, “wild places that offered freedom and ecstasy” (2). A combined process of reading nature writing and having personal encounters with wilderness leads, he argues, to “the most intense kind of personal transformation” (2). Since people develop what he calls an “ecological identity” through such “transformative encounters” with nature, he and his students “go to the wilderness at least once a year” presumably to discover this identity (3, 2). This kind of approach assumes both that encounters with nature are universally self-affirming experiences, and that they are open to anyone willing to develop their ecological identity.

What about those who do not have the luxury of the yearly wilderness experience, or who have been historically excluded from wilderness spaces? Do they have no ecological identity? And if we posit nature as something separate from the human, a place we “go to,” what are the implications for our approach to environmental issues? Organizations like EarthFirst!, and ecocritical strains like deep ecology, “all too frequently come close to accepting” the ultimate tautology that “if wild nature is the only

thing worth saving, and if our mere presence destroys it, then . . . the only way to protect sacred wilderness from profane humanity would seem to be suicide” (Cronon 83). This statement may take biocentric positions to their logical extreme, but it usefully suggests the ultimate futility of attempting to separate “environmental” and “human” concerns.¹⁰

Ironically, while preservationist and biocentric positions posit the inherent value of nonhuman nature and discourage anthropocentric interventions in “wild” spaces, their practitioners often simultaneously tout the value of the transformative “wilderness experience,” which amounts to a form of eco-tourism that, if open to everyone, would profoundly alter the very “pristine” spaces they wish to preserve. In other words, this approach relies not only on a problematic conception of wilderness as separate from humans or culture, but also on a wilderness experience that is by definition exclusive since it is predicated on escaping from other humans (specifically from marginalized people who lack access to wilderness). Defining the “environment” as wilderness and environmental literature as “about” wilderness allows us to ignore non-wilderness places, particularly environmentally degraded places, and the people who live in them. It also absolves its proponents from considering the historical complicity of the “wilderness” approach in ignoring and even perpetuating environmental injustice. Although I critique these discriminatory and contradictory assumptions, I do not mean to imply that we

¹⁰ The Foundation for Deep Ecology describes itself as “dedicated to the preservation of wild nature,” to the idea that nonhuman nature is “inherently valuable” regardless of its usefulness for “human purposes,” and to the idea that the “flourishing of nonhuman life requires . . . a substantial decrease of the human population.” Although its practitioners cite the inherent value of nonhuman nature and biodiversity, they also assert a version of the “wilderness experience” as a rationale for preserving “wild nature”: the experience of “realiz[ing] ourselves in harmony with other beings.”

should not value or protect nonhuman nature. In fact, I see the debate between biocentric and anthropocentric approaches as a false opposition: both humans and nonhuman nature have “needs,” and a focus that privileges one at the expense of the other will always be incomplete. If what happens to nature affects what happens to humans and vice versa, any environmental approach that ignores either the value of humans or the value of nature simplifies this dynamic.

While the field’s traditional focus on nature writing, and its newer “biocentric” branches like deep ecology, are now being complicated by approaches like environmental justice, they have had (and continue to have) a profound influence both on the environmental movement and on the academic treatment of environmental literature.¹¹ The traditional canon of environmental literature in the U.S. reflects ecocriticism’s historical privileging of wilderness literature and consequent elision of race, gender, poverty, and urban/toxic landscapes. Like narrow definitions of metafiction, narrow definitions of what counts as environmental literature often result in the exclusion of marginalized writers. Laura Ingram, for example, argues that because they are

¹¹ The mainstream environmental movement in the U.S. has largely been a white one, and still “more than one-third of mainstream green groups and one-fifth of green government agencies in the United States do not have a single nonwhite person on their staff, according to a 2004-06 University of Michigan survey” (Learn). Environmental journalist Ayana Meade reports that “despite the large number of environment-related issues that affect minority communities, the predominant face of journalists reporting on these issues, and of people working in the environmental community, continues to be disproportionately white.” “This reality,” she goes on to say, “may in part be responsible for the perception within some minority groups that environmental issues are the exclusive domain of upper middle class white people.” In terms of “winning over minorities,” claims activist Jennifer Oladipo, “religion, capitalism, and even militarism . . . have left environmentalism in the dust” (240).

“marginalized by a combination of race, gender, class, and the social-justice themes of their work, current American women environmentalist writers have only very recently received serious critical discussion” (229). She makes a list of the most frequently taught works in environmental literature courses, and only one of them, Leslie Marmon Silko’s *Ceremony*, is by a non-white author. Scott Slovic and George Hart’s 2004 book *Literature and the Environment* reflects this continuing phenomenon. They claim to cover an “equitable range” of environmental literature because they incorporate roughly equal numbers of male and female authors, but they include only one text by a non-white author: again, Silko’s *Ceremony* (9). Mainstream ecocriticism, notes Nixon, generally ignores writers who draw not on conservationist figures, but whose works are “animated instead by the fraught relations between ethnicity, pollution, and human rights and by the equally fraught relations between local, national, and global politics” (235).

Although mainstream ecocriticism and environmentalism have increased public and academic awareness of environmental issues in general, environmental justice literature and activism usually trace their roots not to ecstatic experiences with nature but to political resistance movements. Sociologists Daniel Faber and Deborah McCarthy suggest, for instance, that the contemporary environmental justice movement has origins in “the civil rights movement; the occupational safety and health movement; the indigenous peoples’ movement; the toxics movement; solidarity, human rights, and environmental movements in the global South; and the community-based movements for social and economic justice that have traditionally focused on housing, public transportation, crime and police conduct, and access to jobs” (410). Many cite the

“official” beginning of the movement in 1987 when the United Church of Christ Commission for Racial Justice published a report which showed that race was the strongest predictor of the location of commercial hazardous waste facilities in the U.S., and executive director Benjamin Chavis coined the term “environmental racism.” An updated report published by the Commission in 2007 found that “racial disparities in the distribution of hazardous wastes are greater than previously reported,” which raises “serious questions about the ability of current policies and institutions to adequately protect people of color and the poor from toxic threats” (xi, xii).¹²

Thus, questions of how we define the environment, environmental justice, and the role of ecocriticism are crucial matters. In an attempt to construct a more inclusive environmentalism, the *Environmental Justice Reader* defines environmental justice as “the right of all people to share equally in the benefits bestowed by a healthy environment,” and consequently defines the environment as “the places in which we live, work, play, and worship” (Adamson et al. 4). Similarly, T.V. Reed coins the term “environmental justice ecocriticism” in an attempt to “foster new work that understands and elaborates the crucial connections between environmental concerns and social justice in the context of ecocriticism” (145). In attending to these connections, my project

¹² The 1987 report was spurred by the 1982 protests in North Carolina against the building of a toxic waste landfill for PCBs (polychlorinated biphenyls) in a low-income, African American community. Specifically, the 2007 report discovered that “people of color make up the majority of those living in host neighborhoods within 3 kilometers (1.8 miles) of the nation’s hazardous waste facilities,” and that 90% of states with hazardous waste facilities have disproportionately high numbers of people of color in host neighborhoods. Furthermore, there are extremely high concentrations of low-income and people of color in places where toxic facilities are “clustered,” which have the most damaging effects on public health.

critiques the mainstream environmental movement's tendency to ignore issues of race, gender, and class as well as "environments" that fall outside the bounds of "wilderness" or protected "green space." In the chapters that follow, I read the novels as examples of environmental justice literature that revise traditional nature writing by calling attention to toxic or degraded landscapes.

While some socioenvironmental approaches focus mainly on environmental racism or environmental sexism, I posit an approach that regards the intersections of the environment with race, gender, class, and nation—as well as our representations of those categories—as fundamental to environmental justice and the study of environmental literature. In other words, I see environmental oppression as inseparable from other kinds of oppressions, and see the role of ecocriticism as articulating and challenging these intersections. Racism, for example, is often used to justify environmental harm. As sociologist Robert Pellow notes, the ideology of racism and environmental destruction are closely related since "the ideological, cultural, psychological, and physical harm visited on people of color was supported and made possible by a system that did the same to nature" (38). By combining critiques of racism and environmental destruction, the novels I examine highlight how these two ideologies reinforce one another to perpetuate environmental injustice. Similarly, redefining women's bodies as sites of environmental injustice can empower women to link their struggles with other forms of oppression in order to illuminate the larger structures which enable them. Urging the inclusion of gender and sexuality as factors of analysis in the environmental justice movement, Rachel Stein argues that women must "view our bodies as 'homes,' 'lands,' or

‘environments,’ that have been placed at risk, stolen from us, and even killed due to social or physical harms that may be exacerbated due to our gender and sexuality” (2). Environmental injustice disproportionately affects women not only because they tend to be poorer, but also for biological reasons like the accumulation of toxins in fatty breast tissues, a phenomenon Ozeki’s novel references.¹³ The poor are also disproportionately impacted by environmental injustice since they tend to live in locations that bear the brunt of industrial capital development and urban decay. Like those marginalized by race and gender, the poor can “seldom afford to be single-issue activists” because “their green commitments are seamed through with other economic and cultural causes as they experience environmental threat not as a planetary abstraction but as a set of inhabited risks” (Nixon 4). My intersectional approach to environmental criticism is shaped both by the multi-issue work of environmental justice activism itself and by the similarly multiple focus of environmental justice literature. As such, it is part of a growing emphasis on environmental justice in the humanities. Indeed, the “environmental justice movement is beginning to achieve a more forceful presence within the greening of the humanities” and “seems to be the most dynamic movement within environmental criticism right now” (Nixon 255; Buell 112).

¹³ Interestingly, women environmentalists themselves have been attacked on sexist grounds. Author of the foundational environmental text *Silent Spring*, Rachel Carson investigated the intergenerational genetic effects of synthetic pesticides. Discounting her scientific work, the U.S. Secretary of Agriculture at the time asked, “Why is a spinster with no children so concerned about genetics? She is probably a Communist.” Other angry reviewers of her work described it as “more emotional than accurate,” or as “hysterically over-emphatic” (Lear 429, 461).

Despite the increasing concern with environmental justice in humanities disciplines, most environmental justice scholarship is still oriented toward the sciences and social sciences. What, then, is the role of the humanities in environmental justice scholarship? Joni Adamson points out that there is a “vast literature” on the subject in the fields of social science and environmental science, and Julie Sze notes that environmental justice is “located primarily in sociology, natural resource policy, environmental law” (5, 165). Thus while most environmental justice scholarship uses statistical and scientific data to analyze toxicity and public policy, this project argues that the importance of cultural imagination and representational discourse for determining environmental practice suggests a vital role for the humanities in the environmental justice movement.

My dissertation seeks to demonstrate, then, how popular, political, and historical narratives which shape our imagination of humans and the environment are fundamental to this political project. Such narratives affect how we understand environmental problems and solutions, how we evaluate the ethical questions of risk distribution and access to resources, and how we imagine the connections between environmental degradation and other forms of oppression. While the environmental justice movement has usefully expanded wilderness-based definitions of the environment to include urban, toxic, industrial, and built spaces (“places where we live, work, play, and worship”), my project argues that we need to focus not only on these actual landscapes, but also on the literary and cultural narratives about them which shape our attitudes and practices. While Adamson rightly notes that “environmental justice movements call attention to the ways a disparate distribution of wealth and power often leads to correlative social upheaval and

the unequal distribution of environmental degradation and/or toxicity,” my project is interested in showing how literary texts are calling attention not only to these concrete problems but also to how they are represented or constructed (5). The complexity of environmental justice, as Sze points out, requires going beyond the “discourse of quantitative sociology” and “the narrow grid of public policy” to understand these problems “through the contours of fantasy, literature, and imagination” (173).

The humanities, and literary criticism in particular, are crucial to environmental justice work because they can demonstrate how different oppressions, discourses, and movements are linked. Literature can, for instance, help us understand the intersections between environmental and social injustice by depicting how these links play out in fictional contexts, interrogating how they have played out in historical ones, and modeling ways of resisting on multiple fronts and forming cross-issue alliances. Creative work, whether it is literature or green hip hop, explores realms like imagination, rhetoric, and storytelling that the sciences and social sciences do not, and thus it produces a different kind of knowledge about the relationship between humans and the environment. Music like Bryant’s, for example, can help make environmental discourses imaginatively accessible while also demonstrating the relevance of “environmental issues” to marginalized populations and giving audiences a sense of how lives are actually impacted by environmental injustice. As Ozeki points out, artistic representations of the world are important because “you cannot make a better world unless you can imagine it so;” without “the power of the imagination we lack the power to alter outcomes” (“Conversation” 13).

Existing environmental scholarship, however, “does not substantively address the historical constructions and cultural discourses of mainstream environmentalism’s representations of ‘nature’,” claims Sze, and thus analyzing how cultural texts “broaden the emerging academic field of environmental justice studies by enhancing our understanding of the experience of living with the effects of environmental racism in the United States” is essential (166, 163). From a different angle, political geographer Edward Soja shows that while the environmental justice movement has successfully added “locational bias” to “more conventional notions of racial, class, and gender discrimination,” it usually focuses on “negative environmental impacts” or “outcomes” rather than on “the processes producing them” (53-54). This emphasis on “highly localized and unique cases” has led to the movement’s general lack of “awareness of the interactive and multiscalar geographies of place-based discrimination” (53).

The texts I examine do precisely this kind of work, not by providing more accurate data on “place-based” discrimination, but through metafictionally reflecting on the historical, geographical, and economic narratives that underlie this discrimination. Yamashita’s novel, for instance, links specific “outcomes” like rainforest destruction in Brazil or urban decay in Los Angeles with “processes” like colonialism, neoliberal approaches to globalization, and the historical narratives that legitimate them. In so doing, it creates an explicit “awareness” of how environmental injustice operates on interacting discursive and geographic scales (e.g., global/local, nation/city). This is not to say these novels ignore specific “highly localized” cases, but that they position those cases in “multiscalar” and “multi-issue” contexts. The ability of literature to dramatize

the relation between “outcomes” and “processes” in multiple contexts, and to articulate connections between environmental and other activist issues like economic globalization, represents an important contribution to the primarily sociological and scientific orientation of the environmental justice movement.

Moreover, the ways we represent the environment, and humanity’s relation to it, are crucial to transforming public consciousness and encouraging political change. In a recent book evaluating its successes and failures, sociologists David Pellow and Robert Brulle, claim that although the movement has “gained ground” in framing environmental concerns as fundamental to “civil rights, social justice, and human rights issues,” so that mainstream environmental organizations and government agencies realize they must at least pay lip service to this idea, it has been much less successful persuading the public to “disrupt the popular consent of the current hegemonic relations of ruling” (13). Thus they define issues of “cultural hegemony and ideology” as the new “central battlefield for the EJ movement” (12). Humanities disciplines are uniquely equipped to confront the cultural and ideological issues that underlie, for example, practices like “greenwashing” which affect public perceptions of environmental problems. Both Ozeki and Hogan’s novels reference acts of greenwashing, wherein corporations with the most egregious environmental impacts ironically appropriate the rhetoric of environmentalism. The “profound influence that corporations wield over the words and images fed to the general public seriously affects how we live and how we understand the nature of the environmental crisis and the changes needed to correct it,” claims Joshua Karlinger (186). Because transnational corporations are “potent, active players in manufacturing the icons

and stories that shape popular perceptions of environmental science and policy,” Nixon asserts, it is important to consider “how to devise arresting stories, images, and symbols” about environmental injustices, “stories dramatic enough to rouse public sentiment and warrant political intervention” (38, 3). The authors I examine function as what he calls “writer-activists” who “play a critical role by drawing to the surface—and infusing with emotional force—submerged stories of injustice” (280). Because environmental justice requires a “climate of transformed environmental values, perception, and will,” claims Buell, the “power of story, image, and artistic performance and the resources of aesthetics, ethics, and cultural theory are crucial” (vi). Unlike the environmental critics cited here however, my work seeks specifically to address how ethnic women writers use literary self-consciousness about storytelling and national/historical narratives as a strategy for combating environmental injustice among marginalized populations.

Chapter Outline

By metafictionally interrogating the “power of story,” the novels I examine in the following chapters demonstrate its critical role in shaping our understanding of the relationship between literature, humans, and the environment. This dissertation attempts to create a nuanced understanding of this relationship by showing, for instance, how these novels contextualize their narratives and the environmental justice issues they address within broader cultural and historical discourses like neocolonialism. My methodology involves close readings of the texts along with analysis of their literary, historical, and activist contexts. In reading the novels, I engage with actual documents they refer to (e.g., scientific reports on factory farming), their legal histories (e.g., the Dawes Allotment

Act), and the economic policies (e.g., NAFTA) and transnational links to other resistance movements (e.g., the Zapatistas) that they reference. In the following chapters, each novel is read as a case study for a particular model of metafiction: trickster (Erdrich), trauma (Hogan), documentary (Ozeki), and “hypercontextual” (Yamashita). These models are then linked to the specific environmental justice issues each novel negotiates: land/natural resource claims (Erdrich), hydroelectric damming (Hogan), factory farming (Ozeki), and urban degradation (Yamashita). The first two chapters address metafictions based on indigenous cultural traditions (Erdrich and Hogan), and the last two analyze media-influenced forms of metafiction (Ozeki and Yamashita). Although all of the novels were written in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, I have also ordered them according to the chronology of their settings—1920s (Erdrich), 1970s (Hogan), 1991 (Ozeki), and 1997 (Yamashita)—in order to give a sense of how environmental problems and responses have developed over time.

The first chapter, “Trickster Metafiction: Native Identity and Survival Environmentalism,” argues that Erdrich models her metafiction on the Ojibwe trickster who calls attention to the artificiality of social and storytelling conventions to ensure that the people (and their stories) remain adaptable, ultimately promoting what Gerald Vizenor calls “survivance”—a combination of survival and resistance. While she acknowledges the influence of postmodern metafiction on her writing, Erdrich calls its emphasis on “pure technique and language” a literary “dead end” (Caldwell 68). Instead, the indigenized form of metafiction in *Four Souls* (2004) foregrounds the role of national narratives of nature and racial difference in authorizing the exploitation of Native peoples

and natural resources. In so doing, it develops empathetic or relational models of identity and ecology designed to promote survival. Set in the aftermath of the Dawes Allotment Act, which resulted in the loss of two-thirds of Native lands across the U.S., the novel seeks to recuperate the obscured histories which reside in these appropriated and now ecologically degraded places. However, I contend that the persuasive force of the novel comes not only from its depiction of these abuses, but from its dismantling of the colonial narratives of progress that legitimate them.

In the next chapter, “Trauma Metafiction: Ecological and Bodily Violence,” I claim that Linda Hogan’s metafiction self-consciously employs techniques like shifting narratorial viewpoints, repetition, and breaks in linear time and space to formally replicate the experience of trauma for the reader. The novel implicates colonialism (both in the U.S. and Canada) in the legacy of domestic violence and ecological destruction that continue to traumatize a multi-generational group of Native women. Hogan’s metafiction, I assert, functions as a way of responding to indigenous women’s experiences of ecological and bodily trauma through acts of self-conscious storytelling wherein a series of narrators and narratees offer an alternative to the series of victims and victimizers that replicate violence. In so doing, the novel draws on indigenous mourning and healing ceremonies that function to re-integrate the traumatized individual into a wider human and ecological community. As a fictionalization of the James Bay Hydroelectric Project, which began in the 1970s and decimated Native communities and animal populations, *Solar Storms* (1995) suggests that environmental justice and indigenous women’s well-being are inseparable. I argue that this text redefines environmental injustice as a form of

human and ecological trauma, the healing of which requires a metafictional examination of the historical, economic, environmental, and social narratives that enable this trauma. This chapter analyzes the historical and political contexts of James Bay and draws on my published interview with the author to show how the novel refracts an ecological message through a narrative of bodily trauma in order to posit an expanded definition of environmental justice.

“Documentary Metafiction, Media and Environmental Justice” argues that Ozeki’s metafiction combines sentimental stories with empirical data to create a persuasive meta-documentary form which critiques corporate media narratives that conceal links between the environmental degradation of factory farming and the exploitation of female/raced bodies. Set during the media frenzy surrounding Desert Storm, *My Year of Meats* (1998) calls attention to how media representations influence popular perceptions of social and environmental issues. The novel’s form is characterized by shifts between heart-wrenching accounts of American families on a reality television show marketed transnationally to Japanese housewives and “Documentary Interludes,” which interrupt the stories to provide scientific and historical information about the use of growth hormones in animals and women, and the environmental impact of factory farming (often citing actual scientific studies). This chapter suggests that documentary metafiction is a particularly effective form for environmental justice narratives since it undermines absolutist epistemologies and commercialized sentimentality while self-consciously employing empirical knowledge and sentimental stories to inspire political action. Through this novel I demonstrate the need to go beyond traditional approaches to

environmental justice that use statistical data to define toxicity and pollution by showing how media and literary narratives which shape our imagination of the nation, nature, and human bodies are fundamental to this political project.

In “Hypercontextual Metafiction and the Neoliberal Environment” I contend that Yamashita, who coins the term “hypercontext,” combines the nodal aesthetic of the internet’s hypertext model with a hyper-focus on the economic, social, and environmental contexts which shape transnational narratives of North America. Situated specifically as a response to NAFTA (first implemented in 1994), this model of metafiction seeks to disrupt the neoliberal narrative of free trade and global progress through a self-conscious reflection on the many contexts it ignores. By attending to environmental justice issues including urban pollution, gentrification, homelessness, and the exploitation of poor and undocumented laborers, *Tropic of Orange* (1997) charts the environmental and human legacy of neoliberal policies and globalization for the L.A./Mexico border region. I argue that while the novel critiques the commodified rhetoric of harmonious multiculturalism, its hypercontextual approach suggests that only by linking, for instance, human and environmental rights movements in Latin America, indigenous struggles against colonialism, and African-American resistance to slavery and discrimination, can we construct an effective narrative of resistance.

**Trickster Metafiction: Native Identity and Survival Environmentalism
in Louise Erdrich's *Four Souls***

Contemporary Native American authors have therefore a task quite different from other writers. . . . In the light of enormous loss, they must tell the stories of contemporary survivors while protecting and celebrating the cores of cultures left in the wake of the catastrophe. And in this, there always remains the land.

—Louise Erdrich, “Where I Ought to Be”

Louise Erdrich's recent novel *Four Souls* (2004) continues where her well-known novel *Tracks* left off, telling the story of her fictional Ojibwe reservation in the aftermath of allotment policy and the widespread logging of woodlands. Chronologically located between her most popular novels *Tracks* (1912 to 1924) and *Love Medicine* (1930s to 1984), *Four Souls* bridges the narrative gaps in the stories of recurring characters like Nanapush and Fleur Pillager. Originally conceived as an expanded version of *Tracks*, *Four Souls*' parallel plots depict Fleur's attempt to reclaim her land from lumber baron John Mauser and heal her growing bitterness, alongside Nanapush's analogous effort to hold onto the remaining tribal land and repair his increasingly acerbic relationship with his partner Margaret.

The novel's epilogue provides a succinct account of how its metafictional approach relates to its concern with Native environments and identities. Nanapush, tribal elder and resident trickster, self-consciously reflects on the whole “scope and drift” of the region's history, lamenting the fact that people now “print [themselves] deeply on the earth” with roads, automobiles, and modern buildings that transform the environment and threaten tribal sovereignty (210). He contrasts these destructive markings that “bite deep” and cause the “bush” to “recede” with the printed tracks of his own words (210). Continuing

the titular metaphor from *Tracks*, he muses: “I have left my own tracks, too. I have left behind these words. But even as I write them down I know they are merely footsteps in the snow. They will be gone by spring. New growth will cover them, and me. That green in turn will blacken. . . . All things familiar dissolve into strangeness. Even our bones nourish change” (210). By redefining “words” as “tracks” and the “deep” tracks as a form of “print,” Nanapush links stories with the material world, and specifically with the political context of land use. He draws attention not only to how modern development affects the earth, particularly on Native lands, but also to the historical narratives of progress that legitimate their impact. This deep printing disrupts both the local woodlands and the communal identity of a “people who [once] left no tracks” (210). By comparing his own writing with plant life, Nanapush situates his “words” and himself in a larger natural cycle of decay and renewal. While he is clearly critical of “deep printing,” however, Nanapush neither calls for a wholesale rejection of “modernity” nor offers his own account as a simple alternative. Instead, he self-consciously defines his story as a temporary and partial means of orientation (tracks) and as an impermanent but nourishing contribution to storytelling (plant life). Although he acknowledges that his narrative cannot provide an objective or complete account of particular environments or identities, Nanapush’s reflections on storytelling throughout the novel suggest the positive value of literary self-consciousness for examining both.

As Nanapush demonstrates here, the novel reflects Erdrich’s belief that storytelling, environment, and identity are closely linked. As I noted in my epigraph, she describes the task of Native authors as telling stories that simultaneously register “loss”

by emphasizing particular injustices, and promote the “survival” of remaining peoples, cultures, and lands. For Erdrich, environmental threats are also threats to personal and cultural identities. If in a “tribal view of the world where one place has been inhabited for generations. . . . people and place are inseparable,” then environmental degradation, land loss, and displacement have an inevitable impact on identity (“Where” 43). Louis Owens also sees the connection between place and identity as particularly important for Native literature, arguing that the “recovering or rearticulation of an identity, a process dependent upon a rediscovered sense of place as well as community. . . . is at the center of American Indian fiction” (5). Moreover, Erdrich cites socioenvironmental injustice as an ongoing crisis in Native communities. While Americans may worry about nuclear war, she points out, “to American Indians it is as if the unthinkable has already happened, and relatively recently. Many Native American cultures were annihilated more thoroughly than even a nuclear disaster might destroy ours, and others live on with the fallout of that destruction, effects as persistent as radiation—poverty, fetal alcohol syndrome, chronic despair” (“Where” 48).

Four Souls suggests that both the “annihilation” of colonization and the ongoing “fallout” of its legacy must be defined as issues of environmental and social injustice. As sociologist Maria Brave Heart shows, a history of “forced assimilation and cumulative losses . . . involving language, culture, and spirituality,” not to mention land, means that “the genocide of American Indians reverberates across generations” (57, 9). Furthermore, the material effects of colonization go hand in hand with cultural forces like national and literary narratives that enable the colonial enterprise. “The power to narrate, or to block

other narratives from forming and emerging” constitutes a major political tool of colonizers (Said xiii). It is through stories that the colonizer represents the Other, and through stories that Others assert their own identities and histories.

Specifically, this chapter argues that Erdrich’s novel interrogates how national, social, and legal narratives legitimate environmental injustices—like the exploitation of natural/labor resources and the land loss resulting from policies like Allotment—and the stereotyping of Native peoples as “vanishing,” savage, or romantically authentic. To combat these processes, Erdrich proposes that reflection on the role of stories/storytelling in rationalizing or challenging injustice can promote a self-conscious reevaluation of the relationship between people and between people and the environment. In so doing, it can encourage the development of empathetic or relational models of identity and ecology that promote survival. That is, both the novel’s form and the narrators’ commentary suggest a “survival”-based approach to environmentalism, emphasizing that the way we tell stories about humans and the environment are crucial to the survival of both.

While many of Erdrich’s writings feature experimental forms and self-conscious narrators, this novel, most of which is “written” by Nanapush with the “stub of a grain dealer’s pencil,” offers a particularly rich and complex demonstration of how Erdrich indigenizes and politicizes metafiction (58). Reading *Four Souls* as metafiction—fiction that thematizes or theorizes storytelling—enables us to better understand the novel’s political implications. Unlike many postmodern metafiction, Erdrich’s value empathy/relationality rather than narcissism, materiality rather than hyper-intellectualism. She further reinvents postmodern approaches to metafiction by indigenizing her narrative

within an Ojibwe cultural context. By modeling her metafiction on the Ojibwe trickster, whose antics disrupt stagnant conventions and prompt self-reflection, Erdrich transforms metafiction into a political form of storytelling embedded in community and adaptable to the evolving challenges of Native survival.

Reinventing Metafiction through the Trickster

However, despite the popular and academic recognition Erdrich's novels have gained, negative critiques of her writing often center on its self-reflexiveness. Most famously, Leslie Marmon Silko denounced the *The Beet Queen* (1986) for what she saw as its focus on self-reflexive language and consequent disregard of political issues like racism and poverty. "Self-referential writing," Silko claims, "has an ethereal clarity and shimmering beauty because no history or politics intrudes to muddy the well of pure necessity contained within language itself" (179). Similarly, Gene Lyons describes the stories in *Love Medicine* as "so self-consciously literary that they are a whole lot easier to admire than to read" (70). This complaint continues to surface in reviews of *Four Souls*. Whereas *Tracks* is a "triumph of voice enriched by American Indian lore," argues Heller McAlpin, *Four Souls* is "colder and less spellbinding" in large part because Nanapush "shows a new, jarring literary self-consciousness."¹

¹ On the other hand, *New York Times* reviewer Michiko Kakutani claims that with *Four Souls* Erdrich opts for a "more straightforward, moralistic narrative" which is "old-fashioned, stilted and contrived." The "Faulknerian sense of place and magical García Márquez-like sleight of hand" evident in her other works disappears in this novel that "reads like an ill-fated collaboration between Nathaniel Hawthorne and O. Henry." Chief among the offenders, according to Kakutani, is the narrator Nanapush who "shows flashes of his old lyricism and wisdom" but "all too often . . . devolves into the sentimental reminiscences of a dotty old man." *Four Souls* has thus been characterized

Though Erdrich's writing is not merely a response to postmodern metafiction, she is definitely conscious of metafiction from the 1960's and 70's. Asked in an interview about her use of multiple narrators and a non-chronological structure in *Love Medicine*, Erdrich replied that her wide reading in self-consciously experimental novels has emboldened her to take formal risks in her own writing (Jones 4). In several interviews and at least one essay, she mentions her reading of prominent metafictionists such as William Gass, John Barth, Donald Barthelme, and Italo Calvino (George, Chavkin, Erdrich "Where," Coltelli). While Erdrich does not unequivocally valorize these figures—indeed, in many instances she criticizes their abstractness—she does acknowledge their influence on her thinking about literature. Perhaps this interest stems from her M.A. years at Johns Hopkins, an institution she says had a

very postmodernist slant. You really couldn't help but be influenced by this emphasis on the text, on experimental texts. People were fascinated with Robert Coover and Thomas Pynchon, and John Barth was there, and the focus was on that, which I found very helpful. I certainly went through this whole phase where I did nothing but read postmodernist stuff and try to write it. (Caldwell 68)

as both too naively realistic *and* too insistent on puncturing this realism with a discordant literary self-consciousness. In fact these two critical reviews point to what I consider a deliberate literary strategy of *Four Souls*—that is, the juxtaposition of a realistic portrayal of material conditions for the Ojibwe in this period with a formal and narratorial self-consciousness. Whether the heightened incongruity these reviewers see between this and her other work has contributed to its critical obscurity or not, to my knowledge there is no published criticism on *Four Souls* besides my own article (on which this chapter is partly based).

Erdrich does not specify exactly how this experience influenced her writing, but she does note that its traces are “probably in there somewhere” (Caldwell 68). However, while she “admires” postmodern metafiction because of their aesthetic “texture—the sheer explosiveness of reading something in some form you didn’t expect,” she argues that “the emphasis on pure technique and language is a dead end” (Caldwell 68). In contrast to Silko’s characterization of Erdrich’s writing as “an outgrowth of academic, post-modern, so-called experimental influences,” this chapter shows how Erdrich’s particular approach critiques this “dead end” by using literary self-consciousness to reflect on the role of narrative in shaping our understanding of real-world problems like poverty, racism, and land loss (179).

In *Four Souls* Erdrich emphasizes the process of storytelling primarily through the metafictional techniques of Nanapush, her major trickster character. Nanapush, as a self-conscious narrator, reflects the fact that “tricksters are consummate storytellers, wielding power over their listeners with their artful use of words” (J. Smith 22). As we know from *Tracks*, Nanapush’s name has “got to do with trickery and living in the bush” (33). Nanabozho, like his namesake Nanapush, is both a culture hero and wily fool who teaches others through his own mistakes.² Nanapush fulfills this dual role in his position

² The Ojibwe trickster also goes by the names Nanabush, Nanapush, and Wenebojou, among others. For more on the Ojibwe trickster see also Basil Johnston, Christopher Vescey, Susan Stanford Friedman, Catherine Catt, Claudia Gutwirth, Frances Densmore, and Theresa Smith. Frances Densmore, for example, describes the Ojibwe trickster as both the “master of life,” indicating his prominent role in oral creation stories, and the “master of ruses” (97). Basil Johnston, author of the *Ojibway Language Lexicon*, which Erdrich cites as a source of the Ojibwe terms in *Tracks*, notes in *Ojibway Heritage* that

as a tribal chairman who, in one episode, “accidentally” gets drunk on sacramental wine and runs around town in a dress. As a mediator between human and spirit worlds, Nanabozho calls attention to the artificiality of conventions and stagnated doctrines that are taken for granted in human society in order to ultimately reunite the community. The “trickster functions . . . to demonstrate the artificiality of culture itself,” making “available for discussion the very basis of social order, individual and communal identity” (Wiget 94). Often through humor, Nanabozho works to “destroy hypocrisy and delusion” in an effort to “bring about self-knowledge” (Owens 216).³ Because Nanabozho refuses “fixity” and “closure,” he subverts static histories and promotes cultural “survivance” (a combination of survival and resistance), reflecting Erdrich’s use of stories to promote human and environmental “survival” (Vizenor 14).

As a consummate figure of adaptability, the trickster models strategies for cultural survival that are linked to storytelling in particular. Gerald Vizenor, for instance, argues that trickster stories combat what he calls the “literature of dominance,” or writing about Natives that creates images of the “invented savage.” “Postindian literature,” which often features trickster figures, works to oust these “inventions with humor, new stories” that

Nanabozho possessed qualities of “courage, generosity, [and] resourcefulness” as well as the “human limitations of ineptitude, indecisiveness, inconstancy, [and] cunning” (160).

³ Louis Owens analyzes the ways in which American Indian novels reference traditional modes of storytelling. For more on trickster figures in general see Paul Radin, John Morrell, Paul Tidwell, Gerald Vizenor, Andrew Wiget, William Hynes and William Doty, and Louis Hyde. Hynes and Doty, for example, argue that though tricksters appear in specific cultural contexts, trickster figures worldwide do have similarities, such as “(1) the fundamentally ambiguous and anomalous personality of the trickster. Following from this are such features as (2) deceiver/trick-player, (3) shape-shifter, (4) situation-inverter, (5) messenger/imitator of the gods, and (6) sacred/lewd bricoleur” (34).

attest to personal and cultural survival (5). Erdrich also connects storytelling and survival, describing herself as “devoted to telling about the lines of people that [she] sees stretching back, breaking, surviving, somehow, somehow, and incredibly, culminating in someone who can tell a story” (Bonetti 98). Although her writing looks “back” at traditions of oral storytelling that have been passed down through these “lines of people,” it also suggests that contemporary survival depends on adapting and reinventing traditions, on telling new stories. Erdrich notes, for example, that although her writing “reflects a traditional Chippewa motif in storytelling” in which stories center on a “central mythological character, a culture hero,” it also reflects how these “old stories” have “incorporated different elements of non-Chippewa or European culture as they’ve gone on” in order to ensure an “oral and literary tradition that is a changing, ongoing, vital tradition” (Jones 4, Bonetti 90). Of course, the Ojibwe trickster, like all trickster figures, must be positioned in a historical context because he is not a static character in oral (or written) traditions. Theresa Smith discusses the figure’s historical development in post-contact Ojibwe culture, reporting that many Ojibwe narratives describe Nanabush as temporarily dormant: “his official retirement into sleep is said to have occurred following the European invasion of North America” (175).⁴ This context makes Erdrich’s use of the figure as a model of cultural survival through storytelling particularly significant since it demonstrates the relevance of the trickster to contemporary Ojibwe culture and literature.

⁴ Smith points out other modern uses of Nanabush such as the play *Nanabush of the 80’s*, written and performed by members of the Ojibwe De-ba-jeh-mu-jig theater group, who say in their press release from May 13, 1988 that “Nanabush has been dormant as a character in our culture for many years, but is now acknowledged again, welcomed with open arms, and transformed into *Nanabush of the 80’s*.”

Modeling her technique on the Ojibwe trickster, who, like Erdrich's metafiction, functions to expose the artificiality of conventions, enables her to engage Ojibwe cultural history while critiquing conventional representations of Native environments and identities. Although many critics have noted the trickster qualities of Erdrich's characters, most overlook the trickster role of her fiction itself.⁵ Like the trickster, Erdrich uses metafictional techniques to "destroy the hypocrisy and delusion" of national and historical narratives that rely on commodified conceptions of the environment and reproduce what Vizenor calls the one-dimensional "invented" Indian (Owens 216, Vizenor 7). *Four Souls* thus reflects how trickster figures are used, particularly by ethnic women authors, to "challenge racial and gender stereotypes" while also "attest[ing] to the enduring strength of their cultural communities" (J. Smith 26). In so doing, the novel aims to "bring about self-knowledge" in the reader, highlighting narrative's ability to encourage a self-conscious response to environments and identities. That is, Erdrich's trickster model of metafiction foregrounds the trickster's ability to prompt self-consciousness about the conventions, institutions, and histories that shape our understanding of the world. If, as Kathleen Sands claims, Native novels engaged with oral tradition "demand that we enter not only into the fictional world but participate actively in the process of storytelling," then Erdrich's model which combines literary metafiction with the trickster from oral stories results in an especially active role for the reader who must "participate" in the storytelling as well as look critically at the constructedness of the story itself (24). However, like the trickster who refuses "fixity"

⁵ See, for example, Gutwirth, Bowers, Smith, and Barak.

and “closure,” Erdrich’s metafiction offers no totalizing counter-narrative to replace dominant ones. Instead, *Four Souls* emphasizes the constructedness of narratives while also demonstrating the importance of interrogating political structures which legitimate some narratives and discount others.

Thus the novel, like the trickster, calls attention to the socially-reformative potential of storytelling. Using formal techniques like the alternation between contradictory versions of events by multiple narrators and interruptions of the story by the narrators’ self-consciousness commentary, Erdrich defines narratives as constructed interpretations that nevertheless have real material and ideological effects for Native communities. *Four Souls* thus reflects what Jeanne Smith calls a “trickster aesthetic,” which is associated with formal qualities like “breaks,” “disruptions,” and “multiple voices or perspectives” (21). Through their juxtaposition, for instance, the stories of the text’s multiple narrators call attention to themselves *as* artful form while also emphasizing the political implications of storytelling. The first two-thirds of the novel are narrated alternately by Nanapush and Polly Elizabeth Gheen, sister-in-law of John Mauser; and in the last third of the novel Nanapush’s narrative alternates with Margaret’s. While many novels have multiple narrators, *Four Souls* uses this technique not just to provide different perspectives or first-person accounts, but specifically to interrogate the processes that underlie the construction of stories. As Erdrich points out in an interview, there is no single “quantifiable reality” since “points of view change the reality of a situation” (Chakvin 224).

Her multiple narrators not only show how perspective alters “reality,” but also how it affects what kinds of stories are told and the forms they take. In this case, the characters’ stories influence and are influenced by their particular conceptions of Native people and of the environment. Polly’s “objective” narrative, for example, initially relies on stereotyping Natives and viewing place as symbolic of socioeconomic status. In contrast, Nanapush’s self-reflexive trickster narrative simultaneously highlights “real” socioenvironmental injustices and interrupts the story to undermine his own ability to represent reality objectively. Nanapush’s account, then, is not meant to simply replace Polly’s with a more accurate version of events. Instead, their juxtaposition in Erdrich’s trickster model of metafiction ironizes both while upholding the value of regarding narrative and reality self-consciously. By emphasizing multiple perspectives, trickster narratives often “suggest that although no one point of view is all-encompassing, all points of view, including those of the author, the narrators, the characters, and the reader or listener, together create the meaning of the story,” which foregrounds the “importance of dialogue and community to the storytelling process” (J. Smith 91). Erdrich’s readers are thus made to actively reflect on how (historical and fictional) stories structure their perceptions of reality in general and Native people in particular. While it’s certainly true that literary forms and narrators shape reader perceptions in all literature, metafiction works to make this process explicit. Indeed, Linda Hutcheon characterizes metafiction as “process made visible” (*Narcissistic* 6). However, although *Four Souls* exposes the constructedness of history and reality, unlike conventional postmodern metafiction, it

also emphasizes the value of storytelling as a survival strategy and the material effects of stories regardless of their constructedness.

In the following section I show how this process works, demonstrating the ways Erdrich's trickster model of metafiction highlights the role of national narratives like Manifest Destiny in the perpetuation of environmental and social injustice. Here I emphasize how these problems "manifest" particularly in the context of Mauser's palatial house and the railroad profits through which it is funded. The subsequent section then expands the focus by locating these particular sites in a broader legal history of assimilation that threatens Native survival but can be undermined through trickster modes of storytelling. In the next section, I argue that characters stage resistance to these threats by deliberately performing stereotypical narratives of Native identity that metafictionally signal their artificiality to the reader. While such performances effectively undermine stereotypes, the final section claims that Erdrich's trickster metafiction ultimately aims to demonstrate how self-reflection on the way we tell stories about humans and the environment can produce empathetic or relational models of identity and ecology that promote survival.

The Iron Road to the Great House: Metafiction and Environmental Justice

Starting where *Tracks* left off, *Four Souls* begins with Fleur's journey to Minneapolis to exact revenge after she loses her land and the trees on it (through tax default) to avaricious lumber baron John James Mauser. This journey, and the house that is its destination, evoke the national narrative of Manifest Destiny. Through these first chapters, told alternately by Nanapush and Polly, Erdrich demonstrates the value of

reflecting on how such narratives legitimate environmental and social injustice. By juxtaposing the accounts of a narrator who critiques Manifest Destiny with one that initially accepts its premises, the novel's form highlights how national myths inform storytelling practices. Furthermore, Nanapush's metafictional commentary serves, like the trickster, to challenge accepted doctrines at the same time as it draws attention to the material effects of those doctrines and its own fallibility.

In the first pages of the novel, Nanapush invokes the narrative of Manifest Destiny through the site of the railroad Fleur follows to "track" Mauser. This "iron road," with "two trails, parallel and slender," allows her to "follow his tracks" because "the man who has stolen her trees took this same way" (2). Thus Fleur ironically uses the railroad Mauser partly owns to find him for her revenge. Along with the lumber business, Mauser oversees the building of the railroad line which, as his sister-in-law Polly describes, "stretched west from its terminus, went on forever, its print bold and black as doctor's stitches on the maps he had me trace with my fingers" (35).⁶ The railroad has long been a symbol of the ideology of American progress, and the idea that it "stretched west . . . forever" references its nostalgic association with the narrative of Manifest Destiny, the idea that the expansion of the U.S. from "sea to shining sea" was both inevitable and sanctioned by Providence. Of course, the rails that "brought" Manifest Destiny westward enabled increased settlement of Native lands and increased cultural pressure to assimilate, making the railroad's appearance in this novel a wrought symbol of environmental and

⁶ Interestingly, Mauser here emphasizes not the actual physical presence of the railroad, but its representation on maps which provide the viewer a bird's eye view of its national scope.

social injustice. The railroad represents a form of what Nanapush defines as “deep” tracks, tracks which “print [themselves] deeply on the earth,” like the ones printed on Mauser’s maps (210). As I mentioned earlier, Nanapush contrasts deep tracks with the tracks formed by his own “writing” of this novel: “I have left behind my own tracks, too. I have left behind these words” (210). Because Nanapush’s story-tracks serve to illuminate deep tracks, the novel suggests that storytelling, particularly when it is self-conscious about the effects of stories, is a way to challenge the narratives that legitimate socioenvironmental injustice.

By self-consciously evoking the narrative of Manifest Destiny, Erdrich’s trickster model of metafiction points out the “hypocrisies” and “delusions” that underlie national myths of progress (Owens 216). For example, in the 1845 editorial where he coins the term “manifest destiny,” John O’Sullivan specifically notes the importance of the railroad’s “iron clasp” for advancing U.S. expansion (6). Connecting expansion to progress, O’Sullivan’s 1839 article describes an increasingly imperial U.S. as “the great nation of futurity” (426). Ironically, this narrative of futurity can be achieved only by omitting government-sanctioned practices of exploitation and violence against Native peoples. Deliberately eliding America’s history of colonization and slavery (which was still in practice when he published this), O’Sullivan claims that the “unparalleled glory” of America is demonstrated by the fact that “we have no reminiscences of battle fields, but in defence of humanity, of the oppressed of all nations” and that “our annals describe no scenes of horrid carnage . . . nor have the American people ever suffered themselves to be led on by wicked ambition to depopulate the land” (427). By associating futurity

with the expansion of colonial rule, O’Sullivan both ignores the U.S.’s history of “carnage” and “depopulation,” and implicitly relegates Native peoples to a past that must give way to the inevitable destiny of the country. He further equates the “expansive future” of the U.S. with “untrodden space,” metaphorically depopulating the land that has in fact been “trodden” by indigenous people for thousands of years (427). He justifies this logical contradiction by differentiating between the (civilized, i.e. white) Americans who “carry the glad tidings of peace and good will” across the country, and the indigenous “myriads” who “endure an existence scarcely more enviable than that of beasts of the field” (430). Here O’Sullivan demonstrates the link between economically-motivated imperialism and the realm of culture that Said makes. Although “American expansionism is principally economic,” Said argues, “it is still highly dependent . . . upon cultural ideas and ideologies about America itself” (289).



“American Progress” (1872) by John Gast

Public figures like O’Sullivan helped invent America as a site of progress through expansion in order to justify the violence of this process. The painting above is a stunning symbolic portrayal of Manifest Destiny and the logic of American “progress” with which Erdrich’s novel engages. Its central figure, Columbia, personifies the U.S. as an angelic messenger of civilization. In her right hand she holds a schoolbook, representing the project of assimilationist education, and in her left hand she drags a telegraph wire that will connect the civilized east with the frontier. Paving the way for the three railroad lines that follow her, Columbia is depicted as literally bringing “light” to the “dark” savages she pursues. George Croffut’s advertisement for lithographs of this painting characterize it as a “Great National Picture, which illustrates in the most artistic manner all the gigantic results of American Brains and Hands!” Of course, this description excludes the fleeing indigenous populations, who Sioux writer Zitkala-Sa called the “first Americans,” from those with American “brains” and “hands.” The right side of the painting, Croffut explains, includes “a city, steamships, manufactories, schools and churches” and “the three great continental lines of railway” over which “beams of light are streaming and filling the air—indicative of civilization.” These images indicate how narratives of “civilization” are based on a combination of economic (steamships, manufactories, railways) and cultural (schools and churches) power. On the painting’s left side are “the lurking savage and wild beasts of prey” who are “fleeing from Progress.” While the narrative of Manifest Destiny requires the dehumanization of indigenous peoples to justify its genocidal policies, it also depends on a commodified understanding of the

environment. The undeveloped land on the left of the painting represents “waste and confusion,” whereas the right side demonstrates “the country’s grandeur and enterprise which have caused the mighty wilderness to blossom like the rose!” If “wilderness” land is equated to “waste,” this view implies that only when land is owned and developed, only when it is transformed into a commodity, is it nationally valuable. Thus the painting illustrates the parallel need to dehumanize indigenous populations and declare their territories waste-lands in order to justify the march of “American Progress.”

This example, like Erdrich’s novel, demonstrates how narratives like Manifest Destiny have profound effects on how the national population understands and treats environments and marginalized peoples. As Homi Bhabha notes, nationalist discourses attempt to “produce the idea of the nation as a continuous narrative of progress,” but in so doing they actually highlight anxieties about the instability of the nation (*Nation* 1). Revealing national anxieties about controlling Native peoples and lands, as Erdrich does in this novel, allows silenced narratives to resurface. The cultural diversity of the U.S., Said proposes, creates an anxious need to present the nation as “unified around one iron-clad major narrative of innocent triumph” (315). Thus O’Sullivan’s “iron clasp” of progress depends on an “iron-clad” narrative of the nation, one that serves to justify the kinds of environmental and social injustices represented not only by the railroad but also by the Mauser house to which it leads.⁷

⁷ This national context is also complicated by the fact that when Fleur leaves the reservation she is literally going into a different country, one where “people stared through her as though she were invisible” (3). Erdrich describes “dual citizenship” in Native and U.S. nations as producing a “strange feeling” (Bruchac 83).

Nanapush dedicates the bulk of the first chapter to a detailed history of the land on which Mauser's house sits and the house itself, all of which is contrasted to Polly's ahistorical description of the site in the next chapter. The formal juxtaposition of these two depictions foregrounds the material effects of narrative depictions of humans and the environment. Furthermore, the self-consciousness of Nanapush's "history of the great house" serves to define the house as a historical text whose surface reads as a simple narrative of Euro-American dominance, but which contains suppressed histories that can be uncovered to disrupt this surface narrative (4). The Mauser house is an example of fictional places that "constitute space as the container of history and the generator of story," that "set in motion the identities of the people," and "embody narrativity" (Friedman 219). Moreover, while Nanapush asserts the value of exposing the historical exploitation of land and laborers hidden by the house's surface, his metafictional reflection on his own flawed version of events prevents his account from reproducing the "fixity" and "closure" of the surface text.

Nanapush self-consciously signals the importance of this history for the reader, prefacing it by saying "here is how all that I speak of came about" (4). He suggests, in other words, that without understanding the history of the house and regional landscape that he relates in the first chapters, one cannot understand the rest of his story or the rest of the novel. Metafictionally revealing his narrative approach to the reader, Nanapush notes that he is "going to lay down the roots here. I'm going to explain things. This is where the story fills in deeper" (48). Historicizing the site allows the reader to "see" present injustices "through the past" (48). However, as Nanapush attempts to relate his narrative

and the indigenous worldview on which it is based, he also remarks the difficulty of telling his story to a wider audience. Directly addressing the reader, he asks “How can I tell you this? How can I make you see? Sometimes it is too difficult even for an old man, one who loves to sling words” (57).

The alternative history Nanapush provides demonstrates both how land is crucial to Native identity and how this history can challenge the American narrative of “empty lands” (or “untrodden space,” as O’Sullivan puts it) that authorizes its appropriation. He notes, for instance, that the spot on which the house sits was the location of a valued and strategic camp for pre-contact Ojibwe, thus immediately situating Minneapolis, and Mauser’s house specifically, within an Ojibwe historical context. This was a “favorite spot for making camp” because of its proximity to the water that “drew game” and the high altitude from which “a person could see waasa, far off, spot weather coming or an enemy traveling below” (5). The location was also included in oral stories that told how an Ojibwe woman “gave birth on the same ground where, much later, the house of John James Mauser was raised,” after which the “earth made chokecherries from the woman’s blood spilled in the grass” (5). Elsewhere Erdrich notes the importance of the cultural history of places when she argues that landscapes inhabited for generations “become enlivened by a sense of group and family history” (“Where” 43).

As this statement indicates, Ojibwe identity and knowledge are physically and metaphorically embodied in significant places. Displacement is not a mere physical hardship, then, but a violation of sources of identity and tribal knowledge, and thus an

important environmental justice issue in Native communities.⁸ In her close attention to place, Erdrich notes her difference from authors of postmodern metafiction like Donald Barthelme and Samuel Beckett “whose fiction could take place anywhere, or nowhere” (“Where” 46). While this may be an overgeneralization, it does usefully relate the abstraction of postmodern metafictional form, that literary “dead end,” with abstract representations of place (Caldwell 68). Erdrich describes her own approach to place, saying that although “it is difficult to impose a story and a plot on a place . . . truly knowing a place provides the link between details and meaning” in a narrative (49). Furthermore, she notes that in an age where technology speeds travel and reduces face-to-face contact, “we cannot abandon our need for reference, identity, or our pull to landscapes that mirror our most intense feelings” (49). Although this statement seems to imply a kind of place-based, anthropomorphic view of the environment, the novel itself complicates this conception of place by emphasizing its indigenous contexts as well as its relation to environmental and social injustice.

Moreover, Nanapush’s indigenization of place parallels his indigenization of his own metafictional narrative. Throughout the novel he self-consciously associates narrative construction with Ojibwe cultural symbols and landscapes. For example, he models his narrative response to the shrinking landscape of his tribe on “aadizojaanag,”

⁸ In my interview with Linda Hogan she gives an example of how development threatens the connection between indigenous peoples and places. She tells a story about indigenous people in Arizona who were trying to stop development on their “holy land,” a “sacred site for numerous tribes in that area,” and were actually asked at “what line does it quit being sacred land? As if there was a spot that you could delineate and say: it is no longer sacred. They actually wanted to know where it ended being sacred” (170).

or “stories that branched off and looped back and continued in a narrative made to imitate flowers on a vine” (114). The historical backgrounds of this story are “roots” that help the listener understand how the “vine” came to be shaped (48). In another moment he compares the coughballs of owls, used as medicines and omens, with stories:

The coughball of an owl is a packed lump of everything the bird can’t digest—bones, fur, teeth, claws, and nails. . . . The residue, the undissolvable, fuses. . . . What is the irreducible? I answer, what the owl pukes. That is also the story—what is left after the events in all their juices and chaos are reduced to the essence. The story—all that time does not digest. Fleur left the reservation. Of all that happened day to day, all the ins and outs of her existence, we have what came of the accumulation. We have the story. (71)

A story or history, in other words, is the result of reducing raw events to their “essences.” Here Nanapush not only relates his narrative approach to an Ojibwe understanding of these objects, but also self-consciously admits that his story cannot represent everything that “happened”—that he selects certain details to relate and leaves out others, that he has access to some events and not to others. Moreover, he notes that coughballs are “good medicine” with the ability to “cure headaches, too much menstrual blood, flux, sore feet, love” (72). By relating coughballs with stories, then, Nanapush also implies that stories are a form of medicine. This implication is born out in the novel, which ultimately demonstrates that stories can promote cultural survival and “heal” personal traumas. By theorizing metafiction within an Ojibwe context, *Four Souls* defies charges that

Nanapush's literary self-consciousness is either jarringly out-of-step with "American Indian lore" (McAlpin) or that his account is merely a "sentimental" story not rising to the level of narrative theory (Kakutani).

After positioning the house's location, and his own narrative, within an Ojibwe historical context, Nanapush devotes the majority of this first chapter to a detailed account of the house's individual features, meticulously deconstructing it for the reader. The aspects of the house he focuses on stand in metonymically for the exploitation of natural resources and labor. Working from the land up, then, Nanapush describes the mining of natural resources (such as copper, brownstone, slate, and lumber) to build the house, processes which leave the land "stripped" and "scraped-bare" (5). The sandstone quarried from the "live heart of sacred islands," for instance, becomes a lifeless "fashionable backdrop to [the Mausers'] ambition" as the façade of their mansion (8). Nanapush's redefinition of the land as a living and sacred entity for the Ojibwe underscores the violence the house's "fashionable" façade obscures. The walls of the house, which keep the oppressed outside, are thickly insulated with lake reeds "so that no stray breeze could enter" (7). These walls literally and metaphorically isolate the Mausers from the outside world, that is, from nature and from the laborers who actually build the insulation. The chimneys are made with bricks containing blood from a local slaughterhouse which cause a "greasy sadness" to permeate the "festive rooms" when a fire is lit (8). The juxtaposition of this olfactory reminder of the work and sacrifice that went into the chimneys' construction with the festivity of the rooms (which can only be festive because they forget precisely this work and sacrifice) serves to underline the

conflict between Nanapush's alternative history of the house and that presented by its wealthy white inhabitants.

As Nanapush catalogs the house's components, he explicitly links the plundering of natural resources on Native lands with the exploitation of labor used to obtain them. Thus his redefinition of this particular environment reflects environmental justice approaches that "foreground race and labor in [their] definition of what constitutes 'nature'" (Sze 163). It was "sweat," Nanapush notes, "most of all sweat from the bodies of men and women that made the house": the "sweating men who climbed the hill" dragging blocks of stone and lumber and the "women who coughed in the dim basements of a fabric warehouse sewing drapes and dishcloths" (7). Specifically, the brownstone was quarried by impoverished and "homesick Italians," the iron mined by "Norwegians and Sammi so gut-shot with hunger they didn't care if they were trespassing on anybody's hunting ground or not," and the decorations painstakingly made by orphaned "young women" at the "Indian missions" who survived by weaving "fine lace" after their mothers "died of measles, cholera, smallpox, tuberculosis" (5-7). Here Nanapush lists destitute indigenous laborers alongside impoverished immigrant workers, suggesting that labor conditions and poverty are a shared oppression. By revealing the history of environmental and labor exploitation on which the house is founded, he redefines "this house" as a space of violence:

They had this house of tears of lace constructed of a million tiny knots of useless knowledge. This house of windows hung with the desperations of dark virgins. They had this house of stacked sandstone colored the richest

clay-red and lavender hue. Once this stone had formed the live heart of sacred islands. Now it was a fashionable backdrop to their ambitions. They had this house of crushed hands and horses dropping in padded collars. . . . They had this house of railroad and then lumber money and the sucking grind of eastern mills. This house under which there might as well have been a child sacrificed, to lie underneath the corner beam's sunk sill, for money that remained unpaid for years to masons and the drivers was simple as food snatched outright. In fact, there is no question that a number of people of all ages lost their lives on account of this house. That is the case, always, with great buildings and large doings. Placide [Mauser's wife] knew this better than her husband, but both were non-plussed, and felt it simply was their fate to have this house. (9)

This passage links the degradation of Ojibwe lands and the abuse of human and animal labor with the “railroad and lumber money” that allows the house's owners to justify its costs, and even naturalize them as “fate.” Thus the site of the house, in Nanapush's version of accounts, highlights the gap between assumptions of innocent privilege and the hidden violence on which it actually relies.

Whereas this place represents a sacred and historically important site for Ojibwe people, and a site of despair and suffering for the laborers, Polly's account in the following chapter defines the location as a signifier of social status—it sits on the “most exclusive ridge of the city,” an enviable “patch of royal blankness”—that reinforces the Mausers's social prominence as it upholds the myth of “empty lands” (11-12). Blind to

the labor and natural resources that created the house, she sees only the final product, idealized in her mind as a “pure white house . . . pristine as a cake in the window of a bakery shop” (11). In contrast to Nanapush’s version which probes beneath the “fashionable” façade, Polly foregrounds the literal and metaphorical purity of the house’s white surface. This “purity” narrative, like O’Sullivan’s announcement of America’s “unparalleled glory,” is upheld precisely through concealing the violence and oppression on which it depends. Irene Moser links such disparate modes of viewing space with distinct literary traditions, arguing that “contemporary Native literature” tends to configure spaces as processes, whereas “American literature” tends to characterize spaces as objects to be measured and possessed (285). While this is certainly an overgeneralization of American literature, it does reflect Polly’s approach to narrating this space. By comparing the house to a cake displayed for sale, Polly reinforces its status as a commodity, whereas Nanapush’s account foregrounds processes of labor and exploitation. Moreover, although Polly’s description focuses mainly on the house as a whole entity, in contrast to Nanapush’s dissection of the house into parts, she does note that “the roof, gables, porch” were all “chiseled and bored in fantastic shapes,” thus drawing attention to the artificiality of the house in opposition to natural forms (11). Polly further emphasizes this conflict in her account of the shrubs “clipped in cones and cubes” and a statue of a “white deer” that “pawed delicately at its pedestal and nosed the glittering air” (11). While the house’s construction and its inhabitants are decidedly exploitative of the natural environment, they ironically require an artificial wilderness

around the estate. This mock wilderness serves as a representation the Mausers's cultural dominance that visually demonstrates their conquering of the natural world.

Even though Erdrich presents Nanapush's account of the Mauser house as an alternative to Polly's, she does not simply replace Polly's version with Nanapush's more "accurate" one, or include Polly's story as a simple racist/classist foil. Instead she demonstrates that no one version gives the whole story, and thus all accounts are constructed, interpretative fictions. Some critics of Erdrich's earlier work have interpreted her juxtaposition of multiple narrators' accounts as an effort to replace oppressive cultural narratives with Native-centered ones. Katherine Nelson-Born, for instance, claims that in *Tracks* "Erdrich creates a fiction that substitutes our dominant culture's fiction with that of a Native American female one" (8). While Erdrich does set a Native American fiction against the dominant fiction in *Four Souls*, she does not simply reverse the binary by substituting the one for the other, but shows how their juxtaposition effectively highlights the environmental and social assumptions that structure such stories. The Mauser house functions as what Friedman calls a "heterotopic" site which "bring[s] into focus the social, cultural, and political systems" that underlie places and "form identities" (199). Erdrich's use of dual narrators presents the Mauser estate as a historical palimpsest reaching from its use as a pre-contact Ojibwe campground, through the house's construction, and to the finished product. In so doing, she forces the reader to consider how this space implicates the "social, cultural, and political systems" that shape environments and identities. The novel's form encourages readers to think about how we construct stories in ways particular to our perspectives, and later shows, particularly

through Polly, that exposure to stories told from other people's perspectives can prompt empathy and thereby alter approaches to storytelling. As Jeanne Smith suggests, "a multiplicity of voices and perspectives such as those present in a trickster novel can effect change in the reader; by engaging in dialogue with a text, readers open their own thoughts to change" (24).

Furthermore, Nanapush interrupts his own narrative to comment on its construction, calling attention to the inherent subjectivity and partiality of stories. Textually set off by a row of asterisks, this interruption self-consciously reflects on the act of cobbling together stories from various, perhaps unreliable, sources. Acknowledging that "sometimes an old man doesn't know how he knows things," Nanapush destabilizes his own representation of the house by accentuating the fact that he "pieced together the story of how it was formed" from Fleur's memories told to him years after the fact, and from speculative conversations with local priest Father Damien, "guessing" to fill in the gaps (4). While Nanapush's account accesses knowledge based on oral histories and memory that Polly's account obscures, his story also self-consciously mixes in "rumors, word, and speculation about Fleur's life and about the great house where she went" (4). Thus Nanapush's self-conscious version acknowledges both the historical context of the site and his own narratorial fallibility.

Narratives of Assimilation: The Legalization of Environmental and Social Injustice

Although Nanapush metafictionally points to the constructedness of narrative, undermining the objectivity and completeness of his own story, he also insists on emphasizing the material effects of narratives. Whereas the previous section

demonstrated the effects of Manifest Destiny nationalism in the context of the Mauser house and the railroad (from which profits it was built), this one expands the focus to consider the broader legal contexts of Native survival. Highlighting the political usefulness of trickster metafiction, Nanapush's story functions to interrogate how national narratives of assimilation are enacted through laws that officially justify environmental and sociocultural injustice. Continuing the concerns of *Tracks*, *Four Souls* is in large part a meditation on the effects of Allotment policy for Native peoples and lands. The Dawes Allotment Act of 1887 was designed to encourage assimilation by promoting a sedentary agricultural lifestyle and dissolving tribal bonds. This law allowed land that was formerly held communally to be divided into "allotments" owned by individuals. These allotments were then subject to property taxes (and foreclosure) after a twenty-five year grace period ending in 1912, the significant opening date of *Tracks*. Nanapush's trickster approach in *Four Souls* involves telling stories that expose the "hypocrisies" and "delusions" of such laws—which he describes themselves as "tricks" and "snares" (79). Like his own narrative, Nanapush foregrounds the laws' status as written documents, saying that "with a flare of ink down in the capital city, rights were taken and given" (79). At the same time, this statement emphasizes how written "flares of ink" have profound effects on the "rights" of indigenous people to land and cultural identity.

Justified by assimilationist narratives, the aim of allotment policy was to impose Western notions of property ownership and a Jeffersonian ideal of agrarian society in order to destroy the communal, land-based lifestyles of indigenous tribes. Congressman

Henry Dawes, author of the Act, viewed this legislation as “saving” Indians from their own degenerate cultures and from a reservation system that prevented their incorporation into American society. While professed to be well-meaning, this paternalistic attitude relied on a belief that Natives were inherently lazy, uninterested in their own advancement, and on an unwavering faith in the civilizing power of private property. For Dawes, the civilizing project required that Indians trade communality for “selfishness,” for within a system of common ownership “there is no enterprise to make your home any better than that of your neighbors. There is no selfishness, which is at the bottom of civilization” (5). Thus he suggests that making land into a commodity and encouraging self-interested competition are essential for civilization. However, more than just an “enterprising” economic system, civilization involves cultural markers as well. To be civilized, according to Dawes, requires that one “wear civilized clothes . . . cultivate the ground, live in houses, ride in Studebaker wagons, send children to school, drink whiskey [and] own property” (6). The specificity of these markers makes the claim—that they are universal criteria for civilization—all the more striking. Beyond the gifts of capitalism, the Allotment Act also provided Natives with allotments access to U.S. citizenship.

From its inception, then, the assimilation of Native peoples involved a systematic national effort to destroy tribal ways of life while masquerading as a project designed to bring “freedom” and citizenship to an uncivilized population. President Theodore Roosevelt, for instance, described the Allotment Act in a speech to Congress as a “mighty pulverizing engine to break up the tribal mass,” a process that would lead to the benevolent “recogni[tion] of the Indian as an individual and not as a member of a tribe.”

Commissioner of Indian Affairs, Thomas Morgan, reported that “it has become the settled policy of the Government to break up reservations, destroy tribal relations, settle Indians upon their own homesteads, [and] incorporate them into the national life” so that the Natives might be generously “dealt with not as nations or tribes or bands, but as individual citizens” (438). Even the most “Indian-friendly” Americans viewed assimilation as an act of “saving” Indians from themselves. Alice Fletcher, leader of a group called “Friends of the Indians,” argued that assimilation policy would allow the Indian to “become a free man; free from the thralldom of the tribe; freed from the domination of the reservation system; free to enter into the body of our citizens” (472). Going further, she actually suggests that the Act be considered “the Magna Carta of the Indians of our country” (472).

Far from bringing freedom, however, the Allotment Act actually resulted in massive land loss and cultural genocide. After allotments were issued to Native individuals, the law permitted surplus land to be sold to white settlers, prompting the enormous land-rush that brought these settlers to every corner of the country. Overall, more than ninety million acres, or two-thirds of Native land, was lost as a result of the Dawes Act. The White Earth Ojibwe reservation in Minnesota, for instance, lost ninety percent of its former holdings. Moreover, proceeds from the sale of reservation property were to be invested in a trust fund for the “education” and “civilization” of the Indians, reinforcing the U.S.’s infamous forced boarding school policy. As Lewis Hyde quips, “it’s a nice touch, as if some sect of True Believers were to seize and sell your home, then

claim to demonstrate their good intentions by using the proceeds to send your children to True Believer school” (*Common* 170).

Nanapush’s trickster model of storytelling points to the material effects and hypocrisies of these assimilation narratives in order ultimately to promote community survival. “We acquired an Allotment Agent,” he notes, “to make it easier for us to sell our land to white people,” then “we got a Farmer in Charge to help us chop our trees down, our shelter, and cut the earth up, our mother,” and to teach “us to farm in the chimookomaan way using toothed machines and clumsy, big horses to pull them” (79). The result was not individual prosperity; instead, the “land dwindled until there wasn’t enough to call a hunting territory” while his people had “only just grown used to the idea that we owned land—something that could not possibly belong to any human” (79). As Nanapush emphasizes, assimilation policies that offer incorporation into the national body, actually promote the loss of land and the breaking up of traditional hunting territories, facilitate environmental degradation (through “toothed machines”), and impose a commodified definition of land that elides Native understandings of earth as a relative (“mother”) rather than an object.

Furthermore, Nanapush puts his trickster storytelling skills to use in both exposing the hypocrisy of property policies for the reader and in speaking against them to his tribal community. As he reports:

Just as the first of us had failed at growing or herding or plowing the fields, we were told we could sign a piece of paper and get money for the land, but that no one would take the land until we paid the money back.

Mortgage, this was called. This piece of banker's cleverness sounded good to many. I spoke against this trick, but who listened to old Nanapush? People signed the paper, got money. Some farmed. Others came home night after night for months full of whiskey and food. Suddenly the foreclosure notice was handed out and the land was barred. It belonged to someone else. Now it appeared that our people would turn into a wandering bunch, begging at the back doors of white houses and town buildings. Then laws were passed to outlaw begging and even that was solved. No laws were passed to forbid starvation, though, and so the Anishinaabeg were free to do just that. Yes, we were becoming a solved problem. That's what I'm saying. (80)

Here Nanapush emphasizes the pain of displacement and the hypocrisy of laws that "forbid" begging without acknowledging that the starvation it allows resulted from allotment law in the first place. Moreover, the trickster Nanapush attempts to speak against this "trick" to his tribe, but, given the widespread poverty, this is an instance in which his rhetoric fails to convince many of his people. "We were snared in laws by then," he laments, "Pitfalls and loopholes. Attempting to keep what was left of our land was like walking through a landscape of webs" (79). Throughout the novel Nanapush attempts to navigate this "landscape of webs," sometimes successfully and sometimes not, through rhetoric and storytelling. Although his words are not particularly effective in their original context (as a speech to the tribe), Nanapush's retelling for the reader

successfully emphasizes the importance of understanding this legal history (“what I’m saying”) to understanding the story as a whole.

By interrogating national assimilation narratives, Erdrich’s metafiction demonstrates the need to define the legacy of Allotment and assimilation—the degradation of the environment and the physical and cultural “displacement” of people with land-based identities—as instances of socioenvironmental injustice. In an interview, Erdrich suggests that her own sense of environmental and social justice came from seeing the ongoing effects of assimilationist policies on tribal communities. “There’s a certain amount of commitment,” she claims, “because when you grow up and see your people living on a tiny pittance of land or living on the edge, surrounded by enormous wealth, you don’t see the world as just” (Moyers 144). Moreover, she points to the role of land loss and legal exploitation in the widespread poverty of contemporary Native peoples, saying that the government should focus on “keeping over four hundred treaties that were made and never kept. That would mean returning some of the land back to Native American people. . . . It really comes down to the land” (Moyers 146).

In *Four Souls*, Fleur’s experience serves as an example of how allotment policy affects land and land-based identities, and how stories can be used to resist these effects. She originally lost her allotment land, and the trees on it, at the end of *Tracks* after defaulting on property taxes. As Nanapush reports, when Mauser buys this land, “it proved easy and profitable to deal with the Indian agent . . . who won a personal commission for discovering that due to a recent government decision the land upon which those trees grew was tax forfeit from one Indian woman, just a woman—she could

go elsewhere and, anyway, she was a troublemaker” (6). The Indian agent acquired the land in the first place through another of those “pitfalls and loopholes” Nanapush describes. Although the agent, Tatro, was “white and an Indian agent to boot” and so “should not have been allowed to buy reservation land at all,” there was a “loophole year” in which such acts were temporarily legalized. Even though the bill was nullified when it was found to contradict federal law, this process was not accomplished “quickly enough to prevent Tatro’s smooth theft” (187). Furthermore, Nanapush interrupts this story to emphasize its rhetorical purpose when he goes on to say about the land: “*Don’t let it go*, I tell the people. It never comes back” (187). His narrative serves not only to highlight the importance of telling stories that promote land retention, but also to position Fleur’s personal experience within a wider narrative of assimilation and legalized displacement.

Fleur’s experience, particularly as it relates to the loss of the trees on her former land, emphasizes the effects of this narrative on land-based identities. *Tracks* closes with Fleur using the trees themselves as weapons against the loggers who come to cut them down. Having sawed “each tree through at the base,” Fleur watches as the growing windstorm blows them down, “pinning beneath the branches the roaring men” (223). This act is the beginning of Fleur’s obsessive quest for revenge which is continued in *Four Souls* when she walks to Minneapolis to confront Mauser. Her violent response to the logging of her trees and the loss of her land reflects the acute pain of displacement she experiences. The loss of her land and trees is especially painful because it disrupts her land-based identity. Her displacement from the land, which she considers coextensive

with herself, causes a kind of identity crisis that prompts her to take on her mother's name "Four Souls" as a source of strength.⁹ In fact, when a knife-wielding Fleur does confront Mauser, she equates herself with the trees that now panel the house's rooms: "I am the sound that the wind used to make in a thousand needles of pine. I am the quiet at the root. When I walk through your hallway I walk through myself. When I touch the walls of your house I touch my own face" (45). By defining the trees as a part of her own body, Fleur demonstrates how crucial land is to her identity and why its stripping by Mauser's lumber company had such a profound effect on her. This sense of land-based identity is perhaps put most succinctly by Paula Gunn Allen when she says "we are the land" or Jennifer Brice who claims that "for Native Americans, the earth was and is Self" ("Itani" 192; 128).¹⁰

Furthermore, Fleur's revenge strategies and Nanapush's account of Mauser's sordid history serve to highlight the role of gender-based violence and sexism in assimilationist and colonial narratives. When Fleur moves into the Mauser house as a laundress, she re-frames this Euro-American domestic space as a hunting ground, thus indigenizing the site and flipping the normal power relations implied by her position there. From her basement room Fleur memorizes the sounds of each character's steps and prowls the dark house each night, getting "to know the house the way a hunter knows the

⁹ Despite this name change, Nanapush continues to call her Fleur, as will I.

¹⁰ Just as Fleur asserts her ongoing connection with the trees, so they seem to "remember" her too. Nanapush notes that the house's "beeswaxed mantels and carved paneling" were made from the "fine-grained, very old-grown, quartersawn oak that still in its season and for many years after would exude beads of thin sap—as though recalling growth and life on the land belonging to Fleur Pillager and the shores of Matchimanito" (9).

woods” (26). By reconfiguring the house as a hunting ground, she puts herself in the position of the hunter and makes Mauser the prey, co-opting Mauser’s power for herself. In fact, Polly describes Fleur’s effect on Mauser in these terms when she notes that he “wore an increasingly haunted look, though maybe *hunted* is the better word” (92). As the hunter, Fleur combats gender conventions which position women, especially Native women, as hunted and conquerable. This act allows Fleur to take advantage of what the Mausers see as her disempowered situation in order to disrupt the actual power relations and enable her revenge. Furthermore, the novel explicitly links the “rapine treatment” of Fleur’s land “at the hands of white men, at the hands of Mauser himself” with Mauser’s “rapine” treatment of Ojibwe women (67). In so doing, she redefines logging as an act of rape that violates her body as well as the land. Fleur’s connection of herself with the land subverts the colonial narrative that justifies Mauser’s rape because it refigures land not as an abstract commodity Other from the individual, but as coextensive with the self, and thus as crucial to the process of articulating a land-based identity.

Moreover, Nanapush’s telling emphasizes the “story” about Mauser’s history with other women and their allotments that Fleur herself does not hear. While he is aware that Mauser has built his wealth on a series of “thefts,” Fleur fails to “get the story from the beginning” in her rush to leave the reservation and get revenge (23). Nevertheless, by recounting the story he does not tell Fleur, Nanapush does tell this story to the reader. “I could have told her how he took advantage of one loophole and then another,” he recounts, “how in his earliest days, handsome and clever, he had married young Ojibwe girls straight out of boarding school, applied for their permits to log off the allotment

lands they had inherited. Once their trees were gone he had abandoned his young wives, one after the next. . . . I could have given the story to Fleur, but she never asked my advice” (23). This story demonstrates one of the gendered effects of allotment: land was generally allotted to the male head-of-household in order to promote assimilation into a patriarchal social system, which allowed men like Mauser to gain control of land by marrying Native women whose households lacked a male “head.”

Nanapush’s story also points to the fact that violence and sexism are not incidental aspects of colonialism, but are actually integral strategies for dominating Native peoples. Andrea Smith criticizes some Native activists who focus on combating racism while ignoring sexism and violence against women. Responding to the exclusion of sexism and violence against women from the agenda of these movements, Smith insists on the inseparability of these issues and the legacy of colonialism in the U.S. A “dualistic analysis” that looks at these axes separately “fails to recognize that it is precisely through sexism and gender violence that colonialism and white supremacy have been successful” (127). The relations between gender oppression and (neo)colonial practices must be acknowledged in order to combat both.

Furthermore, if Fleur had heard Nanapush’s story, which emphasizes the link between gender oppression and colonial practices like the appropriation of land, she would have better understood Mauser’s own guilty attraction to her. In a reflective moment, Mauser describes his need to “get near something in her . . . some pure space, something that I went up north to have and only ended up destroying” (129). Mauser associates Fleur with the land, as she does herself. However, whereas Fleur’s view of the

land and trees as part of herself rests on an ecological philosophy that requires respecting and sustaining the landscape, Mauser's view equates Fleur with a romanticized sense of "pure" wilderness that is ironically heightened by his actual destruction of "wilderness" environments.

Nanapush's trickster narrative approach combats the environmental and social injustice that results from exploitative laws, governmental policies, and the general pervasiveness of bureaucracy in Native communities. Nanapush first became involved in tribal politics in *Tracks* when he worked through the reservation bureaucracy to help get Fleur's daughter Lulu back from a government boarding school, a trickster act which allows him to subversively infiltrate the political system. In *Four Souls* he links the endless red tape of the bureaucracy with colonial disease. "Smallpox ravaged us quick, tuberculosis killed us slow," he notes, "but the bureaucrats did the worst and finally bored us to death" (76). The bureaucracy constitutes a disease as thoroughly deadly as smallpox or tuberculosis. Nanapush decides that one of the ways he can combat this disease is by becoming a bureaucrat himself, which he does at the end of *Tracks* by running for tribal chairman. His first act as tribal chairman is the forging of documents "proving" his paternity of Lulu, and he frames his entire narrative as an explanation of the familial and tribal history that led to her being sent to the government school. In both novels trickster deception and telling stories that expose bureaucratic and legal hypocrisies function as antidotes to this disease by reconnecting, literally in this case, Native subjects with their cultural identity.

Moreover, in *Four Souls* Nanapush reflects on the lasting effects of colonial practices like forced schooling on his own identity, and on the way he turns this story of legalized oppression into a strategy for resistance. When he attends a Jesuit school meant to inculcate Christian ideologies in young Natives, he instead uses the opportunity to acquire “a pair of eyeglasses, six books” and “a watch” before leaving (49). Meanwhile he struggles to keep the “old gods still strong in [his] heart” amidst the priests’ attempts to “meddle with [his] soul” (75). As tribal chairman Nanapush’s uses his cross-cultural knowledge to negotiate between his people and the U.S. government, fulfilling the “mediator” role of the trickster. Not only does he translate the needs of his people into the bureaucratic language of “barbed pens,” his narrative also translates the acts of government officials into an Ojibwe cultural context. Relating communication with the government to the “tracking” of animals, he notes that “finding an answer from a local official was more difficult than tracking a single buffalo through the mazed tracks of creatures around a drinking hole” (79).

Erdrich’s novel highlights the ways assimilationist practices—like the boarding schools to which Nanapush was sent—systematically suppressed Native languages, which are themselves closely linked to identity. Although Margaret’s narration is not as explicitly metafictional as Nanapush’s, it does point to the crucial links between language, storytelling, and survival. As Nanapush does in *Tracks* when he tells stories to get through a tuberculosis epidemic, Margaret notes in *Four Souls* that she too “outwitted death by talking,” by telling stories, and by remembering her native tongue (179). When she gets punished at boarding school for speaking her language, she reacts subversively

by refusing to forget it. Every time she “was struck or shamed for speaking Ojibwemowin,” Margaret vows, “*There’s another word I won’t forget*. I tamped it down. I took it in. I grew hard inside to that the girl named Center to the Sky could survive” (179). Here Margaret explicitly links language with personal and cultural survival. Erdrich describes the harm of language suppression in interviews, saying that being “punished for being your most fluent and absorbing and interesting self” is so damaging “because self and language are so much the same,” because there is a connection between “what you express and what you are” (Pearlman 154). “It is very political to keep your own language,” she argues, given the “incredible effort to make Native American people speak English” (Wong 199). Because of its status as a historical language of oppression, English is a conflicted site for Erdrich’s characters. Citing the language of treaties and whiskey bottles, Nanapush says that the “English language tastes foul, tastes rancid in my mouth, for it is the language in which we are, as always, deceived. Lies are manufactured in that English language. All the treaties are written in English, are they not? In its wording our land is stolen. All the labels on the whiskey bottles are in English, do you agree?” (154). Here Nanapush emphasizes the role of language, of “wording,” in propagating the assimilationist “lies” that enable the stealing of land as well as the suppression of indigenous languages. However, both he and Margaret use the “rancid” English language subversively to expose the very “lies” through which it attempts to control Native lands and peoples. These kinds of trickster tactics serve to interrogate the environmental and human costs of national assimilation narratives while also suggesting ways of staging resistance.

(Mis)reading Identity, or Two Squaws and a Lady

The assimilation narratives that Erdrich's trickster metafiction undermines not only promote the displacement of people with land-based identities, they also rely on static, stereotyped notions of Native identity. The trickster, in contrast, "provides a model for establishing identity in the presence of change, for adapting, for surviving" (Catt 75). In reference to Erdrich's previous novels, Jeanne Smith points out that in her fiction "tricksters are central to the formulation of identity, the creation of community and the preservation of culture" (72). I would add that *Four Souls* represents a particularly rich example of how tricksters can "challenge racial and gender stereotypes" in order to "affirm and create personal and cultural identity" and "attest to the enduring strength of their cultural communities" (26). This trickster strategy is most explicit in the two sections of the novel where Nanapush and Fleur give performances as the stereotypical "squaw" figure, traditionally characterized as an animal-like, sexually available, "degraded and filthy creature" (Green 110). Far from reinforcing this notion by mimicking it, Erdrich's trickster model of metafiction redefines identities as performative self-narratives and emphasizes the process by which these narratives are self-consciously constructed either to be misread or to enable rhetorical persuasion. While they may fool other characters, these self-narratives reveal their own artificiality to the reader by metafictionally signaling their status as constructed "texts." Rather than replacing this cultural script with an "authentic" or "original" narrative of subjectivity, both characters ultimately promote a relational model of identity which is based not on individual authenticity but on one's relation to the environment and other people. Nanapush's meta-

commentary about storytelling in the first section, and Erdrich's juxtaposition of narrators in the second, highlight the role of narrative in legitimating stereotypes and the political ability of self-conscious meta-performances to undermine them.

The most hilarious such performance occurs when Nanapush, at his trickster best, wears his partner Margaret's special "medicine dress" when encountering a group of tourists and then while speaking at a tribal meeting. Dismayed at Margaret's attempt to dance in the new dress (she did "as miserable a crow step as a white woman"), Nanapush haughtily sets out to show her what real "old-time traditional woman dancing" looks like (143). The next morning he wakes up in the local drunk tank without any other clothes to go home in. Although Nanapush has not planned to wear the dress around town, he uses this opportunity to both marshal and subvert stereotypes for his own personal and political aims. A group of white tourists who have come to the reservation in search of a "photo-worthy Indian" stop the dress-clad Nanapush for a picture because he is the "first one [they've] met wearing a colorful costume" (152). This interchange evokes the surprisingly resilient notion that Native people are "authentic" only when they fit the popular image of the Indian in traditional garb. As Wilma Mankiller points out in a recent book, "a significant number of people believe tribal people still live and dress as they did three hundred years ago" (xv).

Besides being a metonymic figure of authentic Indianness to the tourists, Nanapush is so "photo-worthy" because he represents for the tourists a dying breed, a cultural relic of a people who have gone the way of the buffalo. The tourists also think that because he wears a dress, he must be a woman, though a particularly "ugly" old

squaw (152). Instead of refusing to take the photo, as he first thinks to do, Nanapush decides to exploit the tourists' expectations when he poses with the family and then lifts his skirt just as the camera flashes. This act, and the "rousing and educational French cancan dance" that follows, provides the tourists an "anatomy lesson" that, in classic trickster style, simultaneously disrupts their notion of the "authentic" Indian and their assumptions about gender (153). In this scene, Nanapush reflects the "trickster's ability to confound established or conventional categories such as hero, fool, rogue—even human and animal, male and female," suggesting "that the trickster and his literary manifestations can cause us to question the validity of a perspective that places these categories in opposition" (Hyde 150). His antics are an example of what Erdrich calls "survival humor" which belies the "stereotype, the stoic, unflinching Indian standing, looking at the sunset" (Coltelli 24). More than diversionary, then, Erdrich claims that this "humor enables you to live with what you have to live with. You have to be able to poke fun at the people who are dominating your life and family" (Moyers 144).

Erdrich's trickster characters are usually examined as culture heroes or as providers of "survival humor," but the self-consciousness of the trickster is often overlooked.¹¹ Nanapush is not a figure of complete self-awareness—he fools others and is often fooled himself—but his questioning of social codes implies a self-conscious troubling of hypocrisy and dogma that echoes the function of metafiction in the novel as a whole. While Nanapush uses survival humor to undermine the notion of a gender-determined "authentic" Indian, he also rewrites this cultural script as a meta-commentary

¹¹ See, for example, Jeanne Smith and Sharon Bowers.

on its own phoniness. He exploits the gap between stereotypical myths about Indians and actual Indians by performing a stereotype that ironically announces its own artificiality both to the tourists and, through his telling, to the reader. This does not mean that Nanapush lacks an identity, but that he uses his shifting, adaptable trickster self-narrative to call attention to the ways stereotypical cultural narratives impact how people “read” him.

While Nanapush very effectively criticizes the tourists’ racist and sexist assumptions here, his goal is not to reveal a “more authentic” identity underneath the stereotype (or the dress, as it were) but to show how identity itself is a performative self-narrative that can be told in politically subversive ways. Perhaps the most shocking part of this encounter for the tourists is not that Nanapush reveals “a man’s equipment underneath a woman’s skirts,” but that he turns out to be just performing this stereotypical “authentic” Indian role (153).¹² Owens argues that the iconic Native American is a product of literature, history, and art with little resemblance to actual Native people. What Vizenor calls the “tribal real” has been falsified and misrepresented so that these inventions substitute colonialist “simulations” for tribal reality (4).¹³

¹² In *The Last Report on the Miracles at Little No Horse* (2001), Erdrich explores gender-crossing through the recurring character Father Damien who turns out to be a biological woman. Nanapush says the Ojibwe are familiar with “woman-acting” men and “man-acting” women (232). For an analysis of gender fluidity in Native cultures see Maltz and Archambault who argue that, unlike Euro-Americans, Native Americans link gender to behavior rather than to biology or power.

¹³ Vizenor cites such sources as the Boy Scouts, western movies, museum dioramas, encyclopedia entries, mascots, “tribal kitschymen,” and the “literature of dominance” that participate in the invention of the Indian. Whether this invented Indian takes the form of the brutal savage or the noble savage, its damage to Native culture and identity is

Though his formulation forces us to ask what constitutes the “tribal real” given the fluid nature of culture and identity, it does point to the very “real” cultural oppression of Native people through the fabrication of damaging stereotypes.

In disrupting notions of Native “authenticity,” Nanapush’s narrative undermines those, like Mauser’s, which evoke stereotypes of the “authentic” noble warrior Indian (already extinct) and the “inauthentic” degenerate modern Indian (destined for extinction) in order to justify the appropriation of land. Telling Polly about the impossibility of his reimbursing Natives for the land he stole over the years, Mauser notes that he “could hardly make restitution to a people who’ve become so depraved. . . . The old type, the warrior type, they are gone. Only the wastrels, the dregs of humanity left, only the poor toms have survived. . . . The reservations are ruined spots and may as well be sold off and all trace of their former owners obliterated” (127). Mauser’s outlook exemplifies the tendency to admire the noble savage, or “warrior type” while relegating him to the past. This formulation implies that modern Natives must then be “depraved” leftovers doomed to extinction. Mauser connects the “inauthenticity” of modern Native identity with the illegitimacy of their land claims: both Natives and their reservations have become “ruined spots” that should be wiped clean of all “traces” to make way for white owners. Furthermore, his use of the passive construction “are ruined spots” obscures his role, and that of other Euro-Americans, in creating the very “ruin” that now requires their control.

irrefutable. Classic western movies, for instance, depicted Indians as bloodthirsty savages, while “postwestern” movies like *Dances With Wolves* associate the Indian with romanticized tragedy (7). Both omit the human complexity and situated cultural contexts of Native people.

Nanapush's narrative, in contrast, self-consciously emphasizes how he constructs his storytelling rhetoric to reinforce land claims and tribal community rather than "obliterating" them. After encountering the tourists, he speaks at a tribal meeting. In this setting where people know him, the fictionality of his performance as a "woman" is immediately underlined. Although Nanapush did not plan to wear a dress to the meeting, he turns this situation into an opportunity to persuade the mostly female crowd not to sell tribal land. By claiming that wearing the dress enables him to "hear" Grandmother Earth beseeching the people to take care of her, a voice he "missed when [he] was arrayed like a man," he plays to his female audience (156).

Most importantly, Nanapush metafactively reveals to the reader the strategies he uses to craft and perform this role. Narrating this meeting after the fact, Nanapush interrupts the story with an aside to the reader, saying: "here I paused. I took a close look at my crowd. My initial impression—that it was composed of two women to every one man—was confirmed" (155). He then self-consciously structures his rhetoric to identify with this particular audience. Although Nanapush does believe that the dress allows him to communicate with the earth, the presentation of his metafictional aside to the reader and the fictionalized conversation with Grandmother Earth that he then designs in response to the audience emphasizes the constructedness of even this useful narrative. In this encounter, Grandmother Earth admonishes Nanapush to respect her, and by extension all women: "Listen, old fool, I heard the earth tell me. You are walking on my beautiful body. . . . Poor man, decorated with a knob and a couple of balls! You're only here on my patience and on the patience of women. . . . So with my generous nature I have given you

all that you have. You owe your life to me” (156). While Nanapush is truly “humbled” by his experience in the dress, he clearly constructs his self-deprecating rhetoric to appeal directly to a female audience (156). “Tricksters are not only characters,” Jeanne Smith reminds us, “they are also rhetorical agents” who “wield power over their listeners with their artful use of words” (2). In fact, this strategy actually succeeds in convincing the tribe to vote against selling their land. As Nanapush says, “the dress worked” (156).

Even though Nanapush foregrounds his performance of a role to achieve the immediate goal of persuading voters, being “read” as female by the tourists actually prompts him to imagine what it is like to be a woman. Nanapush employs a kind of strategic essentialism here that allows him to create a coalition between the people at the meeting based on their common consideration of this women’s perspective, however constructed that notion may be. Although he cannot actually know women’s experiences from a woman’s point of view, in order to play this role he is compelled to empathetically imagine that perspective. This imaginative act not only makes his speech more persuasive, but actually makes him more cognizant of multiple perspectives about the land. His new understanding prompts Nanapush to renounce the conceit that led him to don the dress in the first place and “humbly address each problem [he’d] created” in his relationship with Margaret (157). He is reminded that his own identity is not independent from others, but is coextensive with both Grandmother Earth and Margaret. Moreover, by metafictionally revealing the fabrication of his two ironic performances as a “squaw,” Nanapush suggests that narratives, like identities, are mutable constructions that can be self-consciously shaped to disrupt and re-imagine the “invented” Indian.

My reading of the importance of Nanapush's experiences in the medicine dress to the novel's trickster model of metafiction contrasts the view that Nanapush, here and elsewhere, functions primarily as an entertaining clown. In her review of *Four Souls* for the *New York Times*, Michiko Kakutani claims that this "silly sequence of scenes" depicts an almost "farcical" Nanapush "donning his wife's clothing and generally making a fool of himself." While Nanapush's trickster antics are certainly humorous, Kakutani's reading of these scenes overlooks the "serious" implications of this play—the insights Nanapush gains by expanding his perspective and the significance of his metafictional reflection on his performance. "Transgressive, contraestablishment tricksterisms," like his "offer a carnivalesque post-postmodernist creativity whose central sociopsychological drive promotes important community-formation" (Doty 3). Nanapush's trickster ability to undermine static notions of identity while ultimately reuniting the tribe's opposition to land developers, demonstrates the success—and political usefulness—of his rhetoric.

Nanapush goes a step further when he extends his own self-reflection to inspire the same in his reader. Describing the tribe's history, he imaginatively places the reader in the desperate position of the Ojibwe who signed a treaty with the U.S.:¹⁴

besides cures, people needed supplies. Blankets. Knives. Who can blame them? Supposing the world went dead around you and all the animals

¹⁴ If Erdrich's invented reservation corresponds loosely to that of the Turtle Mountain Chippewa in North Dakota, as several critics have noted (see Peterson), then this passage may refer to the infamous "Ten Cent Treaty" of 1892—so named because it offered a mere one million dollars for nine million acres—which was fiercely debated among the bands, all of whom were threatened with starvation if they refused. For more on the legal history of Native tribes in North Dakota see, for example, Mary Jane Schneider.

were used up. . . . Supposing one new sickness after another came. . . .

Suppose this happened in your own life, what then, would you not think of surrendering to the cross, of leading yourself into the hands of new medicines? (49)

In this metafictional moment, Nanapush interrupts his narrative to directly challenge the reader's thinking. By imaginatively placing the reader in the position of colonized Natives, Nanapush uses this metafictional reflection on tribal history to encourage the reader's empathetic meditation on this position. Although it evokes a particular history, this example more generally encourages the reader to consider historical context when "reading" Native people since the effects of colonization are ongoing even today.

Anticipating responses to his history that would question the tribe's "giving in" to the treaty, Nanapush invokes the environmental threats ("world went dead") and threats to identity (sickness, religion, new medicines) that contextualize the treaty. Thus Nanapush's trickster performance as tribal chairman, whether by wearing the medicine dress or relating alternative histories, demonstrates for the reader how environmental and social justice are linked.

When Fleur performs as a "squaw," Erdrich's trickster model of metafiction uses the formal juxtaposition of different narrators' accounts to show how Fleur deliberately constructs herself as a (mis)read text. Polly first describes Fleur, who presents herself at the Mauser house as a migrant laborer looking for work, with images of lack and mystery. These images reflect Fleur's physical appearance while hunched in dark shawls as well as Polly's own perception of Native women as simultaneously stereotyped and

unknowable. Polly remembers Fleur in this first glimpse as “a question mark set on a page, alone. Or like a keyhole . . . the deep black figure layered in shawls was more an absence, a slot for a coin, an invitation for the curious, than a woman come to plead for menial work. . . . Fleur was a cipher” (12). Polly depicts Fleur as a vaguely sexualized “absence” who invokes the stereotypical squaw seeking “menial work” even as her mysteriousness temporarily eludes definition.

These images demonstrate Polly’s inability to recognize Fleur’s personhood; she sees her only in terms of race and gender stereotypes. The emphasis on the darkness or blackness of Fleur’s figure contrasts the “white, white day” on which she comes to the Mauser house and represents Polly’s attempt to differentiate herself from this woman by making Fleur a racial Other. Emily Potter defines the female body as a site of “manifold subjection” where “racial and sexual struggle is read and revealed” (31). She focuses particularly on depictions of racialized and sexualized bodies as dark, “enigmatic,” and “mystified,” that parallel “colonialist perceptions of un-known and so-called uncivilized lands and peoples as similar hearts of darkness—other, inferior, and territory to master” (31). Thus a direct ideological link connects Polly’s description of Fleur as an absence and Polly’s attempt to differentiate the Mauser house as “white” and “solid”—these are two sides of the same colonialist coin. Furthermore, equating Fleur with empty spaces, like a “keyhole” or a “slot,” sexualizes her as a Native body available to being filled or defined by others, a body that in fact “invites” the curious to define her.

Most importantly, Polly explicitly makes Fleur into a text by describing her as a punctuation mark on a page. However, this question mark is unreadable and meaningless

“on a page, alone” because it has no relation to a question. Following Foucault, Elizabeth Grosz analyzes the body as a “text, a system of signs to be deciphered, read, and read into,” and notes that because these body-texts are “traversed and infiltrated by knowledges, meanings and power, they can also, under certain circumstances, become sites of struggle and resistance, actively inscribing themselves on social practices” (199). Fleur, who self-consciously cultivates this “text,” effectively resists her characterization as powerless by using her status as an absence or an unreadable text to her advantage as a way to covertly infiltrate the Mauser house. Implicitly invoking a metafictional reflection on the constructedness of such cultural scripts, she plays on the stereotypical unreadability of the Native body and on the consequent assumption that she lacks agency.

Given only this depiction, the reader, like Polly, would not be able to de-“cipher” Fleur, that is, to recognize her ironic relationship to the self-narrative she constructs. In actuality, the reader knows from Nanapush’s earlier chapter that Fleur stops before getting to the Mauser house to self-consciously transform herself into this menial figure with braids, a “quiet brown” dress, “heavy boots,” and a “blanket for a shawl” (2). Fleur deliberately makes herself appear as the stereotypical Indian “squaw,” a sexually available beast of burden. Historically, the two main stereotypes of Native women are the over-worked squaw and the exotic princess who leaves her tribe to become a “lady.”¹⁵ In

¹⁵ Polly and her society clearly recognize that “squaw” is a derogatory term. She recounts a time when a visitor to the house, Mr. Virgil Hill, calls Fleur a squaw and then felt “he stood in danger of evisceration.” He claims his intentions were “innocent,” but immediately recognizes his misstep (60). His intentions were “innocent” not because he failed to realize the epithet was pejorative, but because he did not expect resistance to a

Four Souls Fleur exploits both of these stereotypes to advance her ultimate plan to reclaim her land, acting first as a servant and then as a lady. Fleur invokes the second stereotype when she later becomes lady of the house as Mauser's wife. After deciding not to kill Mauser, Fleur changes tactics, marrying Mauser in the hopes that she can then use her trickster wit to get control of the deed.

By combining the knowledge of her actual plan to regain her land, told by Nanapush, with Polly's account of her marriage to Mauser, the reader recognizes the calculated irony of her performance. As Polly describes, Fleur "quickly perfected her carriage, manners, behavior, by steady observation of other women," producing a "talented mimic" (87). Mimicking a dominant social role highlights the artificial power relationship between colonizer and colonized, as Bhabha has shown. Pressures to conform to European social roles reproduce the colonized subject as "almost the same, but not quite. . . . so that mimicry is at once resemblance and menace" (*Location* 123). While on the one hand such mimicry validates European culture ("resemblance"), on the other it exposes the artificiality of European social roles that can be so well imitated by the colonized ("menace"). Thus the gap between "the same" and "not quite" becomes a potentially subversive site that reveals the ambivalence of colonial discourse. Fleur's "talented mimic" of Minneapolis society women makes her both a fascinating, exotic figure and a threat to a community founded on white superiority. Polly describes her in this scene as a public "spectacle" (60). In contrast to Fleur's *invisibility* as laundress

term he thought commonplace. For more on stereotypes of Native women see Van Dyke, Klein and Ackerman.

squaw, her performance as a “lady” makes her *hypervisible*. While she can now be seen, her personhood remains unrecognized, displaced by the stereotype that turns her into an amusing and disturbing “spectacle.” Fleur’s ironic performance here, highlighted by the opposing narratives of Nanapush and Polly, serves to deconstruct the civilized/savage binary on which colonization depends.

The juxtaposition of accounts from Nanapush and Polly reveals to the reader that Fleur strategically plays on the expectation that she lacks a positive identity in order to gain access to the Mauser house and eventually recover her land. Thus the reader does not see Fleur as an “absence” or “spectacle,” but as someone who ironically uses her invisibility as a tool on her ultimate quest for recognition. Only by combining these two narratives can the reader recognize Fleur’s subversive tactics, and thus her ironic relationship to the stereotypical roles she acts out. While some critics have read Erdrich’s use of multiple narrators as a sign of cultural fragmentation (Berninghausen, Owens), and others have interpreted this approach as evidence of a communal worldview (Reid, Schultz), this strategy also has metafictional implications. Irene Wanner’s review of *Four Souls* claims that the “patchwork” quality and “swerving focus” of the novel’s multiple narrators results in a distinct lack of “clarity.” However, my reading suggests that Erdrich’s metafictional juxtaposition of narratives is crucial to the novel’s form because it allows her to scrutinize narratives that legitimate environmental and social justice, and to demonstrate how stereotypical narratives of identity can be self-consciously appropriated for subversive ends.

Empathy, Relationality, and Survival Environmentalism

While undermining such narratives is a crucial political function of Erdrich's trickster metafiction, the novel ultimately proposes that self-reflection on the way we tell stories about humans and the environment can produce empathetic, relational models of identity and ecology which are essential for the survival of both people and the environment. For example, Polly's eventual reevaluation of Fleur and the Mauser house, as well as her own self-narrative, demonstrates how stories and the relationships that develop through storytelling can inspire self-consciousness in others, expanding their political impact. Getting to know Fleur, partly through the stories she tells about her homeland and partly through coming to recognize her self-conscious performance of stereotypical roles, prompts an identity crisis for Polly. It causes her to reflect on her own identity and social status—on how the roles she plays, the spaces she inhabits, and the stories she tells about them impact others. Firmly ensconced in her superiority as a genuine “lady” at the beginning of the novel, Polly's “prejudiced certainty” eventually gives way to self-conscious “doubt” (98). Though Polly and her sister move out when Mauser marries Fleur, Polly returns to care for Fleur during a difficult and (according to Margaret, accidental) pregnancy. Through this process Polly begins to “imagine her as a person—as a woman with family and feelings for them such as my own,” and wants to learn more about “where [Fleur] was from in actual truth and not in the land of my misperceptions” (67). When Mauser later says that Fleur has no family (“she's the last of them”), Polly redefines her former servant as her “sister” (130).¹⁶ This reevaluation of

¹⁶ The reversal of Polly and Fleur's relationship also manifests in their changed spatial positions within the house. After marrying Mauser, Fleur moves upstairs. To nurse her

Fleur, whom she originally defined as an unreadable text—a “question mark on a page, alone”—parallels her similar reinterpretation of the Mauser house. Though she previously “read” the house as a “pristine” façade, and represented it as such in her own narrative, she can now distinguish between its “solid construction” and the “wrecked” and “flawed” identities of its inhabitants (98). From listening to Fleur’s stories, Polly learns that “all of the materials, the fabric, all the raw stuff of our opulent shelter were taken from Fleur’s people” (67). Whereas during the building of the house she “had sympathized in and even acted in protest at the treatment of the horses” but not the workers or the Native people from whom the “raw stuff” was taken, Polly now recognizes the power dynamics encoded in their “opulent shelter” (67). In other words, her growing self-consciousness allows her to understand how environmental and social justice are linked (67).

Moreover, Polly’s new sense of self-conscious “doubt” affects her understanding both of her own identity and of her relationship to texts. While her narrative is not as overtly metafictional as Nanapush’s, it does emphasize the inter-textuality of her worldview. Polly’s interaction with others is largely based on the books in her “preciously assembled household library” (63). In attempting to diagnose Mauser’s sexual dysfunction, for instance, Polly refers to “Dr. Alice B. Stockham’s useful book,” and also models figures from the “classical and biblical settings” of books for her sister to

during pregnancy, Polly moves into the basement room Fleur occupied as a laundress.

paint (37, 21).¹⁷ When Fleur is first hired as a laundress Polly refers to a household management book to interpret her: “the look she gave me wasn’t covered in Miss Katherine Hammond’s courses on the hiring and retaining of help. I could not in honesty have categorized the gaze as impertinence, a thing to be dealt with in a spirit of ‘calm, firm dispatch’” (14). However, her developing relationship with Fleur prompts her realization that books like Hammond’s rely on a hierarchical ideology that rigidly defines the relationships between masters and servants and thus explicitly forbids identification with the Other. Polly eventually comes to “find that I liked living by my own laws, not Miss Hammond’s” (119). Whereas her previous self-narrative was based on social status, she now reflects on the effect of her new sense of empathetic “doubt” about social hierarchies: “I who was privileged, was driven to the side of a woman I’d once ordered to wash my clothes. I suppose it could be said that I was humbled, or enlarged” (66). Like Nanapush when he wears the medicine dress, Polly is both “humbled” and gains an “enlarged” perspective.

The inclusion of Polly’s narrative in the novel, then, is designed not merely to offer a simple “masternarrative” against which to oppose the Native characters’ stories, but to highlight the political impact of Fleur’s self-consciousness that inspires the same in

¹⁷ Stockham’s was a real book, published in 1886, which was revolutionary for its time. Driven by a concern for divorced women and prostitutes, Stockham’s text provided information on gynecological health and midwifery, as well as the practice of “karezza” to which Erdrich refers in the novel. Karezza involved sexual intercourse in which men refrained from ejaculation inside women (while women were free to orgasm) in order to promote family planning without using explicit forms of “birth control.” In terms of its reference in this novel, it is especially interesting that Stockham actually modeled her approach on a similar one in Oneida culture, which was known as “the Oneida method.”

Polly. Similarly, Fleur no longer thinks of Polly as a simple representative of “privilege,” but becomes her confidant and friend as “piece by piece, over the weeks and months” an intimate “connection” and even “love” develops between them (66, 68). While Wanner’s review claims that the novel’s “white characters are one-dimensional and dull,” and even that Polly should not have been a narrator at all, my reading demonstrates how the growing self-consciousness of Polly’s narrative represents a crucial site of this metafiction’s political force. By empathizing with one another, Polly and Fleur both redefine their own relationship and demonstrate how self-conscious reflections on representation can prompt a transformed understanding of the relationship between humans and the environment.

In the scene where Nanapush uses his trickster storytelling abilities to concoct an elaborate explanation for the hole he makes in Margaret’s prized linoleum floor, Erdrich further illustrates the potential of self-conscious storytelling to refigure our relationships to places and other people. Throughout the novel Nanapush becomes increasingly jealous of Shesheeb, his local nemesis who he sees as a rival for Margaret’s love. When Nanapush sets a snare for Shesheeb and accidentally catches Margaret, almost killing her, she decides to get revenge by subtly escalating Nanapush’s paranoia. While both of them recognize the mounting bitterness between them, “neither of [them] had the courage to dismantle the barrier of hard sticks, pointed words, and prickles of jealousy that soon tangled like deep bush between [them]” (135).

Nanapush’s narrative self-consciously calls attention to the limits of revenge as a response to loss, interrupting the story to address the reader: “Do you hear me correctly?

Do you understand what I am telling you? What began as a scheme between Margaret and me to get the best of each other ended up getting the best of us both. Revenge ran away with us, and then it turned around and ran over us” (140). Their conflict centers on this growing jealousy and on Margaret’s obsession with “that substance—linoleum” which she sells land in order to buy (78). Both problems come to a head in this scene. Thinking that Shesheeb has taken the form of a fly, Nanapush defecates on the floor to attract him, slapping a bucket over both and cutting out the circle of linoleum underneath it to complete the trap. “Either I had bested Shesheeb, at last” he quips, “or captured my own shit” (166). After Nanapush “comes back to [his] senses,” he realizes he will need an especially crafty story to avoid Margaret’s wrath (167). When he decides on a potentially believable explanation for the hole—that a star crashed through the roof and into the floor of their cabin—he fabricates an elaborate narrative as well as the physical evidence (a fake star made out of an aluminum can of Red Jacket beans).

Most importantly, Nanapush highlights his construction of this narrative for the reader. “I practiced my story,” he notes, “I rehearsed. I would tell Margaret that I was minding my own damn business and sleeping when out of the heavens that star sizzled down right through the roof” (168). He prepares a look of “dazzled” amazement and is “ready with the story, completely prepared to act the part” in order to elicit pathos from Margaret (171). This scene exemplifies Nanapush’s trickster approach to storytelling and reflects how “the trickster fabricates believable illusions with words” (J. Smith 21). Ironically, however, he only gains Margaret’s sympathy when she sees the “Red Jacket Beans” imprint on the star and recognizes his performance as a performance.

Thus when the fiction reveals itself to be a fiction—when the fiction becomes metafiction—she falls in love with Nanapush the performer instead of the role he plays. When Margaret discovers the ruse, her reaction “was not the horror of sarcasm. Not the scrape of reproach. Margaret did something she had never done in response to one of [his] idiot transgressions. Margaret laughed” (173). Rather than excoriating Nanapush for his deception, she laughs at the elaborate scale of his antics. This reaction, which allows “forgiveness [to begin] in her,” is prompted by her empathetic recognition of the painstaking process Nanapush undergoes to produce his fiction (171).¹⁸ The transformed relationship of Polly and Fleur, and Margaret and Nanapush, models the ironic ability of inwardly-oriented reflection to inspire outwardly-oriented empathy. Nanapush in particular functions as a metafictional trickster who uses “fabricated” stories, and the revelation of this fabrication, to reorganize the social order. While it transforms Margaret’s view of Nanapush, his metafictional stunt has broader effects as well.

As she relates in the following chapters, this experience prompts Margaret to reorient herself within the community of people and land, and to create a ceremony that does the same for Fleur, thus reflecting the trickster’s ultimate aim to reunite the community through performative antics and “fabricated” storytelling. Like Nanapush, who gains an “enlarged” perspective by wearing the medicine dress, Margaret’s and Fleur’s wearing of the dress enables them to access the cultural and personal history of their ancestors, and specifically to reorient themselves within the “line of dawn woman

¹⁸ Although this peace between Nanapush and Margaret is shaken several times in subsequent years, as described in *The Last Report*, they do return again and again to the loving camaraderie we see in this scene.

healers” that comes before them (48). Emil Her Many Horses positions Native dresses as crucial to transhistorical connections between women in particular. Such dresses are “more than garments” because they function as “evidence of a proud and unbroken tradition, links to generations of women who came before them, and bridges to the future” (62). The dress, for instance, reminds Margaret of her own relational identity: “I knew who I was in relation to all who went before” (179). As a symbolic embodiment of the tribe’s traditions and culture, the medicine dress functions specifically to widen the wearer’s view, allowing a historically hybrid perspective. Margaret notes that “I’d see things when I wore this dress. I’d know things beyond the reach of my mind” (117). Specifically, her dress-inspired vision allows her to see the difficult history of her tribe since contact. “I saw a dress of starvation worn meager,” she says, “I saw an assimilation dress of net and foam. . . . A dress of whiskey. A dress of loss” (176). Thus the medicine dress becomes a site which both embodies cultural history and records the ongoing effects of colonial practices (assimilation, starvation, loss).¹⁹ Although the dress

¹⁹ Medicine dresses have long been important elements in Ojibwe ritual life—able to respond to new cultural challenges, they signify the adaptability of Ojibwe culture. For example, Ojibwe women in the 1920s (this novel’s period) responded to epidemics of influenza and tuberculosis by performing ritual dances in “jingle dresses” designed to combat this urgent crisis. Though the medicine dress Margaret makes is not a jingle dress, the historical context of Ojibwe dress-making in this period demonstrates the cultural power such special dresses embodied. Heid E. Erdrich, Louise Erdrich’s sister, similarly invokes the historical symbolism of Native dresses’ response to colonialism, writing in her poem “She Dances” about “the heavy dress of history / the one made of flags / and ration blankets and blood” (12). Reinforcing the agency of such dresses, Richard West notes they are “complex expressions of culture and identity . . . infused with the spirit of its maker, a dress can seem to take on a life of its own” (11). “Dresses and accessories have and remain more than mere articles of clothing for Native women,” claims Colleen Cutschall; “they are canvases for the expression of tribal culture and

embodies colonial history, part of Margaret's duty in preparing the dress involves telling it stories of her own history, including her experiences with other powerful dresses.

When hiding from boarding school agents as a child, Margaret crawled under her great-grandmother's skirt. In this intimate space she has a vision of the "invisible and sacred. Time opened for me. I saw back through my gitchi-nookomisiban to the woman before her mother, and the woman before that, who bore her, and the woman before that too. All of those women had walked carefully upon this earth, I knew, otherwise they would not have survived" (178). By imbuing the dress with the history of women who "walked carefully" on the earth in order to "survive," Margaret calls attention to the novel's environmental ethic. Locating the individual within a history of human and environmental relationships, it suggests, is necessary to the survival of humans and the environments on which they "walk."

Whereas Fleur had previously isolated herself in the single-minded quest to regain her land, the ritual Margaret concocts is designed to address the ongoing effects socioenvironmental injustices have had on Fleur by forcing her to self-consciously "look within" in order to similarly reconnect her identity with the land and her tribal community (205). By the time Fleur returns to the reservation near the end of the novel, and even wins back her "scraped-bare" land in a poker game, this bitterness already has a

personal identity" (90). Janet Berlo argues that "making and wearing ceremonial dress is a literal embodiment of ancestral knowledge. Women's dress encapsulates information about the world of animals . . . and exemplifies the web of relationships among relatives, neighbors, and trading partners" (97). For more on Ojibwe dress-making see, for example, Brenda Child.

deep grip on her life.²⁰ The problem is compounded by her mounting alcoholism (which began with doctor-ordered whiskey treatments during pregnancy) and obsession with revenge. Fleur's ritual, which involves meditating outside for eight days with no food and limited water, will center on a reciprocal dialogue with the multiplicity of voices contained within the medicine dress. Margaret diagnoses Fleur's problem beforehand as a lack of memory; she has "forced herself to forget" her place in the community and larger environment "in order to survive." In order to heal she must then "remember" the stories of what she has "lost," stories that the dress embodies (205). Although forgetting these stories has been a temporarily effective survival strategy, the remembering and telling of these stories is now necessary for Fleur's survival. The dress "forces" Fleur to simultaneously "look within," at her own role in remembering/forgetting, and look without, at the long history of Ojibwe people the dress contains (205). Hence Fleur's wearing of the dress gives her access to a hybrid perspective informed by her personal

²⁰ After Fleur realizes that Tatro, not Mauser, now owns her land, she joins the poker game at his local bar with a shrewd plan to regain the deed. In another instance of ironic performance, Fleur deliberately transforms herself into a stereotypical drunken Indian who gambles recklessly. As the game proceeds Fleur drinks more whiskey and pretends to get falling-down drunk, stumbling and loudly calling attention to her shaky hands. However, she whispers to Nanapush in a voice as "sober as a rock" that her drunkenness is really a strategic performance (194). In fact, her plan's success depends on Tatro's interpretation of her as an ignoble, degraded Indian who is neither clever nor sober enough to best him. Ironically, it is Tatro's belief that Fleur is a debauched Indian with no land rights that convinces him it is safe to bet with her land. Per house rules, Fleur claims she's too drunk to play and hands her cards to her autistic card-counting son. After the boy wins six straight hands, securing the land, Tatro realizes "that the foolish mask the boy wore was in fact both his real face and unreadable" (197). Both Fleur and her son play roles that make their real intentions "unreadable" for Tatro. While her performance as a drunken Indian makes her immediately recognizable as a stereotype, this (mis)recognition actually renders her "unreadable."

history and the history of the tribe as a whole. Not only does the dress hold the memory of her ancestors, Fleur will add her own experiences to this record. Thus the dress itself models the historically rooted and yet constantly evolving identity that Fleur seeks in the ceremony. By imbuing it with her own varied history, Fleur makes the dress into a new narrative which both enables and records her identity.

Most importantly, the dress will break the “arrogant shell” of Fleur’s “loneliness” and allow her to “break down and need” a reciprocal relationship with others and the environment (206). Rather than defining identity based on authenticity or individuality, Erdrich proposes a relational model of identity, one based on relationships (with people, land, and objects) that must be continually renewed. The ceremony is not an isolated *event* in Fleur’s life, but the beginning of a way of *being* founded on mutual “need” rather than isolation and “loneliness.” Fleur’s experience thus reflects Paula Gunn Allen’s characterization of a healing ceremony, which moves an individual from a state of isolation (which is diseased) to a state of incorporation (which is healthy). Similarly, the ritual involves re-orienting Fleur within the environment. As she bathes Fleur in preparation for the meditation, Margaret tells her that her “mother’s spirit and her grandmother’s” and her “father and his fathers love [her],” as well as “the spirits in the four layers of the earth and the four skies that exist above us” and “the crawlers, the fliers, the runners, the swimmers. You are loved in creation though you tried to destroy yourself” (204). Fleur’s healing, then, is predicated on a relational model not only of identity, but also of ecology, one that recognizes humans as part of a larger community of beings that must be treated “carefully” in order to survive.

Moreover, the relational model of identity and ecology that the novel's trickster metafiction proposes relies on a self-conscious attention to the ways we tell stories about humans and the environment. As Erdrich remarks, "although fiction alone may lack the power to head us off the course of destruction, it affects us as individuals and can spur us to treat the earth . . . as we would treat our own mothers and fathers" ("Where" 50). Not only can stories encourage "individual" readers to develop a sense of relationality, they can also teach strategies for survival. We need to learn, she argues, from "cultures who have managed to survive very well on the land without pushing it toward the brink of a serious ecological crisis" (Moyers 147). Like the trickster, Erdrich's metafiction foregrounds the constructedness of narrative at the same time as it attests to the crucial role of storytelling in the survival of people and environments. And like Margaret's recognition of Nanapush's fabricated narrative, the reader's parallel recognition of the way Erdrich has fashioned her literary materials, prompts awareness of the political contexts of storytelling. Thus the political effect of the novel inheres not in its "story" alone, but in the way this story is shaped by the "storytelling." The metafictional shaping of this novel in particular encourages the reader to reflect on the role of national, social, and legal narratives in perpetuating socioenvironmental injustices, and on the parallel role of narrative in staging resistance to those injustices. Erdrich's metafiction thus behaves like a trickster, and activates the social function of narrative.

Trauma Metafiction: Ecological and Bodily Violence in Linda Hogan's *Solar Storms*

We need new stories, new terms and conditions that are relevant to the love of land, a new narrative that would imagine another way.

—Linda Hogan, *Dwellings*

Linda Hogan's novel *Solar Storms* (1995) combines a fictional story about a young Native woman's search for healing, with a historically-based story about Native protests against environmental injustice. While Hogan is arguably the author most associated with the environmental justice movement of all those examined in this project, and most of the novel's criticism addresses its environmental valences, the connection between the novel's environmentalism and its self-reflexive treatment of storytelling—its metafiction—remains largely overlooked.¹ However, as I will demonstrate in this chapter, this connection is vital to understanding the novel's political and aesthetic force as well as Hogan's indigenous approach to environmental justice metafiction.

The novel charts the story of 17 year-old protagonist, Angel, who, after being in foster care, returns to her ancestral homeland in the Minnesota/Canada Boundary Waters area to live with her women relatives—her great-grandmother Agnes, her great-great-grandmother Dora-Rouge, and Bush, a grandmotherly figure not related to Angel by blood. Angel's biological grandmother Loretta, an Elk Islander (a fictional Inuit tribe

¹ Even those critics who focus, to some degree, on the novel's form do not address its metafictional approach to stories and storytelling. Anne Fisher-Wirth and Catherine Rainwater, for instance, both situate Hogan's environmental style in terms of Western traditions of environmental writing, like the elegy and transcendentalism. Similarly, Christine Jespersen relates the form of Hogan's novel to the canonical adventure narrative, saying that it disrupts the linear, individualist conventions of those texts. However, none of the criticism, to my knowledge, analyzes the novel's self-reflexive examination of the function and effects of stories.

from Quebec), witnessed the destruction of her people and lands, and was subsequently sold into prostitution and repeatedly raped. She passes this violence onto Angel's mother, Hannah, who was abused not only by Loretta but also physically and sexually tortured by white men. Hannah then transfers this violence onto her daughter Angel by severely abusing her before abandoning her to the state as a young girl. Thus, when Angel returns to the Boundary Waters area, she is searching not only for her ancestral homeland, but also for the lost story of her mother and the reasons why she was abused. As her elderly women relatives begin to tell her this story, it becomes evident, both to Angel and the reader, that the abuse inflicted on her body ultimately originates from the ecological destruction which killed off most of her tribe and irreparably damaged those who survived. The cycle of trauma begins with colonialism itself, and continues when white settlers all but wipe out Loretta's tribe by destroying hunting grounds, forcing the starving people to eat the "poisoned carcasses of deer that the settlers left out for the wolves" (39).

Still smelling of this cyanide poison after three generations, the bodies and memories of these women become symbolic markers of the damage inflicted on their ancestral lands. No matter how hard they scrub, the smell won't come off because it is "deeper than skin . . . blood-deep . . . history-deep" (40). Thus in the novel, ecological trauma and bodily trauma serve to perpetuate each other in what Hogan calls "the infinite nature of wounding" (94). The novel intertwines the plot about the women's trauma with a plot about their fight against the building of a hydro-electric dam. Hogan fictionalizes the real Native movement that arose in the 1970s to oppose the James Bay hydroelectric

project, a project that did and is still doing massive damage to surrounding ecosystems and local Cree/Inuit peoples. In the novel, the environmental injustice that culminates at James Bay begins with the decimation of people and natural resources by colonists on Elk Island. By intertwining these two stories, Hogan shows how Angel's individual quest to understand her abuse is intimately linked with the larger struggle to stop the exploitation of land. To heal the trauma of indigenous women, Hogan suggests, we must recognize the relation between the traumatization of land and bodies.²

In so doing, Hogan bridges the divide between two approaches to environmental studies that are usually seen in opposition: deep ecology and environmental justice. While deep ecology posits the inherent value of nonhuman nature and criticizes anthropomorphic approaches to the environment, environmental justice focuses mainly on the effects of environmental destruction on marginalized populations.³ Hogan's novel

² I use the terms "indigenous" or "Native" to refer to indigenous people in general, "Native American" to refer to those located in the U.S., and "First Nations" to refer to those located in Canada. In using broader terms like indigenous and Native, I am reflecting Hogan's "belief in an indigenous worldview that transcends tribal borders" (Stromberg 105). While there are obvious important differences both between individual tribes and between Native American and First Nations peoples, they share a common experience of colonization, displacement, legal and ethnic discrimination, and a history of inter-tribal political alliances that, for Hogan, justifies a "pan-Indian native view" (Brad Johnson 2). Hogan's position is not anti-nationalist, but argues for the need to draw connections between common tribal experiences of trauma and healing. For more on the concept of indigenism, the idea that "indigenous people worldwide share a common experience of colonization and subsumption into a capitalist hegemonic nation state," see Annette Jaimes Guerrero.

³ For readings of the novel as ecofeminist see, for example, Ellen Arnold, Bethany Fitzpatrick, or Silvia Shultermandl. While I think these readings offer valuable insights into the connections between the novel's feminist valances and its environmentalism, ecofeminist approaches do not adequately account for the relation between ethnically and economically marginalized bodies and degraded landscapes.

demonstrates that this is a false opposition because the fate of the nonhuman world is inextricably tied to that of humans; a focus on one at the expense of the other will always be incomplete. Instead, she posits that we must understand the links between these two approaches to be able to promote justice and effect real change. In the text, Hogan redefines environmental injustice as a form of human and ecological trauma, the healing of which requires a metafictional examination of the historical, economic, environmental, and social narratives that enable this trauma.

Whereas Erdrich models her approach to metafiction and environmental justice on the trickster, Ozeki on the documentary form, and Yamashita on the “hypercontexts” of stories, this chapter argues that Hogan creates what I term “trauma metafiction,” a narrative form that self-reflexively theorizes the role of stories and storytelling in the perpetuation and healing of trauma. The novel both articulates the relation between bodily/personal trauma and environmental/communal trauma, and employs narrative techniques that formally replicate the experience of trauma—and healing—for the reader. Furthermore, it self-consciously calls attention to the ways neo/colonial narratives, specifically embodied in maps, enable the trauma of environmental injustice.⁴ Ultimately, I demonstrate that Hogan designs her metafiction as a type of ceremony to address both human and ecological trauma from the ongoing legacy of colonialism, domestic violence, and environmental injustice.

⁴ Throughout the chapter I use the term “neo/colonial” to indicate both colonial and neocolonial.

In the first sections below I introduce Hogan's metafictional emphasis on the function of stories, and then outline the formal and thematic concerns of trauma metafiction. Next, the section on stories of "wounding" claims that Hogan refracts her ecological message through a narrative of bodily trauma to highlight the role of stories in articulating the ways trauma gets written on the individual bodies and memories of indigenous women. In the subsequent section I turn to the James Bay project specifically to show how Hogan's metafiction works to challenge neo/colonial narratives of objectivity, progress, and conquest that proliferate this trauma through "two-dimensional" maps and stories. Finally, the last section of the chapter demonstrates how trauma metafiction posits an ethic of witnessing modeled on ceremonial stories which both situate the individual in a community of storytellers and create a global community of resistance with the responsibility to act against injustice.

The Power of Stories

Stories, the novel posits, are powerful forces which shape the world by shaping worldviews—human values, attitudes, and beliefs about the relationships that comprise that world. For example, when Dora-Rouge tells Angel a creation story, she highlights the important role of stories in human life. "On the ninth day was the creation of stories, and these had many uses," she notes, including that "they taught a thing or two about doing work, about kindness and love" and that "there were even stories to show a way out of unhappiness" (181). This metafictional creation story includes not just the creation of "content"—people, plants, animals, land—but also the story of the creation of stories themselves. Importantly, these stories are not theorized as passive records of events or

imagination, but as active tools for shaping human lives and relationships. Similarly, as Angel listens to her grandmothers' tales throughout the novel, she claims that "their stories called me home" (48). That is, these stories are active forces capable of reintegrating the individual with her "home" community and landscape. This belief in the power of stories reflects a common indigenous understanding that words themselves are living beings with the power to create. For instance, when Angel is later rushing to get a family member to the hospital, she says "Hurry! As if the words themselves, like traditional people know, were supernatural beings and would speed us along like light or cloud" (331).

This emphasis on the power of stories and words to shape the world underlies both the novel's narrative approach and Hogan's larger political and aesthetic project. When Agnes begins to tell Angel the story of her past, she chooses her words carefully because she knows that the way we represent the world in stories shapes the way we understand the world, and, ultimately, the world we understand. Agnes "searched for words. As in Genesis, the first word shaped what would follow. It was of utmost importance. It determined the kind of world that would be created" (37). Indeed, Hogan herself believes in the ability of stories to affect the world. In my interview with her, she explained that "the power of story and sharing is the power to make change, the ability to make a difference. . . . So when we talk, when we share, when we hear a story, read a story, learn a new story, it has the real ability to make a difference and change the world, change a person" (Harrison 175). Using her own experience as an example, she went on to say that she had recently read a book that presented "this whole new way of looking at

the world . . . and it made me into a more conscious person than I was” (175). It is this kind of expanded “consciousness” about stories that Hogan hopes to encourage in her own readers.

For Hogan, writing historically-based novels—of which she has written four—is a deeply political act designed to make historical events resonate affectively with readers. In an interview about her first novel *Mean Spirit*, which depicts an Osage community during Oklahoma’s oil boom years, she said she had originally started with historical research and then realized that she had “to do something stronger than history to reach the emotions of readers. “It had to be more than just a record of the facts; it had to get larger,” because “a lot of people would not pay attention to those events, were they not in a kind of gripping story. It would be ‘only’ history, without the power to deeply affect” (*Missouri* 16). In another interview, Hogan explains why she uses fiction to explore political issues:

I’ve found that talking about issues somehow doesn’t create change in the world, but if I can take one of the issues, political issues, or a tribe that’s being devastated because of development, or land that’s being devastated because of development—and I put it into a story, it has more of an impact. . . . People read it and they get it . . . they find characters that they can relate to and care about and they see the story from inside their own body, inside their own selves. (Johnson 3)

This idea of stories as “stronger than history” or stories as something readers can “see from inside their own bodies” shapes Hogan’s approach to writing historical

environmental justice fiction. Novels like *Solar Storms* both demonstrate and explicitly theorize the need to go beyond a purely scientific or objective analysis of environmental injustice.

Writing about the environment, for Hogan, is a deeply self-reflective act. Many “people who write about wilderness and the environment are going away from themselves to do it,” she notes, “they don’t look at the inner wilderness and what motivates people to be destructive. I think everything is connected, that I’m part of the destruction; we all are. Investigating why we’re sometimes apathetic is probably the best work we could do” (*Missouri* 122). This injunction for environmental writing and the environmental justice movement to consider not just the destruction itself, as an abstract measurement, but people’s motives for being destructive or apathetic informs Hogan’s political and self-reflective approach to environmental fiction. *Solar Storms* in particular explores how political, economic, and cultural narratives can drive people to be destructive or to fight against destruction. Both on the level of character-to-character interaction and on the level of text-to-reader interaction, Hogan is interested in how to motivate people to take action against social and environmental injustice, in particular by urging readers to be self-reflective about their own roles in this destruction.

The root of environmental injustice resides, for Hogan, in the *stories* cultures construct about the relationships between different groups of people and between people and the environment. While, for instance, Native foundational stories tend to emphasize the subordination of humans into a web of interdependent relationships with land and nonhuman nature, Western, Christian-based ones seem to emphasize the superiority of

humans who are given “dominion” over the earth and all its creatures. As Vine Deloria notes, tribal religious narratives contemplate “the interrelationship of all things” as necessary to the continuation of earthly life cycles, whereas “Christians see creation as the beginning event of a linear time sequence in which the divine plan is worked out, the conclusion of the sequence being an act of destruction bringing the world to an end” (*God is Red* 91). Hogan describes her own development in terms of the conflict between traditional indigenous stories and those promulgated by the American educational institution. The “old stories” did not “fit with my American education,” she writes, “this education taught that what my own, indigenous people once knew were the stories of superstitious and primitive people, not to be believed, not to be taken in a serious light. . . . We live, I see now, by different stories, the Western mind and the indigenous” (“First People” 9).

Hogan’s metafiction not only seeks to recuperate and reinvigorate an indigenous approach to stories, but to contemplate the *effects* of Western stories on people and the environment. This approach to environmentally-oriented metafiction involves not just addressing the actual devastation of peoples and environments but also examining the practical function of stories that serve to legitimate this devastation. Because the Western “way of being in the world, of staking our claim to the world, has taken us to a point of devastating loss, we need to rethink not only the stories of a culture but where the stories take their people, and to what ends” (“First People” 11). While this may overgeneralize a “Western” worldview as monolithic, it does point to the dominant role of Western countries in the growing environmental crisis worldwide. In *Dwellings*, Hogan writes:

If endings are foreshadowed by beginnings, or are in some way the same thing, it is important that we circle around and come back to look at our human myths and stories. . . . The Western tradition of beliefs within a straight line of history leads to an apocalyptic end. And stories of the end, like those of beginning, tell something about the people who created them.

(93)

This apocalyptic story and the linear, eschatological concept of time on which it relies is opposed to the indigenous notion that “time is alive and travels in a circle” (95).⁵ Hogan claims that through stories we can “reach a hand back through time and a hand forward,” examining events of one time in relation to others, in stories whose function is to make “certain that we do not create the absence of life, of any species, no matter how inconsequential they might appear to be” (95). Stories are so important because they shape both human conduct in the present and a community’s vision of itself in the future. “We live inside a story, all of us do,” Hogan writes, “and not only does a story prescribe our behavior,” it also “holds . . . the very life of the future” for a people (“First People” 10). Stories about the relationship between humans and the environment, and the relationship between Western and indigenous peoples, are a key site of examination for environmental justice since they shape our actions and the beliefs that justify them.

Trauma Metafiction

⁵ For an analysis of Western concepts of time and space as compared to indigenous ones in Hogan’s novel *Power*, see Carrie Bowen-Mercer.

In particular, Hogan's "trauma metafiction" examines the role of the stories and "storied" maps that define these relationships in enabling and responding to trauma. What the novel describes as "two-dimensional" maps and stories that rely on abstract notions of progress and human (i.e., ethnic and species) superiority, both cause and obscure the trauma of indigenous peoples and the environment. Hogan's narrative, in contrast, makes this publicly "forgotten" trauma legible by employing both formal and thematic narrative devices that demonstrate the effects of trauma on people and lands. Narrative, particularly when it is self-reflective about the effects of narrative, becomes a way to at least disrupt the "infinite" cycle of trauma.

On a formal level the novel is characterized by repetition, breaks in linear time and space, and shifting narratorial viewpoints. These qualities have been identified as common ways trauma fictions formally replicate the experience of trauma for the reader. Although traumatic events are, by nature, difficult to represent, Cathy Caruth claims that if trauma can be narrated, it requires "a literary form which departs from conventional linear sequence. The irruption of one time into another" (Whitehead 6). Similarly, Laurie Vickroy argues that "writers have created a number of narrative strategies to represent" trauma, including "repetition," "breaks in linear time" and "shifting viewpoints," and Anne Whitehead asserts that trauma fictions are characterized by a collapse of conventional "temporality," and by "repetition and a dispersed or fragmented narrative voice" (29, 84). *Solar Storms*, for instance, switches between Angel's present narration and the narrated memories and stories of her female relatives, jumping in space and time to repeatedly contemplate the origin of the trauma her ancestors experienced. However,

Hogan ultimately uses these narrative techniques to emphasize not a paralyzing obsession with trauma, but the capacity of stories (both through their form and content) to reveal strategies for healing trauma and promoting survival.

Moreover, unlike the texts upon which literary theories of trauma are based, Hogan's novel merges the writing of trauma with an indigenous approach to storytelling that requires us to consider the multiple resonances of her narrative strategies. For instance, the "breaks in linear time" or the "irruption of one time into another" function in Hogan's novel both to represent trauma and to indicate an indigenous concept of time as circular and cyclical rather than linear. Angel repeatedly receives visions of her colonized "ancestors glittering with mirrors and carrying iron kettles," for example, both because their experience is the origin of her trauma and because she conceives of herself as "liv[ing] in more than one time, in more than one way, all at once" (120).

Furthermore, while mainstream theories of trauma and healing tend to center on the individual subject, Hogan's approach positions the roots of trauma and the process of healing in a larger community that includes society and land. The novel uses both formal techniques and a thematic focus on stories/storytelling to create an indigenous understanding of trauma that links contemporary and past traumas, bodily and environmental traumas, personal and communal traumas, and draws on the knowledge of multiple narrators to recover obscured histories and construct a community of resistance. Hogan's indigenous approach to trauma fiction, in other words, emphasizes not just the individual psyche or body, but also the ways the traumatic histories of lands and communities are embodied in the individual. Because the trauma of indigenous peoples

“originat[es] from the [ongoing] loss of lives, land, and vital aspects of Native culture,” approaches to indigenous trauma fiction must be particularly rooted in place and community (Brave Heart and DeBruyn 6). Thus, we can only understand how trauma metafiction works in the novel by defining it in the broader context of land and communal memory.

Stories of Wounding: Land, Body, and Memory

This section argues that bodies, land, and memory are interconnected sites of meaning that register the trauma perpetuated by neo/colonialists. Furthermore, the relationship between these sites is articulated through stories, and thus stories are crucial for understanding environmental injustice. Land, an animate force in this novel, nourishes bodies and holds tribal memory. Bodies and landscapes contain a “cell-deep” form of historical memory. If land, body, and memory are linked in various physical and metaphorical ways, how does the violation of land also cause damage to the body and memory, and how is trauma “passed on” through generations? That is, how does the experience of conquest get written on the bodies and memories of indigenous peoples, and what is the relationship between wounded bodies and “cannibalized” landscapes? Hogan demonstrates that stories which link present traumas with remembered ones, and personal bodily trauma with collective environmental trauma, are essential for the understanding of trauma necessary to begin healing.

In the narrative form of the novel, the stories that provide the personal and collective history Angel needs come in sections where the main narrative is interrupted by the grandmothers’ narration. These sections, which I will call “insert” narratives, are

typographically indicated by italics. Eight insert narratives by three narrators (Agnes, Bush, and Dora Rouge) appear in the novel, and they each constitute a meditation on the historical sources of trauma and healing. Their subjects range from accounts of personal traumas, communal traumas, and traumas enacted on the land, to traditional oral and ceremonial stories that address processes of traumatization and healing. These insert narratives constitute the major formal technique of Hogan's metafiction, and through them she demonstrates both that stories are crucial for understanding indigenous trauma and that understanding trauma is a necessarily communal activity that requires the knowledge and memory of multiple subjects.

While in the chapter's final section I will examine the cumulative role of these narratives in shaping the novel's approach to healing, this section shows that by articulating the links between land, body, and memory the insert narratives allow Angel to understand how her bodily trauma and memory loss are related to larger communal and environmental traumas. When, at the beginning of the novel, Angel returns to her birthplace after being in foster care most of her life, she cannot remember her relatives or how she got the deep scars on her face. She makes the journey in the hopes that her scars "would heal, maybe even vanish, if only [she] could remember where they'd come from" and that her grandmothers will be able to "remember all that had fallen away from my own mind, all that had been kept secret by the county workers, that had been contained in their lost records: my story, my life" (27). Story, Hogan theorizes, is essential to identity, which is, in turn, essential to the articulation of trauma. As child Angel created a "made-up story" in which she ended up in foster care because her beautiful and wise mother died

tragically, but not before expressing her unending love for Angel (74). “I had long comforted myself in this way,” she recounts, “held up in the hands of this story” (74). This false story, while comforting, merely masks her trauma rather than addressing it.

Therefore, when Angel arrives she is searching specifically for the “story” of her own life, a story about the traumas her body records but which she cannot remember. However, her grandmothers’ account of Angel’s life story begins not with her birth, but with the colonization of her people. As Agnes recounts in one insert narrative:

What happened to you started long ago. It began around the time of the killing of the wolves. When people were starving. . . . they’d just logged the last of the pine forests. . . . I don’t know where the beginning was, your story, ours. Maybe it came down in the milk of the mothers. Old Man said it was in the train tracks that went through the land and came out of the iron mines. I’ve thought of this for years. It might have started when the crying children were taken away from their mothers or when the logging camps started and cities were built from our woods, or when they cut the rest of the trees to raise cattle. (37-40)

This list of possible beginnings to Angel’s story implicates colonial exploitation of land (through iron mines and deforestation) and people (through starvation and boarding schools) in Angel’s personal life story. While the links between her own trauma/memory loss and colonization are not immediately apparent to her, Angel comes to understand that “my beginning was Hannah’s beginning, one of broken lives, trees felled and kindled. Our beginnings were intricately bound up in the history of the land” (96). Hogan

goes on to show that placing Angel's story in the context of colonial and, later neocolonial, stories of conquest is necessary for understanding this trauma.

The novel explores this link between bodily and eco violence specifically through the concept of cannibalism.⁶ The particular method by which Hannah abuses Angel, biting off the flesh of her face, parallels neo/colonial attempts to "devour" the land. After Angel learns through her grandmother's narratives how her scars were acquired, she admits that "my mother was a cannibal. . . . Yes, she tried to kill me, swallow me, consume me back into her own body" (251). Hannah's attempt to devour Angel is echoed in the language used to describe the cannibalistic ideology of neo/colonialism that authorizes past and present environmental injustices—as Angel says: "it was a story of people eating . . . eating land, eating people, eating tomorrow" (302). "Those with the money, the investments, the city power, had no understanding of the destruction their decisions and wants and desires brought to the world," she argues, "they were cannibals who consumed human flesh, set fire to worlds the gods had loved and asked the humans to care for" (343).⁷ The cannibal story of neo/colonialism, then, is physically replicated on Angel's body. This concept of cannibalism not only links bodily and eco violence,

⁶ I use the term "eco violence" or "eco trauma" to denote the traumatization of environments through neo/colonial and industrial destruction of the landscape.

⁷ Hogan also uses the idea of cannibalism to critique the degradation of land in the Brazilian Amazon: "These rain forests, carried across the globe in the shape of toothpicks and fatted cattle that will feed sharp-toothed world-eaters who have never known such richness, such fertility. Inside this place, as deforestation continues, human beings, some of them still unknown to the outside world, are also being swallowed, though the papers do not mention the human losses. Since 1900, more than half of the tribal people of Brazil have become extinct. In the past ten years alone, as the Amazon highway has been under construction, at least one new nation of people a year has been discovered" (*Dwellings* 107).

but also highlights Hogan's indigenous position that devouring land is an act of cannibalism because land is self, or as Paula Gunn Allen puts it, "we are the land" (192).⁸

Furthermore, Hogan puts cannibalism in an indigenous context by invoking Cree/Inuit stories of the windigo. In this tradition, the windigo is alternately described as a "giant ice cannibal" or as a human who has fallen prey to this spirit, who has "gone windigo" (Hans 93). The windigo is a figure in Cree/Inuit narratives who reflects the fear of isolation and starvation during the long, cold winters. Interestingly, the etymology of the windigo cannibal figure references not starvation, but the practice of gluttony. As Theresa Smith shows, "the word Windigo is derived from the Cree *wihtikowiw*, 'he eats greedily,' indicating that gluttony, especially as it indicates a refusal to share in community, may be the root cause of Windigo sickness" (68). Moreover, it is said that the windigo hunts humans who "are foolish enough to travel alone," and, among the Swampy Cree, windigos are often referred to as "He-who-lives-alone" (Norman 4).⁹

Thus windigo sickness, and the cannibalism that accompanies it, implies a state of isolation from community, a profound form of the anti-social. In one insert narrative Dora-Rouge tells Angel a story about a woman who has gone windigo: "a woman in the grip of ice" who "had slept with winter. She had eaten human flesh" (248). The grandmothers use this story's basis in the cultural tradition of the windigo as a way to

⁸ For an analysis of Hogan's novel as an "adventure narrative" that departs from Western conventions of such narratives, see Christine Jespersen, who claims that while in Western adventure tales the individual's encounter with nature as the "other" is meant to achieve "maturation through conquest, while that of Hogan's characters results in the "dissolution of the self/other boundary" (285).

⁹ For more on windigos in Cree/Ojibwa cultures see, for example, Brown and Brightman.

understand both Hannah's illness and that of the neo/colonial cannibals. This ice woman's story parallels Hannah's own experience of being inhabited by "ice spirits" (247). Hannah, like the neo/colonial cannibals, has gone windigo, and no longer understands her responsibility to the larger community. Angel, however, escapes this illness by learning the stories, including the windigo stories, that reorient her within a community and allow her to understand her trauma in context.

Historical wounds from acts of cannibalistic environmental injustice get written on the bodies of individual women, but these traumatized bodies can also be "read" to recuperate obscured histories. Hannah's body in particular is described as a site marked by historical trauma. In one of Bush's insert narratives, a tribal elder defines Hannah as "the house. She is the meeting place. . . . her life going backward to where time and history and genocide gather and move like a cloud above the spilled oceans of blood. That little girl's body was the place where all this met" (101). History, Hogan theorizes, resides in the body, and the wounds of these women are so resistant to healing because they are "deeper than skin," they are "history-deep" (40). In her memoir, Hogan recounts how she first came to recognize this concept, when her own struggles with alcohol and depression led her to a Native Alcoholics Anonymous meeting:

That was when I first began to know, really know, that history, like geography, lives in the body and it is marrow-deep. History is our illness. It is recorded there, laid down along the tracks and pathways and synapses. I was only one of the fallen in a lineage of fallen worlds and people. Those of us who walked out of genocide by some cast of fortune

still struggle with the brokenness of our bodies and hearts. Terror, even now, for many of us, is remembered inside us, history present in our cells that came from our ancestor's cells, from bodies hated, removed, starved, and killed. (*Woman* 59)

Similarly, Hogan writes about how her adopted daughters from the Pine Ridge Reservation, who were both severely abused as children, bear the marks of Native history. Her oldest daughter Marie, who was the inspiration for Hannah's character, "had lived through horrors most of us could not imagine. She had been abused, even as an infant, burned by cigarettes and hot wires, and raped" (*Woman* 76). Like Hannah and Angel, Marie's situation is bigger than "child abuse or the lack of love," but is "the result of a shattered world. She came from the near obliteration of a people. . . . Along with the girls, history came to live with us, the undeniable, unforgotten aspect of every American Indian life. She was a remnant of American history, and the fires of a brutal history had come to bear on her" (77).

Not only is history inscribed on indigenous bodies, but it gets transferred by traumatized people to other bodies in an ongoing process of wounding. Hogan's characters come to understand "the wound and how it was passed on, the infinite nature of wounding" (94). In another insert narrative Agnes recounts the history of Loretta, Angel's biological grandmother, who was wounded by "watching the desperate people of her tribe die" and by being "taken and used by men who fed her and beat her and forced her" (39). Her body has become inhabited by the presence of her torturers, and Agnes says she "could almost hear their voices when she talked, babbling behind hers, men's

voices speaking English” (39). This wounding is not confined to Loretta, however, but explains “how one day she became the one who hurt others. It was passed down” (39). Loretta passes down this traumatic history by abusing Hannah, who then abuses her daughters. Like these women, Hogan’s own daughter Marie “grew up to be a girl who would later severely abuse her own children, who would lose them, eventually, to an adoptive family” (*Woman* 89).

This kind of trauma is also “passed down” through self-inflicted wounding. Angel’s sister, for instance, “was a girl who cut herself . . . with scissors and razor blades,” a girl Angel says had “eaten glass and smiled at me with her bloody teeth, the splinters and crystals of glass on her lips and tongue” (118, 303). Angel describes her sister’s self-wounding as “a language”: she “spoke through blades, translated her life through knives,” to communicate that “she could not be hurt . . . not by anything outside her, that is, not anymore” (118). Similarly, Hogan recounts in her memoir that she “grew up with girls who cut or hit or burned themselves. . . . We hurt ourselves; our own bodies became our language” (*Woman* 56). Because these traumatized women cannot speak their experience through verbal language, they express their pain through the language of wounds. Later in the novel we learn that the youth whose communities are devastated by hydroelectric development are also self-abusive. Angel watches as “the young children drank alcohol and sniffed glue and paint. . . . Those without alcohol were even worse off, and the people wept without end, and tried to cut and burn their own bodies. The older people tied their hands with rope and held them tight hoping the desire to die would pass” (226).

Recognizing the “infinite nature” of wounding, the way wounds are passed on through history, is essential to understanding indigenous experiences of trauma. Maria Yellow Horse Brave Heart, a professor of psychiatry, specifically studies the transference of trauma among generations of Native peoples. What she terms “historical unresolved trauma” is defined as “multigenerational, collective, historical, and cumulative psychic wounding over time” in which “mourning has not been completed” (“Soul Wound” 342). A history of “forced assimilation and cumulative losses across generations involving language, culture, and spirituality” and the “breakdown of family kinship networks and social structures,” have resulted in contemporary communities which are “plagued by high rates of suicide, homicide, accidental deaths, domestic violence, child abuse, and alcoholism” (“Historical Trauma” 9). In other words, as Brave Heart puts it, “the genocide of American Indians reverberates across generations” (“Holocaust” 57).¹⁰

While trauma “reverberates” through psychic and bodily memory for indigenous peoples, its historical roots are often forgotten or ignored by the larger public. Hogan, for instance, describes her own daughter as “a tangle of threads and war-torn American

¹⁰ Similarly, Annie Ingram argues that since “human culture is inextricable from physical environment,” “threats to culture are threats to the environment, and environmental activism saves not only landscapes but the entire ecosystem, including humans’ livelihoods and cultural memory” (228). Like Brave Heart, The Grand Council of the Crees, which was formed to organize the response to the James Bay project in Quebec also link current traumas to a history of genocide and colonialism. Their public newsletter states: “Indigenous peoples in Canada still endure landlessness, mass poverty and unemployment, ill health, ‘third world’ living conditions, state violence and police brutality, disproportionate incarceration, and suicide epidemics. These ongoing disparities are the result of decades and centuries of historic and ongoing racism, dispossession, colonialism and discrimination against indigenous peoples by governments in Canada” (3).

Indian history that other Americans like to forget” (*Woman* 77). In the novel, this problem of public forgetting gets displayed on the body and memory of Hannah as something that, for her, cannot be forgotten. Bush, in one insert narrative, recounts young Hannah’s return home after having suffered extensive physical and sexual abuse from her mother and unnamed men, abruptly switching the narrative time and setting in a way that reproduces for the reader the women’s fixation on the trauma. Hannah mysteriously walks out of the lake during a storm as a haunted girl with “empty eyes,” who has been “inhabited, flesh, bone, and spirit” by “some terrible and violent force” (22). Confronted with her condition, the women attempt to define what is wrong with Hannah. Dora-Rouge says “it was memory,” and Bush “thinks she was the closest. After a time, I thought, yes, it was what could not be forgotten” (100). Hannah’s problem, and by extension the problem of the Cree and Inuit peoples in the novel who suffer the continuing effects of colonization, is that they hold this memory of unacknowledged trauma. What the public discourse forgets is literally and metaphorically transferred to indigenous bodies and then passed on through generations. The function of the insert narratives, then, is to reinstall these obscured histories both for Angel and the reader. While the novel mentions many such elisions and omissions of Native communal memory in official histories, the James Bay project becomes its primary exemplar of the ongoing process of bodily and environmental wounding for contemporary indigenous communities. While this section established the connections between traumatized bodies, land, and memory, the following one shows how the example of James Bay reveals the underlying narratives which give rise to this trauma.

Stories of James Bay: Maps and Trauma

Hogan's trauma metafiction works to highlight the role of neo/colonial narratives of objectivity, progress, and conquest in the perpetuation of bodily and eco traumas. Two-dimensional maps, which abstract and objectify land, combine with two-dimensional narratives of indigenous people, which perpetuate romantic myths of extinction, to simultaneously enable trauma and obscure it from public memory by positioning it within a narrative of innocent civic advancement. Two-dimensional maps and stories reflect an abstract and instrumentalist view of indigenous people and land, and Hogan's metafiction reflects the need to challenge these narratives at the same time as we create "new stories" that take into account multiple dimensions in the relationship between humans and land. By re-reading stories and maps for what they occlude, hidden ecological and cultural trauma is brought to light. At the same time these re-readings provide insight into dominant Western conceptions of land and indigenous peoples. Through this metafictional work, the novel addresses not just the devastating effects of environmental injustices themselves, but also the narratives which underlie and legitimate them.

However, since Hogan's novel is so firmly rooted in the environmental injustice perpetrated in the James Bay region of Quebec, and specifically in the massive hydroelectric development in the area, it is necessary to provide a context for these events. While other critics have acknowledged that the novel is based on the James Bay project, none provide a detailed context or examine the actual rhetoric of officials and

historical narratives to which the novel is clearly responding.¹¹ This is important because Hogan's trauma metafiction is designed to show that trauma cannot be healed in the present without acknowledging the historical context that contributes to its continuation. Prompted by the novel's own logic, then, I examine not just Hogan's literary narrative, but bring historical, economic, and geographical narratives to bear on my analysis.

The history of the Cree and Inuit people, on which Hogan's novel is largely based, is one of continued violence and appropriation by neo/colonial capitalist interests. Cree and Inuit homelands were prime trapping grounds for European fur traders, a situation which eventually resulted in the starvation of many Cree because of depleted animal resources.¹² As early as the seventeenth-century the Hudson's Bay Company, the second oldest company in North America, began to dominate the fur trade in the region, exacerbating natural resource problems. This history extends into the twentieth-century when Quebec began a project of mass resource extraction from the region, resulting in the repeated uprooting of the local indigenous populations. These conflicts came to a head in the 1970s when plans were introduced for the immense hydroelectric

¹¹ Anne Fisher-Wirth, for example, argues that rather following the tradition of environmental writing as elegy or jeremiad, Hogan focuses on "the particulars of rapture," the "impulse to be subsumed in the present" (57). While I agree that certain passages do express the "raptures" of interacting with the natural world, Hogan's representation of the human relationship with this world relies heavily on implicating historical narratives in our current attitudes about it. For an exploration of Hogan's approach as a rejection of other American traditions of environmental writing, such as transcendentalism and anti-transcendentalism, see Catherine Rainwater.

¹² The relationship between Europeans and Cree people is a complicated one, and some recent research, including Toby Morantz's latest ethnohistory of the Cree suggests that while these indigenous peoples were subject to exploitation by European explorers and settlers, they also often "freely" participated in fur trading in order to survive and maintain some cultural autonomy.

development scheme called the James Bay Project. While Hogan's novel is fictional, she notes that it is "based on the true event—the Hydro-Quebec energy grid" (Cook 11). While these events took place in Canada, Quebec's hydroelectric developments were designed on such a massive scale so that surplus power could be exported to the northeastern U.S. Thus the project is very much a reflection of U.S. habits and values as well as Canadian ones.

In April 1971, then Quebec Premier Robert Bourassa announced the launch of the James Bay Project, an endeavor that continues into the present day. This project, and all hydroelectric development in Quebec, is run by a Crown corporation called Hydro-Quebec. The first phase focused on the La Grande River and nearby smaller rivers, and—to give a sense of the scale of the undertaking—involved the excavation of 262 million cubic meters of soil, "enough material to build the Great Pyramid of Cheops 80 times over," the erection of 215 dams and dikes, the pouring of 550,000 tons of concrete into rivers, the creation of more than 10,000 new lakes, and the installation of 5,562 kilometers of power lines, 1,500 kilometers of roads, five villages, five airports, and 15 work camps (Picard, "Power"). From the beginning of the project, the Cree and Inuit peoples of the region were excluded and marginalized, most not even hearing about the plan until construction equipment and workers appeared on their land. "They showed up without warning to tell people to leave their homes, as they were going to bulldoze them, and the Natives had no paper ownership," Hogan accurately reports, "many lost their homes, the rivers rerouted, their land covered and torn, their fishing camps and traplines gone" (Cook 11; *Woman* 63).

The social and environmental effects of even this first phase were catastrophic. The project caused widespread displacement and despair among native communities. As Hogan describes in the novel, “after having lost their own lands to the hydroelectric project, lands they’d lived on since before European time was invented,” the people were “despondent. In some cases they had to be held back from killing themselves” (225). After the flow of the La Grande was doubled in order to generate more power, the Crees on Fort George Island, for example, had to be relocated to the mainland because the island itself began to rapidly erode. The multiple reservoirs created by the project also released toxic methyl-mercury stored in the bedrock, “contaminating certain species of fish with mercury, which in turn has poisoned some Cree villagers” who are dependent on fishing for subsistence (Picard, “Power”). The novel describes the stress this caused for villagers: “there would be no fishing camp because the fish were contaminated from the damming of the water and mercury had been released from the stones and rotting vegetation. . . . people were already worried about food . . . if development continued, there would be no drinking water left” (274). By 1984, two-thirds of people living in a village at the mouth of the La Grande had “unacceptably high levels of mercury in their bodies,” with some elders having 20 times the acceptable level, and developing symptoms of mercury poisoning, including “shaking, numbness of limbs, loss of peripheral vision and neurological damage” (Picard, “Power”). The project also had an enormous impact on land animals because it flooded migration routes, nesting areas, and habitats. For example, when dam operators released a sudden flood of water from the Caniapiscaw River during the height of a caribou migration, over 10,000 of the animals

were drowned at once. Hogan describes a similar event in the novel: “the caribou running across the flats as the water surged toward them, knocking them over, flooding their world, their migration routes gone now, under water” (245).

In 1973, Native protestors won an injunction to block construction on the project; however, this ruling was overturned only a week later. Winona LaDuke, prominent Native scholar and a leader in the opposition to James Bay in the 1980s, points out that the court of appeals overturned the decision “largely on the premise that too much money had already been spent on the project to abort it. The ‘balance of convenience,’ according to Hydro-Quebec and the government, rested in favor of continued development” (61). In 1975, Cree and Inuit representatives signed the James Bay and Northern Quebec Agreement, which allowed for construction to continue in exchange for financial compensation and greater control of health and educational services. This agreement, which LaDuke says was “shoved down the throats” of the local people who were given no alternative, has not been enforced by the Canadian government according to Native leaders (62).¹³ The project continued after 1975, with the first phase being completed in 1986. Another segment of the development, known as the Great Whale Project, was successfully protested both in Canada and the U.S. in the late 80s and early 90s until it

¹³ The Grand Council of the Crees reports that, “while the bulldozers were destroying our land, we negotiated under duress and entered into a Treaty in 1975 with the governments of Canada and Quebec. The Treaty was supposed to assist us to cope with the devastation and flooding, and to maintain and strengthen our economies and ways of life. Since then, however, the governments have extracted billions of dollars of revenues each year from the Project—but have broken their Treaty promises to us. We continue to endure, after 25 years, environmental and social devastation, and crisis levels of unemployment, poverty, shortages of housing and poverty-related disease, while obtaining little benefit” (Grand Council 13).

was shelved by developers in 1994. However, the second phase of James Bay continued, being completed in 1996, the year after Hogan published *Solar Storms*. In 2002, First Nations and Canadian governments signed a new treaty, known as the Paix des Braves, which gives indigenous people more access to employment and revenue at the same time as it allows for the continuation of vast developments. Thus far, the James Bay Project has “reshape[d] a territory the size of France,” and created over 10,000 square miles of reservoirs which together are the size of Lake Erie and constitute the largest bodies of water ever created by humans (Picard, “Power,” Cheskey et al 18). At present, Hydro-Quebec is still building hydroelectric plants, with current plans for development extending until 2020. Thus, while Hogan’s novel is situated in a series of events in the 1970s, the environmental justice issues it addresses are still very much ongoing and crucial for contemporary indigenous communities.

Two-dimensional Stories and Maps

Solar Storms specifically implicates the maps and stories produced around James Bay in the perpetuation of bodily and environmental trauma. For Hogan, stories and maps are very much intertwined, making her exploration of maps an important part of her metafictional strategy. Maps both tell stories about the culture that produces them, and are, according to the novel, stories that come from the land itself. Aware that “those who control the land have also controlled its story,” Hogan’s novel works to dismantle these dominant stories and the maps that reflect them (Blend 68). In her memoir, she describes writers as mapmakers, because “when artists render up the truth of their lives and those of others, it is as if they are cartographers introducing us to foreign worlds” (*Woman* 195).

For Hogan writing has been a map to survival, has “been my map because it’s been the pathway I’ve followed and it’s been my direction out of a certain way of living and being” (Harrison 173). Moreover, stories themselves are a form of mapping because it is through stories that we locate ourselves in the relationship to the world. “Story is how we find ourselves and our place of location within this world,” it “sets out the rules and intricate laws of human beings in relationship with all the rest” (“First People” 9). And because Hogan believes that land itself is a source of human stories, is “storied land,” maps of land might be said to constitute stories about the relationships between humans and land.

Our stories about this relationship shape the way we make maps, just as our maps shape the stories we tell about our relation to land. In calling attention to the cultural stories that lie behind maps, Hogan engages the reader in a metafictional consideration of how these purportedly mimetic objects are, in fact, constructed fictions that must be read in the same way as stories. “Cartography,” Hogan notes, “that whole notion of categorizing the land, and charting it, and naming it, and putting things in their place, is really significant in terms of how we think about the world” (Harrison 172). Colonial stories and maps, for instance, worked in tandem to legitimate conquest. When European explorers came to America, Hogan says, “they shaped their lives, and the world, by believing that their imagined world was God’s map, true and clear and destined. . . . names were given, stories told, maps made” (*Woman* 197). Like maps, Hogan muses, “maybe such stories were born of human need and desire . . . or maybe they justified plunder and violence. Whichever, in history, stories [and maps] were changed to

accommodate what was familiar, sensational, or desired” (199). “It isn’t at all unusual,” she goes on to say, “for fragments of stories, myth, and only a glimmering of knowledge to contribute to great losses” such as those of genocide and environmental injustice in North America (200). These incomplete stories and maps enable trauma because they erase what is inconvenient, Natives and non-commercial natural features, in favor of what is “familiar” or “desired,” a landscape open to “violence and plunder.”

In fact, Hogan specifically takes issue with maps that lack narrativity or, more precisely, obscure their own fictionality. When Angel and Bush pour over a stack of Euroamerican maps in preparation for the journey north to the dam site, Angel sees that “they were incredible topographies, the territories and tricks and lies of history. But of course they were not true, they were not the people or the animal lives or the clay of the land, the water, the carnage. They did not tell those parts of the story” (123). Not only do these maps not include things like Native people and the “carnage” of bodily and environmental trauma but they also constitute a false and incomplete “story.” In fact, they are created specifically to construct a story that furthers conquest and development by obscuring the violence on which it is based. According to Hogan, “maps must be supplemented with other dimensions, other layers of local knowledge—history, experience, ecology, story” (Johnson 114). Because they leave out these other dimensions, the maps Angel and Bush consult become, in effect, stories of erasure and domination.

When the representatives of the hydro-electric company meet with the local Native people the clash between two-dimensional and multidimensional stories comes to

a head. Angel depicts this clash in stark terms: “Our words were powerless beside their figures, their measurements, and ledgers. For the builders it was easy and clear-cut. They saw it only on the flat, two-dimensional world of paper” (279). Here the Natives’ stories, their “words,” about the relationship between humans and land in this area are measured against the mathematical and monetary figures to which the developers have reduced these dimensions. Because this two-dimensional world is considered by the agents to be an accurate representation of the real value of the land, it actually replaces or overrides the material world. Two-dimensional maps are de-corporealized and de-materialized. Even though they in some sense do represent the land and water, or at least their contours, they systematically forget the violence that makes the maps possible.

Two-dimensional maps and stories both produce and replicate the myth that Native lands are empty. To the “white men who were new here,” the Natives “were people who had no history, who lived surrounded by what they saw as nothingness. Their history had been emptied of us, and along with us, of truth” (280). For Angel it is shocking that although her people had “lived there forever, for more than ten thousand years, and had been sustained by these lands,” the land was “now being called empty and useless” by outsiders who “thought this place was barren” (58, 307). Here the builders evoke the popular colonial myth of the “empty lands,” a strategy of legitimation whereby Natives are viewed as unimportant, even “unhistorical,” people living on barren land and thus their exploitation causes no ethical qualms. This “emptying” of indigenous people from the dominant history of North America, is largely accomplished by two-dimensional maps. In fact, the history of the region in which the novel takes place supports this claim.

Before the James Bay Project began in 1971, Quebec actually declared Cree lands empty. In her discussion of the mapping technologies in use at the time in this area, Karen Piper reports that the Canada Land Inventory project classified Canadian land into the following categories: recreation; mines; cropland; rough grazing; intensive cultivation; and city. If an area of land did not fit into one of these categories, it was officially termed “barren.” Piper argues that the technology with which this mapping was performed, called Geographic Information Systems (GIS), “was designed for the exploitative takeover of indigenous lands, the erasure of their history, and the occupation of the North. This became a way for Canada to manifest its sovereignty in areas that were ‘scarcely’ occupied, thus denying Native sovereignty” (152). These maps, like those in the novel, were seen as mimetically representing rather than ideologically “constructing” the world. The passive construction of the phrase “their history had been emptied of us” ironizes the developers’ own view that their history, and the maps that legitimate it, are passive recordings of reality rather than active makers of worlds.

This abstract, two-dimensional approach was also an important part of how the project was presented to the larger Canadian/U.S. public for legitimation. In order to capture the sheer scale of the continuing development, Quebec used panoramic aerial photography. “In these distant, two-dimensional views,” notes geographer Caroline Desbiens, “the dams looked neatly fitted into a space that had been cut up to both contain and display them. Gazing at those images, it is easy to forget that their presence rearranges an entire geography—that of native communities on the ground—from an environmental point of view but also from a social and political one” (106). The situation

resulting from what Desbiens calls this “detached spectatorship” served to reinforce the stereotypical perception of this region as “terra incognita, a rugged, uninhabited land” (105). That is, interpreting the space, and the ethics of the project itself, through these distant photographs and maps “reasserted the colonial imagined geography of the North as a wild, empty space, devoid of local subjects and existing only for the viewer” from the populous South—southern Quebec and northeastern U.S. (106). When Premier Bourassa flies over the territory in 1973, for example, he notes that the “dozens of documents, sketches, and maps I have studied came to life before my eyes” (*James Bay* 116). However, this “direct” experience with the territory, albeit from the remove of an airplane, does not make Bourassa more aware of what is actually in the territory as opposed to what is included on the developers’ maps. Instead, his view is pre-conditioned by the maps to see what they see—an unoccupied landscape ripe for exploitation.

That is, these two-dimensional maps become a lens through which the officials “read” the landscape, and it is this lens that Hogan’s metafiction works to disrupt. “For hundreds of miles, there is forest—dense, inaccessible forest divided by sinuous rivers, huge and often nameless lakes,” Bourassa recounts (115). Such images and maps took on even more significance since “throughout the late 1970s and beyond these representations were often the only ones available to southern residents” who were to be the consumers of northern power (Desbiens 106). Thus these maps and images became the lens through which the outside world, like Bourassa, read the landscape of James Bay from afar. In fact, Hydro-Quebec still uses abstract aerial photographs to represent their projects, like the one below that depicts a dam from so far away it looks like it could hardly have a

drastic impact on the landscape.¹⁴ Like two-dimensional maps, these aerial photographs tell a story that specifically omits Native people and their sacred geography, as well as the animals and plants on which their culture traditionally relies.



Cover of Hydro-Quebec's 2006 Annual Report

Not only do two-dimensional maps and images ignore these dimensions but they also purport a scientific objectivity that legitimates the environmental injustices they are used to enable. When Bush and Angel compare seventeenth-century maps with contemporary ones, they notice the fantastic elements of the older maps that reflect a

¹⁴ This kind of “greenwashing” is common in the advertising of industries that are particularly harmful to the environment. LaDuke claims, for instance, that “given the current interest in environmentally safe products, Hydro-Quebec is marketing its higher-priced product as ‘green power’” (65).

distinct colonial imagination. The oldest map they examine is “ornate,” with “cherubs at the edges. There were water monsters. . . . At the top, part of a boat was going down, a boat with Indian people chained together as slaves for the far continent” (131). In my interview with Hogan she remembers being “fascinated” by such maps that “used to have the angels on them and the little water monsters and whales that were not really whales but horned things, feathered, you know, sea monsters. And they would have the cherub winds blowing. And those were somehow representative of the worldview” (173). These old maps now seem, for modern readers, to be clear products of colonial, Christian ideologies and anxieties rather than accurate depictions of the world.

However, I contend that even the most contemporary maps made with cutting-edge technologies are just as indicative of a particular ideological worldview as these colonial maps. As I mentioned in my interview with Hogan, it is easy to see these old maps as products of a colonial imagination and then look at today’s very technical, GPS-based maps as objective, when actually they replicate a specific, Western, “scientific” worldview. In the novel Angel finds that while the “squares of paper” attempted to represent land objectively, these “maps were not reliable” (122). There are three main reasons these maps are unreliable. First, especially in this intricate landscape of islands and fluctuating lakes, the land itself is not a static, stable entity. “The cartographers thought that if they mapped it, everything would remain the same, but it didn’t, and I respected it for that,” Angel notes, “change was the one thing not accounted for . . . the land refused to be shaped by the makers of those maps” (123). So, one problem with these maps is that they attempt to fix something that is not fixable, and then represent

their fixed images as stable truths. Secondly, by purporting to be objective, these two-dimensional maps fail to account for the bias of the mapmakers themselves, the influence of their worldview on the maps they create. Comparing several maps, Angel sees that “none of the maps were the same; they were only as accurate as the minds of their makers and those had been men possessed with the spoils of this land” (122). In other words, a worldview that posits the land as a source of “spoils” justifies the spoiling of land. This leads to the third problem, that because these two-dimensional maps are based on an ideology that defines land as a repository of lucrative resources, they omit indigenous people, their sacred geography, complex ecosystems, and the historical “carnage” that has enabled exploitation, even as they claim to be objective representations.

Narratives of Objectivity

The neo/colonial narrative of objectivity and rationality, perpetuated by two-dimensional maps, serves to legitimate environmental injustice as the “logical” option. As such, this narrative, and its representation in maps and stories, is an important object of critique for Hogan’s metafiction. In fact, Bourassa includes a chapter in his first book entitled “James Bay: a logical choice” in which he outlines the planning stages of the project during which, predictably, officials concluded that a massive hydroelectric scheme in James Bay was the only “logical” decision. In Hogan’s novel, the dam’s developers use similar rhetoric in an attempt to push Natives to accept a monetary settlement in exchange for the destruction of their homeland. Angel recounts how a “blue-eyed man in a dark suit” from BEEVCO, the novel’s version of Hydro-Quebec,

“tried to ‘reason’ with us,” saying “be sensible” (318). In one essay, Hogan takes issue with the larger Western narrative of rationality:

The belief that the western way has been the best seems to me to be the shape of a madness that has been turned around and stated as logic and rationality, and it is this confusion that characterizes the culture that now dominates. Where is the logic, we Indian women are asking, in the extinction of species, in deforestation that takes away our air, in emptying the sustaining oceans. What’s being lost is almost everything, including our own lives. (“First People” 16)

This narrative of objectivity and rationality is, of course, only “rational” if, as for the developers, it does not entail the destruction of a homeland and way of life. However, the developers presented the “option” for accepting settlement as the only one on the table, and many of the novel’s protesters understood that “the government would do what it wanted anyway” (283). Geographer Gillian Rose argues that geographical knowledge is based on “a particular form of masculinist rationality” which “assumes a knower who believes he can separate himself from body, emotions, past and so on, so that he and his thought are autonomous, context free and objective” (6). This universal knowledge “assumes that it is comprehensive, and this is the only knowledge possible” (7).

Even in contemporary times, supposedly objective science is actually based on a Western worldview. In her geographical history of the James Bay region, Desbiens argues that the “Crees’ own modes of occupation and interaction with James Bay and its resources could hardly be represented” on the maps and images produced by “southern

Quebec's neocolonial imagination on the North" because they "did not admit multiple frameworks for understanding and interacting with nature, which [was] regarded as an objective category" (107). As Johnson notes "even twentieth- and twenty-first-century Native women writers are compelled to engage the myth of scientific accuracy" and its "destructive history in the Americas" (105). This is one of the functions of Hogan's trauma metafiction—not only to expose the myth of this "objective" and "rational" narrative, but to demonstrate the traumatic effects it has on people and environments.

Mapping practices, the novel argues, both reflect and shape narratives about the relationship between humans and land. When Angel and the other Native protestors of James Bay take their case to court, they are asked to calculate their relationship to the land and its resources based on the government maps' account of what is valuable. Rather than take into account the indigenous way of life that depends on a complex system of material and spiritual interrelationships with land, the "questions asked there were how many, how much, how often" (243). According to the court, the "worth and weight" of the land's resources were defined "in terms of numbers, dollars, grams" (243). This instrumentalist view of the human relationship with land—seen only as a source of revenue—parallels the economic narrative used by actual officials to legitimate the project. Rather than acknowledging the complexity of the ecosystem and the history of Native residence there, Premier Bourassa actually equates the landscape to a hydroelectric complex. "Quebec is a vast hydroelectric plant in the bud," he writes, "and every day millions of potential kilowatt-hours flow downhill and out to sea. What a waste!" (*Power* 4). In fact, when he took an aerial tour of the vast territory Bourassa was

deeply moved not by the beauty or ecological significance of the region, but by its seemingly limitless potential for generating revenue:

The forest continues to fan out—impassive, interminable. Thirty-two billion cubic feet of lumber of market value. . . . From time to time, outcrops of volcanic rock draw one’s attention—rock associated with the formation of copper, zinc, gold, and silver deposits. . . . A possible yield of more than a billion dollars. It is impossible not to be moved, not to marvel, before such a sight. What an extraordinary reserve of economic power!

(*James Bay* 116)

Solar Storms serves to critique the role of such economic narratives of land in authorizing the trauma of environmental injustice for indigenous peoples.

Paternalist Narratives of Progress

Two-dimensional interpretations of the land that, like Bourassa’s, emphasize only its revenue potential are manifestations of the larger narrative of progress that shapes traditionally Western approaches to the environment. Hogan’s metafiction works to dismantle the logic of this narrative by pointing to its devastating effects. The novel, for instance, questions the certainty that development is progress given its destructive results. As the construction continues Angel sees these effects, the “cut-down trees and torn-apart land,” the “starvation and invasion . . . in the shape of yellow machines” (285). And yet, the developers were “shielded inside their machines’ metal armor, certain nothing could touch them . . . certain that this was progress” (285). In fact, the actual project was pitched to the public in just these terms. In his original announcement of the plan,

Bourassa claimed that “James Bay will be the key to the economic and social progress of Quebec . . . the key to the future of Quebec” (McCutcheon 33). This narrative, both in the novel and in the history on which it is based, takes for granted that industrialization of the landscape constitutes progress, and that progress is an inherent “economic and social” good. The impact assessment procedures used by the government and Hydro-Quebec to justify the project’s “progressive” nature, according to geographer Evelyn Peters, “provide virtually no consideration of broader values, for example, questioning the equation of development and progress or the inevitability of modernization” even though indigenous “assessment of the desirability of industrial development” is “very different from that of the developers” (407). Hogan defines this contemporary narrative of progress as a continuation of the colonial ideology of conquest.

By comparing colonial and neocolonial stories of environmental conquest, Hogan’s metafiction implicates both in the ongoing traumatization of indigenous people. When the officials refuse to take the protestors’ objections seriously, and the government even sends in troops to protect the construction site, Angel realizes that “nothing had changed since the Frenchman, Radisson, passed through and wrote in his journal that there was no one to stop them from taking what they wanted from this land. ‘We were caesars,’ he wrote, ‘with no one to answer to.’ We were the no one” (285). By positing the indigenous people as “no one to answer to,” both colonial and neocolonial interests are able to create a narrative of morally righteous conquest. This parallels claims by Cree and Inuit leaders that the project is a clear example of environmental injustice. Cree Grand Chief Coon-Come points out that if these dams were proposed for rivers in

southern Quebec they would be “stopped by public outcry,” and thus they are a form of “environmental racism” (“Clearing” 15). Echoing the sentiments of Radisson, Bill Namagoose (executive director of the Grand Council of the Crees) points out the continuing belief that “you can do what you please to the environment in Quebec if the only direct victims are indigenous people” (Picard, “James Bay II” 16).¹⁵ In fact, Bourassa himself makes this connection between the James Bay project and the history of colonial expansion. Gazing out across the landscape, he says he “cannot help but think of the genius and strength of character of the first explorers of the region—the d’Ibervilles, the Radissons” (*James Bay* 115). Comparing Quebec’s exploration of the north to the U.S./Soviet race to space as the “new frontier,” he argues that Quebec’s “destiny” involves “extending our frontiers and taking possession of all our resources” (43). He even goes so far as to describe the developers as colonial “pioneers,” and the imported workers as being like the “first settlers of our land” (117). Invoking this dubious legacy to galvanize public support, Bourassa claims that Quebec must draw on “the moral values, courage and spirit of enterprise” of these pioneers, making them “live again in the

¹⁵ According to Canadian law, “all major projects built north of the 49th parallel are exempt from public hearings, requiring only the provincial environment minister’s approval.” While this absence of legislation is “designed to facilitate the construction of giant aluminum smelters and paper mills in northern Quebec,” its practical effects are to locate environmental harm in areas overwhelmingly populated by indigenous peoples (Picard, “James Bay II” 16). Chief Coon-Come specifically argues against this environmental racism and injustice, saying that his people “want an end to environmental racism, where we in the North must suffer the consequences of unsustainable policies and practices of those in the South” and “will be a voice for social and environmental justice for Aboriginal peoples, and for the animals and land” (“Clearing” 15).

twentieth century” because “Quebec must occupy its territory, must conquer James Bay. We have decided the time has come” (10).¹⁶

Here, the colonial practice of genocidal and ecocidal conquest is rewritten as a neocolonial narrative of patriotism and moral destiny that explicitly disregards the destructive history of colonialism. The trauma enacted against indigenous peoples and environments is expunged, and the developers are left with “no one to answer to.” Presenting James Bay as an environmental and moral clean slate, only reminiscent of the “courage and spirit” of European explorers rather than their oppressiveness, requires the erasure of indigenous people from history. Angel describes the developers as having done just that, saying that “their history had been emptied of us” (280). Similarly, the Quebec government’s announcement of the James Bay project to the public, in the form of an elaborate audiovisual presentation, ended with the slogan ‘Le monde commence aujourd’hui,’ the world begins today (McCutcheon 33). This motto implies that the world of James Bay did not really exist until the government decided to re-conquer it, discounting the approximately five thousand years in which that world was occupied and maintained by Cree and Inuit peoples.¹⁷

The story of James Bay as a new “world” or virgin “frontier” suggests that Euroamericans have the ability and, indeed, the responsibility to bring “civilization” to its

¹⁶ Of course, part of the patriotic zeal for Quebec that Bourassa and others express is a reaction to the history of Quebec’s minority status within Anglo Canada.

¹⁷ The James Bay area has been inhabited by indigenous people since the glaciers receded about five thousand years ago. In the 1640’s the Jesuits identified three nations living in the East Main and Rupert River drainage basin, including the Lake Nipigon Cree, the Misibourounik, and the Pitchiborenik (Lovisek).

inhabitants. This paternalistic narrative is based on a two-dimensional understanding of indigenous people as ignorant and primitive. Angel describes how the developers' spokesperson "called us remnants of the past and said that he wanted to bring us into the twentieth century. . . . He, like the others, believed that we were ignorant" (280). This kind of rhetoric surfaced in newspaper stories at the time that explain how indigenous people had "been violently yanked into the twenty-first century from the eighteenth," implying that before the rapid industrialization of the territory, these people did not exist in the contemporary world (Picard, "Power") Similarly, Hogan's novel references officials' claims that the Native protesters, who linked James Bay to an ongoing history of genocide that the project would accelerate, were simply ignorant. Jean Bernier, general secretary of Hydro-Quebec, said, for instance, "When I hear this talk of genocide, I don't get angry. Instead, I turn to the Holy Scriptures, to the words of Christ: 'Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do'" (Picard, "Power"). In this stupefyingly racist and paternalistic statement, Bernier positions himself as a benevolent god graciously dispensing forgiveness to his feeble-minded subjects.

When the government was forced to negotiate with the Cree and Inuit, however unequal the power dynamic was, the neocolonial rhetoric of paternalism continued to shape their approach. Bourassa, for example, says that his government offered indigenous people a "choice," to "continue their traditional existence" or to "participate in the project, drawing from the 'southern' civilization elements which could improve the quality of their life through a modern technical education, efficient hospital services, and safe and rapid means of communication" (*James Bay* 82). Besides implying that the

project would help civilize the indigenous, this was, of course, a false choice since the government was going to proceed with the project whether or not the Natives approved. Like Radisson, Bourassa believed that “nothing can stop us now from moving forward” (121). While officials lauded their own generosity, Chief Coon-Come points out that these government “gifts” are things “other Canadians have enjoyed for years, basic rights such as citizenship, schools, health care,” and describes the “welfare and subsidy programs as the modern equivalent of the trinkets offered to natives by European conquerors in exchange for the riches of the land” (Picard, “Power”).¹⁸

Ironically, even as neocolonialists claim to bring backward Natives into the present, they also maintain romantic stories of the pre-colonial Native past. While this may seem to be contradictory, both civilizing narratives and pre-contact romantic narratives serve to legitimate environmental injustice by discounting the history of trauma and the needs of contemporary indigenous communities. Angel points to this disjunction between the dominant culture’s idealization of the Native past and its disregard for the Native present: “they romanticized this past in fantasy, sometimes even wanted to bring it back for themselves, but they despised our real human presence” (343). Referencing organizations like the Boy Scouts, or the Canadian version, Scouts Canada,

¹⁸ Similarly, Radisson, a co-founder of the Hudson’s Bay Company, makes the statement in which he defines himself as a Caesar right after telling the story of how he and his men tricked some Crees by agreeing to protect their belongings and then hiding them on the pretense that they were stolen, and finally getting the Crees to carry their equipment to the next camp with the promise of gifts. “We weare Caesars, being nobody to contradict us,” he wrote, and “we went away free from any burden while those poore miserable thought themselves happy to carry our Equipage, for the hope that we should give them a brasse ring, or an awle, or a needle” (201).

she says that “their men, even their children, had entered forests, pretended to be us, imagined our lives, but now we were present, alive, a force to be reckoned with” (343). The dam workers flown in from cities to the south, who “had probably, until now, believed we no longer existed,” had “long admired the photos and stories of our dead, only to find us alive and threatening” (305). That is, while the dominant culture’s images and stories about dead Natives reinforce a romantic fantasy that can be imitated by pseudo “scouts” and weekenders, living ones are “ignored,” Angel says, “until we resisted their dams, or interrupted their economy, or spoiled their sport” (282).

Two-dimensional paternalist narratives and their nostalgic counterparts ignore both the unromantic struggles of indigenous communities and the knowledge these civilizations have produced over thousands of years. Hogan recounts in an interview, for instance, that while many of the non-Indian students in her university classes seem to be “desperately searching for . . . enlightenment” from Native philosophies, they forget both that it “can’t be found in a weekend workshop” and that “most Indian people are living in the crisis of American life, the toxins of chemical waste, the pain of what is repressed in white Americans” (Coltelli 75). “There’s all this romanticization of Indians on the one hand,” she notes, “and yet there’s so much crisis on the other hand” (81). Although Hogan is not arguing for a separatist position—in fact, she believes that the incorporation of indigenous philosophies into the dominant culture is possible and necessary—she does assert that romantic narratives of indigenous people serve to locate them in an ideal past while ignoring the present realities of environmental and social injustice. Furthermore, as Angel points out in the novel, it “hadn’t occurred” to the officials who define Natives as

ignorant remnants of the past that one community leader “knew every plant and its use, knew the tracks of every animal, and was a specialist in justice and peace,” that another was “an intellectual, more well-read than they were or even their wives” (280). In my interview with her, Hogan notes that while “sometimes we’re seen as ignorant or as knowing less than people in the Western world,” the “truth is that if you’ve lived some place for generation after generation . . . you know everything about that environment, and you don’t endanger it because you have to keep it—the new word is—‘sustainable.’ . . . I think that the Western world has that to learn from indigenous peoples all over the world” (170-71). However, by defining “Western” knowledge as the only legitimate form, the neocolonial civilizing narrative devalues indigenous forms of knowledge that have developed out of sustained interaction with the landscape.

Indigenous Mapping

In response to the dominant Western mode of mapping which sees these documents as mimetic, the metafictional reading practices of Hogan’s characters allow them to reinterpret Western maps and to combine their indigenous knowledge with Western technologies to create hybrid maps, while their belief that the land is a living source of stories also allows them to create alternative maps. While two-dimensional neocolonial maps and stories ignore indigenous knowledge, this very knowledge can be used to interpret the maps. In her comparison of different maps, Bush points to the insufficiency of these documents when she “searched for something not yet charted,” something outside these two-dimensional borders (122). Michael Bryson argues that “in the plane of the map, space is bounded and presented for instantaneous interpretation,”

which “enables the potential exercise of power and control by the map reader” (13). However, as the novel emphasizes, one can also “read” what is outside the bounds of the map, disrupting the power relations implicit in the kind of map-reading Bryson discusses. Realizing the artificiality of the maps’ representations, Bush and Angel can read them against the grain in order to recover the stories originating in the land. They can, for instance, “read back to how land told the story of the beaver people” (123). Not only do Bush and Angel read what has been left off the maps but they also reveal alternative strategies to obtain the same information the maps provide, revealing “situated knowledges.” While one can chart the changing water levels by looking at a series of successive maps, Bush notes that “those years also showed up in the rings of trees” (122). Furthermore, they are able to use alternative means to supply information about the maps that the maps themselves do not include. For instance, Bush is able to interpret one ancient map through using communal stories. She can tell the map was made “sometime between 1660 and 1720” because “those years there were no northern lights. There were stories about it” (122). Not only can they use the knowledge from indigenous stories to interpret Western maps but the women also dismantle these maps by re-reading the landscapes they chart. On their long canoe trip to James Bay, Angel remarks that they are “undoing the routes of explorers, taking apart the advance of commerce” (176). By re-traveling these routes, the women are “un-mapping” colonial maps that defined these spaces only in terms of “commerce.”

Native characters not only read maps subversively, even “un-mapping” them but they also create maps which challenge two-dimensional mapping practices. Angel, for

instance, gets frequent visions of her tribe's colonial past, seeing such images as "sleds with frozen animals" (123). She defines these visions as an alternate kind of map, a "deeper map." They show her the historical route that connects her own trauma to that of her ancestors and the land, they tell this story. That is, as Johnson points out, this "deeper map" is "a kind of indigenous mapmaking practice" that "recognizes the importance of narratives, especially local narratives, in the history of Indigenous cartographic traditions" (114). Dream maps constitute another form of indigenous "deep maps" depicted in the novel. Instead of using only "paper" maps, the Cree and Inuit rely on the "place inside the human that spoke with land" and thereby "found directions in their dreams. They dreamed charts of land and currents of water. They dreamed where food animals lived. These dreams they called hunger maps and when they followed those maps they found their prey" (170). Angel herself becomes a "plant dreamer" and learns to draw maps to the locations of sacred medicine plants by "remember[ing] the plants inside myself" (171). Hunger maps rely on dreams, which the novel says come from the land, and Hogan presents this process of mapping as an alternative to Euroamerican mapping strategies because instead of obscuring the relationship between land, bodies, and memory, it relies on their interaction to function. Similarly, plant maps use dreams, a form of land-based and communal memory, to locate sacred plants which do not appear at all on the developers' maps used to legitimate the flooding of the lands on which they grow. According to Norman Chance, dreams are not only seen by the Crees as a form of reality, but are "considered part of the process of revelation by which individuals acquire knowledge about the external behavioral and unseen supernatural world" (12). This

characterization of dreams as essential to the production of knowledge is relevant to my argument because it is these types of situated and alternative knowledges, here rendered through dream maps, that undermine two-dimensional maps and ways of thinking.

Although these alternative mapping strategies are important, they are also problematic as representations because, as the dreams of one person, or even one tribe, they lack a wider legibility. This is the problem addressed by hybrid maps which use Western technologies to translate traditional dimensions of land, body, and memory onto maps, and by the novel itself, which similarly translates land, body, and memory into a legible multidimensional representation. In contemporary Cree communities subversive mapping strategies have been instrumental in preserving indigenous knowledge and in advocating for land rights. First Nations peoples began by re-labeling Euroamerican maps with indigenous place names, and later started using GIS technology in order to create alternative maps of the areas surveyed by the Canada Land Inventory. In 1995 Wade Cachagee established Cree-Tech, an unusual mapping technology that can produce a “traditional values inventory” that “maps out traditional farming, trapping, fishing and hunting areas; pictograph and burial sites; traveling routes; and periodic and permanent settlements” (Piper 148).¹⁹ Thus GIS, a project I mentioned earlier that has been used to deny Native claims to land, ironically has since become instrumental for indigenous land claims in both Canada and the U.S. because “land claims, in court, require spatial precision in order to be acknowledged by the court” (148).

¹⁹ Although these maps are still technically two-dimensional, they include the kinds of information that the two-dimensional maps described in the novel omit.

While two-dimensional maps and stories reflect an instrumentalist view of the land as a source of lucrative resources, indigenous maps reflect a belief that land is a living being which is the source of situated knowledge, stories, and the maps themselves. Land, in the indigenous view Hogan espouses, is not an inert substance to be manipulated at will, but a living entity with memory and agency. When the canoeing women have to navigate a river engorged from a hydroelectric diversion, Dora Rouge goes to “talk to the river” to “convince it to let us pass safely,” saying “a prayer, [she] opened her hand and tossed tobacco into it” (193). The land, according to this philosophy, must be treated as a respected and powerful member of the larger kinship network that encompasses every part of the ecosystem. Angel describes the area as a “defiant land” with a “wildness” and “stubborn passion to remain outside [the mapmakers’] sense of order” (123). Not only does the land have a will of its own but it also retains a memory of events that occur in particular places. For example, the island Bush lives on, a site of colonization by the British and then the French, contains a “memory of all that happened there,” and as Dora Rouge walks across the land she can “hear French songs coming out of the ground . . . the older, Indian songs were just behind them” (16, 163). In her interview with me, Hogan notes that when she writes about a specific place, she approaches it from multiple dimensions. Not only does she “do a lot of environmental research” to think about the place “from a scientific point of view,” but she also “thinks about it in terms of its historical memory” and “in terms of its spirit” in order to construct a “many-layered” map which recognizes that “place itself is a living being” (171-72). This philosophy is not merely a different way of thinking about land, but is directly tied to the political focus

of Hogan's novels. "If you believe that the earth, and all living things, and all the stones are sacred," she argues, "your responsibility really is to protect those things. I do believe that's our duty, to be custodians of the planet" (Coltelli 79).²⁰

Hogan's metafiction challenges two-dimensional stories and maps that represent land mainly as a repository of exploitable resources and obscure their own fictionality by positing land itself as a source of story. As Angel becomes reconnected with her homeland, she comes to realize that it is "storied land" and learns to "hear stories in the land" (177, 193). The hydroelectric project which devastates the landscape thus affects these land-based stories as well. When waterways are diverted, "the mouths of rivers stopped spilling their stories to the bays and seas beyond them" while logging, mining, and roads "cut into every sacred site the people had grown from, known, and told stories about" (205, 296). These disrupted stories contain both cultural tradition and environmental knowledge. "Each biosystem is held in the stories," Hogan argues, "ceremonial literature contains an entire ecosystem, what is now called a textbook for knowledge," and yet "American Indian knowledge systems have been ignored until

²⁰ Jace Weaver points out that while Natives are often stereotyped as "environmental perfectionists" they are, like all humans, capable of "making devastating choices for the environment" or living a life "in harmony and balance with the natural order" (32). While Christa Grewe-Volpp argues that Hogan makes a strategic use of the "Ecological Indian" stereotype, it is also important to remember that not all of her indigenous characters are environmental saints. LaRue, for instance, sells the taxidermied bodies of exotic and poached animals, and initially works against the protesters at the dam site. Rather than portraying indigenous people as "environmental perfectionists," then, Hogan emphasizes that indigenous people "learned to practice reciprocity and natural conservation techniques" in order to survive sustainably over time (Weaver 32).

recently” (Cook 13).²¹ Viewing land as a living being that contains stories and environmental knowledge leads to different mapmaking practices, as we have seen. “Unlike western cartography” in which “conventions of scale, longitude, latitude, direction, and relative location are believed to ‘scientifically’ depict a static landscape,” argues Mark Warhus, “Native American maps are pictures of experience . . . formed in the human interaction with the land and are a record of the events that give it meaning” (3). An understanding of Native maps, then, relies not on a European concept of “scientific geography but on the context—and the narrative—that accompanied each Native-made map” (Johnson 107). While this is certainly true, I hope to have shown that Euroamerican maps are also products of historical and cultural narratives. The difference is that while those maps purport to be context-free, indigenous maps foreground the role of cultural stories and meanings in their understanding of the landscape. While they are considered to be no less accurate than Euroamerican maps, their accuracy depends not on mathematical scale but on their capacity to represent the “storied” relationship between humans and the landscape. In other words, these maps, like Hogan’s metafiction, self-reflectively acknowledge the ways our representations are shaped by our understanding of the relationship between humans, stories, and the land.

Body as Land, Land as Body

²¹ In fact, Hogan, who participates in the Native Science Dialogues organization, is very interested in how Native traditional knowledge about ecology is now being “re-discovered” by Western science. In the novel, this position is represented by the character Husk, who “kept stacks of magazines and books that divulged the secret worlds of atoms and galaxies, of particles and quarks,” and “used theories of science to confirm what he knew was true” (35, 62).

Moreover, this examination of maps and stories is crucial to my earlier discussion of traumatized bodies, linking the cartographic practice of “writing” on land with the trauma that gets “written” on the bodies of indigenous women. In fact, while the developers attempt to inscribe a “sense of order” on the wounded landscape through mapping, Hannah’s traumatized body is described as “an inescapable place with no map for it” (103). By connecting the bodily trauma of indigenous women to the environmental trauma of land, which is considered a living embodied being itself, Hogan shows that we cannot understand one trauma without understanding the other, and that seeing the links between them is necessary for healing both. In the novel, bodies are represented as landscapes and the land as a body, not to replicate the historically exploitative notion of women and land as bodies ripe for plunder, but to demonstrate that the inseparability of these sites is crucial to resisting environmental injustice.

In *Solar Storms*, Hogan represents female bodies as landscapes and land itself as a body. This may at first seem to reinforce historical associations of women-as-land and land-as woman that have functioned to render both as ripe for exploitation. The American tradition of positing land-as-woman is, Annette Kolodny argues, “America’s oldest and most cherished fantasy” both because it relies on the familiar Western ideology of women as being closer to nature and because it justified the conquering of the land by virile men (14). Moreover, American Indian women in particular were also posited as being part of the landscape. Explorers came to see “the Indian woman as a kind of emblem for the land,” a symbol of bounty and ripeness (45). While Hogan does link female bodies and land in her novel, she does it in a way that dismantles this oppressive

ideology rather than reinforcing it. Whereas the Western concept of the woman/land connection served to legitimate the plundering of lands and bodies, Hogan's approach uses the connection to show that bodies and lands are inseparable, so that harming one harms the other. In other words, her approach is meant to critique bodily and eco violence simultaneously by showing how they are related. As Angel observes at the dam site, "the devastation and ruin that had fallen over the land fell over the people too" (226). Hogan echoes this idea in an essay that examines "the genocide of tribal people" and "the ongoing war against the natural world," concluding that "what happens to people and what happens to the land is the same thing" (*Dwellings* 89).

It is traumatized body-landscapes and land-bodies that Hogan focuses on in particular. For example, Hannah, who has been repetitively raped, tortured, and displaced throughout her life, is described as an embattled and disoriented place. A "body under siege, a battleground," she is "like the iron underground that pulls the needle of a compass to false north," her body a "house of lament and sacrifice" (99, 12, 250). As Angel describes, "my mother was stairs with no destination. She was a burning house, feeding on the air of others. She had no more foundation, no struts, no beams" (97). Trauma has rendered Hannah's body a distorted landscape that, unlike maps, actually serves to disorient rather than orient.

Similarly, Hogan represents the land itself as a traumatized body. Angel argues that while her wounded people "embodied the land," it also embodied them, particularly Hannah because "both of them [were] stripped and torn" (228). The area around the dam was "overrun by machines . . . new roads were being cut into the already wounded

forests, and there was a stepped up effort to strip the land's resources . . . to see what else could be taken, looted, and mined before the waters covered this little length of earth" (219). Just as Hannah was "stripped and mined" by her torturers and turned into a degraded landscape, so exploitation of the land makes it into a "wounded" body. "If the land is figured as the female body," claims Geoffrey Stacks, then "the cartographic violence—for example, effacing traditional place names and inscribing artificial political boundaries—inflicted on that land by colonizers manifests itself as scars, as a type of writing on the skin of the earth" (167). Moreover, representing the land as a wounded body that mirrors the wounded bodies of indigenous women has a political and affective function in Hogan's novel. Placing these wounded bodies side-by-side, Hogan encourages her reader to transfer the empathic, emotional response they might have to descriptions of tortured human bodies to the body of the land itself. If, in other words, we understand ecological destruction as a form of bodily violence to a living being, then it becomes subject to the same ethical questions as human torture.²²

Both wounded lands and bodies make visible the "signatures" that two-dimensional maps omit in order to represent themselves as objective. "Beneath all the layers of clothes," Bush describes in one of her insert narratives, Hannah's "skin was a garment of scars. There were burns and incisions. Like someone had written on her. The signatures of torturers" (99). The characterization of Hannah's scars as the "signatures of torturers" suggests that by writing their own names on her body-scape, her torturers have substituted their identities for hers. This relates to my previous discussion of the proposed

²² For more on empathizing with landscapes see, for example, Jennifer Brice.

objectivity of neo/colonial maps. “The map is powerful precisely to the extent that the author *disappears*,” argues geographer Denis Wood, otherwise maps would be recognized for what they are, “no more than a *version* of the world, a *story* about it, as a *fiction*” (70). While two-dimensional maps purport mimetic objectivity by omitting the author’s signatures, omitting their “storiedness,” these signatures resurface on Hannah’s skin. Because these signatures have supplanted Hannah’s identity, her own body becomes a kind of disoriented space “with no map for it.” The signatures on Hannah’s body thus suggest that it is this very omission that allows neo/colonialists to claim authority over the indigenous body, which unlike the maps, bears their signature. The body then becomes a site where these signatures can be recuperated in order to de-legitimize the maps.²³

Although some parts of the landscape and Hannah’s identity are irrecoverably lost, the remaining wounded bodies function as sites where the “signatures” of neo/colonialism can be recuperated in order to challenge two-dimensional maps and stories. “The body is a crucial site for contestation and transformation,” Stacy Alaimo claims, “precisely because ideologies of the body have been complicit in the degradation of people of color, women and nature” (62). Hannah’s skin, like the land, is both written on and “speaks” these ideologies. As Foucault has argued, bodies are “narrativized” (they speak social codes), and in bodies social codes become “incarnated” (199). The

²³ In a related move, Melani Bleck argues that this “rape of Hannah’s soul . . . symbolically represents the theft of Native American land by signatures on treaties” (41). This characterization is important because it associates Hannah with the land itself, implying that the project of recuperating Hannah is also a project of recuperating the land.

novel exposes human bodies and the body of land as surfaces on which Euroamericans inscribe social codes that justify violence, enabling the skin to “speak” back through the novel’s own narrative. In this way, Hogan testifies to the traumatized body’s ironic capacity for resistance.

Stories of Healing: Ceremony, Alliances, and the Ethic of Witnessing

Nevertheless, this bodily “speech” must be “heard” in order to become politically useful as an act of resistance. The novel both represents the trauma (through its form and content) and becomes a public document of witness. Though the account of the women is fictional, the novel testifies to actual ways the destruction of land and public forgetting traumatizes Native bodies. This concluding section demonstrates how Hogan’s trauma metafiction posits the creation of “new” stories as acts of resistance to the two-dimensional representations that perpetuate environmental injustice by “reversing” truth. These stories, and the ceremonial philosophies they are based on, enable healing by reorienting the individual within a larger community of allies and relatives, and by creating a chain of witnesses that makes trauma publicly legible. “Story,” Hogan asserts, “is at the very crux of healing” (*Dwellings* 37).

In order to resist environmental injustice, and the trauma it enables, we need new stories that are self-reflective not just about their content, but about their effects on our attitudes and practices. Hogan explicitly criticizes the adoption of dominant stories which assume that social exploitation and environmental degradation are inevitable results of a modern society. “Without deep reflection,” she claims, “we have taken on the story of endings, assumed the story of extinction, and have believed that it is the certain outcome

of our presence here” (*Dwellings* 94). As Laura Castor points out, Hogan encourages her readers to see the “Western story of technological expansion on the landscape as only one among various possible stories, not an inevitable outcome of the way the world is” (173). Hogan’s approach to metafiction, then, emphasizes the simultaneous need to question the role of this “story of endings” in authorizing trauma and to create alternative stories that encourage reflection on the ability of stories to imagine just and sustainable relationships between peoples and lands. “We need new stories,” Hogan argues, “new terms and conditions that are relevant to the love of land, a new narrative that would imagine another way” (*Dwellings* 94).

The novel both depicts the creation of “new” stories, and becomes one such story itself. As Angel and the others continue to protest the hydroelectric complex, she notes that “there were stories for everything . . . but not for this. We needed a story for what was happening to us now” (302). The protest movement faces the dual problem of the general lack of public storytelling about this issue in the media, and the distortion of truth in the few stories that do get circulated. “If the American Indian Movement got little attention on television,” Angel claims, “the dams and diversions of rivers to the north were even more absent. They were a well-kept secret, passed along only by word of mouth” (301). Thus, the women realize that they must write their own stories that articulate the destruction which is absent in public discourse. Bush, for instance, becomes a self-made “truth teller” and “journalist,” at work “smuggling our story out to

newspapers in the United States and to cities in Canada” (300).²⁴ In addition, the protesters transform old stories into new ones that provide strategies for resistance. One leader applies “lessons” from stories about “Indian leaders,” like Geronimo and his female military strategist Lozen, while Angel gets her strategies “from stories . . . of the animals. From wolverine” (323). Specifically, Angel uses a traditional story about wolverine ridding the land of invading humans by destroying their food as the inspiration for an act of resistance against the invading developers—using this story to address “what was happening to us now.”

The few public stories that are circulated distort the truth and reduce Natives to two-dimensional stereotypes. “Oh there were stories all right,” Angel reports, “like those in *The Greater River News*, about how we ‘Occupied’ Two Town Post, as if we’d stolen it and taken it over by force, as if we were soldiers” (302). Another newspaper includes a picture of Native leaders with the caption “On the Warpath Again” (343). These false stories become literally inscribed on Hannah’s skin after her death. With nothing else to wrap her in, Angel and Bush lay Hannah out on newspaper:

How appropriate it was to place her on words of war, obituaries, stories of carnage and misery, and true stories that had been changed to lies. It

²⁴ Rachel Stein argues that Hogan’s depiction of women as leaders of the movement for environmental justice in the novel parallels the prominence of women in actual environmental justice organizations. “By portraying the ways in which women are mobilized to concerted political activism by their desires to restore their families and communities to well-being,” novels like Hogan’s “help us to understand the predominance of women, particularly mothers, in actual grassroots environmental justice organizations. . . . Hogan’s characters illustrate the way that women of color, who often bear the brunt of the effects of environmental racism upon their families and communities, oppose these injustices as an extension of their caretaking roles” (194-98).

seemed like the right bed for her. Some of the words stuck to her body,
dark ink, but we did not wash them off; it was a suitable skin. (253)

These stories are a “suitable skin” for Hannah because they literalize what her skin already speaks. If her body has been marked by “carnage and misery” and the “lies” of history, the newsprint merely represents her scars as words. Interestingly, however, when imprinted on Hannah’s body these words are literally reversed. Angel pictures “Hannah’s body with the words of the newspaper reversed across it,” words like “Dam Construction Begins at St. Bleu Falls” (303). This image resonates with the novel’s motif of “reversal” as a technique of repression and public forgetting.

In a self-conscious attempt to dismantle the “story of endings,” the novel redefines the neo/colonial narrative of progress as a narrative of regress, an ideology of reversal. Angel describes the developers, for example, as “men who would reverse the world, change the direction of rivers, stop the cycle of life until everything that backward as lies,” and Bush “called them the reverse people. Backward. Even now they destroyed all that could save them, the plants, the water” (288, 86). Similarly, the project’s transformation of the river into electricity becomes a form of “alchemy in reverse,” in which “what was precious became base” (268). These environmental “reversals” parallel the reversals enacted on indigenous people. A priest describes Hannah, for instance, as a “miracle in reverse” (100). Likewise, Angel recounts how, “reversing the truth, [the media] would call us terrorists. If there was evil in the world, this was it, I thought. Reversal” (283). It is these stories of reversal, part of the larger “story of endings,” that Hogan’s metafiction seeks to disrupt. While the “true stories” of the event are reversed to

“lies” in the newspaper accounts, when these words stick to Hannah’s body, they are reversed again, suggesting that her body is a site which can re-reverse false stories, a site from which some of the “true stories” obscured in dominant histories can be recuperated. Using her metafiction to emphasize the role of stories in articulating the interdependence of bodies, land, and public memory, Hogan is able to both “re-reverse” the ideology of reversal that enables trauma and construct a new story of healing.

This new story of healing that Hogan’s novel and its metafictional strategies create is modeled on mourning and healing ceremonies. The novel, like these ceremonies, functions to reorient the individual in relation to the community. Indigenous healing ceremonies, claims Paula Gunn Allen, move an individual from a state of isolation—which is diseased—to a state of incorporation—which is healthy (80). Hogan describes such a ceremony in her memoir, saying that “the intention of a ceremony is to put a person back together by restructuring the human mind,” a restructuring that is “accomplished by a kind of inner map, a geography of the human spirit and the rest of the world” through which “we reestablish our connections with others . . . our place in the community of all things” (*Woman* 40). This community, she explains, is “not just us—our nuclear family, or the Indian community, or a ‘university community’ . . . but the community of all living creatures” (Smith 148). In fact, while Hogan’s novel is specifically oriented toward the healing of indigenous lives, her belief that the fate of these lives and the land itself depends on the larger community “of all living creatures” shapes the political thrust of her metafiction.

The only way to end environmental and social injustice, the novel argues, is to convince others to recognize that narratives which authorize harm to indigenous peoples and land will eventually harm them too because we are all, finally, interdependent. This is precisely what Hogan's trauma metafiction is designed to accomplish. As Angel says, "to the builders of the dams we were dark outsiders whose lives had no relevance to them," and they "had no understanding of the destruction their decisions and wants and desires brought to the world" (283, 343). The developers, in other words, are unable to see the "relevance" of indigenous peoples' wellbeing to the wellbeing of the larger community. This is often the case because the people making such decisions are physically distant from the sites of environmental injustice their decisions create. Bill Namagoose, for instance, points out that "there are two ends to a hydro line," the "luxury end, the comfortable end. Lights, heat, cooking, there's music coming out of [that] end of the line," as opposed to "our end of the line" where "we don't hear music. We hear massive destruction" (Desbiens 113). These two ends of the line are ultimately connected, however, and the destruction that starts at one end will inevitably affect the other end as well. This rhetoric of interconnectedness structured the actual protests against subsequent phases of the hydroelectric project in the 1990s, as can be seen in Chief Coon-Come's "message" to Canadians and Americans: "You may think that what happens in the North does not concern you. You just want to flick the switch and turn on the lights. But there are people involved. We native people are the victims—but we are only the first victims" ("Clearing" 13). In the novel, Angel wonders what history, what kinds of stories, "would allow men to go against their inner voices, to go against even the

cellular will of the body to live and to protect life, land, even their own children and their future” (288). Creating new stories that articulate this connection between the health of indigenous peoples and lands and that of the dominant culture are essential for combating environmental injustice.

While stories modeled on healing ceremonies demonstrate the interrelationships between the “community of all living things,” those modeled on mourning ceremonies emphasize our responsibility to share the burden of injustice and act to remedy it. In one insert narrative, Agnes describes how Bush constructs a mourning ceremony to deal with the grief of Angel’s absence after the county returns her to her abusive mother and eventually takes her out of reach to state foster care in Oklahoma.²⁵ Like the novel, this ceremony is a self-consciously “invented” story, a new ritual concocted out of tradition and imagination to address a practical problem. While Bush tells the community that “this was her tradition,” they “suspect that she’d invented this ceremony, at least in part, but mourning was our common ground and that’s why they came, not just for her, but out of loyalty for the act of grief” (15). However, the most important part of the ceremony is that Bush gives away all of their joint possessions so that “when [the guests] went through [the door] each person carried a part” of “Bush’s sorrow. We all had it after that. It became our own. . . . After that your absence sat at every table, occupied every room, walked through the doors of every house” (17). This strategy of distributing a sorrow that is too overwhelming for a person to bear alone exposes the narrative strategy and ethical

²⁵ For a comparison of the mourning ceremony scene and Chickasaw traditional mourning feasts, see Catherine Kuncie.

stance of the novel. The text accomplishes the same thing as Bush's ceremony—it forces us to share in its invented ceremony and carry part of the burden of this painful history with us.

Hogan proposes an ethic of witnessing as an alternative to the cycle of violence the women perpetuate. The alternative to inflicting violence on others in order to gain control over the trauma is to narrate it to and with others. The novel formally dramatizes this strategy through its use of multiple narrators and insert narratives. Angel's grandmothers tell her stories of the trauma's origins which she then "tells" the novel's readers. This form establishes a series of narrators and narratees that offers an alternative to the series of victims and victimizers that replicate violence in an "infinite" cycle. Narrators and narratees form a chain of witnesses that alleviate the burden of trauma by sharing it and simultaneously making it publicly legible and "multidimensional." Unlike the two-dimensional representations that de-corporealize trauma, this ethic of witnessing gives readers, as Hogan contends, the ability and responsibility to "see the story from inside their own body, inside their own selves" (Johnson 3). Hogan's approach does not suggest that the reader is then able to "feel" this trauma in the same way as its direct victims, but that encouraging an empathic response in readers is crucial for mobilizing political resistance. As such, this chain of witnesses works similarly to what Dominick LaCapra calls "empathic unsettlement," which involves "put[ting] oneself in the other's position while recognizing the difference of that position and hence not taking the other's place" (78). In Hogan's approach, as I argued earlier, this empathic response extends beyond human bodies to the body of land as well. The "role of empathy" in the novel,

argues Castor, is to “influence her reader’s attitudes and understanding of the ways in which indigenous people’s rights are connected to the survival of the planet” (159).²⁶

Thus, this ethic of witnessing reflects Hogan’s larger, global approach to environmental justice and alliance politics. She sees her writing as contributing to a global justice movement that puts “the personal in its global context”:

I ask myself how to best let my words serve. I know that part of that is to take a global perspective, because I see what’s happening in the world, and others see, and our combined voices are a chorus, a movement toward life. They are a protest against human imposed suffering. They are vital energy going out into the world. We feed each other with that energy when we read each other’s work. (Smith 154)

This appeal to a larger community reflects the strategy of Cree and Inuit leaders as well. Chief Coon-Come, for instance, argues that abandoning “human rights” and the “environment” to “ensure that the air conditioners of New York City can run full force” is untenable “if we as a people, as a planet, want to survive” (Picard, “Power”). This is not just “an Indian issue,” he explains, but one that requires the mobilizing of public opinion and the creation of broad alliances to be successful: “we need to world to be concerned. Collectively, we can do it; separately, we will be defeated” (Picard, “Power”).

²⁶ Similarly, Jill Fiore argues that Hogan instills empathy by positioning her account of indigenous women in terms of global problems: “In asking the questions that pertain to us all, Hogan enables readers to feel a sense of empathy for the characters, events, and larger political struggles represented in the story. . . . Hogan’s novel is transformative insofar that it transmits a global message that influences her readers’ understanding, ensuring for them, as for her characters, a way of life rooted in hope” (60).

In the novel, Hogan depicts the formation of alliances between multiple indigenous communities as well as white environmental groups. Her “alliance politics,” claims Jim Tarter, suggests “new possibilities for intercultural alliances formed on an environmental basis” (139). Hogan’s “global” approach to environmental justice, like her approach to metafiction itself, suggests the need for multiple perspectives that together create an effective community of resistance to bodily and environmental trauma.

Although by the end of the novel Hannah finds no relief from her trauma, the novel itself becomes a kind of ceremony that enables Angel to break the cycle of violence by narrating this bodily and environmental trauma instead of replicating it. Angel’s ability to tell this story is predicated on her acquired understanding of the relation between the trauma inflicted on her body and the damage to indigenous memory and land. While the two-dimensional maps and stories Hogan criticizes obscure the interrelationships between peoples and lands, her “multidimensional” metafiction argues that attending to the ways we narrativize these connections is a pre-condition of healing trauma. However, this novel offers no neat resolution to the problem of bodily and environmental trauma. The nature of wounding remains, to use Hogan’s term, “infinite.” Instead, Hogan’s trauma metafiction highlights the recuperative capacity of narrative for translating the unacknowledged trauma of the women—invisible on neo/colonial maps—into a publicly legible, though never complete, text. Such a “multidimensional” text alleviates trauma’s “infinite” impact by reinstalling it in public memory, thereby making it subject to ethics.

Trauma metafiction, then, does not just critique two-dimensional representations or create multidimensional ones but, like Bush's ceremony, requires readers to take responsibility for these stories. *Solar Storms*' outwardly-directed metafiction ends with a direct address to the reader: "Something beautiful lives inside us. You will see. Just believe it. You will see" (351). Believing, however, requires action according to Hogan. "You do not believe one way and act another," she argues, "You see cruelty and injustice and you act. You do not sit and meditate and think you are making yourself clean and pure by that" (Bruchac 131). In other words, Hogan's trauma metafiction redefines readers as witnesses, and reading as a self-reflexive ceremonial act that makes one responsible for sharing the burden of our stories and taking action to create justice in the "community of all living things."

**Documentary Metafiction, Media and Environmental Justice
in Ruth Ozeki's *My Year of Meats***

In essence, I point an authorial finger at the very thing that I am writing,
and poke a hole in the seamlessness of the happy ending by making it self-
referential and reflective. Ironic.

—Ruth Ozeki, “Conversation”

Documentarian and author Ruth Ozeki's best selling novel *My Year of Meats* (1998) is a partly fictional, partly factual “documentary” narrative of the U.S. meat industry and its representation in commercial media. The book was awarded the Imus American Book Award, a prize which selects “books people actually read,” and the Kiriyaama Prize, which aims to “recognize outstanding books about the Pacific Rim and South Asia that encourage greater mutual understanding of and among the peoples and nations of this vast and culturally diverse region.”¹ Thus the text's reception points both to its accessibility and its cultural acumen. Besides being taught in countless undergraduate courses, and being translated into eleven languages and published in fourteen countries, the novel has generated a robust academic response. Some critics have analyzed the text as an exemplar of transnational literature and as a significant work in the Asian American and ecofeminist canons, while others have criticized the novel's representation of multiculturalism, contrived plot, and penchant for the sentimental. While this scholarship does important work, which my chapter will build on, none of it analyzes the novel as an example of metafiction which self-consciously interrogates the

¹ Information about the Imus American Book Award can be found here: <http://imonthe.net/imus/nfaq.htm>. Information about the Kiriyaama Prize can be found on their website: <http://www.kiriyamapize.org/>.

rhetorical strategies of popular media that perpetuate environmental injustice. This chapter aims to show how reading the text as metafiction helps us understand the political work it attempts, as well as how it responds to and reinvents the postmodern model of metafiction from the 1960s and 70s.

In my introduction I argued that recent metafiction by women of color use the techniques of metafiction not to emphasize the solipsism of literature, but to highlight literature's ability to promote social justice by prompting the reader to self-consciously consider the role of narrative in shaping our conceptions of identities and environments. Whereas Erdrich approached this project through "trickster metafiction" and Hogan through "trauma metafiction," Ozeki writes what I will call "documentary metafiction," a form which self-consciously combines "fact" and "fiction" to critique media representations that perpetuate racism, sexism, and environmental degradation by bolstering corporate power. Like Erdrich's novel, Ozeki's is often accused of being too overtly political and didactic.

Because it explicitly investigates so many political discourses, *My Year of Meats* has been criticized as a "novel of causes." Reviewer Lise Funderburg, for instance, claims that "Ozeki (herself a documentary filmmaker)" sometimes "allows her fiction to be overshadowed by her message." Similarly, Nina Mehta argues that the novel is "too subservient to the author's didactic zeal," and Stephan Faris accuses the novel of furthering Ozeki's "activist agenda." While he later complicates his interpretation, critic Davis Palumbo-Liu admits that the "completeness of this inventory" of causes might "strike one as formulaic and contrived" (54).

Ozeki's response to this charge also marks her critique of the kind of apolitical solipsism that characterizes some postmodern metafiction. "What is it that frightens us about a 'novel of causes,'" she asks, "and conversely, does fiction have to exist in some suspended, apolitical landscape in order to be literary?" (Penguin 8). While Ozeki understands that "didactic, polemical preaching is obnoxious," she also insists on the need for literature to wrestle with "real information and real conflicts."² The novel's catalogue of causes is not merely an attempt at liberal inclusiveness; instead she aims to show how these causes are connected through the larger systems and ideologies which shape our physical and social environments. Metafiction is uniquely suited for this work because the form already privileges the reevaluation of representational conventions we take for granted.

I ultimately argue that reading *My Year of Meats* as documentary metafiction allows us to understand how it uses sentimental stories and empirical knowledge to strengthen its rhetorical appeal for environmental justice by paradoxically scrutinizing the rhetorical conventions of both. The novel condemns the "passive" use of sentiment to produce nostalgia and commercial desire, but also demonstrates how sentimentality can be an effective tool for inspiring political action. Similarly, it criticizes narratives which purport to represent objective knowledge, while simultaneously appealing to facts in order to mobilize readers. This allows Ozeki to critique commercial media representations of national, bodily, and natural environments which reinforce corporate

² These quotes come from Linda Richards' interview and Dave Weich's interview, respectively.

power without promoting apolitical relativism. By laying bare the rhetorical construction of sentimentality and empirical knowledge, the novel requires readers to self-consciously reexamine the ways media narratives shape their own understanding of these environments. Thus what seem to be competing discourses are actually harnessed to further the novel's formal and political project.

The text's metafictional investigation of rhetoric leads to its intervention in the discourses of environmentalism and environmental justice. *The Environmental Justice Reader* defines environmental justice as "the right of all people to share equally in the benefits bestowed by a healthy environment" (Adamson et al 4). Environmental justice groups have critiqued the mainstream environmental movement's tendency to ignore issues of race, gender, and class as well as "environments" that fall outside the bounds of "wilderness" or protected "green space." In this sense, *My Year of Meats* can be read as environmental justice literature that revises traditional nature writing by bringing attention to toxic landscapes. However, the novel also suggests that environmental justice itself must be expanded to include not just toxic landscapes, but the media representations of "environments" that serve to legitimate toxicity. The *Reader* asserts the need to move environmental justice beyond its roots in environmental racism to include factors like "class, gender, family and community relations, sexuality, cultural and ethnic traditions, transnational economics and geographic location" (12). I argue that Ozeki's novel demonstrates the need to add narrative to this list.

My Year of Meats goes beyond traditional approaches to environmental justice that use statistical data to define toxicity and pollution by showing how media and

literary narratives which shape our imagination of the nation, nature, and human bodies are fundamental to this political project. Such narratives form the ideological underpinnings that shape our understanding of environmental problems and solutions, our evaluation of the ethical questions of risk distribution and access to resources, and our imagination of the connections between environmental degradation and other forms of oppression. While most environmental justice scholarship originates in the social sciences, environmental sciences, and philosophy, this chapter contends that the humanities can make an important contribution to environmental justice. The novel brings discourses of media, representation, racism, sexism, violence, and food under the rubric of environmental justice, revealing the need for understanding the connections between them in order to create justice. Ozeki uses documentary metafiction to both depict environmental injustice and to interrogate how the commercial media's representations of female/raced bodies and nature, for instance, legitimate the violent domination and exploitation of both.

This chapter first discusses the novel's metafictional "happy ending" and outlines the formal techniques of documentary metafiction. Next it considers the limitations of previous critical approaches to the novel, arguing that we need to examine both the text's sentimental and empirical rhetorics in order to understand the political function of documentary metafiction. The following sections trace the two types of sentimental rhetoric used in the novel—the language of catharsis and the language of horror. I show how *My Year of Meats* combines these sentimental rhetorics with factual contexts in order to transform the passive consumption of sentiment into a call for real political

action. In the last two sections of the chapter, I demonstrate that commercial media functions as an ideological battleground where narratives of nation, nature, and female/raced bodies can be constructed or dismantled. These sections illustrate how the novel metafictionally models the critical reading of texts through a narrator who interprets the novel's own intertexts. Finally, I argue that while *My Year of Meats* acknowledges its own constructedness and inability to represent "Truth," unlike conventional postmodern metafiction it also insists that the subjective nature of truth and the constructedness of narrative can actually prompt political action rather than paralysis or apathy.

Happy Endings

To introduce the function of Ozeki's metafiction, I will start by looking at one of the most criticized parts of the novel, the ending. The main narrative traces Japanese American narrator Jane Tagaki Little's work as a director for *My American Wife!*³ This Japanese-aired "documentary" TV show combines cooking segments with lifestyle pieces on various American wives to promote meat consumption for U.S. trade syndicate BEEF-EX. The Tokyo-based storyline focuses on Akiko and her husband Joichi Ueno, the show's executive producer and a chronic domestic abuser. Besides creating the show's most controversial episodes, Jane also makes an independent documentary and "writes" the novel *My Year of Meats*. Although Jane presumably would not have access in particular to some of the scenes that occur in Japan, she does claim that the novel is a "work of my imagination," signing "J.T.-L" after her "Author's Note." The narrator-as-

³ For typographical ease, I will not reproduce the exclamation point of the show's title in future mentions.

author is a characteristic technique of metafiction which depict “the process of actually writing the fictional text one is reading at the moment” (Hutcheon 53). The political function of this technique in *My Year of Meats* is illustrated most clearly in the novel’s last pages.

The novel ends after Jane has gotten fired from the show for filming the unsavory aspects of a factory farm, and had a traumatic miscarriage after discovering that her uterus was permanently damaged from the doctor-prescribed DES (synthetic estrogen) her mother took during pregnancy. Despite this, Ozeki willfully writes a “happy ending” that focuses on the success of Jane’s independent documentary in bringing global attention to growth hormones, the emerging coalition of women it inspires to oppose the meat industry, the justice meted out to many of the novel’s villains, and Jane’s hopes for environmental justice in the future.

Even as Jane narrates her happy ending, though, she reflects on its form and function. Although she admits that merely writing a happy ending is “too easy and not so interesting,” and that she may not be able to “change [her] future simply by writing a happy ending,” she does insist that she will “certainly do [her] best to imagine one” (361). This imperative to imagine a happy ending is not merely a personal strategy to create hope, but a collective one that Ozeki shows to be necessary for political change. In fact, she argues that “the first step toward change depends on the imagination’s ability to perform this radical act of faith” (Penguin 13).

Asked in an interview why she ended the novel this way, Ozeki acknowledges that, like Jane, she is “suspicious” of happy endings, but sees this ending as both

satisfying and self-reflexive. “By having Jane discuss the shortcomings of happy endings right smack in the middle of one,” Ozeki notes, “I was hoping to invite the reader into a more complex relationship with that ending. In essence, I point an authorial finger at the very thing that I am writing, and poke a hole in the seamlessness of the happy ending by making it self-referential and reflective. Ironic” (Penguin 13). The novel’s ending thus simultaneously imagines change and metafictionally reflects on the act of imagining—and writing—change. Both approaches are crucial for inspiring readers to take action rather than being mired in pessimism or apathy. In other words, the novel uses its metafictional self-reflexivity not to underscore the apolitical solipsism of literature, but as the very basis of its political project.

The combination of “satisfying narrative closure” with self-reflexivity about that closure, in Ozeki’s words, “free[s] the intellect to continue its trajectory beyond the story line, pondering the issues the book raises,” a crucial function given that “without the power of the imagination we lack the power to alter outcomes” (Penguin 13). Rather than providing an uncomplicated romantic conclusion, this ability to inspire the reader comes not simply from the actual “outcomes” that Ozeki or Jane imagine, but from their self-consciousness. Inverting conventional criticism that views happy endings as escapist and romanticized in favor of the more ambiguous “open” ending, the novel seeks to enable readers to move out of its story-world and into the world of political action. This leaves the text open to criticisms like those expressed by reviewer Stephan Faris that “the plot seems contrived—all the puzzle pieces fit too neatly.” While Shameem Black admits that “the conclusion of the novel can appear somewhat contrived and overly optimistic,” she

claims that “in its tidy plot resolutions and comically vengeful disposals of its characters, the novel creates an illusion of justice (both legal and poetic) that attempts not to usurp the place of historical justice but to imagine its possible contours” (“Fertile” 249).

The novel’s self-conscious happy ending is not a “closing off” of imagination, but an invitation to “open up” reader’s imaginations to its extra-textual contexts. This argument is reinforced by Ozeki’s formal and political strategy of including a list of references after the ending that provides texts on meat production, factory farming, and the health effects of DES, as well as contact information and websites for advocacy organizations. Thus not only does Ozeki design her metafictional ending to inspire political action in readers, she uses extra-textual references to explicitly point readers to resources that enable them to extend the book’s conversation beyond the scope of its pages. Linda Hutcheon argues that while novels usually employ “documentary evidence” to “authenticate the core universe,” in metafiction the use of extra-textual materials like footnotes are meant as parodies of narrative conventions that ultimately direct the reader back inward to the text (63). Ozeki, however, includes this bibliography not to “authenticate” her narrative world or to parody it, but to direct her reader outward to its political contexts.

Documentary Metafiction

Besides propelling the reader outside the text’s boundaries, this list of references signals the documentary style of the novel’s form and content. Ozeki’s “documentary metafiction” uses techniques like montage (of texts, genres, and discourses), multiple narrators, and the combination of “fact” and “fiction” to self-consciously reflect on the

ethics of representing “subjects” and environments. The “Author’s Note” that precedes the list of references demonstrates the novel’s documentary impulse: “Although this book is a novel, and therefore purely a work of my imagination, as a lapsed documentarian I feel compelled to include a bibliography of the sources I have relied upon to provoke these fictions. –J.T.-L.” While the author’s note is attributed to narrator Jane Tagaki-Little, Ozeki has described herself in similar terms as a documentarian-turned-novelist. In fact, her impetus to write this first novel began with a desire to “record some of the anecdotes” that occurred off-screen during her work on a documentary television show. “I hate wasting good narrative,” says Ozeki, “and am an archivist at heart” (Penguin 6).

One way in which Ozeki attempts to “archive” the late twentieth-century moment is through the montage of various texts, genres, and discourses. This technique was inspired by Ozeki’s documentary-style films, *Halving the Bones* and *Body of Correspondence*, which “both rely heavily on montage in their construction” (Penguin 9). While the novel’s core narrative follows Jane’s travels across the U.S. to film *My American Wife*, Ozeki complicates the form by including multiple inter- and intratexts. Office memos and faxes, recipes and letters, episode outlines and scripts, newspaper and magazine articles, journal entries and poems pepper the novel throughout. In addition, Ozeki interweaves long quotations from two actual texts: *The Pillow Book*, the eleventh-century “documentary” diary of Japanese courtier Sei Shonagon, and the 1902 edition of *Frye’s Grammar School Geography*. She also includes references to other “real” books, quoting, for instance, from meat industry “bible” *The Meat We Eat*. This onslaught of texts is not meant simply to reflect the fragmentation and frenzy of the contemporary

world, but to demonstrate how all these different “narrative” forms, which generate vastly different representations of the same subject, interact to construct our understanding of an issue like the marketing of meat.

In context, these texts function to “point a finger” at the conventions and assumptions of various genres, and in juxtaposition, each narrative serves as a reflection on the other micro-texts. For example, Shonagon’s lists of subjects like “Hateful Things” and “Times When One Should Be on One’s Guard,” which preface each chapter, catalogue the particular trials of (unmarried) women’s lives and loves. These lists are juxtaposed to producer Joichi Ueno’s lists of “Desirable Things” and “Undesirable Things” in American wives, which define women in terms of their “attractiveness” and “wholesomeness” and circumscribe their lives to a heteropatriarchal domestic realm. In another instance, Ozeki juxtaposes industry text *The Meat We Eat*’s claim that “a liberal meat supply has always been associated with a happy and virile people,” with “Beef Junkies,” a fictional magazine article which explicitly cites growth hormones in beef as the cause of global drops in sperm count. Such examples demonstrate the critical edge of Ozeki’s montage. This play of texts allows the novel to reflect on broader metafictional questions about how form and editing influences meaning, how the economic realm infiltrates the cultural or literary, how some narratives are validated and others are ignored, and how we approach our ethical responsibilities as global media-makers or consumers.

Ozeki’s multiple texts parallel her use of multiple narrators and modes of narration. While Jane’s first person narration is most ubiquitous, the novel also includes

sections from the third person perspectives of Akiko Ueno, and of Suzie Flowers and Grace Boudreaux, American wives featured on the show. In an interview, Ozeki describes “the juxtaposition of first-person and third-person narrative voices” as a “transgression” of the conventional “straight, linear structure” of novels (Penguin 9). While one reviewer found that this structure made for “a jalopy of a book whose various bits seemed tied together with baling wire,” another claimed that the frequent switching of points of view worked well to “accommodate[e] the television viewer’s attention span.”⁴ Ozeki herself argues that multivocal narrative and “extreme subjectivity” serve to undermine “notions of absolute or objective truth” (Penguin 9).

Not only does Ozeki employ this structure, but point of view is something “Jane discusses quite overtly in the novel,” signaling the metafictional approach of Ozeki’s form (9). While “extreme” might overstate the novel’s experiment with subjectivity, Jane repeatedly discusses the unsettling experience of immersing herself in the lives of the women she films: “the parameters of my own world would collapse, sucked like a vacuum pack around the shapes of the families and the configurations of their lives” (140). Asked about her use of multiple narrators in both her novels, Ozeki argues that “if we don’t learn to inhabit other people’s perspectives, then we’re never going to understand why people do what they do” (Zeisler). Thus multivocal narrative and self-reflexivity about that mode is not merely an aesthetic choice, but is linked to the ethical need to understand multiple perspectives.

⁴ From Claire Dederer’s review and Stephan Faris’s review.

The most crucial and defining characteristic of Ozeki's documentary metafiction is its constant shifting between rhetorical modes. Her rhetorical project, designed to persuade readers of the human and environmental costs of the meat industry and the general commodification of the media, incorporates fiction and nonfiction, sentimental stories and empirical knowledge. She relates this approach to her "racially halved" status, being (like Jane) half Japanese and half white, which makes her "suspicious of binary oppositions—comedy and tragedy, documentary and drama, fact and fiction" (Penguin 9). Jane expresses a similar stance when she notes that because she is "halved" and "neither here nor there," her "understanding of the relativity inherent in the world is built into [her] genes" (314). While this form is not, of course, unique to Ozeki, both she and Jane imply that the "displacement" of traditional genre distinctions reflects their feelings of racial displacement and inherent questioning of rigid categories.

Like her use of montage and multiple narrators, Ozeki's combination of "documentary and drama, fact and fiction" structured her two independent films as well. She describes *Body of Correspondence* as a "drama with documentary aspirations," and *Halving the Bones* as a "documentary with fictional lapses" (Penguin 9). In *Halving the Bones*, for example, which traces the history of her Japanese family through the image of her grandmother's bones, Ozeki includes home movies depicting her young grandmother in Hawaii with voiceover excerpts from her grandmother's autobiography. After the scene shifts to an interview with Ozeki's mother, who argues that people "color their memories" with fictional inventions, Ozeki admits to the camera that the home movies and autobiography are faked. She explains, however, that "even though [she] made up the

way [she] represented them, the facts of their lives are all true.” By presenting the footage and then explicitly discussing its fictionality, Ozeki calls the nature of objective truth into question—suggesting that fiction may offer the “truest” way of representing some facts.

My Year of Meats also switches between fiction and documentary, however, like the films, these shifts are not merely stylistic experiments or plot expedients but important components of her rhetorical and political project. Ozeki’s use of multiple rhetorical modes functions both to increase the persuasive political capacity of the novel and to enable a juxtaposition of modes that allows for a metafictional reflection on the workings of each. Most critical analysis of the novel, however, focuses either on its sentimentality or on its environmental valences. Although this distinction is not absolute by any means, as many critics pay at least some attention to both aspects, it means to categorize what seem to be the two primary approaches to reading the novel. *My Year of Meats* has been both criticized and praised for its representation of “sentimental” stories.

Sentimental Stories and Empirical Knowledge

While some critics characterize the novel’s use of the sentimental as romanticized, contrived, or clichéd, others argue that its focus on visceral suffering and emotional connection provides an important affective appeal. Although the text is eminently contemporary in its focus on global media networks and food technology, Ozeki’s language often replicates that of traditional women’s sentimental fiction from decades and centuries past. When, for example, Jane describes the otherworldly beauty of a girl who’d been paralyzed by a Wal-Mart delivery truck, she notes that “her hair shone like a mutable golden corona, whose shiftings and waftings sent fractured particles of

light into the leaden air” (137). Christina Bukowsky is “simply and heartbreakingly radiant,” with the “eyes of an angel” that “spilled crystalline tears of beatitude and joy” (137). The presence of such over the top sentimental rhetoric in a novel supposedly about the corrupt meat industry led one reviewer to write that “Ozeki’s novel sometimes feels as much like a Lifetime movie as a complex, hard-hitting exposé” (Mehta). Lifetime movies might be the contemporary equivalent of women’s sentimental novels of the past: both are marketed to women, and seem to associate sentiment with femininity. In her analysis of the novel’s sentimentality, Black notes that critiques of sentimental literature have shown that its focus on individual suffering often masks broader power relations, thereby allowing sympathizers to ignore their own complicity in the other’s suffering (*Fiction* 81).

Perhaps the most strident critique of the novel’s sentimentality centers on what critics describe as its romanticized or clichéd representations of multiculturalism. Linking the text to popular (and marketable) notions of harmonic diversity, Faris claims that “Ozeki must have written this book to make Oprah’s Book of the Month Club. She pushes all the right buttons: race, gender, community, self-empowerment.” While this criticism implies that literature about these pressing political issues is economically calculated to push social “hot buttons,” Black admits that despite the novel’s progressive political “aspirations” it often reflects “specifically liberal stereotypes at work (multiracial vegetarian lesbians, heartwarming African American families, luminous disabled children)” (*Fiction* 70). Monica Chiu argues that this “American-style romance with difference,” represented in the novel’s vision of a “happy, multicultural America,”

elides the “forgotten story” of racial violence and poverty (109). Rather than promoting a critical reflection on multiculturalism, “the novel expects that its readers will sympathize with and support Jane’s efforts at televising America’s ‘difference’” (108). Although she acknowledges that the text does depict racism and economic injustice, Emily Cheng also characterizes it as an “idealized portrayal of multiculturalism” (202). One episode, which tells the story of an impoverished family of Mexican immigrants, has been particularly criticized for reinforcing a problematic American Dream narrative in which the father’s disfiguring agricultural accident is glossed over as their Texas-Style Beefy Burritos recipe becomes a celebratory “symbol of their hard-earned American lifestyle” (61). What Chiu calls the “pull-themselves-up-by-their-bootstraps’ mentality” of the Martinez story is echoed in David Palumbo-Liu’s claim that this episode is “placed squarely” within the typical “immigrant story,” becoming a wan “cliché” of diversity (107).

All of these critics point to a problematic reliance on the rhetoric of sentimental multiculturalism, however, a few ultimately read the novel’s sentimentality as an effective persuasive strategy. “While we might cringe at the clichés and the ‘nationalist’ sentimentality found in Ozeki’s novel,” writes Palumbo-Liu, episodes like the Martinez one are “primarily geared toward eliciting interest and sympathy from a broad moderate and liberal audience” (61). Similarly, Black argues that the novel’s focus on public health and the “suffering body” speaks to middle-class readers who “might not otherwise be galvanized against . . . structural sources of harm” (“Fertile” 240). Because public health issues like food safety have become a “national middle-class obsession” in a “late twentieth-century American context,” Ozeki’s rhetorical approach “speaks to the pressing

practical concerns of [her] readership” (*Fiction* 88).⁵ Palumbo-Liu follows Richard Rorty in emphasizing the ethical importance of a “sentimental education” which manipulates audiences through telling “sad and sentimental stories” in order to impel them to “imagine themselves in the shoes of the despised and oppressed” and thereby treat others as “humans” rather than “subhumans” (Rorty 179). Even as both critics acknowledge the problematic fact that this approach relies on appeals to those already in power, Palumbo-Liu insists that “we ignore the sentimental at our own risk—rather than simple knowledge or ‘rationality’ it might be the most powerful tool in persuasive storytelling, and progressives should reclaim that as a tool” (66).

What the most strident critiques of the novel’s sentimentality seem to overlook is the difference between *My American Wife*’s use of sentiment and the novel’s. Ozeki doesn’t employ sentimentality in a simple or unselfconscious way, but rather makes the rhetoric of sentimentality an overt subject of discussion. The first episode of the show, before Jane becomes its director, demonstrates the program’s corporate-driven mandate to instill in its audience both feelings of nostalgia and commercial desire. In the last scene of the Suzie Flowers episode, which the crew tapes first, this “American Wife sits on the floor in front of a fireplace” with her husband (1). This scene is meant to link meat products with a nostalgic sense of “hearth and home” (8). However, the next sentences of Jane’s description quickly introduce a sense of the artificiality and sentimental

⁵ In her larger work, Black argues that literary sentiment is only useful in situations where there are “only moderately strong imbalances of power” between the sympathizer and the sympathized, and when sympathizers are encouraged to “take action to alleviate the suffering of others” (*Fiction* 69).

calculation of the scene. The iconic image of a family gathered around the collective hearth is replaced with a simulacrum: rather than a roaring fire, the couple basks in the “flickering light from an electric yule log, left there all year round” while sitting “nervously on a brand-new pink shag rug from Wal-Mart” (1). Director Oda wants to capture a “romantic” kiss, but the couple’s nervousness about being on television makes the moment “creepy” and awkward as the husband “lurches forward . . . and bangs his teeth hard against his wife’s upper lip” (1-2). While the show’s audience sees only the highly edited version of the scene, the novel’s reader is immediately aware of the show’s calculated attempts to construct affect.

Since readers have backstage passes, we can see the effort that goes into making the “fake” seem “real.” The show employs a “food stylist” who labors over slabs of steak “with her little camel-hair brushes to achieve just the right blush of pink,” and several “meat wranglers” who paint beef with glycerin to make it “glisten” and “sizzle” (42). Ozeki admits that she herself used “meat-wrangling tricks” on Mrs. America, “applying glycerin to a T-bone to make it glisten, tucking sanitary napkins under a tenderloin to keep the blood from spoiling the nice clean platter” (“My Year”). The process of food styling becomes particularly fraught for Suzie Flowers, whose recipe called “Coca-Cola Roast” is actually included in the text. Besides featuring a list of “classic” American processed ingredients, including Campbell’s Cream of Mushroom Soup and Lipton’s Powdered Onion Soup (all name-brand), the key ingredient for this recipe is, of course, “Coca Cola (*not* Pepsi, please!)” (19). The almost slap-stick humor of the scene in which Suzie prepares the recipe rests on the contrast between Coke as the “real thing” and Pepsi

as an imposter. In order to film multiple shots of the cooking scene, they not only have to “wash off the raw meat in the sink and pat it dry with paper towels to make it look new again,” but, because the store has run out of Coke, they have to keep filling up the original Coke bottle with Pepsi. Upon reviewing the episode, producer Kenji is particularly impressed by a close-up of the Coke bottle (a “great product shot”) because he recognizes the commercial appeal of associating beef with a classic American product like Coca-Cola. Jane replies with a tongue-in-cheek response that sums up not just this episode, but the show’s problem in general: “It’s Pepsi, Kenji. Not the real thing at all” (30).⁶ By self-consciously questioning the “realness” of the episode’s depiction, Jane introduces a tension between sentiment and its representation which is then developed throughout the novel.

While the Coke substitution is an innocuous and even funny example of misrepresentation, the episode’s sequencing of the Flowers’ story demonstrates a more sinister falsification. During the “Sociological Survey,” a segment used to reinforce the show’s status as a “documentary” program, Suzie’s husband suddenly reveals that he’s having an affair with a cocktail waitress. During editing, director Oda places this revelation right before the “special Valentine’s Day moment” where the couple shares a kiss by the fireplace (29). Thus the version aired on TV shows a seamless and sweet

⁶ Coca-Cola’s use of the “real” as a marketing technique has a long history. Its slogan from 1942, “The only thing like Coca-Cola is Coca-Cola itself” was the beginning of the campaign for “realness” and uniqueness that later became more explicit. The 1969 slogan, perhaps the company’s most well-known, was “It’s the real thing.” This rhetoric reappears in recent years with the 2003 slogan, simply “Real.” and 2005’s “Make It Real,” which implies not only that Coke is “real” but that it will actually make consumers’ lives “more real.”

narrative wherein the couple “had this minor tiff but everything turned out all right in the end” (29). To accentuate the “unreality” of the edited version, Jane notes how it also includes tacky sound effects (a “boinnnggg!” when the husband reveals his affair) and graphics (a “cartoon heart” that emanates from the final kiss). This “documentary” program explicitly incorporates the cruder techniques of advertising—the cartoon heart represents not genuine affect, but a “cheap computer graphics effect, like a TV ad for phone sex” (29). It is this gross misrepresentation that prompts Jane, and her reader, to consider the tension between “reality” and representation. When Jane objects that show’s final version is shamefully false, Kenji reminds her that she “choose[s] all the content. The only thing you don’t do is cut” (30). However, she realizes in this moment that “editing is what counts” because it has the power to completely alter the narrative’s meaning and the audience’s response. The tension established in this scene resonates throughout the novel as Jane becomes more and more aware of the importance not just of “content” but of “cutting”—the “form” in which content is presented. Further complicating this dynamic, at the end of the novel Suzie reports that showing her husband the tape of their “fake” resolution on camera actually inspired him to reconcile with her in “real life.” This reaction demonstrates the ironic ability of even “fake” representations of sentiment to generate “real” feeling.

So how is *My American Wife*’s use of sentimentality different from the novel’s? While *My American Wife* presents seamless sentimental narratives designed to conceal their constructedness from the audience, the novel metafictionally exposes how these episodes carefully construct affect for commercial appeal. *My American Wife* functions

not as a representation of the novel's ethics, but as a *mise en abyme*, or documentary within a documentary, that teaches readers to think critically about the representation of sentimentality. The manipulation of sentiment for passive consumption that we see in the Flowers episode is, as I have shown, overtly criticized. Episodes under Jane's direction, like the Martinez and Bukowsky shows, are still highly sentimental, but even so are not unselfconscious since Jane explicitly discusses how she constructs the affect they exhibit. Rather than including in these episodes explicit discussions of poverty, racism, or corporate abuses, Jane focuses on creating moving images of her subjects. When she films young Bobby Martinez standing in a sea of waving grass holding his prize 4-H piglet, named American Supper, she knows this moment will be particularly poignant for audiences: "a little Mexican boy shyly offering his American Supper to the nation of Japan. . . . It was a surreal and exquisite moment" (61). Similarly, as Jane describes the "heartbreaking radiance" of Christina Bukowsky, she notes that the "best [part] was that you could see it on camera" (137).

Because Jane both films these exquisite moments and discusses how she overtly constructs her shots to produce sentiment, they become not simple representations of "reality" but metafictional reflections on the nature of representation. While these episodes in particular offer no explicit political critiques, they are both genuine attempts to "humanize" subjects the show's bosses seek to exclude (raced and disabled bodies) and are further complicated by other more overtly political sections of the novel. I agree with critics that the portrayal of these and other families on *My American Wife* are stereotypical and romanticized, however, they are made from the perspective of a flawed

narrator who only gradually comes to a more developed ethics of representation. As Palumbo-Liu reminds critics, Jane's views should not be automatically equated with Ozeki's. Furthermore, Jane's self-conscious reflections on how media productions deliberately generate affect, accessible only to the novel's readers, complicate even the most romanticized episodes. Other parts of the novel, as I will show, demonstrate Jane's use of sentimental rhetoric and images to encourage political action rather than the passive consumption of "happy multiculturalism" or vicarious suffering.

Ozeki's self-consciousness about the romanticized representations on *My American Wife* is further corroborated by reflections on her previous work with a TV show called *Mrs. America* which closely parallels *My American Wife*. *Mrs. America*, sponsored by an American meat industry lobby group and aired on the Fuji Television Network in Japan, was tasked with promoting American meat products by taking "Japanese housewives out of their living rooms and into the heartland of America" ("My Year"). Like *My American Wife*, *Mrs. America* was designed to "depict happy, rural American families enjoying delicious meals." Just as Ozeki comes to regard this sentimental narrative of American wholesomeness as a "fiction, gussied up as fact," so Jane undergoes a "slow process of . . . political awakening" throughout the course of the novel ("My Year"). Ozeki's work on *Mrs. America* eventually inspires her to write *My Year of Meats*, which uses her insider knowledge of commercial television to critique rather than reinforce an "idealized" narrative of America. Mirroring Ozeki's own "political awakening," the novel is not just an emotional "experiment" in using sentimental rhetoric to obfuscate harsh realities, social power relations, or "forgotten

stories” (Chiu 109). Rather, the novel’s rhetoric is explicitly designed to demonstrate how sentiment can be translated into action.

While the aforementioned critics focus mainly on the novel’s use of sentimentality, other scholars concentrate primarily on its environmental valences. Jennifer Ladino reads the novel in the tradition of ecofeminist fiction, since it uses the historical narrative of American meat to draw connections between the oppression of women and the exploitation of nature. Highlighting its “toxic humor,” Cheryl Fish claims that the novel “offers a counterpoint to the rhetoric of fear and catastrophe that dominates many environmentally themed works” (57). In contrast, Melissa Shoeffel focuses on the novel’s portrayal of the “effects of technologized food production on women’s reproductive bodies” (112). Similarly, Julie Sze examines how both female characters and the food they eat are shaped by corporate pollution such as DES. Although I will return to some of these arguments later in the chapter, this brief sketch outlines the environmental approach these critics take.

Whereas the “sentiment” critics tend to focus on episodes of *My American Wife*, the “environment” critics tend to foreground the novel’s fact-based sections which address the meat industry. Although each approach has been quite productive on its own, I argue that we need to combine both in order to understand the ethical function of the novel—that is, how it attempts to combat apathy and political paralysis to inspire action. A focus on sentimentality, for instance, may underemphasize how the novel ultimately uses sentiment to highlight the human costs of environmental degradation. Furthermore, Rorty’s claim that a “sentimental education” is necessary to get people to recognize

others as humans rather than objects, is extended by the novel's plea for readers to recognize the environment as more than an object of exploitation. Alternatively, concentrating on the impact of environmental toxicity on women and food may overlook how these "facts" are shaped by the novel's sentimental rhetoric.

If, instead, we read the novel as a documentary metafiction which self-consciously juxtaposes rhetorical modes, we can account for both its sentimental and empirical approaches. Because the novel's ethical force relies on its oscillation between fictional and "factual" modes, neither can be justifiably ignored.⁷ Not only does this documentary metafiction combine fictional and "factual" modes, it self-consciously models the construction and interpretation of texts. In juxtaposing sentimental stories and empirical facts, Ozeki "points an authorial finger" at the rhetorical techniques we use to persuade others to act. In so doing, she requires readers to think critically about the risks and benefits of particular modes of representation. While Rorty argues that "most of the work of changing moral intuitions is being done by manipulating our feelings rather than increasing our knowledge," Ozeki demonstrates that we must combine "sentimental" and "empirical" educations in order to effect change (172). In other words, a "sentimental education" alone is not sufficient because it lacks the empirical knowledge which contextualizes and historicizes sentimental stories. The following sections illustrate exactly how this dynamic works in the novel.

⁷ Palumbo-Liu cites Jane's growing awareness that "a combination of fact and fiction is necessary to get an audience" for *My American Wife*; however he pays little attention to the fact-based parts of the novel, such as Jane's investigations of DES and factory farming (60). In an interview, Ozeki explicitly characterizes her intention to engage both "the emotions and the intellect" (Penguin 8).

While the mixture of documentary and narrative, fact and fiction, is present throughout the text, it is perhaps most salient in passages which shift between sentimental stories and what Jane calls “Documentary Interludes.” These interruptions of the main narrative provide mostly scientific and historical information about subjects like plant species history, the use of DES in cattle and women, and the environmental impact of factory farming. I trace this trajectory through two such Interludes and the fictional narratives which accompany them in order to show how Ozeki’s sentimental and documentary impulses work together to strengthen her rhetorical appeal. The first section examines cathartic or ecstatic sentimentality, whereas the second section focuses on the novel’s use of horror to produce affect.

Dawes, DES, and Documentary

Ozeki’s most direct Documentary Interlude, about the use of DES in meat production and as medication for pregnant women, is book-ended by the explicitly sentimentalized stories of the Dawes family and Jane’s own infertility. Miss Helen and Mr. Purcell Dawes, and their nine children, are a low-income African American family living in the American South. When Jane and her boss Joichi Ueno, attend a church service and have dinner with the family in preparation for shooting the episode, Jane immediately recognizes the affective appeal of the Dawes’s lives. Jane and Joichi experience the emotional potential of this episode first hand during the church service led by preacher Mr. Purcell. Although they arrive late and nervous (and, in Joichi’s case, hungover), Jane describes how they are both quickly submerged into an ecstatic fervor. “The music filled every crevice of heart and soul,” Jane exclaims, as parishioners began

“grabbing Ueno and me and wrapping us in their arms, then passing us off to another neighbor, to be similarly embraced. Catharsis was close at hand. I dimly understood it, felt it gathering around me” (113). Mimicking religious rhetoric, Jane expresses her surprise that the service would have the affective power to take a “tightly wound Japanese business man” like Ueno and “[break] the bonds of his repression and liberat[e] his wellspring of love” (114). Miss Helen, in turn, is “honestly moved by Ueno’s religious feeling” (115).

Although Ueno ultimately cancels the episode because the Dawes family is not “ideal,” that is, white and middle-class, Jane recognizes the affective impact this show would have on audiences.⁸ “They’re perfect. . . . You’ll never get a more interesting show than that,” she implores, “Think about the church! How can you even *consider* not filming there, after what you went through today!” (118). Despite the fact that the episode was never filmed, Jane’s metafictional reflection on the narrative production of affect demonstrates her aptitude at sensing which modes of representation are best designed to inculcate an emotional response in her audience.

⁸ Ueno rationalizes his racism through an appeal to the preferences of the show’s audiences, and thus to its commercial value. When informed that the Dawes’s plan to make chitterlings, he objects to Jane, saying “it is the intestine of pig. *My American Wife!* is for Japanese people, not for Koreans or black peoples” (119). It is mainly through Ueno, who makes several such comments, that the novel critiques not only U.S. racism but also Japanese racism. Special investigator for the UN, Doudou Diene, made a report in 2005 that described racism in Japan as “deep and profound” (Hogg). In 2010 the U.N. Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination found that the Japanese government was not doing enough to discourage racism, citing, for example, the lack of laws against hate speech (*Japan Times*).

While this experience testifies to the limits of sentimental persuasion, given Ueno's hypocritical and temporary "catharsis," it also reveals the political potential of moving stories. When Jane interviews the Dawes about the kinds of meat they typically eat, Mr. Purcell reveals his personal run-in with hormonally contaminated chicken. "Used to be they had these *parts* that was real good. And cheap down at the packin' house," he relates (117). However, Miss Helen quickly adds that these chicken parts caused "Mr. Purcell's barry-tone" to come out "soundin' serpraner," and also made him develop "teeny little titties" (117). Mr. Purcell explains that "it was some medicines they was usin' in the chickens that got into the necks that we was eatin'" (117). This marks the novel's first exploration of meat toxicity and completely changes the narrative's course.

Although Jane admits she "didn't get it" at the time, this experience directly motivates her to begin the research on meat industry abuses that eventually shapes her social and environmental justice causes. Whereas Ueno ironically uses his cathartic experience to reinforce the Dawes's inferior "otherness," later describing to his wife how "they all went into trances and fell down on the floor," Jane's emotional connection to the family prompts her first attempts at critical inquiry (129). "I knew about antibiotics . . . and I guess I knew that hormones were used too," Jane confesses, "I'd just never given it much thought before. But now I couldn't get the image of Mr. Purcell out of my head. . . . and suddenly I wanted to know more" (124). Where working for the meat industry and eating meat herself had not convinced her to research its practices, the emotionally charged "image of Mr. Purcell" does. Her experience with the Dawes transforms her

abstract half-knowledge about antibiotic and hormone use in meat production, something she'd "never given much thought," into a proactive spur to action.

This is a crucial moment for the novel's rhetorical project because it illustrates both the affective power of sentiment and the corresponding need for empirical knowledge to contextualize sad stories. In fact, Jane later uses this technique of combining emotional images and factual data in her independent documentary. On a broader level, Ozeki employs this strategy to convince readers of the need to translate vicarious sentiment and raw data into concrete political action. Thus this example demonstrates the political potential of the novel's documentary metafiction form.

While all political fiction implicitly responds to extra-textual documents and discourses, Ozeki explicitly cites many of the sources she uses to inform her novel. By metafictionally revealing these sources, she is able to show readers how she uses them to shape her fiction. Immediately after Jane's account of the Dawes family, she shifts into a Documentary Interlude about DES which marks the novel's turn toward characterizing this drug as an environmental justice issue. The following discussion attempts to flesh out the wider context the novel is responding to, and to situate its concerns within a history of environmental justice.

The Interlude traces the history of synthetic estrogen, citing FDA policy, scientific studies, and medical journals to demonstrate the dangerous use of DES in meat production and the scientifically unfounded use of DES to prevent miscarriages. DES was invented by a University of California professor in 1938, and first used to "chemically castrate" male chickens so that they developed the enlarged breasts that

made the meat of female chickens so marketable. Even early studies, however, suggested that hormonally contaminated meats disproportionately affected low-income and people of color. Specifically, Jane cites a 1959 study which “discovered that dogs and males from low-income families in the South were developing signs of feminization after eating cheap chicken parts and wastes from processing plants” (124). While this study, based on the experiences of people like Mr. Purcell, finally prompted the FDA to ban DES use in chickens, the U.S. government ironically allowed the drug’s continued use for cattle and women.

The environmental justice movement did not “officially” begin until almost thirty years later when the 1987 United Church of Christ Commission for Racial Justice (UCC-CRJ) report found that race was the strongest predictor of the location of commercial hazardous waste facilities in the U.S., and executive director Reverend Benjamin Chavis coined the term “environmental racism.” However, Jane’s research into DES reveals a precursor to the data later used to jumpstart the environmental justice movement.

Although the particular report she cites is from 1959, the problem of environmental toxins being unequally distributed to people of color and the poor is more widespread today than ever. A new report published by the Commission in 2007 found that “racial disparities in the distribution of hazardous wastes are greater than previously reported,” which raises “serious questions about the ability of current policies and institutions to adequately protect people of color and the poor from toxic threats” (xi, xii). Similarly, a 2005 Associated Press study showed that African Americans are 79% more likely to live in places where industrial pollution poses a significant danger to public health. While the

work of grassroots organizations in the past twenty years has made environmental justice more publically visible, this has not translated into an effective government response.

“Having the facts and failing to respond,” the 2007 report claims, “is explicitly discriminatory and tantamount to an immoral ‘human experiment’” (xii).

Although the UCC Commission, and most academic work on environmental racism, focuses on industrial pollution and hazardous waste, the kinds of factory farming Ozeki investigates in this novel should also be understood as an environmental justice issue. Within a decade of the patenting of DES in 1954 as the “first artificial growth stimulant,” Jane notes, 95% of U.S. cattle operations were using the drug despite reports that it caused estrogen poisoning in farmers and in consumers like Mr. Purcell. Because it made meat production so much more efficient, and necessitated the confinement of cattle, DES almost single-handedly ushered in the age of large-scale factory farming in the U.S. Like hazardous waste pollution, the negative health effects of factory farming are disproportionately distributed among low-income and people of color. A 2002 study, for instance, found that “census blocks in Mississippi with high percentages of African Americans or people in poverty were much more likely to be the locations of swine CAFOs [concentrated animal feeding operations]” (Wilson et al 196). The 2008 Pew Trust study on industrial farming in the U.S. found that the use of hormones and antibiotics in animal feed constituted a “major risk” to producers and consumers, and that exposure to factory farming pollution increased rates of asthma, depression, anger, fatigue, confusion, impaired balance, hearing, and intellectual function (6). Curtis Stofferhan’s 2006 report determined that communities with industrialized farming have

more income inequality, lower employment, and more negative environmental impacts to health and land, concluding that this practice negatively effects community well-being. Such evidence supports the necessity of approaching factory farming as an environmental justice issue.

In fact, food itself must be framed as an issue of crucial importance to the environmental justice movement. While the mainstream environmental movement has traditionally equated “environment” with “wilderness,” environmental justice activists have redefined environment to include the “places where we live, work, play, and worship” (Adamson et al 4). Ozeki’s novel demonstrates the need, as Robert Gottlieb calls for, to add “where, what, and how we eat” to that list (7). Although the two movements are often at odds, David Schlosberg argues that food justice can bridge the gap between mainstream environmentalism and environmental justice because it incorporates concerns with human toxicity and “nature.” Because food and farming encompass diverse issues including resource conservation, pollution, worker protection, and public health, Orrin Williams sees them as a focus that can unite the environmental justice movement behind a common cause. Chiu’s analysis of *My Year of Meats* rightly points out that food has often been a palatable way of experiencing diversity which threatens to satisfy the desire for “cultural difference” with the simple act of eating “ethnic food” (104).

However, Ozeki’s food theme in this novel is not merely a tour of ethnic foods, but actually links eating practices to environmental justice concerns with toxicity, racism, and poverty. Furthermore, Ozeki points out that food is not just a cultural institution, but

instead represents the intersection of culture, government, and corporations. Eating, she argues, “is now primarily a commercial, economic act” since every bite we take “is the result of a series of decisions that have been made by the Food and Drug Administration and the Environmental Protection Agency, by corporations and scientists, by marketing agencies and PR firms” (Clyne).⁹ Because individual acts of eating are mediated by such power relations, they become a crucial site for challenging larger governmental and corporate structures. When we look at food, the “idea that the political is the personal, and the personal is political becomes very real” (Clyne).

As Ozeki demonstrates in her novel, in order to bring about justice we must make links between public health threats and the larger social and industrial structures which perpetuate them. In this Documentary Interlude, Jane characterizes factory meat production as part of the broader shift toward increasing “econom[ies] of scale” which constitutes “the wave of the future” (125). DES and other drugs, she notes, allow farmers to “process animals on an assembly line, like cars or computer chips” (125). Ironically, factory farming did not model itself on automobile assembly lines—instead car production was actually inspired by factory farming. In fact, the first mechanized swine slaughterhouses in the 1930s gave Henry Ford “the idea to take the swine ‘disassembly’ line idea and put it to work as an assembly line for automobile manufacturing” (Pew 5). Although DES in cattle production was finally banned in 1979, 95% of cattle on factory feedlots still receive some form of growth hormone or pharmaceutical. The rampant use

⁹ Ozeki’s latest novel, *All Over Creation*, demonstrates how this process works with potato products as opposed to meat.

of DES then, and other drugs now, is enabled by what Jane calls “the marriage of science and big business” (125). Despite evidence suggesting harmful health effects in consumers, she notes that it took “almost a decade of bitter political struggle to ban the drug, overcoming tremendous opposition launched by the drug companies and the meat industry,” neither of which were willing to forego the enormous profits DES generated. Similarly, the Pew study cites the “agro-industrial complex—an alliance of agricultural commodity groups, scientists at academic institutions who are paid by the industry, and their friends on Capitol Hill” as an over-arching “concern in animal food production in the 21st century” (viii).¹⁰

Ozeki illustrates the devastating effects of this “marriage of science and big business” when applied to women’s bodies. Starting in 1947, DES was prescribed for pregnant women to prevent miscarriages and premature birth even though no studies were conducted to determine its effects on women or fetuses. In fact, several early studies on animals, like the one at Northwestern University Medical School in 1930, suggested that DES caused deformities of the sexual organs, and even cancer, in offspring.¹¹

¹⁰ Historian Alan Marcus reinforces this claim that drugs like DES require a “partnership” between different social sectors: “the case of DES seemed to be a model of the application of the partnership idea. A college scientist uncovered a new technique, pharmaceutical scientists produced the drug, feed-manufacturing scientists compounded the material as a premix, federal scientists approved its use, agricultural college scientists publicized it by demonstrating its utility, and farmers made use of it. That type of expert-based interaction had been the model for ‘progress’ since the 1920s. With respect to stilbestrol, little in the mid-1950s seemed to undercut faith in that model” (25).

¹¹ Later studies proved links between DES use in pregnancy and many health problems in offspring. Daughters of women given DES, as Jane mentions, suffered from cancer, irregular menstruation, high risk pregnancies, and “structural mutations of the vagina, uterus, and cervix.” Sons developed mutations of the testicles, “abnormally undersize

Ironically, it was later found that not only did the drug not prevent miscarriages, it increased them and was even subsequently prescribed as a morning-after pill. However, this evidence was discounted by pharmaceutical companies which aggressively advertised their product. Jane cites one such ad, run in the *Journal of Obstetrics and Gynecology*, which claimed that the drug would produce “bigger and stronger babies” (125). The widespread advertising of DES led “many doctors [to prescribe] it casually as a vitamin, to an estimated five million women around the world” (125). Drug companies like Eli Lilly simply requested that the FDA approve DES, in increasingly large doses, for use in pregnancy. “Stunningly the expansion of DES usage to pregnancy and the introduction of larger doses,” reports Roberta Apfel and Susan Fisher, “were done by simple administrative fiat” (19-20). This shocking history provides an acute example of how corporate profits are often valued above women’s health.

The DES narrative Jane uncovers demonstrates how women’s bodies become commercialized sites, and also suggests the revolutionary potential of defining this phenomenon as an environmental justice issue. Discussing the egregious history of DES, Arlene Plevin argues that within a commercial model “the womb, the first home of the child, often a symbol of sanctuary . . . is recast—and one might argue usurped—as the site of corporate earnings” (230). While this accurately describes the DES case, the corporate “usurping” of women’s bodies for profit is a much more widespread phenomenon that occurs in everything from pharmaceuticals to the representation of

penises, defective sperm production, and low sperm count, all of which increased the risk of testicular cancer and infertility” (126).

women in advertising. Furthermore, women bodies are particularly vulnerable to certain environmental toxins which affect reproductive organs and accumulate in fatty tissue.¹² Urging the inclusion of gender and sexuality as factors of analysis in the environmental justice movement, Rachel Stein argues that women must “view our bodies as ‘homes,’ ‘lands,’ or ‘environments,’ that have been placed at risk, stolen from us, and even killed due to social or physical harms that may be exacerbated due to our gender and sexuality” (2).

Redefining women’s bodies as sites of environmental injustice can empower women to link their struggles with other forms of oppression in order to illuminate the larger structures which perpetuate them. Unlike most artistic narratives of DES, points out Julie Sze, Ozeki’s focuses not just on its use in women but also traces its use in animals. This allows Ozeki to link her narrative with the corporate ideology which underlies abuses to women and animals, and to explore the historical characterization of women, especially women of color, as “chattel.” That word, she notes in an essay, “shares its origin with ‘cattle’ and ‘capital,’ thereby exposing the very root of our capitalist etymology. The stock market is named for the livestock traded there. Wall

¹² Robert Verchick cites several studies that demonstrate the particular environmental dangers women face, arguing that the risk assessment models used by government agencies do not take this difference into account: “Women, for instance, may be more susceptible to PCBs, dioxins, and other dangerous chemical that bioaccumulate in fatty tissue (Swanston 1994, 592). Evidence suggests that certain chemical exposures are more likely to damage women’s immune systems (Nelson 1990, 176-77). Women in childbearing years may be more susceptible to ozone exposure (Fox et al. 1993, 242-44). Environmental degradation also threatens women’s capacity to bear and nurse healthy children (Eggen 1992, 848-51)” (70).

Street was an abattoir” (“My Year”).¹³ By relating women and chattel, and redefining Wall Street as a slaughterhouse, Ozeki links the ruthless pursuit of capitalist profits with the oppression of women. If we start with the “fleshy” body, we “can see how, once commodified, it transmogrifies so easily from temple into meat, whereby women become cows and wives become chattel” (“My Year”).

Furthermore, the novel’s shifts between fiction and Documentary Interludes serves to connect personal experiences of environmental harm with their broader political contexts. Like the narrative of Mr. Purcell, Jane describes her own discovery that she is a “DES daughter” in visceral terms. Although she did not know about her own estrogen poisoning until she began researching the drug, Jane was previously diagnosed with infertility and cervical cancer. She depicts the experience of seeing her deformed uterus on an x-ray through the language of violence: it looked like “my uterus had been coldcocked” (153). Using the rhetoric of toxicity, Jane remembers how “barrenness took its toll” on her life, prompting her to quit her graduate studies and eventually get divorced because “it poisoned every single thing we tried to do as a couple” (153). Redefining the womb as a site of violence rather than safety, Jane notes that “the bludgeoning my uterus received occurred when I was still only a little shrimp, floating in the warm embryonic fluid of Ma” (156).

¹³ Perhaps the nation’s most famous stockyard, the Fort Worth Stockyards and Livestock Exchange, is still known as the “Wall Street of the West” for its once large role in the U.S. economy. I will use “My Year” to refer to Ozeki’s essay “*My Year of Meats*” (published in *Shambhala Sun Magazine*) to differentiate it from the novel.

Mirroring Mr. Purcell's story, Jane links DES to race and gender—not through the consumption of contaminated meat, but through the gendered racial stereotypes that made her mother exceptionally vulnerable to prescribed DES. When she tries to get her mother to remember whether she took DES, Ma replies, “maybe sure I take some pill, some vitamin. . . . Doctor say I am so delicate” (156). Suddenly the narrative of her and Ma's bodies “seems perfectly clear”: their small town family doctor was “used to treating large-bodied Swedes and sturdy Danes, with ample child-bearing hips,” so of course he “decided she was delicate” (156). The physical difference of Ma's Japanese body precipitated medical treatment based on the orientalist perception of Asian bodies as fragile and helpless. This example demonstrates how DES is both an issue of environmental justice in general, and of environmental racism/sexism in particular.

Rather than interpreting her story as one of individual loss, Jane uses her experience as a starting point for the environmental justice activism she gradually develops. Judith Hefland, documentarian and fellow DES daughter, had a similar response after learning of her own cervical cancer and undergoing a radical hysterectomy at the age of 25.¹⁴ Like Jane, who'd “never given much thought” to meat toxicity, Hefland says that until that moment “the dangers of toxic chemical exposure hadn't really worried me” (2). Just as Jane “suddenly wanted to know more,” Hefland also “started questioning everything” (2). Refusing to view DES as an isolated instance of environmental injustice, Hefland uses the settlement from her DES lawsuit, what she

¹⁴ Hefland notes on her website that “I read Ruth Ozeki's novel, *My Year of Meats* (1998) while traveling in the UK, where it was published before its release in the US. I couldn't put it down.”

calls her “uterus money,” to fund a documentary film about the toxic pollution of the vinyl industry. In so doing, she connects her “own loss from the poisoning of her body to that of other’s homes and communities” in the impoverished neighborhoods surrounding PVC factories (Plevin 227). Similarly, Jane characterizes her personal story as part of a larger narrative of the corporatization of media, meat, and women’s bodies in particular. Although Jane doesn’t “put these pieces together all at once,” her uncovering of the DES narrative “was a discovery that ultimately changed [her] relationship with meats and television. It also changed the course of [her] life” (124). It is here that she gets a “first glimpse of the larger picture” in which alliances between science, corporations, and government structure both the representations of women’s bodies and their physical compositions. Representing this kind of violence is part of the mission Ozeki outlines in an interview—to show how the “workings of the larger social, political, and corporate machinery impact something as private and intimate as the descent of an egg through a woman’s fallopian tube” (Penguin 8).

This DES data adds rhetorical weight to the novel’s fictional stories. Reviewer Nina Mehta found this break in the fiction to be “manipulative,” as “doctors and other experts are paraded through the novel to provide whatever information is deemed necessary at the moment.” While Ozeki’s reliance on research does interrupt the narrative world, we can also read this strategy as a rhetorical move designed to maximize persuasion by compounding multiple techniques. By combining researched facts and figures with fictional stories that give them a “face,” both the facts and the stories are more rhetorically effective than either would be on their own. Furthermore, this series of

examples illustrates the political potential of this rhetorical strategy. The affect generated by her experience with the Dawes family prompts Jane to do the research that is reported in the Interlude. This research then informs Jane's account of her own "sad story," which she ultimately uses, in turn, to inspire viewers of her independent documentary.

Although Jane's *My American Wife* episodes are ultimately complicit with BEEF-EX's corporate aims, despite her efforts to include people of color and lesbians against the show's mandate, her metafictional reflections on representation demonstrate the paradoxical necessity to combine fact and fiction in order to gain audience appeal and potentially effect social change. By the novel's end, Jane characterizes herself as "half documentarian, half fabulist," noting that "maybe sometimes you have to make things up to tell truths that alter outcomes" (360). Rather than diluting the "truth," claims Palumbo-Liu, novels like Ozeki's demonstrate how literature can "lend new forms of information an affective and ethical content" (64). While the rhetorical strategy of Ozeki's documentary metafiction may seem jarring to some readers and contradictory to others, it may also be a successful attempt to address the contemporary need for texts which imagine the ethical ramifications of the vast quantities of information that circulate in global media.

The Rhetoric of Horror: Violence against Women, Land, and Animals

In contrast to the poignant and cathartic sentimentality Jane highlights in the Dawes story, the following example appeals to emotions through graphic and horrific language. The other major Documentary Interlude in the novel, about the environmental impact of factory farming and cattle, is positioned between the account of Akiko's rape

and the filming of the Dunn feedlot and an abattoir. None of this is aired on *My American Wife*, although footage from the feedlot and abattoir later becomes part of Jane's independent documentary. Part of Joichi's enthusiasm for *My American Wife*, and American meat in general, is due to his belief that meat will "cure" his wife's bulimic infertility. When Joichi finds a fax Akiko sent to Jane, telling of her desire for a new life apart from her husband, that she recently started menstruating again, and that he beats her, he is furious. The brutal scene that follows represents domestic violence in graphic detail. Akiko tries to play dead, lying "limp as a dead cat," but Joichi kicks her in the stomach, suffocates her, and punches her in the face (238). As he "lifted her up by the hips and forced his penis into her anus," he exclaims: "It doesn't matter where I put it . . . because you are a sterile useless women. . . . So I'll do it to you like a little boy. Do you like that?" (239). Joichi's rationale is disturbing on many levels, including its reference to pedophilia and its justification of violence based on Akiko's reproductive capacity. In the aftermath of the rape scene, the rhetoric of pain and bodily suffering is intense. "Slowly the pain began to punch through," Akiko remembers, "like an erratic pulse at points across her body—a dull throb here, a searing tear there" (239). The bloodiness of this violence is emphasized repeatedly as Akiko first "smelled the blood" that made her legs "sticky," and then saw how "the blood was bright and smeared along the insides of her legs" (240). Finally, a "shock of nauseating pain in her anus made her gasp, and she realized the blood was coming from there" (240).

This horrific account of domestic violence is not figured as an isolated event, but is explicitly connected with the violent ideology of the meat industry. According to

“market studies” cited by BEEF-EX officials, Japanese women often feel “neglected” by their husbands. Thus the show aims to select American wives with “clean, healthy-looking husbands who help with the cooking, washing up, housekeeping and child care” (13). Although these criteria appear to promote an equal partnership between mates, they are actually put in the service of a sinister message. BEEF-EX aims to “create a new truism: The wife who serves meat has a kinder, gentler mate” (13). This motto, of course, then implies that it is the wife’s fault if her husband is abusive, mean, and violent. This particular “truism” rings dangerously false for Akiko, who devotedly cooks every meat recipe for her husband Joichi, and yet is the victim of escalating physical and verbal abuse at his hands. When Joichi vaginally rapes her, he asks “Don’t you think I know when you’re in heat?” (239). This language of dehumanization directly links Akiko’s body to the bodies of breeding animals, reinforcing the novel’s attempt to connect the oppression of women with the commercial logic of the meat industry. Ironically, Joichi finds the fax that precipitates this violent episode hidden in an English dictionary when he looks up the word “unsavory” after Jane uses it to describe the meat industry. Dramatizing such connections is one of the political functions documentary metafiction can have because it disrupts the narrative of wholesome family values and American innocence that media productions like *My American Wife* reinforce.

The violence against women’s bodies portrayed in the rape scene is then linked to the meat industry’s violence against land in the Documentary Interlude that follows it. This Interlude, which Jane plans to use in the Dunn episode, takes the form of a conversation between her and Dave Schultz, her local driver and an agricultural student at

Colorado State University. In this scene, Dave becomes a mouthpiece for facts about the environmental impact of cattle on the American West and worldwide. Defining “desertification” as a “National Crisis,” Dave notes that 85% of eroded topsoil in the U.S. (six to seven billion tons) is “directly attributable to livestock grazing and unsustainable methods of farming feed crops for cattle” (248). Ironically, given their status as the western U.S.’s most iconic animal, “cattle are destroying the West” and have already degraded 85% of its rangeland according to a United Nations report cited in the text (249). The impact of cattle on U.S. land is then expanded to include the global impact of greenhouse gas emissions and the devastation of South American rain forests from soybean farming to feed cattle for U.S. fast food restaurants. Dave states that “every McDonald’s Quarter Pounder represents fifty-five square feet of South American rain forest, destroyed forever” (250). While the novel doesn’t specify the source for this information, I found it on the websites of several environmental organizations, including Greenpeace and the Rainforest Action Network.¹⁵ Dave cites a shocking quote from environmental historian Philip Fradkin to reinforce his position: “The impact of countless hooves and mouths over the years has done more to alter the type of vegetation and land forms of the West than all the water projects, strip mines, power plants, freeways and sub-division developments combined” (249). Through this quote from Fradkin’s *Audubon Magazine* article, “The Eating of the West,” Ozeki expands our image of

¹⁵ The Greenpeace website is www.greenpeace.org, and the Rainforest Action Network website is www.ran.org.

environmental toxicity beyond the industrial factories of cities into the rural areas which are often presumed to be more pristine.

Not only does this Documentary Interlude provide factual information about the environmental impact of cattle, by sourcing these facts from some of the most traditional ecological organizations—including the National Audubon Society and Greenpeace—it models how to bring together mainstream environmentalism and environmental justice. Neither the National Audubon Society’s mission to “conserve and protect nature’s at-risk birds and wildlife” nor Greenpeace’s commitment to combat “global warming, destruction of ancient forests, deterioration of our oceans, and the threat of nuclear disaster” explicitly reference issues usually tagged under “environmental justice.”¹⁶ However, placing the conservation-oriented research of such organizations in the context of environmental justice concerns with human toxicity and violence against women, Ozeki demonstrates the necessity of approaching the “environment” as an interconnected web of people and nature.

This documentary account of the “rape” of land connects the horror of domestic violence with the horror of meat production that follows. When Jane films the Dunn family’s industrial feedlot and a local slaughterhouse, her bloody rhetoric directly parallels Akiko’s. Just as Akiko’s “blood was bright and smeared” all over her legs, in the abattoir “blood was everywhere: bright red, brick red, shades of brown and black; flowing, splattering, encrusting the walls, the men” (281). At the Dunn feedlot, Jane’s

¹⁶ Of course, these issues can be interpreted as environmental justice ones. Indigenous environmental movements, for instance, often combine a focus on “wilderness” with the environmental racism of industrial polluters.

crew films a “slimy, half-dried puddle” that turns out to be a calf aborted after an injection of the hormone product Lutalyse. This “misshapen tangle of glistening calf-like parts” has “grotesquely bulging eyes . . . alive with newly hatched maggots” (267). A few pages later, Jane’s dream that she gives birth to a stillborn calf, a “misshapen tangle . . . with a dead milky eye . . . alive with maggots,” connects the gruesomeness of the feedlot with her own “misshapen” uterus which is also the result of hormonal toxins (277). This parallel reinforces the link between commodified meat animals and the commodification of women’s bodies.

The extreme grotesqueness of this scene demonstrates how Ozeki uses emotionally-charged rhetoric to encourage a visceral reaction in readers. Replicating for readers her own experience of sensual “assault” in the slaughterhouse, Jane describes it as being “caked with a deep, rotting filth. And thick with flies” (281). Mirroring the images of horror films, slaughterhouse workers “used power tools to perform various operations on the hanging carcasses—lopping off hooves, decapitating, eviscerating—and the whine of the saw severed the air, its blade slicing bone, searing bone, scorching hide and hair” (282).¹⁷ In one of the most vivid and disturbing descriptions, Jane says that “skinning a giant carcass is like peeling the pajamas off a dozing twelve-foot child” (282).

The gruesome rhetoric of the rape and slaughterhouse scenes is not merely a titillating spectacle of vicarious suffering for readers to consume, but an effective strategy for producing politically-directed affect. While Chiu rightly points out that because of the

¹⁷ Ozeki herself once worked to “recreate carnage” on the sets of horror films with names like *Mutant Hunt*, *Breeders* and *Necropolis*.

secrecy of slaughterhouses, “it seems highly contrived that Jane and her crew . . . could have gained entry,” Ozeki steps outside the logic of narrative realism here because the “affective” potential is so high. Although the resort to melodramatic, over-the-top language inherently involves simplification, environmental critic Lawrence Buell argues for the “importance of moral melodrama’s . . . totalizing rhetoric” in descriptions of “environmental poisoning” (659). Accounts of environmental injustice, what Buell calls “toxic discourse,” often rely on a lurid “gothic” rhetoric of “shrill apocalypticism” (662). However, because environmental harm is notoriously hard to “prove” in the face of powerful corporations and governments, “gothic” representations of personal experiences with toxicity are “not only conceptually justifiable but socially indispensable” (661).

Cheryl Fish criticizes Buell’s approach as too focused on negative descriptions of horror, anger, and despair, instead arguing that the kind of “toxic humor” novels like Ozeki’s use are essential for inspiring political action. While Ozeki’s novel does use humor as a rhetorical technique, it also clearly uses horror. The kind of “toxic discourse” Buell describes does not merely catalogue catastrophe and political impotence, however. The gothic rhetoric of toxicity is so important because of its affective power. “The evidence suggests,” Buell claims, “that the sheer eloquence—the affect—of testimony of ordinary citizens’ anxiety about environmental degradation can have substantial influence on public policy, especially when the media are watching” (662). The slaughterhouse scene models this process as Jane translates horror into an affective media representation (her independent documentary). By self-consciously juxtaposing images of corporeal horror with environmental research, *My Year of Meats* demonstrates how documentary

metafiction can be an effective and affective rhetorical mode for environmental justice literature.

Ideologies of Environmental (In)justice: Reimagining Nation, Bodies, and Nature through Documentary Metafiction

Ozeki ultimately uses her documentary metafiction form to challenge the ideologies of corporate exploitation and social domination which underlie environmental injustice. Environmental justice cannot be reduced to data about toxicity, pollution, and public health. Rather, the ways we imagine the nation, bodies, and nature itself—and how these sites are mediated through commercial media—are crucial for environmental justice politics.

While most environmental justice activism and scholarship is oriented in the sciences and social sciences, the importance of cultural imagination and representational discourse for determining environmental practice suggests a vital role for the humanities in the environmental justice movement. In a recent book evaluating its successes and failures, sociologists David Pellow and Robert Brulle, claim that although the movement has “gained ground” in framing environmental concerns as fundamental to “civil rights, social justice, and human rights issues,” so that mainstream environmental organizations and government agencies realize they must at least pay lip service to this idea, it has been much less successful persuading the public to “disrupt the popular consent of the current hegemonic relations of ruling” (13). Thus these sociologists define issues of “cultural hegemony and ideology” as the new “central battlefield for the EJ movement” (12).

Although environmental justice criticism is “gaining ground” in literary studies, it has not yet been afforded the status of traditional ecocriticism which tends to focus on nature writing and the literature of wilderness. While scholar John Tallmadge, who comes out of a traditional ecocritical perspective, makes no mention of environmental justice in a recent essay, he too points to the necessity of analyzing cultural ideologies for understanding environmental dilemmas. Since “environmental problems ultimately stem from our values, beliefs, and ideas about the proper relations between human beings and nature,” we “will never understand them without understanding those beliefs, subjecting them to critique, and transforming them with capable imagination” (4). Working from an environmental justice standpoint, Julie Sze argues that the complexity of environmental justice necessitates going beyond the “discourse of quantitative sociology” and “the narrow grid of public policy” to understand these problems “through the contours of fantasy, literature, and imagination” (173).

Through the rhetorical mode of documentary metafiction, *My Year of Meats* demonstrates how literature can combine the data-driven analysis of the sciences with the imaginative work of fiction. Thus far, I have outlined the formal techniques of documentary metafiction, argued for the necessity of attending to both the novel’s sentimental and “factual” rhetorics for understanding its political project, and shown how the novel self-consciously models the construction and interpretation of cultural narratives in order to critically evaluate modes of representation. The remainder of the chapter builds on this framework to demonstrate how Ozeki situates commercial media as an ideological battleground where popular narratives of nation, female/raced bodies, and

nature can be reinforced or challenged. Defining these narratives as crucial for environmental justice, the novel reveals the ideological underpinnings that perpetuate media misrepresentation and models ways of reimagining these sites. However, the political impact of Ozeki's documentary metafiction rests not only on her attention to these issues, but on the formal juxtaposition of discourses which allows her to link various modes of oppression. Furthermore, this section illustrates how Jane's interpretations of "texts" like *My American Wife* constitute a metafictional strategy which functions to model critical analysis for the reader.

Since media representations of the nation serve to shape our collective imagination about national identity, which bodies belong, and how we relate to national land, they are a crucial site of analysis for environmental justice politics. Feminist scholar Uma Narayan has called for women to "*reimagine* the national community," marking the intersection of nation and imagination as a crucial locus for women's literature (135). By reading U.S. national identity through the meat industry, Ozeki both critiques national narratives driven by corporate power and suggests ways of reimagining the nation. To provide a historical basis for her contemporary critiques of the nation, Ozeki quotes at length from *Frye's Grammar School Geography*, a book Jane checks out of her local library as a child and again as an adult documentarian (154). As Jane is careful to point out, this is a "real" text: "I'm a documentarian. I'm not making this up. The book is the *Frye's Grammar School Geography* published in 1902 by Ginn & Company, Boston" (150). To the best of my knowledge this textbook was used widely in early twentieth-

century American schools, as well as in mission schools around the world.¹⁸ Frye's narrative, which he suggests is a "true" product of "REASON" rather than a subjective interpretation, reads the world's nations as racially determined and almost completely ignores women. The "black or Negro race," he writes, consists of "very ignorant . . . savages" who "know nothing of books," and the "red or Indian race" comprises "savages" who "lead a lazy, shiftless life" (150).

While the explicitness of these stereotypes may be extreme and dated, making the text an easy target for criticism, Ozeki includes the passages because versions of these stereotypes are still, in more or less subtle and insidious forms, very much alive. Frye's description of the "yellow race," for instance, has clear relevance for Jane's struggles in the novel. The Japanese are singled out within this description as having "made more progress than any other branch of the race" because "they have been wise enough to adopt many of the customs of the white race" (150). This portrayal resonates with the modern concept of the "model minority," a phenomenon Jane experiences personally and describes as the "Asian-American Woman thing—we're reliable, loyal, smart but

¹⁸ Samuel Armor's 1921 *History of Orange County California* points to the prominence of Frye's textbooks at that time, saying that "it is probably true that his text-books have outsold every other book in the world, save the Bible" (642). The international reach of Frye's books was vast, since there was "not a nation of the civilized globe that has not been influenced in its school work by the text-books of Mr. Frye" (642). Armor notes that the 1902 geography in particular was adapted for use in Canadian, English, and Norwegian schools, and that it was translated into Chinese for use in mission schools. This translation is particularly problematic given the text's claim that while the Chinese "invented printing and gunpowder" they have since "made little progress" (36). Frye was an undeniably important figure on the national and world stage, whose ideological promotion of U.S. civilizing missions is clear. He was charged by President McKinley in 1899, for example, with setting up the new public school system in Cuba.

nonthreatening” (158). In portraying the “white race” as “the leading race in the world, in commerce, in power, in art and in general intelligence,” Frye ultimately uses his authority as a national media producer to reinforce the American narrative of progress and white superiority—making both seem natural and inevitable (Frye 38).

As opposed to Frye’s “objective” narrative, the novel suggests that the nation is flexible and rewritable. Jane juxtaposes the long quotes from Frye’s *Geography* with an account of her inadvertent attempts at “revisionist history” as a child. She first realizes that her body is racially marked when playing games like “cowboys and Indians” and “World War II.” Because she’s ethnically marked, Jane is always cast as the “Indian princess” and is accused of “cheating” when she wins “because the Indians were supposed to lose” (148). When playing World War II, a game which consists of drawing white and Japanese faces as quickly as possible, Jane’s “Japs had won” because eye “slashes” are easier to draw than “circles.” Jane later learns in school that the Japanese had lost the war, so that she has “once again been practicing revisionist history” (148). This playful account of imagining alternative histories both critiques the racial marking of bodies and suggests, contra Frye, that national narratives are always open to reinterpretation.

Although the blatant racism of Frye’s textbook is appropriately criticized, Jane actually links the ideology of racial hierarchy with the environmentally devastating ideology of anthropocentrism. Frye prefaces the text by stating that “in this book, man is the central thought,” and that his purpose is to “present the earth as the home of man . . . thus bringing REASON to bear on the work” (1). Jane points out that the text figures

man's reason and industry as conquering the "entire natural world" (154). This damaging perspective, one with ancient roots and vast contemporary consequences, is the "dirty secret hidden between the fraying covers" (154). If racism is based on the idea that it is justified to dominate those who are different from you (the Other), then environmental destruction also relies on the justification to dominate that which is Other from you (the "natural world"). As Robert Pellow notes, the ideology of racism and environmental destruction are closely related since "the ideological, cultural, psychological, and physical harm visited on people of color was supported and made possible by a system that did the same to nature" (38). By combining critiques of racism and environmental destruction, the novel highlights how these two ideologies reinforce one another to perpetuate white supremacy and economic dominance. *My Year of Meats* describes how this ideological dynamic plays out in the contemporary meat industry and commercial media. *Frye's Geography* actually provides a historical gloss on these contemporary issues as he explicitly links the expansion of the "white nations" to the ever-expanding need for cattle pastures, thus implicating meat in the very foundations of Western nationhood.

Almost a century after the publication of *Frye's Geography*, Jane is tasked with selling an updated version of what she calls this "vast illusion of America" through *My American Wife*. While the show is indeed focused on selling meat for BEEF-EX, it is clear from the beginning of the novel that selling meat also means selling a certain ideology of American values. Although each episode must "culminate in the celebration of a featured meat, climaxing in its glorious consumption," the featured wife must be

“attractive, appetizing, and all-American” because she is “Meat Made Manifest” (8).

Whereas *Frye’s Geography* largely ignored women to focus on men as the leaders of commerce and industry, *My American Wife* reinterprets this narrative using women as symbolic bearers of cultural values. Emily Cheng criticizes the novel for situating women within the family as guardians of “cultural values” (194). However, the novel actually critiques this stereotyping of women by revealing that this idealized image of America is a constructed fiction motivated by corporate power.

Because the individual wives are supposed to represent Meat, capital M, they must be (like the meat) “ample, robust, yet never tough or hard to digest” (8). “Although marketed as icons of robust health, vigor, and fertility,” argues Black, “both women and meat become commodities on the global market whose bodies are shaped, deformed, and violated for commercial profit” (231). The show’s list of “desirable” qualities for American wives includes “attractive,” “wholesome” and “clean,” while “undesirable” traits include “physical imperfections,” “obesity,” “squalor,” and “second class peoples” (12). The ideal wife, according to the show, is a “middle-to-upper-middle-class white American woman with two to three children” (12). These so-called “authentic” American wives become the literal conduit for transmitting to Japanese women the “traditional family values symbolized by red meat in rural America” (8). The wives *embody* all-American values, which in turn inculcate a desire for American meat. The wives, the values, and the meats mutually reinforce each other, and together constitute an “attractive” package for the product they are selling.

By visually consuming the show's idealized images of American wives and then literally consuming the stand-in for American values—red meat—Japanese housewives are meant to equate these acts of consumption with nurturing their families. Ironically, of course, the American values promoted to Japanese women are based on the same narrative of moral, cultural, and racial superiority that underlies *Frye's Geography*. The show's values of consumption and commodification, masquerading as wholesomeness and nurturing, are most conspicuous in an episode in which the crew actually films the interior of a Wal-Mart store. This, Jane comes to learn, was the “heart and soul of *My American Wife*: recreating for Japanese housewives this spectacle of raw American abundance” (35). Designed to instill a state of “want” (i.e., “lack” and “desire”), the focus on Wal-Mart ironically ignores the fact that many of their products come from Asian sweatshops.

Both *Frye's Geography* and *My American Wife* claim to truthfully document an “authentic” record of the nation, while actually reinforcing an oppressive national narrative that relies on ideologies of superiority and homogeneity in order to appear legitimate. The novel metafictionally deconstructs these narratives to show their ideologies are particularly damaging to female/raced bodies and the natural environment.

My American Wife claims not only to represent authentic American values and families, but also to portray the authentic American landscape. Although the show centers on the wives, the process of developing an episode starts not with a search for an “ideal” American wife, but for a particularly evocative landscape. The representations of authentic American families must be complimented with shots of “distinctive

geographical features and scenic appeal” (56). These scenery shots are not merely attractive backgrounds for the show’s family narratives, but rather important ideological tools used to reinforce its “authentic” picture of the nation. When visiting Memphis’s Beale St., for instance, Joichi “was really happy because the atmosphere was a hundred percent authentic” (108). However, Jane deconstructs this authenticity by emphasizing the commercial specter of tourism which has turned Beale St. into a “self-referential shadow” where tourists “graze . . . in search of the real thing” (347).

While *My American Wife* seeks to represent the authenticity of American natural and built spaces, the novel reveals how these places are defined by commerce, media, and nostalgia. The show’s nostalgic vision of the Old South, for example, relies not on direct historical fact but instead mimics representations of the region in highly sentimental movies like *Gone With the Wind*. Jane describes the opening shot of the Beaudroux episode set on a Louisiana plantation:

OPENING: Imagine *Gone With the Wind*. The frame is locked and neatly circumscribes a classical Southern perspective. The long drive cuts straight down the center toward the house, lined on either side by ancient oaks whose branches are laden with beards of Spanish moss. The brick plantation house defines the end of the drive and plugs up its vanishing point. (65)

This scenic opening represents America for Japanese audiences by replicating a film that has already come to stand for the U.S. in the global imagination. In fact, this and other episodes set in the American south are designed to appeal to Japanese tourists who were

“part of the *Gone With the Wind* boom that had mysteriously swept the country” (105).¹⁹

While the Beaudroux episode remake of the movie ironically centers on a family with twelve adopted, mostly Asian, children, it is clear that the show’s corporate mandate is to unselfconsciously reproduce a global nostalgia for American landscapes.²⁰

Whereas *My American Wife*’s depictions of the South rely on *Gone With the Wind*, its representation of the American West uses “westerns” in order to generate a marketable nostalgia for the space of the frontier. The novel metafictionally examines the commercial and racial contexts that underlie the narrative conventions of these filmic genres. When the crew is “shooting scenery in a remote part of Montana,” a railroad engineer mistakes their camera equipment for weapons and reports them to the police as a “band of Mexican terrorists with a rocket launcher” (189). After Jane and her crew are thrown in jail, the sheriff admits that the “engineer prob’ly just got the news confused with some old TV western” (189). While the crew is attempting to shoot scenery that replicates the landscape of westerns, they are ironically interpellated as villains in a western TV show. Claiming himself as a western “hero,” Joichi Ueno, whose American name is John, repeatedly mentions that his name sounds like “John Wayno.” Chiu argues that this comparison to John Wayne, depicted in westerns as a macho womanizer, is used

¹⁹ Mary Hess claims that *Gone With the Wind* has been particularly popular in countries like Japan, Germany, and Russia. She suggests that this might be attributable to the “special resonance” of this film “for nations who have experienced defeat and occupation.” This makes its popularity especially ironic since it implies that the American occupation of Japan actually prompted Japanese audiences to look to an American film for representation of “defeat and occupation.”

²⁰ Arjun Appadurai argues that forms of mass-advertising teach consumers to “miss things they have never lost,” thus creating “imagined nostalgia” or “armchair nostalgia” for things that never actually existed (77).

to construct Ueno/Wayno as an “effeminate Asian other” (114). In the context of the novel’s critique of idealized frontier representations, however, Wayne/Wayno stands for an ideology of dominance that impacts the natural environment as well as women.

These examples demonstrate how the iconic western landscape, and its commercial reproductions, are laden with ideological residues of racism and violence. Here and elsewhere Ozeki shows that frontier violence is not a thing of the past. Jane references the 1992 murder of Yoshihiro Hattori, who accidentally approached the wrong house while looking for friends and was shot by homeowner Rodney Peairs. She situates this incident within the historical context of “frontier culture” which continues to legitimize the use of “deadly force” on “people who look different” (89).²¹ During filming of the Dunn family episode, Gale Dunn actually defends his right to use illegal DES and potentially to commit violence on Jane through appealing to “frontier justice.” When Jane confronts him about using DES, he responds: “this here’s ranch country, girl, and we do *what* we want, *when* we want, without no government’s say-so. . . . We got our own kinds of justice, frontier justice” (279). Frontier justice, available only to white males, legitimates violence by defining it as part of a national narrative of self-sufficiency and courage.

Ozeki extends the concept of the frontier by explicitly linking it to contemporary landscapes of consumption. National superstore Wal-Mart is defined in this novel as “the capitalist equivalent of the wide-open spaces and endless horizons of the American

²¹ This case received international attention, especially after Peairs was acquitted. Millions of citizens in the U.S. and Japan petitioned for stronger gun laws. Peairs was later required to pay \$650,000 in civil damages to Hattori’s parents.

geographical frontier” (35). The vast geographical horizons of early America are replicated in the national imagination by the vast horizon of goods that fill a superstore. Ironically, the fantasy portrait of the western landscape’s “wide-open spaces” that is so marketable for *My American Wife* relies on the absence of commerce. Although this description itself makes no mention of the problematic image of “empty space” that legitimated Native American genocide, it does make an important connection between the frontier ideology of conquest and the economic conquest enacted by multinational corporations. As Patricia Limerick remarks, “the American frontiers spirit, sometime in the last century, picked itself up and made a definitive relocation—from territorial expansion to technological and commercial expansion” (88). Reading the frontier in the context of globalization, Ladino argues that “today’s frontier is more than an imaginary geopolitical landscape or a rhetorical play on words . . . it is a powerful ideological force that underscores globalization’s economic and social policies” (124). Where “frontier justice” legitimates violence and environmental degradation, so “today’s frontier” becomes an ideological legitimization of globalization. In this context, corporate interests seek to conquer global markets as new frontiers, just as BEEF-EX does by tapping the new red meat market in Japan.²² Although Ozeki’s novel shows how the American “economic” frontier is exported to the deterritorialized global marketplace through

²² Jane notes that BEEF-EX began marketing meat to Japan after European countries banned the import of U.S. meat (because of hormones) and the U.S. government pressured Japan to sign a New Beef Agreement which relaxed import quotas and increased the U.S. share of the Japanese meat market (127).

commercial media, it also suggests the importance of paying attention to how media representations of actual landscapes reproduce frontier ideology.

Corporate representations of iconic national landscapes paradoxically rely on “pristine” images of nature even as they actively destroy the land. We can understand BEEF-EX’s insistence that *My American Wife* include “nature” shots in every episode as a deliberate effort to associate beef with pristine nostalgic landscapes, thereby concealing the toxic landscapes of the factory farms which produce it. The producers are especially excited about the Dunn show because its Colorado setting “conforms perfectly to Japanese people’s preconceptions of America’s ‘Big Rugged Nature.’ Wide-open prairies, snow-capped mountains . . .” (231). BEEF-EX appropriates images of “Big Rugged Nature” in order to prevent attention to the bloody landscapes of meat production that I examined earlier. The factory feedlot operation run by the Dunn family requires the same slight of hand. Gale Dunn, for instance, appropriates the language of recycling to legitimate his experimental feeding practices: “You East Coast environmental types are always going on about recycling . . . well, that’s just what we’re doing here with our exotic feed program and we’re real proud of it” (258). This “exotic” feed includes everything from cardboard, plastic, and cement, to slaughterhouse by-products through which he’s “recycling cattle right back into cattle” (258). Joshua Karlinger, founder of CorpWatch (an organization which investigates corporate human rights and environmental violations), argues that this type of “greenwashing” is a common marketing tactic for industries with the most egregious environmental impacts. Corporations “appropriate the symbols, language, and message of environmentalism” in

an “effort to ward off the threat that the environmental movement might convince the world’s governments to force them to make much more far reaching changes” (179-183). In a world where our thinking about nature is mediated through television representations, “the profound influence that corporations wield over the words and images fed to the general public seriously affects how we live and how we understand the nature of the environmental crisis and the changes needed to correct it” (186). When the meat industry uses media outlets like *My American Wife* to associate itself with “pristine” images of nature, it usurps any public debate by concealing its direct contributions to the degradation of the landscape.

By juxtaposing the marketable landscapes she films for *My American Wife* with a historical account of their often hidden toxicity, Jane metafictionally deconstructs the show’s “greenwashed” representation of nature. Colorado’s “Big Rugged Nature,” “wide-open prairies,” and “snow-capped mountains” are reread through the discourse of toxicity. Grand Junction, Colorado, was once a uranium production center, and now is an unlikely “center for fruit production—a rich riparian zone, the countryside bursts with iridescent peaches, sweet pears, luscious cherries, and glowing apples” (245). Ironically, Jane notes, landscapes that “hide underground bunkers” full of toxic waste often appear “rich with flora and fauna” because these toxic sites have been paradoxically “protected from families with fat-tired recreational vehicles, grazing cattle, and other ruminants” (247). Such underground sites literally use “nature” to conceal their destruction of the natural environment.

By pointing to what is hidden in greenwashed representations of nature, Ozeki uses her documentary metafiction to subvert the corporate narrative of innocence that perpetuates environmental degradation. The novel demonstrates that idealized images of nature are not a neutral record of “reality,” but are ideological constructions calculated for commercial gain. As Allison Blunt and Gillian Rose point out, representations of space as “transparent,” or objective and static, are complicit in establishing and maintaining oppressive social power. This novel shows how exposing the veiled resonances of landscapes makes them crucial sites for challenging corporate power. In addition, Ozeki’s environmental literature explicitly critiques traditional nature writing which focuses on “green space” and ignores the toxic landscapes that produce environmental injustice. Phenomena like corporate greenwashing, the novel shows, are particularly harmful for female/raced bodies.

These bodies are figured as sites of environmental harm, evidence, and resistance. The aggressive promotion of DES by pharmaceutical companies led to Jane’s mother being targeted as a vulnerable Asian body by her doctor. Jane’s own body, then, becomes a form of physical evidence of this racialized pharmaceutical harm when she develops cervical cancer and uterine deformities. Through “writing” the novel and creating her independent documentary, Jane uses her body as a site of resistance by connecting it to the other damaged bodies that she films. I’ve already discussed her gruesome footage of DES-injected cattle at the feedlot and in the slaughterhouse, but the documentary’s *pièce de résistance* is its disturbing representation of five year old Rose Dunn’s naked body. In a brave act of subversion, Rose’s mother Bunny allows Jane’s crew to secretly film her

daughter while she sleeps. Although “Rose’s skin was still a baby’s milky white and downy,” Jane notes as they film the child innocently sucking her thumb in her sleep, she has “two shockingly full and beautiful breasts” (276). The babyish quality of Rose’s body is starkly juxtaposed to the bodily evidence of estrogen poisoning she contracted by exposure to DES and other hormones on the feedlot.

Through a form of toxic “graffiti,” environmental injustice comes to be literally “written” on female/raced bodies. Panning down Rose’s body, “the baby skin continued, smooth and uninterrupted, down over the swell of her belly to her public bone, where suddenly, like grotesque graffiti, her skin was defaced by a wiry tangle of hair” (276). This scene is not bloody like that of Akiko’s rape and the slaughterhouse (though it does mention that Rose has begun menstruating), however Jane still emphasizes its “grotesqueness.” Rose’s body has been vandalized, her baby skin “defaced” by a toxic “graffiti.” The violence written on Jane’s body by pharmaceutical companies parallels the way greenwashing by BEEF-EX and the Dunn feedlot company rationalizes the vandalizing of Rose’s body.

Rather than just highlighting the existence of this kind of violence, Ozeki’s documentary metafiction models strategies for translating this violent “message” into a message of resistance. While *My American Wife* wants to present Rose as a “normal as pie” girl growing up on an ecologically conscious feedlot in the picturesque Colorado countryside, Jane’s independent documentary exposes the hidden inscription masked by Rose’s baggy clothes and childish demeanor. The documentary thus functions as a metafictional critique of commercial media representations which reveals how these

idealized narratives are constructed and how they legitimate violence against female/raced bodies and the natural environment. Furthermore, by figuring violence as a form of writing, Jane demonstrates both the need to expose the “authors” of violence and the political potential of “rewriting” these texts. Through publishing Rose in a documentary that is eventually aired worldwide, her body becomes a form of public evidence that rewrites toxic graffiti as a message of political resistance.

Combating Ignorance through Documentary Metafiction

Ozeki’s documentary metafiction, which juxtaposes different modes of representing nation, nature, and bodies, explicitly investigates the personal and collective forms of ignorance that threaten to stymie such political resistance. Rather than just depicting the harmful effects of media narratives through fiction, this novel actually analyzes the ideological functioning of representations and their impact on audiences. Both Bunny and Jane struggle with a form of denial that Jane describes as a “massive cultural trend . . . that characterizes the end of the millennium” (334). While Bunny, for instance, was well aware of Rose’s over-mature body, she refused to connect it to the family business and so repressed her suspicions. “Things you’d never even believe could ever happen just start seemin’ as normal as pie,” Bunny admits (295). Similarly, Jane suspects the meat industry’s “unsavory” side early on, but represses her misgivings because she needs the job to pay her rent. “The fact is, I did care, and at the same time I couldn’t afford to care,” Jane confesses, “and these two contrary states lived side by side like twins, wrapped in a numbing cocoon that enabled me to get the work done” (176). Jane’s denial parallels Ozeki’s experience working for the *Mrs. America* show where “the

illusion of wholesome meat-fed Americans” she conjures for Japanese audiences is something she must also “[hang] onto” for her own “consolation” (“My Year”).²³

Philosopher Nancy Williams argues that this type of repression is a form of “affected ignorance,” the “phenomenon of people choosing not to investigate whether some practice in which they participate might be immoral or rife with controversy” (371). Likewise, Jane defines this kind of “ignorance” as “an act of will, a choice that one makes over and over again” (334).

The novel’s political project inheres not only in its representations of injustice which contradict “greenwashed” narratives, but in its deconstruction of the ignorance that often prevents ethical awareness and political action. “Information about toxicity in food is widely available,” Jane admits, “but people don’t want to hear it” (334). Similarly, Ozeki confesses that while she’d “always known” somewhere “at the back of [her] mind” about the meat industry’s mistreatment of animals and its toxic impact on humans and the environment, she still “dreaded the knowledge” her research for the novel would uncover (“My Year”). This simultaneous knowing and not-knowing is at the heart of the novel’s investigation of ethical practice. “Knowledge about factory farming systems and animal suffering is knowledge most people do not want to have,” argues Williams, because we “suspect” that this information will make our own complicity in suffering undeniable (377). Thus affected ignorance is, paradoxically, a “delicate form of knowledge,” a type

²³ Ozeki also experienced this phenomenon when she worked for a television show sponsored by tobacco company Philip Morris in which part of her job was to hand out cigarettes to people on the street and film them smoking. Like Jane, Ozeki started “growing increasingly uncomfortable making programs sponsored by an industry about which I knew little, but suspected a lot” (“My Year”).

of ignorance “generated by what one already knows” (378). In this novel, Ozeki specifically investigates how affected ignorance is produced through commercial and news media.

In a society inundated with an overwhelming quantity of information, affected ignorance becomes a personal and collective survival strategy that ultimately produces political paralysis. “Coming at us like this—in waves, massed and unbreachable—knowledge becomes symbolic of our disempowerment—becomes bad knowledge” so that we suppress it, “riding its crest until it subsides from consciousness” (334). Against the conventional wisdom that knowledge is power, Jane defines “bad knowledge” as disempowering. Conversely, if we “can’t act on knowledge,” then “ignorance becomes empowering” because it enables people to “survive” (334). In an interview Ozeki suggests that the “overwhelming” quantity of information distributed by the media creates “a real bias in this country toward reductive thinking” (Weich). This is not to say that we should be getting less information—in fact, the information presented is often incomplete and simplified—but that the “form” information takes is important. *My Year of Meat*’s documentary metafiction approach, which combines information with sentimental stories and ethical analysis, is an effort to represent “bad news” in a rhetorically effective form.

The novel seeks to create “good knowledge” by not merely representing “bad news,” but modeling strategies of responding to it which promote political action and critical thinking rather than paralysis and apathy. The novel demonstrates, for example, how coalitions of women can be organized not by identity categories (of nation, race,

etc), but by a common commitment to acting on the “bad news” of meat industry abuses against bodies and lands. Bunny, described as “amplitude personified . . . our ideal American Wife,” ironically collaborates with Jane to create the independent documentary (252). In fact, Jane gradually pieces together a diverse network of women who had been associated with *My American Wife*. She turns to interracial couple Dyann and Lara of the so-called lesbian episode, for instance, to find information about meat toxicity. They in turn help the pregnant Akiko set up her new household when she escapes Joichi and moves to Connecticut. Black thus describes the novel as part of a “cosmofeminist” movement to create global alliances between women, implying an important role for feminist writing in an age of globalization. Ladino characterizes this network as a model for “ecofeminist alliances” that address the connections between the oppression of women and the exploitation of the natural environment.

Furthermore, Jane’s independent documentary, which traces meat industry violence on animal and human bodies and the natural environment, demonstrates how media representations that combine scientific information with sentimental stories can actually change audience perspectives. The tape empowers Bunny, for example, to “get to the bottom of this thing with Rosie” (295). After seeing the film, Rose’s father John Dunn “went ballistic . . . like he finally understood.” The documentary actually prompts this formerly complacent figure to take action, making his son Gale call the USDA and

“fess up” to using DES (357).²⁴ Both Bunny and John then charge Jane to “spread the word” by airing her documentary because “people gotta know” (357). The documentary also transforms environmentalist Dave Schultz’s pessimism: “you remember what I said . . . about nothing helping and no one caring and it being too late?” he asks, “Well I don’t believe that anymore” (302). The political paralysis Dave feels because of the overwhelmingly “bad news” about the environment, is then translated into positive action when he becomes the film’s enthusiastic promoter and official media liaison.

This documentary, which is picked up by several international media outlets, also influences the global imagination. *My American Wife*’s wholesome version of the Dunn episode is aired in Japan on the same day that Jane’s independent film hits media circuits. This juxtaposition creates a “media controversy over reliability in television and the power of corporate sponsorship to determine media content and truth” (358). Furthermore, the footage of Gale discussing how he feeds cow by-products back into cattle “stirred up a wave of media concern” about mad cow disease and its human equivalent, Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease (358).

This “controversial” reception attests to the ability of alternative media accounts to at least potentially become sites of political resistance through which audiences are able to reimagine their relationship to “media content and truth.” Brian Donahue insists that television creates an “inherent passivity” in which “we are held hostage to the emotive responses we experience when television reports on disturbing events,”

²⁴ Palumbo-Liu notes that watching the film allows John Dunn to achieve an “exterior point of view” (59). However, he overlooks the fact that this shift in perspective is due to the film’s combination of factual and sentimental evidence.

eventually becoming “numb” to “ethical experience” altogether (390). This phenomenon resonates with Jane’s description of how “bad knowledge” leads to our collective need for ignorance as a survival strategy. In contrast, however, Arjun Appadurai argues that the mass media can no longer be thought of as the “opiate of the masses” because it “often provokes resistance, irony, selectivity, and . . . agency.” That is, collective forms of imagination, mediated through the mass media, constitute a “staging ground for action, and not only for escape” (7). Through the juxtaposition of *My American Wife*, which relies on the passive consumption of American values and meats, and Jane’s independent documentary, which seeks to inspire political action, we can see both of these processes at work in the novel. This more complex view, expressed by Richard Kearney, suggests that while “media images often banalize and anesthetize our perceptions,” they can also “enlarge out imaginative horizons and extend our sympathies by putting us in contact with other people in other places” (364).

While Ozeki’s documentary metafiction juxtaposes the anesthetizing effects of “bad knowledge” with the sympathy-enlarging potential of “good knowledge,” it metafictionally undermines its own ability to represent the “truth.” We can trace the development of this metafictional reflection on representation through Jane’s changing conception of truth. Remembering her early naïveté, she confesses that she “wanted to make programs with documentary integrity, and at first . . . believed in a truth that existed—singular, empirical, absolute” (176). Jane’s eventual realization that truth is not “singular, empirical, absolute,” but multiple, subjective, and partial/contingent, has ethical and formal consequences for her narrative. Although her independent

documentary, for instance, “got a small but critical piece of information about the corruption of meats in American out to the world, and possibly even saved a little girl’s life in the process,” Jane admits that the “truth is so much more complex” (360). That is, she acknowledges that no representation can capture the “whole” truth because it inevitably leaves out some things to highlight others. The ethical question for representations, then, is not “does it tell the whole truth?” but “which truth does it tell? And how does its truth benefit some and disadvantage others?” Whereas she once believed she could represent “absolute” truth, Jane is now “haunted by all the things . . . that threaten to slip through the cracks, untold, out of history”—like “all the parts of the Gulf War we didn’t see on TV” (360).

Unlike conventional postmodern metafiction, however, Ozeki’s insists that despite the multiple and subjective nature of truth and its representations, we must still appeal to factual and emotional “truths” to combat ignorance. The novel’s ethical stance opposes moral certitude, but still insists that we need to make decisions between “better” and “worse” options. As Jane asserts near the end of the novel, “Nothing is simple. There are many answers, none of them right, but some of them most definitely wrong” (327). In spite of her belief in approximate, partial truths, Jane asserts the paradoxical necessity for documentarians to believe in truth: “as a documentarian, you must strive for the truth and believe in it wholeheartedly” (176). Similarly, Ozeki acknowledges in an essay that while “on the one hand, truth is relative and approximate . . . on the other, one must believe in it absolutely and wholeheartedly” in order to create social change (“My Year”).

Thus the “antidote” to ignorance and paralysis requires not a disavowal of any “truth” in the face of competing “truths,” but a “choice one must make over and over again . . . simply to look, and hopefully to see” the complex truths that structure our political possibilities (“My Year”). Nancy McHugh claims that this seemingly contradictory stance is necessary to effect practical change. If you are trying to combat the kind of ignorance this novel addresses, “you must be able to point to some information as better, more accurate, and more revealing than other information” (46). Figuring knowledge as purely relative, in other words, has the same practical effect as saying it’s absolute because they are equally advantageous for “those that benefit from the construction of ignorance” (46). In this novel, it is corporate powers like BEEF-EX who benefit from collective ignorance about factory farming, while ignorance legitimates violence against female/raced bodies and the natural environment. Because it actually enables the production of toxicity and violence, then, ignorance itself must be defined as a crucial environmental justice issue.

Ozeki demonstrates that documentary metafiction is a particularly effective form for environmental justice narratives since it undermines absolutist knowledge and commercialized sentimentality while using empirical knowledge and sentimental stories self-consciously to inspire political action. Revealing how media representations are constructed empowers readers to think critically about representation in general, and thus the novel becomes a form of “good knowledge” that combats the paralysis and apathy of affected ignorance. *My Year of Meats* reinvents the narrative solipsism and political

paralysis of conventional postmodern metafiction as a self-conscious environmental justice narrative.

Rather than positioning it in a tradition of literary metafiction, Ozeki locates the novel in a history of women's documentary. In creating her independent documentary, and in writing the novel itself, Jane sees herself as part of a transnational community of women documentarians with a long history. Placing herself in a line of beginning with Sei Shonagon, Jane defines female documentarians as "master thieves" of language who tell stories that are omitted from official histories. Jane imagines Shonagon "hiding in her nook of history, watching me slip in and out of darkened rooms and steal from people's lives" (33). Similarly, when fellow Shonagon aficionado Akiko begins documenting her own life through poetry, she feels like a "thief" who is "stealing back moments and pieces of herself" (37). Women documentarians in this novel transgress narrative conventions and official histories to "steal" back the stories that "threaten to slip through the cracks, untold, out of history." Shonagon lists the following under "Pleasing Things:" "Someone has torn up a letter and thrown it away. Picking up the pieces, one finds that many of them can be fitted together" (5). Likewise, this novel demonstrates the political importance of fitting together disparate "pieces" of the meat industry story and thereby exposing the connections between oppressions which have been masked by commercial media. In fact, Ozeki sees writing as a method of picking open our "pockets of denial" in order to reveal "the vast interconnectedness of what we label political and social, economic and personal spheres" ("My Year").

The political impact of the novel rests not only on its vision of interconnectedness, but on the outwardly-oriented arc of its metafictional form. While Shonagon inspired Jane to “become a documentarian,” Jane imagines the continuation of this line by specifically directing her work to inspire “some girl . . . now or maybe even a thousand years from now” to “learn something real” about America in the same way Shonagon’s writing allowed her to learn about Japan (15). The rhetorical trajectory of Jane’s documentary work mirrors the trajectory Ozeki creates for the novel’s readers. The simultaneously self-referential and satisfying “happy ending,” “free[s] the intellect” to “pond[er] the issues the book raises” beyond its “story line” (Penguin 13). Furthermore, the list of research references and activist organizations that follows provides readers with direct resources to jumpstart their own inquiries. Thus Ozeki’s documentary metafiction explicitly constructs a “documentary reader”—one who cannot passively consume the novel, but is empowered to join the line of documentarians by embarking on their own political journey.

**Hypercontextual Metafiction and the Neoliberal Environment
in Karen Yamashita's *Tropic of Orange***

I can't think of any work that interests me that can be engaged with as purely an aesthetic experience. You or I can step into a Zen rock garden or stare into field of irises, but the stepping in or staring away is an act of repudiation or leave-taking. The world encumbers me/us.

—Karen Yamashita⁸⁴

Karen Tei Yamashita's third novel, *Tropic of Orange* (1997), charts the political landscape of L.A. and the nearby U.S./Mexico border region in a post-NAFTA, globalized era of media saturation, increased immigration, and the intensification of labor and environmental exploitation. The novel's large and diverse cast of seven protagonists reflects this heightened interaction between populations, countries, and discourses. Bobby, for instance, is a "Chinese from Singapore with a Vietnam name speaking like a Mexican living in Koreatown," who, with his Mexican immigrant wife Rafaela, runs a janitorial business in L.A. (15). Two other characters work in the media industry: Emi is a Japanese American TV producer, and her boyfriend Gabriel is a Chicano newspaper reporter. Buzzworm, described as a "walking social services," is an African American community organizer in East L.A.; Manzanar, a homeless Japanese American man, "conducts" symphonies from the sounds of the traffic on the freeway; and Arcangel is a mythical Latin American "everyman" figure born at the moment of colonial "discovery" in 1492 (26). All of these characters' stories are interwoven in plots that culminate in two epic events. The growing unrest of marginalized populations of immigrants, homeless,

⁸⁴ From an interview by Wendy Cheng.

and ethnic poor culminates in the radical occupation of an L.A. freeway. Meanwhile, Arcangel transports the Tropic of Cancer (attached to an orange) across the U.S./Mexico border, literally dragging the southern hemisphere and thousands of undocumented immigrants into L.A. to witness a symbolic battle against NAFTA. This chapter demonstrates the novel's use of what I will call a "hypercontextual" approach (a word Yamashita coins) to interrogate narratives of global progress that legitimate environmental injustice against such marginalized populations.

While some critics mention the metafictionality of the novel, the function and focus of its self-reflexiveness is a subject of debate. Molly Wallace, for instance, describes *Tropic* as a blend of "magical realism, political satire, and postmodern metafiction," but does not develop a reading of the novel as metafictional (148). Moreover, I believe that the novel is actually reacting against conventional characterizations of postmodern metafiction by foregrounding the constructedness of historical and political narratives while also emphasizing the material effects of those constructions and making genuine claims for human/environmental rights. Although she does not call the novel metafiction, Rachel Adams makes a useful comparison of the different kinds of self-referentiality in *Tropic* and in Pynchon's *Crying of Lot 49*. Pynchon's "preoccupation with close reading and textuality, and complex formal experimentation" turns "the novel into an infinitely receding hall of mirrors in which words seem to have lost their ability to refer to anything other than themselves" (250, 253). The text's "moments of self-reflexivity" replicate a sense of "alienation" and a

“pessimism about the possibility of political resistance” that exemplifies postmodern approaches to metafiction (256). Although Yamashita’s novel is “similarly complicated in terms of plots and narrative construction, its formal difficulties seem designed less to entrap both character and reading in a postmodern labyrinth” or in a “claustrophobically self-referential fiction designed to mirror a lack of agency over their own lives” but instead to “evoke the dense networking of people and goods in an age of global interconnection” (252). Similarly, Ruth Hsu argues that the novel is “better understood *not* through the lens of certain strains of postmodernism that posit a non-centered subjectivity composed merely of endless linguistic play and of endless deferral of meaning” (78). The only other specific mention of *Tropic* as a metafictional text is in Kevin Cooney’s insightful article which argues that the novel is driven by a “metafictional struggle between the genres of magical realism and noir” wherein “magical realism and its transformations of the city’s geography” represent “multicultural promise” (191).

Indeed, Yamashita notes that writing a novel about L.A. meant metafictionally “looking at Los Angeles as literature” (Gier). If detective noir has been the genre most associated with the city, has been the “myth, or the Hollywood representation of Los Angeles seen in *L.A. Confidential*,” *Tropic* attempts to “hear different narrative voices, see different visions or points of view representing the City” (Gier). This governing idea illuminates Yamashita’s strategy of multiplying contexts by writing the novel through the perspective of seven different characters who are all storytellers. “I don’t believe that there is any one voice that *can* represent that city,” she notes in an interview, so “I

wanted to experiment with multiple voices” (Gier). Because each character is explicitly defined as a storyteller, the novel becomes a thoroughly metafictional reflection on the function of storytelling. Gabriel, for instance, models his storytelling on Ruben Salazar, the first reporter to expand the *Los Angeles Times*’ coverage of East L.A. beyond a sole focus on crime. “By the time I got my first story,” Gabriel remembers, “[Salazar] was long dead, but I was there to continue a tradition he had started. . . . This was going to be my contribution to La Raza” (39). In contrast, Emi’s role as a television producer is to “slash and burn” stories so that they seamlessly “wrap around the commercials” (126). For her, televised stories are “not about whether us Chicanos or Asians get a bum rap or whether third world countries deserve dictators or whether we should make the world safe for democracy,” but “about selling things: Reebok, Pepsi, Chevrolet” (126). Opposed to Emi’s focus on commodities and up-to-the-minute television storytelling, Arcangel, the novel’s most overtly metafictional protagonist, tells stories that range across multiple locations in the Americas and across multiple historical moments beginning with “discovery” in 1492. Throughout the novel he constantly writes poetry (he “couldn’t help” writing “political poetry” because “it was always there carousing around in his brain”), “thinks” in poems (he “saw his thoughts as a poem”), and even describes himself as a “character in a poem” (148, 146, 183). Arcangel’s poetic stories reflect his construction as a literary hybrid of Pablo Neruda and Guillermo Gómez-Peña, a strategy Yamashita says allows his storytelling to evoke a “sense of the history of Latin America

coming to Los Angeles” because “he takes the poetry, and also the political conscience and history across the border” (Gier).⁸⁵

So while the novel is definitely metafictional—foregrounding the process and function of stories/storytelling—I argue that it is not primarily a critique of noir, but a critique of the neoliberal narratives of free trade and progress that underlie the novel’s depiction of a globalized world. “At the heart” of “neoliberal discourses of globalization sits a narrative of progress” which “presents globalization as evolutionary, inevitable, and beneficial” (Laffey and Weldes). It is this neoliberal narrative of progress through consumption, urban development, and labor/environmental exploitation that Yamashita’s approach to metafiction challenges. Specifically situated as a response to NAFTA, the novel ends in an epic wrestling match staged as a metafictional battle between the neoliberal progress narrative and narratives of human rights and environmental justice.

⁸⁵ Both Arcangel’s and Manzanar’s stories function on a mythically large scale. Manzanar “imagine[s] himself a kind of recycler” who uses “the residue of sounds” from freeway traffic to both “record” and “interpret” the story of contemporary Los Angeles (56). His vision expands, however, by contextualizing this story in time (as far back as a “prehistoric” era) and space (as part of a larger “Pacific Rim” story). Buzzworm’s stories, however, are squarely situated in his East L.A. community because he sees storytelling as a communal activity and works tirelessly as an insider contact for Gabriel to get stories of his community into the mainstream press. As he walks around impoverished neighborhoods he is always ready with a story: “if you wanted to hear a story, you came round to listen, ‘cause Buzzworm always had one” (28). In contrast, while Bobby’s life constitutes a “long story,” he says he “don’t have time to tell stories” because he is too busy working multiple jobs to achieve the American Dream (15-16). He later realizes that this is a false narrative based on engendering immigrants with a desire for material goods to prove their social status while leaving structural discrimination unchallenged. Bobby’s wife Rafaela rejects the American Dream narrative outright, and tells the stories of her exploited immigrant community through college papers with titles like “*Maquiladoras & Migrants*” and “*Undocumented, Illegal & Alien: Immigrants vs. Immigration*” (161).

Almost certainly a source of inspiration for Yamashita's final scene, Gómez-Peña also describes resistance to NAFTA in terms of a "great end-of-the-century wrestling match" where "Round One" pits the "neoliberal formula of a continent unified by free trade, tourism, and digital high-technology" against "indigenous, campesino, environmental, and human rights movements" (170). In *Tropic*, Yamashita pits "Supernafta," a superhero embodiment of the policy, against Arcangel's alter ego "El Gran Mojado" (the Big Wetback), who is described as a lucha libre version of Subcommandante Marcos, leader of the anti-NAFTA Zapatista movement.⁸⁶ Supernafta's pre-match speech to the mostly undocumented immigrant crowd presents NAFTA as an unqualified generator "progress" and "freedom." "What's the future?" he asks, "It's a piece of the action! And that's what progress is all about. . . . Before any one of you can be truly free, you need to have enough money to do what you want. The only way that's gonna happen is to free the technology and the commerce that make the money go round" (257). Supernafta's rhetoric conflates "free trade" with personal freedom (being "truly free"), thereby masking the human and environmental costs of "free trade" with a universal narrative of

⁸⁶ Marcos and the Zapatistas actually declared war on NAFTA when it went into effect on January 1, 1994. As Adamson et al. note in the *Environmental Justice Reader*: "by calling into question global institutions such as NAFTA, which favor large multinational agribusiness at the expense of small subsistence farmers, the Zapatistas brought the urgency of the issues at the center of the environmental justice movement into international prominence and demonstrated that disgruntled groups of women, farmers, indigenous peoples, or urban city dwellers have the power to confront large governments, corporations, and even global steamrollers such as NAFTA or the World Trade Organization" (5). Lucha libre, an especially dramatic and performative kind of wrestling in which "luchadores" wear colorful Aztec-inspired masks, is popular in Mexico and other Latin countries.

“freedom” for all, reflecting David Harvey’s argument that “neoliberal utopianism . . . presumes that personal and individual freedom is best assured by strong private property rights and the institutions of a free market and free trade” (*Freedom* 8).⁸⁷ This argument simplifies the causal “link” between freedom and free trade by representing the first as the “inevitable” outcome of the second.

Tropic’s narrative strategy, which I will call “hypercontextual metafiction,” serves to disrupt this kind of reductive logic through a self-conscious reflection on the many contexts it ignores in order to construct its narrative of freedom and progress. Thus, the novel becomes a “metafictional struggle” between the neoliberal narrative and “hypercontextual” narratives which emphasize spatial and historical contexts. El Gran Mojado’s reply, spoken as a poem, exemplifies this approach: “There is no future or past, / There is only changing. / What can this progress my challenger speaks of / really be? / You who live in the declining and abandoned places / of great cities, called barrios, ghettos, and favelas: / What is archaic? What is modern? We are both” (260). El Gran Mojado challenges Supernafta’s simple binary logic by disrupting the linear sense of time (“there is no future or past”) and the unequal spatial distribution of resources (in “barrios, ghettos, and favelas”) that it relies on. The novel metafictionally exposes the narrative of neoliberal globalization as a “myth of the first world” which simplistically claims “that development is wealth and technology progress” without considering the historical and

⁸⁷ Harvey also points out that President George W. Bush often made similar claims in his “frequent association of personal freedom and democracy with free markets and free trade” (4).

spatial contexts which enable this supposedly equalizing system to create inequality (260). Demystifying this narrative, El Gran Mojado explains that “It means that you are no longer human beings / but only labor. / It means that the land you live on is not earth / but only property. / It means that what you produce with your own hands / is not yours to eat or wear or shelter you / if you cannot buy it” (260).⁸⁸ While El Gran Mojado’s fight against Supernafta is unsuccessful (he is finally destroyed by a missile described as a “tiny patriot”), his counter-narrative and that of the novel as a whole works to metafictionally expose how the narrative of free trade and progress conceals its human and environmental costs, and how alternative narratives can be constructed to combat these injustices. This scene illustrates Yamashita’s “hypercontextual” approach to metafiction, and the following section explains her use of the hypercontext concept, the term’s roots in the technology of hypertext, and the function of “hypercontextual metafiction.”

HyperContext, Hypertext, and Hypercontextual Metafiction

While working as a secretary after emigrating back to L.A. from Brazil, Yamashita began outlining *Tropic* using her office’s Lotus spreadsheet software designed for calculating figures. This initial grid, pictured below, eventually became a spatialized diagram of the novel that she labels its “HyperContexts.” The two-page spread, included in the novel’s opening pages, places the seven major characters on the vertical axis and the seven days of the week in which the novel takes place on the horizontal axis. The 49

⁸⁸ Gómez-Peña objects to this narrative on similar grounds, arguing that NAFTA “avoids the most basic social, labor, environmental, and culture responsibilities that are actually the core of any relationship between the three countries” (8).

chapters (one for each character on each day) are then mapped according to the resulting grid. Many of the chapter titles list the specific location in Los Angeles or Mexico in which the chapter takes place, such as “Not Too Far from Mazatlan,” “Harbor Freeway,” or even “Virtually Everywhere,” thus situating them in space as well as narrative time. The horizontal rows of chapter titles chart the themes that define each character. Buzzworm’s chapters, for instance, highlight his obsession with radio news and music programs (“Station ID,” “Oldies,” “LA X,” “You Give Us 22 Minutes,” “AM/FM,” “The Car Show,” “Hour 25”) while Manzanar’s underscore his fascination with freeway traffic (“Traffic Window,” “Rideshare,” “The Hour of the Trucks,” “Lane Change,” “Jam,” “Drive-By,” “SigAlert”), and Arcangel’s name basic human acts (“To Wake,” “To Wash,” “To Eat,” “To Labor,” “To Dream,” “To Perform,” “To Die”), signaling his mythical “everyman” status in the novel.⁸⁹

⁸⁹ Rafaela’s chapters (“Midday,” “Morning,” “Daylight,” “Dusk,” “Dawn,” “Nightfall,” and “Midnight”) are all times of day that emphasize the relative position of the sun, foreshadowing her connection to the Tropic of Cancer. Chapters attributed to Bobby concern transactions (“Benefits,” “Car Payment Due,” “Second Mortgage,” “Life Insurance,” “Visa Card,” “Social Security,” and “American Express”), signaling his fixation on obtaining the stereotypical American Dream. While Emi’s chapters reflect her work at a television news network (“Weather Report,” “NewsNow,” “Disaster Movie Week,” “Live on Air,” “Promos,” “Prime Time,” “Commercial Break”), Gabriel’s reference his position as a busy newspaper reporter (“Coffee Break,” “Budgets,” “The Interview,” “Time & a Half,” “Overtime,” “Working Weekend,” “Deadline”).

HyperContexts

	Monday Summer Solstice	Tuesday Diamond Lane	Wednesday Cultural Diversity	Thursday The Eternal Buzz	Friday Artificial Intelligence	Saturday Queen of Angels	Sunday Pacific Rim
<i>Rafaela Cortes</i>	Midday-Not Too Far from Mazatlán chapter 1	Morning -En México chapter 10	Daylight -The Cornfield chapter 18	Dusk -To the Border chapter 24	Dawn -The Other Side chapter 30	Nightfall -Aztlán chapter 38	Midnight -The Line chapter 45
<i>Bobby Ngu</i>	Benefits -Koreatown chapter 2	Car Payment Due -Tijuana via Singapore chapter 12	Second Mortgage -Chinatown chapter 15	Life Insurance -L.A./T.J. chapter 26	Visa Card -Final Destination chapter 34	Social Security -I-5 chapter 40	American Express -Mi Casa/Su Casa chapter 49
<i>Emi</i>	Weather Report -Westside chapter 3	NewsNow -Hollywood South chapter 9	Disaster Movie Week -Hiro's Sushi chapter 20	Live on Air -El A chapter 27	Promos -World Wide Web chapter 29	Prime Time -Last Stop chapter 41	Commercial Break -The Big Sleep chapter 44
<i>Buzzworm</i>	Station 10 -Jefferson & Normandie chapter 4	Oldies -This Old Hood chapter 13	LA X -Margarita's Corner chapter 16	You Give Us 22 Minutes-The World chapter 22	AM/FM -FreeZone chapter 31	The Car Show -Front Line chapter 37	Hour 25 -Into the Boxes chapter 48
<i>Manzanar Murakami</i>	Traffic Window -Harbor Freeway chapter 5	Rideshare -Downtown Interchange chapter 8	The Hour of the Trucks -The Freeway Canyon chapter 19	Lane Change -Avoiding the Harbor chapter 28	Jam -Greater L.A. chapter 35	Drive-By -Virtually Everywhere chapter 42	SigAlert -The Rim chapter 46
<i>Gabriel Balboa</i>	Coffee Break -Downtown chapter 6	Budgets -Skirting Downtown chapter 14	The Interview -Manzanar chapter 17	Time & a Half -Limousine Way chapter 25	Overtime -El Zócalo chapter 32	Working Weekend -Dirt Shoulder chapter 39	Deadline -Over the Net chapter 43
<i>Arcangel</i>	To Wake -Marketplace chapter 7	To Wash -On the Tropic chapter 11	To Eat -La Cantina de Miseria y Hambre chapter 21	To Labor -East & West Forever chapter 23	To Dream -America chapter 33	To Perform -Angel's Flight chapter 36	To Die -Pacific Rim Auditorium chapter 47

The vertical axis of the diagram offers yet another way to approach the novel's chapters. Each day of the week, starting Monday and ending Sunday, is given a subtitle which provides an overarching theme or concept that runs through each character's chapter on a given day. On "Cultural Diversity" Wednesday, for example, Emi's chapter proclaims that "cultural diversity is bullshit" because it's based on the false rhetoric of diversity as a harmonious "multicultural mosaic" (128, 127). Arcangel's Wednesday chapter, in contrast, situates "cultural diversity" in terms of international "free trade" policy: he observes patrons of a Mexican cantina "eating hamburgers, Fritos, catsup, and

drinking American beers” while they are ironically left politically “hungry and miserable” (131).

Although “hypercontext” seems to be the novel’s major organizing principle, it has received only brief and infrequent mention in the criticism. Douglas Sugano, for instance, off-handedly remarks that the diagram suggests that “our reading experience will be akin to channel-surfing through a week’s worth of seven characters’ docuhistories” (406). However, channel-surfing suggests a passive and fragmented reading experience that belies the novel’s multilayered weaving of stories and its critique of television’s mediation of experience. Sue-Im Lee claims that the HyperContext’s “disjunctive organization leads to an atomistic sense of each character’s life, as each chapter seems to stand on its own with little continuity from the other” (506). Although each character does have a unique trajectory through the text, the diagram seems precisely designed to reveal the complex interweaving of these stories so that an “atomistic” separation of them is impossible. Far from chapters which “stand on [their] own,” the hypercontext model provides multiple lines of connection between stories. I hope to show, in fact, that the hypercontext concept offers a more complex paradigm for understanding the novel’s interconnected aesthetic and political project. Florence Hsiao-Ching Li mentions that the hypercontext “breaks the linear narrative of traditional novels and invents a complex narrative intersected by multiple episodes” (151). While this short description accurately defines the structural role of the diagram, it does not offer a thorough analysis of how hypercontext functions as a concept in the novel. Similarly,

Alvina Quintana's brief but insightful observation that the diagram's vertical/horizontal axes "blur Japanese and English reading conventions" does not explain the implications of this blurring for reading the novel (222). Finally, Yanoula Athanassakis comments that "Yamashita's choice to entitle her grid 'HyperContexts' self-reflexively points to the central role that new forms of media play in a developing global order" (95). While she rightly points to the grid's self-reflexiveness, she does not speculate on the implications of this self-reflexive function for understanding the novel.

To understand the function of hypercontext in *Tropic* we must first consider its roots in the term "hypertext." Coined by Ted Nelson in 1965, "hypertext" was designed to offer a non-linear, associational system of organizing information that mimicked the human brain's process of linking thoughts. This impetus led to the hypertextual model of linking that is now ubiquitous on the internet.¹ Literary uses of the term "hypertext" refer

¹ Vannevar Bush, an engineer who worked on the Manhattan Project during World War II, is considered the grandfather of the hypertext concept. In his 1945 article, "As We May Think," he proposed a machine called a "memex"—a portmanteau of "memory" and "index"—on which an individual could "store all his books, records, and communications" and create associative links between different documents (102). What was so different about his model was that he designed it to behave more like the human brain than other systems of information organization, like the alphabetical. "The human mind," he argued, "operates by association. With one item in its grasp, it snaps instantly to the next that is suggested by the *association* of thoughts, in accordance with some intricate web of trails carried by the cells of the brain" (101). Ted Nelson actually coined the term "hypertext," in a paper delivered at the Association for Computing Machinery conference in 1965, to describe a system of links that allows for "non-sequential writing" (*Machines* 2). Inspired by his own experience with Attention Deficit Disorder, or what he calls "hummingbird mind," Nelson contested conventional linear models of organizing information. Imposing "hierarchy and false regularity" on "thoughts which were not intrinsically sequential" seemed "wrong . . . because you were trying to take these thoughts which had a structure, shall we say, a spatial structure all their own, and put them into linear form" ("Zigzag").

both to online texts which use hyperlinks and to hypertext as a metaphorical or structural concept in literature. George Landow describes highly allusive or nonlinear texts like Stern's *Tristram Shandy* as "quasi-hypertextual fictions" (226). The concept of hypertext expands beyond electronic linking systems, he argues, as a paradigm for understanding texts which exhibit the defining characteristics of hypertext: "multilinearity," "multivocality," "decentering," a "nodal" structure, and an "active reader" (1, 220).² Similarly, Jaishree Odin defines the "hypertext aesthetic" as a narrative strategy which "represents the need to switch from the linear, univocal, closed, authoritative aesthetic involving passive encounters . . . to that of a non-linear, multivocal, open, non-hierarchical aesthetic involving active encounters" ("Performative"). *Tropic* exhibits many of the qualities defined by theorists as "hypertextual." The novel contains an almost staggering number of references or "links" to figures, texts, political movements, historical events, and places. Its multiple stories that range not only across L.A.'s contemporary border region but throughout the Americas and the past five hundred years of history, make the novel structurally multilinear. The lack of a central voice, which is instead spread between seven main characters, demonstrates *Tropic's* multivocal and decentered structure. Rather than following a single story "line," then, readers experience

² Joining the thinking of computer-based hypertext's founders with that of poststructuralist theorists like Derrida and postcolonial thought, Landow notes that they all "argue that we must abandon conceptual systems founded on ideas of center, margin, hierarchy, and linearity and replace them by ones of multilinearity, nodes, links, and networks" (1). This model of hypertext emphasizes the active role of the reader's perspective in interpreting texts: "as readers move through a web or network of texts, they continually shift the center . . . of their investigation and experience. Hypertext, in other words, provides an infinitely recenterable system whose provisional point of focus depends on the reader, who becomes a truly active reader" (56).

the novel as a network of linked nodes where different stories are woven together. This structure requires an active reader who traces these threads in multiple directions.

Yamashita, however, defines her novel not as “hypertextual” (or “quasi-hypertextual”) but as “hypercontextual.” In fact, her choice of the term “hypercontext” came out of a critique of internet hypertext models: “I call the map for my book’s structure ‘hypercontext’ because hypertext has become this sort of thing where people can take material out of context over the Internet, pull it out and read it, then change to the next window and see something else, as they like, move on to the next subject” (Imafuku). While she values hypertext’s ability to create links, she points to the danger of its capacity to engender a context-less experience akin to channel-surfing. A hypercontextual narrative model, then, creates links while also providing a narrative context in which to interpret them. It combines the multilinear, multivocal, and nodal aesthetic of hypertext with a hyper-focus on context.

Hypercontextual metafiction is defined by its proliferation of references (excessive context), its heightened (hyper) attention to spatial and historical contexts, and its self-reflexive meditation on the construction and representation of contexts. In other words, the novel doesn’t just employ hypertext’s nodal structure of links, but metafictionally reflects on the act of linking itself. *Tropic*’s excessive references serve as “hyperlinks” between the novel and the space/history of the Americas. While all fiction refers to intertexts or extra-textual contexts in greater or lesser degrees, Yamashita’s hypercontextual metafiction foregrounds these links, making their interaction with her storyworld explicit and intrusive. In so doing, she attempts not merely to emphasize the

importance of “context,” but to explore how contexts work to influence our political and aesthetic choices. The novel demonstrates that context is not an objective or neutral record of the history or location of an object, person, idea, or event. Rather, like metafiction in general highlights the constructedness of narrative, the novel argues that contexts are human constructions shot through with ideologies and biases.

Tropic’s hypercontextual approach results, for instance, in an excess of generic play that serves to situate the novel in terms of literary and representational contexts. Many critics have commented on the novel’s blending of several genres. Ursula Heise, for example, argues that Yamashita’s novels draw on “North American multicultural writing,” “Latin American magical realism,” and “techno-postmodernism” from Japan and the U.S. (127). Caroline Rody claims that *Tropic* both references and “exceeds” genres like “postmodern satire, magic realism, Los Angeles disaster fiction, Asian American fiction, ethnic American fiction, Mexican fiction” (131). For Douglas Sugano, Yamashita’s fiction “combine[s] anthropology, science fiction, the picaresque, and magic realism” (404), and for Edward Mallot it represents a “bizarre combination of commodity theory and magic realism” (115). This proliferation of visions and genres, however, made the book difficult to categorize by potential publishers. After the novel was rejected about a hundred times, Yamashita began to realize that “there was no clear niche for what I did. It wasn’t Asian American feminist literature; it wasn’t magic realism; it wasn’t science fiction” (Murashige 323). In fact, Claudia Sadowski-Smith claims that Yamashita’s work has received relatively little critical attention in part because it does not restrict itself to “portrayals of her ‘own’ community” (101). Rather than trying to categorize the novel

according to one generic rubric, or simply noting its multiple literary roots, this chapter attempts to demonstrate how the proliferation of contexts which inform the text and reflect its hypercontextual approach work to enable political critique.

If the neoliberal narrative the novel critiques neglects spatial and historical contexts in order to make reductive causative links that promote “progress,” hypercontextual metafiction seeks to disrupt this model of thinking/linking by providing an excessive number of contexts/narratives that make it impossible to think of history and space in a monologic or fixed way. Hypercontextual metafiction does not simply replace dominant contexts or narratives with different ones, or argue that context is arbitrary, but aims to reveal the political, social, and environmental implications of how we construct and represent context. The construction of context always requires the selection of some “texts” at the expense of others, and hypercontextual metafiction serves to highlight how this process is implicated in ideological “readings” of the world. Read in the context of neoliberal globalization, for instance, *maquiladoras* are just institutions that reflect the “natural” movement of “free” capital and labor. While she critiques narratives that selectively omit contexts which contest global “progress,” Yamashita argues that there is an inherent value in selecting for what is usually excluded from these representations. In an interview, she cites this impulse as one of the questions that drove her writing of the novel: “How do we bring people into a work of literature who seem to be invisible and who have been invisible in that literature of Los Angeles for so many years?” (Imafuku). Such alternative contextualizations are useful because they allow us to see people, and

the spaces and histories in they occupy, in new ways. Re-constructing contexts produces new “links” that enable the novel’s political critiques.

As a response to the “passive” consumption of the neoliberal narrative of progress that Supernafta advocates, Yamashita’s hypercontextual metafiction posits the ability of imagination to “actively” recontextualize reality. In her metafictional note to the “Gentle reader,” Yamashita states that the novel “may not be about the future, but is perhaps about the recent past; a past that, even as you imagine it, happens.” Imagination, and imaginative literature, are not disconnected from material reality, but actually have the power to create and re-create it. One of the novel’s epigraphs, from Michael Ventura’s collection of essays originally published in *L.A. Weekly*, establishes this tension between the imaginary and material reality as a defining characteristic of Los Angeles: the city was “named after sacred but imaginary beings” and “came to fame by filming such fragments,” but “its suffering is real enough, God knows” (91). Furthermore, Yamashita’s injunction to the reader posits the act of reading as performative rather than merely consumptive. “Contribut[ing] to the collective imagination,” Yamashita argues, is not the task of “writers” alone but “the creative role of every thinking citizen” (Brada-Williams 4). When read in the context of the subsequent novel, *Tropic*’s prefatory note does more than point to the familiar idea that reading brings a text “to life” in a reader’s mind. Rather, it metafictionally suggests that *what* we read and imagine ultimately affects *how* we read and imagine the world at large. Given that relationship, what we read—the contexts that inform our imaginations—becomes crucial to the transformation of perspective necessary for political resistance. Thus the novel depicts a “metafictional

struggle” that juxtaposes several competing narratives: Supernafta’s with Mojado/Arcangel’s, police and urban developers’ with Buzzworm’s and Manzanar’s, the commercial media’s with the alternative broadcasts of marginalized populations, and multiculturalism with a grassroots or hypercontextual model of coalition-building. In order to effectively challenge the neoliberal narrative with these alternative stories, the novel demonstrates, we must fundamentally revise neoliberal conceptions of space and history. The following section shows how this process works in the novel and situates the text in terms of debates about neoliberalism and globalization.

Revising Neoliberal Space and History: Hypercontextual “Elasticity”

The fundamental problem driving Yamashita’s complex narrative seems to be how to stage an effective challenge to the neoliberal narrative of global free trade and progress. Neoliberalism can be defined by its emphasis on the virtues of deregulated “free” markets, privatization, property rights, and general “progress,” which then entail an erosion of social services, labor rights, and environmental protections. Harvey describes the “neoliberal worldview that currently reigns supreme” as a belief that the “universal system of private property rights, free markets, and free trade together form the privileged, if not the sole, institutional framework within which the universal virtues of liberty and freedom can be realized,” and Edward Soja defines the “neoliberal ideology of deregulation, privatization, and promoting the intrinsic values of small government versus big government” as the source of increasingly extreme levels of

income inequality (Harvey, *Freedom* 53; Soja 57).³ While globalization itself is not “neoliberal,” neoliberal approaches to globalization currently dominate the world market. The “most recent phase of globalization,” notes Harvey, has “been powered by a neoliberal, free market agenda in which privatization and the opening up of markets worldwide to entrepreneurial and multinational capitalism have become a dominant moving force backed by the military and commercial power of the United States” (131).⁴

Hypercontextual metafiction seeks to disrupt the logic of the dominant “neoliberal worldview” and to propose new models of linking/thinking that take into account the spatial and historical contexts that it conceals. While the neoliberal theory of globalization does entail a “linking” of markets situated in multiple locations, it conceptualizes these locales as fixed points of “exchange” without accounting for contexts, like culture and history, considered largely irrelevant to commodity trading. “Neoliberal economic theories” assume a “world of deracinated men and women; producers and consumers; buyers and sellers; entrepreneurs, firms, megacorporations;

³ In 2010, the top quintile of Americans owned about 85% of the wealth, while the bottom 40% owned only 0.3% (Wolff). Despite this staggering inequality, Americans are remarkably unaware of the magnitude of this gap between the nation’s richest and poorest inhabitants. A survey conducted by Michael I. Norton and Dan Ariely in 2010 shows that the average American believes that the top quintile owns 60% of the wealth (instead of the actual 85%) and that the bottom 40% owns 10% (far more than the actual 0.3%). These figures suggest, then, that there are two interrelated problems at work here: the inequality itself and the inadequate representation of that problem to the general public.

⁴ Rob Nixon describes the “neoliberal ideology” as one “premised on globalizing the ‘free market’ through militarization, privatization, deregulation, optional corporate self-policing, the undertaxation of the super wealthy, ever-more arcane financial practices, and a widening divide separating the gated uber-rich from the unhoused ultrapoor within and between nations” (41).

and supposedly neutral but placeless institutions of market and the law” (Harvey 64). Subcommandante Marcos, on whom Arcangel’s wrestling persona is based, points out that while neoliberal globalization is “ostensibly working to eliminate frontiers . . . it actually leads to a multiplication of frontiers,” producing a “world full of watertight compartments which may at best be linked by fragile economic gangways” (Fourth World War). Moreover, it ironically relies on tightening immigration restrictions, limiting the spatial movement of people, while allowing for an increased movement of goods and money. In 1994, the same year NAFTA was enacted, the U.S. launched “Operation Gatekeeper.” Enabled by a doubling of the Immigration and Naturalization Service’s budget, this policy dramatically increased the militarization of the California/Mexico border in particular. By 1997, the year *Tropic* was published, the number of border agents and fences had doubled, and the number of underground sensors had tripled. In what Subcommandante Marcos calls the “giant planetary hypermarket,” it is “only commodities that circulate freely, not people” (Fourth World War). The paradoxical “linking” and dividing of compartmentalized space in the neoliberal approach to globalization parallels its conceptualization of time as a linear advancement toward “progress.” This narrative is based on the “Enlightenment ideal of progress and humankind’s universal linear march toward modernity—a modernity that is both liberal, globalized, and cosmopolitan in appearance” (Bowden 43). However, this neoliberal formulation of global progress both elides the uneven distribution of the “benefits” of “modernity” throughout the world and posits “modernity” as a one-way export from the first world to the “rest”—even as it appears to be a unifying force of cosmopolitanism.

Yamashita's hypercontextual metafiction disrupts this logic through its magical realist depiction of space and time as flexible and distorted. As Arcangel carries the novel's eponymous orange north from Mazatlan, he literally drags Latin American space and history into the U.S. This movement causes the distortions in time and space that drive the novel's plot and enable its critique of the neoliberal narrative. Characters gradually become aware that space and time seem to be shifting. Gabriel first senses that "something's wrong" and that "it's got something to do with time. Place" (61). Then the anomalies start to pile up. A wall Arcangel helps build seems to "stretch . . . like those concave mirrors," a young "homey" in East L.A. sees a bullet inexplicably arc around him "like space curved," and Buzzworm remarks that "the world teeter-tottered" and "time stood still momentarily," pausing the radio broadcast he's listening to (70, 86, 137). "Someone put this city in the washer/dryer," Bobby comments, as L.A. seems "shrunk 50% in places" and "ironed out 200% in others" (230). Rafaela begins to notice an "elasticity of the land and of time," noting that "to everything there seemed to be an eerie liquid elasticity" or "folding [of] space" (149, 119, 253). During the freeway occupation, Manzanar experiences a similar "uncanny sense of the elasticity of the moment, of time and space" and knows that "the entire event was being moved, stretched" (123).

This emphasis on elasticity suggests the need to challenge the conceptions of fixed space and linear time that enable the neoliberal narrative of progress. In *The World Is Flat*, for instance, Thomas Friedman argues that communication technology and the increasing interconnection of global markets "levels" the "global competitive playing field" creating a spatially "flat world" of equal participation in the "amazing era of

prosperity” that accompanies globalization (8). While he does admit that the world is not yet “flat” for everyone, he ironically overlooks the role of “flattening” in exacerbating inequality. This rhetoric of “flatness” and “equality” conceals the actual capacity of free trade and globalization to create an even “bumpier” world where inequalities between different geographic areas and populations are intensified.⁵ Whereas “neoliberalization has created a ‘flat’ world for the multinational corporations and for the billionaire entrepreneur and investor class,” it has produced a “rough, jagged, and uneven world” characterized by “massive disparities in income and wealth” for everyone else (Harvey 58, 60).

Such “flattening” approaches to globalization have implications for our understanding of the environment as well as economic markets. In the seminal environmental justice text, *Noxious New York*, Julie Sze argues that studies of environmental justice must work to “understand the cultural and ideological roots” of both the “inequality” generated by “neoliberalism and globalization” and “local and racial resistance” to this inequality (19). The “cultural and ideological” analysis of neoliberal accounts of globalization that Sze calls for is especially important for environmental critiques given that the rhetoric of neoliberalism and globalization often co-opts the language “nature” to depict market practices as inevitable. Friedman, for instance, equates the unavoidable rise of economic globalization with the rising of the sun. “I think it’s a good thing that the sun comes up every morning,” he writes, “but even if I didn’t much care for the dawn there isn’t much I could do about it. I didn’t start

⁵ For more on this idea see, for example, Richard Florida’s essay “The World is Spiky.”

globalization, I can't stop it" (*Lexus* xxi). Similarly, William Orme compares NAFTA's inevitability to that of the weather: "To be 'for' or 'against' greater North American trade is much like being for or against the weather. Like it or not, the continent's economic integration is fast becoming a reality" (1).

In contrast, Yamashita's depictions of space and time not as "flat" but as "elastic" and "foldable" enable her to literally juxtapose different locations and historical moments to illustrate the "uneven" experience of globalization for marginalized populations. By "folding" the spaces and histories of Latin America into those of Los Angeles, the novel re-contextualizes both, bringing the South in contact with the North and colonial history in contact with the contemporary era. This narrative strategy defines Yamashita's hypercontextual metafiction, which both reintroduces contexts omitted from the neoliberal narrative and enables alternative "linkages" between, for example, resistance movements in Venezuela and L.A. That is, hypercontextual metafiction is designed to reveal how different oppressions are linked across space and time and how resistance to these oppressions requires linking the struggles of populations in different spatial and historical contexts.

This method illustrates the novel's position within debates about globalization. Scholars like Harvey, Anthony Giddens, and Arjun Appadurai "define globalization as a contemporary phenomenon linked to the development of electronic media, the rise of transnational corporations, global financial institutions" (Jay 2). Appadurai, for instance, argues that globalization represents "a dramatic and unprecedented break between tradition and modernity," and focuses on the contemporary role of electronic media and

migration in shaping our “imagined selves and imagined worlds,” and Harvey describes globalization in terms of the “timespace compression” that modern forms of transit and communication engender (Appadurai 3; Harvey, *Condition* 147). Other scholars, like Paul Jay and Malcolm Waters, theorize “globalization as a long historical process” that “treats colonialism and its aftermath as the driving force of globalization” (Jay 7).

Although Yamashita’s novel does foreground the “contemporary-ness” of globalization through its focus on technologies like the internet and satellite television, it also demonstrates how contemporary globalization (and neoliberal approaches to it) are linked to the ideologies and ongoing material effects of colonialism. While neoliberalism is “new” in its scope and intensity, Yamashita’s novel links its basic profit-driven ideology with a broader history of capitalism and colonialism. *Tropic* depicts capitalist “neoliberalism as a direct continuation of the principles and practices of colonialism,” and dramatizes how both have functioned to legitimate social and environmental injustices (Huggan 11). Similarly, Subhabrata Banerjee, Vanessa C.M. Chio, and Raza Mir claim that neoliberalism is a form of “neocolonialism” which “can be understood as a continuation of direct Western colonialism without the traditional mechanism of expanding frontiers and territorial control, but with elements of political, economic, and cultural control” (8). In addition, the novel suggests that positions which either demonize or blithely rejoice in globalization are incomplete. For example, Appadurai’s view of globalization, which emphasizes cultural rather than economic manifestations, tends toward the celebration of globalization as bringing new opportunities for the “play of the imagination” to “even the meanest and most hopeless of lives” (54). Yamashita’s

approach both depicts globalization as potentially enabling new kinds of globalized resistance movements and points to the environmental and social injustices that globalization, particularly in its neoliberal form, can intensify for marginalized populations.

Thus Yamashita's hypercontextual method shapes her approach to environmental justice, which links multiple spatial and historical sites in a larger legacy of global oppression. Whereas Ozeki's environmental justice critique focused on factory farming, Erdrich's on the exploitation of Native lands, and Hogan's on hydroelectric damming, Yamashita's hypercontextual novel addresses the environmental legacy of neoliberal globalization and capitalist urban geography for L.A.'s border region. Soja argues that while the environmental justice movement has succeeded in linking "locational bias" to "more conventional notions of racial, class, and gender discrimination," it tends to focus on "negative environmental impacts" or "outcomes" rather than on "the processes producing them" (53-54). This attention to "highly localized and unique cases" has led to a general lack of "awareness of the interactive and multiscalar geographies of place-based discrimination" (53). Yamashita's novel does just this kind of work. It links specific "outcomes" like rainforest destruction in Brazil or urban decay in Los Angeles with "processes" like colonialism, neoliberal globalization, and racism, thus producing an explicit "awareness" of how environmental injustice functions on interacting geographic scales (global/local, nation/city, etc). The novel does not ignore particular "highly localized" cases, but it positions those cases in "multiscalar" contexts. Literature's capacity to dramatize the relation between "outcomes" and "processes" in multiple

contexts represents a crucial contribution to the environmental justice movement given its largely sociological and scientific orientation. “Environmental justice needs literature,” argues Julie Sze, to “better understand why and how” the exploitation of humans and the environment are “linked, historically and systemically” (“From” 173).

If corporate neoliberalism legitimates environmental injustices, how can environmental literature critique this commodified view of the environment and labor without advocating a nostalgic return to “nature” or “wilderness?” Yamashita’s novel is an example of how literature can challenge the neoliberal narrative of global “progress” by linking contemporary neoliberalism with its colonial roots, and by positioning it in alternating local and global contexts. These strategies, I ultimately argue, allow the novel to stage an effective critique which highlights the human and environmental exploitation omitted from this progress narrative, revealing a network of linked oppressions across time and space. However, Yamashita does not advocate a reactionary, albeit impossible, return to an idealized concept of nature, but instead proposes a kind of “globalization from the bottom” which is based on an alternative network of linked resistance that draws on minority histories and marginalized spaces to promote environmental justice.

While the novel does not respond to this intensified commodification of labor and land with an idealized concept of nostalgic pre-globalized nature, it begins by depicting one character’s failed attempt to do just that. Gabriel, a Chicano newspaper reporter living in L.A., begins building a “tropical . . . hideout” in rural Mexico as an escape from the commodified city (224). What his girlfriend describes as his “back to nature thing” is structured by a “romantic impulse” to create a “sensation of timeless vacation” (23, 6, 5).

However, the novel reveals that this pastoral escape from consumer culture is actually predicated on consumption—he designs the place based on “photos torn from slick architectural magazines” (6). Moreover, far from escaping globalization, Gabriel’s “tropical hideout” is thoroughly infiltrated by the global market—from its imported fixtures to the “exotic northern trees” he insists on planting even though they “couldn’t survive in this climate” (10). Further demonstrating that his “timeless vacation” cannot actually escape global forces, his housekeeper attributes the growth on one of these sickly trees of an out-of-season “aberrant orange,” the magical orange of the novel’s title, to “global warming” (11). Perhaps most importantly, Gabriel’s “romantic impulse” elides the political and ideological consequences of his “back to nature thing.” It relies, for instance, on exploiting the labor of his housekeeper—he originally thinks he’s “doing her a favor” by letting her work for him and later realizes that he is “part of the net of favors and subtle harassments” that oppress her (224). Moreover, Yamashita juxtaposes Gabriel’s exotic fruit trees with the uneven distribution of trees in L.A., demonstrating that access to nature is structured by class and race in ways Gabriel’s hideout elides. While the wealthy Westside is marked by lush shade trees, the low-income ethnic neighborhoods of East L.A. have scraggily palms because, as one character explains, “poor people don’t get to have no shade” (32). So if this kind of “back to nature thing” or romantic escape seems insufficient as a political response to neoliberalism and environmental injustice, what does the novel propose instead?

The following sections illustrate how Yamashita’s hypercontextual metafiction constructs different, but complimentary, responses which each demonstrate that linking

the neoliberal present with its colonial roots, and its local effects with global contexts is essential to an environmental justice critique. The first demonstrates how Arcangel's border poetry works to "spatialize" the past five hundred years of history in the Americas, situating neoliberalism and colonialism in specific geographic and bodily sites. In the second section, I examine the different models of mapping depicted in the novel to show how Manzanar's cartographic method disrupts neoliberal representations of urban space by "historicizing" Los Angeles. Both strategies are central to how hypercontextual metafiction critiques the neoliberal narrative of globalization. The final section demonstrates why this critique is crucial to the novel's vision of social and environmental justice. Through a reading of the freeway occupation, I show that hypercontextual metafiction allows for a grassroots, dialogical model of coalition-building that challenges the apolitical narrative of multiculturalism. Globalization, the novel argues, generates new oppressions but also new opportunities for cross-cultural alliances.

History Traveling: Arcangel's Border Poetry

When Yamashita describes Arcangel in an interview, she says, "he is many things, but perhaps he is also history, well history traveling" (Imafuku). In the context of the novel, Arcangel is "history traveling" in at least two senses. As a mythical character born on October 12, 1492 (the day Columbus is believed to have reached landfall in the Caribbean), he has since traveled throughout the Americas witnessing important political events. In another sense, the novel's seven days chart Arcangel's pulling of the Tropic of Cancer across the U.S./Mexico border, literally causing the history of Latin America to "travel" northward through space. If the neoliberal narrative of globalization, represented

by Supernafta, is “only concerned with the / commerce of money and things,” the poems Arcangel writes throughout the novel serve to hyper-contextualize the abstract function of “commerce” by highlighting its effects on environments and human bodies (133). Representing free trade either in terms of abstract “trade imbalances and stock market figures. / Negatives and positives. / Black and red numbers,” or in the universalist rhetoric of “progress,” says Arcangel, requires the suppression of such contexts (147). While “paper money” and commodities float “effortlessly” across the border from South to North, the people, ideologies, and histories of the South have been blocked (200). What this “graceful movement of free capital” elides is the environmental destruction and the “hidden and cheap labor” that enables policies like NAFTA to be seen as a positive force of hemispheric progress and development (200).

Arcangel’s poetry reflects the novel’s hypercontextual approach to metafiction both through its excessive number of references to external contexts (people, books, historical events, places) and through its strategy of linking the abstract forces of neoliberalism and globalization with particular spatial and bodily sites. Arcangel is perhaps the novel’s most overtly metafictional character since he actually writes poems and, in them, reflects on the need to challenge the ahistorical neoliberal narrative of progress. Arcangel is a quintessential performer, a “one man circus act” whose work, like the novel itself, incorporates multiple genres including “big epics and short poetry—as short as a single haiku—romantic musicals, political scandal, and, as they say, comical tragedy and tragical comedy” (47). Moreover, Arcangel’s performances, whether they be poetic or dramatic, are both self-conscious constructions and genuine pleas for justice.

Like the novel, Arcangel metafictionally signals to the reader that his work is “part of an accomplished performance” that, while constructed, also points to the real suffering of people and environments. Although he makes several performances in the novel, like the wrestling match discussed earlier, I am focusing here on his poetry because it best demonstrates the novel’s hypercontextual approach to metafiction. Arcangel’s poetry seeks to name, often in the form of epic lists, everything that is concealed or forgotten in the neoliberal narrative. His poems not only reference a dizzying array of historical moments and places but also serve to “spatialize” this traveling history by examining its effects on particular geographies and bodies. By spatializing history, Arcangel is able to define the exploitation of land and laboring bodies as urgent environmental justice issues, and to propose a model of resistance that links struggles across multiple locations.

Arcangel’s first poem in the novel, for instance, takes the historical moment of colonial “discovery” and expands it spatially throughout the Americas. While the poem starts with the well-known arrival of Christopher Columbus in “San Salvador, Cuba, Haiti, and the Dominican Republic,” it goes on to multiply the contexts in which Arcangel reads the narrative of discovery (49). He includes the “discovery” of places like Trinidad, Venezuela, Newfoundland, Brazil, Mexico, Argentina, and even California. By highlighting the fact that “Every year / there has been a historic discovery of our lands,” Arcangel ironizes the colonialist mandate to conquer “new” lands and situates the Americas within a longer indigenous tradition (50). His poems in subsequent chapters go on to specify the environmental and human costs of colonial “discoveries” of new lands and neoliberal “discoveries” of new markets.

Arcangel's hypercontextual "traveling history" traces a history of resistance to environmental injustice not through "classic" environmentalist figures like John Muir and Edward Abbey, but through political revolutionaries like Che Guevara and "ecomartyrs" like Chico Mendes. For example, Arcangel juxtaposes owners of enormous agricultural tracts, or "latifundists" (derived from the Latin "latus" meaning spacious and "fundus" meaning farm), who have been major forces in the environmentally disastrous practice of clear-cutting Amazonian rain forest to raise cattle for U.S. multinationals like McDonald's, with "ecomartyrs" like Chico Mendes who was murdered by ranchers opposed to his efforts to preserve the Brazilian rainforest (200). Mendes has been remembered as a figure who united environmental and social justice imperatives by, for instance, creating alliances between the rubber tapper's union and indigenous peoples to promote the sustainable use of the rainforest.⁶ In the same poem, Arcangel lists endangered rainforest animals like "panthers" and "sloths" alongside "El Nino" as contexts which are omitted from the official narrative of neoliberals like Supernafta (201). As a weather pattern linked to global warming, El Nino is a reminder of how the environmental practices of first world polluters like the U.S. contribute to climate change in the Southern hemisphere.

Tropic explicitly links the international market economies of colonial and neoliberal eras with environmental injustice not only through Arcangel's poetry but also through Rafaela's vision. When Rafaela turns into a snake during a mythic battle with the

⁶ In an earlier poem, Arcangel has a specific vision of "Chico Mendes tapping Brazilian rubber" (145).

representative of an organ-smuggling cartel, she has a vision of environmental “massacre” that parallels Arcangel’s (221). She sees the death of “thousands” of tropical birds, and the “scorched land that followed the sweet stuff called white gold and the crude stuff like black gold” (221). Rafaela links the extraction of sugar and oil, as well as “coffee, cacao and bananas,” with both the environmental costs of “scorched land” and the labor exploitation of the “human slavery that dug and slashed and pushed and jammed” all of these commodities “out and away, forever” (221).

Arcangel further spatializes the historical legacy of colonialism and globalization by linking abstract commodities to their origins in specific places. Combating the market view of products as neutral “placeless” items of exchange, Arcangel references their loaded spatial, political, and historical contexts as part of a larger pattern of third world exploitation. When he remembers “Haitian farmers burning and slashing cane, / workers stirring molasses into white gold,” he connects the history of slave labor on sugar cane plantations with current exploitations of labor that result from policies like NAFTA (145). A vision of “Guatemalans loading trucks with / crates of bananas and corn” is juxtaposed to an image of a “mother in Idaho peeling a banana for her child” while “lines of laborers” are “gripping soiled paychecks at the local bank” (145). Described in this context, the seemingly innocent act of a mother peeling a banana for her child is seen as a link in the chain of labor and environmental exploitation that characterizes the “uneven” distribution of power among first and third world spaces.

These poems metafictionally disrupt the neoliberal “progress” narrative by situating it in laboring bodies, the “hidden and cheap labor,” that this narrative conceals. That

Yamashita focuses throughout her “environmental” novel on exploited labor signals her critique of mainstream environmentalism’s privileging of wilderness preservation over the effects of environmental degradation on vulnerable human populations like low-wage laborers. The “novel’s emphasis on labor marks it as an environmental justice text,” argues Sze, because it reflects the “environmental justice movement’s recentering of people and their labor as central to the narrative of nature” (“Not” 37).

In a long poem that lists all of the forgotten things now crossing the border with Arcangel’s orange, he starts by naming low-wage laborers. Children who sell “Kleenex and Chiclets” in the street, are accompanied by maquiladora factory workers (“the women pressing rubber soles into tennis shoes” and “the men welding fenders to station wagons”), and “all the people who do the work of machines” (200). These last include service workers, or “human washing machines, human vacuums, human garbage disposals.” Workers like Bobby and Rafaela in their janitorial business are invisible as human individuals and are thus effectively equated to the machines with which they perform their labor. As Emi quips, “these days, if you are making a product you can actually touch *and* making a comfortable living at it, you are either an Asian or a machine” (23). Despite the fact that immigrant workers like Bobby “never stopped working” at tasks like “Digging ditches. Sweeping trash. Fixing pipes. Pumping toilets,” Rafaela remarks that they are “not wanted here. Nobody respects our work” (79-80). When Arcangel encounters a group of immigrants just after crossing the border, they warn him that he’ll be seen as “nothin’ but a lazy old freeloading mes’kin around here”

(212). These examples emphasize a paradox of the neoliberal model that simultaneously needs and rejects immigrant labor.

This poem, then, links the exploitation of laboring bodies with the bodily perils of colonialism and the contemporary border. The suppressed history of colonialism, figured through disease and death, now comes hurtling across the border: “then came smallpox, TB, meningitis, E coli, / influenza, and 25 million dead Indians” (200). These “diseases of the third world” come back to haunt the U.S. like the memory of 25 million indigenous people killed by European germs. Arcangel relates the impact of colonialism on Native bodies to the bodily dangers encountered by immigrants at the contemporary U.S./Mexico border. As he approaches the border, Arcangel knows it “wait[s] with . . . rape, robbery, and death” (198). Border-crossing brings particular risks for women, who face the real threat of rape and assault. Bobby later remarks, for instance, that “long the border everybody knows, every woman don’t get raped, she don’t pass. The price she pays” (201). In fact, Arcangel figures the border itself as a violent weapon used against immigrant bodies when he states that government officials “held the border to his throat like a great knife” (198).

Moreover, this poem contextualizes the border within the legal history of U.S. immigration, highlighting especially the role of language in legitimating exploitation and displacement. The border “waited with its great history of migrations back and forth—in recent history, *the deportation of 400,000 Mexican / citizens in 1932, coaxing back of 2.2 million / braceros in 1942 / only to exile the same 2.2 million / wetbacks in 1953*” (198). Every other line in this section of the poem starts with an identifying term (“citizen,”

“bracero,” “wetback”), the poem’s form emphasizing the historical importance of the rhetoric used to identify Mexican immigrants. Following the Great Depression, between 1929 and 1939, as many as one to two million Mexicans and Mexican-Americans were deported or harassed into leaving the U.S. as part of the government’s program known as “Mexican Repatriation.” As many as sixty percent of this number were U.S.-born children who left with their parents. The 1932 Repatriation defined deportees, regardless of their actual status, as citizens of Mexico rather than the U.S. Instead of “deportation,” the program was spun as a positive initiative of “repatriation.” Just as the Great Depression’s unemployment rates prompted Repatriation, so the sudden labor shortages during WWII prompted the U.S.’s Bracero Program, which began in 1942. These “braceros,” who totaled more than two million over the course of the program, were manual laborers brought to the U.S. to work in agriculture and on railroads. When the U.S. was in desperate need of Mexican workers, they were welcomed (legally, if not culturally) as “braceros,” a term which emphasizes their value as laborers. However, the same workers were then maligned as “wetbacks” after the WWII era production boom had ended. Like the Repatriation before it, “Operation Wetback” (started in 1954) used raids, harassment, and scare tactics to pressure migration.⁷ Arcangel’s attention to this

⁷ L.A. was particularly targeted because of its high population of immigrant workers. In February 1931, for example, agents closed off La Placita, a public plaza in a downtown L.A. Mexican community, and forced some four hundred Mexican-looking people to produce papers proving their legal statuses. In 1985, Father Luis Oliveras, pastor of the church at La Placita, actually declared the church and its grounds a sanctuary space off-limits to the INS. This history is particularly salient given Arizona’s controversial 2010 law that forces immigrants to carry identifying papers with them at all times and enables police to stop anyone whom they suspect of being undocumented. In 2006, California

evolution of terms is part of the novel's larger critique of history, which highlights how official language serves to rationalize contradictory, discriminatory, and even illegal policies against ethnic minorities.

Like its attention to how official language is used to facilitate American progress, Arcangel's poetry demonstrates how environmental and labor exploitation is reinforced by the neoliberal transactional model in which Latin America provides resources in exchange for "progress." Reflecting a hypercontextual strategy of intertextual linking, one poem is based on journalist Eduardo Galeano's treatise *Open Veins of Latin America*, which traces this history of exploitation by Spanish colonials, the British Empire, and finally the U.S. This book was given to President Barack Obama by Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez in 2009, rocketing it to best-seller lists.⁸ In Arcangel's poem, Galeano explains that "industry was like an airplane. / It landed and left with everything-- / raw materials, / exotic culture, and / human brains-- / everything. / Everybody's labor got occupied in the / industry of draining their / homeland of its natural wealth" (145). According to this transactional model, all facets of Latin America—including land, raw materials, culture, labor, and even human thought—are objects ripe for exploitation by first world countries. Ironically, the labor of Latin Americans serves not to enrich their

became the first U.S. state to offer a public apology when it passed the "Apology Act for the 1930s Mexican Repatriation Program." This statute recognized the "unconstitutional removal and coerced emigration of United States citizens and legal residents of Mexican descent" and apologized "for the fundamental violations of their basic civil liberties and constitutional rights committed during the period of illegal deportation and coerced emigration."

⁸ While the novel references many anti-capitalist or anti-NAFTA political figures and struggles, it neglects in large part to address how figures like Chavez, for instance, are complicit in consolidating power and exploiting natural resources like oil.

own lives or regions, but to ensure that this is impossible. “In exchange,” explains Galeano, “they got progress, / technology, / loans, and / loaded guns” (145). These are the supposedly beneficial exports of NAFTA-model international trade, what Bobby sarcastically calls “gifts from NAFTA” (161). This poem satirizes the narrative of “saving” people of color from themselves by linking Latin American poverty and political instability with exploitative U.S. trading policies. Countries like the U.S. export the myth of “progress”—as increased technology, consumerism, and militarism—across the border while concealing the human and environmental costs of importing “raw materials,” “exotic culture” and “human brains.”

In contrast to the neoliberal narrative’s emphasis on this “graceful movement of free capital” across borders, Arcangel’s hypercontextual model defines the U.S./Mexico border as an imagined line that nevertheless has profound material effects. He juxtaposes the arbitrariness of the U.S./Mexico border, created “with a stroke of the pen,” with the obviousness of the Tropic of Cancer, a “border made plain by the sun itself” (133, 71).⁹ As he drags the Tropic northward, however, he knows that the national border “wait[s] with seismic sensors and thermal imaging, / with la pinche migra, / colonias of destitute skirmishing at its hard line, / . . . steel structures, barbed wire, infrared binoculars, / INS detention centers, border patrols” (198). The contrast between the technological sophistication of the border itself and the destitute colonias which surround it highlights

⁹ The Tropic of Cancer, the northernmost line over which the sun appears directly overhead, runs through Mexico and, in the novel, specifically through Gabriel’s vacation property. The novel’s eponymous orange, grown on a tree that sits on this line, becomes attached to the Tropic itself, allowing Arcangel, as I described earlier, to drag Mexico into the U.S. by carrying the orange northward.

the uneven spatial distribution of resources generated by neoliberal globalization. Colonias are border communities created in “waste” lands unfit for other development or agriculture. They are plagued by poverty, lack of access to clean water, health care, and other services, and high rates of unemployment.¹⁰ While the neoliberal narrative represented by Supernafta tells Mexicans that “[they] are North too,” they respond by asking, “what’s the good of being North when it feels, looks, tastes, smells, shits South?” (132). Far from erasing the border between North and South, neoliberal free trade accentuates it. In fact, “profound differences in industrial regulation as well as wealth distribution” make the “topographical contrast” at the U.S./Mexico border “look more distinct today than a century ago” (Buell 82). Even “Martians” would be able to recognize this border, says Arcangel: “they would swim nude in Acapulco, buy sombreros, ride burros, take pictures of the pyramids, build a maquiladora, hire us, and leave” (132). Supernafta’s simple assertion that NAFTA makes Mexico “North too” conceals the border’s material impact on lands and bodies. “Environmental justice activism,” argues Yanoula Athanassakis, “has long pointed to the absurdity of national boundaries as they alternately claim and mine resources” while “disclaiming and disowning the resulting issues of human rights violations and toxic dumping” (91). Arcangel’s literal dragging of the South into the space of the North illustrates the

¹⁰ These wastelands are divided up into parcels and sold to individuals who usually construct houses gradually out of discarded materials. According to the Federal Reserve Bank of Dallas’s Office of Community Affairs, colonias “may lack electricity, plumbing and other basic amenities.”

permeability of national borders that can stop neither pollution, El Nino, and “progress,” nor revolutionary ideas and transnational coalitions.

In answer to the de-contextualized narrative of progress, Arcangel proposes a hypercontextual “traveling history,” a history that travels across borders to link resistance struggles in multiple geographic locations. As the embodied form of this traveling history, Arcangel writes of his presence at important political moments across the continent. He was “with Sitting Bull at Custer’s Last Stand, / at the Bay of Pigs in 1961 and / on San Juan Hill with Teddy Roosevelt in 1898”; he “sailed down the Magdalena River with the / dying Simon Bolivar,” was “with Che in Bolivia in 1967 / when he was killed, and likewise / with Leon Trotsky just as he was being stabbed in 1940,” saw “Tachito Somoza assassinated in Asuncion,” and “marched with the Mothers of the Disappeared” (213).¹¹ These events, “folded” together across space and time, create an alternative map of the Americas that highlights resistance to capitalist imperialism.

Arcangel’s poem about the forgotten things now crossing the border similarly spatializes the histories of resistance located in places like Venezuela, Argentina, Mexico and Chile. The “spirit of ideologies thought to be dead / and of the dead themselves” now

¹¹ Tachito Somoza was the U.S.-supported president of Nicaragua assassinated by the socialist Sandinistas during Nicaraguan Revolution. The Sandinistas’ goals included unionization, equality for women, and improved working conditions for the poor. “Mothers of the disappeared” refers to the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo whose children were “disappeared” during Argentina’s Dirty War (1976-1983): the military admitted to over 9,000 kidnappings, while the Mothers said the number was closer to 30,000, and the civilian government later admitted to 11,000 kidnappings (some children were adopted by military families, most were secretly murdered). Three of the 14 founding mothers were also disappeared and killed (later identified through DNA in 2005). They have since founded an independent university and cultural center, and continue to march every Thursday.

“clamored forth” (200). While Arcangel does not mention any of these ideologies by name, he does include a list of “the dead” who are associated with ideologies of resistance. These include two of the figures listed above: Simon Bolivar, a Venezuelan leader who was instrumental in the struggles of several Latin American countries for independence from the Spanish Empire, and Che Guevara, the Marxist Argentinean figure long regarded as a symbol of Latin American revolution. Also included are Benito Juarez, the first indigenous president of a country (Mexico) in the western hemisphere, Augusto Sandino, leader of a guerilla war against the U.S. occupation of Nicaragua, Pancho Villa, a Mexican general who actually crossed the border in 1916 to attack towns in New Mexico and Texas, and Salvador Allende, the first democratically elected Marxist president of a Latin American country (Chile). These figures and ideologies cross the border along with the memory of “African slaves, freedom fighters,” and “dead Indians” (200).

If the de-contextualized neoliberal narrative represents colonialism and contemporary globalization, as the inevitable results of increased global interconnectivity, Arcangel’s traveling history demonstrates that this interconnectivity can also generate resistance to that narrative. That is, his poetry juxtaposes global networks of exploitation with potential global networks of resistance. While Yamashita is decidedly a critic of the commodified rhetoric of harmonious “multiculturalism,” the kinds of linkages made in Arcangel’s poems suggest the need to chart a “pan-revolutionary” history that includes the struggles of multiple populations in multiple locations. The novel’s hypercontextual approach suggests that only by linking, for

instance, human and environmental rights movements in Latin America, Native struggles against colonialism, and African-American resistance to slavery and discrimination, can we construct an effective narrative of resistance.¹² If, as Rob Nixon suggests, “the neoliberal era has intensified assaults on resources,” it has “also intensified resistance, whether through isolated site-specific struggles or through activism that has reached across national boundaries in an effort to build translocal alliances” (4). In fact, Arcangel himself embodies this kind of pan-cultural connection, since his speech combines “Latin mixed with every aboriginal, colonial, slave or immigrant tongue” (47).

At the end of his long list of people and things now crossing the border, Arcangel notes that “Everything and everybody got in lines-- / citizens and aliens-- / the great undocumented foment” (201). By including the entire list of people, raw materials, culture, history, and environment as part of the “great undocumented foment,” Arcangel ironizes the persecution of undocumented workers. By defining immigrant workers as “undocumented,” the U.S. government also un-documents, or erases from public history, the historical, labor, and environmental legacy of colonialism and First World economic domination. Arcangel’s poem, then, works to “re-document” them by reviving their existence in public memory. He ironically describes himself as the “Conquistador of the North,” and his poetry enacts a kind of reverse colonialism (198). Unlike the European

¹² In fact, Gómez-Peña describes his multi-generic book *New World Border*, as a “kind of post-Mexican literary hypertext” (ii). The “reader follows multidirectional links that connect throughout the book,” and this reading process, says Gómez-Peña, “emulate[es] the endless journeys and border crossings which are at the core of my experience, and therefore my art” (ii). This sense of hypertext as a form which mimics or enables border crossing resonates with *Tropic*’s representation of the Mexico/U.S. border as a nodal space intersected by multiple histories, cultures, and narratives.

colonization of the Americas, though, Arcangel's reverse colonialism aims to bring not genocide and domination, but the memory of colonial and neoliberal abuses, across the border. His poetry shows specifically how the ideology of colonialism leads directly to contemporary political, human rights, and environmental abuses. This ideology, which defined Latin America (and indigenous North America) primarily as a source of raw materials and human labor for the first world, continues in present-day international trade policies like NAFTA. In response to the "forgetful" narrative of progress, Arcangel emphasizes the need for a traveling history that "remembers" environmental and bodily sites. In the next section, I examine the corresponding need for an account of space that "remembers" history.

Layered Geography: Mapping L.A.

Whereas Arcangel's poetry argues for a "traveling history" of the Americas, the parts of the novel set in L.A. demonstrate the parallel imperative for a "layered geography" of the city. Describing her aim in writing the novel, Yamashita notes that "what in part I try to say is that the city is a layered geography traversed and negotiated every day by different people" (Glixman). Because "every new group of immigrants appropriates the given structures and infrastructures to take ownership of a new home," the "city is thus forever changing, but it is home, and this also means that home is not fixed but changing" (Glixman). Among the "layers" of L.A. are "historical layers," "layers of people who are homeless, people who are very close to just the trash in the city," the "layer of immigrants and illegals and those questions," and the "babel of Los Angeles" (Imafuku). The novel dramatizes these fluctuating layers of the city, and its

depiction of the literal shifting of space emphasizes how human populations actually transform the geography of the city. As Yamashita asserts, “geography is not just the land; it’s the people” (Shan 132). Just as Arcangel’s poems worked to spatialize the “placeless” history of neoliberalism/colonialism, the notion of “layered geography” serves to contextualize the ahistorical neoliberal narrative of the city within its human and environmental history.

Yamashita’s interest in the concept of layered geography informs the novel’s obsession with maps. “I’m fascinated with the map of the city,” she notes, “how it’s been determined over time by immigrant communities that have come and gone, along with the decline, gentrification, and renewal that goes on constantly to redefine the city” (Shan 132). In fact, Yamashita actually describes the “HyperContext” diagram as a map. “The hypercontext at the beginning is sort of the map of the book,” she notes, “it was a big map . . . well, my map of Los Angeles” (Imafuku). If the hypercontext creates a “layered” map of the novel, and the novel represents a “layered” geography of L.A., then we can read hypercontextual metafiction as a form of “layered” fiction that emphasizes the importance of historical and spatial contexts (layers) for how we interpret narratives. Yamashita’s metafictional structuring of her novel as a geography mapped by its “hypercontexts” leads to her positioning of the reader as a metaphorical driver. “You as a reader are put in the driver’s seat,” she claims, “you have your map, you’re in L.A., and you have to drive” (Murashige 339). This characterization of the reader as driver through the novelistic landscape not only references the book’s preoccupation with L.A.’s driving culture, but also theorizes an explicitly active role for the reader. The hypercontext

diagram itself provides a map that allows readers to traverse the novel's geography in a spatialized, non-linear way, with a heightened sense of how the different locations, times, and stories intersect across the boundaries of chapters. Moreover, Yamashita's formulation defines reading more generally as an act of traveling—an act that, like the traveling of immigrants, can actually transform literary, political, and physical geographies.

The novel's fascination with maps, then, is directly related to its hypercontextual approach. *Tropic* includes several references to maps of L.A., including maps of gang territories, maps of urban renewal projects and freeways, Manzanar's imagined maps, the satellite-tracked maps of organ traffickers, and even the L.A. Thomas Guide. As Manzanar says, "*there are maps and there are maps and there are maps*" (56). However, the novel demonstrates that all maps are not created equally. Maps are not neutral records of "reality"; rather, they are both representations of power and objects which create and reinforce power. These maps function in the text as narratives in their own right that can either reinforce or challenge the neoliberal geography of the city. Yamashita's hypercontextual metafiction highlights the role of maps in perpetuating an unjust urban geography in order to show how acts of re-writing and re-mapping are necessary for creating social and environmental justice in an era of globalization.

To accomplish this, the novel juxtaposes de-contextualized and hypercontextual models of mapping. De-contextualized maps, which represent space as fixed and ahistorical, reinforce the capitalist logic of neoliberal globalization that perpetuates discriminatory urban geographies. In contrast, Yamashita proposes a form of

hypercontextual mapping that sees space and time as elastic, palimpsestic, porous. This model involves attending to the “layered” histories of particular places, making the exploited visible and providing them access to histories of resistance that can be recuperated from physical and imagined places. The remainder of this section analyzes examples of both models: the first represented by maps of gang territories, freeway construction, and gentrification projects, and the second by Buzzworm’s concept of “gente-fication” and Manzanar’s imagined maps of the city. If the environmental justice movement critiques mainstream environmentalists’ equation of nature with “empty green space” as “ahistorical, classist, and antiurban,” this section’s focus on maps of L.A. reflects the movement’s commitment to historicizing urban landscapes and emphasizing the needs of low-income ethnic city-dwellers to access resources (Sze, “From” 165).

The novel’s critique of de-contextualized maps begins when Gabriel hands Buzzworm a 1972 map which outlines the territories of street gangs. Buzzworm, who has made it his personal mission to get the “true” stories of his impoverished East L.A. community into the media, relies on newspaper reporter Gabriel to “tell the story. Point is there’s people out here. Life out here” (111). As a figure especially concerned about representations of the ethnic poor in his community, Buzzworm has a visceral reaction to this map. He studies the document, following “the thick lines on the map showing the territorial standing of Crips versus Bloods,” and then shakes his head, asking “Even if it were true, whose territory was it anyway?” (81). The problem with this map is that its “thick lines” oversimplify the communities’ social geography, reducing a complex nexus of human life to the abstract shapes of rival gang territories.

Rather than acknowledging either the socio-economic conditions that contribute to gangs or the majority of community members in these areas that do not belong to gangs, this map portrays East L.A. as a landscape of violence and fear. Buzzworm cites his own family history, in which his grandmother sacrificed even food to make house payments so that he would one day own a home, as an example of the map's blindspots. Thinking of his home, he wonders, "Was this his territory? According to the map, it was in Crips or Bloods territory" (81). By representing the community solely through the prism of gangs, the map erases the hard-won history of community building by impoverished minorities in East L.A.

Buzzworm's reaction exemplifies the novel's hypercontextual metafiction strategy. He lists other map-able data from his community that the gang map conceals, including

which kind of colored people (black, brown, yellow) lived where; which churches/temples served which people; which schools got which kids; which taxpayers were registered to vote; which houses were owned or rented . . . which houses on welfare; which houses making more than twenty thou a year; which houses had young couples with children; which elderly; which people had been in the neighborhood more than thirty years. (81)

He adds, finally, "where in Compton did George Bush used to live anyway?" (81).

While the gang map inevitably reflects indices of race and poverty, it does not acknowledge how these factors relate to the existence of gangs, but instead makes a

simple causal link between gangs and crime. “There’s a whole list of things that the map could possibly tell you,” notes Yamashita in an interview, “more than to say that the Crips and the Bloods occupy this area” (Gier). Buzzworm’s analysis of the map both links gang activity with the racial ghettoization and economic insecurity that underlies it, and complicates the portrait of his community by drawing attention to aspects like religion, education, and community history. “If someone could put down all the layers of the real map,” Buzzworm claims, “maybe he could get the real picture” (81).

This idea, developed later in Manzanar’s model of mapping, points to the need for a “real map” that makes links between the multiple strata of social and environmental factors that together contribute to a community’s spatial-historical reality. The novel does not suggest that another one of these “layers” would necessarily provide a better map, or that the “real map” consists of the simple addition of multiple data sets. Instead, this model, as we will see with Manzanar, requires an approach that positions layers in relationship with one another and highlights the ways each reinforces, leads to, or challenges the others. Without a multi-layered hypercontextual approach, individual layers are misread and de-contextualized, enabling social scapegoating and fearmongering by those with the power to draw the maps. Approaching the layers as interconnected and mutually constitutive, on the other hand, allows community members to demonstrate how phenomena like gangs are directly related to indices of unemployment, poverty, racial and gender discrimination, and spatial segregation.

Asked in an interview about this scene, Yamashita notes that the novel itself is an attempt to create such a layered map. The gang map, which Gabriel tore out of a book

called “Quartz City or some such title,” is actually from Mike Davis’s *City of Quartz*, a social history of Los Angeles originally published in 1990 (80).¹³ Yamashita says that “Mike Davis’s map made [her] think about other possibilities for defining those territories,” and that *Tropic* is an effort to expand and update Davis’s project by bringing in “places and things that may not have been mentioned before,” thus creating a map that’s not necessarily “more real, but more ample and complex” (Gier). While the impulse to complicate such maps is well-founded, the map in question is not Davis’s creation—it was actually designed by the LAPD and included as part of Davis’s history of gang formation.¹⁴ That this map did not originate in a history book, but was released by the 77th St. Division of the LAPD to the media in 1972, makes it all the more important in terms of Buzzworm’s concern with media representation of his community. In fact, almost forty years later the LAPD still publishes these gang maps which can now be viewed by the public on their official website.¹⁵

¹³ This book was re-published in 2006 with a new introduction that provides updates on some of the key issues addressed in the original version.

¹⁴ Rather than displaying the 1972 map as an accurate representation of East L.A., Davis actually critiques it on many of the same grounds that *Tropic* does. His book provides a detailed history of the links between gangs, systemic poverty, and the government’s systematic decimation of leadership organizations like the Black Panthers. It also makes a scathing critique of racial profiling of Black and Latino youth by police, racist drug laws, and institutionalized spatial segregation in the city, as well as charting community efforts to resist these injustices. “The deafening public silence about youth unemployment and the juvenation of poverty,” writes Davis, “has left many thousands of young street people with little alternative but to enlist in the crypto-Keynesian youth employment program operated by the cocaine cartels” (309). The map, which can be found on page 301 of *City of Quartz*, names several different Crip groups as well as the many independent gangs which joined forces in 1972 to form the Bloods.

¹⁵ The LAPD’s current map of the city’s gang territories can be found at http://www.lapdonline.org/la_gangs.

While government officials demonize gang violence and drug dealing in their representation of this urban space, they ignore how these phenomena are created by systemic unemployment and poverty that result from a long history of racism, segregation, and labor exploitation. Davis cites a rare example of an event where gang members were allowed to publically air their grievances: at the Human Relations Conference in 1972 (the same year the map was published) sixty gang members astonished officials by demanding not money or revenge but “jobs, housing, better schools, recreation facilities and community control of local institutions” (300). Where officials overlooked or ignored these underlying contexts, gang members themselves made explicit connections between gangs and the community’s historical lack of resources. That these indices of community well-being are left off maps like the LAPD’s demonstrates the sinister capacity of maps to reinforce stereotypes and discrimination by presenting oversimplified, ahistorical, and ideologically-skewed representations as objective, complete truths. A map using cocaine statistics or white-collar crime to depict L.A.’s wealthy Westside, for instance, would be considered an absurd representation of that region. Both Yamashita’s and Davis’s critiques of the gang map demonstrate the need to “historicize” such representations of city space.

The de-contextualized logic of the gang map is replicated in maps which chart the freeway expansions and gentrification projects that profoundly impact low-income ethnic communities in the city. The maps of Buzzworm’s neighborhood have been drastically affected by such development, and he notes that many families must now “locate the old house somewhere between Mrs. Field’s and the Footlocker. . . . or the Dorothy Chandler

Pavilion, or Union Station, or the Bank of America, Arco Towers, New Otani, or the freeway” (82). “Gentrification . . . plays a pivotal role in neoliberal urbanism,” argues Neil Smith, because “it serves up the central- and inner-city real-estate markets as burgeoning centers of *productive* capital investment: the globalization of productive capital embraces gentrification” (99). Buzzworm highlights the neoliberal function of developers’ maps which design the city’s spatial contours to serve the desires of wealthier populations and corporations without taking the historical contexts of his community into account. “Somebody else must have the big map,” he muses, “or maybe just the next map. The one with the new layers you can’t even imagine yet” (82).

Not only do developers’ maps, then, ignore “old layers” of community history and material need in their rush for profits but they also control the “new layers” of the “next map” which run roughshod over poor ethnic neighborhoods. “Where was his house on this map?,” Buzzworm wonders, “Between Mrs. Fields and Footlocker? Somebody’s parking lot? Somebody’s tennis court? Or just the driveway to some gated community?” (82). Gentrification, in these terms, means replacing houses like Buzzworm’s with spaces of consumerism, luxury, and security—spaces from which people like Buzzworm are explicitly excluded.¹⁶

¹⁶ Soja describes L.A.’s “security-obsessed urbanism”: “not only are residences becoming increasingly gated, guarded, and wrapped in advanced security, surveillance, and alarm systems, so too are many other activities, land uses, and everyday objects in the urban environment, from shopping malls and libraries to razor-wire protected refuse bins and spiked park benches designed to stave off incursions of the homeless and hungry” (43). In fact, Los Angeles’s wealthy Palos Verdes peninsula is the site of some of the nation’s earliest “gated” communities.

His hypercontextual critique of these maps suggests that political re-mappings must include both the history of spaces and imaginative visions of future layers that offer an alternative to exploitative profit-driven models. Low-income families, “bought out” at rock-bottom prices, are displaced in the city’s supposedly beneficial plans for “urban renewal” which could be more aptly described as projects of “urban removal.” These displaced people wonder how things might be different “if they’d a known then every square foot of that land was worth millions. If they’d a known the view’d be so expensive. If they’d a known” (82). Buzzworm connects these struggles of low-income communities for affordable housing with the history of land grabs during the colonization of the region. Elitist gentrification in his own neighborhood starts him thinking about the removal of “Mexican rancheros and, before that, about the Chumash and the Yangna. If they’d a known” (82). In an interview, Yamashita links the history of L.A., the “conquest” of its “Indian and Mexican populations” by Euroamericans, with “the literature of California being the romanticizing of an idyllic place in which these two cultures get along” (Imafuku). This historical understanding of the region’s conquest metafictionally disrupts both the literary and cartographical narrative of L.A. Redefining the land-based struggles of various displaced groups as a continuous history of capitalist colonialism allows Buzzworm to critique the contemporary gentrification maps’ rhetoric of “renewal” and “progress” as an ongoing process of racialized oppression.

Buzzworm juxtaposes these predatory gentrification practices with the alternative concept of “gente-fication.” This model, generated not from the top down but from the “gente” or “folks” themselves, was the “sort where people living there become their own

gentry. Self-gentrification by a self-made set of standards and respectability. Do-it-yourself gentrification” (83). While some jokingly call Buzzworm’s plan “This Old Hood,” linking it to the television show *This Old House*’s restorations of mostly white-owned wealthy homes, his proposal speaks to the social and environmental health of the neighborhood. Do-it-yourself “gente-fication” calls for different ethnic groups to work together in an effort to “restore the neighborhood. Clean up the streets. Take care of the people. Trim and water the palm trees” (83). Progress, in this sense, equates not to an increase in consumer luxury and security from undesirables, but to an increase in “caring” for people and environments. The enlargement of community self-determination in “gente-fication” rejects the neoliberal narrative of progress and remaps the neighborhood according to the community’s human and environmental needs.

This model of “gente-fication” directly opposes the de-contextualized maps of L.A. officials who plan on widening a freeway that runs through the neighborhood. Freeways in this novel are contested spaces where class, race, and environmental conflicts play out. Buzzworm recalls a neighborhood meeting about a freeway expansion where “city bureaucrats” unveiled “their poster boards and scale models. Everything in pastels, modern-like. Made the hood look cleaned up. Quaint. Made the palm trees look decorative” (82). Bureaucrats recreate the neighborhood in the guise of a wealthy suburb, representing it through what Buzzworm later describes as “Westside thangs” like a “fascination with . . . pastels” that belie real conditions of poverty and urban blight (175). While this map of the “hood” seems superficially parallel to Buzzworm’s vision of “cleaned up” streets and maintained palms, it is actually designed to make it impossible.

The bureaucrat's "quaint" and "clean" hood is merely the fictional backdrop to the expanded freeway—their plan includes no actual proposal to improve the neighborhood.

In fact, the neat scale models conceal the commission's neoliberal strategy of creating more poverty and urban decay in order to justify further reclamations. David Harvey describes these kinds of reclamations as an example of the neoliberal strategy of "accumulation by dispossession": the "government's right of eminent domain has been abused in order to displace established residents in reasonable housing in favor of higher-order land uses, such as condominiums and box stores (327).¹⁷ Since developers have "time and paper on their side," they assure one local dress-shop owner that she will not be affected by the project and then proceed to:

Make sure it took five years to clear out the houses. Make sure the houses left to be broken into and tagged. Let the houses be there for everyone to see. Use for illegal purposes. Pass drugs. House homeless. Make sure the ramp took another five years. Slow down the foot traffic and the flow. Break down the overpass crossing the freeway. Make it impossible for people to pass. Stop people from using the shops that used to be convenient. Stop people from coming to her dress shop. Used to be a respectable shop. (83)

By strategically leaving houses abandoned and disrupting pedestrian transit, the project—whose use of immanent domain rests on perceptions that it reclaims urban wastelands for

¹⁷ Harvey goes on to note that "when this was challenged in the U.S. Supreme Court, the justices ruled that it was constitutional for local jurisdictions to behave in this way in order to increase their property tax base" (327).

public benefit—in effect creates its own self-fulfilling prophecy. “Now homeless, dope dealers, prostitutes” are the “only ones passing” the woman’s shop (83). Neither the novel nor *Buzzworm* intend to equate homeless, dealers, and prostitutes with expendable pariahs. This example illustrates not the pernicious inroads of persistent undesireables, but the ways poverty-driven crime is in fact created by the very development projects that profess to correct it because they ignore the “spatial” needs of urban communities.

The novel defines this kind of spatial exploitation as an environmental justice issue not only because of the increased pollution such projects bring to already vulnerable populations but also because of the damage they inflict by destroying the community’s spatial interconnectivity and thereby increasing poverty and crime. This episode likely draws on the freeway and gentrification projects that displaced nearly 22,000 working-class families in the Bunker Hill neighborhood between the 1950s and 1970s in order to build Los Angeles’s new Downtown. In an effort to ensure the “security” of this area, Davis notes, “virtually all the traditional pedestrian links to the old center, including the famous Angel’s Flight funicular railroad, were removed” (230). Angel’s Flight, the site of Arcangel’s rousing speech later in the novel, was closed in 1969 during this restructuring and re-built on a new site in 1996.¹⁸ The removal of pedestrian pathways in favor of automobile traffic, insular buildings without street frontage, and a general lack of public space, works to deliberately exclude ethnic and poor populations. “The Downtown hyperstructure,” writes Davis, “is programmed to ensure a seamless continuum of

¹⁸ Angel’s Flight was closed again in 2001 after a fatal accident, and then re-opened in 2010.

middle-class work, consumption, and recreation, without unwonted exposure to Downtown's working-class street environments" (231).

Like the model of hypertext that Yamashita critiques, this "hyperstructure" allows commuters to link "home" and "work" without being exposed to the undesirable contexts which surround these sites. One of the major projects that effected Los Angeles' downtown was the Harbor Freeway, the site of apocalyptic conflict with the city's marginalized populations in *Tropic*. Built between the 1950s and 1970s, its construction "massively reproduced spatial apartheid" by cutting off "the new financial core from the poor immigrant neighborhoods that surround it on every side" (Davis 230). Buzzworm recalls a ride on the Harbor Freeway where he "realized you could just skip out over his house, his streets, his part of town. You never had to see it ever" (33). The freeway spatially and visually blocks his community from interaction with the spaces of power consolidated in the new Downtown. This obscuring of his neighborhood from the view of suburban commuters and downtown elites literally reproduces the political invisibility of the ethnic working-class.

Such historical glosses provide an important context for Buzzworm's reaction to the gang map. "Was no wonder you could make a map," he asserts; "Call it all gang territory. . . . Leave it crumbling and abandoned enough; nothing left but for bulldozers. Just plow it away. Take it all away for free" (83). The city's new abatement laws, mobilized through Operation Knockdown which began in 1989, expanded the power of officials to evict tenants and bulldoze run-down houses, appropriating the land for other uses. The displacements created by these and other development projects lead directly to

systemic problems facing such communities. The early Crips, for instance, were “incubated in the social wasteland created by the clearances for the Century Freeway—a traumatic removal of housing and destruction of neighborhood ties that was equivalent to a natural disaster” (Davis 298).¹⁹ Just as freeway construction contributed to the rise of gangs, so public perceptions of gang violence facilitate the appropriation of more devalued land for freeways and other development projects—creating a self-perpetuating cycle.

While the historically de-contextualized maps of developers and government officials serve to maintain unequal power relations under the guise of helping the ethnic poor, Manzanar’s hypercontextual model of mapping reveals linkages between spatial and historical layers in order to empower this misrepresented population. Unlike the gang map or the pastel scale model of the freeway and surrounding “hood” which obscure the spatial and social history of the city in its idealization of urban progress, his re-mapping of L.A. highlights these unacknowledged contexts.

In so doing, Manzanar’s maps exemplify Yamashita’s hypercontextual metafiction approach by historicizing city space and linking neoliberal configurations of urban geography to environmental injustices. Although Manzanar never produces actual “paper” maps, Yamashita imbues him with a mythical ability to imagine maps of seemingly infinite complexity. He can see maps, for example, of natural features of the

¹⁹ Clearances for the Century Freeway began in the 1970s, though the project was not completed until the mid-90s. Whereas ethnic working-class communities were displaced and disenfranchised by its construction, the city allowed the 1994 movie *Speed* to film on the empty freeway before its opening.

landscape and man-made infrastructures, maps of labor, homelessness, immigration, race, and wealth reaching back through history—” all spread in visible and audible layers” (57). The “uncanny thing,” however, “was that he could see all of them at once, filter some, pick them out like transparent windows and place them even delicately and consecutively in a complex grid of pattern, spatial discernment, body politic” (56). Although the “complexity of [these] layers should drown an ordinary person,” Manzanar notes, “ordinary persons never bothered to notice” (57). Thus he both seeks to complicate maps of the city and to increase awareness of its layers.

While Manzanar’s uncanny perception of space seems impossibly complex, this hypercontextual model, like the novel itself, emphasizes the need to approach the city as a layered site of multiple contexts. Moreover, the palimpsestic image of maps as “transparent windows” suggests that these layers are not distinct and fixed but interrelated and contingent. Gómez-Peña relates this concept to the political role of “artists and writers” to “reinterpret, remap, and redefine”: “we see through the colonial map of North, Central, and South America, to a more complex system of overlapping, interlocking and overlaid maps. Among others, we can see Amerindia, Afroamerica, Americamestiza-y-mulata, Hybridamerica, and Transamerica—the ‘other America’ that belongs to the homeless, and to nomads, migrants, and exiles” (12). In an electronically posted “dialogue” between Yamashita and scholar Ryuta Imafuku, Imafuku explains that their “agenda” is to “try to discover a new map behind the old map.” If “complicit ideologies” including imperialism, neoliberalism, nationalism, and a “narrow-minded ecology movement favorable only for the world’s elite” underlie conventional maps, then

seeing the “old map as representing these interrelated ideologies” allows us to “think critically and clearly about the need for a new map.”

Yamashita’s model of hypercontextual metafiction, exemplified by Manzanar’s mapping, insists on the need both to unmask these “complicit ideologies” and to imagine a “more complex system of overlapping, interlocking and overlaid maps” in order to critique environmental injustice. This more complex system of mapping specifically challenges ideologies like neoliberalism and a “narrow-minded ecology” that both favor the “world’s elite” over its marginalized populations. Looking out from his regular post on an overpass of the Harbor Freeway, Manzanar sees “mapping layers” that begin not with the visible landscape before him, but “within the very geology of the land” (57). These geological strata include “artesian rivers running beneath the surface, connected and divergent, shifting and swelling,” and the “complex and normally silent web of faults—cracking like mud flats baking under a desert sun, like the crevices in aging hands and faces” (57). Still “below the surface,” he observes the “man-made grid of civil utilities” including natural gas pipelines, water and sewage tunnels, and electrical lines (57).

Manzanar describes these spatial foundations of L.A. not as neutral features of the city’s map, but as ideologically-laden constructions which underlie environmental injustices. The “great dank tunnels of sewage” and “cascades of poisonous effluents surging from the rain-washed streets into the Santa Monica Bay” highlight the normally invisible transit of toxic waste through the city (57). The “costs” of environmental pollution, however, become highly visible when viewed through the perspective of

homeless and other marginalized populations. The L.A. River, a natural stream which was redirected and lined with concrete, is a paradigmatic site for the movement of pollution through the urban landscape. Buzzworm describes the variety of “shit floating down the river”: “car parts, hypodermics, dead dogs, Neanderthal bones, props from the last movie shot down there, you name it” (41). This “shit” disproportionately affects immigrants and homeless. Providing a news story lead to Gabriel, Buzzworm tells him about a man from a homeless transvestite camp who almost drown in the river. Davis notes that homeless men, many of whom are immigrants and refugees, are regularly “washing in and even drinking from the sewer effluent which flows down the concrete channel of the Los Angeles River” (234). Even Manzanar’s vision of the “electric currents racing voltage into the open watts of millions of energy-efficient appliances, telephone cables, cable TV, fiber optics, computer networks” can be read in terms of environmental injustice (57). Not only are toxic power plants most often located in poor ethnic communities, the city’s “electric currents” fuel a techno-consumerist society to which such communities have limited access. These maps of the city’s infrastructure are not neutral features, then, but are evidence of the uneven spatial distribution of “costs” and “benefits” of resources generated by the neoliberal/capitalist model.

These spatial layers of contemporary L.A. are then linked to its historical geography. A “prehistoric grid of plant and fauna and human behavior” underlies “the historic grid of land usage and property,” including “the great overlays of transport—sidewalks, bicycle paths, roads, freeways, systems of transit both ground and air” (57). Manzanar explicitly links these patterns of built space with a history of social “patterns”

like the “distribution of wealth [and] race” and environmental “patterns of climate” (57). Built space, this model highlights, is not a “fixed background” that “remains external to the social world and to efforts to make the world more socially just,” but a “social product” that actively creates social and environmental injustice (Soja 2). Disconnecting space from human and environmental history masks its ideological nature and prevents communities from staging resistance. With his long view of the city’s spatial history, Manzanar sees how “human civilization covered everything in layers, generations of building upon building the residue, burial sites, and garbage that defined people after people for centuries” (170). He also expands his spatial vision of L.A. by linking it to a wider Pacific Rim context: “encroaching on this vision was a larger one,” the “great Pacific stretching along its great rim” from the “southernmost tip of Chile . . . to the Bering Strait,” from the “Japan Isles and the Korean Peninsula” to Australia and New Zealand (170). By positioning L.A. as a node in global space, Manzanar links the local effects of neoliberalism to a broader international context. While this vision is necessarily abstract, his model of mapping allows for a contextualized understanding of the spatio-historical roots of struggling communities in L.A.

As a conductor of traffic “symphonies,” Manzanar pays special attention to systems of transit—linking them to a history of colonialism and labor exploitation that resonates with L.A.’s contemporary transportation politics. These maps of transportation contextualize his critique of what Soja calls L.A.’s “unjust metropolitan transit geography” which favors “the wealthier, multi-car owning population in the suburban rings” over the “massive agglomeration of the immigrant and more urgently transit-

dependent working poor in the inner core" (x). Specifically, Manzanar remembers a time before the "V-6 and double-overhead cam" when transportation was dominated by "the railroads and the harbors" (237). He positions these modes of transit within a history of exploited ethnic labor. These "first infrastructures" were "built by migrant and immigrant labor," creating the "initial grid on which everything else began to fill in" (237). L.A. was literally built from the ground up by ethnic laborers whose contemporary counterparts are still excluded from its resources. Railroads, a major technology of colonization in the American West, are given particular attention. These "steam locomotives cut a cloud of black smoke through the heart of the West," bringing both environmental and human destruction (237). Such transportation systems, posited as carrying progress and civilization to the wild West in the fulfillment of Manifest Destiny, allowed "Yankee pirates" to arrive with "cotton linens" and leave with "smuggled cow hides and tallow" (237). Manzanar highlights the role of transportation systems in colonialism's economic and environmental consequences, noting that once "Yankee pirates" gained physical access and a source of water in this desert region "nothing could stop the growing congregation of humanity in this corner of the world" (237). This historical layer of L.A. ironizes the ongoing demonization of undocumented immigrants in California by contextualizing it within a history of the invasion of these same lands by "undocumented" Yankees. Manzanar's map of L.A.'s transportation history links the colonization of native lands and the past exploitation of immigrant labor with the contemporary space of the freeway which perpetuates this ideology of exploitation/exclusion.

Whereas the de-contextualized maps created by developers and police exacerbate social and spatial divides, Manzanar's hypercontextual maps not only "represent" disadvantaged peoples but demonstrate their ability to actually generate new spaces and maps. L.A.'s colonial past and neoliberal present structure its social and spatial "grid," a grid which Manzanar says has "spread itself with particular domination" (237). However, because these dominating "grids" are human constructions, they can be changed. The novel's depiction of space and history as "elastic" and "foldable" emphasizes the ability of social action to alter urban geographies. When Arcangel arrives in Los Angeles along with "hundreds of thousands" of immigrants and the "entire continent" of South America, Manzanar notices that "the grid was changing" (200, 213, 239). The radical occupation of L.A.'s Harbor Freeway, to which the final section of this chapter turns, similarly transforms the grid. As this impromptu community develops, Manzanar "began to sense a new kind of grid, this one defined not by inanimate structures or other living things but by himself and others like him"—that is, L.A.'s "others"—the homeless, immigrants, and ethnic poor (238). This new grid inverts the neoliberal narrative of profits and property, remapping L.A. from the perspective of its most vulnerable populations. As the freeway occupation demonstrates, radically changing the grid requires coalitions between different exploited populations. The next section examines the political implications of Yamashita's hypercontextual metafiction approach for how we read the space and history of resistance.

Hypercontextual Metafiction on the Freeway

Arcangel's poetry demonstrated the need to create a "traveling" or spatialized history of resistance to neoliberalism, while Buzzworm's notion of "gente-fication" and Manzanar's layered maps demonstrated the corresponding need to historicize urban space in order resist the social and environmental injustices perpetuated by de-contextualized representations. Both strategies reflect the novel's hypercontextual model of linking spatial and historical contexts to disrupt the neoliberal narrative of global "progress." The following section shows how a hypercontextual approach enables the coalition-building necessary for staging political resistance. Yamashita's depiction of the freeway occupation metafictionally juxtaposes neoliberal and coalitional spaces, commercial media narratives and "TV from the bottom," the rhetoric of multiculturalism and the practice of hypercontextual dialogue (192).

This quintessential L.A. disaster, which generates a media feeding-frenzy, begins when a Porsche careens into a semi-truck carrying propane and then two other semis (one hauling gasoline) crash further down the Harbor Freeway. The resulting explosions create "an entire mile of cars trapped between two dead semis, not to mention two craters, fires, and the debris from the blasts" (112). It is this mile-long stretch of freeway that becomes the controversial site of a temporary community and, later, of a violent government attack. Although this impromptu community begins when the fires drive homeless people from their make-shift camps and into the owner-abandoned vehicles, it quickly develops into a diverse coalition of supporters, including African and Asian Americans from the low-income neighborhood surrounding the freeway, Salvadorian refugees, and eventually the Latin American immigrants who arrive with Arcangel. The populations all come

together to create a “motley community” (240). Their coalition demonstrates the need to appropriate space (the freeway) and the history or narrative of the event (media representations). As this scene illustrates, hypercontextual metafiction works to expose what neoliberal space and narrative conceals, and to thereby create “hypercontextual” spaces and narratives that “link” with multiple contexts in order to enable coalitional resistance.

Freeways, as we have seen, are contested sites of dislocation and discrimination in Yamashita’s L.A. The freeway occupation represents a literal disruption of the progress narrative, by blocking traffic flow and the movement of commodities through the city, which parallels its “ideological” disruption of corporate neoliberalism. Whereas the neoliberal narrative defines the freeway as an exclusionary space of commerce and commuter travel, these new inhabitants transform the freeway into an ironic temporary utopia. Members of this spontaneous community quickly assess and distribute the resources trapped with them on the mile-long stretch of freeway. A commissary truck and salvaged caches of fruit, Wonder Bread, Trader Joe’s fresh pasta, Snapple, and Perrier are immediately put in the service of the hungry population. That is, these commodities are taken out of the context of the transactional market economy and put into that of human need. Similarly, in repurposing owner-abandoned vehicles as shelters, the occupiers revalue the vehicles according to their practical living space and amenities rather than their brand status, driving performance, or appearance. Thus “the vans and camper trailers went first; then the gas guzzlers,” while “Porsches, Corvettes, Jaguars, and Miatas were suddenly relegated to the status of sitting or powder rooms or even telephone

booths” (121). The cars are assessed for their relative “storage space” and their “exterior condition was deemed of secondary importance” (121). This occupation critiques the equation of luxury commodities with social status by reevaluating these objects according to the actual human need for shelter. As the days wear on, they also create makeshift versions of public services, including “regular trash pickup” and a recycling program which makes sure that “bottles, cans, and plastic” are properly separated (218). Their attention to recycling even during this crisis signals their awareness that social justice for marginalized populations cannot be separated from environmental justice. In order to organize and facilitate movement through the space, they go so far as to give “names to the lanes, like streets! South Fast Lane and North Fast Lane. Limousine Way” (156). While these names merely describe the relative location of the freeway lanes, the act of establishing these “streets” serves to re-map the freeway as a space of inclusion and community rather than one of exclusion and displacement. Although this utopic space can only be temporary, it represents an important experiment in imagining alternatives to the thoroughly capitalist organization of urban space which normally makes these populations invisible.²⁰

²⁰ This appropriation represents a direct critique of capitalist urban geography which is fundamental to the novel’s political project. Spatial theorist Henri Lefebvre argues that contemporary society is structured by a tension between spaces of domination and spaces of appropriation. Spaces of domination reproduce the logic of capitalism since they are figured as abstract exchange commodities which conceal their ideological functions. Lefebvre actually cites “motorways” as an ideal example of “dominated space”: “a motorway brutalizes the countryside and the land, slicing through space like a great knife” (165). This parallels Arcangel’s earlier description of the border, another “dominated space,” as a “great knife” held to his throat. The “forces that aspire to dominate and control space” include “business and the state, institutions, the family, the

While the reappropriation of freeway space by the coalition is short-lived, the temporary community they create illustrates the importance of exposing what neoliberal conceptions of space conceal and imagining new spatial formations based on human need rather than abstract capitalist rationality. Both are necessary for creating meaningful forms of resistance to oppressive urban geographies which function to exclude marginalized populations. This seemingly neutral and “public” space obscures the freeway’s privileging of wealthier commuters over the mass transit needs of the poor and its history of displacement and disruption in low-income ethnic neighborhoods. The occupation reveals that the dominated space of the freeway is not a “given” or inevitable feature of the urban landscape but a human construction with an ideological function which serves some populations at the expense of others. In so doing, it emphasizes the ability of even loose or temporary coalitions to radically change the way we perceive urban space.

This change, however, requires more than physically occupying the freeway; it also necessitates a metafictional interrogation of the ways in which we represent the crisis. Yamashita notes that one of the novel’s aesthetic and political projects is “critiquing the media and the control it has over our lives, not only obviously in its sifting of the

‘establishment,’ the established order, corporate and constituted bodies of all kinds” (392). Spaces of appropriation, on the other hand, have been “modified in order to serve the needs and possibilities of a group,” and include “various forms of self-management or workers’ control of territorial and industrial entities, communities and communes,” among other formations (165, 392). The significance of this distinction is not only its description of different types of spaces or spatial actors, but its clarification of the political stakes inherent in space. “Any revolutionary ‘project’ today, whether utopian or realistic,” Lefebvre asserts, “must . . . make the reappropriation of space into a non-negotiable part of its agenda” (166-7).

information we receive, but in the way we project its vision of reality on everything else” (Gier). This critique takes the form of a metafictional juxtaposition of two competing “news” narratives that construct very different “visions of reality.” The commercial media’s coverage positions the event in the context of corporate neoliberalism, while the coalition’s own “hypercontextual” programs highlight the human and environmental needs of the occupiers.

The crisis inevitably generates an immense amount of “news”: the semi crashes prompt the “usual questions of traffic safety,” the occupation prompts the “usual questions of shelter and jobs, drug rehabilitation, and the closing of mental health facilities,” and the angry car owners prompt the “usual questions of police protection, insurance coverage, and acts of God” (122). Although they attend to these usual questions, network television stations ultimately represent the crisis as a titillating spectacle for its audience to eagerly consume. While Gabriel, reporting from the freeway, metafictionally situates the crisis in terms of literary history as “one more day of the locust,” Emi playfully criticizes this impulse by responding “there you go again trying to be part of a book” (162).²¹ As a producer for NewsNow, Emi ironically revels in the exciting—and marketable—sense of unreality or super-reality that the crisis lends to media coverage. When she actually sees Gabriel on the news while he’s phoning her from an abandoned Mercedes, she is envious of his proximity to this scene of heightened “reality”: “there you are, down in the middle of a true current event. Live on the air! You

²¹ Gabe’s comment refers to Nathaniel West’s 1939 novel *The Day of the Locust*, an apocalyptic account of corruption in Hollywood during the Great Depression.

are the reality on TV. God I'm jealous" (163). Emi's excitement, however, stems not mainly from the fact that Gabriel is "down in the middle" of the crisis, but from the fact that he is part of the representation of the crisis, part of the translation of the crisis from "reality" to "TV."

The commercial media's representation figures this event as an entertaining spectacle par excellence, actually highlighting the distance between "reality" and "TV." Its coverage provides "an imminent collective sense of immediate live real-time action, better than live sports whose results—one or another team's demise—were predictable, and better than CNN whose wars were in foreign countries with names nobody could truly pronounce" (122). While the media can offer a form of "collectivity," its equation of the crisis with live sports and foreign wars suggests that this collective model is compromised. The most pointed link between news and entertainment is made when the station Emi works for airs its coverage of the crisis and a "disaster" movie simultaneously. *Canyon Fires*, part of the network's "Disaster Week" series, shows on the full screen while a box in the corner displays constant coverage of the freeway fires, effectively equating the real crisis with its simulacrum. A sushi chef at the local restaurant where Gabe and Emi are watching TV points out the parallel: "no difference. Fire here. Fire there" (125). This simultaneous broadcast of "commercial time" and "live action news" creates a marketing situation in which "the station couldn't lose" (125). Further reinforcing the equation of the freeway crisis with entertainment media, Emi asks if Gabriel thinks the news coverage "can compete" with the movie (125). When he later chides her for this entertainment-based view of the event, asking her how she would rate

it on the Neilson, she replies: “Listen. You’re preempting *The Simpsons*, *Married With Children*, and *Margaret Cho!*” (163).

These examples emphasize the fact that even directly recorded footage of the crisis cannot produce a straightforward “record” of events. This coverage is mediated both by the network’s biased attention to the most sensational parts of the crisis and by the event’s contextualization within the station’s larger broadcast of entertainment and commercials. Moreover, commercial media coverage leaves the “average citizen” who “viewed these events” on television feeling “overwhelmed with the problems” (122). The television audience feels “sympathy” for those involved in the crisis, but also an “anger and impotence” which prevents them from having any kind of effective or sympathetic response (122).

The commercial media’s representation of the crisis is juxtaposed to that of the coalition when they gain temporary access to the news cameras. The coalition-run news program both mimics and critiques the conventions of mainstream television news. Buzzworm spearheads the first show, in which three homeless guests sit on the bed of a truck, using a wooden crate as a coffee table topped with a “paper cup with California poppies” (177). In a later broadcast, “two homeless anchors” sit in “beat-up bucket seats behind some kind of makeshift desk with decorative hubcaps,” with “the real L.A. skyline draped behind them” (190). These makeshift sets are both more “fake” than those on regular television and more “real.” On the one hand, the coalition attempts to approximate network sets by using found objects to signify conventional ones whereas, on the other, their set is framed by the actual skyline instead of a reproduction like those

on network TV. In the context of Yamashita's novel, these alternative newscasts both validate the conventions of the commercial media and reveal its artificiality by taking the sets out of the studio and into the "real" world. This double signification has the political function of highlighting the unequal power relationships between the coalition and commercial television. While the homeless anchors mimic conventional studio sets to legitimize their own news program, they actually use their air time to critique the conventions of commercial media.

Unlike the network TV coverage, these alternative broadcasts focus on the population's needs rather than its marketability. Programs like "Homeless Vets: From the Jungles to the Streets" run next to interviews with immigrant "street peddlers" and an "onsite powwow 'tween the gangs" (180, 192). Whereas these populations are usually ignored or sensationalized in the commercial media, the alternative newscasts acknowledge their material and aesthetic needs. In a "special report" called "Life in the Fast Lane," an immigrant woman named Mara Sadat interviews a homeless man who turns a "rusting Cadillac" into an "urban garden" (191). "We pulled her guts out and filled her yey high with some good old-fashioned dirt," he reports, "Got lettuce in this corner, some baby carrots over here, tomatoes here. A patch like this'll do some good feedin'" (191). In this direct critique of environmental injustice, an emblem of consumer luxury culture is transformed to serve the food needs of this marginalized population. When Saratoga Sara gives birth to a baby girl "in the back of a VW bus," the homeless reporter calls for "contributions of diapers, baby clothing, and food for the mother" (191). The coalition's programming also includes "arts and culture" in its lineup. The LAPD

(Los Angeles Poverty Department) a “homeless performance group” gives shows and workshops, and Manzanar conducts a “homeless choir numbering near 500” (190, 192). The Los Angeles Poverty Department, a real performance group started in 1985 by residents of L.A.’s infamous Skid Row district, explicitly describes their mission in terms of appropriating narrative: “we want the narrative of the neighborhood to be in the hands of neighborhood people. We work to generate this narrative and to supplant narratives that perpetuate stereotypes used to keep the neighborhood people down or to justify displacing the community.”²² In this mission, the LAPD reflects the aims of the coalition’s representations and the novel itself. As Buzzworm puts it, the coalition creates “TV from the bottom. Aspirations of the lowest bum on skid row. Lifestyles of the poor and forgotten” (192). Although they ironically end up producing the “hottest property” in entertainment, which Emi wants to syndicate for network TV, they do succeed in temporarily disrupting conventional media representations and making the “poor and forgotten” visible.

While the freeway occupation reveals that the neoliberal narrative is not an inevitable “reality” but an imagined construction, the scene also emphasizes its very “real” and violent consequences. Manzanar puts the basic conflict most succinctly when he points out the “utterly violent assumption underlying everything”: “that the homeless were expendable” while “citizens had a right to protect their property with firearms” (123). Days before the crisis occurs, Buzzworm comments on the irony of L.A. society’s

²² More information, including this mission statement, can be found on the LAPD’s website: <http://lapovertydept.org/about-lapd/index.php>

valuing of cars above “expendable” people. While “cars living in garages” and “garages living inside guarded walls,” the homeless are outside “going through the garbage at McDonald’s looking for a crust of bread and leftover fries” (43). As the occupation continues, Buzzworm hears a radio host go as far as suggesting that they “could bring back the Nazis” to “put ‘em all to sleep” (192). Other “final solutions” to the homeless problem that were actually proposed include “deporting them to a poor farm on the edge of the desert, confining them in camps in the mountains, or, memorably, interning them on a derelict ferry at the Harbor” (Davis 232). Even the urban garden, which the coalition’s newscast represents as an important act of resistance, is tinged with the threat of violence when Buzzworm remarks that “the man who owns that dirt-filled Cad is probably putting together an arsenal of AK-47s to take it back” (191). Similarly, the novel juxtaposes the liberatory performances of the Los Angeles Poverty Department with the repressive force of the Los Angeles Police Department which “lined up on either side of the Harbor Freeway readyin’ up to catch any homeless wantin’ to flee the canyon” (139).

This threat of hostility eventually erupts into a full-scale attack that exposes the “violent assumption” at the heart of the neoliberal narrative. Suddenly the “terror of gunfire ripped across that valley of cars” and “the thunder of a hundred helicopters announced their appearance on the downtown horizon, strafing the freeway along its dotted lines, bombing the valley with tear gas and smoke” (239). In the midst of the attack Manzanar remarks on the “horror” of this “assemblage of military might pointed at one’s own people” (239). The government functions not to protect its people, this scene

suggests, but to protect property and ensure the global flow of commodities, thus reinscribing the neoliberal narrative. Moreover, Emi, who gleefully represents the crisis as an entertaining spectacle on television, is ironically killed in this attack, illustrating the material dangers of representations that ignore complexity in favor of marketability.

Yamashita's hypercontextual metafiction demonstrates that this attack is not merely a discreet response to a unique situation, but an act which must be contextualized in a larger narrative of spatial and historical oppression. Just as Arcangel connects the violence of the U.S./Mexico border with a larger history of colonial oppression, so the freeway occupants define the attack within a "traveling history" of U.S. imperialism. Manzanar watches, for instance, as the "coordinated might of the Army, Navy, Air Force, Marines, the Coast and National Guards, federal, state, and local police forces looked down as it had in the past on tiny islands and puny countries the size of San Bernardino and descended in a single storm" (239). His symphonic interpretation of the attack, in which "strings bled a foul massacre," further ironizes this use of national violence by linking it to the U.S. war of independence. Looking up at the helicopters, he asks, "Oh say can you see by the dawn's early light the rockets red glare, the bombs bursting in air?" (240). Buzzworm contextualizes the violent backlash in terms of another U.S. war when he notes that the "urban front line" it creates reminds him of his experience as a soldier in Vietnam, an experience shared by "half of the homeless" occupants who are also "veterans of war" (217). He then links both the freeway attack and the Vietnam War with the history of spatial segregation and racism in Los Angeles. "If he stepped over the invisible front line" into a white neighborhood, "he could get implicated, arrested, jailed,

killed. If he stepped back, he'd just be invisible. Either way he was dead" (217). The novel suggests that these "front lines"—whether they mark cities, wars, or national borders—serve to legitimate violence against the most vulnerable populations.

Furthermore, while the perpetuation of the neoliberal narrative relies on violence, it ironically attempts to conceal this fact, especially when the media are watching. "A rainbow of putrid green gas and red, white, and blue smoke hid the fray from discerning eyes, muffled the shrieking and wailing" and "golden clouds of boiling petroleum" rose in "two great walls, further obscuring the deed" (240). Although the violent attack kills and injures many of the coalition, they respond by strengthening their solidarity and joining with the wave of immigrants Arcangel brings to the city. As the "motley community of homeless and helpless and well-intentioned . . . cradled the dying," the "rising tide of migration from the South—not foreign to the ravages of war—never stopped, clamored forward, joined the war" (240). Rather than breaking the coalition, the attack reveals these groups' common interest in fighting against the neoliberal narrative and thereby prompts an expansion of the coalition.

While Yamashita's hypercontextual approach demonstrates the political value of making links between populations, spaces, and histories of resistance, it does not advocate a model of coalition that erases differences in an idealized vision of harmonious co-operation. Indeed, it explicitly critiques "multiculturalism" as a narrative that masks the exploitations propagated by neoliberalism. Supernafta addresses his speech "to all the children of the world," to "that multicultural rainbow of kids out there," and "upon saying *children* his eyes became slightly droopy like a puppy dog's" (257). The false affect of

this “rainbow” rhetoric conceals neoliberalism’s actual violence—the “rainbow of putrid” gases—and its privileging of commodities over “children.” This rhetoric also conceals the fact that multiculturalism, as Yamashita notes in an interview, has been “appropriated by [multinational corporations like] Coca Cola and the United Colors of Benetton” not to promote actual co-operation but to sell products (Cheng). This commodified model of multiculturalism is exemplified in the novel by a white woman in a sushi restaurant who, after Emi says that “cultural diversity is bullshit,” asserts that she “adore[s] different cultures” and loves “living in L.A. because [she] can find anything in the world to eat” and because “it’s a meeting place for all sorts of people. A true celebration of an international world” (129). Rather than acknowledging racialized oppression, this woman equates multiculturalism with the ability to purchase “ethnic” food. Yamashita critiques the depiction of L.A. as a place where we are “all getting along” as a “wonderful mix” because it ignores, for example, the fact that “California has a long history of racism against Asians and against the Mexican population coming from the south” (Imafuku). Sue-Im Lee describes the novel’s critique of multiculturalism as a rejection of “the globalist ‘we’” which is central to “the First World’s discourses of politics, commerce, and culture, crucial to its narrative of ‘progress’ and ‘development’” (502).

While the rhetoric of multiculturalism—appropriated to reinforce neoliberal values—masks oppression, the model of linking generated by hypercontextual metafiction works to reveal these networks of human and environmental exploitation and suggests that cross-cultural alliances can function to disrupt this oppression. Instead of a blithe “celebration” of the multicultural rainbow, the novel proposes a grassroots,

dialogical model of cross-cultural interaction. Buzzworm, for instance, listens to “rap, jazz, R&B, talk shows, classical, NPR, religious channels, Mexican, even the Korean channel” on the radio (29). Unlike a consumption-based model of multiculturalism, that views the consumption of ethnic food, for instance, as evidence of multicultural harmony, Buzzworm’s listening to these diverse stations allows him to “get behind another man’s perspectives. Hear life in another sound zone. Walk to some other rhythms” (103).

Whereas “some wanted to pit black against brown,” for example, he sees listening to Mexican and African American stations as a way of “keeping up so’s to be ready with the dialogue” (102). Moreover, he enacts this dialogue by traversing “the hood every day, walkin’ and talkin’, making contact” (26). Music not only provides a forum for dialogue between groups, but also provides access to alternative histories and spaces. Buzzworm teaches the young African American men in his neighborhood about jazz because the “history of jazz followed the history of a people, black oppression, race, movement of the race across the Earth, across this country. Ended up here in South Central. Count Basie and the Duke playing on Central Avenue. . . . Found out you came from somewhere. History” (103).

This model of grassroots dialogue, which draws on spatial and historical contexts to enable resistance, structures the novel’s ultimate political effect on the reader. As the music Manzanar creates mythically spreads throughout the disadvantaged populations on the freeway and beyond, the “entire city sprouted grassroots conductors of every sort” (254). Manzanar then

found himself at the heart of an expanding symphony of which he was not the only conductor. On a distant overpass, he could make out the odd mirror of his figure, waving a baton. And beyond that, another homeless person had also taken up the baton. And across the city, on overpasses and street corners, from balconies and park benches, people held branches and pencils, toothbrushes and carrot sticks, and conducted. (238)

The proliferation of “grassroots conductors” suggests that resistance to the neoliberal narrative must be hypercontextual—be rooted in multiple populations, spaces, and histories. Earlier in the novel, Buzzworm remarks that what Manzanar’s “doing up there is a kind of interpretation,” and that in order to understand it one would need to “go up there and conduct” themselves (157).

Ultimately, Yamashita’s hypercontextual metafiction reveals the need for multiple “conductors,” including the reader, to function as critical interpreters that imaginatively redefine the city and the Americas in terms of human need and environmental justice. The novel’s hypercontextual approach reflects Yamashita’s belief that interesting art is not “purely” aesthetic but is “encumbered” by such worldly matters. In an interview she acknowledges she has “been criticized for [her] political bent,” adding that because of it one agent even “refused to represent” her (Cheng). Still, she says, “I can’t think of any work that interests me that can be engaged with as purely an aesthetic experience. You or I can step into a Zen rock garden or stare into field of irises, but the stepping in or staring away is an act of repudiation or leave-taking. The world encumbers me/us” (Cheng). *Tropic*, as a deeply “encumbered” text, suggests that metafiction which acknowledges the

material effects of narratives like neoliberal progress, rather than “staring away,” can engender an awareness in readers of the political contexts which structure narratives. In so doing, the novel answers Boaventura de Sousa Santos’s call for artists and academics not to speak “for” others, but to “amplify” the voices of “those who have been victimized by neoliberal globalization, be they indigenous peoples, landless peasants, impoverished women, squatter settlers, sweatshop workers or undocumented immigrants” (30). The novel’s hypercontextual method—its inclusion of multiple voices and narratives, and its attention to spatial and historical contexts—illustrates the power of environmental literature to respond to neoliberalism not through a nostalgic escape from “globalization” but by revealing linked histories of oppression and creating linked practices of resistance.

Epilogue

As I write this epilogue, members of the “Occupy movement” are gearing up for a summer of widespread protests. Originally begun in September 2011 as a response to the dominance of massive corporations and a global financial system that has created escalating inequalities, Occupy Wall Street and its offshoots around the U.S. and the world point to a growing public awareness of the links between economic and environmental issues. The Occupy movement’s slogan, “we are the 99 percent,” emphasizes the increasing gap between the wealthiest, most powerful one percent of society and the “rest”:¹

We are the 99 percent. We are getting kicked out of our homes. We are forced to choose between groceries and rent. We are denied quality medical care. We are suffering from environmental pollution. We are working long hours for little pay and no rights, if we’re working at all. We are getting nothing while the other 1 percent is getting everything. We are the 99 percent. (wearethe99percent.tumblr.com)

Importantly, this statement of the movement’s grievances connects economic oppression and labor rights with environmental issues that cause human “suffering.” While admittedly some issues have pitted economic and environmental interests against one

¹ Of course, this gap is even wider if we compare the “one percent” not against the “99 percent” of Americans but against low-income, women, and ethnically marginalized populations in the U.S. and around the world.

another, many movement activists are making this connection as well.² J.A. Myerson, for instance, claims that “the demolition of the natural world is a fundamental component of the warfare that the wealthiest 1 percent wages on the rest of humanity,” and Chip Ward asserts that “degrading the planet’s operating systems to bolster the bottom line is foolish and reckless . . . the 1% profit, while the rest of us cough and cope.” As Douglas Rushkoff reports, Occupy addresses a “wide array” of concerns, including “the collapsing environment, labor standards, housing policy, government corruption, World Bank lending practices, unemployment, increasing wealth disparity and so on.” While “different people have been affected by different aspects of [this] system,” protestors “believe they are symptoms of the same core problem.”

Moreover, as the multi-issue rhetoric of Occupy shows, the way issues are represented—in language, in the media, and in stories—are crucial for affecting public perception. A typical example of the movement’s rhetorical strategy of linking economic and environmental oppression, the protest sign pictured below connects corporate greed to “ecocide.” The Occupy movement, and its strategies, have spread around the world, prompting similar protests across Europe, Asia, and Australia. It, in turn, was in part inspired by the Arab Spring—especially the protests in Cairo’s Tahrir Square. According to Rushkoff, “unlike civil rights protests, labor marches, or even the Obama campaign,”

² For example, “Occupiers” associated with the Teamsters and Laborers unions support the Keystone Pipeline and more environmentally-focused ones protest it. However, many in the movement see the solution not as siding with one or the other of these positions but as advocating for the development of a “green economy” that would provide jobs while also promoting clean energy and industry.

Occupy “models a new collectivism” that, as a “product of the decentralized networked-era culture,” self-consciously “recognize[es] its internal inconsistencies,” “debat[es] its own worth,” and is “not about one-pointedness, but inclusion and groping toward consensus.” While the movement’s ultimate impact is yet to be determined, its cross-cultural and multi-issue structure represents a hopeful trend in resistance politics that in many ways parallels the interests and strategies of the novels I have examined in this project.



I begin with the Occupy movement, then, because it recalls many of this project’s major concerns: the relation of environmental issues to other forms of oppression, the attention to constructing cross-cultural and multi-issue alliances, and the focus on self-conscious examinations of political and historical rhetoric. Throughout the chapters, I have attempted to demonstrate that literature in particular is a powerful medium for challenging the historical, economic, and national narratives that legitimate environmental injustice. As opposed to the navel-gazing and aesthetic acrobatics of

conventional postmodern metafiction, the novels I have examined here foreground the constructedness of narratives while also calling attention to their material effects, especially for marginalized populations. Writers like Erdrich, Hogan, Ozeki, and Yamashita, I have argued, are creating new models of metafiction that specifically target environmental and social justice issues which are important in their communities and in a larger global context. As I have shown, these environmental metafiction trace their philosophical and literary origins not to wilderness or preservationist models, but to alternative or ethnic traditions of conceptualizing the relationship between literature, humans, and the environment.

Interestingly, both early ecocriticism and “post-postmodern” literature began as a reaction to postmodern/poststructuralist approaches. As Buell notes, ecocriticism began as an attempt to “rescue” literature from “the distantiations of reader from text and text from world” by “reconnect[ing] the work of (environmental) writing and criticism with environmental experience—meaning in particular the *natural* world” (6). However, this early work, based on wilderness or preservationist models of ecology that touted the transformational “wilderness experience,” defined the “natural world” as separate from the human one. The post-postmodern novels I have analyzed in this study also react against postmodern “distantiations,” but to “reconnect” literature to environmental and social justice concerns rather than to reaffirm narrow definitions of the “natural” environment. What traditional nature writing and these contemporary novels have in common is their sense that, as Buell puts it, “a text’s representation of its environmental

ground *matters*—matters aesthetically, conceptually, ideologically” (33). While literature cannot “replicate extratextual landscapes,” it “can be bent toward or away from them” (33). Rather than “bending toward” only “green space” or “wilderness,” the novels included here show that race, gender, class, and nation “matter” to both literary and public discourses about environmental issues.

In so doing, these novels demonstrate the importance of literature and humanities disciplines for shaping our understanding of environmental justice. Literature and other creative work offers what Julie Sze calls a “new way of looking” that “references the ‘real’ problems of communities struggling against environmental racism, and is simultaneously liberated from providing a strictly documentary account of the contemporary world” (162). One crucial role of literature and the humanities in the struggle for environmental justice, then, is to make stories of these issues more visible and affectively persuasive. “Grassroots leaders are demanding justice,” says sociologist Robert Bullard, but “unfortunately their stories of environmental injustice are not broadcast into the nation’s living rooms during the nightly news, nor are they splashed across the front pages of national newspapers and magazines.” Despite increasing public awareness, the communities suffering from environmental justice and the grassroots organizations fighting it are still relatively invisible when compared to the voices of the “one percent” and the mainstream environmental movement. “To a large extent, the communities that are the victims of environmental injustice remain invisible to the larger society,” and likewise, because grassroots environmental justice groups are not part of

“the established environmental community,” for “too long these groups and their leaders have been invisible and their stories muted” (Bullard).

Literature is uniquely suited not just to reporting such stories, but also to highlighting the connections between environmental and other types of oppressions and dramatizing the real effects of environmental injustice on marginalized people and degraded landscapes. As an interdisciplinary undertaking, then, this project contributes to ongoing conversations about how literature can respond to pressing issues like environmental destruction, human rights abuses, and globalization. The capacity of literature in general, and environmental justice metafiction in particular, to imagine alternative “ways of looking” at the relationship between humans and the environment is crucial given that our attitudes and beliefs about this relationship shape our actions.

As part of scholarly and political dialogues, then, this project attests to the need for increased attention to the role of literature and literary criticism in promoting justice. The future of environmental and literary studies depends, I think, on making links between injustices in different nations, between formal/rhetorical strategies and their material effects, and between “environmental” and “human” concerns. As the novels I have examined show, environmental injustices cross national as well as group (race, gender, class) borders, and articulating these links is crucial to producing a nuanced and politically useful understanding of environmental problems. Likewise, rather than focusing mainly on the depiction of environments in literature, more ecocritical work needs to explore the ways formal and rhetorical literary strategies contribute to the

arguments literature makes for environmental and social justice. Because both literary critical attention to environmental justice and post-postmodern fiction which combines formal experimentation with genuine claims for justice are on the rise, I believe that environmental justice metafiction will be part of a growing literary trend. This trend will, I hope, engender an increased public awareness of the environmental issues that science and social science disciplines explore as well as provide a crucial “way of looking” at environmental injustice that demonstrates the material effects of historical, economic, and national narratives and offers new stories about humans and the environments in which we live.

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